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THE JOHANNINE TRANSPOSITION AND JOHANNINE THEOLOGY

David John HAWKIN

IT IS an axiom of New Testament Studies that the Gospel writers do not seek simply to relate the life of Jesus, but have *kerygmatic* concerns. Each of the Gospel writers expresses his own unique theology in the writing of his Gospel. Each of them is presenting in the narrative mode a "to-be-communicated" (the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ) which transcends the historical. They are *transposing* into the narrative form their own confessional witness to Christ¹.

In the Fourth Gospel this transposition is bolder and more central to the Evangelist's intention than it is in the Synoptics. The Fourth Gospel shows little concern with history as the "recovery of past particulars" and is thus perhaps the furthest removed of all the Gospels from the "actualities" of history. The Christ of the Fourth Gospel is transposed from the realm of historicity² to a realm that transcends the merely historical. It is in the performance of this transposition that the Evangelist reveals his deepest concern. He wishes to present Jesus as the *way*, for Jesus is truth and life. Jesus *alone* is truth (14 : 6). This concern is, I believe, a vital key to the understanding of the Johannine transposition.

Before examining the Gospel in detail in order to substantiate this thesis, a few preliminary remarks are necessary, especially on the relation of structure to intention.

In an interview a fashionable novelist was asked if he found it difficult to develop the plots of his novels. "Not at all", he replied, "I merely cut up the finished typescript with a pair of scissors and then stick it back together again in random fashion". This anecdote, although amusing to some, is perhaps not quite so amusing to the Johannine scholar. If the Fourth Gospel has undergone anything like the amount of redaction and rearranging that some scholars suggest, then we have a MS which is not too dissimilar from the novelist's!

This, moreover, is not the only problem facing the scholar seeking the intention of the Fourth Evangelist. A student of mine wrote an essay on Ezekiel claiming that it was all about UFO's, spacemen and drug experiences. He was somewhat annoyed when told that this was not what the author meant. "Well that's what it means for

1. See B.F. MEYER, *The Man for Others*, New York : Bruce, 1970, pp. 12ff.

2. In the sense of "the literal actuality of the past" as well as in the sense of "the reality of ordinary human existence".

me”, he exclaimed, “and I don’t think that you should bring the author’s meaning into it”. He was expressing in his own way a common prejudice against the methodology which seeks to recover the intention of the author.

Much confusion may be dissipated at this point if we make a distinction between two kinds of interpretation: intentionalist and non-intentionalist. The goal of intentionalist interpretation is to grasp the *intended* sense of some expression or work. In this context an interpretation is correct when it grasps the intended sense of the author. The goals of non-intentionalist interpretation are various but in all instances such interpretations are *creative*. There are musical pieces in which the interpretation of the piece by the performer is more important than what the composer actually wrote. In the same way some believe that the art of literary composition is of less consequence than the art of interpretation. Interpretations in this sense are never correct or incorrect but more or less brilliant performances. “Right” and “wrong” are inappropriate categories of judgement; “rich” and “poor” are appropriate.

My object in this paper is not to deliver (even if I were able to) a virtuoso performance of creative interpretation, but rather to endeavour to grasp the intended sense of the Fourth Gospel. This means, above all, that an effort must be made to recover as precisely as possible the historical horizon of the Fourth Gospel. To this I shall return at the conclusion of the paper.

I am making two explicit methodological assumptions in what follows. First, I am assuming with Dodd (and others) that it is “the duty of an interpreter at least to see what can be done with the document as it has come down to us before attempting to improve upon it”³. Secondly, I assume that unless there is direct evidence to the contrary, the author wishes his work to be understood and therefore arranges his material in a coherent and meaningful way.

My first step, then, is to examine the *structure* of the Fourth Gospel. An author’s intentions and meaning invariably become clearer once we discern the organizational disposition of key thematic concerns. The way the whole is organized often indicates the purpose of a literary work. Thus I will examine the structure of the whole and seek to isolate those parts which constitute the whole. This strategy of inquiry is undertaken not only with a view to understanding the parts in terms of the whole and the whole in terms of the parts⁴, but also in an attempt to grasp the peculiarity and particularity of the whole by discerning the function of the meaning of the parts. In other words, the attempt is to enter the Johannine world of meaning by an examination of the Johannine constellation of themes, and to relate them to the thrust of the whole. Moreover, “the whole” in writing and music is sequential; it is not grasped all at once as in such art forms as sculpture and painting. It follows that the strategy of understanding the whole in terms of the parts and the parts in terms of the whole calls for the understanding of the author’s strategy of sequence. The effort, then, of drawing up a plan of the redaction will be followed by a few remarks on the strategy of sequence in the work.

3. C.H. DODD, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge: C.U.P., 1963, p. 290.

4. The so-called “hermeneutical circle” of interpretation.

I shall begin by looking briefly at Johannine themes. A short explication of the Fourth Gospel's thematic concerns is a necessary preliminary to understanding how their organizational disposition illuminates the author's intent.

All the themes of the Gospel center on Jesus as the incarnate Word. He is God's only Son, the true life, the light that enlightens every man. His "signs" reveal him: in witnessing them, the disciples have seen his "glory" and testify to him. He is the Paschal Lamb and the new Temple. His mission is not condemnatory, but inasmuch as he is the light that shines in the darkness he shows up evil for what it is, and this is the judgement (cf., e.g., 3: 19). As he is one with the Father and abides in him, so his disciples must be one and abide in him. They do this by love. Begotten of the Father from above (e.g., 8: 23), he is the Way, Truth and Life; whatever is opposed to him is from below, especially darkness, lies, and death, the progeny of sin and the devil (cf. 8: 44). He is sent into the world because the Father loves the world and wills its salvation (3: 16 f.). The consummation of his salvific action is his hour: it is also the supreme moment of his glory. He is the true shepherd, and his own recognize his voice; he is the true vine and his disciples abide in him. He sends the Paraclete as a "guide into the whole range of truth".

The transcendent nature of the Johannine Christ is asserted at the very beginning of the Gospel in the Prologue — he is the pre-existent logos, the agent of creation. What is remarkable about the section following the Prologue (1: 19–51) is the thematization of "testimony" and the number of appellations applied to Jesus. Testimony to Jesus is given by John the Baptist, Andrew, Philip and Nathanael. In the section Jesus is given the following titles: Lamb of God, Son of God, Rabbi, Messiah, King of Israel, Son of Man. It is perhaps worth noting that all these are *Jewish* titles. In other words, in the beginning the Evangelist is asserting that Jesus is the fulfilment of Jewish religious hopes. He goes further in the incident of Jesus and the Jewish Samaritans (ch. 4) when he presents the Samaritans as confessing Jesus as "Saviour of the World". The Johannine Christ is thus presented as transcending the boundaries of exclusively Jewish hopes, even though the Fourth Evangelist *begins* with the assertion that Jesus is the fulfilment of Jewish hopes.

That Jesus is the fulfilment of Jewish messianic hopes is also thematized throughout the Gospel by constant references to him as the fulfilment of the scriptures. This is done both allusively and directly. There are many allusive references to the Old Testament in the Fourth Gospel, for it is one woof woven into the fabric of the whole Gospel.⁵ Besides 1: 1–19 this is especially evident in 2: 1–11 (Jesus as the agent of the new dispensation), ch. 6 (Jesus the Bread of Life), 10: 1–27 (Jesus the Good Shepherd), and 15: 1–17 (Jesus the True Vine). The redactor specifically refers to the fulfilment of Scriptures in 12: 37–41, 18: 9, 18: 32, 19: 24, 19: 28, and 19: 36.

Thus by the use of testimonies to Jesus and by the use of Old Testament allusions and specific Scriptural citations, the Fourth Evangelist presents Jesus as the climatic revelation of God's plan. In this sense the Johannine Christ is at one with the Christ of Synoptics. But the Fourth Evangelist's presentation of Christ goes further.

5. See C.K. BARRETT, "The Old Testament in the Fourth Gospel", *JTS*, 48 (1947), pp. 155–169.

Throughout the Fourth Gospel runs the recurrent theme of the Son's relationship to the Father. This relationship is explicated in such a way as to leave no doubt that it is this very relationship which is the reason for the rejection of Jesus by the Jewish authorities (cf. chapters 7 and 8). Jesus is presented unambiguously as the revealer of the Father (cf. 1: 18; 6: 37-40; 8: 28 f; 10: 30; 14: 9-11; 14: 31; 15: 15)⁶. Bultmann finds the symbolic picture of Jesus as the man who has descended and ascended a puzzle in the Fourth Gospel, inasmuch as Jesus never reveals what he has "seen and heard", but only reveals that he is the revealer⁷. But the Johannine Christ *is* the revelation of the Father (Jn. 14: 9). Thus he is *the way*, for he is the truth and life (14: 6)⁸. As he alone is "truth" (and "life") he is the *only* way. This concern for truth belongs to the very substance of Johannine soteriology.

Let us now move more particularly to an examination of "the whole". Among those scholars who have not concerned themselves with displacement theories, most have tended to agree that the structure of the Gospel is "simple in outline, complicated in detail"⁹. The main divisions are as follows:

| | |
|------------------------------|--------------|
| Prologue | 1: 1-18 |
| Jesus' Public Revelation | 1: 19-12: 50 |
| Jesus' Private Revelation | 13: 1-17: 26 |
| The Passion and Resurrection | 18: 1-20: 31 |
| Postscript | 21: 1-25 |

Our question is: What is the function of each part of the redaction? Accordingly, we will briefly examine the major parts as outlined above.

(A) *Prologue (1: 1-18)*

Our specific questions are: What is the thrust of the Prologue and how does it relate to the rest of the Gospel? There can be no doubt that in its present form the Prologue is indissolubly linked to the rest of the Gospel. J.A.T. Robinson has maintained that the Prologue (minus vss. 6-8, which originally began the Gospel) has been interposed into the completed Gospel¹⁰. His thesis is open to objections on stylistic grounds¹¹. Schnackenburg maintains that "we are, therefore, dealing with a

6. See also E.M. SIDEBOTTOM, "The Ascent and Descent of the Son of Man in the Gospel of John", *AngTheo* 1R, 2 (1957), pp. 115-122.

7. R. BULTMANN, "Die Bedeutung der neuschlossenen mandäischen und manichäischen Quellen für das Verständnis des Johannesevangeliums", *ZNW*, 24 (1925), p. 102.

8. In support of this translation of Jn 14: 6 see I. DE LA POTTERIE, "La verita in San Giovanni", *RivBib*, 11 (1963), pp. 3-24 and "'Je suis la Voie, la Vérité et la Vie' (Jn 14, 6)", *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, 88 (1966), pp. 907-942.

9. C.K. BARRETT, *The Gospel According to St. John*, London: S.P.C.K., 1955, p. 11.

10. J.A.T. ROBINSON, "The Relation of the Prologue to the Gospel of St. John", *NTS*, 9 (1962/63), pp. 120-129.

11. R. SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to St. John*, Vol. 1, New York: Herder & Herder, 1968, p. 223: "These verses 6-8 cannot have been mechanically transplanted from, say before 1: 19 and put into the middle of the Prologue, since both the "giving testimony to the light" (v. 7b) and the second *hina*-clause with the intransitive *pisteuein* (v. 7c) presuppose the preceding verses of the Prologue".

deliberate piece of redaction which, as is also suggested by the presence of criteria of Johannine style, can be attributed only to the Evangelist himself"¹².

What then, is the meaning of the Prologue in relation to the rest of the Gospel? It has been variously described as an overture¹³, a dramatic introduction¹⁴, and a summary¹⁵. How are we to see it?

There are four units within the Prologue: vss. 1-5, 6-8, 9-13, 14-18. The first describes the pre-incarnate status of the Logos; the second the testimony of John the Baptist; the third returns to the role of the Logos as creator and as existing in creation as the Light and Life of men (he enters the world and is rejected); the fourth deals with the economy of salvation (grace was manifested to those who believed).

It is evident that the Prologue is an announcement of theological themes. To this extent I agree with Bultmann when he says that the Prologue leads the reader "out of the commonplace into a new and strange world of sounds and figures," and singles "out particular motifs from the action that is now to be unfolded"¹⁶. The Prologue thus functions as a hermeneutical key to the sense of the narratives, conversations, and discourses to follow.

(B) *Jesus' Public Revelation (1: 19-12: 50)*

This section contains a great deal of apparently disparate material, but the function of the whole section is quite clear. As we have noted briefly, 1: 19-50 is remarkable for the number of appellations applied to Jesus. It leaves the reader in no doubt that Jesus is the fulfilment of Jewish salvific hopes. 2: 1-4: 54 then elaborates on this theme. Jesus is not only the fulfilment of Jewish salvific hopes, but his work also has a universal significance (4: 42). The meaning of the cleansing of the Temple (2: 13-22) for the Evangelist is quite clear from the redactional comment in 2: 21-22: the crucified and risen Christ would take the place of the Temple. This same theme had been anticipated in the incident at Cana (2: 1-11). The dialogue with Nicodemus

12. *Ibid.* Schnackenburg does, however, isolate what he considers to have been the "Logos-hymn" used by the Evangelist (see his "Logos-Hymnus und johanneischer Prolog", *BZ*, 1 (1957), pp. 69-109). It consists of vss. 1, 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, 16. There have been many other reconstructions of this supposed "Logos-hymn". But Jack T. Sanders, whose own reconstruction of the hymn omits vss. 6-8 and goes through only to v. 11, admits that "It is not entirely clear that this passage should be referred to as a hymn. There are no particles in the passage, the article is generally present, and, with the exception of v. 3, there is no parallelismus membrorum..." (*The New Testament Christological Hymns*, Cambridge: C.U.P., 1971, p. 21). Barrett, *John*, p. 125 f., after dividing the Prologue into four parts, goes further: "It does not seem possible to split them up into poetic structure, either in Greek or in a conjectured original Aramic". He maintains that the whole passage shows marked internal unity (see further his *The Prologue of St. John's Gospel*, London: Athlone Press, 1971.)

13. R. BULTMANN, *The Gospel of John*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1971, p. 13.

14. Clayton R. BOWEN, "The Fourth Gospel as Drama", *JBL*, 49 (1930), pp. 292-305. He conceives the Prologue to be "the overture to a drama". The whole Gospel is drama: "What we have is an imperfectly edited collection of material, only partially worked into the form it was meant to exhibit. What that form was meant to be is, I submit, obvious. It was to be a dramatic sequence, in many particulars not unlike what we today call a pageant" (p. 305).

15. E. HOSKYNs, *The Fourth Gospel*, ed. F.N. Davey, London: Faber & Faber, 1940, p. 137.

16. BULTMANN, *John*, p. 13.

(3: 1–15) stresses the point that only by rebirth can one enter eternal life and not by virtue of one's Jewish heritage. Chapter 4 then makes the universal significance of Jesus' work clear: he is "Saviour of the World" (4: 42).

The healing story beginning chapter 5 provides the introduction for the important and recurrent explication of the relation of Jesus to the Father. As this healing takes place on the Sabbath (to the chagrin of Jewish authorities), the ensuing dispute provides the occasion for a discourse by Jesus explaining his unity with the Father. This is the real stumbling block to Jewish authorities, who fail to realize that their own religious heritage points to Jesus (5: 45 f.).

Chapter 6 (an obvious midrash on the Exodus theme) then elaborates further the true nature of Jesus the Christ. He is the Bread of Life. Chapters 7 and 8 (masterfully exegeted by Dodd¹⁷) continue, in a series of discourses, the dispute of Jesus with the Jewish authorities. Throughout runs the continued explication of Jesus' relationship to the Father, and the opposition that these claims evoke from the Jewish authorities. Chapter 9 delineates the conflict by the use of dramatic irony: the Jews are blind to the Light within their midst.

In 10: 1–18 Jesus refers to himself as the Good Shepherd. A discourse follows, once again explicating the relationship of Jesus to the Father. 11: 1–52 then climaxes the first half of the Gospel. Through the raising of Lazarus, Jesus is quite clearly presented as the way to the victory of life over death.

Thus, although 1: 19–12: 50 does contain much apparent disparate material, it all coheres together in its function of explicating the true nature of the Johannine Christ. In particular, Jesus as revealer of the Father is treated over and over again in various ways.

It is evident that the Evangelist does not conceive of the Jewish scriptures as the norm against which Jesus must be measured; rather, the Evangelist presents the scriptures as being incomplete without the climactic revelation of Jesus the Christ. In other words, the thrust of the first part of the redaction is not to present Jesus as part of God's plan — he *is* God's plan. Man's salvific hopes are consummated in him.

(C) *Jesus' Private Revelation to "his own" (13: 1–17: 26)*

This section opens with the symbolic action of Jesus washing the disciples' feet, after which there follows an almost uninterrupted discourse given by Jesus to the disciples ("his own").

The subject-matter of the new section of the Gospel becomes clear from its opening scene: it deals with the relation of Jesus to his disciples, with his *ἀγάπη* to his *ἰδῶι*. His mission, seen as a whole, is itself the divine *ἀγάπη* (3: 16) as it becomes operative in the world. The first part (chs. 3–12) has shown this *ἀγάπη* in its struggle to win over the world to itself; it had shown how *ἀγάπη* necessarily implies *σκάνδαλον* for the *κόσμος*, and how the latter allows the *σκάνδαλον* to become its own condemnation. The second part shows the *ἀγάπη* revealing itself

17. C.H. DODD, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, pp. 345–354.

to the community of "his own", firstly by direct means, in the farewell scenes of the night before the passion, and then indirectly in the passion itself, and in the Easter event¹⁸.

Chapters 13–17 are a hermeneutical key to the narratives of the suffering, death, and resurrection appearances which follow. There is no particular focusing on "the Twelve", and the disciples present at the Last Supper represent the *idioti* generally. The whole of the Last Discourse embraces the life of the community and its relation to Jesus and the Paraclete. The guiding principle of the community is Jesus. The community is united to him by its knowledge and faith, and by its love.

13: 1–30 falls into two parts, each closely connected¹⁹. The first part (13: 1–20) has further subdivisions. 13: 1 introduces the narrative. The footwashing scene (vss. 2–11) is followed by an interpretative discourse (vss. 12–20). The second part (13: 21–30) concerns the prophecy of the betrayal.

What is the meaning of this complex of material in 13: 1–30? The footwashing scene focuses on the self-abasement and humility of Jesus. There may also be a secondary sacramental motif²⁰. As for the betrayal scene:

There can be no talk of the community, without reckoning with the possibility that one of its number is unworthy. But in the circle of those who have received Jesus' service, unworthiness is synonymous with betrayal. The consciousness of belonging to the body of disciples must not seduce any of them into the illusion of security. The Evangelist has emphasized this immediately after the emergence of the body of disciples as a limited circle (6. 66–71), and has twice drawn attention to the fact in the previous scene which dealt with the founding of the community (vv. 11, 18). He now uses a special scene, that of the prophecy of the betrayal (13. 21–30), in order to express the idea in tangible form²¹.

At the end of the section Judas departs into the night. The self-disclosure of Jesus to the faithful now commences.

13: 31–38 is an introduction to the unit 13: 31–14: 31. It announces the theme of the unit — Jesus' departure and new commandment. Chapter 14 is subdivided into two parts: 14: 1–14 focuses on the way to the Father for the community, and 14: 15–31 on the promise of the Paraclete and his work.

The next unit is easily discernible. It begins at 15: 1 and ends at 16: 33²². The unit thematizes the community in the world. The thematic sequence in these two major units (13: 31–14: 31 and 15: 1–16: 33) is quite evident: first, the departure of Jesus, then the community he leaves behind (and the work of the Paraclete within

18. BULTMANN, *John*, p. 457.

19. *Loc. cit.*, p. 461.

20. See the extended note of BULTMANN, *John*, pp. 469 f., n. 2. One of the best arguments for a sacramental interpretation is that of M.E. BOISMARD, "Le lavement des pieds (Jn xiii 1–17)", *RB*, 71 (1964), pp. 5–24. A forceful argument against is presented by G. Richter, *Die Fusswaschung im Johannesevangelium: Geschichte ihrer Deutung*, Regensburg: Pustet, 1967.

21. BULTMANN, *John*, p. 479.

22. See R.E. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John* (xiii–xxi), Anchor Bible 29A, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1971, p. 587.

that community), and finally the community in the world. Moreover, these two units are preparatory to the final unit in the whole section, the prayer of Jesus for the community (17: 1–26).

(D) *The Passion and Resurrection (18: 1–20: 31)*

The Passion in the Fourth Gospel is highly charged with theological significance. Furthermore, the sparse comments of the redactor inescapably etch the meaning of Jesus' crucifixion: this is "the hour" of Jesus (13: 1), the consummation of his salvific action, foretold by the scriptures (19: 24; 19: 28; 19: 36–37).

The meaning of the resurrection appearances is specified in 19: 17, where the Evangelist is making the theological assertion that "the elevation of Jesus which affected man's salvation involves the chain of crucifixion, resurrection and ascension"²³. Moreover, the meaning of Christ's first appearance to the disciples (20: 19–23) is found in the crux of the episode in vs. 21–23, where they are divinely commissioned and receive the Holy Spirit to accomplish their mission. They are the chosen agents of the messianic economy of forgiveness²⁴. The central intent of the second appearance, which is witnessed by Thomas, is given in 19: 27–29. The climatic response of Thomas, "My Lord and my God", is followed by a blessing of Jesus on those who believe and yet have not seen. 20: 30 f. forms the conclusion to the Gospel²⁵.

From this brief analysis it is evident that there is indeed a strategy of sequence in the Fourth Gospel. Moreover, the meaning of each part is grounded in the transcendent nature of the Johannine Christ. The unfolding of the meaning of the Gospel is governed by the author's prime concern: to present Jesus as the revealer of the Father. In this respect, there are at least two "hermeneutical keys" which feature prominently in the sequential strategy of the writing: the Prologue and the Last Discourse. As we observed, the Prologue singles out the motifs of the Gospel. The second part of the Gospel features the private revelation of Jesus to "his own". In the first part of the Gospel Jesus is presented as the revealer to the world. He is "Saviour of the world"; the judge of the world. In this sense, he is the norm of all religion. The second part of the Gospel embraces the life of the specifically Christian community and its relation to Jesus and the Paraclete. That is, the concern here is with the revelation of Jesus as the norm for Christians.

The Fourth Gospel, indeed, may be seen as a single development in two phases: normative religion and normative Christianity. In the first phase (normative religion) the Fourth Gospel is pervaded by the claim that Jesus is the one and only way to salvation. The Evangelist's presupposition is that salvation consists in communion with "the Father", that such communion is mediated by the gift of "eternal life", and

23. R.E. BROWN, *The Gospel of John and the Johannine Epistles*, Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1965, p. 95.

24. BARRETT, *John*, pp. 474f.

25. It seems clear that chapter 21 is an addition to the Gospel by another hand — see BULTMANN, *John*, pp. 700–706. I have therefore left it out of consideration.

that this gift is nothing other than "truth", (i.e., the revelation of the Father). The central affirmation is that Jesus — to be complete exclusion of all others — is the way to salvation. He alone has seen the Father; he alone can reveal him. It follows that he alone can give eternal life. It is clear that the Fourth Gospel prominently features themes of revelation and response, the unique saving revelation brought to the world by Jesus Christ and the call for unreserved adherence not simply to it but to him, for he is not simply the revealer but the revelation itself. Therefore normative religion can be nothing other than the response to Jesus. Indeed, he himself is the very norm of religion. John Bogart, in his excellent dissertation on *Orthodox and Heretical Perfectionism in the Johannine Community*, seems to have the same point in mind when he speaks of the *pisteological* dichotomy in John. Those who stand in the light are to be differentiated from those who stand in darkness by their faith in the One from Above. There is thus a doctrinal dichotomy in the Fourth Gospel²⁶.

The second phase of this development is "normative Christianity". The Johannine concern here is not *thematic* but *pragmatic*. The Evangelist has not presented orthodoxy as a theme, rather he has orchestrated themes such as "truth" and "witness" to secure orthodoxy as a fact. In chapter 17, for example, we are told that the Johannine community taught what Jesus taught, and that this comes from the Father himself (17: 6c, 14a, 17 cf. 7: 16b).

There is obviously a legitimising interest here. In 17: 8 the Johannine community is presented as having accepted (in the past — note the aorist) the Christological doctrine that the Father sent the Son, and the Son has communicated to them the *Logos* (the authoritative teaching) which they have faithfully handed down to the second generation (17: 20). Other major themes such as the sending of the Paraclete and the witness of the Beloved disciple²⁷ have also been pressed into the service of the concern for orthodoxy and this concern is equally the key to what I have called the Johannine transposition.

The discussion of how the Fourth Evangelist has presented Jesus inevitably leads to the question: What readership did the Fourth Evangelist have in mind? For the presentation of Jesus gives us insight into the community for which the Gospel was intended.

In his commentary on John, C.K. Barrett wrote:

It is easy, when we read the Gospel, to believe that John... wrote primarily to satisfy himself. His gospel must be written: it was no concern of his whether it was also read. Again, it is by no means necessary to suppose that he was aware of the historical problems imposed upon later students by his treatment of the traditional material. It cried aloud for rehandling; its true meaning had crystallized in his mind, and he simply conveyed this meaning to paper.

It seems right to emphasize a certain detachment of the gospel from its immediate surroundings; no book was ever less a party tract than John²⁸.

26. JOHN BOGART, *Orthodox and Heretical Perfectionism in the Johannine Community as evident in the First Epistle of John*, Missoula: Scholar's Press, 1977, p. 61.

27. See my own article "The Function of the Beloved Disciple Motif in the Johannine Redaction", *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 33 (1977), pp. 135-150.

28. BARRETT, *John*, p. 115.

This position of Barrett's has been almost universally rejected. Yet I believe Barrett is both right and wrong. He is right inasmuch as the Gospel is not *polemical* but *apologetical*. He is wrong inasmuch as the author *was* interested in its publication. But here again, I think that Barrett is nearer to the truth than many; for I believe that the author was only interested in its limited publication. Wayne Meeks is quite right when he says:

It could hardly be regarded as a missionary tract, for we may imagine that only a very rare outsider would get past the barrier of its closed metaphorical system. It is a book for insiders...²⁹

It is a book, in other words, which is written for a sectarian community which feels the need to defend its faith.

In the conclusion, then, the Fourth Gospel is a document for use within the Johannine community, which elaborates what Christians have in Christ. Inasmuch as the Gospel seeks to show Jesus as the norm of religion, it enters into a dialogue with Judaism. But I cannot agree with Martyn and others that this is the primary purpose of the Gospel³⁰. In the first place, it seems to me that Martyn overlooks the thrust of the *whole* redaction. There is indeed a dialogue with Judaism in chapters 1-12, but this is not so in the second half of the Gospel. Secondly, it seems equally demonstrable to me that the Fourth Evangelist is concerned to enter into dialogue not only with Judaism, but also with hellenistic and gnosticising philosophies³¹.

The Gospel, then, presents Jesus as the norm of religion. The Gospel also displays a concern for normative Christianity. The Gospel is thus a defence of the community's faith. It seems to me that this concern would be a profitable avenue of approach in future studies of the Fourth Gospel. For not only might such studies silhouette more precisely the nature of the Johannine community, but they might also contribute to the important debate on the supposed gnosticising theology of the Fourth Gospel³².

29. Wayne MEEKS, "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism", *JBL*, 91 (1972), p. 70.

30. See J.L. MARTYN, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, New York: Harper & Row, 1968; also "Glimpses into the History of the Johannine Community", in *L'Évangile de Jean: Sources, rédaction, théologie*, ed. M. de Jonge, BETL 44, Gembloux: Duculot, 1977, pp. 149-179.

31. See, for example, B.W. BACON, *The Gospel of Hellenists*, New York: Holt, 1933.

32. See for example, E. KAESEMANN, "Ketzer und Zeuge. Zum Johanneischen Verfasserproblem", *ZTK*, 48 (1951), pp. 292-311 and *The Testament of Jesus*, London: S.C.M., 1968; L. SCHOTTRUFF, "Joh. iv 5-15 und die Konsequenz des johanneischen Dualismus", *ZNW*, 60 (1969), pp. 199-214; "Heil als Innerweltliche Entweltlichung", *NovT*, 11 (1969), pp. 294-317 and *Der Glaubende und die feindliche Welt*, Neukirchener-Vlvyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1970.