

Ton Veerkamp, Solidarity against the World Order

A Political Reading of the Gospel of John
about Jesus Messiah of all Israel.

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1 [The translator’s notes and additions to the text will be in square brackets. In editorial notes, I refer to Ton Veerkamp with the abbreviation TV. My English translation of TV’s 2015 German translation of the Gospel of John, including the accompanying notes, is inserted into his interpretation from 2006 and 2007. Occasionally, some notes are taken from TV’s 2005 German colometric translation, introduced by the abbreviation “CT”. As for the English translation of the Gospel of John, a small selection of the words of John have been adapted from the “Complete Jewish Bible” (Copyright Dr. David H. Stern. Used with Permission from Messianic Jewish Publishers, www.messianicjewish.net). For more details on the translation and edition of the author’s texts see the appendix.]

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Introduction²

Who, When, Where?

We have a text we do not know who wrote it and where and when it was written. There are many hypotheses, and it cannot be the task of an introduction to add another one or take sides for one or the other hypothesis. We only have a text that is almost two millennia old.

We can at least say this about the person or persons behind the text: They are one or more Jewish people who are versed in the Scriptures of Israel, and have a good knowledge of the Greek language, but with their Greek, their Aramaic mother tongue shines through. The text must have been written after the year 66 because it refers to events that did not happen before the last third of the 1st century of our era.

Text and Context

The text is about *Messianists*, i.e., Jews who believe that the Messiah will come soon and thus radically transform the world order. “We have found the Messiah,” says Andrew to his brother Peter (1:41). And Philipp says to Nathanael, “The one that Moses and the prophets wrote about in the Torah, we have found him: Jesus, son of Joseph, from Nazareth in Galilee.” (1:45).

So it is about a Galilean who is supposed to be the Messiah of Israel. The text wants to answer the question as to whether this is true: Is that Galilean Jesus the Messiah or not? Our text—let us call it “John”—knows the answer: This is the one, and those who allegedly came before him as Messiah are “thieves and terrorists,” 10:8. They pretend to be “shepherds,” that is, leaders of the people, but they do nothing but “steal, slaughter and lead them to destruction” (10:10). Political leadership would have to stand up for the people—the text calls them “sheep”—protecting and defending them against those who want to plunder them. The text calls the latter “wolves,” a designation of the Roman Empire. The leadership fails; it “flees” and leaves the city, temple, and people to the Roman armies. The Messiah, that very Jesus from Nazareth, is just the opposite; his leadership of the people is good leadership; he is “the good shepherd.”

The text places Jesus from Nazareth in the midst of the deadly struggles of his people in the Judean War against Rome (66-73). “Stealing, murdering, plundering, slaughtering, and leading to destruction” are the keywords of the tenth chapter about the “good shepherd,” the Judean War is John’s context.

2 [TV prefaced his 2015 revised translation of the Gospel of John with this introduction.]

Contradictions

Jesus is involved in numerous and fierce contradictions. In no other Gospel does he deal more harshly with his opponents than in John. His opponents are “the Jews,” the Pharisees, the priests, Jews who had initially believed in him (8:31). That is why John has acted as the main text of Christian anti-Judaism. It all comes down to translating scrupulously here.

John was a Jew, Jesus was also a Jew. We translate the Greek word *Ioudaioi* as “Judeans,” not “Jews.” Jesus was a Jew from Galilee, that is, a Galilean, he was not a *Ioudaios*, one from Judea. The Galileans were very orthodox Jews; most of them rejected any cooperation with the Romans. The Jews from Jerusalem were different; they tended to compromise, their culture was more Hellenistic than Jewish. Probably for this reason the Galileans were regarded as backwoodsmen by the people from Jerusalem. They were the militant spearhead of the rebellion against Rome in the Judean War.

Although in John, Jesus strictly rejected armed struggle, he had friends among the militants (Zealots). Peter was a Zealot (13:37, 18:10). The contradiction between Jesus the Galilean and the Judeans of Jerusalem was that of political opposition. So was the contradiction between Jesus and the Perushim (Pharisees), who were an influential and yet moderately anti-Roman party not only in Judea but also in Galilee. Jesus saw Pharisaism as a political aberration that tended to cause division (*schism*, 7:43; 9:16; 10:19) among the Jews in the land, in Samaria, and the Diaspora. Thus, it is not only a matter of being a disciple of Moses but also of being a disciple of Jesus from Nazareth, so that the schism can be overcome.

The Pharisees were opponents, but not enemies. It is different with the renegades, people who had left the group around John; in 6:66 it is still neutrally stated that “many of his disciples went away . . .,” but in 8:44 they are “of the devil,” as traditionally translated. Our translation deliberately differs, “You are of the father, the enemy.” The *diabolos* is not the evil angel from the other world, but the this-worldly mortal enemy, Rome. Rome is the father of the renegades, they act in his sense, they are collaborators, traitors, no pardon for them! So it is not about “the Jews,” not even about the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Judeans, it is about a very specific group of Judeans, who were originally members of the group around John.

The occasion for the secession was the bread speech, 6:30-58. This speech has sectarian features, it does not take the slightest trouble to arouse understanding, but proceeds according to Hobson’s choice, “It’s sink or swim.”³ This made it difficult for

3 [I tried here to find a reasonably adequate English equivalent for a German phrase that would be literally translated as “Eat, bird, or die,” which goes back to the controversial theological writing “Friss, Vogel, oder stirb” by J. N. Weislinger, Strasbourg 1726.]

people at that time to follow this Jesus, and for us today it is difficult to read John and even to understand him.

Our translation does not take away these difficulties, but it at least tries to make the real contradictions audible. John is a sectarian paper, but it is not a document of anti-Judaism, even of anti-Semitism. It has been Christianity that, at least since Augustine, has admitted the anti-Jewish reading of John as the only possible one. Our translation, therefore, tries to peel off the mighty layers of traditional translations and interpretations; it diametrically opposes not John, but his history of impact. Those who put on the glasses of anti-Judaism are no longer able to perceive the real —political!—contradictory structure of the text, a contradictory structure “with dominant,” as the French philosopher Louis Althusser said. The dominant is the contradiction between Rome and Jesus; vv.12:27-33 make this perfectly clear once you are prepared to admit that “the ruler of the world” is Rome. All other contradictions in the text have to be derived from the relationship to this main contradiction.

Messiah

All Christians—Greek *Christianoj*, also to be translated as “Messianists”—have a big problem: Why has the world remained as it was, predatory, murderous, wolfish, despite Jesus the Messiah? John did not wipe this problem off the table. In no other Gospel, the solution is so desperately struggled for as in John’s Gospel.

The document of this despair is found in the Farewell Narrative, chapters 13-17. It holds that there can be no compromise between Jesus and Rome—in whatever form. “The ruler of the world order is coming”—John knows that the great time of the Roman Empire is yet to come—but “with me, indeed, he has *no concern at all*,” 14:30. This Messiah fails because of the murderousness of the Empire, his resurrection underscores his departure, and this is “useful” (*sympherei*, 16:7) to the disciples.

The Messiah, however, is not a utopian dream, but a perspective, *zōē aiōnios*. Our translation diverges from the traditional idea of “eternal life” (what is that?). We write “life of the age to come,” the Messianic era. It is coming. For the time being, we must live from the inspiration of this Messianic perspective, from the consolation of the Messiah (*paraklētos*, 16:7). We must live without Messiah, but we can live inspired by him; his way, his *fidelity is life*, 14:6. That is why we translate *pneuma tēs alētheias* not the usual “spirit of truth,” but “inspiration of fidelity,” 16:13.

John understands the time ahead as the epoch of the Roman Empire; in fact, the second century was the great time of the Empire. He anticipates the situation of early Christianity and directs the disciples to the catacombs, to the underground. In the underground, however, you can only survive by and as long as you are in solidarity with your fellow travelers. Therefore, the life of Jesus’ disciples must be a life of solidarity. The “new commandment” (13:34) is that of “solidarity,” this word being the

only possible translation of the word *agapē*. Humans do not need more religion than that.

We do not consider the writers of the Messianic writings (the “New Testament”) as theologians, but as Jewish politicians, who are not concerned with the salvation of the soul, but with “the world different,” a world in which body and soul will be well! And so we translate.

Lemgow-Schmarsau, March 2015

Ton Veerkamp

The Language of John and our Language⁴

The other culture

André Chouraqui, the Jewish legal scholar, linguist, philosopher, and theologian, set himself the goal as far as possible to make the Semitic language structure of the Scriptures audible in a (French) translation. This concerns the rhythm and the vocabulary of the respective original texts. In the journal “Amsterdamse Cahiers” (No. 5, 1982), André Chouraqui explained his own background and working method. He begins immediately with a warning, quoting from the Talmud. Rabbi Jehuda bar Ilai (about 150 CE) had said: “Whoever translates the text of a verse is a liar; whoever makes a gloss on a verse is a blasphemer.”

Many Islamic theologians saw and still see things similarly. The Qur’an should not be translated into any other language because God spoke to Muhammad in Arabic and nothing else; a translation would falsify the word of God. Access to the promises of Islam is not denied to others, but they are expected to move toward the foreign, not the foreign toward them; otherwise, the message would have to adapt to the listeners.

The *Good News’s Bible (Today’s English Version)* or the *Contemporary English Version*⁵ on the other hand, rely entirely on the comprehension possibilities of the listener or reader. Every translation has to move between both extremes. A translation that adapts itself entirely to the listener’s ingrained possibilities of understanding no longer conveys the structure of the text and the culture that can be heard in it. André Chouraqui, on the other hand, demands something similar to the Islamic

4 [I supplement here the overview of translation principles that TV prefaced his first translation of chapters John 13-17: Ton Veerkamp, *Der Abschied des Messias. Johannes 13-17*, in *Texte & Kontexte* 95/96 (2002), 5-13.]

5 [TV himself mentions the German Bible translation “Die Gute Nachricht des Alten und Neuen Testaments. Die Bibel in heutigem Deutsch.”]

tradition: the text to be translated must remain a foreign text, otherwise, the listeners will not move toward this foreignness.

But he also says: “Among all versions, the oldest, that of the Septuagint, remains a monument stamped as an imperishable seal not only of the knowledge of the Bible in the West but also of human civilization in general.” Unlike Islamic theologians, Alexandrian scholars around 330-100 BCE chose to translate the Hebrew Scriptures into a completely different structured language. This achievement, he says, was something entirely unheard of in the history of mankind up to that time. It was to take five centuries, writes André Chouraqui, before a comparable project was undertaken: the translation of the classical Buddhist books into Chinese by Kumaradji-va and his disciples (344-413 CE). However, you can notice the origin of the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Scriptures from Alexandria, produced from the 3rd to the 1st century BCE, because it does not want to deny it at all. Precisely in this way, with a Greek that is no Greek at all, this translation wants to make itself understood by the Greeks.

The translations *Vetus Latina* and *Vulgate* suffered the same fate. For the classical rhetors—like Augustine!—this Latin was an imposition. This was true *mutatis mutandis* for all the great translations of the Reformation period. Only after the foreignness of the great translations had become the old familiar—ingrained in everyday language—, did they seem “self-evident” and no longer convey anything new.

Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber have created a foreign—and therefore alienating—version of the Scriptures in German. Their version is deliberately not oriented to the alleged possibilities of understanding of the addressees but is oriented to the structure of the message to be translated. The addressee has to experience that he is dealing with a foreign text, especially if the message comes along with German vocabulary and in German sentences. He is confronted with a foreign culture. The reaction of alienation is intended. The version goes to the limits of the capacity of the German language, perhaps beyond it, and it expects German recipients to develop first from readers to listeners and then to have something said to them in German that actually cannot be said at all in German. In the process, they also learn that there is more to their own language than they thought possible. But above all, they learn to listen anew and to put what they thought they knew before to the test. The *Good News Bible* conveys what people already think they know. Learning rarely takes place here. It is precisely the unfamiliarity that is a necessary condition for hearing something new and moving from the message. It is not by chance that there have been really new and “moving” translations in the last century. The Germans have Buber-Rosenzweig, the French André Chouraqui, in the English-speaking world there is Everett Fox.

Buber/Rosenzweig represent a challenge to exegesis to listen anew and to leave old habits in the closed milieu of the so-called “research.” Some of their basic insights

(colometry, root translation, word repetitions as structural elements, etc.) are applied in this translation of the Gospel of John. By the way, this is done without slavish copying. However, Siegfried Kracauer clearly pointed out the limits of Buber/Rosenzweig already around 1930. One cannot restore an ancient text to its original form by “archaizing” it.⁶

You can use “today’s German” [or “English”] without destroying the structure and still not have to fall into the language of informatics or business administration. Nevertheless, Buber/Rosenzweig have made preliminary theological decisions behind which you cannot go without very good arguments. By translating words like *pisteuein* or *alētheia*, which go back to the Hebrew root *ʾaman*, not as “glauben” or “Wahrheit,” [“to believe” or “truth”] but as “vertrauen” or “Treue,” [“to trust” or “fidelity”] you are following Buber’s admonition to translate all words that go back to *ʾaman* with German words of the root “treu-” or “trau-.” “Fidelity” is more than “faith,” because world-changing practice is more than world view.⁷

Nevertheless, a warning on my own behalf. The Septuagint was “foreign” enough; but if foreigners, in this case, “Christians,” gain the sovereignty of interpretation over the Scriptures of Israel, even the foreignness of the translation is no longer of any help. What is decisive is not linguistic purism, but the ideological objective in the use of texts. The author of the present translation is aware of this ideological danger. A translation is an interpretation, and this interpretation is put up for discussion.

On the Translation of John

Our texts are not for reading, but for reading aloud, for “calling out.” The Jews call the corpus of their basic texts—what we call the “Hebrew Bible” or even the “Old Testament”—*miqraʾ*, what is “to be called out, to be recited.” The word has as its root *qaraʾ*. Islam calls its scripture “Qurʾan”, which also goes back to that common Semitic root *qaraʾ*. It is a text structured by breathing units. Therefore, the written form of a translation must make this structure visible. The principle of “colometry” is therefore mandatory; each line should contain at most as much as can be said with the human voice in one breath. This has consequences for the interpretation.

The Tanakh—as Jewish theology calls what we call the “Hebrew Bible,” i.e., *Torah*, *Neviʾim*, *Ketuvim*, Guidance, Prophets, and Writings—is the main source of John’s Gospel. Therefore, every word is to be consulted for its Hebrew-Aramaic equivalent.

6 [I refrain from translating the quotation from Kracauer because it refers almost exclusively to German words, which Buber/Rosenzweig modeled on the “idiom of Richard Wagner’s music-dramatic gods and knights.” (Siegfried Kracauer, *Das Ornament der Masse*, Frankfurt/M. 1963, 180).]

7 [In English, it does not seem possible to me to translate all words that go back to *ʾaman* with words of the same root. Which word is reasonably appropriate, I will justify in each case.]

This also applies to such trivial particles as *kai*, *en*, etc.; since *kai* stands for the Hebrew *we*, *en* for *be*, it must be asked in each case whether we have to translate “Greek” or “Hebrew-Aramaic.”

Thus, *be* can mean not only “in,” but also “with” or “through.” The disciples of Jesus are not to “stay *in* him,” for every honest person must ask how a person can stay in another person at all. Semitic languages do not know copulative verbs like “to be” and “to stay.” To stay (Greek: *menein*) stands for the “roots” *ʿamad* or *qum*, which means “to be steadfast” or “to be erect,” hence also “to remain connected, to stay firm.”

All the more it becomes exciting when the translator encounters forms of the verb *einai*; in classical Greek texts, the verb simply means “to be,” so it is the copula of identity. The Hebrew *haya* is rendered with forms of *einai*, but it does not mean “to be,” but “to be there for, to happen,” at most “to become.” The emphatic *egō eimi* that is so characteristic of John’s Gospel is not a sentence of judgment along the lines of *subject = predicate*. It gives no information about what Jesus *was* all about, but *that* and *how* he *acted* for others; hence, “I am there for you as . . . , I happen to you as . . .” Sometimes, however, the Greek text may, indeed, mean such verbs “in the Greek way,” *einai* as a copula. The translator must therefore scrupulously ask himself what usage is involved.

The intermediate link in determining the Semitic background of a text like the Gospel of John is the Septuagint. Since it was not an *idiolectic* translation (translating the same words with the same foreign language equivalents without exception) and it very often translates a single Hebrew word by several Greek words and, conversely, one Greek word has several Hebrew equivalents, the matter is not simple. You have to consult all the passages first and then make a selection.

Our text is like a painting of an old master, hidden under one or even several layers of varnish darkened by the action of light. There is little to be said against varnish; it protects the picture from harmful influences from the outside. Just as little can be said against dogmatics; a binding interpretation protects against arbitrary interpretations caused by the respective spirit of the times. However, the protective layer can itself become harmful. What is in the picture is hardly visible anymore. Careful restoration by removing the protective layers brings to light an image that we had never seen before. Our translation, founded on an interpretation that protects against arbitrariness, is comparable to such a restoration. It is to be freed from ancient dogmatic prejudices, hardly perceived as such.

John did not know “Father-Son-Holy Spirit dogmatics” as it was developed in the 3rd century in the categories of the Greek scientific language of that time and became orthodox since the early 4th century (Council of Nicaea). When we read such words as “Father,” “Son,” “Holy Spirit,” we can be quite sure that he who thought Semitically would not have been able to do anything with the language of orthodoxy.

Therefore, where possible, we must translate differently than the orthodox—but not biblically—trained readership expects.

All recent translations in German [or English⁸] are “post-Nicene” translations, that is, they cover the text, even if they do not want to use newspaper German [or English], with that thick layer of varnish of Christian dogmatics that has become partly dark.

Jesus is, to give an example, the “Son of Man”; at the same time, he is the Son of God. After the Council of Chalcedon in 453 thought to have to settle the dogmatic dispute about “Christ” with a compromise formula (“true God, true man, one undivided person in two natures”) and after this formula has become the basis of the Christian religion in all its shades, most people think that “John” could not have meant much else than “Nicaea” and “Chalcedon.”

But since the vocable “son” is written and pronounced *ben* in Hebrew, *bar* in Aramaic, and *hyios* in Greek, the question is: do we mean *ben* or do we mean *hyios*? *Ben*, *bar* means not only “son” but also “one like.” We learn, for example, in Genesis 7:6, *we-noach ben-shesh me’oth shana*, and, if we translate literally, we get: “And Noah was a son of six hundred years.” Neither Chouraqui nor Buber translates the word *ben* there as “son.” He is a “six hundred years old” man. So a “son of man” is “one like a man, a human.”

In Daniel 7, the history of the peoples of the world comprehensible for the Scriptures was determined by a regime of predatory powers: lion, bear, panther, sea monster. After the disempowerment of these “predators” appears as an absolute alternative the “son of man,” that is, a human. And this human does only what the God of Israel demands; he identifies himself thus totally with God’s concern that he acts and speaks “like God” (*ben ’elohim*, *bar elahin*). From Nicaea and equality of essence (*homoousios*, *consubstantialis*), from “Father” and “Son” every trace is missing here.

Maybe the Christian theologians, who had only the philosophical scientific language of late antique Greek at their disposal, could not formulate differently, but John was a Greek-writing child of Israel with Aramaic as his mother tongue, grown up and thinking in the linguistic body of the Tanakh. At the same time, we must keep in mind that the author of John’s Gospel was a scholar, but not a Rabbinic scholar, and certainly not a late ancient scholar. We will see very often that the Gospel of John vehemently and principally sets itself apart from Rabbinical Judaism. The Gospel of John is indeed an *Israelite* text, but it is certainly not a *Jewish* text—and all the less a *Christian* text. It has only become a text of Christianity and thus a Christian text through the Christian reception since the 2nd century.

8 [I think this is true even of the Complete Jewish Bible, which is mindful of the Jewish background of John’s Gospel.]

These remarks may suffice to illustrate to readers how arduous the restoration of the text of a heterodox, fiercely anti-Rabbinic Messianist from Israel of the late 1st century of our era must be.

Although we have the Gospel of John only in the form of manuscripts of later Christian theologians, we must take into account what has been said above when translating it. Unfortunately, we do not have one original text, but many original texts that differ in details and sometimes also in important aspects. The earliest reasonably complete text, the papyrus codex P⁶⁶, dates from around 200, at least a hundred years after the first writing; other important manuscripts date from the 3rd to 4th centuries and even later.

Textual criticism cannot aim at reconstructing the original of the author “John.” Apart from clear spelling mistakes, every maker of a handwritten manuscript has had his good reasons to reformulate one thing or another. Thus, after about 400, producers of manuscripts began to insert into the text the “Narrative of the Adulteress” with the famous phrase: “He who is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone.” The question is not: Is it part of the original? but: What reasons did which people (manuscripts) have for inserting the narrative in this exact place?

We must therefore admit that we are not even translating one of the original texts, but a “bastard text.” The commonly used 27th edition of “Nestle-Aland” is also a “bastard text,” albeit one that has been worked out with the greatest care, a mixture of different text templates. It is the basis of our translation, whereby we take the liberty to deviate from it if necessary and to choose other variants.

Names of persons and places in the text are a problem in themselves. To Christian readers, Jesus, John, Simon-Peter, or Peter, etc., are “old acquaintances.” For this reason alone, it is advisable to give the persons back their original Hebrew or Aramaic names. To a Greek person, *Iēsous* or *Lazaros* were also exotic names, and for them, these people were non-Greeks, which means strangers, even barbarians. The text comes from a culture foreign to us—the people in the text lived, thought, felt different from the Greeks—and us.

If we translate the Greek word *Ioudaioi* as “Jews,” we pretend that John had problems with those *Ioudaioi* that were identical with that murderous paranoia that “Christians” of the Middle Ages and the Modern Age developed regarding the respective Judaism. This difference must be taken into account. Therefore we write the Hebrew “Yehudim” (the Aramaic “Yehudayin” would be another possibility) and the corresponding “Yehuda” for the country and the person of Judah. John does not write *Ierousalēm*, as Luke does, but *Hierosolyma*, which is undoubtedly an attempted transcription of the dual form *Yerushalayim*; we retain this form. Samaria is *Shomron*, so the woman from Samaria is a *Shomronite* woman. The attempt is not

so much a return to an origin of whatever kind, but rather what Bertolt Brecht calls “alienation.”⁹

Brecht looks at pictures by the older Breughel. He writes: “If an Alpine massif is set in flemic landscape, or the contemporary European costume is opposed by the ancient Asian one, then one denounces the other and shows it in its particularity, but at the same time we get landscape par excellence, people everywhere.” This seems, to me, a translation program for ancient texts in general. “The Jesus in Oriental costume among flemic contemporaries,” that is for Brecht at first the striking thing about the painting “Expulsion of the Changers from the Temple”.¹⁰ In “Dialogues from the ‘Brass Purchase,’” it says: “Just as empathy makes the particular event commonplace, so alienation makes the commonplace particular”.¹¹

In the so-called “bibliodramas” empathy plays the main role, Jesus thus becomes an everyday—therefore also boring, in any case, interchangeable—figure. Only through alienation does he become for us what he was for the narrators: the unique, the special in itself. And the characters who interact with him become unique. Brecht, despite his intense relationship with the Bible as a narrative, never dared to make a drama out of biblical material. One does not perform “Jesus” any more than one can perform “Muhammad.” In the translation we let the characters appear in the dress of oriental names.

House of Study

For those who are familiar with the standard German or English translations, this translation will sometimes feel like an ox at a strange barn door. We have therefore endeavored to justify factual deviations from the standard translation. This is done in an extensive footnote appendix. Purely technical notes alternate with commentary. A small glossary (new translation—traditional translation—Greek equivalent—Hebrew/Aramaic equivalent) is provided at the end of the book.

The interpretation of a text is not a scientific *l’art pour l’art*. The gigantic corpus of interpretation of the Talmud shows the always necessary effort how people should live concretely, under the respective ruling world orders, with the Grand Narrative.¹²

9 [As can be seen from TV’s preface to his 2015 translation (see note 593), he has since refrained from overdoing it with the alienating use of names. I too no longer use the names *Elʿasar* for Lazarus, *Yerushalayim* for Jerusalem, or *Shomron* for Samaria, and I limit myself to retaining the Aramaic term *Perushim* for the “Pharisees” and the translation *Judeans* for the word *Ioudaioi* who are not synonymous with what we mean by “Jews” today. (See my explanation of the translation of names in the appendix).]

10 Bertolt Brecht, *Über Theater*, Leipzig 1966, 345 ff.

11 Bertolt Brecht, *Schriften zur Literatur und Kunst I*, Berlin/Weimar 1966, 99.

12 [For an in-depth insight into what TV means by “Grand Narrative,” see Ton Veerkamp, *Die Welt anders. Politische Geschichte der Großen Erzählung*, Berlin 2013. A brief glimpse of its

I think that in the common worship service, the Grand Narrative usually cannot be interpreted, even made audible. The place where this can and must be done is what the Jews call *beth ha-midrash*, “House of Study.” The era of Christianity is over. Those who want to live with and in the Grand Narrative *under* the conditions of the world order, but not *according to* the conditions of the world order, are today only a vanishing minority, even in the churches. If they want to avoid turning into a fundamentalist sect, they depend on the Jewish model “House of Study.” The translation is meant for the House of Study. Translation, apparatus, and interpretation may be helpful for the students in the House of Study. What sense the translator and interpreter make of this troublesome, recalcitrant, annoying, and occasionally great text—in any case still powerful in its ideological effect—, he has to make recognizable as his own commentary: a contribution to the discussion among many others. Whereby the boundaries between interpretation and commentary are sometimes fluid.

Acknowledgment

The translation, interpretation, and commentary are strikingly different from what is offered in standard translations, interpretations, and commentaries. My commentary is critical. By criticism, bourgeois science understands the discussion of assigning questions: who has what, who has “edited” where, etc., where did who get what, who is Gnostic or not, etc. Otherwise, “Jesus” is always right with them. Rather, criticism for me is a political criticism of John’s Gospel. Which politics does the text propose, which interests does it want to serve, are the means suitable or not, which ideological, political, and social consequences does it have, which does it have to answer for, and which does not? This presupposes a distance that most commentaries are lacking. For me, John’s “Jesus” at times is just not right. In a conflict like John’s, it is necessary not to side from the outset with a particular conflicting party.

Of course, I consulted several commentaries. I have learned from all of them, even where I have come to diametrically opposed conclusions. This is even more true of “great” commentaries such as those of C.K. Barrett and Rudolf Bultmann. Without them, I would have overlooked much that was necessary for understanding the text.

Lemgow, September 2002

Ton Veerkamp

The Farewell of the Messiah

A Reading of the Gospel of John

The Preface, 1:1-18

A preface is written after having completed the opus. You can't understand it before having read the whole of it. Thus a preface is a summarizing postscript placed in front to make clear the intention of the text from the very start. The preface recapitulates. When reading the interpretation you should begin with 1:19 and then study the preface. You may arrange the preface as follows:

1. The Word¹³ and the Life, 1,1-3
2. The Life and the Light, 1,4-5
3. The Witness, 1,6-8
4. The Light and the World Order, 1,9-11
5. Birth, 1,12-13
6. The Word and Human Reality, 1,14
7. A Postscript, 1,15-18

1. The Word and the Life, 1:1-3

Good Message According to John¹⁴

1:1 In the beginning¹⁵

13 [Words in the Gospel of John referring to the Messiah Jesus like "Word" or "Human" (= "Son of Man") are initial-capitalized.]

14 CT: *Euangelion kata Iōannēn*, title after the oldest complete version of papyrus 66, about 200 CE.

[I translate *euangelion* literally as "good message," because unlike the German word "Evangelium," the English word "Gospel" does not take on the sound of the Greek word. See TV's remarks to John 20:4 where he—concerning the race between Peter and the so-called beloved disciple—recalls the use of the word *euangelein* in 2 Samuel 18:19 ff.]

15 BEGINNING: John writes Greek, thinking from the Hebrew Bible. Neither *archē* nor *logos* are terms from Hellenistic or Greek philosophy. With his first word, he invokes the beginning of the Scriptures: *be-reshith*, "in the beginning." The Scriptures set the standard for John; they should also set the standard for translation. What is beginning here is nothing less than the beginning of a new creation. This brings to mind Paul, *kainē ktisis*, "new creation," 2 Corinthians 5:17.

CT: In John, the word *archē* is constructed in various ways. *En archē* stands in 1:1-2 for *be-reshith* of Genesis 1:1. We stick to the classic "in the beginning," also used by Martin Buber. *Ap' archēs* occurs twice, 8:44 and 15:27. It does not mean *ex archēs*, "from the beginning," as in 6:64 and 16:4, but mainly, "in principle."

is¹⁶ the Word.¹⁷
 The Word is onto GOD,¹⁸
 divine¹⁹ is the Word.
 1:2 This one is in the beginning onto GOD.
 1:3 All things began happening through it,
 without it, nothing²⁰ began happening
 what has happened.²¹

The problem is the custom of taking the verb “to be” as the only passable translation for the Hebrew word *haya*. In European languages “to be” nearly always is a

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- 16 IS: The Greek verb *einai* presupposes a very different language structure than the Hebrew *haya* or the Aramaic *hawa*. *Einai* is consistently a copula, it gives the static state of identity between coupled realities, *haya* is dynamic, it means “to happen” or “to be there for something” rather than “to be.” If John uses *einai*, we must always think of the possibility that *haya* is meant. In the first sentence, we could translate *einai* as “to happen,” then come into conflict with *egeneto*, *wa-yehi*, in v.3. Nevertheless, no “Greek” identity is meant between *theos* and *logos*. We translate *ēn* with a present tense, “is”; the Word is always and everywhere the principle of all reality. The phrase means, “Principally, the Word is.” In the Scriptures, and therefore for John, God’s existence for humans has only the form of the Word, *davar*, *logos*.
- 17 WORD: *Logos* stands for Hebrew *davar*, translated by Martin Buber mostly with [German equivalents of] “speech,” more rarely with “thing” or “occurrence.” God is, according to Deuteronomy 4, “voice of speeches/words” (*qol devarim*), and initially the “ten speeches/words” (*‘aseret ha-devarim*), the so-called “ten commandments.” This is what is meant by *logos*. *Logos* is indeed related to *legein*; however, we translate the verb throughout as “to say,” because John uses the word neutrally. We translate *lalein* as “to speak,” because it refers to emphasized and purposeful speech. *Rhēmata* (or *logoi*, plural) are “spoken words” as opposed to *grammata*, “written words.” For completeness, let’s mention *ephē*, “he stated, declared” (three times in John). Nevertheless, I return to the practice of translating *logos* in John’s Gospel as “word,” because Buber’s “speech” seems somewhat artificial-strained.
- 18 [Fully capitalized words—“GOD, NAME, FATHER”—refer to the one God of Israel. In my translation, I adopt this highlighting from TV’s 2015 translation.]
- 19 DIVINE: *Theos* (*theios*). If John means the God of Israel, he writes *ho theos*; without the article, the word is an adjective, “divine, godly,” or “in accord with God.”
- 20 NOTHING: *Oude hen*, “not one” or “not one thing”; a minority among the manuscripts, including P⁶⁶, have *ouden*, “nothing.”
- 21 [As in the English translation here, TV in his interpretation relates the last words of v.3 *ho gegonen* to the preceding line. Both of his translations combine them with the beginning of v.4, “What happened is life with it” or “in it.” He explains this by referring to the question of whether a period should be placed before or after *ho gegonen*:]
 CT: Handwritings like P⁶⁶ rarely put delimiters; it has little to do with our punctuation. If we apply punctuation, we are already interpreting. It seems to us that the stanza introduces the keyword “to happen” (*ginesthai*) and transposes it into the new keyword “life” in the third line. In the following stanza, the keyword “life” becomes the new keyword “light.”

copula.²² It links the subject to the predicate according to the basic formula $S = P$, the subject is *equal* to the predicate.

Semitic languages don't know a copula. The Arabic placeholder for this verb, the verb *kana*, is followed by the accusative, so it's not a copula. To declare an identity, these languages don't use the copula but the plain juxtaposition.

Haya means "to occur, to come to pass, to happen, to act as, to exist as, to become." In our text, we can't translate *haya* by "to happen", because for that meaning John takes the verb *ginesthai*.

In our translation, the present tense in the first lines of the Gospel undertakes the function of "shocking." Taking the traditional imperfect tense, "in the beginning *was* the Word", we would suggest a historical chronology: "In the beginning *was* the Word, and then there are further events." Yet the Word always is acting as inception, as a principle, in everything that is happening. The "Word" belongs to the inner structure of every human reality, in which the Word *is acting* as a precept, as the *main issue*²³. *ENTÊTE* is the French translation by André Chouraqui²⁴ for *bereshith* in Genesis 1:1 which he writes in capitals, but he uses small letters for *en archē*. Genesis 1:1 leads the way, and John 1:1 follows it.

The preface of the Gospel of John can only be understood from the first chapter of the Scriptures. The creation story sets in with the sentence: "In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth." The Verb of this sentence is only used with the subject "God." Pieces of evidence are chiefly found in Genesis 1:1 ff. and Isaiah 40-48. This action is the political basis of both the Scriptures and the Gospel.

That's what the Hebrew word *bereshith* stands for. The root of this word is *rosh*, "head, top, summit, chief." You might translate: "Chiefly, God is creating the heaven and the earth." The chief thing is not heaven and earth, but this very special way of creating. *En archē*, *be-reshith* has a structural function. Inception, beginning, *is* always in everything that is.

This inception is—from the creator—a completed work: "And on the seventh day God completed the work he had been doing; he rested (*yishboth*, *shabath*) on the seventh day from all the work he had undertaken", as it says in Genesis 2:2. The Jews are celebrating this every week. The Messianists disagreed in as much as in their eyes creation is not a fact that was completed in the past. Especially this thought is distinctly expressed in the Gospel of John. That's why among the Mes-

22 Sometimes the verb is used absolutely. M. Heidegger in his "Einführung in die Metaphysik" ["Introduction to metaphysics"] refers to Goethe's line of verse: "Über allen Gipfeln / ist Ruh" (1967, 68) ["Above all summits there is peace"].

23 [In German, TV translates: "Hauptsache" = "head thing."]

24 André Chouraqui was a Jewish linguist, philosopher, and theologian of Algerian-French origin.

sianists and particularly in John, the Sabbath is not a commemoration and feast day of the accomplishment of the works of creation. John said it more distinctly, more provocatively than the other evangelists. “My Father is at work until now, so I am at work” (5:17), his Messiah Jesus says. A paralyzed man, a paralyzed Israel, is a sign of non-completion. Creation *is* not (in the sense of being ready), creation *becomes* (in the sense of being in the making). Creation is not a massive being like “world” or “nature”, but a structure of reality, a structure of *coming into being*, never of *being*. That *everything* has a beginning and an end, too, is a truism. Creation means that *nothing* is founded in itself. *Nothing of reality*, no single individual can declare itself to be absolute, i.e. to be *theos* (God-like).

By its first two words *en archē*, the Gospel of John invokes the creation theology of a prophet in Babylon from the mid-6th century BCE. This anonymous prophet, known as *Deutero-Isaiah*, wanted to prevent the people, deported from Judah to Babylon under the enormous pressure to conform, from losing their identity and thus their future. Their God, i.e. what engages their absolute loyalty, therefore cannot be a regional, even local authority. At a time when the Great Powers—the Neo-Babylonian, the Egyptian, and the Persian Empires—control the fates of all peoples in the world known to that prophet, the people of Judah in its exile can only have good prospects if what represents its social being is an authority *above* all political authorities, *all of them*, without exception in time and space.

So this prophet can turn the *shooting star* of the political reorganization in the entire ancient Orient, the Persian king Kourosh (Cyrus), into the chief functionary (“Anointed One”, *maschiach*, Messiah) of the God of Judah/Israel (Isaiah 45:1 ff.).

The meaning of the creation theology is of political, not cosmological nature. The text of Genesis 1:1-2:4 is the formalized summary of the creation theology of that Deutero-Isaiah. He starts with the words *bereshith*, *en archē*. Genesis 1:1 ff. serves as the preface for the whole Hebrew Scriptures as well as the summary of the whole Gospel of John serves as its preface. No Jew can hear a text with the words “In the beginning” without hearing all at once the “In the beginning” of the creation story.

The sentence “*In the beginning is the word*” can also be paraphrased as “*Basically is happening (in everything else what happens) the Word.*” The meaning of “Word,” *davar*, *logos*, is told by the Gospel at length. The text precisely defines the vocable “Word”: primarily as the *basic principle*; then it is stated: “The Word is onto²⁵ God.”

In the Scriptures, “God” is the absolute authority, the basic principle (*archē*) of the particular social system. It is functioning as the converging point of every social dependency. Within Biblical logic, the question of whether any God does exist is absurd. You only may ask: “*Who* or *what* is the God, who or what is functioning as *God*”

25 [The vocable “onto” is to express the directedness of the preposition *pros* toward God. The usual translation as “with” shows a connection—side by side—of two entities.]

in a given society?” With this question, the Prophet Eliah confronted the people of Israel on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:21). According to this logic, there cannot be a godless society, because no society can go without a basic order. Otherwise, it would fall apart.

In the Scriptures, we don’t have an abstract, idealist monotheism. There were many gods, many social systems of many people, insisting on absolute allegiance. So the question is: “Which sort of social order do we want?” In the language of the Tanakh: “*Who* is God?” or “*What* is his NAME²⁶?” (Exodus 3:13). If this question once is answered, the social order no longer is up to free negotiation. It then turns into an absolute opposite, that is to say, “God.” “God” is defining a function—and in the old Judean society, this function was “to bring out of the house of slavery” (Exodus 20:2).

In the Gospel of John, the definite article (*ho theos*, “the God”) hints at that very special function of God. The Word is determined by this functional God. So *pros ton theon* does not mean to be directed onto *God* or onto the *divine in general*, but onto a *certain* God, the God of Israel. The two words *ton theon*, “the God”, signify—in an infinite concentration—the specific detailed social order that Israel gave itself in its Torah, an order of liberated slaves, of *autonomy* and *equality*. And as the Word is onto *the* God, that is to say onto *this* God, it can only be understood from these Scriptures. This is true for the Gospel of John and for all Messianic writings²⁷. Provided that by *God* without definite article we mean *this* God, we may translate “onto God”, otherwise we have to translate “onto the God.”

The third sentence reads: *theos ēn ho logos* = “. . . divinely determined is the Word.” It is not a Greek definition according to the pattern *S = P*. The Word is not identic with any predicate, but it is happening *determined by God*. Here the article is lacking, thus the meaning is “*determined by God*” or, if you want, “*godlike*,” “*godly*,” “*divine*.” Obviously, this is not a general statement, the word has no *general, divine* structure, but a specific one: the word takes place within the scope of what in Israel is called *the God*, and it is acting *like (the) God*.

In the Gospel, this “like God” in substance is rendered by the expression “Son of the God” (*hyios tou theou*). A 3rd or 4th century Greek, educated in the thinking of late antiquity, can’t help reading such sentences within the framework of his logics, the logics of occidental civilization in general. Certainly, he will have problems.

The logic sentence “*the Word = God*” seems to violate the principle monotheist clause of the Scriptures. So he has to *interpret* the sentence. He knows the Alexandrian philosophic tradition and its climax in the philosophy of Plotinus, he makes use of its scholarly categories, he hasn’t got different ones. He has to ask how to define

26 [When fully capitalizing the word “NAME,” TV means the unspeakable name of the God of Israel that is circumscribed in the Scriptures by the Tetragrammaton “YHWH.”]

27 [“Messianic writings” is TV’s expression for the so-called “New Testament.”]

the identity of “Word” and “God.” Some try to interpret: The Word is not *God*, but it is *divine*. Others saw that quite differently, and the quarrel began.

Do you have to think of the identity of *God* and *Word* as sameness or semblance, in Greek *homoousios* or *homoiousios*? The difference seems to be subtle, the problem is important. If you subordinate the word to the God of Israel, you will ultimately reduce the *Christ* of the Christian religion to one of the great prophets of Israel. Compared to Judaism and later to Islam, Christianity would have no significant ideological advantages. If you, in a Neoplatonic way, turn the word to one of the emanations of the *One (to hen)*, Christianity compared to late antiquity loses its singular character.

But after the year 323—when Constantine took over the Roman Empire as sole ruler—Christianity should play the role of a solely legitimate and universal—or more precisely: hegemonial—ideology of the Empire. The culture of late antiquity, after having tried once more and without success to reconquer lost terrain under the reign of Julian (361-363), was prohibited as *heathendom* under Theodosius (379-395). Christianity had won the race. Based on the reorganized exploitation of peasant work (colonnate), the Christian Middle Ages began. By the Plotinic translation and interpretation of the sentence “and the Word is God”, Christianity ideologically became fit for hegemony within its reach, Byzantium, the Occident. Since then, we hardly can’t help reading John 1:1-18 in a *Greek* manner. But our reading here is *Oriental* if you will.

The fourth sentence resumes the word *bereshith*. But now it is determined by the social order of Israel. It was not from the beginning onto God *in general*, but it is onto this very specific God, and that *in the beginning, in principle*, thus from what in Israel is called *creation*. This beginning is no past, but presence. *Creation*—as we have learned—has to be defined politically, not cosmologically; so it politically determines the direction toward the Torah, the social order of the old Israel as such, “onto God.”

The fifth sentence is a double sentence: a) “Everything is happening through it (the Word)” and b) “without it nothing is happening.” The punctuation of the manuscripts is an attempt at interpretation by the makers in question. Some have a full stop after sentence b), others continue with a relative clause. The next full stop in the oldest complete manuscript from around the year 200—the Papyrus P⁶⁶—does not occur before the end of the sentence: “And the light shines in the darkness.”

We have to decide and set a full stop after “what has happened.” “What has happened” means “everything that began and was finished in the past” (*gegonen*, Semitic, not Greek Perfect). Only by the Word, the completed and concluded past is broken open for the future. It is by the Word that the past becomes *actual*: *egeneto*, Semitic, not Greek imperfect. The verbal form *egeneto* shows the persistence of all that began in the past. Without the Word, everything that happened in the past and was completed in the past is over forever. *History*—shorthand for all that began and was completed in the past—then would have no breath, and even more so no “long

breath” as you say in German for “staying power.” Without the Word, nothing more is happening of what has been history, *ho gegonen*. The word *ouden*, “nothing”, or, like other manuscripts read, *oude hen*, “not one thing”, is related to *ho gegonen*, “what has happened.”²⁸ *Not one thing* is completed in its *becoming*, that is the statement. Through the Word, *all* history remains open, *living*, as we will hear in the next line. *Nothing* is over and *nothing* is complete.

2. The Life and the Light, 1:4-5

1:4 With it is life.
Life is the light of humankind.
1:5 The light is shining in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it.

“With it (the Word) is life”, it says. Or, traditionally: “*In* it is life.” *Life* is the opposite of *nothing*. It has to be defined more closely. That is done by *light*, not *light by itself*, not *light* as a cosmic principle, but *light for somewhat*, the *light of humans*. The genitive case here is a so-called *objective genitive*. As soon as it comes to closer definitions of the Word—history, life, light—the human reality shows up. This human reality is concrete history. Before this history is brought up, the antithesis to *light* has to be named. The antithesis is *life/light* against *nothing/darkness*. This antithesis leads us back into the creation story, we quote once again (Genesis 1:1-4a),

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.
The earth became crazy and mazy:
Darkness over the area of the unending sea.
Storm of God breeding over the area of the unending sea.
And God said,
“Let there be light!”
Light came about.
And God saw the light—that it was good.

Before even hearing the word *light*, before there is spoken a single word, in the creation story we hear the word *darkness*. Before turning heaven and earth into *creation*, darkness has to be put in its place, as well as the sea of chaos. Of what primarily might have been a cosmological myth of origin, the prophets made a political teaching of man-made chaos and dark human conditions. We have to hear two other texts together with this one. To begin with, Genesis 1:4-5,

28 [As to German grammar, TV notes that “our perfect cannot exactly reflect the Semitic perfect ‘*gegonen*’; you should rather circumscribe unpleasantly, like: ‘What is completed in its becoming.’”]

God separated the light from the darkness.
 God called out to the light: "Day!"
 To the darkness, he called out: "Night!"
 It became evening, it became morning,
 Day one.²⁹

Hereby, the darkness is sort of *demythologized*. It is no cosmological principle, it is simply *night*, no more, no less. Admittedly, there is man-made darkness, too. We hear Jeremiah 4:23-26,

I saw the land, there: crazy and mazy,
 the heavens: no one of its lamps!
 I saw the mountains, there: quaking,
 all the hills, they are shaking.
 I saw, there: no more mankind,
 all the birds of the heavens flown away!
 I saw, there: the vineyard is wilderness,
 all the cities destroyed,
 before the face of the NAME,
 before the face of the blazing anger of his nose.

Here the condition of a land ravaged by war is described as the condition of an earth before every creating word: crazy and mazy, no light, no mankind, no birds, everything devastated, what came about because of the foolish policies of the elites of Jerusalem, their refusal to preserve the reform policy of the good king Josiah and to consider the regional power relations. The result of this policy is nothingness and darkness, in the eyes of the prophet the result of the wrathful reaction of Israel's God. If the order of the Torah—being "God" for Israel—is destroyed by the politics of its elites, this order reacts by the wrath of its being destroyed. It isn't about a mythic primal state, it is a matter of all that people around John and we now were or are seeing every day: darkness, chaos, destruction of life.

Jeremiah exactly describes the condition of the people of Judea after the year 70. The city is devastated, the population massacred, the land uninhabitable. An absolute new beginning is necessary. From the catastrophe of the year 70, there's no going back, nothing will be as it was before. Because of the present state, somebody who interprets the year 70 as the end must begin with the words *in the beginning*. The work of the Messiah is a new earth under a new heaven: life and light. Darkness did not win: the verb turning up here, *katalambanein*, "to overcome", in the Greek version of the Scriptures is always connoted in a violent sense. Against the nothingness and the darkness that prevailed since the disastrous outcome of the First Judean-Roman War 66-70, John brings out "light" and "life": darkness did not overcome light and life.

29 This unusual translation of *yom 'echad* will be motivated in the discussion of John 20:1.

3. The Witness, 1:6-8

1:6 It happened:
A man,
sent from GOD,³⁰
his name: John.

1:7 This one came as a witness,
to bear witness of the light,
so that all through him might trust.³¹

1:8 Not that one was the light,
but he was to bear witness of the light.

“It happened: A man, John his name.” Very similar to this sentence John 1:6 is the sentence in Judges 13:2,

It happened: a man (human), sent from God,
his name: John.

It happened: one man from Zorah,
from a clan of the tribe of Dan,
his name: Manoah.

Both sentences correlate not only by the “Semitic” origin of John’s language but also by their content. Both Manoah and John make possible a history of liberation, but they are not the liberators. By the word “*wa-yehi, (kai) egeneto*”, “it happened”, a void history of suppression and hopelessness is finished. Now the *past* turns to real *history*. In the Scriptures, this expression appears many hundreds of times; it is always a matter of *what happened*, never of *what was*.

The hero of the story Judges 13-16 is not Manoah, but Samson, but without Manoah, the story about the liberator Samson would not have been possible. The story of the Messiah Jesus would not have been possible without John, either. A human is happening, and this story is “determined by God”; this man is entirely deter-

30 SENT: We translate *apostellein* and *pempein* as “to send.” Behind both verbs is the Hebrew root *shalach*.

[In German, TV uses the different words “senden” and “schicken” for *apostellein* and *pempein*; I could not find two corresponding verbs in English.]

CT: The first is said primarily of humans. That is why they are “apostles.” In John, *pempein* belongs, as it were, to the “definition” of Jesus, as *apostellein* belongs to the “definition” of Moses in Exodus 3 ff. Accordingly, God is the one who sends Moses or Jesus. These are only “sent ones” or “messengers.” Jesus is the *apostle* par excellence, so to speak! *Para* with genitive suggests origin, hence “from” or “on behalf of . . .” Since the article is missing, it can also be translated as “divine messenger.”

31 TRUST: *Pisteuein* stands for the Hebrew *he’emin*, from *’aman*.

mined by what in Israel is “God”, he is “godly.” The name of the man sent by God is *John*, a priestly name; in Luke, he was descended from a priestly family. In John, however, he is not John the *Baptist*, but John, the *Witness*.

Verse 7 is colored Hebrew as well. If you would put back the Hebrew result into English you’d get: “This one came for the testimony . . . so that all trust through him.”³² The aim of his action as a witness is to inspire confidence. John’s aim is identically equal to the aim of the whole Gospel that “was written so that you trust”, 20:31. John is a witness within proceedings concerning the trustworthiness of the Messiah. In 1:19-34 and 3:23-30, we will hear particulars. “He was not the light” is abbreviated for: “He confessed, he did not deny, he confessed: I am not the Messiah” (1:20). But John is the chief witness of the Messiah who is the light of the world (8:12). The witness inspires *confidence* in the Messiah Jesus; that was his life task.

We explain the verb *pisteuein*. It is the Greek form of the causative verbal form of the root *ʾaman*, “to be loyal, firm, faithful”; thus causative, *he-ʾemin*, “let (a man) be trustworthy”, i.e. “to trust.”³³ “To believe” means to have a more or less reasonable opinion, “to trust” can set an action in motion. For substantives or adjectives of the Hebrew root *ʾaman*, John takes Greek words of the root *alēth-*. Words of this Hebrew root we will translate by English words like “faithful”, “trustworthy”, “fidelity”, only seldom “true”. The light is *trustworthy*, it is able to engender *trust*. Appropriate to the *fidelity* of the light is the human action of *pisteuein*, “to trust.”

4. The Light and the World Order, 1:9-11

1:9 That is the trustworthy light,³⁴
that is enlightening every human

32 The problem is how to translate the Hebrew syntax of an *infinitivus constructus* and a clause of purpose with *vav copulativum* (Gesenius, *Hebrew Grammar*, Oxford ¹⁴1978, § 165; Segert, St., *Altaramäische Grammatik*, Leipzig ³1981, § 7.5.9.2) into the Greek language. John often tries to do it with a twofold particle of purpose (*hina*)—not very elegantly in the eyes of an enthusiast of classical syntax.

33 In Isaiah 7:9 a prophet warns the king of Judah in a very critical situation not to lose his nerves: “If you (yourself) don’t trust, you will not be trusted (by others).” (*im lo thaʾaminu ki lo thaʾamenu, kai ean mē pisteusēte oude mē synēte*.) The Septuagint does not meet the sense of the Hebrew pun with the causative and passive forms of the root *ʾaman*. [Buber’s “Germanizing” translation uses the German word “betreuen” = “to care for”: “Vertraut ihr nicht, bleibt ihr nicht betreut.”] The meaning is that panic will lead the people into disaster. The king shall trust his advisor, the people shall trust the king and act accordingly. The same attitude is to take up toward the Messiah, and that is more than “to believe.”

34 TRUSTWORTHY: *Alētheia* is not “truth,” but “fidelity” (*ʾemuna*, *ʾemeth*), *alēthēs* not “true,” but “faithful, trustworthy.” *Phōs alēthinōs* of 1:9 is not “true light,” but that light which can be relied upon in walking through life (Jewish *halakha*), that is, “trustworthy light.”

by coming³⁵ into the world.³⁶
 1:10 In the world it is working,
 the world began happening through it,
 yet the world order did not recognize it.³⁷
 1:11 It came to its own,
 yet its own did not accept it.³⁸

The light is shining into the world order (*kosmos*). Dark is not the world as living space for mankind as such, but dark is how humans *ordered* or *organized* the living space; the Greek verb *kosman* means “to put in (beautiful) order” (see *cosmetics*). This is no pseudo-metaphysic of primeval antagonisms *light/dark*, *heaven/earth* or *world*, *spirit/flesh* or *matter*, and so on. Here is not dealt with a *cosmology*, even less a “Gnostic” one, but with *politology*.

Kosmos is Greek all through. As heaven is an organized, calculable entity of celestial bodies, the world is a politically organized world, like a classical *polis*, a world order. The Hebrew language has *‘olam*, “era”, not a spatial, but a temporal notion. To Israel, the earth (*‘eret*) is made of many “earths”/lands (*‘aratsoth*), in which many peoples live according to their statutes or orders, under their own “gods”, from one

35 COMING: The word *erchomenon*, “coming,” refers not to *anthrōpon*, “human,” but to *phōs*, the “light.”

36 WORLD: *Kosmos* is both “world” and “world order.” In John, *kosmos* is primarily *ho kosmos houtos*, “this world order.” The word denotes what the rabbis call *‘olam ha-ze*, “this age.” It is a political category: the ruling world order, precisely the Roman Empire. Where John speaks of the *kosmos* being liberated, it is not the world in its present order that is meant, but the human living space, the world that is liberated from the order that weighs upon it, 4:42! The Greek *kosmos*—it has no actual equivalent in the Hebrew Scriptures—means “(harmonious) order, ornament (cosmetics).” Here it means both living space and that order that threatens the order of the individual peoples and just above all the orders of Israel. To John, the bad thing about the world is not the world itself, it is the object of God’s solidarity, 3:16. What is bad is the order under which it suffers. Therefore, there is no “Gnostic,” but rather a “political” cosmology in John, which we try to account for by the alternating translation “world” and “world order.”

37 CT: Here we have to translate *ēn* emphatically with “is working”; it is about a working “being,” about the real “being” (*haya*). The subject is “light” or “word”; it is not an element of the world order, but its active principle, its reality (see 1:1). The word *kai* stands for the Hebrew particle *we*, “the coordinating conjunction ‘and’ which is also capable of expressing several other relations” (according to Stanislav Segert, *Altaramäische Grammatik*, Leipzig 1986, 224). In the second line, *kai* means “for,” and in the third “but.” The third line is not about ignorance (“does not know”) but about refusal (“does not recognize”); this aspect of the verb *ginōskein* is prevalent throughout the Gospel.

[Instead of “it is working” in the first line of 1:10, the later 2015 translation reads “it is.”]

38 ITS OWN: *Ta idia*, “the own,” meaning Israel. To recognize (v.10) is the condition to accept in v.11. Israel has recognized, according to the position of the text, but it has not accepted.

generation to the next, for the ages (*dor wa-dor le-‘olam*). That’s an entirely different sort of worldview.

Since Alexander’s conquest of the Orient, humans have been living in an order that is determined by the urbanity of Hellenism, that is in a *cosmos*. It was by the Romans that this order, literally, was turned into the world order. And exactly that is the political problem. The world order has destroyed all traditional orders of humankind. For them, the order, in fact, is disorder, everything has fallen to pieces. Only in the light of traditionalist revolts in the whole Orient against the Hellenistic modernization of traditional social structures, you can understand messianism. In Judea, they were temporarily successful by the Maccabean revolution about 170 BCE.

The purpose of the light is the enlightenment of humans, enlightenment well within the meaning of *the Enlightenment*.³⁹ They shall see the world order as it is and act accordingly. We decided not to relate the last dependent clause, “coming into the world order”, to the word “humans” (*anthrōpon*), but to the word “light” (*phōs*); grammatically, both are possible. For the Messiah—the light—is “the one-like-God, coming into the world order” as Martha will define the Messiah (11:27). It is the Messiah who “enlightens” the humans. The verbal form *ēn* mustn’t be translated by a form of our verb “to be.” It isn’t about a general abstract being, but a concrete, dynamic, effective happening, *working*.⁴⁰

The next dependent clause is hard to interpret. We cannot explain it from an orthodox-trinitarian doctrine that the Father had created the world *order* through the Son, so it had *become* through him. The world *order*, however, is no work of creation, but man-made. The living space of humans is this *earth*; it is created. Of the earth, the humans make the *world*, *world order*. Thus, if you translate “the *world order* was made *through* it (light, Word), you put about nonsense. For then you would have to ask by what thought the sentence has to be continued. Made to be what it is? Or made to be what it ought to be? The meaning is: Through the Word, the ruling world order (*ho kosmos houtos*, Jewish *‘olam ha-ze*) is confronted with its absolute alternative, the age to come⁴¹ (*ho aiōn ho mellōn*, *‘olam ha-ba*). No ruling world order can think of its radical alternative; it would then have to think of its decay. The Word is coming up to it from the outside and starting up things that will call it into question altogether. Not until the dialogue between the Messiah and the agent of Rome, Pilate, this will be clear. This world order and the Word are mutually exclu-

39 [In German, there are two words for “enlightenment” and “Enlightenment”: “Erleuchtung” and “Aufklärung.” TV notes that in the Dutch language, there is only one word for both issues as well: “verlichting.”]

40 [“Working” in the sense of John 6:28 of “working the works of God.”]

41 [Instead of translating *aiōn*, *aiōnios* in the Bible and especially in John as “eternity, eternal,” I will take the paraphrase “age to come” as a close match of *‘olam ha-ba*’, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_to_come#Jewish_eschatology.]

sive in an absolute sense. The history set in motion by the Word is opposed diametrically to the history of Rome—the concrete world order.

“The Word came into its own.” The commentaries usually treat “the own” as a synonym for “world.” But it is not the *world*, even less the world *order*. It is about “the own” of the Messiah under the terms of the world order: the Judean people. It is “the own” who in the Gospel are called *Ioudaioi*, the *Judeans*, “Jews” in the current translations. This people does not accept its own Messiah. That is the determining conflict throughout the Gospel, the struggle for recognition of the Messiah by his own people.

5. Birth, 1:12-13

1:12 All who accept it, however,
to them, it gives the authority
to become GOD-Born,⁴²
them who are trusting in its Name,
1:13 who are begotten not of bloods⁴³
or of the will of the flesh⁴⁴
or of the will of a man,⁴⁵
but divinely.

Those who accept the Messiah Jesus (nevertheless) get “power to become *born of God*.” The status of those who now are named is concerned with *power (exousia)*. The expression *tekna tou theou*, “children of God”, we paraphrase as “*God-born*.”

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- 42 GOD-BORN: *Tekna theou*, not “children of God,” but “GOD-born.”
CT: *Tekna* comes from *tiktein*, “to give birth,” and means “those who are born, born ones.” The text does not have *tekna tou theou*, “children of GOD,” but *tekna theou*, without the article {“born divinely”}. The article is not found in any of the variants, see note “DIVINE” on 1:1. “GOD” has no children.
- 43 BLOODS: The plural *haimata* (Hebrew *damim*), cannot be rendered in German—but in English. This plural occurs 73 times in the Scriptures. To be thought of in this context is Exodus 4:25, where Moses’ wife Zipporah spreads the bloody, cut foreskin on her husband (or son?); to Moses, she says, “You have become a blood bridegroom (*chathan damim*) to me.” The meaning unfolds from the circumcision. This is in line with Paul: it is not the physical circumcision that determines whether a person is “God-born,” but the attitude toward the “only begotten Son.”
- 44 WILL OF THE FLESH: The expression “will of the flesh” is not meant negatively; “flesh” is the human, transient, and vulnerable existence. In the coming Messianic time, this form of vulnerable existence will come to an end, when people are not “man-born,” but “God-born,” godly begotten.
- 45 A MAN: The unique reference here can only be Abraham, who of himself cannot beget the Son of Promise, which Sarah knows very well, Genesis 18:11-12. When later the “only-begotten Son of God” will be spoken of, Isaac will also have to be thought of.

From the Scriptures we know expressions like *bene ha-ʾelohim*, “sons of God”, *ʾish ha-ʾelohim*, “man of God”, but *yilde ha-ʾelohim*, “children of God”, are not to be found in the Scriptures. God does not have children. The meaning of the expression comes out of the following determinations. Two of them are positive, three negative. The two positive ones are framing the three negative ones:

Them who are trusting in its (the Messiah’s) Name,
who are begotten not of bloods
or of the will of the flesh
or of the will of man,
but divinely.

Primarily, John doesn’t think of humans in general, but of those in his *own* people who accept the Messiah. To accept means to trust, to trust in the NAME of the Messiah. In that culture, unlike in ours, the name was more than a label of an individual. In our culture, we can change our name at will. But the *name* in an ancient Middle Eastern culture is the distinctive, indispensable self of the person, it is the very own life task of a person. If he does not do what his name demands, it remains undone and unhappened forever. The NAME of the Messiah is the liberation of the world from the order that is bearing down on it, John 4:42. To trust in the NAME (or *to-ward the NAME*) means to expect that the NAME keeps what he promises.

“Not of bloods.” We take the plural “bloods” for the Greek plural *haimata*. In Hebrew, there is the plural *damim* which in the Scriptures is to be found 73 times, most of all related to sacrificial rites. Exodus 4:24-26 relates,

So it happened:
On the way, at a lodging place, the NAME encountered him (Moses),
he sought to kill him.
Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son’s foreskin,
she touched his foot with it.
She said: “You’ve become a bridegroom of blood (*damim*, plural) for me.”
He (the NAME) let him go.
Hence she said “bridegroom of blood,”
because of the circumcision.

Not circumcision, distinguishing mark between Israel and the other peoples, decides about who belongs to “the own” of the Messiah. “*Not of bloods*” thus means: not to be begotten from and for circumcision. Here is no difference of opinion between John and Paul.

“Not of the will of the flesh.” *Thelēma* stands for two Hebrew words: *chafetz* and *ratzon*. Buber translates the first mostly as “Gefallen” = “favor” and the second as “Gnade” = “grace,” but also as “favor.” Both have similar meanings. Of God, it says: “He does whatever pleases him (ʾasher *chafetz*, *ho ethelēsen*), Psalm 115:3. In the Scriptures, that does not imply arbitrariness, but rather an unquestionable authority.

“Flesh” is no negative notion. It means the vulnerable, perishable human existence. Isaiah 40:6-8 says: “All flesh is like grass . . . , the grass withers . . . , the word of our God stands (*yaqum*) for the ages.” What is begotten by human reality, will always be “flesh”, transient like the grass and the flowers of the field. But the denial of “the will of the flesh” is no refusal of human existence; that would be absurd, as would be the refusal of the green grass and the flowers of the field because of their perishability.

The contrast is between “fading” and “abiding.” “Not of the will of the flesh” means: not to be begotten of an existence that remains bound to *this age*, to the *‘olam ha-ze*, i.e. to the ruling world order. John does not want a human (fleshly) existence, that remains bound to the perishability of its historical conditions, but a Messianically inspired (not: *spiritual!*) existence that embodies the *age to come*. To John, the opposite of a perishable, vulnerable, physical life is not the eternal, spiritual life in the afterworld, but a life of the age to come in *this* world, *zōē aiōnios*. The adjective *aiōnios* means “the coming *aiōn*, the *‘olam ha-ba* (Buber: *Weltzeit* = “world age”), concerning the coming era.” The expression originates from Daniel. We’ll get back to it when discussing the passage 5:29. This era will remain, an era when human life no longer is threatened by inhuman circumstances. Hence we translate *zōē aiōnios* consequently as “life of the age to come” and not as “eternal life.”

“Not of the will of a man.” Here you have to think of Abraham. The son is the theme of Genesis 15-22. This son is born from a woman “with whom it ceased to be after the manner of women”, and who lived with a man, “who was old”, from two humans who were sterile, Genesis 18:12-14 and 21:1-2,

Sarah laughed to her inner self, saying:

“After I am a nothing,
am I still to have sexual pleasure,
my lord being old, too?”

The NAME said to Abraham:

“Why did Sarah laugh and say:
‘Will I really bear [a child],
old as I am?’

Is anything too marvelous for the NAME to do?

At the appointed time I will return to you,
about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.”

. . .

And the NAME arranged it for Sarah as he had said,
he did for Sarah as he had spoken:

She became pregnant.

Sarah bore Abraham a Sohn in his old age
at the set time of which God had spoken to him.

At no point there is talk of Abraham having begotten this son, the only-begotten, with Sarah. There only is talk of Sarah and her son. Nowhere we hear the classical sentence: "Such and such (Abraham) knew her and she (Sarah) became pregnant and bore a son . . ." The son, wanted by both of them, for whom they had begged God, is born *not of the will of a man!*" To be sure, we hear: "These are the begettings of Isaac, the son of Abraham. Abraham begat Isaac", Genesis 25:19. But the begetting by Abraham is an element of the chapter "begettings of Isaac." In marked contrast to all the patriarchs of the book Genesis, begettings (*tholedoth*), *tholedoth Adam* (Genesis 5:1), *tholedoth Noach* . . . to *tholedoth Ya'aqov* (Genesis 37:2) just the chapter *tholedoth Avraham* is lacking (see the discussion of 8:58)! That's an absolute *joke*⁴⁶ (Genesis 18:15),

Sarah lied, saying:

"I did not laugh", for she was afraid.

He said:

"No, but you did laugh!"

And Abraham agrees to it (Genesis 21:3),

He called the name of his son,

who was born to him,

whom Sarah bore him:

"*Yitzchaq* (Isaac), he laughs."

The child was born to Abraham, passive form; Sarah bore, active form. Both are old, a joke. The joke is the NAME. One chapter further it comes to be deadly serious, Genesis 22:1 ff.,

It happened after these words:

God tested Abraham, he said to him:

"Abraham!"

He said:

"Here I am."

He said:

"Take now your son,

your only one (*yachid*),

whom you love,

Yitzchaq.

Then you go to the land Moriah,

exalt him as a sacrifice of exalting,

on one of the mountains of the land that I will tell you."

46 The Qur'an here (surah Hud 11:71) has the word "to laugh at" (*dahikat*); actually, the announcement of Isaac's birth (here another root different from the one for "to laugh") is extremely amazing (*'adschib*), 11:72-73.

We'll get onto the "only son" (*yachid*, *monogenēs*) later.⁴⁷ Anyhow, we may conceive an idea of what the expression means when we hear: "not of the will of a man, but begotten divinely."⁴⁸ The only one, *monogenēs*, is the new Isaac, the only one begotten divinely. Whoever trusts in him will be "born of God" as well in this sense: He really sees light, is enlightened, remains alive amidst an order of death.

6. The Word and Human Reality, 1:14

1:14 The Word began happening as flesh,
 has its tent⁴⁹ among us,
 we are viewing⁵⁰ its honor,⁵¹

47 See note 133 when discussing John 3:16.

48 The famous fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians gives this notion as well. Apparently, the connection between Isaac and the Messiah Jesus was a widespread perception. Not by chance, it is there about the contrast between *flesh* and *spirit*, in the Biblical, not Greek meaning, that is the contrast between Ishmael, begotten of the flesh, and Isaac, begotten of the spirit, Galatians 4:29.

49 TENT: The verb *eskēnōsen* invokes the word "tent" and is the link, especially, to Exodus 40:34-38. The dwelling place of God (Hebrew *mishkan*) is the "tent of meeting" (Hebrew *'ohel mo'ed*). From there God "speaks" through Moses to the children of Israel.

50 VIEWING: We appoint here to translate all verbs derived from the stems *hor-*, *ops-*, *id-* as "to see" and the like. (Hebrew *ra'a*); *theasthai* we translate as "to view" (see our theater, the Hebrew root is *chaza*); *theōrein* we translate as "to observe" or "to take into consideration" because in our text it stands for a point of view that orients action (see our word "theory"; the Hebrew counterpart here is also *chaza*). John chooses these various forms carefully.

51 HONOR: *Doxa* is Hebrew *kavod* and literally means "weight, brunt" (from *kaved*, "to be heavy"). According to Buber, we translate it as "honor," not "glory." The Word is not to be "glorified," but *honor* is due to it based on what it does for Israel.
[Martin Buber himself, however, generally does not use the word "honor" to translate the word *kavod*, where it refers to God, but rather the word "Erscheinung" (Martin Buber, *Zu einer neuen Verdeutschung der Schrift*, in "Die Schrift. Verdeutscht von Martin Buber gemeinsam mit Franz Rosenzweig," Gütersloh 2007, 1105): "But it is not always possible to go back to the original meaning of the word to do justice to the biblical intention. For example, there is no Western equivalent to the actual meaning of the word *kavod*, which is translated as 'honor' where it refers to people and as 'glory' where it refers to God. According to the root meaning, it denotes the inner weight of a being, but as manifesting itself, as appearing. In the human realm it must remain with 'honor,' but for the *kavod* of God, the word 'appearance' may be used, as the becoming visible of the invisible majesty, its appearing—light glory in the sky as radiation of the 'brunt.' Assuming this immediacy of linguistic perception on the part of the reader, the interpreter may use the corresponding verb in the reflexive form in passages such as Exodus 14:4, 17f.; Leviticus 10:3, instead of 'be honored, get glory' or the like, to renew a good German word and let God speak: 'Ich erscheinige mich' [somewhat like 'I appear myself']."]

an honor as of an only begotten one⁵² by the FATHER,
filled with solidarity and fidelity.⁵³

Now the Word, the *logos*, has to be defined more closely. If—according to the Gnostic myth—it were the eternal light and the soul, as a spark of this eternal light, were imprisoned in human reality, then the light would come into a diametrically opposite reality which ontologically is determined as *dark*, into a hostile and divine antagonistic entity.

We translate: “The Word is happening as flesh.” Our author is not a Greek, but a child of Israel who learned to think in the building of the *Grand Narrative*. His language is always and everywhere the language of the Scriptures of Israel. For Greek thinkers, it is nearly impossible to think of the perishable (flesh) together with the imperishable (word).

Who bothers to read the *Enneads* of Plotinus, will inevitably get under the impression of the elite pagan glory of this ideological construct. But if he then measures a text like John 1:14 by the yardstick of the Plotinic (or neo-Platonic) categories, he will lose himself in an insoluble problem. According to the neo-Platonic logic, the eternal imperishable word, the *logos*, cannot combine itself with the perishable human reality. It merely can leave behind the perishable by a cloistered life. According to this metaphysic, the sentence “The word has become flesh” is impossible. For the word can *seem* to be flesh, at most, but cannot *be*, *become*, and *remain* flesh. The equation of “word” (eternal, imperishable) and “flesh” (temporal, perishable), however, is busting this metaphysic.

The great theologians leave no doubt to be as serious about the identity between subject and predicate as about the whole Scriptures: Gospel and Tanakh. That’s why they dare—according to Greek thinking—an impossible sentence. What unites both poles of the equation, holds “*inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably*”, so it reads in the dogmatical formula of Chalcedon. By these four adjectives, every single of them with an *alpha privativum* (*a-*, English *in-*, or *un-*), one hand gives what the other takes away. By such formulas, it was attempted to extract the sting out of

52 ONLY BEGOTTEN ONE: See above, explanation of “A MAN” in 1:13.

53 SOLIDARITY AND FIDELITY: *Charis kai alētheia*, Hebrew *chessed we-ʿemeth*. This word combination is classical, especially in the Psalms. Buber translates it as “Huld und Treue.” Because there is some objection to “Huld” [= something like “grace, favor, benevolence of a superior one”] (precisely because of the feudal relationship between liege lord and vassal intended by Buber), we write “solidarity/solidary.” The word *charis* occurs only four times in John, except in this verse in 1:16 (2x) and 1:17. Although *charis* is usually used for the Hebrew *chen*, “favor,” or traditionally “grace,” and the LXX translates *chessed* mostly as *eleē-mosynē*, the thought context of the preface suggests that in 1:14 *chessed we-ʿemeth* is in the background.

the often bloody conflicts around orthodoxy. From these speculative pull-ups of ecclesiastical politics and their toilsomely negotiated orthodoxy of the 5th century, John was light-years apart.

The disaster of the exegesis of the Gospel of John subsists until today, being used to reading John from the Councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon instead of reversely reviewing the dogmatics from John and the Scriptures altogether. Admittedly, to save the honor of classical dogmatics it has to be said that the 4th and 5th century theologians did a good job. Their compromise could be maintained until the modern era, and we can learn a lot from their accuracy and their passion. But we mustn't turn their sentences into eternal truth.

John 1:14 says: The Messiah is a concrete human, and this human stands for the truth of the sentence Isaiah 40:8, "The word of our God is standing to the ages." Like long ago the word took shape in the words of Moses, so now the word takes shape in the concrete historical existence of a very special Jew who, in the political and ideological struggles of his days, represented a very special position. To use the words of Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, we say: The Messianism professes to "Jesus the Jew." The Word did not become flesh or human in general but a Jewish man, and not—thus going one step further than Marquardt—a Jew in general, but a very special Jew who, in the concrete political conflicts of his people, had taken up a very special position, a position that led him into a deadly antagonism to the elites of his people and Rome as the occupational force. Especially in the Gospel of John, the Messiah, as this concrete human, passionately takes sides in these struggles. To be the disciple of such a Messiah means to John: to become a fellow combatant—flesh and blood of the Messiah—"eating his flesh, drinking his blood", to share his concrete human reality and his political struggles and in consequence to be hated by the ruling world order.

By this sentence, John reacts against a tendency in the Messianic communities of the Greeks. The disdain of the flesh leads to more or less canceling a sentence like: ". . . Son, descended from the seed of David according to the flesh, established as Son of God according to the inspiration of sanctification . . ." (Romans 1:3-4). The origin from the "seed of David", his rootedness in the people of Israel, played an increasingly marginal role. One generation later, the awareness of the Messiah, having been a child of Israel, vanished thus far that, around the year 150, Marcion could suggest to the Christian communities the abolishment of the Scriptures.

"The Word has its tent among us", it goes on to say. The translation "it dwelt among us" is more than bland. The tent is the "tent of meeting" from the wilderness, where the NAME dwelt: "The cloud covered the tent (*ʾohel*) of meeting, the brunt/honor of the NAME filled the dwelling (*mishkan*) Exodus 40:34. The Septuagint has *skēnē*, "tent", for both of these *two* Hebrew words. The tent was the location of who is signified by the four unspeakable characters *YHWH* and in our text is displayed by the word "NAME." The tent is the place of law-making, the place of determining the or-

der of the society of liberated slaves. After Exodus 40:34-38, the Book of Leviticus follows (Leviticus 1:1): "He called to Moses, the NAME spoke to him from the tent of meeting." In this book, the coordinate system of autonomy and equality is filled out. All at once, the tent of meeting is mobile: "Whenever the cloud was taken up from the dwelling, Israel would set out in all their journeys", Exodus 40:36. Of this mobile place later was made the stable place of the sanctuary in Jerusalem. John says that after the destruction of the sanctuary by the Romans the tent of meeting would have taken the shape of the incarnate Word, the Messiah Jesus.

In John, the placeholder for the NAME is the word "FATHER." Thus in John 1:14, we hear the word FATHER for the first time, not before having heard the word *brunt/honor*: "We have viewed its honor, an honor as of an only-begotten one by the FATHER, filled with solidarity and fidelity." All decisive words of Exodus 40:34 we hear in John 1:14. What is hinted at by the enigmatic word *kavod*, "brunt" (the root *kaved* means "to be heavy, bulky"), that we try to translate with "honor", is substantially filled with "honor as of an only-begotten one (*yachid*, *agapētos*) by the FATHER." The analogy is the relationship between Isaac and Abraham, first of all in the story of the "binding of Isaac," Genesis 22. The interlacing of the motive of the "binding of Isaac, the only-begotten one" with the relation between the God of Israel and the Messiah of Israel gives rise to questions, but the Epistle to the Hebrews saw the connection between Genesis 22 and our passage, 11:17.

Monogenēs stands for Hebrew *yachid*. In the Septuagint six times out of ten it means "only child" (e. g. the daughter of Jephthah, Judges 11:34). Twice, in Psalms 22:21 and 35:17, it means "the only soul." Psalm 25:16 has it for "lonely"—like a human without siblings. In the apocryphal book *Wisdom of Solomon* "unique" is a suitable translation, "Unique is the inspiration of wisdom", 7:22. In John it appears five times (incl. 1 John 4:9); in Luke three times it means "only child," in Hebrews 11:17 the "only child" of Avraham, Isaac. John transfers the theological usage of "only" (*yachid*) in the narrative of Isaac as "only son" and thus as the only future of Abraham to the Messiah Jesus. He is the new Isaac, he opens the future of the new Israel.

Conclusively, the honor is rendered with the words *charis/chessed* and *alētheia/ʔemeth*.⁵⁴ "Grace" is shaped as authoritarian, by this vocable the NAME could seem like the God of antiquity, as "Lord." That may coincide with the idea that people then got about the absolute counterpart of their social order that was "word of God" for them. "God" as a function normally plays the role of "rulership", but what is

54 [TV mentions Buber's German translation of *chessed* with "Huld" because of the affection of a master to his vassal, but he thinks that "Huld" is too much shaped by perceptions of feudal bonds, as Buber was prone to neo-Gothic German of people like Richard Wagner, anyway. In this regard in a note, he points to S. Kracauer, *Das Ornament der Masse*, 174 ff., Frankfurt/M. 1977.]

called “God” in the Scriptures plays the role of *liberty*. Liberty but does not rule, is not *gracious*, condescendingly. In John, the word *charis* only appears in the preface to the Gospel, twice together with *alētheia*, once by itself. As the word *agapē* in the Gospel indicates both an attitude of God toward humans and the attitudes of humans toward each other, here you should think of *chessed* as well. Apparently, the writer of the preface felt compelled to take the word *charis* for the attitude of God toward humans. In the Septuagint, it usually stands for *chen*, “favor” (“grace”). There, it is the attitude of the superior toward the subordinates. On the other hand, in the Scriptures, we never find the expression *chen we-’emeth*, but only *chessed we-’emeth*. This combination must have been remembered by the writer of the preface. In the time of catastrophes for the Judean people, *chen*, “favor, grace”, only comes into question as *’emeth*, “faithfulness, fidelity”, and then is “solidarity.”

To John, the Word as human reality and the only future for the new Israel in new humanity is only concrete if it is thought of as a concrete human. The Word is this very special Jewish human, Jesus ben Joseph of Nazareth, Galilee. There is, so John says, no other word. John 1:14 is the center of the summary of the Gospel.

By this last sentence, strictly speaking, the preface is completed. But the discussions in the Messianic community around John are going on. The so-called farewell speeches, John 13-17, give an insight into the process of discussion. The postscript of the preface points out two unsolved problems: the relation to the messianic group around John “the Baptist” and to the nascent Rabbinical Judaism (the “Jews” of the Gospel of John).

7. A Postscript, 1:15-18

1:15 John is testifying to him, he has cried out,
 “This is the one of whom I said,
 ‘The one coming after me
 has happened before me,
 for he is my beginning.’”⁵⁵

1:16 From his fullness we all receive,
 yes, solidarity for (instead of) solidarity.⁵⁶

55 MY BEGINNING: *Prōtos mou*. An ordinal number, that is, not *heis* (Hebrew *’echad*), but *prōtos* (Hebrew *rishon*). The latter has the same root in Hebrew as *reshith*, Greek *archē*, “beginning.” Chouraqui has, “Antérieur à moi: il est.” To John the Baptist, the Word (*logos*) is the beginning in itself, so it is also to him.

56 SOLIDARITY FOR SOLIDARITY: *Charin anti charitos*; see the note to 1:14. Solidarity and fidelity are happening in Israel, even though it has fallen into a hopeless situation after the catastrophe of 70 and can do nothing on its own.

1:17 What was⁵⁷ given through Moses as the Torah, began happening as solidarity and fidelity through Jesus the Messiah.

1:18 No one has seen GOD, never ever. He as the only-begotten, divine,⁵⁸ *who is in the bosom of the FATHER*,⁵⁹ that one is performing.⁶⁰

“The one coming after (behind) me happened before me, for he is the first to me” (1:15 = 1:30, see Revelation 1:17).⁶¹ In 1:8 it was already mentioned: “He (John) is not the light, but the witness to the light.” The members of the group of the disciples of the Baptist are told that the Messiah Jesus is the *background* and future of

57 WHAT: *Hoti* is not omitted by any manuscript, but is often omitted in old and new translations. I read here two words *ho ti* and suggest “what” (instead of “because”); the Torah is and remains the foundation. Later generations have seen a contrast here: “Through Moses, the Torah was given, but through Jesus, solidarity and fidelity occurred.” Through Jesus Messiah, the one story (“is happening!”) became new. The gift of the Torah was the “solidarity and fidelity” of God through Moses, now the same “solidarity and fidelity” is happening anew through Jesus Messiah, which is expressed in the “new commandment,” 13:34. Yet John is not talking about *nomos kainos*, “new Torah,” but *entolē kainē*, “new commandment.” There is an unmistakable contrast in John’s Gospel between the people around John and Rabbinical Judaism, which sees Moses as its only teacher; all rabbis are only disciples of Moses (9:28). John *cum suis*, on the other hand, are also disciples of Jesus. But nowhere does John write that Jesus separates himself from Moses; on the contrary: “If you (rabbis) trust Moses, trust me, too; for about me the latter has written” (5:42).

58 DIVINE: See v.1, third line. Interpreters and translators have the agony of choice here between *ho monogenēs theos*, “the only-begotten God,” and *ho monogenēs hyios*, “the only-begotten Son.” The reading “God” seems better because it is supported by the older manuscripts. The reading “Son” is found only in manuscripts younger than the 5th century. “Son” seems to fit better with the thought process of the Gospel, especially with 1:13-14. Papyrus 66 lacks the article, therefore not “the only begotten God.” *Ho theos* is always “the God,” namely, the God of Israel. *Theos* without the article can be taken adjectivally, like *theios*, “divine, from God,” or “like God.” “Son” is a reading of the orthodox need for harmony of the 5th century, the century of Chalcedon! FATHER is John’s most common paraphrase of the sacred NAME, the four letters *YHWH*, which Jews never pronounce and which we render with the capitalized word “NAME,” following the example of the theologian K. H. Miskotte. This is especially explained in 5:18 ff.

59 IN THE BOSOM OF THE FATHER: *Eis ton kolpon tou patros*, meaning “intimately joined to the FATHER,” see 13:23 and the note to this passage.

60 [I take “is performing” for Greek *exēgēsato* because its range of meanings is similar to the German word “ausgeführt” between “is [God’s] exegete” and “is showing in his conduct of life.”]

61 *Prōtos*, ordinal number, not *heis*, the ONE, cardinal number. The Hebrew form for *prōtos* is *reshith*, not *’echad*. Thus you should translate: “He is my first” or “he came first to me”; you could also translate: “He is my beginning!”

the Baptist. That is a systematic question. It has nothing to do with the modern question of whether Jesus historically descended from the Baptist movement. In the opinion of the preface, all the political activity around John is up in the air, if it doesn't see itself as a movement *pointed at the Messiah Jesus*. By repeatedly coming back to this problem—notably in the passage 3:25-30—the Gospel of John shows that there was resistance against this insight. Admittedly, there was a tendency from the Baptist movement to the Messianists around Jesus, but a rest of them turned out to be rather tough. For this group, John the Baptist even later was the “first,” *prōtos*. That obviously must have been a constant source of agitation in the community around John (see below for 1:30).

The sentence in 1:16 leads over to the second problem area. The pronoun “we” shows that “John” is speaking for the group as a whole. From the fullness of the Messiah, “we all receive, well, solidarity for (instead of, *anti*) solidarity.” *Charis* here again stands for *chessed*. The solidarity with Israel is replaced (*anti*), by a new type of solidarity.

The solidarity of God with Israel manifested itself in the Torah (*nomos*) through Moses. The Perushim said to the healed man born blind: “We are disciples of Moses” (9:28). That means, Moses is their teacher, *Moshe rabbenu*. The latter is the very definition of Rabbinical Judaism. In this Judaism, God's solidarity with Israel is the Torah of Moses, exclusively. This Torah describes the regulations the people of Israel wants to live in. These regulations are salutary, they allow for human life in Israel.

This social order of *autonomy and equality* is/was the solidarity of God. Rabbinical Judaism says: *is*. John says: *was*. For the circumstances—and verily the worldwide, global circumstances—have changed to such an extent that the social order of the Torah is no longer politically feasible anywhere. *Now* the Torah is the *mandatum novum*, the solidarity, the *agapē* of the Messiah's disciples among each other. Thus not philanthropy in general, but the coherence of the group in all, even the adversest, circumstances. In this way today, the abiding *chessed we-ʿemeth*, *charis kai alētheia* of the God of Israel is happening through the Messiah Jesus.

Is this a new Torah? It would seem so: “What was given through Moses as the Torah, is happening as solidarity and faithfulness (*chessed we-ʿemeth*) through Jesus Messiah” (1:17). You cannot slam the one over the other, for this sentence means: Solidarity and fidelity of God toward Israel are abiding even if the Torah, under the actual circumstances, is no longer liveable in practice. Many Messianists looked at it that way (Paul, Romans 7).⁶² Due to the qualitatively new circumstances, the Torah is sort of “suspended.”⁶³

62 See Gerhard Jankowski, *Die große Hoffnung. Paulus an die Römer. Eine Auslegung*, Berlin 1998, 165-170.

63 [Furthermore, for “suspended” TV takes a word of Jankowski, loc. cit. 152-153, the Torah, temporarily, is “geledigt” ≈ “free, unmarried, single” because according to Romans 7:2 a

John does not speak of a new Torah (*nomos kainos*), but of a new commandment (*entolē kainē*). Admittedly, John seems to stand aloof from the Torah ("your Torah" 8:17; 10:34; "their Torah" 15:25). But simultaneously, to John, the Torah (or the Scriptures) continues to be *davar*, *logos*, "word," that has to be fulfilled. And to John, "to fulfill" does not mean "to bring down" (see 19:24, 28).

In this regard, the writer of the First Epistle of John has his doubts. Does the "new" mean in effect to cancel the "old" without substitution? Is Jesus the abolishment of Moses? The expression "solidarity for solidarity" seems to prompt this conclusion, all the more the sentence: "What was given through Moses as the Torah, is happening as solidarity and fidelity through Jesus Messiah." 1 John 2:7-8 reads as follows,

Friends, I am writing no new commandment to you,
but an old commandment that you had from the beginning.
The old commandment is the word that you have heard.
Yet I am writing a new commandment to you.
What is trustworthy in him, it is also in you:
that the darkness is passing
and the true light is already shining.

The writer of the First Epistle of John does not see a replacement of the "old commandment" (Moses) by the new commandment. "The old commandment" (*entolē palaia*) is the word heard. He avoids the vocable *anti* ("instead of, for") of the preface. In the Messianic group around John, the relationship with Rabbinical Judaism kept being in progress for a long time. New to him is the new situation that is, due to the Messiah, already shining within the old order of darkness. No replacement of the Torah with the *mandatum novum*. Obviously, the discussion in the group around John was also about the question of whether you still need the "old" at all. Everywhere, the Messianic communities tried to clarify their relationship toward Rabbinical Judaism. John 1:16-17 is reflecting this debate.

Next up is a veritable concluding sentence. "No one has ever seen God", is stated in 1 John 4:12 as well. This sentence summarizes the fundamental concern of the Scriptures. Moses' request to see the face of God is sharply rebuffed by the NAME: "Man shall not see me and live," Exodus 33:20. Only "from behind" Moses can see, namely what came to pass afterward: what happened is manifesting as real liberation, Exodus 34:6,

. . .
the NAME, the NAME,
God compassionate, gracious,
slow to anger,
abounding in solidary faithfulness (*rav chessed we-’emeth*) . . .

wife is no longer bound by law to her husband after his death.]

Let us translate “to see God” into the political prose of the 21st century. If “God” is the deepest point of convergence of every social loyalty, the densest conglomeration of order in a given social system, then “to see God” means: to lay one’s hands onto the social order of liberated slaves, to pull one’s own imaginings over the social order as such. By doing that, the king or the state presses an absolute claim, enslaving the humans: “false gods into my face,” Exodus 20:3. “No one has ever seen God” is no empirical statement, but the statement that the opposite would be nothing but a lie. The sentence means: Experience of God is something utterly illegitimate. He who is politically implementing this unintermediateness of God raises the claim to —personally and absolutely—embodying the innermost order of society. Communists called that “cult of personality,” describing correctly what under Stalin happened to the communist party and the people of the Soviet Union.

The Messiah did not see “God” as well. No one has *seen*. But the Messiah did “declare, explain,” *exēgēsato*, what is meant here by the vocable “God.” The Messiah is not a visionary, he is an *exegete*, he explains the Scriptures: Scriptures that, in his opinion, the disciples never had understood. And, in the way he lives according to the Scriptures, he is setting an example. For *exēgēsato*, we now write “performed,” because the “exegesis” by the Messiah is his conduct of life (*halakha*), such conduct of life that led him into an ultimately irreconcilable opposition to the elites of his people and the Roman occupational force.

The subject of the second part of the final sentence is called *monogenēs theos*, “only begotten, divine.” We shouldn’t wonder to have problems with this. Those who in the first centuries passed down our text had problems as well. Some inserted the definite article, thus: *the* only begotten God. Others replace the vocable *God* with the vocable *Son*. The latter goes very well together with the orthodoxy of the 4th and 5th centuries. Then the thought reads as follows: “No one has ever seen God, the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the FATHER (orthodox: the Son who is co-essential, *homoousios*, with God), has . . .” They used an orthodoxy that, two or three centuries after the wording of our text, tried to solve its problem. This method cannot scientifically be justified.

The key probably lies in the baffling expression “*who is in the bosom of the FATHER.*” Let us hear Numbers 11. The people in the wilderness remembered the beautiful days in the house of slavery where there was fish to eat at no cost (*chinnam*), and “cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, garlic,” at that! Moses was fed up with leading this people. He complains to the God of Israel about this task. Then the word is, Numbers 11:11-12,

And Moses said to the NAME:

“Why do you treat your servant so badly?

Why have I not found favor in your eyes,

that you lay the burden of all this people on me?

Was I pregnant with all this people,
 did I give them birth,
 that you should say to me,
 carry them in your bosom
 as a nurse carries an infant. . .?”

The relationship between an infant and its caregiver is one of complete dependence. The same is true for the relationship between Moses and the people that he has to lead and that is dependent on him. Moses says to his God, “They are not my people, but yours. Carry them in your bosom!” Indeed, this only-begotten *divine*, uniquely determined by God, can be called “the one in the bosom.” He is the exemplary concentration of Israel, he is “in the bosom of the NAME/FATHER,” completely and utterly determined by God, just *divine*. The God of Moses answered Moses’ voice. Like an infant in his bosom, he carried this beaten and murdered Messiah as the representative for the beaten and desperate people of the Jews.

And now the narrative begins, telling of Jesus ben Joseph from Nazareth in Galilee, of his prototype John, of his followers and disciples. Not before we have heard and grasped the story we can understand the preface.

PART I: THE MANIFEST MESSIAH, 1:19-4:54

A Preliminary Remark

In this first large part, it is about the *manifest Messiah*, i.e. about the Messiah who developed his program *in all openness* through *signs* and *words*. In the Scriptures, both together are called *devarim*, word deeds or deed words, in Greek *logoi*. These signs and words constitute a Messianic movement in Israel, and the supporters of this movement are the Messianic group or community. So this first part deals with the Messiah and his community.

The second large part—5:1 to 12:50—will be about the decay of the Messianic community, according to which the Messiah has to hide from his adversaries.

The third part—13:1 to 20:31—tells about the farewell of the Messiah and the isolation of the community in a room with “locked doors.”

A fourth part—chapter 21—describes the process of overcoming the community’s isolation and of turning the Gospel of John from the paper of a sect into a text of the church.

The three parts—*manifestation*, *descent into hiddenness*, and *ascent*—correspond with *foundation*, *decay*, and *rebirth* of the Messianic community.

We arrange the first part as follows:

1. Introduction: The Baptist, the Messiah, and the Disciples, 1:19-51
2. The Beginning of the Signs at Cana, Galilee. The Messianic Wedding, 2:1-12
3. Passover. The Messiah as the Teacher of Israel, 2:13-3,21
4. “He must increase, I must decrease,” 3:22-36
5. The Woman at Jacob’s Well, 4:1-42
6. The Other Sign at Cana, Galilee: “Your son lives,” 4:43-54

1. Introduction:

The Baptist, the Messiah, and the Disciples, 1:19-51

1.1. The First Day. The Interrogation, 1:19-28

1:19 And this is the testimony of John:
The Judeans⁶⁴ of Jerusalem⁶⁵ sent priests and Levites
to question him,
“You, who are you?”
1:20 He confessed,
he did not deny,
he confessed,
“I am not the Messiah.”
1:21 And they questioned him,
“What then? Are you Elijah?”,
and he says,⁶⁶

64 JUDEANS: *Ioudaioi*, in the singular *Ioudaios*. In the 1st century CE, the word *Ioudaios* could mean two things: 1. a Jew in the ethnic sense; 2. an inhabitant of the Roman province of Judaea (as distinct from the inhabitants of Samaria, Galilee, etc.). This second sense is dominant in John. His *Ioudaioi* are inhabitants of Roman Judaea and thus, according to the logic of the text, automatically opponents of Jesus. The Galilean Jesus from Nazareth is indeed a Jew, but not a Judean, in the sense of the Gospel of John consequently not an *Ioudaios* either.

65 JERUSALEM: John always writes *hierosolyma*, plural, to reflect the Hebrew dual *Yerushalayim* (but see Martin Hengel, *Judaica, Hellenistica et Christiania*. Kleine Schriften II, Tübingen 2002, 118 ff.). Luke writes *Ierousalēm* all but four times in the Gospel; in Acts, he uses both spellings to the same extent.

66 HE SAYS: *Legei*, “he says,” present tense. John’s peculiar alternation between the present, imperfect, and aorist tenses (*legei*, *elegen*, *apekrithē*) can probably be explained by the author’s Aramaic background. Semitic languages do not have proper tenses like Indo-European languages. Rather, they have “verbal aspects,” the decisive criterion being whether an action is represented as completed (casually called “perfect” in grammar) or as not—or not yet—completed (“imperfect”). Whether the action is represented as (not) completed in the past or the future is meaningless (see Gesenius, *Hebrew Grammar*, Oxford ¹⁴1978, § 106-107; Segert, St., *Altaramäische Grammatik*, Leipzig ³1981, 244; J.A. Haywood/ H.M. Nahmad, *A New Arab Grammar of the Written Language*, London, ²1965, 96-97). This may explain why John writes “he says” here and “he answered” a few words further on. The question is

“I am not.”
 “Are you the Prophet?”
 He answered,
 “No.”
 1:22 So they said to him,
 “Who are you?
 —so that we can give an answer to those who sent us.
 What do you say about yourself?”
 1:23 He declared, “I am
A voice of one calling:
*In the wilderness make straight the way of the NAME,*⁶⁷
 as said Isaiah, the prophet.”
 1:24 And they who were sent were from the Perushim.⁶⁸
 1:25 They questioned him,
 “Why then are you immersing,
 if you are neither the Messiah nor Elijah,
 nor the Prophet?”
 1:26 John answered them, he said,
 “I am immersing in water;
 in your midst is standing the one whom you don’t know,
 1:27 the one coming after me,
 the straps of whose sandal I’m not worthy to untie.”
 1:28 This happened in Bethany⁶⁹ beyond the Jordan
 where John was immersing.

whether we should smooth this over, as when in 1:38 two participles in the aorist (*strapheis, theasamenois*) are followed by a present tense (*legei*): Jesus turned and perceived them following him, “he says.” This is very unusual for Greek; we can let the unusual be heard in our translation . . .

[TV added, “. . . but usually decide for the usual tense.” In CT, he had written, “As a rule, we adopt the tenses of the text.” For the English text, I prefer the alienating variant.]

67 VOICE OF ONE CALLING: The quote Isaiah 40:3 is structured according to the Hebrew text, with the musical accents of the Masoretic text providing clues: “Voice of one calling / in the wilderness make a way for the NAME // set up in the steppe / a path for our God.” The well-known “voice in the wilderness” unfortunately has nothing to do with the original.

68 PERUSHIM: *Pharisaioi*, “Pharisees.” The word “Pharisee” has entered the common language as a result of thousands of years of propaganda of an anti-Jewish Christianity synonymous with “hypocrites, deceivers.” The word has thus become unusable. Therefore, with the Jewish translator André Chouraqui, we write *Perushim*. The word means something like “separated,” because after the Maccabean revolution they separated from the ruling wing of the anti-Hellenistic coalition.

69 BETHANY: *Bēthania*. There are two alternative readings, each supported by numerous manuscripts: *Bēthabara*, *Bētharaba*. Bethany makes sense because decisive things will happen in this place, see John 11 and 12.

“This is the testimony of John.” Primarily, the testimony consists of the Baptist not being the Messiah but bearing a specific relation to the Messiah. About the intrinsic substance of this testimony, we will be taught later, 3:27-36. The testimony is called for by those who later will turn out as the main opponents of the Messiah Jesus, the Judeans (“Jews”).⁷⁰ These Judeans from Jerusalem believe they have the right to be informed about who is the Messiah and who is not. The emissaries are priests and Levites, so they belong to the political class of Judea.

John “the Baptist” is a constant in every Gospel. Paul is hardly interested in the Messiah Jesus before his death. So John can’t appear in his letters. All the more massive is the testimony about John in the Gospels. Flavius Josephus honorably mentions him.⁷¹ He is said to be the central figure of a movement who summons the people from Judea and Galilee to prepare for an imminent upheaval in the life of the people and of every single member of the people, an upheaval that could not be more radical and ultimate and affected the whole world of the peoples. To indicate that they took this announcement seriously, they let themselves be immersed or “baptized” in the water of the Jordan. According to the Synoptic Gospels, the Messiah Jesus was “baptized” by John. John [the Evangelist] omits this notice; anyway, he thought poorly of the baptism with water, as we will hear! The relation between the disciples of John and Jesus, i.e. between two messianic groups, to John, as well, was a historical fact that he had to classify. He does it—as we will hear—in a clear manner.

The political leadership of the district of *Judea* had governmental functions within the limits of the autonomy left by the Romans. During the period of 6 to 66 CE, the priests were the crucial political class of the region. The Levites were a class of officials headed by the priests. So the Judeans sent members of their political leadership to John.

70 Our translations always read “Jews.” But John refers to the Greek word *Ioudaioi* as a specific current among the “Jews” that was very influential indeed but did not yet have the ideological monopoly: Rabbinical Judaism. This will change after the last one of the three “Jewish wars” against Rome, 131-135 CE. Since then, Rabbinical Judaism—which established itself in about 140-150 CE after the end of the excessive persecution by Rome—actually was identical to Judaism in general. Before this time, there was no homogenous “Judaism.” The denotation “Judeans” serves to differentiate between Jesus’ adversaries and the “Jews” since the middle of the 2nd century. To avoid the unpleasant connotations of the word “Pharisees,” we don’t write this ideologically and emotionally loaded word, but choose the Aramaic equivalent “Perushim.”

71 [TV cites Flavius Josephus, *Jüdische Altertümer. Übersetzt und mit Einleitung und Anmerkungen versehen von Dr. Heinrich Clementz, Wiesbaden (Reprint o. J.).* I refer to Flavius Josephus, [*Antiquities of the Jews, translated from the original Greek by William Whiston, Hartford, Conn. 1905, 18,5.*](#) At further mentions, I refer to the work with the abbreviation “Ant.”]

John specifies: These political functionaries belonged to the political party of the *Perushim* (Pharisees). This party had a venerable tradition. It originated in the time when the Judean population fought against the northern Hellenistic monarchs (Syria-Mesopotamia), that is about 170 BCE. It formed as opposed to the politics of the national leaders and later kings of the Hasmonean dynasty (Maccabeans) who more and more revealed themselves as Hellenistic monarchs. The struggle of the Perushim was a struggle for the Torah in its written and oral tradition as the center of social life, under which supremacy whatsoever. The opponent of Jesus ben Joseph was the emerging Rabbinical Judaism that was not identical, but politically akin to the Perushim, after all. Many of the leading teachers of Israel after the year 70 CE came from the milieu of the Perushim.

The remark that the priests and the Levites belong to the Perushim is more than strange. Generally, the priests belonged to the party of the Sadducees. Here, John causes a special group of priests and Levites to perform. *Judeans* means the whole political establishment of the capital city; probably it seemed opportune to John to send a “Pharisaic” delegation to John. The Sadducees regard themselves as the real high representatives of the Judean people. The relation between priests and people will become clear in 11:46-54. The reason for the enmity between Jesus and the priests is unambiguously pronounced in 19:15; their first loyalty is directed at the Roman emperor: “We have no king but Caesar.” For John, the Perushim belonged to the political establishment, to those whom he calls “*Judeans*.” In this arc of suspense, the first passage has to be read.

The first two scenes of the introduction, 1:19-28 and 1:29-34, are determined by the verb *martyrein*, “to witness”: “This is the witness” (1:19). The witness is eye-witness: “and I have seen and have *borne witness* . . .” (1:34).

The question: “Who are you?” is crucial. It will be asked often throughout the text; then it is directed to the Messiah himself. Those who are charged with the interrogation of John want to get to know only one thing: whether he is the Messiah or not. If he is the Messiah, their executive function has ended. If he is not, they have to clear up the meaning of the political action of John. They avoid the word “Messiah.” John is the first to use it. The answer is a confession, and the confession purports a negation: “He confessed, he did not deny, he confessed.” It would have been a lie if he had said: “It is I.” John was not the Messiah, his movement was—if you give credit to our narratives—at best a prelude to the Messianic movement around Jesus.

If John is not the Messiah—what else is he? Any figure, playing a key role in the crucial days? For instance, the “Prophet” mentioned by Moses in the book of Deuteronomy? It says, Deuteronomy 18:15, 18: “I will raise from among their brothers a prophet like you (= Moses).” Or Elijah whom the NAME, the God of Israel, will send? Malachi 3:22-23, it says,

Remember the Torah of Moses, my servant,
 that I gave him as commandment at Horeb,
 face-to-face to all Israel,
 laws and decrees.
 There: I myself send you Elijah the prophet,
 before my face,
 when the day of the NAME comes, great and terrible . . .

This is the end of the second subdivision of the Scriptures (the books of the prophets). John says, he is neither the one nor the other, he is neither Moses nor Elijah, neither Torah nor prophets. This information is baffling, it doesn't fit into the frame of reference of the Judeans. But they need an answer, for they have to classify John's action in political terms. John answers with the famous quotation Isaiah 40:3,

*"I am A voice of one calling:
 In the wilderness make straight the way for the NAME."*

John says: "I am 'A voice of one calling,'" i.e., neither Moses nor Elijah. We state that there is a certain distinction between Moses and Elijah on the one hand, and the voice of one calling, on the other hand, a difference that is showing up in the Synoptic narrative of the Transfiguration on the mountain, as well (Mark 9:2 par.). It remains unexpressed what kind of difference it is. But this difference is linked with the contrast to the Perushim. Otherwise, v.1:24 would have no function.

Those who undertake the interrogation have no use for these answers. The quotation from Isaiah says John is like the prophet Isaiah; like this one then in Babel announced something unheard new, so today—during the period of the Romans—John is the one who announces something new. The parallel is between the liberation from Babel and the liberation from Rome. This point escapes their attention. They want to know what all this—John and his action of Baptism—has to do with "Moses and Elijah." For you cannot trust somebody who differs from the "Torah and prophets." What's the point of all this baptism, if he—John—is neither Moses nor Elijah?

He immerses in water, he says. "In your midst" is standing one who is coming after him. The expression "*in your midst*" points to Deuteronomy 18:15: "A prophet *from the midst* of your brothers." If anyone is the longingly awaited "prophet" in Israel, it is the one who "is coming after him." *Opisō mou erchomenos*, we translate: "the one who is coming after me." [We have to consider the double sense of "after": not only temporal but also spatial.] Likewise, we could write: "The one who is *going behind* me", for in the Scriptures, "*to go behind*" means "*to follow someone*."⁷² Both are true. Jesus belonged to the entourage of John the Baptist, and simultaneously he is the one who comes after him and inverts the relationship. The evangelist knows this

72 [See *halakh 'achare, poreuomai opisō*, Deuteronomy 6:14; 8,19; Hosea 11:10.]

“historical” fact from the life of Jesus. Theologically—i.e. *politically*—he turns around this historical relationship: He—Jesus—is to him—John—the first, the preceding one.

The people from Jerusalem don’t know him, nobody knows him, not even John (1:31). Hence they don’t understand the sense of the quotation. John only knows that he has to immerse in water. And he knows that the one who must come will not be a stranger but one from “the midst of the brothers”; liberation—so Jesus will tell the woman at Jacob’s well—is from the Judeans, 4:22. In 1:29 ff. we will be told more details.

But that much is clear: John doesn’t regard himself as worthy to untie the sandal straps of the one who is coming after him. From the Scroll of *Ruth*, we know that to untie a sandal is a sign. In Israel, a transaction is legally valid, as soon as one of the participants unties his sandal and gives it to the other (Ruth 4:7-8). Here is more in play as an expression for complete subservientness. Nobody in Israel can force the Messiah to act in and for Israel in a legally binding way, you can’t untie his sandals, not even their straps. At all events, what is in progress “in your midst” will turn upside down every notion of politics and resistance in Judea.

All this takes place in Bethany. Bethany is not a geographical location, but a theological one. What will happen in Bethany goes beyond the imagination of everybody in Israel, which is apparent from the narrative of recalling the dead Lazarus to life (John 11). So there is no need to worry about the exact location of Bethany and the exact spelling of the name. For this purpose, the people who crafted the old manuscripts already applied a lot of wasted effort. So you have to ask for the part that is acted by the location throughout the narrative rather than for its exact position on the map. No: Bethany is the location of the testimony because it will be the location of the crucial sign.

1.2. The Second Day. Someone *like* God, 1:29-34

1:29 On the following day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and says,
“Look: The ewe coming from GOD
and taking away the aberration of the world order.”⁷³

73 THE EWE COMING FROM GOD: *Amnos tou theou*. *Amnos* stands for Hebrew *rachel*, a female sheep that has already lambed. John refers to Isaiah 53:7: “the ewe that falls silent before her shearers.” Isaiah 53 is about a man who bore responsibility for his city Jerusalem and was held liable by the imperial government for the rebellion of the city’s inhabitants. “Bearing the sins” is taking upon oneself the consequences that result from rebellion. This is about the aberration of the world order, that is, the world that was ordered by the Roman Empire. The “Son of Man” is held liable for this aberration, he has to walk the way that

- 1:30 This is the one of whom I said,
 ‘After me is coming a man
 who happened before me,
 for he is my beginning.’⁷⁴
- 1:31 I myself did not know him,
 but so that he might be made manifest to Israel⁷⁵
 I came immersing with water.”
- 1:32 And John bore witness, he said,
 “I have viewed
 the inspiration⁷⁶ coming down like a dove from heaven,

the “servant of God” had to walk in Isaiah 53. So it is not about the moral misconduct of individual people, but about the aberration of the whole human world.

CT: John combines this image of the “suffering servant of God” with the image of the “scapegoat” of Yom Kippur, that goat on whose head the high priest thrusts his hands, thus transferring to it the wrongdoing of the whole people: “the goat bears (*nasa’*, *lēm̄psetai*) all their transgressions,” Leviticus 16:22. The LXX always chooses the verb *lambanein* for this vicarious bearing; we find *airein* only in 1 Samuel 15:25; 25:28, as Klaus Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium*. 1. Teilband: Kapitel 1-10 (ThKNT), Stuttgart 2000, ad.loc., shows. One person—Samuel, David—may “bear” and so, as the LXX interprets, “take away” the error or transgression of another person—Saul, Abigail. *Airein* means “to carry away, to lift,” thus, “to do away with” or “to abolish.” Let be done here what Saul asks of Samuel, “Do away with my aberration, turn back with me, that I may bow to the NAME.” Jesus cancels the aberrations of Israel so that it may repent and bow to the NAME. We have to translate accordingly, by rendering *rachel*, *amnos* as “ewe” like in Isaiah 53. We try to preserve this saying with its rhythm in the translation: *hinne rachel ha-’elohim / nos’eth chata’t̄h ha-’olam, // ide ho amnos tou theou / ho airōn tēn hamartian tou kosmou*. We will translate the word group *hamartia*, *hamartanein*, *hamartōlos* with words from the stem “err-.” For *hamartia* is not an individual moral lapse (“sin”), but that which leads an entire society astray. Taking this into account, you can also understand the sacrificial texts of the Book of Leviticus; if you do something that damages or breaks society, you can only do justice to it by destroying things, animals. The word “sin” is much too religious to be able to express the Scriptural dimension of *chata’t̄h/hamartia*.

74 BEGINNING: See 1:15 and the note there.

75 BE MADE MANIFEST: *Phaneroun*, Hebrew *gala*, *nigle*, “to show (himself) publicly,” “to manifest (as).” Jesus is to become publicly recognizable as the Messiah, to reveal himself as such. The public here—as in 2:11, 3:21, 7:4—is Israel, then in 17:6 all humankind, but in 21:1, 14 the now restricted public of the circle of disciples.

76 [Although TV’s reservations about the German word “Geist” probably don’t fully apply to the English word “spirit”—as relating to the Latin word *spiritus*—I agree with his translation of *pneuma* as “inspiration” because “Holy Spirit” as well might be misunderstood as a substance instead of a process:]

INSPIRATION: *Pneuma*, traditionally “spirit,” stands for Hebrew *ruach*, i.e. for that “rushing (wind),” German “(Wind)braus” (as Buber often translates) which drives the prophets. See, for example, Isaiah 11:2: “‘Geisthauch’ [‘spirit breath’] of the NAME rests upon him, ‘Geist der Weisheit’ [‘spirit of wisdom’],” etc. Even Buber cannot do without the word “Geist,”

and it stayed firmly with him.⁷⁷
 1:33 I myself did not know him,
 but the ONE who sent me to immerse in water,
 that ONE said to me,
 ‘The One on whom you see the inspiration coming down
 and staying firmly with him,
 this is the One who is immersing
 in the inspiration of sanctification.’
 1:34 And I have seen,
 I have borne witness:
 IT IS HE—the Son of GOD (One like GOD).⁷⁸

We have a Messianic week. After the interrogation, there are three “following days” (1:29, 35, 43), and after these three days once again three days. On the third day—added together, the seventh—the “fundamental sign” is happening as we will see below. At the end of this week, the Messiah openly revealed himself, and the first Messianic community came into being (2:11-12).

While on the first day, the game of questions and answers is crucial, in the second scene it is about what John is seeing, viewing, looking at. He is the first and possibly most important eye-witness: He saw Jesus coming toward him (v.29), and in the end “he has borne witness and seen” (perfect) that “this one will exist *like God*.” He who comes “behind” John is the one who is “coming toward John.” From the depths of

“spirit.” The Latin word *spiritus* better preserves what is meant by the word *ruach*. It seems appropriate to dispense with the word “Geist,” determined by later Christian dogmatics and thoroughly corrupted by German idealism, as far as it is somehow possible. What is indicated by the word *ruach* is not a substance but a process: that which drives a person to lead his life in this way and not otherwise. “Holy Spirit” is accordingly that which drives a person to live according to Leviticus 20:7: “Sanctify yourselves, become holy . . . for it is I, the NAME, who sanctifies you.” Therefore, “inspiration of sanctification.” See 3:5; 14:17 and the notes to these passages.

77 STAYED FIRMLY WITH HIM: *Menein*, “to stay, to remain,” in the LXX stands in very many cases (more than 50%) for the root *ʿamad*, “to stand,” and *qum*, “to be erect,” and thus has the connotation of a firm attachment.

78 SON OF GOD: Aramaic *bar elahin*, Hebrew *ben ʾelohim*. The word *ben* indicates affiliation; *baqar* is “cattle,” *ben baqar* is a single cattle. Correspondingly *ben ʾadam*: “one who belongs to humankind, a single person,” thus “one like,” such as *ben ʿawla*, “son of wickedness, a wicked one,” or *we-noach ben shesh meʾoth shana*, “and Noah was a son of six hundred years,” thus he was (like) a six hundred-year-old man. “Son of God” means “one like God,” i.e., one who does perfectly the will of God. See Daniel 3:25. *Houtos estin* we translate analogously to *egō eimi*, see 4:26.

CT: To Jews—whether orthodox or heterodox like John—it is inconceivable that the God of Israel should have a son coessential to him.

the Scriptures comes the future of Israel. Because and while Jesus is coming toward him, John can say: “Look: The ewe (*rachel, amnos*) coming from God that takes up the aberration of the world order.” Here John intertwines two crucial passages of the prophets and of the Torah. In Isaiah 53:7, 12 we hear,

He was oppressed, he, he submitted, did not open his mouth.
Like a lamb led to slaughter,
like a ewe (*rachel, amnos*), silent before its shearers,
he did not open his mouth.

...

He, he bore the aberrations of the many,
our transgressions struck him.

The second passage is from Leviticus 16:21-22,

And Aaron shall lay both his hands
on the head of the live goat,
and confess over it all the misdeeds of the sons of Israel,
all their transgressions, all their aberrations.
He shall put them on the head of the goat,
and send it away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness.
The goat bears on itself away (*nasa'*) all the misdeeds
into the land of separation.
He shall sent away the goat,
into the wilderness.

In this *Agnus Dei* both passages are intertwined. It is about a definitive *Yom Kippur*. The Messiah is the ewe of Isaiah 53, and as the goat of Leviticus 16 he carries away the aberrations of the world order, he abolishes it: that's the meaning of that Hebrew word *nasa'* which almost always is translated by the Greek word *airein*.⁷⁹ The Messiah does not only passively carry the aberrations, but he actively abolishes the aberrations of a whole *world order*. John changes the dimensions; it is not about the “aberrations of the sons of Israel” but of the “aberrations of the world order, *kosmos*.”⁸⁰

79 The Greek version of Isaiah 53:12 does not use the verb *airein* but *anapherein*. But there is no doubt that John using *airōn* thinks of the Hebrew word *nasa'* in 53:12, just as *amnos* in John doubtlessly stands for *rachel*, “ewe,” from Isaiah 53:7. In Leviticus 16:22 “bearing the transgressions” is translated *lēmpsetai*, future tense of “to take.”

[I found it impossible to get the multiple meanings of the German word “aufheben”—from “to lift, elevate” and “to cancel, abolish, negate” and “to save, put aside” to the Hegelian “sublate”—in only one English word. So “he abolishes it” meets it only partially.]

80 The word *kosmos* occurs 76 times in John, more than in all other writings of the so-called “New Testament” combined, 38 times alone in the “farewell speeches” John 13-17, where it is about the existence of the Messianic community under the real conditions of the pre-

Kosmos, “world,” is both the living space of humans and the social order that is the outfit—“beautiful decoration”—of this space, as we hinted at in discussing 1:9. The only Hebrew word that comes near *kosmos* is *tzava*’, “(military, astronomical) order.” *YHWH ’elohe tzeva’oth* thus means: “The NAME, God of the orders” (the German word “Heerscharen”—[similar to the archaic English word “host”]—is overly confined to military order).

But in the context of the Tanakh, there is another semantic field of *kosmos*. At about the beginning of our calendar, the apocryphal “Book of Solomon’s Wisdom” was written in Alexandria. The author must have been a Jewish Torah scholar with a sound education in Greek philosophy. To him, the word *kosmos* is identical to what he calls *ktisis*; for him, this word means “creation.”

He created the being of the whole,
liberating are the begettings (origins) of the world.
In them, there was not the poison of decay,
Hades did not wear a royal crown on earth (Wisdom 1:14).

Then it says,

God created humankind to be imperishable,
in the image of his own lastingness.
By the envy of the adversary, death entered the world
[the world got an order of death],
he leads them into temptation so that they get his lot
(Wisdom 2:23-24).

The word *hamartia*, *chata*’ means “to miss an aim.” Humankind was not created “sinful.” It missed its aim and since then has gone astray. That is no hereditary sin, humankind can find back its way as the people of Israel is demonstrating to humankind. The theory of original sin of the Christian orthodoxy obscures what John is on about. Admittedly—given the circumstances, under the ruling order of the world—mankind only can go in the wrong direction. The world order (*kosmos*) itself is the aberration. What John sees coming toward him thus is the abolishment of this world order. Humans can’t abolish it of their own accord. The translation: “Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world,” is not wrong, but it is debased, the more so as with the word “sin” it calls forth the association of a personal moral deficiency. “Aberration/sin” is not an anthropological category, it is not a feature of a (fallen, sinful) human nature. The word that we hear at this point is a “cosmological” category in a *political*, not ethical sense. According to John and the other Messianists, the world order as such is destroying every social coexistence and brings about every perversity, treason, and injustice that single humans are committing against

each other—well, *must* do so. Now the future is that this will be no more. That is what John is seeing.

In John, the “sin” of a single human is nothing but a symptom of a perverse order under which he or she has to live; they have to take over responsibility for this personal aberration, it is true, and cannot push it off to an anonymous order. But in the end, they can only overcome it if the order, of which personal “sin” is the outflow, will be abolished. To John, *kosmos*, the world order, Rome, is nothing less than an obsession. Nowhere else besides him, the word appears that often. You needn’t share this view of the Roman Empire, but it is John’s view.

“He is the first to me,” John says, “he is my beginning.” Certainly, you can translate: “He was *before* me.” The members of the group that derives from John are told: The Messiah is the *background* and *future* of the Baptist and not vice versa, to John he is the *principle* of his life. John is up in the air if he doesn’t conceive Jesus’ Messianic future as his own future. John will repeat that over and over. Neither in 1:15 nor here it is about who was temporally earlier but who is the “principle,” who ranks first. The “history” of the Messiah precedes John’s own “history,” it determines his history altogether, he doesn’t want to be anything else but the one calling of that Messiah who will “make straight a way in the wilderness.” All his life only served the “publishment” of the Messiah; what he does only serves as the basis for Jesus in becoming a public phenomenon (*phanerōthē*) to Israel. Mostly, this is translated as “to reveal.” Here the program of the Messiah is to be heard: Its concise summary is just “to be revealed to Israel.”

Twice, John says: “I myself did not *know*”, neither of him nor of his program. According to the *awareness*, he belongs to the people itself whose leaders had just as little “*knowledge* of him,” as we heard in 1:26. But his conduct distinguishes him from the leadership. He immerses so that the Messiah becomes manifest, a public event, “Therefore I (John) came immersing in water.” Only from his Messianic *pre-consciousness*, he can say that Jesus already then determined all his life, “He was the first to me!”

To this, we add that this view of the relationship between the Baptist movement and the Messianism of Jesus of Nazareth certainly might not match the “historical facts.” But is a historical fact something else than a particular—more or less reasoned—view of history? Both movements were linked to each other, both shared the radical refusal of the ruling world order, both had their view of their political role, their self-awareness.

After the sudden confrontation with Jesus has unsettled all his former knowledge —“I did not know him”—, John presents his vision. The verb used here is about spectatorship (*tetheamai, theasthai*, see “theatre”): to watch what will happen, to have a vision.

“The inspiration comes down like a dove from heaven.” We avoid the word “spirit” because it is an expression of reified thinking. Both in Greek and Hebrew, this inspiration is described in a word that is about “wind, to blow.” It sets people in motion, “moves, inspires” them. The inspiration comes from heaven. Heaven is not-earth: “The heaven is heaven for HIM, the NAME, the earth he has given to the children of man,” Psalm 115:16. According to Exodus 20:2, the NAME is the one “leading out of the house of slavery,” *moshiaʿ yisraʿel*, the liberator of Israel (Isaiah 43:3, etc.). This liberator is absolutely opposed to the earth and its inhabitants, like heaven to the earth. The inspiration comes from this area, heaven “inspires” Israel, thus for Israel, heaven is the liberator and not the transcendental, the numinous.

How to think of this counterpart without having to make use of a metaphysical transcendence cannot be described here in detail. So much be said here: Liberation is what radically abolishes the ruling power system, which can’t anyhow be derived from the latter. It is the “nihil” of the real existing order, of its principle (*archōn tou kosmou*): It has *no concern at all* with the Messiah, as we will hear in John 14:30. The liberating NAME comes on Jesus as inspiration, and that means, everything that Jesus will speak and do “breathes, respire” (*spirat*) liberation. The Messiah Jesus (SON) is the inspiration (SPIRIT) through the liberator, the NAME (in John: FATHER). From there you can think of the phrase—though debased beyond recognition—*Father, Son, Holy Spirit*: that’s John’s vision.

Now what he views is portrayed not only with the image of *wind* but also with the image of the *dove*. Both of them we know very well from the story of the Flood, Genesis 8:1, 6-12,

God remembered Noah and every living thing, all the livestock
that were with him in the ark.

God made a wind (*ruach, pneuma*) sweep over the earth,
the waters ducked down.

. . .

It happened at the end of forty days;

Noah opened the hatch of the ark that he had made.

He sent forth the raven,

it went forth to and fro and came back,

until the waters were dried up from the earth.

He sent forth the dove from him,

to see if the waters had lessened from the face of the earth.

The dove found no rest for the sole of her foot

and returned to him into the ark.

For the waters were still on the face of the whole earth.

He put out his hand, took her, and let her come to him in the ark.

He waited another seven days;

then again sent forth the dove from the ark.

The dove came back to him toward evening,
 there: a freshly plucked olive leaf in her beak!
 Noah realized that the waters had lessened on the earth.
 He waited another seven days,
 he sent forth the dove, she did not return to him anymore.

The dove in the vision is the sign of the habitability of the earth. Apparently, this notion had a great vogue in Messianic circles. Mark uses it in his prologue (1:10), Matthew and Luke adopt it. If the inspiration has the form of a dove, then it is the warranty from heaven that the times of the destruction of the earth come to an end and the times of earth as the dwelling place for humans are beginning. When interpreting John 1:29-34, you have to read aloud this part of the story of the Flood to pick out the sound of this context. All the four Gospels have this vision in common. The vision is a Midrash of Genesis 8. Each Midrash is an application of a fragment of the Scriptures to the new situation in which people live. What is coming is a new life for humans on a renewed earth.

The Messiah Jesus will immerse “in the inspiration of sanctification” (some manuscripts add “and with in fire”). Again, we only get the point of this if we question the Scriptures of Israel. It says, “You shall be holy, for I the NAME your God am holy”, Leviticus 19:2. In the third part of the third book of the Torah, *wayiqra*⁸¹ (Leviticus)—beginning in chapter 18—, the God of Israel once is called “the holy” (*qadosh*) and seven times active-causative: “who makes holy” (*meqadish*). In Leviticus 20:7-8 we hear,

Make yourself holy and be holy people,
 for I AM the NAME, your God.
 Keep my statutes, do them,
 I AM the NAME, who makes you holy.

This active “making holy” is meant by “inspiration of sanctification.” To Israel, it was the empowerment to live the Torah. The question is whether John means the same Torah. No question is whether John means the same God or the same inspiration that animated the prophets of Israel. Essential to him is the amount of social vision that is hiding in the vocable *God*. The content of John’s vision is the remaining inspiration from heaven, i.e. from the NAME. It is related to Jesus forever. John the Baptist summarized it this way: “And I have seen and have borne witness: IT IS HE—One like God!” Certainly, this translation is a provocation. But the provocation is necessary. Whoever reads the traditional translation: “This is the Son of God”, keeps in mind the whole Christian dogmatics from Nicaea via Chalcedon to Constantinople, the places where the dogma about Jesus Christ was formulated.

81 [Wayiqra⁸¹ is the first Hebrew word in the book of Leviticus which gave the book its Jewish name (= “And he [the NAME] called”).]

The word “son”, Hebrew *ben*, means “biological son.” As the son, he is the one who gives permanence to his father’s name, he continues the father’s life task. As the son, he acts like the father. Semitic names reflect this relationship as the essence of a name: Simon is *bar lōna* or *ben Yochanan*; the king of the oil-producing desert land of Arabia—installed by the Britons—was called *Ibn Saud*, *son of Saud*, the *Saud*, one of the *Saud* family. The Arabian peninsula, therefore, is family property, *Saudi Arabia*. In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus was called “son of David”, i.e. one of David’s family, therefore one who has to continue the life task of David and his descendants. John briefly views this Jesus as one “like (the) God (of Israel),” therefore the one who does only and nothing else but what the God Israel does for Israel. That has nothing to do here with “equality in nature” between God and Jesus.⁸²

1.3. The Third Day. The Messiah, 1:35-42

1:35 On the following day again John was standing and two of his disciples.⁸³
 1:36 On seeing Jesus walking his way,⁸⁴ he says, “Look, the ewe (coming) from GOD.”
 1:37 His two disciples heard him speaking, and they followed Jesus.
 1:38 Jesus turned around, he viewed them following, he says to them, “What are you seeking?” They said to him, “Rabbi”—which translated means “Teacher”—“where are you staying?”
 1:39 He says to them, “Come, and you will see.” So they came and saw where he was staying,

82 See Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, *Das christliche Bekenntnis zu Jesus, dem Juden*. Eine Christologie II, München 1991, 78 ff.

83 [I do not follow the CJB in translating *mathētēs* as *talmidim* according to the Hebrew root of *lamad* = “to learn,” because this word would insinuate that Jesus’ followers or disciples were something like the later students of Talmud. But at the time of Jesus, the Talmud did not yet exist.]

84 WALKING HIS WAY: *Peripatein* does not simply mean “to go, to walk, to stroll,” but a very specific “way of life, path of life.” *Halakha*, “walk,” among the Jews is a path of life according to the directives of the Torah and the oral traditions. It is this *Halakha* of Jesus that drew people’s attention to him. John does not see Jesus strolling, but walking that very way of Isaiah 53. Therefore “walking his way.”

and with him, they began staying that day,
it was about the tenth hour.

1:40 It was Andrew the brother of Simon Peter,
one of the two of the listenership and followers of John.

1:41 This one first⁸⁵ finds his own brother Simon,
he says to him,
“We have found the Messiah”
—which is translated *Christos* (anointed).⁸⁶

1:42 He lead him to Jesus.
Looking at him, Jesus said,
“You are Simon, son of John,
you will be called Cephas”
—which is translated “Peter” (*rock*).

“John was standing again.” But this time something new is happening, the movement away from John toward Jesus. About that, we will be conclusively informed in 3:25-30. He is not alone, two of his disciples are with him. This time, John does not see Jesus coming toward him, but he is watching more precisely, the verb *em-blepein* here is an intensification of the seeing (*blepein*) in verse 29. He perceives what is happening: Jesus “is walking his way”, *peripatein*. Thus he is not going for a stroll. The verb stands for what the Jews call *Halakha*, “the way of living, the path of life.”

Again the term: “ewe from God.” Exactly that is Jesus’ path of life, he has to live according to the intimations of the images in Isaiah 53 and Leviticus 16. John doesn’t need to speak any further, the disciples are in the know. When they hear the word, they follow Jesus.

They don’t convert to Jesus by leaving John’s group and joining Jesus’ group. Instead, Jesus converts to the disciples. The word *strephein*, *shuv*, here, always has to do with that “return” or “conversion” which describes God’s abiding affection for Israel. “God” is the one whom the people in Israel have to pursue; “God” is what finds its converging point among all loyalties of people. To pursue or *to follow* “God” is *to know*, what it ultimately has to be about in society. The conversion of God is the precondition for the conversion of humans and not vice versa. That is the lesson of

85 *Prōton*, accusative. Used adverbially, the word means “first.” Some manuscripts have the nominative, “Andrew as the first, finds the brother.” Here it is about the future function of Simon, who also gets the new name Peter, “rock.”

86 [John 1:41 and 4:25 are the only places where the Greek word *Messias* occurs and is translated as *Christos*. To emphasize that “Jesus Christ” does not denote a first and last name but that John uses *Iēsous Christos* to proclaim Jesus as the Messiah, I translate *Christos* as “Messiah” everywhere except in these two passages.]

the Book of Job, “God” converts from his demonic Hellenistic alienation (Job 1-2) to himself as the liberator of Israel (Job 42:7-17), in other words: “God” stands “again” (*shuv!*) for an order that allows the people of Israel to live within the terms of autonomy and equality instead of being submitted to a tyrannical order. Jesus, the “One like God”, turns around (“converts”) to them and *views* them as they follow (again the word, that acted as the model for our “theatre”).

These two represent all of Israel. What Israel has to seek is always what in Israel is called “God”—“with all your heart and with all your soul,” at that (Deuteronomy 4:29; 6:5; etc.). All of Israel was in search of the “God” who should put an end to the desperate situation of the people, in search of the Messiah. According to John, all of Israel waited for a real, definitive change. “What are you seeking?” He knows what they seek, they know, what they seek.

The verb “to seek” [*zētein*] is to be heard 34 times in John. Mostly it has as the subject the Judeans, Jesus as the object (21 times), 13 times with the addition or implication of seizing or killing Jesus. What Jesus himself *is seeking* (Jesus as the subject of the verb) is “God’s will”—exactly which *not to seek* the Judeans are blamed. Nowhere it is said that Jesus *seeks* people, he *finds*. “To seek” is an aim of life, it means something like “to strive.” The Judeans *strive* to eliminate Jesus as the Messiah, that’s an aim of life of Rabbinical Judaism—apparently, this is John’s view, but we don’t have to share it. Here Jesus asks what the disciples *are seeking*. There is no direct answer, reported is only what/whom they *find*.

The verb “to find” plays an important role in John’s narrative as well. It is about a deliberate action. The verb also can mean “to meet (accidentally) but here only is *found* what is *sought*. 6 times Jesus is the subject, 4 times the object of “to find.” Jesus *finds* humans whom he wants to acquire as disciples (Philipp), whom he has healed and wants to save from further aberration (the paralytic of 5:1 ff.), he *finds* the man blind born and expelled from the synagogue, the dead friend who already was four days in the grave; he *finds*—for the purpose of fulfillment of the Scriptures—the donkey of the prophet Zechariah, he *finds*—for the purpose of purification of Israel—the traders in the sanctuary. 4 times the crowd of Judeans *seeks* Jesus to take him to task, even to kill him. (The *finding* does not succeed, however, as is pointed out 3 times just in 7:34-36.) 3 times, Pilate doesn’t *find* a reason for a trial against Jesus. Twice, disciples confirm to have *found* the Messiah, 3 times, disciples *find* other disciples. Fishermen will *find* fish and sheep pasture. In all these cases it is always about the result of deliberate *seeking*.

They view him as the Teacher, the Rabbi. He is the Teacher (Rabbi), and they who are called teachers (Rabbis) are no teachers to John. He will demonstrate this in the dialogue with Nicodemus (3,10!).

The two disciples of John want to know where Jesus “is staying.” The verb that at a first glance simply means “to stay” has—as it is often with innocuous words—a dou-

ble bottom. In Semitic languages, there is no copula “to stay” (like “stay sane and healthy”). By this “to stay”, the Greek translators of the Scriptures often display roots like “to stand” or “to be upright.” The disciples don’t want to know Jesus’ address but his “stand” (“position”) from where he can “stand, endure” this entire desolate situation of Israel. Later on, the verb will describe a basic virtue of the disciples; they shall not “remain *in* Christ”—which normal people can’t imagine anyway—but “stand firm *with* the Messiah.” So they ask: “Where is your stand?” “Come and see,” is the answer. Both of them stand firm with Jesus that day, to begin with.

“It was about the tenth hour”, it says. Some refer to certain passages of the Talmud,⁸⁷ others to the “tenth day” of the months of the feasts when the Paschal lamb is chosen or else the great day of the coverage of the aberrations (“Yom Kippur”).⁸⁸ K. Hanhart remembers the fact that Jesus died in the tenth hour.⁸⁹ Rudolf Bultmann—thoroughly educated in classical culture—like Pythagoras and Philo of Alexandria sees the number “ten” as “the *teleios arithmos*,” the perfect number; thus the tenth hour was “the hour of fulfillment.”⁹⁰

John uses the word “hour,” *hōra*, 26 times. 8 times certain hours of the day are meant, 3 times thereof with a numeral. The remaining ones indicate the fixed point of time when anything, in particular, shall happen. Here the Greek word *hōra* is synonymous with *kairos*. If you disregard the disputed verse 5:4, the last word only appears in 7:6, 8—but there it is 3 times. 7 times explicitly is talk of “Jesus’ hour,” thus of that fixed point of time when Jesus shall be “honored.” 4 most certain hours are emphasized with a numeral.

The sixth hour was the hour when Jesus sat down at Jacob’s well in Samaria (4:6); here the Messiah calls the people of Samaria back to the unity of Israel. The seventh hour was the hour when the son of the royal official was healed (4:52). The sixth hour is mentioned once more; in John, it is not the moment when the whole country is shrouded in darkness but the moment when Pilate lead out the tortured Jesus with the words, “There, your king!” (19:14). The tenth hour was the hour of the “come and see.” To come is an invitation, to see a request. Here the invitation goes to those who are not blinded by their prejudices.

Andrew is one of the two who followed Jesus in the first place. “What are you seeking?” Here comes the answer, Andrew says, “We (!) have found the Messiah.” This “we” refers to the group around John whose task is to inform the outside world about this finding. Andrew “finds” his brother as the “first,” namely as the one

87 So Klaus Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium. 1. Teilband: Kapitel 1-10* (ThKNT), Stuttgart 2000, 88).

88 Joop P. Boendermaker/Dirk Monshouwer, *Johannes: De evangelist von de feesten*, Zoetermeer 1993, 31-32.

89 In Boendermaker/Monshouwer loc. cit.

90 Rudolf Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (KEK), Göttingen 1941, 70.

whom the Messiah will appoint to be the shepherd of Israel (21:15-17). When hearing the word “Messiah,” Simon does not walk up to Jesus of his own accord but is brought to Jesus. Simon son of John received a new name, in other words: He has to be the foundation of Messianic Israel. Before he can do so, he has to be completely dismantled—as the follower who “denies” in a crucial moment. John the Baptist “does not deny,” but “confesses” (1:20), Simon does not confess, but denies, 3 times (18:25 ff.). By his choice of words, John joins together the crucial scenes of his narrative.

1.4. The Fourth Day. The Human, 1:43-51

- 1:43 On the following day he wanted to leave to Galilee.
He finds Philipp.
And Jesus says to him,
“Follow me.”
- 1:44 Philipp was from Bethsaida,
the town of Andrew and Peter.
- 1:45 Philipp finds Nathanael and says to him,
“The one that Moses wrote about in the Torah, also the prophets,
we have found him: Jesus ben Joseph from Nazareth.”
- 1:46 Nathanael said to him,
“From Nazareth? Can anything good come from there?”
Says Philipp to him,
“Come and see!”
- 1:47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him,
he says about him,
“There, really⁹¹, an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.”
- 1:48 Nathanael says to him,
“From where do you know me?”
Jesus answered and said to him,
“Before Philipp called you,
when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.”
- 1:49 Nathanael answered him,
“Rabbi!
IT IS YOU—the Son of GOD (One like GOD),
IT IS YOU—the King of Israel!”

91 REALLY: Here *alēthōs* could stand for the Aramaic *yatziv*. In Theodotion’s Greek version of the Jewish Bible, the word *alēthōs* is found as the translation of *yatziv* in Daniel 3:24 (Masoretic text)—and thus as the opposite of “seemingly.” Hence the rendering chosen above with “really.” Reality is an element of trustworthiness.

1:50 Jesus answered, he said to him,
 “Because I told you
 I saw you under the fig tree,
 you are trusting.
 Greater things than that you will see.”

1:51 And he says to him,
 “Amen, amen, I say to you,⁹²
 you will see:
heaven opened,
the messengers of GOD ascending and descending
*over the *bar enosh* (Son of Man), the Human.”⁹³*

Jesus wanted to go to Galilee. To the Messianic writings, the Galil (Galilee) is what the wilderness is to the Torah. There everything began, there the disciples will find themselves again after the homicide of the Messiah.⁹⁴ To John, Galilee is the political periphery, the center is Jerusalem.

The landscape of the *Galil* doesn't loom large in the Scriptures. A location “Kedesh in Galilee, on the mountain of Naphtali,” is named as a city of refuge for people under suspicion of murder (Josiah 20:7; 1 Chronicles 6:61), a stretch of land that King Solomon assigned to the king of Tyre (1 Kings 9:11) and that was conquered by the Assyrians as one of the first areas of Israel (2 Kings 15:29): that's all. Not until the king Judah Aristobulos (104-103 BCE), Galilee was united with Judea, its population became Judean partly by immigration from Judea, partly by forced conversion,⁹⁵ and was in a tense relationship to the center of Jerusalem. A text from the Book of Isaiah (reflecting the late Maccabean time?) counts the land among the periphery, togeth-

92 AMEN: The evangelists did not find a Greek equivalent for the Hebrew *’amen*. It means “it stands firm.” Revelation 3:14 treats the word as a noun: “This is what the *Amen*, the faithful witness, says.”

93 THE HUMAN: The expression *hyios tou anthrōpou*, “son of a man,” or traditionally “Son of Man,” refers back to the Aramaic *bar enosh*, and thus to the figure encountered in Daniel 7:13. After the reign of beasts of prey and beastly monsters, the “Ancient of Days”—a circumscription for the God of Israel—gives “to the Human” all earthly power and administration. This figure is in Daniel “the people of the saints of the Most High,” that is, the Torah-keeping people of Israel. The Messiah Jesus is the embodiment of this figure, i.e. of Israel. When Jesus is spoken of as the Son, the figure of Daniel 7:13 is to be thought of; that is why we write the word with initial capital letters. To make this connection clear, we always translate the expression *hyios tou anthrōpou* as “Human” and add the expression *bar enosh*.

94 In Luke, however, the Messianic community has to stay in Jerusalem, because in his Gospel the Messianic movement (Paul!) will go up from the center of Israel to the center of the world order—Rome.

95 Flavius Josephus, [Ant. 13,11](#).

er with the coastal areas and the Transjordan, “the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, the Galil of the nations” (Isaiah 8:23 [LXX]). This text is cited by Matthew, 4:15. About mid-1st-century BCE, the land was torn apart by civil-war-like conditions and “pacified” by people like Herod (about 44 BCE). By the lackeys of Rome who kept the title of king (say Herod Antipas) it was plundered more than administered and had a bad record in Jerusalem. It was a rebellious country, and in the great war against Rome (66-73 CE), the rebels here initially achieved their best successes. The Gospels depict Messianism as a movement that originated in the periphery of the *Galil*.

Heading for Galilee, Jesus *finds* (!) Philipp. Peter is the “finding”⁹⁶ of two disciples, Nathanael the “finding” of Philipp, but Philipp is the “finding” of the Messiah himself. Philipp figures prominently in the Gospel. He comes from the same location as Andrew and Simon Peter, he puts people of the Diaspora (Greeks) in contact with the Messiah (12:21); there, Philipp is addressed as *kyrie*, “lord”, a title which in the Gospel remains reserved to Jesus himself. The first two disciples follow Jesus of their own accord, Simon gets a new name, and none but Philipp is summoned to *follow* him.

In the milieu of the Gospels, the word “to follow” is looming large, as well as in the Book of Revelation. In Paul and the texts dependent on him, it appears just as little as in the letters of the apostles. In John, *to follow* the Messiah (15 times) is a real possibility not before the raising from the dead of the Messiah. Both the first disciples follow Jesus, still without knowing that this one is the Messiah (1:37-39). The crowd follows the Messiah because they expect him to establish the kingdom of Israel (6:2). Israel will *follow* when the Messiah will be the shepherd (10:4 ff.).

Philipp—who in the “Galil of the Nations” was close to the people of the nations—had the task of finding Nathanael, the Israelite “without deceit.” Philipp puts Jesus in the tradition of Torah (Moses) and prophets. “We have found,” he says, like Andrew, though he has not found but was found. Someone who stands for the Israel of the *Diaspora* has to instruct someone who stands for the Israel of the *land* about his *finding*.

This Messiah—announced by the Torah and prophets—is a concrete human with an officially known name and origin: *Jesus ben Joseph from Nazareth, Galilee*.

Nathanael asks: “From Nazareth? What good comes from it?” Almost always this question is conceived as a rhetorical question—that nothing good could come from Nazareth. Indeed, the question mirrors the astonishment that he whom all Israel seeks and hopes for is supposed to come from a location that is not found in the history of Israel’s liberation; in the Scriptures (*Moses and the prophets*), there is no

96 [In German TV uses the word “Erfindung” [= “invention”] sounding the word “finden”= “to find.”]

question of Nazareth at all. Matthew and Luke let the Messiah be born in Bethlehem, the city of David. John, however, interprets the origin from Nazareth as an entirely new initiative of God. To him, Nazareth is a break with the past, too. The sentence lightens up from 7:52 when the Perushim ask their comrade Nicodemus: "Aren't you from Galilee? Search and see: no prophet arises from Galilee." Nathanael objects that Jesus' Messianity can't be proved from the Scriptures, apparently a widespread objection.

Philipp answers in the same way as Jesus answered the question of the first two disciples: "Come and see!" And Nathanael will see because Jesus sees just like Nathanael is coming toward him; he says about him: "There, someone who really (adverb!) is an Israelite, in him is no deceit." Was is a deceitful man in Israel?

They may not rejoice over me, my enemies, liars,
who hate me without reason, winking with their eyes.
They speak no words of peace toward the quiet of the land,
speak and devise deceit.

Psalm 35:19-20 says so, the verse that Jesus will hint at (15:25). Nathanael asks from where Jesus got to know him as a child of Israel without deceit. In Israel, the deceitful is the absolute antagonist to the one who is called "reliable" (*tzadik*). "When you were under the fig tree, I saw you", says Jesus. The imagination of many exegetes then runs riot that Jesus would have seen what a normal man was not able to see, anything that Nathanael secretly had been up to under that fig tree, a small demonstration "of supernatural knowledge";⁹⁷ a certain Blank opines that the encounter with Jesus affects man by revealing to him the truth about himself, at that.⁹⁸ No, Nathanael's alleged amazement at Jesus' parapsychological abilities reveals the cluelessness of the exegetes. Jesus does not directly answer the question, rather he proclaims his vision: "Peace for Israel." In the golden age of Israel when king Solomon still was a blameless man, it was put about, 1 Kings 5:4-5,

Peace was with him (Solomon) from all sides around him.
And Judah and Israel dwelt in safety,
everyone under his vine and under his fig tree,
from Dan to Beersheba,
all the days of Solomon.

The writer of the First Book of Maccabees had this vision as well; during the government of the ruler Simon Maccabee "everyone sat under his vine and fig tree" (14:12). This vision was alive in the Maccabean time. Jesus calls Nathanael "an Israelite without deceit." What this means, Jesus explains by his view that Nathanael "was under

97 Charles K. Barrett, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (KEK), Göttingen 1990, 208.

98 See Klaus Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium. 1. Teilband: Kapitel 1-10* (ThKNT), Stuttgart 2000, 94.

the fig tree.” An Israelite without deceit is an Israelite who wants only one thing: Peace for Israel. “To be there under the fig tree” is the vision of peace of the Messiah and Nathanael’s matter of the heart.⁹⁹ Nathanael grasps immediately what Jesus says to him. Jesus—the Teacher—is “like God” and “King of Israel” like Solomon ben David and Simon, Judah Maccabee’s brother. That’s not a formulaic confession but a conceptual statement about Jesus.

Jesus suspects Nathanael’s misunderstanding that with him—Jesus—the great old days of Israel would come back. He says to him: “Because I said that I see you under the fig tree, you are trusting. Greater things than that you will see.” Nathanael trusts that he will be “under the fig tree,” that he will experience peace, and peace is more than the absence of open war, peace is safety, and that is not really available under kings like Solomon or Simon. The evocative image of life in peace is *sitting* under the vine and the fig tree. But this desire is not enough. There is a problem of the world order that is not solved by this peace. Between the vision of the revival and reunion of Israel in Ezekiel 37 and the blueprint of the reconstruction of Israel in Ezekiel 40-48, there is the text about Gog from Magog. This one comes “against a land of farmers, to prey on people who dwell securely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having no bars or doors” (Ezekiel 38:11). As long as there is Gog from Magog there is no true safety. What is greater than peace for Israel? A world order of peace.

John then brings a sophisticated quotation of the Scriptures referring to three passages, Ezekiel 1:1, Genesis 28:12, and Daniel 7:12. This conglomerate is commenced with the sentence, “You will see the heaven, opened.” The expression only appears in the Book of Ezekiel, 1:1,

Opened were the heavens,
I saw, sight of God,
...

What “sight of God” (*mar’oth ’elohim*) means, we will get to know later. At first, John invokes Jacob’s vision: The disciples should see what Jacob saw in his dream, Genesis 28:12-13,

He dreamed,
there: a ladder set up on the earth,
the top of it reached to heaven,
there: messengers of God ascending, descending on it,
there: the NAME stood over him,
he said,
“I AM—the NAME,
the God of Abraham, your father,

99 Might that be a rebuke in the direction of Mark or Matthew who let Jesus curse the fig tree (Mark 11:12 ff. par.)? Luke may have deliberately omitted this passage. As to the image of the *fig tree* see Micah 4:4 and Zechariah 3:10.

the God of Isaac.
The land on which you lie
I will give to you and to your offspring . . .”

What they get to see is about Israel, the promise of the land. Today the land belongs to others, through the Messiah it will belong to Israel. Then there is the third element, *bar enosh*, the Human. Daniel watched that thrones were set up in heaven for an “Ancient of Days,” innumerable beings stood before him. Then it says, 7:10-14,

The court is seated, books are opened.
A vision happened to me then,
because of the voice of boastful words
that the horn (the Great King of Syria) was speaking,
a vision happened to me,
the beast (the kingdom of Syria) was killed,
its body destroyed and given over into the blazing fire.
As for the rest of the beasts (kingdoms)
their dominion was limited,
their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.
I saw, a night vision,
There: coming with the clouds of heaven a Human
(*bar enosh*, One like a son of man),
to the Ancient of Days he went,
he was lead into his presence.
To him was given dominion, dignity, kingdom,
all people, tribes, and tongues paid reverence to him.
His dominion is a dominion for the ages that will not pass away,
his kingdom will not be destroyed.

This vision has the brunt of the will of the people not to surrender permanently to the power of the predators who until then ruled over Israel (Daniel 7:1 ff.). “The court is seated, books are opened.” What comes now is no more bestially but someone “like a Human.” The expression “son of man” simply means: “a Human.” We write the word initial-capitalized to signify a very specific human with a very specific task. The power of bestial kingdoms is limited in time, the power of humaneness is unlimited. With the clouds of heaven is coming what never was: the power of humaneness, embodied in the people of the holy ones of the Most High, by Israel (Daniel 7:27). And this humaneness all at once is criterion and executor of law.

To John, the embodiment of this Israel, of this *bar enosh*, this Human, is the Messiah Jesus ben Joseph from Nazareth. Whenever in John we hear the expression *bar enosh*, “Son of Man”—we write “Human”—we have to hear this vision, too. The “greater things” that Nathanael and his condisciples will see are of three kinds.

They will get “sight of God,” i.e. “the heavens opened.” Heaven—the second work of God’s creation— is the vault (*raqiaʿ*) that shields the celestial from the terrestrial. So it’s fortunate that heaven remains shut. If it is opened, the disaster of the Flood happens, “the floodgates of the heavens were opened,” Genesis 7:11.

If further the heavens are opened, then secondly a future on earth is made accessible to Israel: the land.

Thirdly, however, the heavens are opened so that justice will happen to the earth and its inhabitants, Isaiah 24:18. The disciples will see that finally right will be done, divine law. It comes from the “heaven opened,” Ezekiel 1:1, with the “Human,” Daniel 7, to Israel, Genesis 28:10 ff. The Scriptures will be fulfilled.

The introduction is at its end. Now the “found” disciples have to grow into what can be called the Messianic community.

2. The Beginning of the Signs in Cana, Galilee.

The Messianic Wedding, 2:1-12

John structures his narrative by the great festivals of the Judeans. Right at the outset, he makes a reservation. The festivals are the festivals of the Judeans, i.e. John’s opponents. But take care! He does not replace the Jewish festivals with Christian festivals¹⁰⁰ but wants to show that in the days of the Messiah, all feasts get a new orientation. This new orientation is given to the Jewish feasts by the *principled* (*archē!*) festival: the Messianic wedding, which signifies the essence of all festivals.

2.1. Messianic Wedding, 2:1-11

- 2:1 And on the third day, a wedding happened at Cana, Galilee.
And the mother of Jesus was there.
- 2:2 Called to the wedding was Jesus, too, along with his disciples.
- 2:3 When the wine ran out, Jesus’ mother says to him,
“They have no wine.”
- 2:4 Says Jesus to her,
“What is between me and you, woman?”¹⁰¹

100 A more benevolent explanation would be that the expression “*pascha tōn loudaiōn*” distinguishes the Passover of the Judeans from the Passover of the people of Samaria which took place at another time.

101 WHAT IS BETWEEN ME AND YOU, WOMAN: *Ti emoi kai soi, gynai*. The phrase is not Greek; it is often attested in Hebrew, *ma li u-lakh*. It means a distancing, such as “not my problem, your problem.” The address *gynai* is not disrespectful; the statement is aimed at the fact that the Messianic time has not yet come. What is happening here is the sign of the age to come, and indeed the first, i.e., principle, sign, *archē tōn sēmeiōn*, v.11.

My hour has not yet come.”

2:5 His mother says to the persons on duty,
“Whatever he will say to you, do so.”

2:6 There were stone water jars there, six,
being ready for the purification of the Judeans,
each holding two or three *metretes*.¹⁰²

2:7 Jesus says to them,
“Fill the water jars with water.”
They filled them to the brim.

2:8 And he says to them,
“Draw some out now and take it to the master of the feast.”¹⁰³
They took it.

2:9 When the master of the feast tasted the water
that had become wine,
and did not know where it is from
—the servants who had drawn the water knew—,
the master of the feast calls the bridegroom

2:10 and says to him,
“Every man serves the good wine first,
and when they are drunk the lesser.
You have kept the good wine—until now.”

2:11 This did Jesus as the beginning of the signs at Cana, Galilee.¹⁰⁴
He manifested his honor,
and his disciples began trusting in him.

The first words of this passage indicate a problem. You wait for a series: one day, the following day, the third day. Instead, in John 1:19-51, we have one day and three additional following days. Now you can continue counting: After the four days,

102 TWO OR THREE *METRETES*: Since a *metrētēs* contains about 40 liters, about one hundred liters go into each of the jars.

103 MASTER OF THE FEAST: *Architriklinikos*. The word *architriklinos* did not occur in the Greek language until John. *Triklinos* meant “consisting of three beds.” In the Mishnah, it is transcribed as *traqlin*. In mAvot 4:16 it means “palace.” This functionary, then, is “palace ruler,” *maior domus*, as the Carolingians were at the Merovingian court, i.e., “majordomo.” The author of a widely read and otherwise thorough commentary, C. K. Barrett, suggests “toast-master.” In German, we leave the word untranslated.
[In English, “master of the feast” seems appropriate to me.]

104 BEGINNING: *Archē* (see 1:1!) is more than a temporal beginning, that is, more than the first sign in a series. Otherwise, *prōton* would have to be here. This is essential for the interpretation of 2:1-12: the transformation of water into wine is the original, principled Messianic sign; in all signs happens in principle (therefore *archē*) what happens in Cana: the dawn of the Messianic time, the age to come.

there are two further days and, then, a third day. The result is a full week, the seventh day is a festival day, indeed. In the other Gospels, the third day is a constant figure; it signifies the day of the resurrection. To Paul, this *third* day was a traditional notion already, 1 Corinthians 15:4. John knows—that's what we can safely assume—what Messianists connect with the third day.

The location *Cana* from Josiah 19:28 is a northern border town of the tribal area of Asher. Asher is situated at the northern periphery, and *Cana* in this periphery is again periphery. The third day of John 2:1, the day of the Messianic wedding, takes place in the periphery of the periphery. Like Nazareth, Cana has no past of liberation; with the great events of the life of Israel, it had nothing to do. It is a marginal location where there was "nothing going on." The other evangelists don't know Cana. Cana is a theological, not a geographical location, as the star of Bethlehem is not an astronomical, but a theological object. Cana is the place of the "beginning of the signs" and the place of the other (second) sign, 4:46. Here John's political program takes on contours: the purpose of Israel, the Messianic wedding, takes place in the periphery, at a location which never had been thought of before, at that. The *center* (Jerusalem, the political establishment of Judea) will reject the perspective from the *periphery*.

At this marginal location, a wedding took place. In John's language area, a "wedding" is not just any Oriental wedding to which Jesus' family was invited. His language is normed by the language of the Scriptures. There can be no talk of Jesus having bailed any wedding party out of any embarrassing situation and proving himself a wonder worker. The prefiguration of the wedding is the wedding between Israel and its God. Here you should think of Isaiah 62:4-5,

No more shall you be called: "Forsaken!"
 Your land shall no more be called: "Desolate!"
 You (Israel) are called: "My Delight Is in Her,"
 and your land: "Married."
 For the NAME delights in you,
 and your land shall be married.
 As a young man marries a young woman,
 so will your Builder marry you.
 And as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride,
 so will your God rejoice over you."

The purpose of the "sign" is that the disciples find confidence in Jesus who announced "greater things": to see everything from the sight of God and to grasp that in this wedding it is about Israel. The sign answers this purpose and, to start with, the prerequisite of that seeing and understanding, the confidence in the Messiah, the *bar enosh*, the Human. It is about Israel, how should it then on the "third day" be about another matter? You can call this an allegory and reject it as "unscientific."

But isn't the whole of Scripture *allegory*, doesn't it hint with all its words and images and narratives, tales, etc. to quite another (*allos*) matter, to the totally *Other*? In any case, Isaiah introduces more deeply into what happens than the feast of Dionysos on the isle of Andros where wine instead of water is alleged to have sputtered from the springs of the temple for three days. That made sense to Rudolf Bultmann¹⁰⁵; our light is from another source!

John introduces another person, the mother of Jesus. She plays a role that none of the other evangelists allowed to her. In Luke, she is the acting person in the narrative of the begetting and birth of the Messiah. From that, no special role arises to her, on the contrary: the Synoptics harshly reject every claim of an elevated position in the Messianic community: "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers," the Messiah asks. "Whoever does the will of my FATHER in the heavens is my brother and my sister and my mother", Matthew 12:50, see Luke 8:21 and Mark 3:23.

In John, the mother plays a decisive role right at the "beginning of the signs." The mother of Jesus belongs to the wedding party in the first place, Jesus and his disciples were called afterward. It is she who ascertains a grave deficiency that renders the wedding impossible: "They have no wine." In Greek, "wine" is the first word of the sentence, it is the chief thing. Just this chief thing is lacking. Thus Jesus' mother stands between the Messiah with his disciples and the wedding party. She acts as an intermediary between Israel and the Messiah.

Later on, the mother appears on the scene once more, under the cross. Then she is made the mother of the disciple to whom Jesus was solidarily conjoined in particular, and this disciple the son of this woman. John never mentions the name of Jesus' mother. With him, she is none but *the mother of the Messiah*. In the Messianic community from which the Gospel of John originates, she must have figured prominently. In the narrative of the Messianic wedding, her role is to mediate between the Messiah and Israel. But she is not—as the Roman Catholic Mariology believes—the prototype of the Christian church.

Jesus says to his mother: "What is between me and you, woman?" The expression is known from the Scriptures; it means that a common concern between two persons is called into question.¹⁰⁶ His hour—"the hour to come to pass out of this world order to the FATHER" (13:1)—has not yet come. Not yet on hand is the moment when the deficiency of wine is remedied and Israel becomes Israel again by filling the abyss between Israel (the mother) and the Messianic community (Jesus and his disciples). Apparently, the wine has something to do with the "hour." The woman's request is hidden in this ascertainment like an urgent plea. It is a plea like that of the disciples, Acts 1:6: "Are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

105 Rudolf Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (KEK), Göttingen 1941, 83.

106 Examples: Judges 11:12; 2 Samuel 16:10; similarly Joshua 22:24, Jeremiah 2:18 etc.

There the disciples were rejected (Acts 1:7) as here the mother is rejected. “Not yet,” Jesus says here, and later he will say it to Maria from Magdala because she tries to touch Jesus like a living man: “Not yet I have ascended to the FATHER” (20:17).

The salutation “woman!” (*gynai*) is neither irreverent nor repellent. The mother of the Messiah has called attention to the decisive point. They have no wine, what they have is water. Water is vital for life, water is the Torah, it serves to obey the central instructions of purification of the Torah.

Jesus’ mother who has appropriated the central problem of the wedding turns to the servants. By her action, she interprets the question “What is between me and you?” not as a rhetorical but as a real question. What have I—the Messiah—to do with *this* Israel? She answers this implied question by an action; she says to the servants that they shall do whatever Jesus will say to them. With *such* an Israel, he does have something to do, indeed.

The meaning of the word *diakonos* is not simply “attendant, servant, slave.” The normal word for “servant” is *doulos*. The *diakonos*, however, is the one who carries out a higher duty at a royal court like those seven officers, “who carried out their duty before the face of the king Ahasuerus” (Esther 1:10, see 6:3). Martha carried out her duty in the house of her brother Lazarus before the face of Jesus who had called Lazarus from the dead (12:1-2); that also was not the service of a servant (the appropriate word would be *douloun*, not *diakonein*). The one who is a servant, *diakonos*, par excellence is Martha, the sister of Lazarus (12:2). The *diakonos* is the one who will be there where the Messiah will be, the *diakonoι* are those who follow the Messiah, 12:26. Thus Jesus’ mother is talking as to the court officials of a king.

You can puzzle over the six jars for the purification of the Judeans; to John and his listeners, they undoubtedly bore a meaning. The number six in 12:1 (“six days before the Passover”) can hardly be explained from here. A possible explanation may be: Twelve is the number of “all Israel.” This interpretation is supported by the narrative 1 Kings 18 where Elijah initiates to fill *twelve*—three times four—jars with water (18:34) after having erected twelve stones—“according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob” (18,31). Here, however, is only “half” Israel. The other half is not yet there. (See 10:16: “Other sheep I have that are not of this yard”). Torah-abiding Israel in the land (the six jars filled with water) has to turn into Messianic Israel (six jars filled with wine). Admittedly, the question remains: why *six*?

And now the *architriklinos* appears on the stage. The word is unique, it is to be found neither in the Greek editions of the Scriptures nor in nonbiblical Greek literature. A narrator—all the more a narrator of distinction like John—has his reasons for introducing a character and denoting it with a totally unusual word. All sorts of things are made use of to clear up the matter. Bultmann has “Tafelmeister” [“mas-

ter of the table”], Barrett has “toastmaster,” Wengst has “Speisemeister” [“master of the food”].¹⁰⁷

Wengst would have been able to avoid this embarrassment. For the part of the word *triklinos*, he refers to the passage of the Mishnah: “Rabbi Jacob says: This world equals to a front hall of the future world: gear up in the front hall so that you can enter the palace (*triklinos*, *traqlin* in Mishna Hebrew)” (mAvot 4:16). The word explains the *location* of the wedding, the house of the bridegroom. Thus the character must mean more than a minor character. In any case, the *architriklinos* is the confidant of the bridegroom as will be shown. The bridegroom can represent—if we interpret the wedding according to Isaiah 62:4-5—none other than the God of Israel. The *architriklinos* knows nothing, the ones who know are the servants, the *diakonoι*. The servants have no direct access to the bridegroom. The *diakonoι* know, the *architriklinos* is the one who does not know what the *diakonoι* know; from there, the riddle that is proposed to us by this character has to be solved. Up to now we only had twice the assertion of the Baptist: “Me too, I did not know him” (1:31, 33, *kai egō ouk ēdein auton*). About the *architriklinos* it is said: “He did not know.” Just as the Baptist didn’t know that Jesus ben Joseph from Nazareth was the Messiah, so the *architriklinos* didn’t know where the wine—the effective sign of the Messianic time—came from. Who is the confidant or “friend of the bridegroom”? Let’s wait until 3:29!

This confidant says to the bridegroom: “Every man serves the good wine first, and when they are drunk the lesser. You have kept the good wine—until now.” Let’s begin with the last sentence. In John, the word “to keep” anyplace else means “to keep the commandments.” Twice more we’ll hear the expression “until now.” In 5:17, “My FATHER is working until now, and I too am working.” The other one is 16:24, “Until now you have asked nothing with my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be full,” right at the end of the so-called “farewell speeches.” These passages explain our passage here. Jesus has worked “until now”; until now the name of Jesus played no role in the longing (praying) of the disciples. At the moment when they will connect their longing for the age to come to the Name of Jesus, they will accept what they pray for, and their joy will be fulfilled. Now Israel turns into that “good wine”; until now it was far from being good wine, Isaiah 5:1 ff.:

Let me sing for my beloved,
a love song:
A vineyard belonged to my beloved, vineyard to him,
on a fertile hillside.
He dug it up, cleared it of stones,

107 [The traditional English translations “ruler of the feast” or “master of the feast” come nearer to the proper sense of *architriklinos* than all the mentioned German ones.]

he planted it with the choicest vines,
 built a watchtower in the midst of it
 and hewed out a wine press.
 Then he hoped that it brings forth grapes,
 it brought forth only sour ones.

The same image is used in Jeremiah (2:21). The sign of Jesus “at last” turns the bitter words of the prophets into what the beloved one always hoped from his vineyard Israel: good wine. God’s hope “at last” comes to fulfillment. The *architriklinos* helps the bridegroom out of a large embarrassment without even suspecting where the wine comes from and what is happening, after all.

The bride will be talked about in 3:29-30. Here it is about the *principled* sign. Not the first sign from a series of many further ones, but the *beginning* of the signs. The Gospel starts with the same words “In the beginning” as the Scriptures itself had started. Now we hear the same word once more. The sign of the signs—what it is actually about and has to be about—shows: Israel turns into Israel, at long last. That’s what it’s all about in everything that Jesus will be saying and doing. For that will be his honor. The honor of Jesus is to lead home Israel.

The disciples trust Jesus. This is the first time—except in the preface—that we hear the word *pisteuein*, “to trust, to have confidence in.” About this trust, confidence, it will be. That Jesus becomes the Messiah is clear to them (*ephanerōsen, evident!*) when Israel’s deficiency was remedied. They *trust*, not because a magician by a magic trick enchanted 600¹⁰⁸ liters of water into just as many liters of wine, but because they have been made aware of what Jesus must do and will do. The vast amount of wine stands for the abundance of the Messianic time.

Consequently—and that confirms our interpretation—Jesus’ next action takes place in the *traqlin*, in the *triklinos* of the God of Israel, the sanctuary in Jerusalem. “Before the face” of the Messianic community that was constituted in Cana: The mother, the brothers, the disciples.

2.2. Messianic Community, 2:12

2:12 After this he went down to Capernaum,¹⁰⁹
 he, and his mother, and his brothers, and his disciples.
 And there they stayed not many days.¹¹⁰

108 According to Klaus Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium*. 1. Teilband: Kapitel 1-10 (ThKNT), Stuttgart 2000, 102, a *metrētēs* contains about 39 liters.

109 CAPERNAUM: *Kefar Nachum*. The name means “village of consolation.”
 [On the descent to Capernaum, see also note 217.]

110 [NOT MANY DAYS: Many translations including the CJB have “a few” instead of “not many” and thus make it impossible to take notice of the reference to Deuteronomy 1:46 and 2:1,

The Messianic wedding in Cana, Galilee, is the festival of the foundation of the Messianic community. With it, he goes to Capernaum. Here—at the beginning of the signs—all who represent the original Messianic community are still together: the community to which Jesus' mother belongs, the community of Jesus' brothers in Jerusalem, and the communities of the disciples in the land and the region.

“There they stayed not many days,” it finally says. About Israel, it was said, “You stayed at Kadesh many days, the days you stayed there” (Deuteronomy 1:46), and: “We circled Mount Seir many days” (Deuteronomy 2:1). At last, it says, “And the days that we went from Kadesh-Barnea to the brook Zered (the border to the plains of Moab), were 38 years” (Deuteronomy 2:14). “Not many days” means: the abidance in Capernaum shall not become like the abidance in Kadesh-Barnea: the 38 years of Israel are over. To understand that, we have to wait until 5:1 ff. The problem: John always poses riddles that you can't solve before having read the whole text.

Scholion 1: What's so Reprehensible about Allegorical Exegesis?

Our way of exegesis is not timid about allegory. The allegorical interpretation has a venerable tradition. Only when modern historical-critical exegesis became dominant, allegory was discarded as “unscientific.” Indeed, we know kinky examples of traditional interpretations of the Church Fathers, the old ascetic literature from the milieu of the monks, and the theologians until the Reformation period. In the Talmud, allegory is widespread, too.

The allegorical interpretation has seen something that in historical-critical goes by the board. This one mistrusts the text in hand, looks for “sources”, original versions, redactional revisions, and the like, and tries to set it back into its own historical (political, social, ideological) milieu. That is a necessary effort; without it, the text turns into an exotic object.

It alone does not *explain* the text at hand. But if you want to interpret the text, you have to know its structure. At first, the structure of a narrative is the network of roles that are acted in it by its characters. They and their actions are signs. The signs refer to what they signify, to what they are *driving at*, but what they are not *for themselves*. They sign-ify something that they are for us or *by themselves*; it is exactly this *something* of the text that we are *interested* in. Otherwise, we would not read it, interpret it, preach it, make it a topic of education. The sign presupposes the *sign-ified* as the *other (allon)*, or it would be no *sign, sēmeion*. Exactly because of the pre-eminence of the word *sēmeion* in the Gospel of John—we hear it 17 times—in its interpretation, you can't go very far without *allegories*.

Admittedly, danger is at hand. In the *allegory*, there is no limit to phantasy, and thus a danger of arbitrariness. The historical merits of criticism are to prevent allegorical

as TV will explain. The King James Bible translates literally.]

arbitrariness. Criticism points at the narrative's own social and political context, it is the element of *diachrony* that considers the difference between our time and the time of the narrative.

To us, allegory is not an arbitrary method but an essential component of the structural (*synchronic*) analysis of the text as a whole. In our view, *allegory* means to respect the whole that precedes the fragment and transcends it. This whole is the *Other*, and the characters of the narrative are pointing beyond their special role in the particular fragment to their role in the whole. This whole has its very own system of signs and images, characters and visions, its *language* in the comprehensive sense of the word. Therefore the characters in Cana do not play a part in any peasant wedding in any village where the people ran out of wine—it could have been beer, roast mutton, etc. as well—but in a *Messianic wedding*. If we don't accept this *Other* which the sign "water turns into wine" points to, the whole scene becomes arbitrary, and Jesus a Jack of all trades who can do everything, like enchanting 600 liters of water into wine. If the narrative does not mean that *Other*, it means just *nothing*.

All characters will appear again in the course of the narrative, Jesus and his mother as well as his disciples, the bridegroom, the *diakonoi*, and even the *architriklinos*. The characters are agents of a reality that points beyond them, they always are more than they are, or—to quote Sartre—"They are not what they are, and they are what they are not."¹¹¹ The transcendence of the whole blows up what they superficially seem to be. Incidentally, this also applies to all great literature, to which the Gospel of John undoubtedly belongs.

3. Passover. The Messiah as the Teacher of Israel, 2:13-3,21

3.1. A Lesson, 2:13-22

- 2:13 Near was the Pascha of the Judeans.¹¹²
 And Jesus ascended to Jerusalem.
- 2:14 He found in the sanctuary
 the sellers of cattle, sheep, and doves,
 and the coin-changers seated there.
- 2:15 He made a whip from cords,

111 In many passages of the analysis of the *pour-soi* in "L'Être et le Néant," 1943. Sartre demonstrates this with the numerous characters in his novels and plays from the period between 1935 and 1955.

112 THE PASCHA OF THE JUDEANS: *Pascha tōn loudaiōn*. *Pascha* is Aramaic, Hebrew *pessach*. *Pascha*, Passover, is the great feast of liberation that plays an important role three times: here, at the bread speech of John 6, and the Messiah's departure, John 13-21.
 CT: The more specific definition *tōn loudaiōn* may imply a distancing from the festival of the Judeans, but the expression could also serve to distinguish it from the Passover of the people of the Samaritans.

he cast them all out of the sanctuary,
 the sheep and the cattle as well,
 he poured out the coins of the money-changers,
 knocked over the tables,
 2:16 and to the sellers of doves he said,
 "Take that away from here,
 do not turn my FATHER's house into a house of trade."
 2:17 His disciples remembered that it was written,
 "*Zeal for your house devours me.*"¹¹³
 2:18 Now the Judeans asked, they said to him,
 "What sign do you show us for doing all this?"
 2:19 Jesus answered and said to them,
 "Break down this temple,
 in three days I will raise it up."
 2:20 The Judeans said,
 "It took 46 years to build this temple,
 and you're going to raise it in three days?"
 2:21 But that one had spoken of the temple of his body.
 2:22 Therefore, when he was raised from the dead,
 his disciples remembered that he had said this;
 and they began trusting in the Scriptures
 and in the word that Jesus had said¹¹⁴.

*Pascha*¹¹⁵ is the Aramaic word for the Hebrew *pessach*, Passover, the great festival of liberation from the house of bondage. John and the other Messianic authors have to leave the word untranslated because there is no Greek equivalent. But it is highly questionable whether John in mentioning *pascha* refers to Christian Easter. If the Messiah—"the ewe from GOD, taking up the aberration of the world order" (1:29)—is killed on the preparatory day of Passover, then what the first *pascha* aimed at becomes reality—the final liberation of every pharaoh.

Jesus ascends to Jerusalem, for the *pascha* has to be celebrated at the location that the NAME had chosen. In John, *pascha* always is "near." There Jesus makes a discovery that makes any celebration of liberation impossible to him: in the sanctuary, he *finds* (!) those who turn it into a house of trade.

113 ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE DEVOURS ME: This translation of Psalm 69:10 is by Buber.
 [The first English translation of the Jewish Bible published in America in 1853 by Rabbi Isaac Leeser reads: "the zeal for thy house hath devoured me."]

114 SCRIPTURES/WORD: John distinguishes between the written words (*grammata*), namely the words of the Scriptures (*graphē*), and the spoken words (*rhēmata*), see 5:47.

115 In the Aramaic language, the final vowel *ʾalef* of a substantive serves as a definite article—therefore "*the*" *Pascha*.

The sanctuary was a market for the interregional exchange of goods according to the principles of a monetary economy. It had this function already in pre-Hellenistic times, but in Hellenism, the sanctuary quickly evolved into a market of goods and services and played a role as a financial institution as well (2 Maccabees 3:10-11). In such markets, there were money-changers from Hellenistic antiquity until the early modern time. Outside of the Gospels, there is no historical evidence of the existence of such markets in the area of the house of God. The city itself knew of such markets, indeed. Traders bought and sold, and as each little potentate of the region (say Herod Antipas) had at least a restricted right of coinage, a clutch of currencies was circulating. Even if the money-changers are only subserving the collection of the heave-offering to the sanctuary (usually called “temple tax”), John views them as traders like those who traded with sacrificial animals.

To John, the last sentence of the Book of Zechariah seems to be deciding. “There shall be no trader in the house of the NAME of the orders on that day.” A condition that pious Israel is longing for. In Israel and premodernity in general, the merchant class was regarded as abnormal, professional traders were called “Canaanites.”¹¹⁶ At least on Shabbat, Nehemiah didn’t tolerate traders in the city (Nehemiah 13:15-22). In the eyes of the evangelists, Jerusalem was a Hellenistic city, a “trading city” (*emporion*), as the prophets called the Phoenician commercial metropolis Tyre; consequently, their trading partners were called *emporioi*, “traders” (Isaiah 23:17; Ezekiel 27:15). That must come to an end. Jesus puts an end to it.

Striking is the violence that is used by Jesus here; in John, he is none like Gandhi. To unbiased people this doesn’t make a good impression; they can’t escape the idea that here a fundamentalist Zealot is at work. This impression is wrong. Instead, all evangelists fully align Jesus in the tradition of the Maccabean revolution. That they have Jesus reject military *Zealotism* (John 10:8-11; 18:11; Matthew 26:52) is not at all due to dogmatic pacifism but on all accounts to a realistic estimate of the relative military strength. The disciples, however, remember that Jesus was a zealot: “Zeal (*zēlos*) for your house devours me”, says the Psalm, and we think of Elijah who confessed: “Zealous I have been, zealous (*zēlōn ezēlōka*) for the NAME, the God of the orders,” 1 Kings 19:10. According to John, Jesus was a zealot, but a proper one, no Rambo of the same batch as were the people who—during the Zealot regime in Jerusalem (68-70)—wreaked that bloody havoc which lead to the inconceivable catastrophe of the year 70. What is happening here, is a sort of *chanukkah*, the purification of the house of God. Here the negative element of the *chanukkah* is mentioned, the cleansing, in 10:22 ff. the positive one.

116 Aristotle, for instance, has a very low opinion of trading (*kapelikon*) for the sake of earning money (*chrēmatistikē*) (Pol. 1257b).

The Judeans lived in a city that culturally was deeply shaped by Hellenism.¹¹⁷ They “countered” Jesus and ask for a sign. They didn’t suspect that the principle sign already was given, at Cana, Galilee. They ask upon what grounds Jesus by his action could endanger a policy of compromise with Rome. After all, the Zealot’s military adventure had led the people into an appalling catastrophe. They caused Rome’s barbaric intervention and the destruction of the city and the sanctuary. Not only proponents of Rome like Flavius Josephus but also other members of the people took that view. Thus the Judeans had every reason to ask Jesus for his legitimation.

Jesus’ answer is an outrageous provocation. What we experience here is typical of John’s literary procedure. He has Jesus say something that his adversaries necessarily must misunderstand. Either the Gospel is written before the destruction of Jerusalem, and then John plays a wicked game with the fears of the Judeans. Or it is written after the destruction. Then the answer is unacceptable all the more. Jesus does not make the slightest effort to take seriously the standpoint of the adversaries. Not even the disciples understood him; only after his death did they grasp that he had not spoken of the sanctuary, the house of God, but “about the temple of his body.” Before his death, like all the others, they took it for granted that Jesus spoke of the sanctuary and nothing else.

The provocation is intended. They should have listened more closely; John always talks about the house of God as the sanctuary (*hieron*). Only here he speaks of the temple (*naos*). John moves about in an imaginative space that was widespread among many Messianists. Thus the high priest during the interrogation before the Sanhedrin will understand Jesus; this one had said: “I will break down this temple (*naos*) that is made with human hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with human hands” (Mark 14:58; Matthew 26:61). This is not cheap polemics against “Jewish temple piety”; to the Messianists as well, the location in Jerusalem where Jesus taught and politically enlightened was a location of the sanctity of the God of Israel, just “sanctuary.” Rather it is about resistance against the process of turning the Judean sanctuary (*hieron*) into a temple (*naon*) of the *goyim*.¹¹⁸ The temple is denoted with the same adjective *cheiropoiēton*, “made with human hands” (Acts 7:48), that in the Scriptures is used for idols (*ma‘ase yede ‘adam*, Psalm 115:4). In the Messianic time, the temple will turn into the sanctuary again; this makes up the passion (*zēlos*) of the Messiah. John has Jesus reproach the Judeans in Jerusalem—the Judean authority—of turning the house of the God of Israel into a Hellenistic institute for religious affairs with all its excesses of profiteering and being not even aware of this fraud.

117 Martin Hengel, *Jerusalem als jüdische und hellenistische Stadt*, in ders., *Kleine Schriften II*, Tübingen 2002, 115ff.

118 [In German, TV speaks of a “gojischen Tempel” = “goyic temple,” because the words “pagan” or “heathen” don’t meet exactly the meaning of the Hebrew word *goyim* = “foreign people” from the viewpoint of Israel.]

Not the destruction of the temple but the raising of the Messiah from the dead is the sign. To John, after the resurrection of the Messiah, the destruction of the city and the sanctuary carries no more actual weight. In John, no Messiah is weeping over the city (Matthew 23:37 ff.; Luke 13:34-35, 19:41-44). The *temple* has been destroyed, the Messiah killed, but the *sanctuary* could not be destroyed, because it was not made by human hands but was the location that the NAME himself chooses, admittedly for a very new service, namely bowing (adoration) according to “inspiration and fidelity,” as we will see in the interpretation of 4:20-24 (section 5.4). And the Messiah could not be held up by death in ascending to the FATHER.

The disciples as (not) acting characters of the narrative stand here for the Messianic communities after the destruction. Not they, either, saw through the answer to the question for a sign. According to John, that’s because the disciples—the Messianic communities after the year 70—have not trusted or understood either the Scriptures or Jesus’ word. In front of the empty burial cave, the uninhabited site of the ruins of Jerusalem, the community is still standing uncomprehendingly, 20:11. John is hard on the depressiveness of his and other Messianic communities. He wants Israel to come to a real understanding of its Scriptures; his hermeneutic principle is the Messiah who had to die to be able to stand up. To Luke as well, the Messiah was the Teacher of the Scriptures, 24:32. A good House of Study is taking place if the people’s “hearts are burning at the opening of the Scriptures.” Here nothing is burning, here is none but incomprehension.

3.2. “You are the teacher of Israel, and you do not understand this?”, 2:23-3:21

2:23 Now while he was in Jerusalem
at the Pascha, during the festival,
many began trusting in his name,
when they observed¹¹⁹ the signs he did.
2:24 But Jesus did not entrust himself to them,
for he knew everybody
2:25 and didn’t need anyone to testify of man.
For he himself knew what was in man.
3:1 Now there was a man among the Perushim,
named Nicodemus¹²⁰, a ruler of the Judeans.

119 OBSERVED: The verb *theōrein* occurs 22 times in John (also in 1 John 3:17). It is more than a simple “to see,” it is a very deliberate “to observe, note, consider, take into account.” In classical Greek, it also means “to muster” (of soldiers).

120 [Although the CJB takes the Hebrew name *Naqdimōn* to translate *Nikodēmos*, I refer to the traditional version “Nicodemus”—without deciding the question whether this man might refer to Naqdimon ben Gurion, a wealthy Jewish man who lived in the 1st century CE and is mentioned in Josephus’ “The Judean War” and later Rabbinic works.]

3:2 This one came to him, by night.
 He said to him,
 “Rabbi,
 we know it is from GOD that you have come as a teacher.
 For no one can do these signs that you do,
 unless GOD is with him.”

3:3 Jesus answered, he said to him,
 “Amen, amen, I say to you,
 unless someone is begotten¹²¹ from above
 he cannot see the Kingdom of GOD.”

3:4 Nicodemus says to him,
 “How can a man be begotten when he is old?
 Can he go back into his mother’s womb a second time
 and be born?”

3:5 Jesus answered,
 “Amen, amen, I say to you:
 unless someone is begotten of water and inspiration,
 he cannot enter the Kingdom of GOD.

3:6 That begotten of the flesh is just flesh,
 that begotten of inspiration is inspired .¹²²

3:7 Don’t be amazed that I said to you
 that you must be begotten from above!

3:8 The storm blows where it wants to,
 and you hear its voice,
 but you don't know where it is coming from or where it is going.
 So is anyone begotten of the storm of inspiration.”¹²³

121 CT: *Gennan* (*holid*) means “to beget,” the passive form *gennesthai* (*huledeth*) “to be begotten” (see Matthew 1:2-16!). The *hiphil* form means “to make someone live.” That is a unique incident which means that the unique name of a human—by adding the name of the begetting one—is integrated into the whole of the history of the people: He/she is the son/daughter of the begetting one, Jesus *ben* Joseph. The new time of the Messiah all at once signifies a new start in history. “To beget” therefore is better than “to be born.”

122 THAT BEGOTTEN . . . INSPIRED: *To gegennēmenon ek tēs sarkos sarx estin, kai to gegennēmenon ek tou pneumatōs pneuma estin*. The opposition “spirit (inspiration)/flesh” is explained by the opposites “heaven/earth” and “above/below.” Inspiration proceeds from the God of Israel and the Messiah (FATHER and SON), as John will explain in 16:13-15. “Inspiration” means that which turns an earthly, carnal life into a heavenly and inspired life, a Messianic existence. The translation “spirit” in the sense of the German term “Geist” invokes an idealistic dualism: Spirit versus body. Those who think from this idealism must misunderstand John.

123 STORM: See the note to 1:32. In 3:8 we translate *pneuma* as “storm,” because an image is used here for comparison. The equivalent in the fourth line must then read, “storm of inspi-

- 3:9 Nicodemus answered and said to him,
“How can this happen?”
- 3:10 Jesus answered and said to him,
“You are the teacher of Israel, and you do not understand this?
- 3:11 Amen, amen, I say to you,
what we know we speak about,
what we have seen we are testifying,
but you don’t accept our testimony.
- 3:12 If I tell you about the things of the earth
and you are not trusting,
how will you trust
if I tell you about the things of heaven?
- 3:13 No one has ascended into heaven,
if not the one who descended from heaven,
bar enosh, the Human.
- 3:14 Just as Moses exalted the serpent in the wilderness,
so the *bar enosh*, the Human, has to be exalted,
- 3:15 so that everyone trusting in him
may have life in the age to come.¹²⁴
- 3:16 For GOD so solidarized with the world¹²⁵

ration.” [In his former translation, TV had taken the weaker word “wind”:]

CT: Here initially we translate *pneuma* as “wind,” because *pnein*, “to blow,” demands it. *Phonē*, “voice,”—heard from the Scriptures—is here more than “sound.” The voice that makes very special words heard is the only way the God can sensually be experienced—in a voice of word, not in sound or noise (Deuteronomy 4:12, *sulathi qol*, “only a voice”!), cf. also Kings 19:11-13.

- 124 LIFE OF THE AGE TO COME: *Zōē aiōnios* is usually translated as “eternal life.” What is meant is life in the coming eon, the epoch established by the Messiah’s struggle. In Rabbinical Judaism it is called ‘*olam ha-ba’*’ in contrast to ‘*olam ha-ze*,’ this ruling epoch. John calls it *ho kosmos* (*houtos*). The contrast between *ho kosmos* (*houtos*) and *zōē aiōnios* is nothing else than the Rabbinic difference. So it has nothing to do with Gnostic dualism.

- 125 SOLIDARIZED WITH THE WORLD: It is often claimed that John uses the verbs *agapan* and *philein* synonymously, meaning “to love” in either case. In fact, *agapan* is a rather prosaic word (see Plato, *Politeia* 330b, where money, poems, and children—as belonging to property—are possible objects). *Philein* has more emotional coloring, from “to be friends with” to “to kiss, to love.” In John, the response of human beings to the *agapē* of God is precisely not expected to be “love of God,” but *agapē* (“solidary relationship”) among humans. Solidarity, because you can’t demand that all people “love” each other. Therefore, God’s attitude to his people and the living space of his humans, here to be translated as “world,” is that of unrestricted solidarity. The word is rather “modern,” but it makes clear the basic structure of the relationship between “God” and “human” in the Tanakh. The Hebrew verb *’ahav* (phonetically close to *agapē*) is much more powerful. Anything from “being solidary” to “sensual-desirous love” is possible. Even murderous greed that ended in rape and had

that he gave the Son, the only-begotten,
 so that everyone trusting in him may not be destroyed,
 but has life in the age to come.

3:17 For God did not send the Son into the world
 to judge the world,
 but that the world might be liberated through him.

3:18 The one trusting in him is not judged,
 the one who is not trusting has been judged already,
 because he has not trusted in the name of the only begotten Son of GOD.

3:19 Now this is the judgment:
 the light has come into the world,
 but the humans solidarized with the darkness rather than with the light,
 their works being evil.

3:20 Everyone who is acting wickedly¹²⁶
 is fighting the light with hate,¹²⁷
 and not coming to the light
 so that his works won't be exposed.

3:21 Everyone who is doing fidelity
 is coming to the light,
 so that his works may be made manifest,
 for they have been worked with GOD."

There is a certain dissent between the note that Jesus "did many signs" in Jerusalem during the Passover, although he did his "second sign" (4:54) not before his stay in Jerusalem and after his way back from the Jordan through Samaria to Galilee. What "second" means there, we will explain.

nothing to do with love, the story between Amnon and Tamar, is rendered with *ʾahav*, 2 Samuel 13:15.—As to the keyword "world," see the note on 1:9.

126 WICKEDLY: *Phaula*, a rare word. It is found, for example, in Proverbs 13:6, where it is a translation of *hisslif*, "to show as perverted, perverse": "The iniquity makes it that the transgression is perverse." It also stands for *ʿevil*, "foolish," or *ʿawla*, "deviant, perverse, deviating from Torah."

[I considered translating as "foolishly" or "perversely," but the first seemed too weak, the second too one-sidedly sexualized; instead, I chose the word "wickedly," which I use nowhere else for the translation of John's Gospel, especially since TV also wrote in the notes to his earlier translation:]

CT: Here the contrast is *agathos*, "good," *phaulos* therefore "foolish, wicked."

127 FIGHTING . . . WITH HATE: *Misein*, Hebrew *sanaʿ*, also has a wide range of emotional intensity, from aversion to ardent hatred. To be thought of in this context is Micah 3:1 ff, where it is said of the leaders of Israel, "They hate what is good, love what is evil." We are talking about a political struggle that is being waged with passion on both sides. Therefore, "fight with hatred."

Here we have an anticipated summary, see 12:37. Jesus distances himself from those who “trusted in his name” based on the signs in Jerusalem. We avoid the verb “to believe,” because “belief” has something static. It invokes a religious worldview. The Greek word *pisteuein* and its Hebrew equivalent *he’emin* are no religious categories. What is meant is an attitude of confidence that there will be a radical change in the people’s situation, and this will come about by moving toward the Messiah in their way of life (*Halakha*). Jesus does not estimate the movement of the Judeans toward his Name as a real movement. Of them is spoken in 8:31 ff., where a conflict of serious consequences arises. Jesus knew what he had with these people. Here again, it is not about supernatural psychological knowledge, but about a political estimation. He didn’t need a testimonial about people, he realizes what is going on with them politically.

For instance: Nicodemus. He was a member of the party of the Perushim and the political leadership of Judea, *archōn*. He was—as we will hear—“the teacher of Israel” (*ho didaskalos tou Israēl*, 3:10). In the Gospel of John, there are hints of contacts between the Messianic community around John and influential representatives of the synagogue or Rabbinical Judaism below the official level; the dialogue with Nicodemus is one hint to such contacts. In Rabbinic circles, there were efforts of a minority who didn’t want to carry the conflicts to extremes and to avoid secessions of the synagogue. Apparently, it had to act cautiously, “by night.”

Luke in Acts 5:34 mentions Rabbi Gamaliel who advised caution to his colleagues in the Sanhedrin.¹²⁸ This Gamaliel was a member of the Sanhedrin in the days of Jesus, but when Luke was writing, his grandson—named Gamaliel as well—was the leading teacher of Israel (in the second tannaitic generation of the great rabbis, 80-120 CE).

There is a certain ambiguity concerning the role of Nicodemus. On the one hand, he is an example of those Judeans who trust in the Messiah Jesus but don’t share his political estimation toward Rome. On the other hand, he is a rabbi, one of the rabbis of the 1st century. There was—this much we know—a messianic faction in Rabbinical Judaism. Rabbi Akiva is a famous example. Admittedly, Akiva didn’t think Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah, but Bar Kochba.¹²⁹ At all events, in Nicodemus we deal with a representative of Rabbinic messianism.

Nicodemus appreciates Jesus and his appearance (“signs”) and declares that God is with him. Nicodemus deduces this from the signs. By this statement, he wants to find a basis for the dialogue. Jesus opens with a sentence that confirms his skepticism about those who trust in him because of the signs to which Nicodemus would

128 See Gerhard Jankowski, Und sie werden hören. Die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas. 1. Teil (1,1-9,31), in *Texte & Kontexte* 91/92 (2001), 106-107.

129 Bar Kochba (the “son of the stars”) was the leading figure of the last messianic war against Rome, 132-135 CE.

belong. Not so much this trust as instead the fact that a human has to be “begotten from above” is required to be able to “see the Kingdom of God.” Jesus obviously takes it for granted that every child of Israel wants to “see the Kingdom of God.” The expression is odd. John was skeptical toward the talk of the “Kingdom of God” that is common in the other Gospels; therefore he otherwise avoids it altogether. What exactly he regarded as questionable, we won’t really grasp until Jesus’ interrogation by Pilate.

Instead, he uses the expression “life in the age to come” (*zōē aiōnios*). In the dialogue with Nicodemus, he takes up a word that brings forward the longing of Israel. “To see the Kingdom” means: to be able to experience the breakthrough of the Kingdom of God in this world and against this world order. “Who is not anew begotten from above” will not experience this. This condition seems absurd to Nicodemus, he interprets the word *anōthen* as “a second time”, a meaning which the word has as well. Promptly, Jesus clears up the misunderstanding. Only the Messianic groups coming from John the Baptist (water) and from Jesus (inspiration) will “enter the Kingdom of God.” That means “from above.” “To see” means “to enter,” and “Kingdom of God” means “life of the age to come.” John alters the general Jewish terminology; he names the same thing *differently*. He has to do so because the circumstances are *different*.

“To be begotten from water and inspiration” is the condition for “entering the Kingdom of God.” Water stands for the action of John—the “Baptist”—, and inspiration stands for the Messiah Jesus, who immerses “in the inspiration of sanctification”, 1:29-34. Both the Messianic movement coming from John and the one that was deepened and intensified by Jesus are the conditions for entering the Kingdom; only he is able to do the latter who draws his orientation and inspiration from these two humans. Nicodemus has not, by all means, to submit to the baptismal rite of the Messianic groups. The group around John thought poorly of it, “Jesus himself did not immerse,” he will say later, 4:2.

Now there is a sentence that must be misunderstood by us who became acquainted with Gnostic-dualistic Christianity. “Flesh” is not “spirit” and vice versa, they are mutually exclusive. That’s how Greeks would talk to each other. But here, Judeans are talking to each other, and Judeans like Nicodemus, the rabbi, and John, the Messiahist, have nothing to do with Gnosis and dualism.

“Flesh” is this concrete earthly existence, this life which under the actual circumstances of the world order is vulnerable and corruptible. Life “according to the flesh” is a conformist life, susceptible to corruption by the world order. Who is begotten “from the flesh” only can live “fleshly”; who is begotten like this, bred to adapt to the orders of the world according to the principle: so it was, so it is, so it will ever be. This human has no other choice but seeing to how to get through until death takes him.

Admittedly, the Rabbinic option was another one: Compromise is not “adaptation.” Compromise can have to do very much with “inspiration.” What John says here is not just insinuation. Compromise can—probably often—lead to adaptation as well. This discussion is eternal; it is the discussion between reform and compromise on the one hand and revolution on the other hand.

But the one who “sees” an alternative, i.e. who realizes that an alternative is necessary and possible, lives differently. What is meant is a life from Messianic inspiration, inspired by the Messiah Jesus. Thus it is no wonder that a new life is beginning then, sort of “being begotten from above, anew.” The wordplay with *inspiration* (*spirit*) and *wind/storm* (both are present in the word *pneuma*, Hebrew *ruach*) shows that a human who is gripped by this inspiration can’t help allowing himself to be led to where this inspiration will bring him. The one who engages with this revolution does not know either what he actually engages in or where it will lead someday.

Nicodemus repeats his question: “How can this happen?” John can’t stop ventilating his anti-Rabbinism: “You want to be *the* (!) teacher (*rabbi*) of Israel, and you do not understand this?” Nicodemus’ question is justified. The disclosure “to be begotten from above” sounds full of promise, the justified question is what is the strategy of Jesus or of the Messianism that acts in his Name? After all, there is no sign of any change in the course of the world order.

At this point the contrast becomes clear. This Messianism has no answer to the questions of Rabbinical Judaism or of those who indeed trusted Jesus (the *pepisteukotes* of 8:31), but cannot believe in the victory over the Roman Empire and his principal (16:33). The one who demands a policy of compromise and tries to reason it with others—the *teacher of Israel!*—leads astray the people, so John, and serves the cause of Rome, the *satan*, the *diabolos* (8:44).

This Messianism is not able to see how Judaism will change anything with its strategy of negotiating open spaces for a life according to the Torah and thus keeping open the own history and the history of mankind. The Rabbinic answer would be: Because Judaism knows that its God, the NAME, is *’adon ha-’olam*, Lord of the ages and Lord of each world order, and that the great powers come and go, but the word and the vision are staying if one holds out. The strategy of Rabbinical Judaism is *hypomonē*, *thiqwe*, holding out, at all events, just the “Principle of Hope.”

Messianism does not want to live *differently* under the circumstances of the *actual* world order like the teachers of Israel, the rabbis, want to; it wants a *different* world order—at once and on the spot. But what if the world order not only decides the extinction of Israel but sets it about? Here all questions fall silent because we know what happened and still may happen. “Fertile is the womb from which that crawled,” Bertolt Brecht. Here at the latest, the faith in an almighty God who could if he only wanted to is insipid. Now as before—exactly after Auschwitz—the radically different world order is on the agenda. No, this is not theological scholarship that the two of them are discussing here.

Jesus declares solemnly, “*Amen, amen, I say to you, we know what we speak about, and we bear witness of what we have seen, but you don’t accept our witness.*” Here the Messianic community is speaking, *we*. The counterpart is Rabbinical Judaism with its representative Nicodemus, the *didaskalos tou Israel*, the rabbi of Israel. The community speaks from its self-confidence, i.e. from its *knowledge*. It bears witness to what it has seen, it is an eyewitness.

But what reason would Rabbinical Judaism have not to accept the witness? Jesus speaks about “what concerns the earth.” The Dutch exegete Wout van der Spek says about John 3:35: “Where the talk is of the Kingdom of God, earthly things are at stake.”¹³⁰ If van der Spek’s remark applies that the proclamation of *the things of the earth*—*ta epigeia*—is the proclamation of the “Kingdom of God”, then John refers to the proclamation of those Messianic groups who had produced the Synoptic texts. If the Kingdom of God is a very earthly matter, as the parables of the Kingdom of God show (Mark 4; Matthew 13), and the opponents do not want to get involved, then John has to depart from this type of Messianic proclamation. With the word “we” he expresses his solidarity with those groups. In other words: “We tried to make the coming of the Kingdom of God clear and understandable. Our Rabbinical opponents did not accept this. Now I speak of the *epourania*, of that *which concerns heaven.*”

He does so with a reference to Daniel 7: “For no one has ascended into heaven, if not the one who descended from heaven, *bar enosh, like a human.*” Of the Kingdom of God, he says, in your opinion, there is nothing to be seen on earth. But we both think that the Kingdom of God comes from heaven; I tell you how this happens.

Jesus here instructs the teacher of Israel in the Scriptures of Israel, with Midrashim. Midrash is a form of exegesis, but an exegesis with the practical intention of connecting the word with the ever-changing circumstances of life. Thus the narration of the text to be read aloud (which the Jews call *miqra*?) takes on a new form in Midrash.

John answers with the Scriptures, linking Daniel 7 with Numbers 21, but he alienates Daniel 7:10 ff. There it says: “The court sits down, books are opened.” It is then reported how the (tenth) horn of the monster, the image of the tyrant Antiochus IV, is destroyed. He who ascended into heaven, who thus stands before the “advanced in days,” is now he who descended from heaven. This is new in the Gospel of John. In John, the so-called “Son of Man” has turned into an earthly figure, he just “became flesh, is happening as flesh,” it says in the prologue. In Daniel, the elevation of the Human is the endowment of “governmental power, dignity, and kingship.” The vision does not say *how* this will happen. It only hints that this *bar enosh* is identical with “the people of the saints of the Highest,” Israel. John describes the “how.” In

130 Wout van der Spek, *Zwischen Galiläa und Judäa. Auslegung von Joh 2,12-5,18*, in *Texte & Kontexte* 26 (1985), 14-36, here 21.

principle, the elevation or rise of the *bar enosh*, the Human, will happen as descent, as “incarnation,” as concrete political existence that ends and must end at the Roman cross. As the situation is now, the elevation of the Human, i.e. of Israel, can only be interpreted through defeat. The alienation of Daniel 7 is the actualization of the vision: ascent is descent, descent is ascent. To illustrate this, John brings another midrash, this time on Numbers 21:4-9,

The spirit of the people became fainthearted on the way.
The people spoke against God and against Moses:
“Why did you bring us up from Egypt . . .?”

The God sent snakes that bit the people. Many died. The people confesses that they had gone astray and urges Moses to pray. He prays. Then it says,

And the NAME said to Moses,
“Make yourself a poisonous snake,
put it on a pole.
It shall be:
Whoever is bitten and sees it,
will live.”
Moses made a snake of copper,
he put it on the pole.
And it was:
If a snake bit a man,
and he looked upon the snake of copper,
he would live.

The cause of the catastrophe with the snakes was the grumbling of the people against the leadership that led them out of the slave house. If the people rescind liberation and gamble away their freedom, the result is ruin. The symptoms of doom are the poisonous snakes, whose bite is fatal. The forfeited freedom is the poisonous snake. It is pinned to a pole, made harmless. To look at the image of the attached snake is to understand that unfreedom is no longer an enticement. Whoever imagines this, whoever becomes aware of what forfeited freedom is, will be healed. For most commentators, the reference to this Torah passage plays no or only a minor role. Wengst points out that it

is not the copper snake that provides healing—not even Moses; it is rather a sign that points to God as the sole and real Savior. By placing the “exalted” Son of Man in this biblical analogy, John makes the crucified Jesus understood as a sign pointing to God. To adhere to this sign and follow it is to submit one’s heart to the Father in heaven . . .¹³¹

131 Klaus Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium*. 1. Teilband: Kapitel 1-10 (ThKNT), Stuttgart 2000, 134.

Such classical formulas of Christian orthodoxy miss the meaning of the Midrash. What else is “God” than the one who names himself in Israel only as “the one leading out of the slave house”? He has no other NAME. Israel, so much means John to know, is today in the slave house of Rome. To the *bar enosh*, the Human, executed and “pinned” to the torture instrument cross by the Romans—by those who keep Israel in their worldwide slave house—Israel has to look up to become aware of what is happening to him. The “image of the copper snake,” the “cross,” is drastic political training. Of the Christian idylls of the cross no man has yet become better, let alone “whole, unhurt,” or “safe and sound” [as you might render the German word “heil”—which, as an adjective, is derived from the nouns “Heil” = “salvation, (soul’s) health, well-being” and “Heiland” = “Savior, Redeemer”].

John alienates Daniel’s *bar enosh* into a human child tortured to death and perishing miserably. The high representative of Rome presents the humiliated and ridiculous Jesus ben Joseph from Nazareth to the people: “There, the human—*bar enosh*—this is what man looks like when he falls into our hands.” At first, he seems to be the absolute contrast to Daniel’s powerful figure *bar enosh*. But precisely the defeat of the Messiah is for John the starting point for the liberation of the world from the order that weighs upon it. The linkage of Daniel 7 with Numbers 21 is the end of all political illusions suggested by the Zealot adventure.

The alienation of Daniel 7 solves one question only to raise the next unsolved—unsolvable?—question: How can such a liberated world be created? The Christians, followers of the Messianists of the same batch as John, make the cross a truly *narrow escape* from earthly life into heaven after death. “*Apple pie in the sky, Life for you after you die,*” so the radical black leader in the USA, Malcolm X, mocked the paralyzing world of pietist spirituals, in a fight against Christianity, which turns the cross and its alleged healing power into a pure placebo. We have no answer to the question of how defeat can turn into victory. But we must ask it.

John goes one better here, he rubs salt into open wounds. How can a God “love” if he has his Son—his only one, *monogenēs*—thus become the plaything of Roman marauding soldiery? For Jesus experiences in body and soul what the people must experience in and after the *Judean War*. Israel asks itself in that catastrophic time of the messianic wars against Rome between 66 and 135 CE, whether and how its God, the God of the liberations from each slave house, is still in solidarity with Israel. Here we hear the verb *agapan* for the first time. It is almost always translated as “to love”; we prefer the translation “to solidarize with” and have previously, in the interpretation of the first letter of John, justified this.¹³² Therefore, the question is: How can Israel’s God be in solidarity with Israel? John answers with three sentences:

132 Ton Veerkamp, Weltordnung und Solidarität *oder* Dekonstruktion christlicher Theologie. Auslegung und Kommentar (= Texte & Kontexte 71/72 (1996)), 35 ff.

- (1) For GOD so solidarized with the world,
- (2) that he gave his Son, the only-begotten,
- (3) so that everyone who trusts in him will not perish,
but will receive life in the age to come.

(1) The first sentence is about the material and social living space of people. The Torah tells how Israel becomes the firstborn of all peoples, how it is freed from the slave house and had to learn the discipline of freedom in the wilderness so that it can lead the lives of freed slaves in the land of freedom.

This narrative is not possible without the creation narrative. Without this, the Torah narrative is pious nonsense. The world, the living space for people, becomes the work of God only through the Torah (word of God) because only the Torah puts the living space in order. A Greek would call the *ordered* living space *kosmos*. Exactly this Torah order of the living space of the people in Judea no longer exists, nor can it exist under the worldwide orders of Rome. Here “world” as “ruling world order” becomes a negative idea. Through the *mandatum novum*, the *new commandment* of solidarity (13:34), the world is ordered in a way that God can solidarize with it.

The ambiguity inherent in the vocable “world” demands precise differentiation when translating and interpreting. When it comes to the living space to be ordered by the word of God, we write “world.” If it is about that ruling, inhuman order of Rome, we write “world order.”

This is John’s view. You can have a different opinion of Rome; we are trying to make John’s view understandable—politically! The God of Israel is solidarizing with the *world* by liberating it from the *order* that weighs upon it. *How* does the God of Israel exercise his solidarity with the *world* as a living space for people?

(2) John again offers a midrash in the second sentence, which is about the “binding of Isaac, the only one,” Genesis 22.¹³³ There Abraham is demanded to raise his son, “his only one,” as a sacrifice. Then the messenger of the NAME said to Abraham, Genesis 22:11 ff.:

133 In the interpretation of the first letter of John (ibid., 97) it was proven that the word *monogenēs* necessarily presupposes the connection with Genesis 22. We know the word in the Greek version of the Scriptures “of the seventy” (LXX) as a word for “only child,” the child of Jephthah (Judges 11:34) or Raguel and Tobit (Tobit 3:15; 6:11; 8:17). In the Book of Wisdom of Solomon (7:22), the word means “unique.” Three passages in the Psalms have *yachid*; there it is rendered with “precious” (22:21; 35:17) or “lonely” (25:16). The word *monogenēs* is missing in Genesis 22:2, where the Greek version is: “Take your son, the beloved, whom you love.” But in the Hebrew version, we read: “Take your son, your only son, whom you love.” Why the LXX replaces the word “your only one,” *yechidkha*, with “your beloved” (*’ohavkha*) may have been because the old translators in Alexandria of the 3rd century BCE had a different source. But the Vulgate has not *dilectum tuum*, *’ohavkha*, but *unigenitum*, *yachid*. John most likely thought of Genesis 22 when he heard the word *monogenēs*.

The messenger of the NAME called to him from heaven . . .
 Abraham said, "Here, I!"
 He said:
 "Do not send your hand out against the lad,
 do not do anything to him;
 now I realize:
 you are in awe of God,
 for you have not kept your son, your only one, from me."
 Abraham raised his eyes,
 he saw how a ram got caught in the undergrowth with its horns.
 Abraham went, he took the ram,
 exalted him as a sacrifice of exalting in place of his son.

With the word *monogenēs*, *yachid*, John invokes this passage of the Scriptures. Christians always think of the dogma of the Trinity, Jesus as the eternal son of the FATHER, *genitum non factum*, "begotten, not made." No; here the Son is not the figure of Daniel 7, but the representation of Isaac. Abraham had waited a lifetime for this son; he is his future. The God of Abraham must make it clear to Abraham in a wickedly drastic way that this Isaac is not the son of Abraham, but the son of his God, the FATHER of Israel, the people destined to be the firstborn one among the nations. If Isaac does not stay alive, Abraham has no future. He must remain alive, but only as of the son of God.

John here introduces Jesus as the representation of Isaac. Like Isaac then, Jesus is now the future. In the Hebrew text, it says that Abraham must "exalt" his son as a "sacrifice of exalting" (*haʿala le-ʿola*). It did not come that far; the binding of Isaac is dissolved, the slaughter of Isaac is prevented, because Abraham demonstrably no longer sees his son as his own particular future, but recognizes him as the future of "God." God's solidarity with Abraham was evident at that time in the prevention of Isaac's sacrifice. In John, the God of Israel must do something that was never demanded of Abraham. Here Jesus/Isaac is exalted, bloodily. Here the God of Israel goes all the bloody way with the world of humans because there is no other way to solidarize with them.

John alienates the narrative of Isaac's binding. Abraham's future is accomplished by the release of the binding of Isaac, but here the future requires the slaughter of the Messiah, thus brutally you have to interpret the word *edōken*, "gave, surrendered." "God" goes all the bloody way down, because the world order forces the God, so to speak, to have "his only one" killed.

(3) The third sentence starts with "so that" (*hina*). The meaning is that everyone who trusts will receive the life of the age to come. Isaac, i.e. Israel, has a future. The small verse John 3:16 is nothing else but the attempt to cope with the defeat of Jesus in the year 30 and the catastrophe for the whole people in the year 70. It wants

to insist that the order of the *world*—come what may—is not to be an order of *death*, but an order of *life*. With the slaughter of the Messiah, all hopes end to find a place and thus a future for Israel within the valid order. Life is only possible in the age to come. To trust (*pisteuein*) despite and because (!) of the slaughter of the Messiah is the condition.

While Genesis 22 was already an imposition to all listeners of the word, John 3:16 is all the more unbearable. The central political thesis of the Gospel of John is: Only through the defeat of this One and Only, the liberation of the *world* from the *order* that weighs upon it is possible. This thesis is perpendicular to everything that was—and is—conceivable as a political strategy. The strategy of John is world revolution, even if it is not on the agenda. This is precisely what is unpolitical about him, and this is what tempts the generations after him to internalize, to spiritualize, to depoliticize his Messianism.

World revolution is certainly not world damnation. John is a child of his time; he knows the world's condemnation of Gnosis. World condemnation is rejected here. We are dealing here with an anti-Gnostic text. The *world* is not to be judged, but to be liberated from the world *order*.

Jesus ends with an explanation of the court proceedings. What is meant, of course, is the trial from Daniel's vision: "The court sits down, books are opened." He who has no confidence that, with the slaughter of the Messiah, all world-order illusions will come to an end is judged, that is, he is condemned to death because he holds fast to the orders of death. The contrast is the trust in the NAME. The NAME is the "God" of Israel, and "the one like a Human" is "the one like God," the "Son of *Man*" is the "Son of *God*." This Human in his whole life, in everything he does and says and must suffer, is "like God," like the God of Israel, the liberator from the slave house. Only in this way does an end come to the orders of Rome, to the world order of death. *How*—is written on another page, is the central riddle of our text. A first hint comes with the explanation of the judgment. We hear that trust equals acquittal in court.

A court case brings light into all dark business. Light is to all Jews, and therefore also to all Christians, the first and principal creature; we know this since Genesis 1:4. And then God "divided between light and darkness," between day and night. All clear, we think. Nothing is clear.

John begins with the main sentence: "This is the judgment" (3:19). So we are not dealing with Gnostic original principles but with categories of jurisprudence. What the judgment is, is explained by two subordinate clauses, which are connected by the particle *kai*: "The light has come into the world (order), and/but the humans solidarized with the darkness rather than with the light." They do not want the light to be brought into the dark business of the world order. One might think, "This is a quieter way to live." We will hear that John goes much further. His opponents do not

want to bring light into the darkness because they are deeply involved in this sinister business themselves.

In any case, the second subordinate clause is not a massive anthropological statement. John does not say here something like: “The people are just like that, they are bad from the bottom up.” Not men are bad, but their order, their *kosmos* is bad. And that altogether. A late disciple of John explains succinctly: “The whole world order lies in evil,” 1 John 5:19. This evil is dark, but only when there is light, darkness does exist, and not vice versa. Otherwise, darkness would be the “normal” thing according to the principle: Humans are just like that. The light shows that humans are just not “so”; they are responsible, responsible for the darkness that they produce.

The first subordinate clause is also a massive statement with the famous perfect tense which John uses to indicate that something has happened and that the situation has therefore become a completely new one, irreversible. Only when an alternative becomes visible, a decision can be made. The Messiah brings light into the matter of “world order.” This does not make people’s lives easier. One has arranged oneself, one makes one’s way. That goes rather badly than rightly, but it mostly goes just like that. As soon as the light comes into the confused matter of life in this world, you can no longer cheat your way through.

Bultmann has seen right here. He calls Jesus “the eschatological event.” The massive ideological expression is not everyone’s taste. But Bultmann probably thinks that the light that *has* come makes a decision possible. He tries to interpret this passage in such a way that a person of the 20th century can understand it. However, the detailed explanation of 3:20¹³⁴ is based on a misinterpretation. It is not a matter of morality, Bultmann must agree. Then it says:

Rather, it is meant: in the decision of faith or unbelief it comes to light what man actually is and has always been. . . . And this mission [of Jesus, TV] can be an eschatological event because in it God’s love restores to man the lost freedom to grasp his authenticity [German: “Eigentlichkeit”].

In John, not the “Eigentlichkeit” of man is coming “to light,” that authenticity of the existentialists of that time, but the *works of humans are coming to light*. In this respect, there is no difference to Matthew. Matthew, too, is concerned with the works, feeding the hungry, giving the thirsty something to drink. It is the (political) practice of the people, which is to be criticized and if necessary condemned. But anyone who, like Bultmann, turns the campaign against Luther’s righteousness by works into an existentialist worldview and from there suppresses the works and their falsity or reliability or defames them as “mythologically dressed up moralism”, has understood little. Who lives—and living is always practice—from the trust in this Messiah of Israel, who “practices fidelity” (*poiōn tēn alētheian*), his practice, his

134 Rudolf Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (KEK), Göttingen 1941, 114-115.

works (*erga*) come to light, become public, do not have to be hidden, “because they are worked godly.” *En theō*, godly, according to the NAME. A person’s practice decides on acquittal or condemnation, admittedly a practice that is based on the trust that with the slaughter of the Messiah, the ruling world order will come to an end. If this is called an “eschatological event,” you can be at peace with the terminology if necessary.

Nicodemus remains silent.

Scholion 2: The Antagonistic Scheme in the Gospel of John?

A concluding remark on the alleged dualism or Gnosticism in the Gospel of John. No one would think of accusing Bertolt Brecht of dualism or Gnosticism. In the film version of *The Threepenny Opera*, he has the audience sing at the end:

For some are in the darkness
And the others are in the light
And you see those in the light
You can’t see those in the dark.

It is clear that some people agree more with the darkness than with the light; after all, the Threepenny Opera is about them. They do business that should remain in darkness for their well-understood interests. Following the prejudice of seeing Gnosticism in all dualism, you could also call the scheme of antagonistic classes—which Brecht is dealing with here and which comes from Marx—Gnosticism. The bourgeoisie tends not to perceive real contradictions that exist within a valid social order (economic and social order). It calls today’s class antagonisms and the class paradigm in general communist nonsense, as it calls the old dualism in the Roman Empire fanciful religious construction—Gnosis.

Of course, Gnosticism has not been a pure fad. The Roman Empire aggravated the social contrasts everywhere and people felt the worldwide disharmony in body and soul. The Gnostics volatilized the real contrasts and turned the antagonism into an absolute principle. The absolutization of opposites had to meet with resistance from those people who tried to interpret their world from the Torah. This is the case with John, and for this very reason, his text is an anti-Gnostic text.

Nobody can deny that there are pairs of opposites in John that are irreconcilable in nature. This is often called *dualism*, thinking of the esoteric systems of *Gnosis*, which may have emerged at the interface of Diaspora Judaism and Hellenism.¹³⁵ John is now, some have claimed, a Gnostic text. Jürgen Becker has written the following on Johannine dualism in the third excursus to his commentary on John,

135 Hans Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist*, Teil 1, Göttingen 1988; Kurt Rudolph, *Die Gnosis. Wesen und Geschichte einer spätantiken Religion*, Göttingen 1994.

The Son sent comes to earth for the revelation of the Father unknown to the world. He encounters hatred, incomprehension, and unbelief; with few, he finds faith, recognition, and love. This means: birth from above, having a new origin, being from above, thus having eternal life, or if deterministic thought is given: gathering together his own. The Son returns to the Father because the devil has no power over him, i.e. he cannot kill him (cf. 5:26 with 14:30). Exalted from the earth and glorified in the Father, he draws people to himself by enabling faith and knowledge (3:13-14; 12:31-32) or through the sacraments (3:3, 5; 6:51c-58).¹³⁶

A good caricature sharpens the main lines so that the reality it implies is more apparent. In Becker's caricature, it is precisely the essential that disappears. In the minds of fundamentalist and arch-conservative circles, this quickly turns into life-threatening nonsense. Even "the old dualism" as in the sect of Qumran must be interpreted from the political situation and not from the superficial ideological contents and images. In the so-called community rule (*ssefer sserekh ha-yachad*) of the commune in Qumran the antagonistic scheme is unmistakable:

To seek God
do what is good and straight in his eyes,
which he commanded by the hand of Moses and by the hand of his servants
the prophets,
to love all that he chose,
to hate everything he rejected
...
To love all the sons of light, each according to his part in the council of deity,
to hate all the sons of darkness, each according to his guilt in the punishment
of the deity.

This antagonism shows that the contrasts in society have become unbridgeable at all levels—social, political, and ideological. Qumran shows this physically by withdrawing from the real political world. John, however, wants to remain politically capable, in this, he rather resembles his favorite opponents, the Perushim. But exactly in the tradition of the unbridgeable political contradictions, the Jesus of the Gospel of John is speaking.

Completely different world order and the traditional Jewish society, faithful to the Torah, have been irreconcilably opposed to each other since the Maccabean wars at the latest. According to John, the traditionalism of Torah loyalty is no longer enough, and Moses cannot be repeated or updated today. That is the new thing about him. But Israel finds itself still faced with a choice: either life and good or death and evil,

136 Jürgen Becker, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, I. Kapitel 1-10, Gütersloh³1991, 174 ff., here 178.

either the NAME (autonomy of farming families) or the *baʿal* (world order of large-scale landholding), Messiah or Rome. This is not a Gnosis, this is the staying power of the traditional revolution, which stretches from the Maccabean uprising to the Jewish wars of the 1st and 2nd centuries CE.

The essential thing about Gnosis is the liberation of (the souls of) people from the material world. It is about the “fear of existence”, “the fear of the self corresponds to the fear of the world”, the “world-entangled existence must be left behind in redemption”, etc.¹³⁷ In John, the world itself is liberated, since the liberation of a single country is no solution; the tyranny of a king has given way to the tyranny of Caesar, i.e. to the Roman order. Where is Gnosis here? Gnosis turns real earthly and antagonistic opposites into two supernatural, metaphysical, and cosmic primal principles. However, Gnosis must be explained from the real contradictions in the inner-Jewish conflicts and not vice versa these conflicts, for instance in the Gospel of John, from Gnosis.

4. “That one must increase, I must decrease,” 3:22-36

4.1. The Baptist and the Messiah, 3:22-30

- 3:22 After this, Jesus and his disciples went into the land of Judea, there he was remaining with them and was immersing.
- 3:23 John too was immersing at Aenon, near Salim, because there was plenty of water there; and they were coming and being immersed.
- 3:24 For not yet had John been thrown into prison.
- 3:25 Now it happened:
There was a discussion between some of John’s disciples and a Judean about purification.

137 Hans Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist*, Teil 1, Göttingen 1988, 145. Ibid., 149-150, “God and world, God and nature separate, become strangers to each other, become opposites . . . To be born into the cosmos means *eo ipso*: to be born into death, and stands opposite the pneumatic rebirth (*eis zōēn*), which leads out of the cosmos . . . Thus, in the compact counter-translation of this dualism, the *desacralized* cosmos becomes religiously specific again . . ., inasmuch as it—in quite substantial counteraction to the otherworldly ‘light and life’, to God,—is ‘darkness and death’.” It is no wonder that some here think they hear John. The Gnosis is also resistance against Rome, but a fantastic and aloof one. Under Rome, the world order is so bad and life so impossible that nothing more can be done. Only away from here, is the mood. But this can only be done magically, through rites and mysteries. “Self-redemption,” says Micha Brumlik (*Die Gnostiker. Der Traum der Selbsterlösung des Menschen*, Frankfurt/M. 1992), and shows that this thoroughly un-Jewish attitude has a long life span, right up to our days.

- 3:26 And they came to John and said to him,
 “Rabbi,
 the one who was with you beyond the Jordan,
 of whom you have borne witness,
 there, this one is immersing,
 everyone is going to him!”
- 3:27 John answered, he said,
 “No human can receive anything
 unless it has been given to him from heaven.
- 3:28 You yourselves are bearing witness to me that I said,
 ‘I am not the Messiah,
 but that I have been sent ahead of him.’¹³⁸
- 3:29 The one having the bride is the bridegroom.
 The friend of the bridegroom, standing by and listening to him,
 is rejoicing with joy at the bridegroom’s voice.¹³⁹
 Just this joy of mine has been fulfilled.
- 3:30 That one must increase,
 I must decrease.”¹⁴⁰

“After this, Jesus goes into the land of the Judeans, the land of Judea.”

During the time of Hellenism and the Roman Empire, the land of Judea was almost always a victim of boundless exploitation with constantly changing agents of exploitation. The end of the Herodian monarchy in the year 6 CE was generally welcomed. The direct administration by Rome through procurators or prefects from the Roman knighthood may at first have been perceived as a relief. Alongside senators and praetors from the classical Roman aristocracy, Augustus strove to appoint those *equites*, “knights.” The latter owed their professional advancement only to the emperor and were more devoted to him than the Roman aristocrats, who tended to intrigue. They let themselves be called “friends of Caesar” (John 19:12).

The classical provinces of the empire in the late republican period were senatorial. Militarily exposed provinces like Syria were administered by praetors. The incomes of the knight provinces were used primarily for the household economy of the emperors. Egypt, the granary of the empire, was a knight province; it supplied the

138 SENT AHEAD: We find a similar sentence in Genesis 45:7 where Joseph says to his brothers that God had sent him ahead of them.

139 REJOICING WITH JOY: The expression has a definite Hebrew/Aramaic tinge.

140 INCREASE/DECREASE: In the LXX, the Hebrew word *para*, “to bear fruit” (see Genesis 1:22, 28) is rendered *auxanein*. *Elattousthai*, “to become lesser,” has to do with the Hebrew *chasser*, “to be deficient.” John the Baptist thus accepts the decrease in his number of disciples in favor of Jesus, so “to bear fruit” would not be correct here; the point is not that John’s work would be less fruitful.

bread that the emperors were obliged to donate to the people of Rome in addition to the games.

The emperors had an economic interest in maintaining peace and order in their provinces. In the days of Jesus, the knights were called prefects, after the brief intermezzo under Herod Agrippa (39-44), procurators. The prefect Pontius Pilate (26-36) was deposed for mismanagement. The procurators of the fifties and sixties of the 1st century were often corrupt and incompetent. Since the last years under the procurator Felix (52-60) the unhappy province slipped inexorably into civil war.

In Judea, the Judeans had a not inconsiderable measure of self-administration rights. The beneficiaries were primarily Judea's elites, above all the priesthood; the leadership was pro-Roman. Galilee and the land beyond the Jordan were under the administration of Herodian princes and, in some ways, more independent than Judea. Nevertheless, the burden of the Roman rulers and the relatively wealthy landowning classes must have been great, for resistance to Herodians and Romans was much more militant in Galilee than in Judea.

"There he immersed," it says. This information is taken back in the text a bit later: Unlike in the Synoptics, we do not learn what kind of baptism it was. Baptism is certainly connected with the dawning of the new age to come. Until late in the 1st century, the messianic group of John the Baptist practiced immersion; meanwhile, the Messianic communities had their own baptismal practice. Luke, however, describes the difference. The disciples of John immersed in water "for repentance," Acts 19:3-4; Jesus "in fire and the inspiration of sanctification," Luke 3:16 cf. John 1:33. Where the places *Ainon* and *Salim* were, we do not know; the names have to do with *well-spring* and *peace*. People from the land of Judea "came along and were immersed." That is, they were attuned to the age to come.

The theme of "purification" was already hinted at during the wedding at Cana with the six vessels for the "purification of the Judeans." According to Leviticus 10:10-11, the two main tasks of the priests, i.e., the political leadership in the Torah Republic since the reforms of Nehemiah and Ezra, are,

You shall separate
between the holy and the everyday,
between the impure and the pure,
you shall instruct the children of Israel
in all the laws that the NAME has spoken through Moses.

What is "pure" and what is not, is explained in the Torah, especially in the 3rd book of the Torah, Leviticus 11-15. Pure/impure is a topic of great importance in Israel. What is pure and impure to Messianists, Jesus will explain to the disciples later, 13:1 ff. About the dispute between the disciples of John and a Judean on the question of purity, we do not learn anything precise.

The fact that the disciples complained to John about the baptismal practice of Jesus shows that this Judean was a follower of Jesus. Therefore, the disciples run to John to inform him about Jesus' action, "Everyone is coming to him." A process began in which the John group was absorbed into those Messianic groups who saw Jesus as the Messiah. This process was not yet complete in the days of the writing of John's Gospel. John, like the Synoptics, must clarify the relationship between the two groups. The Messianic communities around Jesus never talked about John else than with the greatest respect.

John reminds his disciples that he always had said that he, John, was not the Messiah, but that he had been sent ahead of the Messiah. The disciples of John lived in the expectation of the Messiah, they did not see him as the Messiah.

John was "the friend of the bridegroom." The bridegroom is he who has the bride. The Semitic languages do not know the verb "to have." In our languages, it wants to indicate any assignment of an object to a subject. Ownership is a form of assignment. The claim of ownership, which the God of Israel asserts among the people in Israel, is a unique and specific form of attribution, which differs from other forms common among people. Nobody may assert claims of ownership against a human being. If we are talking here about the possession or ownership of a person, then Scripture can only be referring to the God of Israel.

In most ancient oriental societies, the man, as the head of the household, "has," as "owner," his wife as "property"; his wife belongs to him like everything else that is "his," Exodus 20:17. The "possession of a woman" is peculiar to a patriarchal society. The relationship between the NAME and Israel is not the relationship between an owner (*ba'al*) and possession. This means that Israel is not free to look for a *ba'al*—lord, owner, spouse, or just "god."

The Messianic wedding is a wedding according to Hosea 2:18.¹⁴¹ The bridegroom *has* the bride, but that does *not* mean: he is her *ba'al*, her master owner. Here it becomes apparent how difficult it is to adequately translate the Semitic language gesture into the Indo-European, here the Greek. Perhaps you should translate: "He who has the bride *as his own* is the bridegroom." We must see the difference between *nachalah*, "property," and *'achuza*, "possession," between what belongs inseparably to a family as the basis for its livelihood, what is its own, and what is alienable property, such as ox and donkey or slaves from foreign peoples (Leviticus 25:44-45).¹⁴² Israel is the *property* and not the possession of the NAME, Psalm 33:12,

141 This Hosea quotation will occupy us during the discussion of 4:17 ("I have not a man").

142 It is true that texts such as Leviticus, Numbers, and Ezekiel 40-48 make no consistent distinction between *nachala* and *'achuza*. Nowhere it is said that Israel is "possession" (*'achuza*) of the NAME, 29 times its "property" (*nachala*), and six times that conversely the NAME is "property" (*nachala*) of Levi or the priests. The own of the NAME is Israel, the own of the priests the NAME. From there the metaphorical relationship *bridegroom*—*bride* has to be interpreted.

Happy the nation for which the NAME is God,
the people he chose as his own.

In this second wedding narrative in the Gospel of John, we are referred back to the narrative of the wedding at Cana. The friend of the bridegroom is the *hestēkōs*, the supporter, the one who “stands by.” Rightly Barrett, Bultmann, Wengst, and others refer to the function of the friend as (oriental) best man.

With this narrative, the main sign in Cana receives its proper dimension. The bridegroom is the Messianic King, the bride is Israel. Matthew uses the image of the Messianic wedding in the story of the ten girls, Matthew 25:1-13. John is the most important of all wedding guests, he is the *architriklinos*, “master of the feast” from John 2:1 ff: “I myself did not know him,” said John, 1:33, just as the *architriklinos* did not know where the wine came from (2:9). Now the friend knows. For he hears the voice of the bridegroom.

We know the “voice of the bridegroom” from the Scriptures very well. Three times Jeremiah makes this voice sound like a dark refrain, once like a joyful message. In Jeremiah 7:34 (see 16:9 and 25:10) we hear,

I farewell from the cities of Judah, from the streets of Jerusalem
voice of bliss and voice of joy,
voice of the bridegroom and voice of the bride,
for the land is becoming a wasteland.

But in 33:10-11, it says,

So the NAME has said,
“Yes, it is heard again in this place,
of which you say: ‘It is a waste,
without man, without cattle,
and from the cities of Judah, from the streets of Jerusalem,
devastated, no man, no inhabitant, no cattle,’
voice of bliss, voice of joy,
voice of the bridegroom, voice of the bride,
voice of those who say,
‘Give thanks to the NAME of the orders,
because good is the NAME,
his solidarity for the ages’ . . .” (= Psalm 136)

It is about the “fulfilled joy,” the final Messianic turning point for a city where only the voice of war is heard and which is devastated in the days of John the Evangelist. In the days of the Messianic wedding, the prophet—Jeremiah, John [the Baptist]—steps back. The Messiah, the bridegroom, is to increase, whereas that one is to decrease. Against this background, the Evangelist wants to interpret the process of the growing Messianic community and the shrinking groups of the Baptist’s disciples.

Thus, the riddle that John poses to us with the figure of the *architriklinos*, “master of the feast,” has been solved. The “one who does not know”—confidant or friend of the bridegroom—is that John whom we call “the Baptist.” In the Gospel of John, he is *John the Witness*.

Scholion 3: About Purity

In 1975, Fernando Belo, in his then spectacular book *Lecture matérialiste de l'évangile de Marc*, distinguished between the symbol system “pure/impure” and the symbol system “donation/guilt.”¹⁴³ Kuno and Eva Füssel¹⁴⁴ recently resumed this systematization. Belo initially places the two systems next to each other without explicit value judgment. In an interpretation of Mark 7:1-23, however, he then prefers the system “donation/guilt.” Rochus Zuurmond and Andreas Pangritz critically examined the disqualification of the system “pure/impure.”¹⁴⁵

John does not question the system “pure/impure,” but he doubts that, under the completely new Roman circumstances, purity is to be understood as Rabbinical Judaism wants it. This is a *political* debate. Christianity has discriminated against the Jewish concept of purity. Rabbinical Judaism has taken the practice of purification as a means of identification; it serves to ensure the identity of *this* people among other peoples, especially the *sign* of circumcision. The Messianists had a different view of the political situation, and this led them to a new conception of purity. This difference must be noted and respected, two thousand years later. Kuno and Eva Füssel have remained tributary to the dogmatic view of Christianity. They, too, accept the subordination of the system “pure/impure” to the system “donation/guilt,” playing it off against each other and thus devaluing it.¹⁴⁶

A few years ago, at the Berlin Academy of Arts, some *littérateur* read passages from Leviticus 11-15 and ridiculed them to the amusement of the educated audience. This attitude is subliminally widespread and a root of anti-Judaism, of racism in general. You may express your incomprehension of these purity regulations. You must then say, “I do not understand this!” That is very different from, “Ridiculous, outrageous!” Rather, you may try out on yourself how your own tolerance stands when dealing with Leviticus 11-15. The Gospel of John refrains from any cheap polemic against the purity view of its opponents; Mark is sharper and coarser here. This

143 Fernando Belo, *Lecture matérialiste de l'évangile de Marc*, Paris ²1975, 63 ff.

144 Kuno and Eva Füssel, *Der verschwundene Körper: Neuzugänge zum Markusevangelium*, Luzern 2001, 228.

145 In two articles of the exegetical journal *Texte & Kontexte* Nr. 24 (1984): Rochus Zuurmond, *Der Tod von Nadab und Abihu*, Lev. 10, 1-5, 23-27, and Andreas Pangritz, *Jesus und das “System der Unreinheit”* oder: Fernando Belo die Leviten gelesen, Mk. 7, 1-23, 28-46.

146 Kuno and Eva Füssel, *op. cit.*, 228.

could be related to John's priestly origin, which some claim to have observed.¹⁴⁷ Purity results from the relationship of trust with the Messiah, this much is clear to John.

4.2. Heaven and Earth; Trust and Distrust, 3:31-36

- 3:31 The one coming from above is above all.
The one being from the earth is from the earth
and is speaking of the earth.
The one coming from heaven is above all.¹⁴⁸
- 3:32 He is bearing witness to what he has seen and heard,
yet no one is accepting his testimony.
- 3:33 Whoever does accept his testimony
puts his seal to GOD's fidelity.
- 3:34 For the one whom GOD sent
is speaking the words of GOD.
For not according to measure he is giving the inspiration.¹⁴⁹

147 Martin Hengel, *Die johanneische Frage* (WUNT 67), Tübingen 1993, 306 ff.

148 FROM ABOVE . . . FROM THE EARTH: The contrast is between "he who is from above, that is, from heaven," and "he who is earthly (*ek tēs gēs*)."¹⁴⁸ On the one hand, *gē* corresponds to the Hebrew *ʾeretz*; this means "the (particular) land" and "all lands together," that is, what we call "the earth." On the other hand, *gē* is used for the Hebrew *ʾadama*; this word means "acre" or "acre dust." According to Genesis 2:7, God forms humankind, *ʾadam*, from acre dust, *min ha-ʾadama, ek tēs gēs*. That is, the One who comes from above, from heaven, that is, as the figure of Daniel 7:13, has been placed as the Human over all earthly people. This is not Gnosis, but Messianic utopia.

CT: The Semiticizing participle *ōn* in the prefix and the personal form *estin* are from the same verb *einai, haya*. There is no ontological statement here, but a practical determination. From his speeches (*lalei*), from his *devarim*, words and deeds, a human's being is determined, not from his nature. From his deeds, one can conclude whether a person thinks, acts, speaks from heaven or not, whether he thinks, acts, and speaks according to God's fidelity to Israel or not. The metaphor "above" or "from above" (*anō, anōthen*, 3:3, 7, 31; 8:23; 11:41!; 19:11!) does not denote metaphysical transcendence. In the thinking of the Jews of that time, a person can never cease to be "flesh" or "earthly." He can, however, very well abolish the seemingly fated nature of his existence by overcoming "flesh" or "earthly conditions" as ruling conditions and choosing a new earth—and then also a new heaven!—decides. This is something different than Gnosis, the abolition of the earth and the flesh.

149 ACCORDING TO MEASURE: *Metron*, Hebrew *ʾefa*, "measure, bushel, vessel"; the reference could be Zechariah 5:6. There it is about the measure (bushel) of Israel's wickedness that leads it into exile, into the land of Shinar; there the inspiration of the NAME settles: "See, those who go out there into the land of the north, they set my inspiration at rest in the land of the north" (6:8), at the place of Israel's abduction. Inspiration is no longer determined by the "measure of wickedness," but by the inspiration given by the God of Israel and the Mes-

3:35 The FATHER is solidarizing with the Son,
and has put everything in his hands.
3:36 The one trusting in the Son has life in the age to come.
But the one distrusting the Son will not see life
but the wrath of God is staying on him permanently.¹⁵⁰

The following passage is difficult to interpret. Some manuscripts add at the end of v.36: “After these things, John was delivered.” So they thought they had to frame the whole passage with the two verses 24 and 36 and attribute the words to John. Unlike them, Bultmann added the passage 3:31-36 to the conversation with Nicodemus. This solution is convenient but hardly makes its interpretation any easier.

The passage 3:31-35 is a kind of summary explanation of the great section on the activity of the Messiah in Judea. V.31 seems to refer to the contrast between heaven and earth. Before we continue here, we have to make a fundamental statement. There is a clear *difference* between heaven and earth, but no *opposition*. *Earth* is not a synonym for *world order*. Psalm 115:16 says, “The heavens are the heavens of the NAME, the earth he gave to the children of men.” This fragment shows that there is no opposition. From the Scriptures of Israel, there is no dualism here, the God of Israel is “the maker (‘ose) of heaven and earth” (Psalm 115:15).

Verse 3:31 seems to be a kind of summary of 1:19-3:30; it begins,

He who comes from above is there above all.
He who is of the earth is from the earth,
he speaks from the earth.
He who comes from heaven (is there above all).

Who is the “one coming from above”? It makes sense to understand by him “who comes from above [heaven]” first of all the *bar enosh*, the Human. He is now above (*epanō*, ‘al) all, he exercises dominion. *Anōthen* (“from above”) in the first line is replaced by *ek tou ouranou* (“from heaven”) in the fourth line. The copyist of P⁶⁶ (around 200 CE) had a source in which the third line appeared. He forgot it when copying, but added it in the margin. Obviously, it was more logical to him to go straight from the second to the fourth line. Many manuscripts left out the last words of the fourth line. Apparently, the verse caused problems early on. Because according to

siah. John assumes that his listeners are familiar with the referenced passage Zechariah 5:1 ff. Therefore, you should not translate adverbially, such as “moderately.”

CT: If you translate adverbially, “in (limited) degree,” you have to include ‘limited’ between brackets to make the sentence understandable. We leave the definite article and refer to the explanatory Tanakh passage. [Also the CJB takes “in limited degree.”]

150 [PERMANENTLY: TV translates “weighs on him permanently” to catch the full meaning of the Greek word “menein” that in John refers to Hebrew ‘amad and qum (see note 77).]

the analogy of the first two lines, you would expect, “he speaks of the earth / he who comes from heaven . . . speaks of heaven.” It is not by chance that the fourth line is badly passed on. But it reminds us of the conversation with Nicodemus, 3:12-13.

The connection with 3:27 ff. exists from v.32. The witness is, as we have seen, John. The testimony is not accepted. He should be trusted because he bears witness to what he has seen and heard. But one does not trust him. One does not trust at all in the God of Israel. But if one “trusts the testimony” one assures under hand and seal (*sphragizein*) that God is faithful (*alēthēs*). It is about an official confirmation (Matthew 27:66) by the one who accepts the testimony. He acts in accordance with the God of Israel, who gives his people “the food that remains (= keeps alive) until the life of the age to come,” 6:27. Whoever trusts will survive the coming catastrophe of the world order: “But he whom God has sent, he speaks the words of God.”

Then there is a half-sentence that is difficult to understand. “Not measured scarcely, but abundant” is how Wengst interprets the expression, like the other commentaries, “not measured, but in entire fullness.”¹⁵¹ John could have written *perisson* (see 10:10). He does not, he writes: “. . . not according to measure (*ou gar ek metrou*).” *Metron*, “measure”, occurs only here in John.

A hint could be Zechariah 5-6. There we have the only passage in the Tanakh where both words “measure, inspiration” (*metron, pneuma*) occur together. With the storm (*ruach*) the crime is carried into the land of exile. The storm itself is then settled. This inspiration drives the prophets to familiarize the deported in the land of exile with the possibility and conditions of a new beginning. Immediately after this, there is the announcement of the construction of the sanctuary and the royal dignity of the great priest Joshua.

John now says that it is *not* according to this bushel measure that the Messiah gives the storm wind of inspiration. It will be different than after the first destruction of the city, very different. There is no reconstruction of the city and the sanctuary. What is coming is that Son who is “above all.” The FATHER is in solidarity with the Son, he has given everything into his hands. The connection is admittedly difficult. On the other hand, the paraphrase “*without measure*” is an admission that one does not understand the matter properly.

The last verse 3:36 belongs to the sentences by which John, again and again, summarizes his message. They generally have the form: *Who . . . who, who not . . . that not*. “He who trusts in the Son will receive the life of the age to come. Whoever distrusts the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God will weigh on him permanently.” Throughout the whole Gospel, we will hear this sentence in countless variations. To

151 Rudolf Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (KEK), Göttingen 1941, 119.

trust the Son means to trust that finally right will happen and that this right will be the right of the God of Israel. Who, on the other hand, distrusts the Son, assumes that the one to whom the power to create right is given, will not appear, so that the right and the legal order of the God of Israel is an illusion. Whoever wants to live this way lives under the wrath of God. “Anger,” *orgē*, occurs in John only here. It is the word of the letter to the Romans, where we hear it eleven times. John means this wrath and shares with Paul the view that wrath is an essential element of the *dikaiokrisia*, the “approved judgment”, the veritable judgment. John 3:36 does not mean anything else, and he reinforces this with the verb *menein*, “to be permanently or firmly united.” The judgment of wrath is final and definitive.

Scholion 4: The Source of John

The reference to Zechariah 5 gives many readers the impression that here we have an unsolvable equation of the type $x = y$; we know neither what John nor Zechariah wanted to say. Therefore a word about the function of the explicit and implicit quotations from Tanakh.

John used sources in the writing of his text; everyone is dependent on traditions that function as sources for his actions, speeches, and thoughts. The scholarly world often assumes that John had recourse to written sources. These assumptions are a continuation of the source hypotheses for the so-called Old Testament. The source hypotheses had the effect that the unity of the text has been cut up. One book then became many pamphlets, which were treated separately. In the succession of Rudolf Bultmann, the Gospel of John was also cut up. In the meantime, it has got about also in the learned world that one should take the present text seriously. No longer does one search for its “original” components, even for its “original” form and the supposedly used written models.

It is not unlikely that John knew the Gospel of Mark and the narrative traditions that preceded it. The *fact* is that he uses the Tanakh as his source because he quotes it explicitly. The language of the Scriptures is the common language of all children of Israel. Whether you speak a truthful language, can be proven in the arguments of the children of Israel among themselves only from the Scriptures. In the Talmud, a certain view is presented and often concluded with the sentence: “For it is written . . .” with a subsequent Scriptural quotation.

In the time of John, the Scriptures were not yet a definitively finished entity. The Greek version of the Tanakh had, apart from a different order with ideologically far-reaching consequences, more material than the Tanakh, which was valid in Rabbinical Judaism. Whether John uses the Septuagint or a preliminary form of the Masoretic Text is not always clear.

Be that as it may, John is not understandable without comprehensive knowledge of the Tanakh. For his language in the comprehensive sense of the word (French: “*langage*”, not “*langue*”) is, as with every Jew of that time who went to the synagogue, deeply determined by the language of the Scriptures, and this is not only evident in the explicit quotations. It is important to work out the implicit references.¹⁵² Therefore, we quote explicitly where, in our opinion, John is quoting implicitly, so that the connections become traceable and verifiable. In the House of Study, it must be discussed whether the reference is correct or not.

In this case, the reference to Zechariah 5 seems far-fetched. But the expression *ek metrou* is not explained. So you must ask: what has *metron* (“measure”) to do with *pneuma* (“storm wind, spirit”)? What does John want to get at, what is in his mind? He has the Tanakh in his head and Zechariah 5 and 6 is the only Tanakh passage where both words are related to each other in terms of content.

For this reason, all teachers of exegesis must first and foremost be “Old Testament scholars,” and what they teach cannot be anything other than biblical theology. We must take the references we give as suggestions for a better understanding of the text so that we can then discuss them thoroughly in the House of Study. Under certain circumstances, it may turn out that the reference is too far-fetched and that the proposal does not go further. But we must always seek to understand John from the Tanakh.

5. The Woman at Jacob’s Well, 4:1-42

5.1. Samaria, 4:1-4

4:1 Now when Jesus realized that the Perushim had heard
he was making and immersing more disciples than John,
4:2 —although not Jesus himself was immersing but his disciples—,
4:3 Jesus left Judea and set out again for Galilee.
4:4 This meant that he had to go through Samaria.

152 Klaus Berger mocks himself in his book “Im Anfang war Johannes. Datierung und Theologie des vierten Evangeliums” (Stuttgart 1997, 18 ff.) about alleged “allusion hunters” who, as “scientists,” smell “a reference to what is written” everywhere. This polemic is ridiculous. John quotes the writing repeatedly. He fulfills Berger’s criterion, according to which “the text to which allusion is made . . . has been generally known.” The Tanakh was “generally known” among Jews. The book of Zechariah played a major role in Messianic circles. A further criterion would be, “The function of allusion must be clearly recognizable and theologically important.” That is what we are trying to prove. Against Berger, we can say that comprehensive knowledge of the whole Scriptures is not a modern “biblicism” and has nothing to do with the “perfectionism of modern pious people.” Admittedly, unlike Professor Berger, we read John not as a Christian text but as a heterodox Jewish one born of Tanakh.

This introduction to Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman begins with a complicated sentence. "When Jesus realized that the Perushim had heard that Jesus made and immersed more disciples than John, he left Judea and went . . ." This structure is simple. Subordinate clause, second-order subordinate clause, third-order subordinate clause, main clause. The sentence is interrupted by another sentence, "Admittedly Jesus did not immerse, but . . ." This is now in clear contrast to 3:22, "There (in Judea) he stayed and was immersing." According to this, the baptismal practice of the Messianic communities should go back to an example of Jesus. Here it is said: Baptism is something that the disciples did, Jesus did not! There must have been a controversial discussion in the group about the sense and nonsense of baptism.

That Jesus was immersing, the Perushim have from hearsay. This rumor makes Jesus suspicious. John lived in great danger. Jesus didn't want to expose himself to this danger without need. Jesus went away to Galilee, the land of the signs. He takes the way through the land of Samaria which is by no means a matter of course. To understand this you have to know the political geography of the country.

The books of the "Former Prophets" (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings) show the course of Israel through the times as a unified history, from the crossing of the Jordan under Moses' successor Joshua to the devastation of the sanctuary by the Babylonians. South (Judah) and North (Israel) went separate ways after the death of King Solomon, ways that were nevertheless connected again and again. These books were the work of reflection on one's own past after the catastrophe of the Davidic monarchy in Judah/Jerusalem in the 6th century BCE—possibly in the 5th century—as far as its core holdings are concerned. Their field of vision remained "all Israel," all twelve tribes.

For the *remake* of this review of Israel's history, the book "Speeches of the Days" (in our Bible 1 and 2 Chronicles) was only about the fate of Judah, the South. Although the inhabitants of the North were called "our brothers," 2 Chronicles 11:4, the link between South and North, characterizing the Books of Kings, was severed. Only in connection with the entanglements under the Northern Dynasty of the House of Omri did the North come into view. The great prophets of the North are completely missing, and the prophet Elijah appears only with a letter to King Joram (2 Chronicles 21,12 ff.)—as a "Southern prophet," so to speak. For the Chronicles and thus for the consciousness of the people in Jerusalem and Judah, Israel was coincident with Judah. An Israelite is a Judean.

This *remake* certainly has to do with the divergent development of the two districts of Judea and Samaria in the Persian and Hellenistic periods. The people of Judea regarded the people of Samaria as bastards. After the end of the Babylonian epoch, the new Persian rulers made Samaria an independent province of the Great Satrapy

“Beyond the River,” i.e. the Syro-Phoenician region of the Persian Empire. Yehud with Jerusalem was initially under the provincial administration in Samaria but became an independent province around 440 BCE after the measures of Nehemiah. The independence of Samaria came to an end around 108 BCE when the Judean ruler John Hyrkan of the House of Hasmoneans conquered the city of Samaria and thus completely devastated it so that it could hardly be found and was never rebuilt.¹⁵³ Instead of it and in its immediate vicinity, Herod later had the city of Sebaste built. Twenty years earlier, John Hyrkan had already conquered the ancient city of Shechem and devastated the city and the central sanctuary on Mount Gerizim outside the gates of Shechem. An attempt to rebuild the central sanctuary of Samaria was interpreted by the Romans under Pontius Pilate as an uprising against Rome and prevented by force of arms. The perpetrators of this attempt (among them a man who revealed himself to be the prophet) were executed. This could have happened during the lifetime of Jesus.

The mutual hatred between Samaria and Judea, between the “Samaritans” and the “Jews” has ancient roots, but in its virulent stage it dates back to the time of the conquest of the country by the Judean rulers from the House of Hasmoneans, i.e. the end of the 2nd century BCE.¹⁵⁴ Some Judeans preferred to make the detour from Jerusalem to Galilee or vice versa through the Jordan Valley or Transjordan, rather than set foot on the soil of Samaria. They had good reasons for this. In the year 52 CE, an incident occurred. People from Samaria had attacked pilgrims from Galilee and killed many of them. Thereupon a troop of Zealot Jews from Galilee set out to avenge the pilgrims. They burned several Samaritan villages in the south of the region. The population was massacred. The Romans had several Zealots crucified; at the same time, they had some of the Samaritan elites brought to Rome, where they were executed.¹⁵⁵ The hatred between the two peoples was very deep and grew deeper.

According to Hengel,¹⁵⁶ the place Sychar mentioned in John 4:5 is within sight of the holy mountain of Samaria, the Gerizim, about 1 km northeast of the ruins of Shechem, where the city of Neapolis (Arabian *Nablus*) was built. A good place for the peace narrative that now follows.

153 See Peter Schäfer, *Geschichte der Juden in der Antike*, Neukirchen/Stuttgart 1983, 83; Flavius Josephus, [Ant. 13,10](#).

154 Roger T. Beckwith, *Formation of the Hebrew Bible*, in: M. J. Mulder (Hg.), *Mikra* (CRINT II,1) 1988, 38-86, here 85.

155 Flavius Josephus, [Ant. 20,6](#).

156 Martin Hengel, *Das Johannesevangelium als Quelle für die Geschichte des antiken Judentums*, in: ders., *Kleine Schriften II*, Tübingen 2002, 293 ff., here 298.

5.2. In the Land of the Beginning, 4:5-15

4:5 He comes to a town in Samaria called Sychar,
near the field Jacob gave to Joseph, his son.

4:6 There was Jacob's spring.
So Jesus, having toiled from the stretch of way,
sat down by the spring.
It was about the sixth hour.

4:7 A woman from Samaria comes to draw water.
Jesus says to her, "Give me to drink,"

4:8 for his disciples had gone into town to buy food on the market.

4:9 Now the woman from Samaria says to him,
"How is it that you, a Judean, ask for water from me,
a woman of Samaria?"
—For Judeans don't associate with Samaritans.—

4:10 Jesus answered and said to her,
"If you knew the gift of God
and who it is saying to you, 'Give me to drink,'
then you would have asked him;
and he would have given you living water."

4:11 The woman says to him,
"Sir,¹⁵⁷
you don't have a bucket, and the well is deep.
From where do you have 'living water'?

4:12 Are you greater than our father Jacob?
He gave us the well
and he himself drank from it, and so did his sons, and his fatstock."¹⁵⁸

4:13 Jesus answered and said to her,
"Everyone who is drinking from this water will get thirsty again,

4:14 but whoever would drink from the water that I will give him
will not get thirsty into the age to come,
but the water I will give him will become a spring of water inside him,
welling up into the life of the age to come."¹⁵⁹

157 [If Jesus is addressed as *kyrie* in Greek, it is usually translated into English as "Lord." But this translation usually implies that he is identified with the Messiah. So I take the word "Sir" in cases where this identification is not yet clear. In German, this problem does not exist, because as in Greek the word "Herr" serves both the address of a man of higher rank and God or the Messiah.]

158 FATSTOCK: *Thremmata*. The word is rare, absent from the Septuagint, and occurs only once in the NT, in this very passage. It comes from *trephein*, "to feed, to fatten."

159 The reference is Isaiah 35:5-7. The words *hallelsthai* (Hebrew *dalag*), "to leap," as well as *dipsan*, "to thirst," *hydōr*, "water," and *pēgē*, "spring," all occur in the song "Rejoice, wilder-

4:15 The woman says to him:
 “Sir,
 give me this water,
 so that I won’t have to be thirsty and keep coming here to draw water.”

Jesus—“having toiled” with the arduous path—sits down at the well in front of the village. What the word *kekopiakōs*, “having toiled”, means, becomes clear only at 4:38.

A woman from Samaria came to draw water. The woman sets the water jug down. She puts her hands on her hips—so we may imagine the woman, the story will prove us right!—, speaks unmistakably and loudly, from top to bottom. So she will stay during the whole conversation, she is not to be made small. Jesus asked her to give him a drink after he had sent the disciples away. Besides this impious figurative imagination, we need “Bible firmness.” We explain a *Biblical* text, the context of the narrative is the whole Scriptures and the current political situation, both. Our narrative first sends us into the book, *In the beginning*, Genesis.

The village of Sychar near Shechem evokes an event from Genesis. The area was a gift of Jacob to his son Joseph; Joseph here stands for Samaria. Jacob gave to Joseph “the mountain ridge (*Shekhem*), which I (= Jacob) took away from the Amorites with my sword and bow” (Genesis 48:22). Jesus, like the fathers of Israel, like Isaac and like Jacob, sat down at the local well, which Jacob had already dug. Three names we have heard: Jesus, Jacob, Joseph. Now comes a woman who makes us think of Rebekah and Rachel—the mother of Israel and the mother of Joseph (= Samaria). The woman at the well is not some stupid person with a grubby past, she is one of the great women of Israel. Whoever does not realize this right at the beginning will not understand anything here.

We hear Genesis 24. Abraham sends his servant as a bride suitor to Nahor, his relative, to find a wife for Isaac, his son. The servant comes to the city “at eventide, the time when the women go out to draw water.” He says (Genesis 24:12-14),

Eternal, God of my master Abraham,
 set it up for me today,
 show solidarity with my master Abraham.
 There, I have stationed myself by the water well,
 and the daughters of the townspeople go out to draw water.
 May it be:
 The girl to whom I say,

ness” (*yesusum midbar*, Isaiah 35:1 ff. The connection with the song Isaiah 35 points to the final liberation. The signs of Jesus (the paralyzed walking, the blind seeing, etc.) originate as signs of liberation from Isaiah 35.

“Hold out your jug that I may drink,”
and she says, “Drink,
I will also give your camels to drink”—
that one you have chosen for your servant Isaac,
in her, I recognize that you have shown solidarity with my master.

Rebekah came and fulfilled the wish of the servant of Abraham. “It was the sixth hour,” John now says. This again reminds us of Rachel, because Rachel came with her sheep when “it was still great in the daytime,” that is, in broad daylight, noon, sixth hour (Genesis 29:7). At this moment, at the well, the promises of Israel, which Jacob saw in the dream at Bethel and which Jesus had called to Nathanael’s memory (1:51), begin to be realized: with the great love of Jacob and with the great esteem with which Jesus will meet the woman from Samaria. We are still in the Book of Genesis, “In the beginning.” Jacob said, 29:7 ff,

“It is still high in the daytime, it is not the time to gather the cattle.
So water the sheep, go away, and pasture them.”
They said,
“We must not do so until all the flocks are gathered;
then we roll the stone from the well and water the cattle.”
While he was still talking to them, Rachel came with her father’s cattle;
she was a shepherdess.
It happened:
When Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of Laban, his mother’s brother
and the cattle of Laban, the brother of his mother,
Jacob came forward and rolled the stone from the opening of the well,
and watered the cattle of Laban, the brother of his mother.
And Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice, and wept. . .

The association with these passages of Genesis is intended, but the situation of Israel is completely different from that of Jacob. For Israel at that time, the slave house was still to come, here, however, Israel is—torn and maltreated—in the slave house of Rome.

That he, the Judean, addresses a question to her, the Samaritan, that is quite a miracle. Men, especially men with the dignity and authority of a rabbi, do not talk to women, and certainly not to a woman from the bastard people of Samaria. The woman feels anything but honored by the request. In sharp contrast to the old oriental customs that Rebekah embodied, she rejected him, “How do you, a Judean, come to ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink? Judeans do not associate with Samaritans,” says the woman. Under these circumstances, she cannot be Rebekah, mother of Israel, and not Rachel, lover of Israel. Jesus cannot be the Messiah of Israel for the same reason of “ruling conditions.” The situation is in the true sense of the word “impossible” because it is impossible for Jesus—as a Judean—to see the

Samaritan as a daughter of Jacob, a daughter of Israel. It is even more impossible that the Samaritan woman could believe that a Judean would see her as a daughter of Israel. To her, he can only be the master in the worst sense of the word, who wants to be served by a Samaritan as a slave. Not even sacred oriental hospitality is possible under “Bosnian” conditions.

Only the Messiah could do away with the situation, “Judeans do not associate with Samaritans,” this murderous political situation: This is the content of the narrative. Based on place and time, the Samaritan woman, the woman at the well—the *setting* invokes the association—represents Rebekah, the mother of Israel, and Rachel, the mother of Joseph, i.e. of Ephraim, i.e. of Samaria! Both names, Jacob and Joseph, do not appear here accidentally or casually. They are *essential*! It all depends, then, on these two, Jesus Messiah and the Samaritan woman, creating a new beginning for all Israel, Judea and Samaria. John intertwines the current political situation with the story in which Israel, the son of Rebekah and Isaac, and Rachel’s beloved, became the firstborn and among the peoples the people of all twelve “sons of Jacob/Israel”; Israel was not only Judea. Without this connection, the narrative becomes incomprehensible. With this linkage, it proves to be a fundamental political paradigm.

She does not know at all with whom she is dealing, Jesus says, she has no idea of the gift of God, of “living water,” and should not give him, but rather he should give her to drink. She is by no means impressed, the political situation separates them. She calls him *kyrie*, “Sir,” but at the same time makes him ridiculous: He does not even have a bucket, but he still wants to give her to drink, her, a daughter of Jacob, who received Israel as his new name? Had not Jacob given them, the Samaritans, the well and thus kept their people and their cattle alive? Where should just he—the Judean—get “living water” from, who accepts many other things besides the Torah? The people of Samaria only know the *Torah of Moses*, that alone is enough. She is proud and indomitable, she is a child of the Torah, she doesn’t need anything else, what should she do with “living water”, of all things, from a Judean hand?¹⁶⁰

Whoever drinks of this, your water, says Jesus, will become thirsty again; her insistence on tradition will not solve the murderous problem. In Capernaum, he will say something similar to the Judeans, “Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died,” John 6:49. Both narratives are strictly parallel at this point; Jesus has only one thing to say to all Israel, Judea like Samaria: the new that he announces

160 To the equation Torah = water: Texts like Isaiah 55:1, “All you who are thirsty, come to the water . . .” are often interpreted as an invitation to accept Torah, bTaan 7a. (Further proofs in Hermann L. Strack / Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch II*, München ⁶1974, 436; Klaus Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium. 1. Teilband: Kapitel 1-10 (ThKNT)*, Stuttgart 2000, 159f.)

and *is* in person creates a situation where things that were decided only with fists and swords can now be discussed again. Here, we are eyewitnesses of the political process that Jesus wants to set in motion, the unification of Israel. If Israel drinks the water that the Messiah will give him, which *is* the Messiah, it will not thirst anymore until the age to come, i.e., no longer remain in a hopeless political situation. Thus, people will see a real perspective for themselves in the age to come, and that will give them the strength to endure until that new world epoch, in which all problems will be solved.

The woman is unbeatably sober. A new era would indeed have come for her if the women's drudgery of scooping water from a deep well and dragging it from the well to the village were to cease. Water in abundance is a dream of the Messianic time, it is the dream of the paradise of the Qur'an almost in each of its 114 surahs. The two talk with each other, but past each other! Both speak politically, Jesus of a political situation beyond the murderous situation of the relationship between the two peoples, she starts from the current state.

In her answer, bitterness immediately mixes with her sobriety, "The Judean of all people allegedly wants to free not only me from my daily toil but also our people from its hopeless situation!" She cannot understand this. Indeed, the image of the "dancing water" (*hydor hallomenos*, "water welling up") is incomprehensible to her, and not only to her. Jesus refers to the song *yesusum midbar*, "Let the wilderness rejoice," Isaiah 35. All the decisive words in John 4:13 ff. also occur in that song. It says (Isaiah 35:5-7),

Then the eyes of the blind are opened,
opened the ears of the deaf.
Then the limping man will dance like a deer (*yedaleg, haleitai*),
the tongue of the mute will cheer.
For the waters (*mayim, hydata*) break forth in the wilderness,
and the rivers in the steppe.
The glowing wasteland will turn into a pool of water,
the thirsty ground (*tzimma'on, gē dipsōsa*)
to springs of water (*le-mabu'e mayim, pēgē hydatos*).

Neither the woman at Jacob's well nor the disciples and the Judeans could perceive that what Isaiah says could be a real perspective in Roman times. The disciples have the greatest difficulty with this until the end, and the woman can only think of what she has to do every day, to carry water. For her, the toil of daily life applies first and not unjustly; she does not see that the toil cannot be abolished under the prevailing conditions unless the conditions are changed from the bottom up. Jesus sings to her a melody of the song *yesusum midbar*; she does not feel like such songs. That way the two do not get any further.

5.3 “The husband you have now is not your husband,” 4:16-19

4:16 He says to her,
“Go, call your husband,
and come here.”

4:17 The woman answered and said to him,
“I don’t have a husband.”
Jesus says to her,
“Well you say that: ‘I don’t have a husband’.

4:18 Five husbands, you have had,
and the one you have now is not your husband.
What you have said is trustworthy.”¹⁶¹

4:19 The woman says to him,
“Sir,
I am observing:
you are a prophet.

Jesus is trying to make a breakthrough, now he wants to do some straight talking, politically, “Go and fetch your husband!” We are dealing with a daughter of Jacob and not with the dirty exegete’s fantasy about a slut and her “enormous wastage of men.”¹⁶² She talks about “Jacob, our father.” What kind of husband has the daughter of Jacob? Which husband has the daughter of Zion—Lamentations 2:1 etc.? In other words: What rulers, what gods have the two peoples had?

Under the prevailing conditions between the two peoples, the woman at Jacob’s well can only take the invitation as an insult: Therefore, knotty timber requires sharp wedges, “I have no husband.” Jesus is enthusiastic, “Right (*kalōs*, ‘well’) you say that.” This is not sarcasm, not bitterness. “You had five husbands and the one you have now is not your husband. In what you said, there is something trustworthy.” We must read extremely carefully. *Touto alēthes* (noun) *eirēkas*. A few hand-writings have changed this and written the adverb *alēthōs*. No, it literally says, “This trustworthy thing you have said,” because the word *alētheia* does not mean “truth” but “faithfulness, fidelity,” *’emeth*. That this is about the central political point can

161 TRUSTWORTHY: *Alēthēs*, “faithful, trustworthy,” adjective (the Codex Sinaiticus writes *alēthōs*, adverb). It refers to the fidelity of Samaria.

CT: What the woman says here is praised by Jesus, “What you have said is trustworthy.” This woman, the representative of her people, says something that points to the fundamental fidelity of Samaria, this essential part of Israel, to the God of Israel. All other translations here have a sarcastic overtone and allow themselves to be misled by the prejudice of the woman’s allegedly “dissolute” life. Jesus is not a moralist, and he is even less in a mood of sarcasm.

162 Thus the exegete Schenke, quoted in Klaus Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium*. 1. Teilband: Kapitel 1-10 (ThKNT), Stuttgart 2000, 161.

hardly be doubted. These five husbands have had to do with the political situation of Samaria. Marriage is a symbol of the relationship between the God of Israel and the people. But it is the symbol of the tyranny of the king as well:

Listen, daughter, and look, incline your ear,
forget your people and the house of your father.
Does a king desire your beauty
because he is your lord—bow down to him (Psalm 45:11-12).

“Husbands” in John 4 are not any individual spouses, but *baʿalim*, rulers, kings, to whom the people of Samaria had to bow, the kings of Assyria and Babylon, the kings of Persia and the Greeks from the south (Egypt) and the north (Syria), the kings of Judah, their orders, their gods. The woman says, “I have no husband,” and that means, “I do not recognize the *de facto* rule to which we are to submit. I do not forget my people or my father’s house! I have no husband (*ʾish*), I have only a lord and owner (*baʿal*).” John argues on the line of the prophet Hoshea:

It will happen on that day, proclamation of the NAME.
You will call: “*ʾishi*, my husband,”
you will no longer call: “*baʿali*, my lord and owner.”

The five “husbands” the people ever had were *baʿalim*. The disastrous history of this people under the five *baʿalim* turns the Torah of Samaria into a kind of counter-Torah, all political organization of the society of Samaria was the opposite of a society structured by the Torah. The whole thing has now come down to the rule of the one who is “no husband,” the rule of Rome; there is no longer any Torah possible, neither for the Judeans nor for the Samaritans, as we will hear. In fact, she is forced to invoke a reign to which he, Jesus, has declared war, and which, as the recent history of her people shows, she rejects. “No,” he says, “this is not your husband, at best your owner.” Based on the common rejection of Roman rule, the Roman *baʿal*, political understanding between the two peoples is possible. Therefore Jesus praises the woman’s sentence, “I have no husband.”

Jesus’ word is a commitment to a woman who realistically recognizes her political situation. Here, there is a platform for a conversation, a political one, to be precise. The commitment of people to the Messiah begins with the commitment of the Messiah to the people. “I have no husband” is the relentless insight into the pitiful political situation of her people. It arouses in the commentators the appearance of shamefacedly admitting some guilt, of wanting to give in. Nothing is further from the truth than such confessor exegesis.¹⁶³

163 The commentators across-the-board think that you should not interpret this symbolically. Johannes Calvin also sees here—not simply, but clearly—the whore (Johannes Calvin, *Auslegung des Johannesevangeliums* (1553), übersetzt v. Martin Trebesius und Hand Christian Petersen, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1964, 94): “Meanwhile, I do not believe that she is simply

The sanctuary on Mount Gerizim was destroyed by the Judeans under John Hyrkan. As mentioned above, a prophet had tried to rebuild the central sanctuary of the Samaritans on Mount Gerizim; this was answered by the Romans with a massacre. This mountain could be seen from the village of Sychar. The people of Samaria no longer have a place where they can give to the God of Israel the honor that is due to him as their King (*proskynein*). The word is paraphrased by “worship”; in fact, it is about political homage. We come back to this verb in the discussion of 4:22. When the Judeans think of the sanctuary on Mount Gerizim, they think of the “Hellenistic Zeus,” to whom, according to Flavius Josephus, the Samaritans dedicated their sanctuary around 170 BCE.¹⁶⁴ The sanctuary is destroyed, but instead, Herod had a real temple of Baʿal erected in Sebaste, the city he had built as a replacement for the destroyed city of Samaria, “In the middle of the city he marked out a place suitable in every respect of one and a half stadia, on which he built a great and glorious temple.”¹⁶⁵ State cult took place in such king temples.

Jesus has correctly summarized the situation for her too, that the one she has is not her husband at all. Her reaction is completely correct, “You are a prophet,” because prophets in Israel always had the task of interpreting the political situation truthfully. This sentence of the woman reminds us of the story of the prophet Elisha and the great woman¹⁶⁶ from Shunem as an analogous counter-narrative. This woman also had a husband who was not her husband, 2 Kings 4:8 ff., because she had no future, no son with him. Elisha’s servant Gehazi puts it in a nutshell (v.14), “She has no son and her husband is old.” Then she gets a child from her husband, just because Elisha had promised her. When the child becomes mortally ill, the husband has the child brought to his mother; clearly, it is not his child. The child dies, the mother goes to the prophet, “Did I perhaps ask my master (Elisha) for a child?” (2 Kings 4:28.) We learn how the prophet brings the woman’s child back to life.

She came and fell at his (the prophet Elisha’s) feet,
she bowed before him (*thisthachu, prosekynēsen*) to the earth,
she took her son and went out (2 Kings 4:37).

marked as a whore here. That he says she has had five husbands, can also mean that the frivolous, immoral woman has always given her husbands reason to divorce. I understand the words like this: although God had given you men for lawful marriage, you did not stop sinning until—after several divorces which were insulting to you—you became a whore.” We note two things. First, in a small oriental town like Sychar, it cannot be hidden how the woman lives; a “wild marriage” [as it used to be called in German when living together without being married] was simply impossible there. She is a respected personality in her village. No, bigoted Christian moral concepts led and still lead the commentators astray.

164 Flavius Josephus, [Ant. 12, 5](#).

165 Flavius Josephus, [Ant. 15, 8](#).

166 *ʿIsha gedola*, probably an independent landowner according to Numbers 27 and 2 Kings 8:6.

The great woman from Shunem had a future because she had trusted the prophet, Elisha. Thus far we are not yet at this point. The Samaritan woman observes—sees through—(*theōrei*) the fact that Jesus is a prophet, but he remains a Judean. She is the *analog* of the great women of Israel: exactly at the point where she is similar to them, she differs from them.

5.4. Neither—Nor, Inspiration and Fidelity, 4:20-24

4:20 Our fathers bowed down on this mountain,¹⁶⁷
but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where one has to bow down.”

4:21 Jesus says to her,
“Trust me, woman,
the hour is coming
when you will bow to the FATHER
neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.

4:22 You are bowing to what you don’t know;
we are bowing to what we do know,
that liberation is happening from the Judeans.¹⁶⁸

4:23 But the hour is coming
—indeed, it’s happening now—
when they who are bowing faithfully,
will bow to the Father according to inspiration and fidelity,
for the FATHER is seeking such as these who are bowing to him.

4:24 As inspiration, GOD is working;¹⁶⁹
and those bowing to him
are to bow according to inspiration and fidelity.”

The woman at Jacob’s well did not fall on her knees before him when she called him a prophet. Rather, she brings up what stands between them: the whole bloody history between their peoples. In her eyes, Samaria is the victim, and Judea is the perpetrator. She puts it in a nutshell, “Our fathers bowed down (*prosekynēsan*) on this mountain here. But you say that in Jerusalem is the place where one has to bow (*proskynein*).”

167 BOW DOWN: *Proskynein*, Hebrew *hishthachawa*, “to bow down in deep reverence,” such as to a king.

168 IS HAPPENING: *Estin* in 4:22 is not a copula but emphatic: *haya* is here “to happen.” On “liberation” and “to liberate,” see note to 4:42.

169 AS INSPIRATION, GOD IS WORKING. *Pneuma ho theos* is a declarative clause; therefore, one often translates “God is spirit,” subject “God,” predicate “spirit.” But the Scriptures are about understanding who is functioning as “God.” So Jesus says that—in Israel—only this (Messianic) inspiration should be working as GOD.

The cult in the new temple of Sebaste would then be sheer paganism; to the woman, the ambassador of her people, it was an abomination, “I have no husband!” Her enemies are the Romans and the Judeans, both of them. That is why she cannot communicate with a Judean prophet, “Our fathers had said . . . but you say . . .” Therefore she cannot act like her predecessor, the great woman from Shunem, she cannot and will not kneel before Jesus. She says, “You see through our political situation, it’s true because you are a prophet. But as long as things are thus between us, you cannot impose political tasks on us here.”

She didn’t know what we know. We know what Jesus said to members of his own people, “Do not make my FATHER’s house a market hall” (John 2:16); and he underlined this with an action that was by no means non-violent! She does not know that he announced to the Judeans the required sign, “Dissolve this temple, and I will raise it in three days” (2:19), where John noted that he was talking about the temple of his body, in plain language, of the Messianic community. All this she did not know and could not know. Not even the disciples knew it, “Now when he was raised from the dead, the disciples remembered that he had said this” (2:22). Only then! The tearing down of absurd and murderous dividing walls is the embodiment of Messianic politics, peace politics (see John 14:27 ff. and Ephesians 2:14 ff.). In the place of the sanctuary in Jerusalem, you cannot “politically pay homage” to the God of Israel, for that means the verb *proskynein*, “to bow down.” On the level of the narrative (*fiction*), the sanctuary in Jerusalem still exists; on the level of the narrator (*reality*), both sanctuaries are destroyed. Both peoples have “no place, nowhere” anymore. “Neither Jerusalem nor Gerizim” is an inconsolable reality, to both peoples. What future do they have? Who else can they follow, except the idol of this world order?

But then there is the sentence, “You bow to that of which you do not know. We bow to that of which we do know.” This double sentence seems to unmake again the “neither . . . nor” and destroys the perspective that Jesus had opened up to his and her people. Now it seems that the woman and all her people are required to recognize the priority of the Judeans. There seems to be no doubt about what is meant by “we” and “you.” It is about consciousness (*eidenai*, “to know”), or better, about the contents of consciousness. “We” know what it is all about politically. “Our” consciousness firstly has liberation (*sōteria*) as its content and secondly, that it comes from the *Judeans*. “God” in Israel is the freedom of Israel. But it does not come from the Judeans as such, in general, from *Judaism altogether*, but from a very specific *Judean*, the Messiah Jesus ben Joseph from Nazareth, Galilee. And then from those very particular *Judeans*, the disciples of Jesus ben Joseph. “We” means *Jesus and those who follow*. That does not mean *the Christians*, of course! It means those very particular *Jews*.

Because of the devastating conflict, the Samaritans cannot see that from any *Judeans* could come anything like liberation; from them, they think, nothing but destruction would come. That is why they stick to traditions that have no future. Their sanctuary

is and remains destroyed, just as the sanctuary in Jerusalem will be destroyed and never be rebuilt as such. To many Judeans, Jesus was not a Judean because he does not orient himself to the past. The Judeans said to him, “Do we not say it correctly that you are a Samaritan and that you are possessed?”, 8:48. To the Judeans, Jesus was a mad Samaritan; to the Samaritan woman, he is a Judean. Both peoples reject him—at first. This is the dilemma of the Messianic movement in the land of Samaria, and the reason may have been the Judean origin of the movement.

Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt has the half-sentence, “that liberation comes from the Judeans,” in the version “for salvation comes from the Jews.” His concern was to liberate the Christian faith from its anti-Semitic and—for the Jews until today—deadly tension and thus from its barrenness for the world. But his “dogmatic” reading—in the best sense of the word—does not lead to the comprehension of our narrative.

The “we” here is not a homogeneous Jewish entity, which is not surprising in the context of the Gospel of John. It is the “we” of the Messianic community, which knows that it is of Judean origin and neither wants to nor can deny this. Only thus has it been a movement for and in Israel, only thus a concrete-political liberation movement of the people of Israel, which is more than the people of Judea. This “neither—nor” points beyond the contrast between Judea and Samaria, not of course in the form of a Christian afterlife that overcomes all opposites. For John, the “here-after” is—in this world—“all Israel in *one* synagogue or *one* courtyard,” as the content of his political program (11:52 and 10:11-16). These Messianic Judeans know to whom they bow, knowing that the historically real sanctuary, which had turned into an *emporion*, a marketplace, and was destroyed, became replaced by the sanctuary of the “body of the Messiah,” i.e., the Messianic community (2:18 ff.), which was built up in three days.

The Messiah does not call the Judeans to renounce their origin and thus to receive a new identity, but to finally do justice to their origin as children of Israel and to leave the decayed “market economy,” into which the house of the FATHER has turned. The Samaritans are not fighting this struggle for their own origin, they don’t know, what they actually do—politically speaking—, they thus do not know, what is actually going on with them, “to whom they bow.” Hellenism has ruined the land of Samaria in such a way that it no longer knows what it is and should be.

“The hour is coming—and it is now!—that those who *really* bow to the FATHER are bowing according to *inspiration and fidelity*.” This is always translated as “*in spirit and truth*.” Not false, but worn, worn out. Consciousness has as essential content the fidelity of God to Israel, and this fidelity is *inspiring*. *Inspiration*—the word contains the Latin word “*spiritus*” (*pneuma, ruach*)—is what orients people’s actions, speech, and thinking, from fidelity—to fidelity. “God” is what claims the ultimate loyalty of people, it is what a person is actually concerned about. “God” has a NAME in Israel, and this NAME can only be pronounced as, *Who is leading out of the house*

of slavery (Exodus 20:2), as *moshiaʿ yisraʿel*, “liberator of Israel” (Isaiah 45:15). But in fact, “God” is functioning as anything else, as nameless gods. Samaria is called upon to pay homage only to this NAME as “God,” as to what it is actually about.

Such as these the FATHER is seeking, “for God,” according to Jesus, “may only work as this inspiration.” That is, to be inspired by the liberator and his liberation, to direct all political activity to this liberation, to let this liberation be “God.” This conversation is not about academic clarification of whether God is a “spirit.” No: God inspires by his fidelity to his people that he wants to liberate, as he once liberated Israel from the slave house.

The sentence: *pneuma ho theos* has the form of a declarative clause. What inspires people is their “God.” And what they recognize as “God”, as what it is actually about, is what they must pay homage to politically. In Israel this is the FATHER; by this word, John paraphrases the inexpressible NAME.

What is the meaning of “And this is now?” Christian orthodoxy sees here an inner process: whoever gets involved in it is “redeemed.” This is not entirely false. Whoever makes this political perspective his life’s purpose, does indeed live differently. To him, the splitting of Israel is overcome.

If now the reality of the bitter enmity does not open itself to this reasonable perspective, then you can react in two ways. On the one hand, it may be said, “All illusion,” as Pilate said, “What is fidelity,” 18:38; on the other hand, it is possible to internalize this perspective and let reality be just this catastrophic reality. This second reaction is the emergence of the Christian religion. Admittedly, the eschatological hope of the transformation of the world remains; but for the time being, nothing more can be expected from the world, and the temporary perspective of the individual is life after death and heaven.¹⁷⁰ The woman from Samaria reacts in a third way, with skepticism.

5.5. “I AM HE,” 4:25-30

- 4:25 The woman said to him,
 “I know that the Messiah is coming who is called *Christos* (anointed).
 When that one comes, he will announce everything to us.”
- 4:26 Jesus said to her,
 “I AM HE—the one speaking to you.”¹⁷¹

170 Gnosis doesn’t even leave a trace of a world transformation. All material things are evil in themselves and must burn. Only the non-material, the soul, the spiritual, shall and can live. Christianity never went thus far.

171 *Egō eimi ho lalōn soi*. The emphatic *egō eimi* we hear for the first time in John, 23 more times we will hear the expression (only twelve times in the other three gospels together!).

4:27 Just then, his disciples came.
 They were amazed that he was speaking with a woman;
 indeed, none of them said,
 “What are you seeking?” or, “What are you speaking with her?”
 4:28 At that, the woman left her water-jar,
 went away into the town and said to the humans,
 4:29 “Come, see a human who told me all I’ve ever done.
 Is not this one the Messiah?”
 4:30 They went out of the town and came toward him.

Again, it is the woman who leads back to the reality of the narrative. “The Messiah called *Christos*” would have to come, who, “when he comes, would announce everything.” *If he comes*: her skepticism is unmistakable. There is still much left open for her. She has listened to Jesus’ remarks about the fundamental presuppositions of his policy; *all this* she will see when the Messiah comes. At least she admits that the dilemma between the two peoples is to be overcome. *Neither—nor* was no perspective to her, and presumably to not a few in Samaria; the conflict gave a certain *raison d’être* to agitators with political ambitions in both peoples. To the woman at Jacob’s well, however, a *messianic* perspective is pure Utopia. It would be nice if “the Messiah called *Christos*” would come. With this, she wipes the sentence from the table. Jesus had said, “The hour is coming, and this is *now*.” *Now* is a never-never day for her.

Jesus ends the conversation. We hear for the first time in our text the words: “I AM, I WILL BE THERE.” 24 times in the Gospel of John we will hear this *egō eimi*,

The usual translation “I am the one speaking to you” or the like strictly parallels the Greek translation of Exodus 3:14 in the LXX: *egō eimi ho ōn*, that is, “I am” joined with an active participle. The Septuagint translated the phrase *’ehye ’asher ’ehye* (“I-will-be-there who I-will-be-there”) here as “I am the being.” This is a makeshift translation because a translation *egō eimi ho egō eimi* in Greek hardly seemed possible. Rather, the *’ehye*, which is unusual even in Hebrew, must be retained as the subject. “I-will-be-there” speaks to this woman; she is addressed as a child of Israel from the Exodus event. Where *egō eimi* occurs, you are always reminded of Exodus 3:14, Exodus 20:2, and especially Ezekiel, who uses the expression more than 80 times. We write the translation with large letters “I WILL BE THERE” (see e.g., 8:58).

[In this case, I do not follow TV’s 2015 translation, “I WILL BE THERE,” but fall back on the CT from 2005, “I AM HE,” especially since TV in the CT as well wanted to translate 4:26 analogous to 1:34 and took “I AM HE” as the title of section 5.5. In the CT, he had added:] CT: The preamble to the Decalogue comes to mind: *’anokhi YHWH, egō eimi ho kyrios*, Exodus 20:2. We find this expression more than 80 times in the book of Ezekiel. We often find the emphatic I (*’ani, ’anokhi*) in Isaiah 40-48. In such a case, we fully capitalize the verb and pronoun: I AM HE—(followed by a participle), or I AM—(followed by a noun). When the *egō eimi* occurs absolutely, such as 8:58, then it is recommended to write—analogously to *’ehye*—“I-WILL-BE-THERE.”

“I AM, I WILL BE THERE,” 24 times we will be reminded of the revelation of the NAME in Exodus 3:14, the foundation of prophetic self-consciousness. This peace and liberation conversation of the Messiah with the woman at Jacob’s well is the “way of God’s being” in Israel, and right *now*. To the person to whom these words have fundamental meaning, a new life begins. With this, the announcement becomes true: “Trust me, woman, for the hour [of the *neither—nor*] comes . . . and this is happening now!” At the moment when Jesus removes the blockade, *Judeans do not associate with Samaritans, but they beat each other to death*, the NAME is happening as it was revealed in Exodus 3:14, *I will be there as I will be there*. The NAME is happening in speaking, in this political conversation, where a way out becomes visible that has never been there before.

The expression exists in two forms, one absolute, without any further determination: *egō eimi* (“I WILL BE THERE”), one with a predicative determination, *egō eimi ho lalōn* (“I AM HE—the one speaking”), *egō eimi ho artos* (“I AM—the bread”), etc. The first form indeed occurs only four times, 6:20; 8:24, 28, 58 (the places 9:9, 18:5, 6, 8 presuppose the predicate). In these four cases, it seems to us, that only the direct reference to Exodus 3:14 comes into question. That’s why we translate “I WILL BE THERE.” In the other cases where Jesus is the subject of the sentence *egō eimi*, we must remember the emphatic prophetic final formula: *ʾani hu* or *ʾani YHWH*. The emphasis must be reproduced in the translation, such as: “I AM HE, I THE FIRST, I THE LAST,” Isaiah 48:12. With the phrase: “I AM HE—the one speaking to you,” Jesus invokes to the woman the liberation narrative they share. This happens here and now, this is *Messiah*.

The woman remains skeptical. But it is now clear to her that she has to discuss this matter with her people. In the meantime, the disciples had come. They didn’t like the whole thing. In this situation they have two disadvantages: They are men and they are Judeans. They wonder about a Judean man and teacher who is speaking with a completely strange woman from a hated people. No one comes to Jesus with stupid questions like, “What are you doing with the woman, what do you have to talk to her?” They do not want to expose themselves. But they are Judean men, they think: Ours is not consorting with Samaritans, and certainly not with Samaritan women.

Meanwhile, the woman has the opportunity to leave the stage to fulfill her mission: to go to her people in Samaria as the first Messianic evangelist, leaving her water behind; this water she no longer needs. After 1:39 and 1:46 we hear for the third time in the Gospel, “Come and see.” They shall come so they may see and hear, just as the first two disciples and Nathanael shall come so they may see. Here they shall see “a man who said to me all I’ve ever done.” Of course, most of the exegetes think of her “disgraceful marriage stories.” But he has brought the whole history of her people, her history, to the point and has opened up a perspective beyond the histo-

ry of murder and hate. Maybe a peaceful outcome of the bloody story can now be expected after all, “Is not he, in fact, the Messiah, could not Messianic politics be *re-alpolitik* for us after all?” She remains skeptical but remains open to surprises. The people are setting out on their way.

The disciples are quite baffled.

5.6 What Does Eating Mean Here, 4:31-38

- 4:31 Meanwhile, the disciples were questioning him, they said,
“Rabbi, eat.”
- 4:32 He said to them,
“I have food to eat that you don’t know of.”
- 4:33 At this, the disciples said to one another,
“Did not someone bring him to eat?”
- 4:34 Jesus said to them,
“My food is
to do the will of the ONE who sent me
and to accomplish his work.
- 4:35 Aren’t you saying,
‘Four more months, then the harvest is coming’?
Look, I say to you: lift up your eyes and view the countries!
They’re white, the harvest is coming!
- 4:36 The one who is harvesting receives his wages
and gathers fruit for life in the age to come,
so that the sower may be glad together with the harvester.
- 4:37 For in this matter, the saying holds true,
‘One is sowing, another is harvesting.’
- 4:38 I sent you to harvest what you haven’t toiled for.
Others have toiled, and you have gone into their toil.”

They want to ask, “What’s going on here?” but start with the obvious, “Rabbi, eat.” The *Johannine* strategy of misunderstanding here has something of a humoresque, “I have food to eat that you don’t know of,” says Jesus, knowing full well that they are misunderstanding him: “Has anyone—even this person—given him to eat?”

He immediately enlightens them about the fact that eating to the Messiah means doing the will of the one whose messenger he is. He must finish the work of God. The work of God is Israel, all twelve sons of Israel. In what condition Israel, the eye-ball of God, is moving, we will learn in the fifth chapter: Israel is a cripple, 5:5. But the point here it that the time is ripe, “The harvest is coming”, they have to lift their eyes. In the Scriptures, people lift their eyes to the God of Israel, Psalms 121:1; 123:1. In the book of Jeremiah, it says, 16:14-15,

Therefore:
 days are coming
 —announcement of the NAME—,
 when they don't say:
 "As the NAME lives,
 who brought the children of Israel up
 from the land of Egypt",
 rather,
 "As true as the NAME lives,
 who brought the children up from the north country (Babel),
 from all countries (*'aratzoth, chōrai*),
 into which he had chased them,
 to let them return to the ground,
 which he gave to our fathers."

The disciples have to lift their eyes, they have to see the countries of the world, all the *chōrai, 'aratzoth*, into which Israel was chased away. These countries are ripe for the harvest, ripe for the return of the whole scattered Israel. This is the one reference. The other is the pilgrimage song, "When the NAME let return, return to Zion", Psalm 126,

When the NAME let return, return to Zion,
 it is like a dream for us,
 yes, full of laughter our mouth,
 full of rejoicing our tongue.
 Yes, there will be said among the powerful nations,
 "Great things the NAME has done to these."
 Great things he has done for us,
 Joy has happened to us.
 Let us, Eternal one, turn back,
 like the watercourses in the Negev.
 They sow in tears, rejoice at the harvest,
 whoever went out crying, carried a burden of seed,
 whoever comes, comes back rejoicing, brings in sheaves.

Such references are necessary to understand Jesus' political teaching. In John, Jesus is the one who newly endows Israel, as in the Book of Jeremiah the return from Babel is to take the place of the liberation from Egypt. Such "new covenants" existed and exist again and again. In the pilgrimage song, the weeping is identical to the rejoicing. But not here.

Jesus' eating is the work that the God of Israel, the FATHER, has assigned to Jesus, the "bringing together of Israel into one," 11:52. John sees the work as a work of harvest. Harvest is the final action of the work of the year. This time has come, and

those who do this work gather the fruits. Here John gives up the figurative speech and speaks of “fruit for life in the age to come.” The age to come is that world order where the whole of Israel can be with itself. Then John returns to his image: The one who harvests can only do his work if the one who sows has done his work. The whole is the result of the work of *both*, therefore their joy is shared. Nevertheless, there is a difference between the one who sowed and the one who harvested, explicitly according to the prophet’s word, “You sow but you do not harvest,” Micah 6:15; those who will rejoice are not those who have wept, here: have toiled, as Joshua said to the children of Israel in his farewell discourse, Joshua 24:13-14,

I gave you a land for which you have not toiled (*yaga^ʿtha, ekopiasate!*),
cities that you have not build—you live in them!
Vineyards and olive groves that you have not planted—you eat of them!
And now: Have reverence for the NAME and serve him . . .

In the Book of Joshua, the difference is that the people have toiled who lived in the country before Israel. These are not meant in John. It can only be meant that the Messianic community (“you”) did not sow, did not create the conditions for the harvest, because “others have toiled,” have created the conditions for the harvest. Who are these others? They are the prophets of Israel, and in Jesus, the Messianic movement also saw the last and definitive “prophet.” Here the circle of the narrative closes:

Jesus sat at the well “having toiled from the stretch of way” (*kekopiakōs*), others “have toiled” (*kekopiakasin*). Jesus sees himself in line with the prophets. One of them said, Isaiah 49:4,

But I said: “I have toiled in vain” (*yaga^ʿthi, ekopiasa*).
For chaos and fog, all my strength was used up.
But my right is in the NAME, my work is in my God.”

“Even though he had done such signs before them, they did not trust him,” says John in a summary (12:37), with an explicit reference to the Book of Isaiah. John also sees Jesus as one of the great prophets of Israel and thus is in accordance with the other Gospels.

5.7 Liberator of the World, 4:39-42

4:39 From that town many of the Samaritans trusted in him
because of the word of the woman bearing witness,
“He told me all I’ve ever done.”

4:40 When now the Samaritans came to him,
they asked him to stay with them.
He stayed there for two days.

4:41 And much more they were trusting because of his word,

4:42 as they said to the woman,

“No longer we are trusting because of your speech,
for we ourselves have heard, and we know:
This one really is the liberator of the world.”¹⁷²

An abrupt change of scene, the appearance of the people from Sychar. Many are trusting in this Messiah because of the testimony of the woman because he told her what she had done. John is keen to emphasize this fact, he says it for the third time. Why should people *trust* because a stranger knew about her what they all knew about her anyway unless, for some absurd reason, she lived secretly with some man in her oriental village? That would arouse curiosity, but not trust. He revealed to the woman what had happened to her, that is, to her people; he enlightened her politically. Here, at last, is a Judean who has understood what happened—especially during the previous century—to this unfortunate people in Samaria. This arouses confidence, and this is what the woman conveyed to them.

They want the Messiah to stay with them. In John, “to stay”, *menein*, always has the Semitic coloring of “standing firm, persevering, holding fast.” He stays with them for two days, just as he stays for two days in Transjordan after he has heard that his friend, the only friend, had fallen ill in Judea, 11:6. These two days in Sychar are the prelude to the other sign, “Your son lives”, just as the two days in Transjordan are the prelude to the last, final sign, “Lazarus, come out” (11:43), and as, finally, are the two days between the death of the Messiah and his coming among the disciples (20:19).

During these two days Jesus must have conducted an intensive biblical-political House of Study in Sychar. The people of Sychar first trusted the testimony of the woman, now, after the House of Study, they trust the Messiah himself. They have heard themselves and *know*, their *consciousness* has changed. John can hardly be interested in playing down the woman’s testimony. The woman’s last words showed the messianic reservation. She represents a situation in Samaria where the Messianic community was met with distance.¹⁷³ The solemn confession, therefore, does not come from the mouth of the woman, but from the mouth of those who “themselves had heard and recognized that this one is really the liberator of the world.”

172 THE LIBERATOR OF THE WORLD: *Sōtēr tou kosmou*. Words from the root *sōz(t)-* stand for the Hebrew root *yashaʿ*. The root is a keyword in the book of Exodus, it means social, political, economic liberation. Hebrew *ʾelohim yisraʾel moshiaʿ*, Greek *ho theos tou Israel sōtēr* (Isaiah 45:15), “God of Israel, Liberator.” “Liberator of the world” we translate, namely, the liberation of the world from the order that weighs upon it. In any case, “Savior” is not to be translated here. *Alēthōs* we translate here as “really.”

173 From other sources we can conclude that this Messianic movement had great problems, especially in Samaria: Luke 9:52; Acts 8:14 ff.; see Gerhard Jankowski, Und sie werden hören. Die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas. 1. Teil (1,1-9,31), in *Texte & Kontexte* 91/92 (2001), 1-169, here 139 ff.

This is the open rebellion against the real existing emperors of Rome who call themselves “liberators of the world.”¹⁷⁴ In fact, this title is found in inscriptions of two emperors, Nero (54-68) and Hadrian (117-138). This title is due to them because they wanted to create “order” throughout the empire, which in Nero’s case is a ridiculous presumption. In the case of Hadrian, the title is all right as long as you understand by liberating and salutary order the efficient Roman, but still exploitative administration of the adoptive emperors of the 2nd century, which set a certain limit to the corruption of the provincial authorities. But this has nothing to do with liberation according to the standards of the Torah; in this respect, Hadrian’s self-designation is an arrogance, too.

In any case, the word is a keyword in the political propaganda of the Roman imperial regime. The people of Samaria are clarifying two things with their sentence, “This one is really the liberator of the world.” Firstly, for them only the God of Israel has been the liberator of Israel, *moshiaʿ yisraʾel, sōtēr tou Israel*, nobody else, as it says in the Book of Isaiah; if they did not accept the prophet Isaiah, they knew the Torah and the sentence Exodus 14:30, “And on this day, the NAME liberated (*wa-yoshaʿ YHWH*) Israel from the hand of Egypt.” In the ancient Orient, the name is always also a life program. The NAME of God is essentially liberation; the NAME of Jesus means “liberation,” namely liberation according to Exodus 14:30. And secondly, they denied Rome the claim to be the liberator of the world. They were the first to recognize the political implications of the Messianic confession.

6 The Other Sign in Cana, Galilee: “Your son lives,” 4:43-54

- 4:43 After the two days, he went from there toward Galilee.
 4:44 For Jesus himself bore witness
 that a prophet is not respected in his own father’s town.¹⁷⁵
 4:45 Now when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him,
 because they had seen all he had done at the festival in Jerusalem;
 for they themselves had gone to the festival.
 4:46 So he went again to Cana, Galilee,
 where he had turned the water into wine.
 And there was some official of the king¹⁷⁶
 whose son was ill in Capernaum.
 4:47 This one, on hearing that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee,

174 See Richard J. Cassidy, *John’s Gospel in New Perspective*, Maryknoll/New York 1992, 13.

175 HIS OWN FATHER’S TOWN: His hometown is here, unlike in the Synoptic Gospels, Jerusalem: City of the FATHER!

CT: Otherwise the word *gar*, “for,” could not be explained.

176 CT: *Basilikos*, “one who belongs to the king (*basileus*),” to the bureaucracy of Herod Antipas, king of Galilee.

went away to him,
and asked him to go down and heal his son,
for he was about to die.

4:48 Jesus now said to him,
“Unless you had seen signs and proofs of power,
you had not trusted.”¹⁷⁷

4:49 The official says to him,
“Sir,
go down before my infant dies.”

4:50 Jesus says to him,
“Go your way,
your son is living.”
The human began trusting in the word that Jesus had said to him
and was going his way.

4:51 Already while he was going down,
his slaves met him and said
that his child is living.

4:52 He inquired from them the hour he had gotten better.
They said to him,
“Yesterday at the seventh hour, the fever left him.”

4:53 So the father realized
that it was the very hour when Jesus had told him,
“Your son lives.”
And he was trusting, he himself and his whole house.

177 SIGNS AND PROOFS: *Sēmeia kai terata*, Hebrew *ʾothoth u-mofthim*, “signs and proofs” (Buber). This connection occurs 14 times in the Scriptures, mainly in Deuteronomy. With one exception, this connection always has to do with Israel’s liberation; Isaiah 20:3 is a sarcastic “application” to Egypt and Ethiopia. The sentence construction *ean mē . . . ou mē* with subjunctive aorist shows a general condition of the pattern “if . . . then,” but is related to the liberation at that time: “If you had not had these very definite signs and evidence at that time, you would by no means have trusted.” So also now the signs are a condition for trust; the sentence is therefore not at all reproachful!

CT: The signs were always a precondition for trust: “And Israel saw the great hand of the NAME, his deed against Egypt; the people had a reverence for the NAME. They *trusted* the NAME and Moses, his servant” (Exodus 14:31). Neither signs, nor wonders, nor vision conflict with trust in the Scriptures. Trust without signs is not meritorious, but simply impossible. The “impossible” situation in which the Messianists from the time of John’s Gospel were found, is what John refers to at the end of his narrative, 20:29.

[TV refers to Martin Buber in translating *mofthim* as “Erweise, Machterweise” in German which I carry over into English as “proofs of power.” Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, New York/Toronto 1983-1995, takes the word “portents,” but this sounds too much like “bad omen” to me.]

4:54 This other sign again Jesus did
when he went from Judea to Galilee.

After the two days, Jesus goes from there to Galilee. Why after *the* two days? Of course after the two days of political training of the people of Sychar. But that is only half the answer. The day in Cana is a third day, the day from death to life.

Why to *Galilee*? John has Jesus himself give the answer. The answer refers to the hometown, “father’s town,” of Jesus. In Mark and the other Synoptics, the hometown is in Galilee (Mark 6:1 par.) There it says, “A prophet is not undignified unless in his hometown.” But in John, the father’s town is Jerusalem, the place of the one whom Jesus calls FATHER. The signs and the words of the Messiah inspire confidence in Samaria and Galilee. The mission of the Messiah is to bring together the children of Israel who have been driven apart. The signs also invite contradiction, in Jerusalem, John 5 and 9, but also in Galilee, John 6. However, the decision of approval or rejection is made in Jesus’ hometown, Jerusalem. For the Messiah and his work—liberation—come from the Judeans, as already heard. Jesus ben Joseph comes from Nazareth, Galilee, but the Messiah comes from Jerusalem. Matthew and Luke develop a similar procedure in their stories of origin (Matthew and Luke 1-2). Their Messiah must come from the city of David; he will renew the kingdom of David. In John, the Messiah is priestly-prophetic, therefore he must come from Jerusalem.

The Messianic example of the *other* sign shall happen to a king’s official. John takes his material from a tradition that the Synoptics have also worked on. Mark does not have the narrative. Matthew and Luke are about a *centurio*, *hekatontarchos*, a “man of a hundred,” thus a Roman sub-officer. John is not about a *goy*, at least not about a Roman military man. The man is in the service of a patron king from the house of Herod, appointed by the Romans. Such branch managers of the *Rome company* additionally exploited the population. Herod Antipas and his officials were hated in Galilee. These people nominally were *Israelites*, their officials were recruited from the regional population. Our story is about one “of the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” In John, it is, moreover, about his son, not about a slave, as in Matthew and Luke. In Israel, Judea and the Judeans are the *center*, Samaria, Galilee, and their inhabitants are the *periphery*. The officials of the Herodians—in terms of their social standing in Galilee—were a peripheral group.

The official had a son. The son is his future, and in the deadly illness, even his future is at stake. So he asks Jesus to heal his son. Jesus says something that seems to have little to do with the matter, “If you had not seen *signs* and *proofs of power*, you had not trusted.” The comments always see an accusation in v.48. So Wilckens:

They only believe if they have seen signs and wonders. The Old Testament expression has become established in the early Christian missionary language . . . ,

in this respect, a critical tone can certainly be heard in v.48 in the overvaluation of miracles in connection with becoming a believer.”¹⁷⁸

Wilckens had given nine passages from Acts, Paul, and the Epistle to the Hebrews. Not one of these passages is critical of “signs and wonders.”¹⁷⁹ Neither is Jesus a *theios anēr*, “divine man,” like the ancient miracle doctors; Bultmann found such in his *Semeia Source* of John’s Gospel, and since then the invention has haunted the commentaries. Faith, in this kind of theology, is always something that cannot be seen and always causes something that cannot be seen. The meaning of Jesus’ answer, according to these commentaries, is a reproach, in the sense that “I have always to do signs and wonders so that you may believe—when will you believe without me having to do wonders?” The reproach is absurd, it would invalidate the whole Scriptures. We hear Deuteronomy 4:34,

If ever a god had tested it
to come, to take a people from among a people,
with trials, with signs, with proofs of power,
with war, with a strong hand, with an outstretched arm,
with all these awe-inspiring great things,
which the NAME, your God, has done for you in Egypt before your eyes?

Liberation has always to be experienced sensually in Israel, “Do not forget,” says Moses, “all the speeches¹⁸⁰ you *have seen*, that they will not depart from your heart all the days of your life . . .” (Deuteronomy 4:9). So if Israel had not seen any signs and proofs of power even then, it would not have trusted and could not have trusted. It is about the double designation of what is happening; signs (*’othoth*, *sēmeia*) refer to Israel as the object of God’s action; proofs of power (*mofthim*, *terata*) refer to God himself as the subject. Therefore, these words often occur together, especially if God’s action is brought up in connection with the liberation from Egypt and in the wilderness. Signs and proofs of power always mean the verification of the liberation power of Israel’s God.

Of course, the official is in no mood for theology, he admonishes Jesus to hurry before it is too late. The sign will be seen, “Your son lives.” “The human”—as he is sud-

178 Ulrich Wilckens, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (NTD Band 4), Göttingen 2000, 90.

179 See also Franz Schnider/Werner Stenger, *Johannes und die Synoptiker. Ein Vergleich ihrer Parallelen*, München 1971, 86, and almost all the others. Klaus Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium. 1. Teilband: Kapitel 1-10* (ThKNT), Stuttgart 2000, 178, strives for a Jewish tradition as proof that it is about hearing, not about seeing signs (Shemot Rabba 5,13). But this Midrash—as an argument for obedience (something else than “faith”)—does not mean a devaluation of signs.

180 [The Hebrew word *devarim* has a wide range of meanings: “word, matter, thing, fact, speech”; if it is about the NAME’s words or speeches, it is implied that this word at the same time manifests itself in deeds and facts, in signs and proofs of power.]

denly called—“trusted the word (*logos, davar*) that Jesus said to him. If humankind sees signs and proofs of power that are liberating and reviving, then they trust. But what if they see nothing more, how can they still trust? John invokes the question but only answers it in 20:24 ff.

The official insists, “Run down before my infant dies!” The answer is, “Your son lives.” The man trusts this word. Without having seen anything! This seems to contradict what we just said: Signs and proofs of power cause the trust of Israel. The understatement of the commentaries is anti-Jewish. Jews “believe” when they see signs and acts of power, Christians “believe” without the like, and that is *genuine* “belief.” We express it so that nothing anti-Jewish remains smoldering. Of course, in the days of the failure of the Messiah, of his departure, you can see nothing but the unshakable power of the world order and the ruins of Jerusalem. It is the difference between the Israel of sensually experienced and experienceable liberation and Israel in front of the ruins of its history. This Israel is required to hold on to a Messianic perspective at a moment when it seems to have lost its future. Certainly, there is a tension between *seeing* and *trusting* in this situation. There are times without *signs and proofs of power*, as Israel knows and sings in the bleak song: *Why, God, do you detest forever*, Psalm 74:9,

We no longer see our signs,
Nowhere a prophet any more,
nobody is with us, who knows until when . . .

The official has no choice but to trust. Only afterward the man will find out whether he was in the hands of a messianic charlatan. What is true and therefore trustworthy can always be determined afterward, whether in good or in evil. He must have the affirmation that his son lives. The fever has left his child, his slaves say. “When?” “In the seventh hour.” The official must be sure that it is not a spontaneous recovery, but that the word of Jesus has brought the child back to life and founded his future. The exact time is crucial. Only now it is possible to have real trust; the first trust was a trust in advance. If it is certain that something has really changed, has really turned to good, the word of Jesus becomes a sign and a proof of power. He and his whole house—wife, children, servants—they trust because all have seen that the word *is happening*.

The first stretch of way led Jesus to Cana in Galilee, 1:43 ff. Then the way leads a second time—via Jerusalem, the land of Judea, the Jordan, and via Samaria—back to Cana, Galilee. There, the other sign happens. Jesus’ entire life journey, from Galilee (1:43) to Galilee (21:1 ff.), is concentrated in this passage 2:1 to 4:54. These are the ways to the first and the second sign at Cana. A third time the way will lead from the land of Judea to Galilee, 5:1-7:1. Finally, we find Jesus in Galilee; 21:1 ff. does not, however, tell the last walk of Jesus from Jerusalem to Galilee: he *is* or *is happening* in Galilee, as “the Lord” (21:7). All signs that are happening in Israel—Judea, Jeru-

saalem, and Galilee—can and must be traced back to the two signs 2:1 ff. and 4:46 ff. With these two signs, the Messianic wedding and the revival of the son, the foundation for the things to come is laid. Here—and thus—the Messiah was “revealed, made manifest.”

PART II: THE HIDDEN MESSIAH, 5:1-12:50

The second part deals with the conflict between the Messianic community and its opponents, the Judeans. In this conflict Jesus is not accepted as the Messiah and is not perceived as such; as the Messiah, he is hidden. This part consists of five chapters of varying length. They contain the events during five different festivals of the Judeans.¹⁸¹

There are *signs* here too, and here too they appear in pairs: The healing of the paralyzed and the feeding of Israel (5 and 6) as well as the opening of the eyes and the revival of Israel (9 and 11). The signs are the works through which Jesus completes the work of God. And the works are the signs and proofs of power (*ʾothoth, mof-thim*).

[But both chapters 6 and 12—and both “near Passover”—show that Jesus as the Messianic King is completely misunderstood.]

- 7. A Festival. Life of the Age to Come, 5:1-47
- 8. Near Passover. The Nourisher of Israel, 6:1-71
- 9. *Sukkot*, the Feast of Tabernacles. The Great Struggle, 7:1-10:21
- 10. *Hanukkah*, the Festival of Renewal. Living and Dying, 10:22-11:54
- 11. The Nearness of the Passover, 11:55-12:50

7. A Festival. Life of the Age to Come, 5:1-47¹⁸²

The chapter consists of three sections of different lengths. The first part tells the healing of a paralyzed person on a feast day, 5:1-9a. This feast day is a Shabbat, and this fact causes controversy. At first glance, it is about the question of whether it is allowed to heal a sick person. This question is not dealt with here, it will be taken up later, 7:21 ff.

The second section of chapter 5 deals with the questions: Who “is working” (*ergazesthai*), and what “works” (*erga*) are actually at issue? The “work” of the God of Israel and of the one whom he sends is “to make alive,” *zōopoiein*, 5:9b-18.

181 [Originally TV had placed chapter 11—concerning the nearness of the last and decisive Passover in John—at the beginning of part III instead of the end of part II.]

182 On the order of chapters 4, 5, and 6, see the introduction to the interpretation of chapter 6.

The third section is introduced by a parable “of the father and son” (5:19-21) and then determined by the keyword *krinein*, “to conduct a trial”, and *krisis*, “judgment.” This passage itself has two subparts, “This is now” (5:22-30), and “Moses, my witness” (5:31-47).

Many commentaries connect chapter 5 with 7:9 ff. and close chapter 6 with the passage 4:43 ff.; thus, scholars say, you get a closed account of the appearance of Jesus in Jerusalem. At the same time, the healing of the son of the official (4:43 ff.) is combined with the feeding of Israel (6:1ff.) in Galilee, and we get a logical explanation of how Jesus came to Jerusalem all at once. Our logic is not John’s logic. His logic is the logic of the festivals. Not a single old manuscript has cast doubt on the order of the text that has been handed down.

7.1 The Work and the Shabbat, 5:1-18

7.1.1 Paralysis, 5:1-9a

5:1 After this, there was a Judean festival;
and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.
5:2 In Jerusalem, by the Sheep Gate, is an immersion bath
called in Hebrew Bethzatha—house of olives—,¹⁸³
having five porticoes.
5:3 In these lay a crowd of invalids—blind, lame, crippled.¹⁸⁴
5:5 One man was there who had been sick for thirty-eight years.¹⁸⁵
5:6 Jesus, seeing this man lying down there
and knowing that the time had been long enough,
said to him,
“Do you want to become whole?”
5:7 The sick man answered him,
“Sir,

183 BETHZATHA: The name of the place is transmitted differently by the manuscripts; also worth considering are the readings “Bethesda” and “Bethsaida.”

184 After the word “crippled” other manuscripts (A, C, L, Θ, Ψ, etc.) clarify given the end of v.7: “. . . who awaited the movement of the water. A messenger from heaven descended into the immersion bath and swirled the water. Whoever was the first to enter after the swirling of the water became well, from whatever disease he might have been afflicted.” Especially the oldest manuscripts do not have this passage, and therefore the text edition of Nestle/Aland only includes it in the footnote apparatus.

185 THIRTY-EIGHT: The number “thirty-eight” for the time of the disease surely refers to Deuteronomy 2:14, where it says that Israel, after refusing to go into the land, had to wander in the wilderness for 38 years. During that time, “the whole generation of the men of war died.” All that was valiant in Israel was dead. This aberration of Israel is also the subject here, as can be seen from 5:14.

I have no human—when the water is disturbed—
to throw me into the immersion bath.
At the moment I come,
another one goes down ahead of me.”¹⁸⁶
5:8 Jesus says to him,
“Get up, take away your pallet, and walk your way!”¹⁸⁷
5:9a Immediately the man was whole, took away his pallet,
and was walking his way.

We are talking about a festival Shabbat. The festival is not defined more closely. This is surprising because John usually always names the festivals, *Passover* (nine times), *Sukkot*, and *Hanukkah* (once each). A festival (*heortē, chag*) is a break in the series of days when people do their work. The interruption is dedicated to the completion of God’s work of creation.¹⁸⁸ At every great festival, all Israel is standing in front of its God. Which God? A God who “rested from all his work which he had made” (Genesis 2:2)? Or a God who “is working until today” (John 5:17)? This question must be answered at every festival, on every Shabbat: Has God accomplished, is God celebrating, or does he not? Do all the paralyzed walk, all the blind see, is the human already “in the image of God and His likeness”? Under the prevailing conditions, every festival invokes this question. For this reason, the festival can at first remain without a closer definition.

The place is an immersion bath at the old Sheep Gate, which was built under Nehemiah more than 450 years ago (Nehemiah 3). The immersion bath had five porticoes. This statement seems to be superfluous. Either it indicates that it is a large complex; others see the symbolism of the five books of the Torah in the five columned halls.

It is a spa. According to the legend, a heavenly messenger was supposed to whirl the water and the first invalid who then went into the water was supposed to be healed. The first part of the book of Isaiah ends with the song, “Let the wilderness rejoice”, as we already mentioned in the discussion of 4:14. This song is about the final liberation of Israel from the stranglehold of his enemies. Then it says, 35:5-6,

Then the eyes of the blind are opened,
the ears of the deaf are opened,
then the paralyzed one jumps like a stag,
the tongue of the mute will rejoice.

186 GOES DOWN AHEAD OF ME: See above on v.3.

187 WALK YOUR WAY: *Peripatein* refers not only to the physical walking ability but to the way of life (Hebrew *halakha*), see 1:36.

188 “Festival” (*hadsh*, having the same roots as the Hebrew *chag*) is what Islam calls the great pilgrimage to Mecca, which every devout Muslim has to undertake once in his life.

In the Messianic groups, the song played an important role (Matthew 11:2 ff par. Luke 7:18 ff.). But there is an even clearer reference. The person in question was an invalid for thirty-eight years. Moses had sent out scouts on his way to the land. After their return, they advised the people not to go further there, because the conditions in the country would not allow them to move in and live according to the Torah there, “Giants we have seen there,” Deuteronomy 1:28. The whole project had been foul from the beginning [1:27], “Out of hatred, the NAME has led us away from the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites and to destroy us.” The result: defeat and stagnation in the truest sense of the word, for thirty-eight years Israel will go around in circles. Then the turning point comes, Deuteronomy 2:1-3, 13-14,

Then we turned away, moved into the wilderness, on the way to the Reed Sea, as the NAME spoke to me (Moses).

And we walked in circles around the mountain Seir for many days.

The NAME spoke to me,

“It is enough for you to walk in circles around this mountain, turn north.

...

Now get up, you shall cross the brook Zered (border river).”

We crossed the brook Zered.

The days we went from Kadesh-Barnea

until we crossed the brook Zered:

Thirty-eight years,

until the entire generation of war-capable men had died away

from the midst of the camp,

as the NAME had sworn to you.

Certainly, John with that number *thirty-eight* reminds us of the story of overcoming the paralysis of Israel. “Jesus realized that the time had been long enough.” He acts here in the same power as the NAME said to Israel, “Enough (*rav*) it is for you to go in circles”—just “after the many days (*yamim rabim, hēmeras pollas*).” The man wants to, but cannot, “Others go down into the water before me,” he could not be the first—precondition for healing—to go down into the water stirred up by the healing angel. Israel cannot free itself from this paralysis.

In Deuteronomy, the initiative starts from the mobilizing word: “. . . It is enough for you to circle around this mountain; turn north. Now get up!” The word there created an Israel capable of action; now, according to John, the Human who embodies the word (1:14) creates a new, Messianic Israel capable of action. Jesus recognized that “the time was long enough” and said, “Get up, take away your pallet, and walk your way.” I do not understand why most commentators refuse to see this parallel.¹⁸⁹

189 The reference to Deuteronomy 2:1-3 and 2:13-14 is not seen by most commentators or is

At the moment they do not read politically, the difference becomes inexplicable and the connection is lost. In Deuteronomy, Israel's capability to act presupposes a political situation—a short period in the slipstream of great politics or the politics of the great powers. According to John, the rule of the Flavian emperors leaves no political slipstream anywhere in the Orient. Any insistence on the possibility of being able to live in this Roman Empire according to the Torah of Moses is illusory and leads the people astray (*hamartia*, “sin”). This is a principal moment in the political thought of John. The *incapability* to act, the political paralysis, must be made visible, especially in comparison with Deuteronomy; the number *thirty-eight* stands for Israel's political incapability to act. Only Messianism, or better, the Messiah, redeems Israel from its political paralysis. The refusal to get involved with the Messiah is idealization and perpetuation of the paralysis—contends John.

The human got up, took away his pallet, and walked his way, thus becoming the trigger of a conflict that makes visible the political difference between the Judeans and Jesus (John).

7.1.2. The Shabbat, 5:9b-18

5:9b Now that day was Shabbat,
 5:10 so the Judeans said to the man who had been healed,
 “It’s Shabbat!
 It’s against Torah¹⁹⁰ for you to take away your pallet!”
 5:11 He answered them,
 “The man who made me whole—that one told me,
 ‘Take away your pallet and walk your way.’”
 5:12 They questioned him,
 “Who is the human who told you,
 ‘Take it away and walk your way?’”
 5:13 But he who had been healed didn’t know who it was,
 because Jesus had turned away,
 being a crowd at that place.
 5:14 After this, Jesus found him in the sanctuary and said to him,
 “There, you have become whole.

explicitly denied (Barrett; Bernhard Weiß: “pure gimmickry”). Only Klaus Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium. 1. Teilband: Kapitel 1-10 (ThKNT)*, Stuttgart 2000, 184, sees the reference; it is “an action of God that turns the calamity.” Wengst rightly rejects the interpretation of the anti-Semite Emanuel Hirsch, according to which this should be a disease of Judaism. But the 38 years can very well be interpreted as the condition of a politically paralyzed Israel in the time after 70 CE, without arguing anti-Jewish.

190 [As the Greek expression *ouk exestin*, “it is not allowed, it is not lawful,” refers to the Torah, I take over this translation of the CJB.]

- No longer go astray,¹⁹¹
that nothing worse may happen to you.”
- 5:15 The man went away and announced to the Judeans
that it was Jesus who had made him whole.
- 5:16 And that’s why the Judeans were persecuting Jesus,
because he was doing these things on Shabbat.
- 5:17 But he answered them,
“My FATHER is working until now,
and I too am working.”¹⁹²
- 5:18 That’s why the Judeans all the more were seeking to kill him,
not only because he was breaking Shabbat,
but also he was saying that GOD was his own FATHER,¹⁹³
making himself equal to GOD.

What follows now is structured in the same way as the process reported in Chapter 9: Healing—questioning by the Perushim—new meeting with Jesus—discussion with the Perushim. The problem is with the Shabbat. The healed person is confronted with the reproach, “It is Shabbat, and you are not allowed to take away your pallet.” He answers, “The one who made me whole, that very same one, has said, take away your pallet and walk your way.” We can assume that the man knew that it was Shabbat and that it is not allowed to carry pallets. But he who can make whole people like him has the right to say, even on the Shabbat, “Take away your pallet and walk your way.” The man can assume that Jesus has a power similar to that of the heavenly messenger who stirs up the water in the immersion bath. Implicitly he pro-

191 [The Greek word *hamartanein* in the Septuagint and Messianic writings refers to the Hebrew word *chata’*, “to miss (an aim, the way),” which usually is translated as “to sin.” But TV avoids this traditional expression because of its morally and individualistically restricted implications, and considers *hamartia* most of all politically as “aberration” and *hamartanein* as “going astray.”]

192 WORKING: *Ergazesthai*, Hebrew *‘asa mel’akha*. Apparently, according to John, creation is not complete, nor does God not “celebrate of all the works that He made,” Genesis 2:3. Since the final Shabbat is yet to come, Jesus too must do works like His FATHER.

193 SAYING THAT GOD WAS HIS OWN FATHER: *Patera idion elegen ton theon*: So the problem is not that Jesus calls God “Father”—this is also done by the Judeans in 8:41, and with the words *‘avinu malkhenu* (“our Father, our King”) Judaism addresses God in many traditional prayers. The only problem is the singular. By referring to God as “his Father,” Jesus seems to implicitly exclude the Jews from being children of God. In the eyes of the Judeans, the penetrating “my Father” in the mouth of Jesus means that he claims the God (and Father!) of Israel for his own Messianic enterprise and makes it the real concern of God, everything else would be then godless. But “my Father” does not mean that Jesus excludes all Judeans. In 8:41–44, he accuses very specific Judeans of having chosen the emperor, the *diabolos*, as their God, Father, King (see 19:15!) and thus excluded *themselves* from the filiation of GOD.

nounces what Mark 2:28 says, “The Human, *bar enosh*, is Lord even of Shabbat.” This is the common view of all Messianic groups, from Paul to Luke and John.

Jesus had turned away from the healed man “because there was a crowd of people there.” This is always understood as a “logical” separation because of the crowd in the place. The verb is rare; it occurs only in this place in the Messianic scriptures and only seven times in the Septuagint. In all cases it means active and conscious action; Jesus deliberately turned away from the event.¹⁹⁴

The healed one could only designate his healer by his deed. That should be enough at first. It is then Jesus himself who intensifies the conflict. As consciously as Jesus turned away from him, as consciously does he seek him out. The man did not seek Jesus, rather this one *found* him. Surely it is possible to write that Jesus *met* him, but *to find* is accurate because he had something important to say to him: “Now that you have become whole, do not go astray any longer, lest something worse happen to you.” What then is the aberration of which the paralyzed man should be guilty? That can be nothing else but the paralysis itself, the incapability of Israel to move politically. What is worse for a people than political paralysis?

The political message given with the healing on Shabbat is the reason for the Judeans to persecute Jesus politically. The struggle about the Shabbat is now hinted at and continued in chapter 7 until it reaches a climax in chapter 9.

Here Jesus answers with a principled statement: “My FATHER works until now, so do I.” What John says in a dry sentence, Mark 2:23-28 tells in a small narrative, which boils down to the sentence that the *Human* is Lord also over the Shabbat. Mark has Jesus ask in a dispute with the Perushim, “Is it permitted to do good on the Shabbat or to do evil, to set souls free or to kill?” Creation is the work of God, of which it is said, “And God saw that it was good.” Creation is “to make the good,” Genesis 1:31-2:4a,

And God saw that all that he had made was good, exceedingly!
It became evening, it became morning, the sixth day.
And completed were the heaven and the earth and all their order.
And on the seventh day God finished his works (*erga*) that he had made,

194 [Thus, Jesus consciously turns away from the paralyzed man, to seek him alone, without any influence from the crowd. In the Scriptures, the word “to turn away, turning away” is said of Elisha when he turns to the disrespectful boys (2 Kings 2:24), and of Josiah when he turns to tombs to make the altar at Bethel unclean (2 Kings 23:16-18), from which he takes bones to burn them on the altar—but not the bones of two prophets of YHWH. Does John also want to invoke the “respect” that the healed one is due to him, that the healed Israel owes him? Does he want to invoke the purification of Israel from false gods by Josiah—his cultural revolution based on the rediscovered Torah in the temple—, and the question of which prophet deserves respect?]

he rested solemnly on the seventh day from all his works (*erga*) that he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, he sanctified it, for on him he rested solemnly from all his works (*erga*), which God created by making them.

In this connection “My FATHER works until now” can only mean that creation is *not accomplished*. John can read the first sentence of the Scriptures only presently, “In the beginning (*in principle!*) God creates heaven and earth, and the earth *is* tohubo-hu . . .” Therefore God does not yet “rest,” and still less “solemnly”; there is no reason yet to celebrate Shabbat; rather, it is a matter of “doing works” (*erga-zesthai*). The theme is taken up in the introduction to the bread speech (6:28). The theme also appears in the story about the man born blind (9:4). Shabbat is only when all works are done, when all men are healed, and they are finally what they are: the image of God. Until now men are anything but the image of God; they are not what they are—the image of God—and they are what they are not: mutilated, broken people; there is nothing to celebrate. At least that is what these Messianists think. The thought of an unfinished creation is not taken up by Jesus’ opponents. Their reproach is that Jesus not only dissolves the Shabbat but addresses God as if he were his own Father and makes himself so godlike.

7.2. The Parable of Father and Son, 5:19-21

5:19 Jesus answered and said to them,
 “Amen, amen, I say to you:
 The son cannot do anything of himself,
 but only what he sees the father doing;
 whatever this one does, the son does in the same way.
 5:20 For the father loves the son like a friend¹⁹⁵
 and shows him everything he does;
 and greater works than these he will show him
 so that you will be astonished.¹⁹⁶

195 LIKE A FRIEND: Here it says *philei*, “loves” (it is to be added “like a friend”—*philos*), and not *agapa*, “is solidary with.” 5:19-20 is a *mashal*, a “parable-speech,” about the well-known relationship between “normal” fathers and sons. Therefore we write the words “father” and “son” according to the usual spelling. From 5:21 on, it is then about the relationship between the God of Israel (FATHER) and the *bar enosh*, here indicated with the abbreviation “Son.” Here we must write “Son” to make the analogy audible. Only in 16:27 is FATHER the subject of *philein*.

196 SO THAT YOU WILL BE ASTONISHED: *Hina hymeis thaumazēte*: You have to think of *ethaumase*, Aramaic *thevah*, “he was astonished,” namely King Nebuchadnezzar, when the three men came alive out of his furnace (Daniel 3:91 LXX; 3:24 in the Masoretic text). Therefore, unlike Nebuchadnezzar, the Judeans should not be surprised when the dead hear the voice (5:28).

5:21 Just as the FATHER raises the dead
makes them alive,
so too the Son makes alive whom he wants to.

A peculiarity of the Gospel of John is the designation of the name of God YHWH with the vocable FATHER. Here John discloses to us how he came upon this title. He starts from that social structure in which the chain of fathers—sons forms the supporting framework. We are dealing with a patriarchally structured society. The son continues the life story—the Scriptures say, the NAME—of the FATHER. He only does what he sees the FATHER doing, it says in John.

The sentence, “My FATHER works until today, so do I”, is now continued with a parable. The father *does*, the son also *does*, but always only what he sees the father doing. In patriarchally structured societies, in which not innovation but tradition is the condition of progress, this is a universally valid proposition; in the father’s workshop the son learns by imitation, “What the father does, the son also does.” Only in this way, he honors the father. Because the father is connected with his son as with the one who will continue his history or his name, he shows him what he is doing, “For the father loves the son as a friend (*philei*)” —this applies generally—and the father “shows him all that he does” —this also applies generally. Even in patriarchally structured societies, there are intact social structures. The father is devoted to the son like a friend, not like a subordinate; he shows him what he does (his works) so that the son can do such works, even greater works (progress by imitation).

Then John resolves the parable. “To your astonishment” it is now no longer a matter of any father and any son, but of him whom John calls FATHER, and of him whom John calls Son of Man, *bar enosh*. The God of Israel shows the one whom he sends (Son) his works of creation, and even greater works: the raising of the dead (Ezekiel 37!), the restoration of creation. The transition from parable to theologically and politically grasped reality is shown in the transition from the present (*deiknysin*) to the future (*deixei*). The Father “will show him greater works so that you (the Judean opponents) will be astonished.” The work of the Father as the God of Israel is “to raise and give life to the dead.” The work of the Son is also to *make alive*. Admittedly with the restriction: *whom he wants to*. This restriction invokes the authority that the Father, the “advanced in days” from the vision of Daniel, gave to the Son. *Whom he wants to*, therefore, is not arbitrariness, but the result of that trial that Daniel describes.

7.3 Interpretation of the Parable: “And this is now,” 5:22-30

5:22 The FATHER does not judge anyone
but has given all judgment to the Son,
5:23 so that all may dignify the Son
as they are dignifying the Father.
Whoever is not dignifying the Son

is not dignifying the Father who sent him.

5:24 Amen, amen, I say to you,
 whoever is hearing my word
 and trusting the ONE who sent me
 has the life of the age to come
 and does not come into judgment
 but has crossed over from death to life.

5:25 Amen, amen, I say to you,
 an hour is coming
 —and that is now—
 when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of GOD,
 and those who hear will live.

5:26 For just as the FATHER himself is living,¹⁹⁷
 so he gave it to the Son to live himself.

5:27 And he gave him authority to lead the trial,
 because he is *bar enosh*, the Human.

5:28 Don't be astonished at this;
 because the hour is coming
 when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice.

5:29 They will go out,
 those who did the good to a resurrection of life,
 and those who practiced the foolish to a resurrection of judgment.

5:30 I cannot do anything of myself.
 As I hear, I judge;
 and my judgment is reliable;¹⁹⁸
 because I don't seek my own will,
 but the will of the ONE who sent me.

197 HIMSELF IS LIVING: *Zōēn echein en heauto*, literally “to have life in oneself.” “To have” is a verb that does not exist in the Semitic languages. There are several Arabic verbs (such as *in-talaka*, “to obtain,” *iqṭani*, “to acquire,” *aḥus*, “to grasp”) that can be translated as “to have,” but the plain “to have” is expressed by a preposition with a personal suffix. There is also no reflexive pronoun in the proper sense. The expression probably paraphrases the Aramaic *chay leh*, “he shall live” (literally: “life for him”). In any case, God does not “have life.” He does not get it through others, like all living beings, including humans, but he is his own life and thus the origin of all life. He gave the Son the authority to be the origin of all life. The translation “to have life in himself” is meaningless.

198 RELIABLE: *Dikaïos*, “proven, reliable.” The stem *dik-* stands for the Hebrew root *tzadaq*, which according to Martin Buber is to be rendered with German words of the stem “wahr-.” *Dikaïosynē* is, therefore, “Bewährung, Wahrhaftigkeit, Wahrheit,” “probation, truthfulness, truth.” For “right” we have the Hebrew root *shafat*, “to do right, to let justice prevail, to judge,” *krinein*, *krisis* stands for Hebrew *mishpat*, “law and judgment.” [Here I take the word “reliable” for *tzaddiq*, *dikaïos*, because it is one of the possible English translations of the German word “bewährt.”]

The trial is now entirely (*krisis pasa*) a matter of that Son—“for the Father does not judge”! The aim is the dignity of the Son. It is equal to the dignity given to the God of Israel. Exactly this “equality” (*kathōs*) is unbearable for the opponents. The “dignity” (*timē*), closely related to “honor” (*doxa, kavod*), creates a connection to Daniel, where *timē* stands for the Aramaic *yeqir*, “dignity”, the royal dignity of the judge (Daniel 7:14). The whole royal power and dignity have been given by the God of Israel to the *bar enosh*, the one *like a human*. When this transfer is completed, the Son is entitled to the same dignity as the one who sends the Son.

The *sending* belongs to the *self-definition* of the Father (active, the sender) as well as the Son (passive, the sent). What else “God” can or cannot be, is beyond any human grasp. “God” in Israel was he, she, it which Moses sent (Exodus 3:15), “This is my name for the ages, this is my remembrance from generation to generation.” “God” in Israel shall now be he, she, it which Jesus sends. All other or further or deeper “theology” is blasphemy.

This also applies to Islam. “God” is only revealed through the prophet Muhammad. Admittedly, Judaism and Islam do not follow this Johannine path to identify the messenger with the sender. There remains an unbridgeable difference. Therefore Moses (Torah) is “debatable,” therefore the Talmud. With Muhammad, this is more difficult. The *hadith Muhammad*, the tradition of Muhammad, is indeed an indispensable guideline of life for the believers, but it is not the Qur’an, the word of Allah. The Qur’an is not “debatable,” there is no Islamic Talmud.

John here goes a step further than Moses and Muhammad, but he does not make the messenger equal to the sender (*identity of the essence—consubstantia*). The Council theology of classical Christianity takes this last step. To Judaism and Islam, this is not comprehensible.

The following sentences belong to the center of what John has to say. We got to know the term *zōē aiōnios* during the discussion of 3:15 as the *life of the age to come*. “He who hears *my* words and trusts in him who sent *me* (because he sent me!) will receive the life of the age to come,” which means that he will not have to stand trial. “He has passed over from death into life,” accomplished fact, no future, present, “and that is now!” These sentences are introduced by the famous double *Amen*. It gave immense emphasis to what followed.

The next sentence is also introduced in this way. The dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. “And this is now”—the pathos of revolution. All who ever proclaimed the revolution, 1776, 1789, 1848, 1917, etc., said of all the promises of revolutionaries, “This is now.” It is coming, and it can come only because it is already there—now. To the woman at Jacob’s well he had said, “Woman, the hour is coming—and this is now!” The hour of overcoming that history of murder, manslaughter, and destruction between Judea and Samaria—now!¹⁹⁹

199 Apparently, this has been a thorn in the side of some people from early on. An early reader

The Father *is* life himself, that is what the strange expression means, which literally says, “has life in himself.” By endowing the Son with all power—especially judicial power—he thereby gives him the authority to be life himself, that is, to secure life, to give life.

Jesus here obstructs the possibility of interpreting “symbolically.” The dead in their graves will hear the voice. Now, this is not an unusual idea for the opponents, the Perushim; they know the vision of Daniel and they know the idea of judgment over the living and the dead. This very old conception is to exclude that the criminal, buried in dignity, can escape justice by his death. We are talking here about the *authority of the law* that is not limited by death. Those whose works are in line with the Creator, “who do the good,” experience the “resurrection of life.” Those whose works are the absolute opposite of the works of creation, which do not make alive, but kill and murder, experience the “resurrection of judgment.” And that’s why his trial is reliable.

Jesus is nothing but the executor, “As I hear, so I judge.” This makes his judgment reliable, as the one who sends him, is the *tzaddiq, dikaios*, the *reliable* or truthful one. No, here there is no arbitrariness (“only those I want”), but the lawful will of the God of Israel, the one who sends him. The work “to make the dead alive in their graves” is the work of the law and the righteous judge. This work is yet to come, the judgment is not yet completed, neither to the living nor to the dead. Only when the righteous judge powerfully asserts himself and his right, will the God of Israel “solemnly rest from all the works that he has done.” Only then is Shabbat.

John 5:29 is based on Daniel 12:1-2,

At this time Michael, the Grand Prince, stands by your people.
This time will be a time of distress,
as it has never happened since there was a nation on earth.
At that time your people will escape,
all those that are written down in the book.
All those who sleep in the dust of the ground are awakened,
these to the life of the age to come,
those to the deterrent punishment of the age to come.

It is about the people that the NAME has written down in his book. In the scene of the Golden Calf, the NAME says to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against me, I will wipe him out of my book” (Exodus 32:25). All Israel is awakened, the very Israel from the time of the Maccabean wars, where some remained faithful to the Torah, others surrendered to Hellenism. Strangely enough, in John, the criterion is not pointed to the trust in the Messiah, but we have a similar thought as in the great

of the Codex Sinaiticus from the 4th century, two Latin manuscripts from the 4th and 5th century, and Tertullian (around 200) delete these words in 5:25.

judgment scene in Matthew, 25:31 ff. “Doing the good” is the criterion, in the negative form “the foolish practice” (*ta phaula praxantes*). This is not Pauline, but it is evangelical! [And see 2 Corinthians 5:10, too.]

7.4. Moses, My Witness, 5:31-47

The fragment 5:31-47 can be divided as follows: The testimony, 5:31-37a, and the Scriptures, 5:37b-47.²⁰⁰

7.4.1. The Testimony, 5:31-37a

5:31 If I testify about myself, then my testimony is not trustworthy.
 5:32 There is someone else testifying about me,
 and I know that the testimony is trustworthy
 that he testifies of me.
 5:33 You have sent to John,
 and he has testified to fidelity.
 5:34 Not that I accept human testimony,
 but I say this so that you may be liberated.
 5:35 That one was the torch, burning and shining.
 To the hour you were willing to rejoice in his light.
 5:36 But I have a testimony greater than that of John:
 The works that the FATHER has given me to accomplish them.
 The very works I am doing testify about me
 that the FATHER has sent me.
 5:37a And he who sent me—the FATHER,²⁰¹
 has testified about me.

The objection of the opponents tacitly is that one they openly put forward in 8:13, “You testify about yourself; your testimony is not trustworthy.”

200 Bultmann and commentators in his succession say that—in terms of subject matter and choice of words—section 5:31-47 belongs in the discussion contexts reported in chapters 7 and 8. Thus Becker, like Bultmann, shifts chapter 6 backward. Then it follows on seamlessly from the “Galilean” chapter. His order then is: 5:31-47 + 7:15-24 + 7:1. But even then the problems are not solved. For how can the opponents of the seventh chapter be identical with the opponents of whom it is said, “They wanted to rejoice in the hour with his (John-John’s) light”? The Perushim, and the Judeans in general, are difficult to imagine as “fans” of the Baptist. With text manipulation, you solve one problem, and then at least two others are added. That is why we stick to the handed-down version.

201 WHO SENT ME, THE FATHER: *Ho pempas me patēr*. To John, the essence of God is that he sends, first Moses, then John the Baptist (1:33), and, finally, Jesus. John takes the participle as an essence-defining adjective, “The having sent me FATHER.” We can only translate this as a subordinate clause; see 8:16, 18; 12:49.

To this objection, Jesus responds by admitting that his testimony would not be trustworthy if he gave testimony about himself. There is another witness, John. The opponents have demanded testimony from him, and his testimony is “to fidelity.” That is, this one had testified that the God of Israel keeps fidelity. Jesus points to John; everything he says and does serves the liberation of Israel.

And John sets him a monument with the words, “This one was like a torch, burning, shining.” He adds the—in most translations—enigmatic words, “You wanted to rejoice in his light *for a short time*.”²⁰² Are those who “sent to John” (1:24) identical to those who “rejoiced in his light to the hour”? *Pros hōran*, “to the hour,” does not mean “short time”; for this, John has other expressions.²⁰³ Which hour? Psalm 5:12 reads, “Those who are sheltered with you will rejoice / *until the age to come* they will rejoice (*eis aiōna agalliasontai*). . .” If John refers to Psalm 5:12, *agaliathēnai pros hōran* means that the admiration for John is not based on the messianic aspect of his appearance, but on the moral appreciation of his person. Among the admirers was, for example, the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, who in his *Jewish Antiquities* describes John as a moral preacher,

. . . a good man . . . (who) commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness toward one another, and piety toward God . . .²⁰⁴

People like Flavius Josephus had nothing to do with the messianic preaching of John, or even with his messianic testimony. They wanted him as an esteemed ethicist who did not really question the present order. “John? A good man, one of us. He wants to make people better, but not overthrow the ruling order. But this Jesus? A renegade. These messianists? Fanatics!” These must have been the arguments with which John and his group had to deal with and which probably caused trouble for some in his group. It seems that the admiration for John was only temporary.

The decisive testimony of Jesus is his works. And the fact that Jesus does these works he attributes to the accomplished fact that the Father has testified about Jesus, perfect tense! This he has done by giving all power to Jesus—and this, only this, is shown in the works. Here it is about the work through which he enables Israel—paralyzed for thirty-eight years and circling the mountain Seir—to walk.

202 Barrett, Bultmann, and others refer [for *pros hōran*] to Hermann L. Strack / Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch II*, München ⁶1974, 466. The expression is in contrast to *aiōnion*, “until the age to come.” In Philemon’s letter, we find this expression: “For perhaps that is why he had been separated *for a short time*, that you may keep him *until the age to come*.” (v.15). In the letter of the Ecclesia in Smyrna about the execution of Bishop Polykarpos of Smyrna in 156 we read, “You [= the Roman functionary] threaten with fire that burns *for a short time* and extinguishes instantly; but you misjudge the fire of the coming judgment and punishment in the age to come that is kept for the wicked” (Karl Bihlmeyer (Hg.): *Die Apostolischen Väter*, Tübingen 1970, Mart.Pol. 11,2).

203 *Mikron (chronon)*: 7:33; 12:35; 13:33; 14:19; 16:16, 17, 18, 19.

204 Flavius Josephus, [Ant. 18, 5](#).

7.4.2. The Scriptures, 5:37b-47

5:37b No, you have never heard his voice,
as little as you have seen his shape;
5:38 for²⁰⁵ you do not have his word firmly in you,²⁰⁶
because you are not trusting the one he sent.
5:39 Explore the Scriptures,²⁰⁷
because you think that in them you have the life of the age to come.
Yes, it is indeed they that are testifying about me,
5:40 but you don't want to come to me to have life!
5:41 I don't accept honor from men,
5:42 but I have recognized you
that you yourselves are not in solidarity with GOD.
5:43 I have come in my FATHER's name,
but you don't accept me;
if someone else would come in his own name,
him you would accept.
5:44 How can you trust
by accepting honor from each other?
But the honor, that from the ONLY ONE,²⁰⁸
you seek not!
5:45 Don't think that it is I who will be your accuser before the FATHER.
There is someone who will be your accuser: Moses,
in whom you have hoped.
5:46 For if you were trusting Moses,
you were trusting me;
for about me that one has written.
5:47 If you are not trusting his written words,
how are you going to trust my spoken words?²⁰⁹

205 CT: *Kai*, as already indicated, stands for the Semitic *we-* or *wa-*. It creates a general connection. The kind of connection remains undetermined and results from the context.

206 YOU DO NOT HAVE HIS WORD FIRMLY IN YOU: *Logon auton ouk echete en hymin menonta*, literally: "his word you do not have staying within you." Here you can clearly see the background of *menein*, namely *'amad*, "standing firm."

207 CT: *Eraunan tas graphas*, "to explore the Scriptures." This expression refers to the teaching activity of the rabbis, their training of the people.

208 ONLY ONE: The ONLY ONE points to the ONE, Deuteronomy 6:4: *YHWH 'elohim YHWH 'echad*, "the NAME (is) God, the NAME is ONE (or ONLY ONE)." Some manuscripts add the word "God," but others, including very old ones, do not bring it.

209 SPOKEN WORDS: *rhēmata*. Written words, *grammata*, mean the Torah of Moses, the *rhēmata* are spoken words, the oral tradition. Here, oral tradition stands against oral tradition, the oral tradition of the Perushim against that of Jesus.

In the second half of v.37, a new idea emerges. To the Messianic groups, the so-called *Scriptural proof* is essential. They do not want to be suspected of starting something completely new, even of founding a new religion. No, the foundation of their political, Messianic conviction is *hai graphai*, “the Scriptures.” At first, John reminds us of Deuteronomy 4. The people stood at the foot of the mountain. There was a lot to be seen (v.11), “The mountain burning with fire up to the heart of heaven, darkness, clouds, thunderstorm darkness.” Then it says, v.12,

The NAME speaks to you from the midst of the fire,
voice of the speeches you have heard,
shape you have not seen at all,
voice only!

It is to this verse that John aims and reverses it into an evil reproach,

No, you have never heard the voice,
as little as you have seen a shape,
for his speech is not firm in you,
because you do not trust him whom he has sent.

Then there is the invitation, “Explore the Scriptures because with them you think you can reach life in the age to come.” “You think” (*dokeite*), says Jesus. The opinion can, but does not have to be wrong, “. . . because they (the Scriptures) bear witness about me.” They did not want to move toward Jesus, so the meaning of the Scriptures remains hidden from them. We will come back to the problem of the interpretation of the Scriptures at the end of the chapter.

At first, the passage serves to prove the reproach, “No, you have never heard the voice.” Rabbinical Judaism means to reach life in the age to come through the study of the Scriptures. In fact, lifelong study of the Scriptures and the oral tradition, as well as the protocols of this study (Talmud), has been the living heart of Rabbinical Judaism, indeed of Judaism in general. John’s accusation is directed against this self-confidence of Rabbinical Judaism. It misses the essential point of the writings, the fixed form of the voice, the Messiah. Not only the works but also the writings are testimony about Jesus. Whoever does not understand that the Scriptures speak about Jesus does not understand anything, so his study of the Scriptures is hollow. They, the opponents, do not want to go to Jesus, and therefore they do not want to receive life. This is the first thesis, vv.39-40.

The second thesis refers polemically to the group structure of the emerging Rabbinical Judaism, related, by the way, to Matthew 23:1 ff.²¹⁰ At first, the reproach is rein-

210 With the difference, of course, that Matthew, in contrast to John, acknowledged the authority of the rabbis, “Do what they say.” Admittedly he rejects their way of life, “Do not act according to their works” (23:3).

forced, “I have recognized you; you are not really in solidarity with God. You preach Deuteronomy 6:4 ff., “Listen, Israel, . . . you shall be in solidarity with the name of your God, with your whole heart, with your whole soul, with your whole passion.” Precisely, however, you are lacking the core of the matter, and the core is the Messiah. According to John, you cannot be in solidarity with God if you are not in solidarity with the messenger of God, Jesus.

They cannot, because they seek the honor of humans. If they would seek the honor of the NAME, they would accept him, because “I have come in the name of my FATHER.” What are you doing? You accept those who come in their own names. You accept what the great rabbi—Johanan ben Sakkai, Gamaliel, etc.— says, but because it is *he* who says it. You accept “dignitaries,” you practice—to use an expression of the Russian communists—“cult of personality.” But you don’t care about the matter, about the honor and power (*kavod*) of the ONLY ONE.

This becomes even clearer when John brings Moses into play. The accusation of the opponents before God is not led by Jesus himself but by Moses. “You,” he says, “put your hope in Moses.” Indeed, the core of the Rabbinical self-understanding is *Moshe rabbenu*, “Moses, our teacher”; we will discuss this in detail when interpreting 9:27 ff. The Perushim—the forerunners of Rabbinical Judaism—will clarify this in the discussion with the blind man, “We, however, are Moses’ disciples, we know that God (and only HE and no one else) spoke to Moses,” 9:28-29. John turns the tables; he has Jesus say, “If you trusted Moses, you should also trust me, for that one has written about me.” Has he?

Scholion 5: Christocentrism and Disinheritance of Judaism

John at this point (5:39 ff.) fights for his reading, his pattern of interpretation—the interpretational principle of his reading, “If you do not trust his written words (*grammata*), how should you trust my spoken words (*rhēmata*)?” We are not surprised that he considers this reading the only legitimate one: a minority that has been subjected to exclusion and persecution never tends to be tolerant.

Originally, the Scriptures (*graphai*) were the written sociopolitical order of a small peasant people in the southern part of Palestine, in Judah. In the Hellenistic period, this order became a vision of humankind, after the Torah was translated into the world language Greek in the late 3rd century BCE. It became the *Grand Narrative*, i.e. the culture-giving universal narrative, in which people and nations know their life narratives to be kept. In all cultural, political, and economic centers of the ancient Orient, from Mesopotamia to Anatolia and North Africa, there were groups of people who centered their lives around this written core of the ancient order.

The Judean population groups in the Hellenistic empires grew not only through the biological fertility of the people deported by the Babylonians but certainly also through the influx of people of non-Judean origin. The latter may well have been the

reason for translating the Scriptures into Greek. This points to the ideological inclusiveness of Israel's Grand Narrative. The development from the order of ancient Judea to a vision of humankind is thus not the work of those Messianists from which later Christianity would emerge.

At the moment when Israel's Grand Narrative is translated into one of the main languages of the *goyim*, the narrative becomes independent. Each author, at the moment of publication, gives his text *into foreign hands*; he no longer determines alone the direction of the reading. Israel's Scriptures were already *alienated* long before Christianity appeared. The dialectic of the expression of *Israel's Scriptures in foreign hands* has to be endured. Whatever the foreign hands bring about to the *Scriptures* of Israel, they remain the Scriptures of *Israel*, the written social order of this, and no other people. On the other hand, the children of Israel, our Jewish contemporaries, cannot undo the alienation of their Scriptures, which began in Alexandria in the 3rd century BCE. To the children of alienation—the *goyim*—the Grand Narrative has been made linguistically accessible by the children of Israel.

John is not a *goy*, he is a child of Israel, his reading of the Scriptures is a Jewish reading of the Scriptures, admittedly one that is quite bizarre in the eyes of the Jewish mainstream since the middle of the 2nd century CE. It is impossible to communicate with Jews about the reading of John. To Jews, it is simply outrageous that Moses is said to have written about Jesus ben Joseph as the ultimate messenger of God. The reading of John, according to which the Torah, prophets, and the other writings—Tanakh—are supposed to be directed to the Messiah (*Christ*), we call a *Christocentric* reading.

The conflict between the rabbis and heads of the synagogues in the Diaspora was also a struggle concerning the reading of the *Scriptures*. The great rabbis and their disciples have a reading that is directed toward a specific line of traditions. We find it at the beginning of the Mishna tractate Avot, "Moses received the Torah from Sinai and passed it on to Joshua, Joshua to the elders, the elders to the prophets, the prophets to the men of the great congregation (*ha-knesset ha-gedola*)." The latter are the guarantors of the rabbis. For Rabbinical Judaism, the only authoritative reading is that traditional reading, oriented toward the tradition from Moses, because this leaves the reading *in their own hands*, directed against the reading *in foreign hands*.

The dispute between the Messianic and Rabbinical communities about the year 100 in the Jewish Diaspora is first of all a dispute about the "true" reading of the Tanakh. The Letter to the Hebrews and certainly the Barnabas Epistle are attempts by the Diaspora to attack the Rabbinical—*Moses-centered*—monopoly of Scriptural interpretation; both letters advocate a similar—i.e., *Christocentric*—reading as John. This reading will set a precedent. Having resisted the temptation—on the advice of the heretic Marcion (around 150 CE)—to throw the Grand Narrative of Israel straight onto the garbage heap of history, the Christian church has consistently tried to read according to John's maxim, "About me ('Christ') Moses has written."

The North African theologian and philosopher Aurelius Augustinus (356-430) in his *De Civitate Dei*²¹¹ presents us with an exegesis of 1 Samuel 15. There it was told how Samuel, judge of Israel and prophet, announces to king Saul how he will lose his kingship because of the violation of a central Torah law. The seventh chapter of Book XVII is given the title, “About the schism of the kingdom of Israel, which is the model for the eternal separation between spiritual Israel and Israel according to the flesh.” Since in Augustine “flesh” is a very negative category, his reading of the Scriptures becomes a pattern to read them in such a way that the Scriptures are taken away from Judaism (“Israel according to the flesh”). We call this process “disinheritance,” and Augustine was not the only one who pursued it.

You must not make Augustine an originator of Christian anti-Semitism; he was not an anti-Semite. The dispute over the “true” reading of the Scriptures had not yet been settled in the days of Augustine, hence his aggressiveness toward the Jews in Carthage and Hippo Regius. Later, however, his reading became an effective weapon in the hands of the Christian anti-Semites.

By their reading, the Messianists wanted to exclude that this Messiah was a Hellenistic Savior. To them, he was a child of Israel. The proof of Jesus’ Messianity could only be given with Israel’s Scriptures. Nevertheless, from the Messianic reading of the Grand Narrative, another ideological formation arose, which consistently distanced itself from its origin of this same Grand Narrative and dissolved it into its own ideology, into *Christianity*.

Of course, Moses did not write about Jesus Messiah; in this respect, we too remain “historical critics.” But Jesus is and remains understandable only from Moses—and not vice versa. If John is supposed to have meant *this*, the sentence would be correct that Moses wrote about Jesus.

8. Near Passover. The Nourisher of Israel, 6:1-7:1

In the succession of Rudolf Bultmann, many commentators have shifted this chapter. Now it should be inserted after the story about the recovery of the son of the royal official, to explain the sudden appearance of Jesus in Galilee. However, narrators from ancient times do not have our narrative logic. Our text is about a place/time structure that is not structured by the chronometer and the map, but by the festivals.²¹²

211 Aurelius Augustinus: *De Civitate Dei Libri XXII*. Recensuit et commentario critico instruxit Emanuel Hoffmann, CSEL Vol. XXXX, Wien 1899.

212 Our Western logic of chronic and topographical order is a narrative corset that, by the way, was untied in many novels of the 20th century. A modern narrator shows us how the logic of time and place determines our being and does not break it down into measurable sections. Jean-Paul Sartre does this in the second part of his novel *Les chemins de la liberté, Le sursis*.

The undefined festival of 5:1 is the festival of festivals: the restoration of Israel's freedom of movement, say, its autonomy, the essential content of all festivals. To an autonomous Israel, the Messiah is the nourisher—because he is Israel's *nourishment*! To John, this is new content for the Passover meal.

The starting point is a story about how the prophet Elisha nourished Israel, 2 Kings 4:42 ff. This narrative was popular in many Messianic groups. In John, as well, it has to take place in the periphery of Galilee. In John, it serves to present the Messiah as the life principle of Israel; without the Messiah, the whole autonomy is useless. The work of renewal runs through the series Bread (the new *Passover* meal)—Light (overcoming blindness, *Sukkot*)—Life (overcoming decay, *Hanukkah*).

The sixth chapter is a composition of an introduction and four parts, which are linked chiastic (crosswise) by the two keywords and thus explain each other:

6:1-4 Attunement: Near was Passover, the Festival of the Judeans

6:5-15 and 6:25-59 Keyword "Bread"

6:16-24 and 6:60-71 Keyword "I AM" and "YOU ARE"

8.1. Attunement: Near was Passover, the Festival of the Judeans, 6:1-4

6:1 After this, Jesus went away
to the far side of the sea of Galilee, of Tiberias.
6:2 A large crowd was following him,
observing the signs he did on the sick.
6:3 Jesus went up to the mountain,
he sat down there with his disciples.
6:4 Near was Pascha, the festival of the Judeans.

John must have known traditions about Jesus, which the Synoptics also knew. The tradition of the healing of the son of the royal official (4:43 ff.) belongs to them as well as the dispute with the sellers in the sanctuary, 2:14 ff. The following passage is the third element of tradition that John and the Synoptics have in common. The narration takes place "on the far side of the sea of Galilee." In the time of Jesus ben Joseph, the country was divided; the territories on both sides of the northern Jordan Rift Valley also later, at the time when our texts were written, were under different political administrations. The western bank was under Herod Antipas, the northern half of the eastern bank under Herod Philippos, and the southern half under the provincial administration of Syria.

Here, in a dizzying confusion of places and people, time becomes the only connecting element between the people who, in the last week of September 1938, when the Western powers gave Hitler a free hand in Czechoslovakia at the Munich Conference, saw their lives disappear into the shadows of the coming war. A "modern" reader must be able to deal with abrupt transitions; otherwise, he could not read a novel of the 20th and 21st centuries.

The setting of the narrative is comparable to Mark 3:7-13, but also to Matthew 5:1, where the “Sermon on the Mount” begins. John presupposes knowledge of the Synoptic tradition. He says, “Jesus went up *the* mountain,” a mountain that we therefore know. And sits down, as in Matthew 5:1; the disciples do not come toward him, but they are on the mountain *with* Jesus. We expect “Sermon on the Mount”; we receive it in the form of a sign. The interpretation of the sign will take place in the synagogue of Capernaum, a speech that is no less programmatic than the “Sermon on the Mount” in Matthew. The sign is the nearness of the Passover festival. Near means: “not yet.” But the nearness of the Passover throws light on what is now being told. In 6:4 the nearness of the Passover festival is shown in the feeding of the people with bread, which satiates but makes them hungry again. The people are promised the bread of life, which will drive out hunger “until the coming world order.” In the end, 6:70-71, the nearness of the Passover is the shadow of betrayal, the handing over of the Messiah.

8.2. The Sign of the Nourishment of Israel. A Misunderstanding, 6:5-15

6:5 Jesus lifted up his eyes,
and when he viewed that a large crowd was coming toward him,
he says to Philipp,
“From where should we buy bread at the market,
so that these here may eat?”

6:6 This he said to test him,
for he himself knew what he was about to do.

6:7 Philipp answered him,
“Bread for two hundred denarii is not enough for them
that each one would get even a little.”

6:8 One of his disciples, Andrew the brother of Simon Peter, says to him,
6:9 “There’s a boy here who has five loaves of barley bread
and two pieces of side dish.”²¹³
But what are they for so many?”

6:10 Jesus said, “Have the people settle down.”²¹⁴
There was a lot of grass in the place,
so they settled down—the number of men was five thousand.

213 SIDE DISH: *Opsaria*, actually “side dishes, additional food.” The main food is bread, plus side dishes, fish, meat. Here it will have been fish, see John 21:9, which also speaks of bread and *opsarion* roasted on a charcoal fire, that is, fish. Therefore, you can paraphrase with “fish” to avoid the brittle “two pieces of side dish.”

214 [In the ancient Orient people lay at meals; John uses two verbs to express this, *anapiptein* (6:10 (twice); 13:12.25; 21:20) and *anakeisthai* (6:11; 12:2; 13:23, 28). In this scene in the open air, the translation “to settle down on the grass” is suitable. In the later scenes inside a house, I will both translate as “to recline.”]

6:11 Jesus took the loaves of bread,
 said the prayer of thanks
 and gave to all who were settled down
 —and likewise of the side dish—,
 as much as they wanted.

6:12 After they had eaten their fill,²¹⁵
 he said to his disciples,
 “Gather the leftover chunks, so that nothing gets lost.”

6:13 So they gathered
 and filled twelve baskets with chunks from the five barley loaves,
 the rest left over by those who had eaten.

6:14 The humans saw that he had done a sign, they said,
 “This one really is the prophet who is to come into the world.”

6:15 Jesus now realized
 that they were about to come and take him by force,
 in order to make him king.
 So he withdrew, to the mountain again,
 he alone.

“Jesus lifted his eyes.” Thus begins the great prayer of the Messiah, John 17:1, but there it says, “to heaven.” Here his eyes remain fixed on the earth, “he views that a large crowd is coming toward him. In the catastrophic time of the period around the year 70, Israel starves to death, and the leadership of the Messianists does not see a way out, indeed hindering the work of the Messiah with arguments of “realpolitik.” This kind of realistic political braking is traditional. So it says in 2 Kings 4:42-44,

A man came from Baal-shalishah.
 He brought to the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty barley loaves,
 along with it fresh fruit in his bag.
 He said,
 “Give it to the people that they may eat.”
 His official said:
 “How can I give this to a hundred people?”
 He said,
 “Give it to the people that they may eat,
 for the NAME says, eat and leave over.”
 He gave it to them, they ate and left over,
 according to the speech of the NAME.

215 CT: *Eneplēsthēsan, sava'u*, “they became full” or “satisfied.” The reference is Deuteronomy 8:10, 12. In the land, one gets satisfied if one keeps the commandments given by Moses. Here the Messiah feeds the people in the land.

This is a story from the time of famine, “Elisha sat in Gilgal; the famine was in the land,” says 2 Kings 4:38. All the Gospels have connected this tale with Jesus, two of them even twice. The disciples occupy structurally the same place in the narrative as the *meshareth*, “official,” of Elisha, that is, not simply a servant, but his representative, the *diakonos*. “It won’t work,” he says, they all say. “It will,” say two, Elisha and Jesus, because the NAME, the God of Israel, says so. Elisha had twenty barley loaves for a hundred people. Here we must be even clearer. Jesus had five barley loaves for five thousand people. In addition, two pieces of side dish, probably dried fish. The starting position for the Messianic movement is hopeless, hopeless given the superiority of the enemy.

For the first time after their vocation, the disciples perform. Andrew appears five times in the Gospel. He is the brother of Simon Peter and performs twice together with Philipp. All three came from Bethsaida, a place in Galilee. Philipp appears twelve times. Together with Andrew, he is a mediator between Jesus and the Hellenistic Diaspora (John 12:21-22), and he, the “finding” of Jesus (1:43), conveys to Jesus the “Israelite without deceit,” Nathanael. The three from Bethsaida play a key role here. Andrew and Philipp as the skeptical political realists, Simon as the one who—despite all skepticism—sees no alternative to the Messiah Jesus in the end (6:68).

Andrew and Philipp appear first. They are the only ones with Greek names, although they came from Galilee. We already mentioned that they had good connections to the Hellenistic Diaspora. Both now doubt whether the Messiah can feed Israel with the means at his disposal, that is, keep them alive. The means are five barley loaves and two dried or fried fish, *opsarion*, “side dish.” We will find the word again in the last chapter; it marks 21:1 ff. as a twin narrative to 6:5 ff. Here the Messiah is the nourisher of Israel, there the nourisher of the Messianic community (21:10). We will come back to the number five (see below to 6:32, the “real bread”). The realistic politician says that two hundred denarii would not even be enough to buy enough bread. You should know the text Isaiah 55:1 ff. if you want to understand how Jesus “tests” Philipp. It says:

Oh, all you thirsty ones, come to the water!
He who has no money, come and buy, eat,
come and buy, but not for money,
not for the price of wine and milk.
Why do you pay money for unbread,
your toil for that which does not satisfy?

Jesus asks, “Where shall we buy bread (*agorazein*, *shavar*)? With this question, Jacob = Israel is tormented when he heard that there is grain in Egypt. He sends his sons to buy it (*shavar*, *agorazein*), Genesis 42. Both passages, Isaiah 55 and Genesis 42, resonate here. Isaiah 55 plays a role in the bread discourse when it is a question of what is real bread (*lechem ’emeth*) and not unbread (*lo-lechem*). With the means

of five loaves of bread and two fish for five times a thousand people—which the realistic politicians estimate as completely insufficient—the Messiah will feed Israel.

Exactly twelve baskets of bread chunks are left over. In any case, “twelve” means Israel, that remnant of Israel comprising the twelve disciples of Jesus. The verb *perisseuein* (“to leave over”) is derived from the adjective *perissos*, which in turn stands for *yether*, “rest.” John uses a word that is missing in the story of manna in Exodus 16; there we have *pleonazein*, “to have excess.” The Messiah does not produce an excess but rather feeds the “rest” of Israel, that rest which—in the prophets—was always the starting point for a new beginning.²¹⁶ It is about the remnant of Israel. The disciples cannot solve the problem. The Messiah is the nourisher of Israel, and the disciples can only be so as long as they keep to this Messiah. This is explained in the bread speech (6:26 ff.) and in the speech in which the Messiah says farewell to the disciples (15:1 ff.).

Jesus says the traditional prayer of thanks, *eucharistēsas*. What happens here is Eucharist indeed, but this is neither the archetype of the Protestant communion nor of the Roman or Orthodox mass. Jesus opens a new perspective to Israel and that is what makes him *thankful*. The word *eucharistein*,—except in the passage 5:23 where directly is referred to 5:11—is only found in 11:41 where Jesus thanks the FATHER before calling Lazarus = Israel back to life from decay.

People see what is happening here. Not magic, but a sign. They interpret the sign correctly: this one is “the prophet who comes *into* (perhaps better *against*!) the world order.” So they say more than what the woman at Jacob’s well said, “I observe, you are a prophet!” (4:19) But they say less than Martha, “YOU ARE—the *One-like-GOD*, coming in (against) the world order,” 11:27. Jesus is the prophet, really, like Elisha, like the prophet the people of Samaria are expecting, like the prophet Israel is expecting, like that Elijah whom the NAME will send, Malachi 3:23. A prophet who will give the people “bread” that will finally satiate, the Messiah.

What is more obvious to the people than to force (“to rob,” it says here literally) Jesus to take over the political responsibility as king? Elisha appointed kings (and deposed them in a bloody manner) because that is part of his mission. But never in Israel the prophet himself was king. So Jesus acts like a prophet in Israel has to act. “He withdrew, toward the mountain, he alone.” So three things happen.

“He withdrew (*anachōrēsen*),” in a certain sense he was an anchorite, but not a pious hermit. He did not go up the mountain “to pray,” as the Synoptics say. The Messiah is a king, as we will hear in chapter 12, but not a king under—and according to!—the prevailing conditions. His withdrawal was a political action.

216 Therefore the last line of 6:13 should not be translated as, “For those who had eaten, it had been too much,” but: “Those who had eaten left a rest.”

“He alone,” *monos*, is then said. We had the Messiah as a prophet, like Elijah. Here we have the Messiah as Moses. Now we know which mountain it is, why a definite article is written here, “Toward the mountain (*eis to oros*),” it says. The mountain of verse 6:3 was already known there as well. The Messiah climbs the mountain *alone*. He is Moses, Exodus 24:2.

What does Israel do when Moses is alone on the mountain? Israel prostrates before the golden calf. What does the Messianic community do when Jesus is alone on the mountain? They struggle, in vain, seeing no land. The far side of the Reed Sea, of the Jordan, is out of reach. In any case, John here gets even with a kind of messianism that is guided by the political goal of a monarchy independent of Rome. There has been an independent monarchy under the kings from the house of Judah Maccabee. It could become nothing else but a kingdom like all the others. As long as nothing decisive changes in the condition of the world order as such, you could expect nothing else but royal business as usual. The catastrophic century 63 BCE (capture of Jerusalem by the Romans under Pompeius) to 70 CE (destruction of the city by the Romans under Titus) had to be the necessary consequence of a policy which the people of John 6:14 expect from the Messiah: a king and all will be well. Nothing became well, even with a king Jesus nothing would have become well.

8.3. “I WILL BE THERE,” 6:16-25

6:16 When it had become late, his disciples went down to the sea,
6:17 they boarded a boat and set out across the sea toward Capernaum.²¹⁷

217 [WENT DOWN . . . TOWARD CAPERNAUM: I add here an observation that Andreas Bedenbender discusses in detail in his book “Frohe Botschaft am Abgrund. Das Markusevangelium und der Jüdische Krieg,” Leipzig 2013, in chapter 14, “Am Ort und im Schatten des Todes.” Die neutestamentlichen Ortsangaben Kapernaum, Bethsaida und Chorazin als poetische Verweise auf das römische Reich (the following page references in square brackets [413 ff.] refer to this chapter). It is about the detail that Jesus in John’s Gospel always descends to Capernaum, *katabainein*. According to Bedenbender, it would be wrong to interpret this detail simply as geographical accuracy. In the context of a study of the curses on Capernaum in Matthew 11:23 and Luke 10:15, he demonstrates that “Capernaum” is one of several aliases for the Roman capital Rome, and assumes [433] that in some sense “Johannine Capernaum also represents Rome. Finally, not unlike the Synoptics, Roman emperorship in John is an entity that stands in opposition to the God of Israel, insofar as it belongs to the sphere of Satan [note 45: See only Jesus’ accusation to his Jewish opponents in John 8:44, ‘You have the *diabolos* as your father’ with the sentence of the chief priests, which leads directly to Jesus’ crucifixion, ‘We have no king but Caesar’ (19:15)].” Bedenbender writes [432-433]: “The idea of descent (*katabainein*, ‘to go down,’ in 2:12; 4:47, 49, 51; 6:16-17) is regularly associated with Capernaum in the Gospel of John. There is no second place of which such a thing is true. Capernaum thus functions as the antithesis of Jerusalem and the temple, where the way typically leads up (*anabainein*) [432, note 43: Nine of sixteen *anabainein* references in the Gospel of John refer to Jerusalem or the tem-

- Darkness had already happened,²¹⁸
and Jesus had not yet come to them.
- 6:18 A great wind was blowing, and the sea was getting rough.
- 6:19 When they have rowed about 25 or 30 stadia
they view²¹⁹ Jesus walking his way on the sea,²²⁰
and coming near the boat;
they were afraid.
- 6:20 But he says to them,
“I WILL BE THERE, do not be afraid.”²²¹
- 6:21 They wanted to take him into the boat,
and instantly the boat reached the land they were heading for.

ple, another five . . . to the ascent to heaven]. The inner-worldly vis-a-vis of Capernaum and Jerusalem, however, is embedded in the larger vis-a-vis of *kosmos* and ‘Father.’ Again, *katabainein* and *anabainein* form the central pair of terms—together they describe the movement of Jesus first from the ‘Father’ down into the *kosmos* and then from the *kosmos* back up to the ‘Father.’

Capernaum, the deepest point in the world of the Gospel of John, seems to be the true goal of Jesus’ *katabasis*. Consequently, it is precisely in Capernaum where Jesus literally hammers into his audience: He is the bread that came down from heaven (6,33-58: seven times *katabainein*). And just as logically, the evangelist also situates here the most offensive concretization of the thought that the Word became flesh, which he becomes as a shibboleth on the path of discipleship: It is necessary to swallow the incarnation of the *logos* without any reservation—the flesh of Jesus must be ‘chewed,’ his blood must be ‘drunk.’ Whoever finds this too much of a good thing, according to John, has no place with Jesus.”

This context also subsequently sheds additional light on the descent from the site of the two initial Messianic signs in Cana to Capernaum (2:12; 4:47, 49, 51) [432]:

“Initially, in 2:12, the unity of the Messianic community manifests itself in Capernaum. Jesus’ mother, his brothers, and his disciples all act in the same way as he himself, ‘staying’ (*menein*) with him in one place, i.e., enduring with him. Of course, this is only an interlude (‘not many days’), which is without parallel within the Gospel of John [note 42: A parallel outside the Gospels would be Acts 1:14 (only Jesus is missing here; he has already ascended to heaven)]. And in 6:66, John locates the opposing idea of the disintegration of the community in Capernaum as well. If one takes both, the probation and the failure, together, then Capernaum is obviously the place where the community enters the *krisis*: In Capernaum, it is decided what will become of it, whether it will endure or perish.”]

- 218 DARKNESS HAD ALREADY HAPPENED: Some manuscripts have here *katelaben de autous hē skotia*, “darkness overwhelmed them.” According to these manuscripts, 6:17-18 describes the condition before creation. It is possible to recognize the same idea in the line of tradition, which was preferred above. Therefore, we do not write, “it had already become dark” but “darkness had already happened,” according to *we-choshekh ‘al-pne thehom*, “darkness over the primeval sea,” Genesis 1:2. The troubled sea and storm also refer to Genesis 1:2. The unusual translation compels the hearers to refer to Genesis 1 and John 1:5.

- 219 VIEW: *Theōrousin*. It is about a vision, not a visual event.

- 220 WALKING HIS WAY: See above, explanation of 1:36; 5:8.

- 221 CT: See note on 4:26.

6:22 On the following day, the crowd which had stayed
on the other side of the sea
saw that there had been no other small boat there but only one,
and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples,
but that the disciples had gone away alone.

6:23 But now other small boats, from Tiberias, came near the place
where they had eaten the bread and the Lord had said the prayer of thanks.

6:24 So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there,
nor his disciples,
they boarded the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking for Jesus.

6:25 When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him,
“Rabbi, when did you get here?”

What happens to Israel without the Messiah? It becomes dark. This darkness is not the normal sequence of day and night. In this context, it is pointless to wave aside and say that it has become late and they are just having bad weather. The Synoptics avoid the word *skotia*, “darkness.” John had a reason to use exactly the word that was so important to him. Two important manuscripts foresee the danger of trivialization and replace “darkness was already” with “darkness has overcome them” (*katelaben*, according to 1:5). For these manuscripts, darkness was a hostile, active power. Even if we do not adopt their variant, the thought behind the interpretation is a guide. We think of Gen 1:2,

The earth had become a *thohu wabohu* (*hayetha, egeneto*):
Darkness over chaos (*choshekh ‘al pene thehom, skotos epanō tēs abysson*),
God’s wind brooding over the face of the waters.

The disciples find themselves in a situation that was far more desperate than that into which Israel had fallen during Moses’ absence. They are in that condition in which the earth was before the first word sounded and the first light appeared. This sea has become to them that *thehom* of Genesis 1:2, seething chaos whipped up by the storm. It was on this sea, and through this chaos, that Jesus walked his way. The Halakha of the Messiah takes place only through this seething chaos of the ruling world order (*kosmos*), near their boat. He does not calm them down, he rather says, “I WILL BE THERE, do not be afraid.”

Matthew, Mark, and John tell their stories in their own typical way. But all three of them have their eyes on the unruly sea, i.e. the completely chaotic political conditions after the devastation of Jerusalem. They observe the completely bewildered Messianic communities; in the case of Matthew and Mark, Simon Peter underestimates the situation; he is unable to cope with it. “Little trust” is the word, *oligopistos*. In John, Simon Peter plays an important role as well. But before John brings him into the game, many things have to be clarified, until Simon Peter can say in 6:69, “IT IS YOU!”

Matthew and Mark are having Jesus calm the sea, “Duck down,” he says, and this shows what creation always means: not allowing the ever-threatening chaos to take hold. To John, this is too naive. It will not be light, the wind does not settle, and the sea rages as before. Roman conditions are prevailing, and little will change in this respect shortly.

The disciples have progressed twenty-five or thirty stadia—three or four miles—without seeing any land. But they watch the Messiah Jesus “walking his way” on this raging sea of chaos. This frightens them. Not because they believe he is a ghost, a *phantasma*, as Mark and Matthew say; John avoids the word. Their fear is caused by the idea that the Messiah “walks his way” without anything being changed in the external circumstances.

Jesus says, “I WILL BE THERE, do not be afraid.” Whatever happens, what was said to Moses in Exodus 3:14 remains. The NAME is, “I WILL BE THERE!” Therefore the fear is understandable but unfounded. They wanted to take him in the boat, but it is not said that Jesus entered the boat with them. Nevertheless, they immediately reach the shore exactly where they wanted to go, without the Messiah!

Those others from whom Jesus had withdrawn could not be taken for fools. They held fast to their king’s project, saw that his disciples left without Jesus, and concluded that the disciples and Jesus had arranged to meet in Tiberias. But people from that place who had come by boat reported that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there. Tiberias was founded by Herod Antipas and made his capital.²²² Tiberias only appears in John. He alone refers to the great lake in the Jordan depression east of Galilee as the “Sea of Tiberias.” To John, Tiberias is “near the place where they ate the bread and the Lord said the prayer of thanks.” If the place is supposed to be worth mentioning, it is only because of the sign of the feeding of Israel. Jesus was not there, so—the people guessed—he must be in Capernaum, in the “place of consolation” [Hebrew *kefar-nichum*], the place where the dying son of the royal official revived. They found Jesus and wanted to know in what wonderful way he had come to the other shore. This he does not tell them. He has something very different to tell.

222 It was the place of an important conference of the kings of Syria-Palestine who were associated with Rome around the year 40, hosted by King Agrippa I (Menachem Stern, *The Reign of Herod and the Herodian Dynasty*, in Shmuel Safrai/Menachem Stern (Hgg.), *The Jewish People in the First Century* (CRINT I/1), Assen 1974, 216-307, here 297ff.). From 55 the city came under the administration of King Agrippa II, who ruled over Galilee and the surrounding areas until the early nineties of the 1st century. Tiberias was the city of the dynasty of Herod and at the same time a Greek polis with a traditionally Jewish population. At the time when the Gospel of John took shape, the city of Javne, between Askalon and Jaffa, was the capital of Rabbinical Judaism. After the *Bar-Kochba War* of 131-135 and a period of bloody suppression by the Romans, from 140 the center shifted to Galilee (Günter Stemberger, *Das klassische Judentum. Kultur und Geschichte der rabbinischen Zeit*, München 1979, 60). The city of Tiberias became a major center of Rabbinical Judaism in the second half of the 3rd century and played an important role until the Islamic conquest in the 7th century.

8.4. In the Synagogue of Capernaum. The Teaching of the Bread of Life, 6:26-59

8.4.1. The Work that God Demands, 6:26-29

6:26 Jesus answered them, he said,
 “Amen, amen, I say to you,
 you’re not seeking for me because you saw signs,
 but because you ate from the loaves of bread and were satiated!

6:27 Don’t work for the food which passes away
 but for the food that stays on into the life of the age to come,
 which *bar enosh*, the Human, will give you.
 This is the one whom the FATHER sealed, GOD.”

6:28 So they said to him,
 “What should we do to work the works of God?”

6:29 Jesus answered and said to them,
 “This is the work of God:
 to trust in the one he sent.”

Actually, people want to know what they have with Jesus. This one immediately cuts off their word. In what happened they did not see the sign of the liberation of Israel. The satiation refers to the bread in the wilderness, Deuteronomy 8:3,

He (the NAME) humiliated you, made you starve,
 made you eat the manna,
 that you did not know, that your fathers did not know,
 to make you recognize
 that human does not live by bread alone,
 rather, human lives from all that comes from the mouth of the NAME.

What Jesus will say here is a midrash about this passage. The manna shows Israel that only the NAME ensures life. Israel stays alive not only because it organizes the production of daily life (bread). Experience teaches that under the prevailing production systems, most people would not be satisfied even if Jesus became king instead of Herod Antipas. Only if the Torah organizes the order of production the life of those who need bread is assured. This is imperishable, everything else is perishable, passes away, can be replaced by something better.

Jesus immediately speaks bluntly; he states with great emphasis the misunderstanding concerning the Messiah: they have not seen any “sign.” They have seen a miraculous spectacle, but simply no sign, not that which points beyond itself. That is the essence of *sēmeion*, the sign: it points to a completely different and new direction. All that Jesus does is *sēmeion*, it points to what is coming, to “greater works” (14:12).

They only see the bread and only feel the satiation. Bread is digested, satiation passes quickly, “perishable food.” Every king, under the same ruling conditions, will be nothing else but a Herod Antipas, even if he would begin his reign with the most sublime intentions. Works, “doing works” (*erga-zesthai*), on the other hand, should be done for what is remaining, not for what is passing. Thus the daily bread is not defamed; humans must work for the daily bread, *ergazesthai*. Despite this work, most people remain stuck in misery. What remains is whatever leads people out of misery and into the age to come (*zōē aiōnios*). What this is, Jesus first explained to Nicodemus (3:14 ff.), to the woman from Samaria (4:14), and finally to the Judeans in Jerusalem (5:24 ff.). “Life of the age to come” is inseparably linked to the figure and work of the one whom our translations call the “Son of Man” (“the Human”, *bar enosh*).

The people are not stupid and grumpy opponents. They really want to know what they are to do to advance the cause of God, to do the “works of God.” They ask, “What must we do to work the works for God, *ergazesthai ta erga tou theou*?” This is a difficult question as long as we understand the genitive here as *genitivus subjectivus*. For the works of God are the creation (Genesis 2:2), the liberation of Israel (Psalm 73:28; 90:16), and the covenant with Israel (Exodus 24:3-8). Paul knows the Messianic community as the “work of God” (Romans 14:20).

The pious Judeans know the works as “works for God” (*genitivus objectivus*), the works that the God of Israel demanded, the fulfillment of “the commandments, laws and ordinances,” *the very Torah* that comes “from the mouth of God.” The works *for* God on a human level correspond to the works *of* God— creation, liberation, covenant.

But that is exactly what—as John believes—can no longer work today. So the work that God demands of Israel *today* is the trust in the one whom God has sent, who declares today’s age to be ended and defeated, and who embodies the coming epoch. Precisely *this* is implied by *zōē aiōnion*, not eternal life, unlimited in time, but a new life under completely new conditions.

Jesus is not a Lutheran, he does not slam the faith in the messenger over the works of Israel. In the Messianic writings “Law and/or Gospel” is nowhere a contradiction. So that the works of Israel do not go into the void, so that Israel does not “putter around” without a real radical perspective for itself, the trust in the Messiah is a necessary condition.

8.4.2. No More Hunger, No More Thirst. The Decisive Day, 6:30-40

6:30 Now they said to him,
 “Then what sign do you do,
 so that we may see it and trust you?
 What are you working?
 6:31 Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, as it is written,

- He gave them bread from heaven to eat.*"²²³
- 6:32 Jesus said to them,
 "Amen, amen, I say to you:
 Not Moses has given you the bread from heaven.
 But my FATHER is giving you the bread from heaven, the effective one."²²⁴
- 6:33 For GOD's bread is the one that comes down from heaven
 and gives life to the world."
- 6:34 They said to him,
 "Sir, forever give us this bread."
- 6:35 Jesus said to them,
 "I AM—the bread of life."²²⁵
 Whoever comes to me will not go hungry,
 and whoever trusts in me will not be thirsty,
 never!
- 6:36 But I told you: You have seen me, but still don't trust.
- 6:37 All that the FATHER gives me will come to me,
 and whoever comes to me I will not cast out.
- 6:38 For I have come down from heaven not to do my will
 but the will of the ONE who sent me.
- 6:39 And this is the will of the ONE who sent me:
 that I should let nothing be destroyed of all he has given me
 but should raise it up on the Day of the Final Decision."²²⁶

223 BREAD VOM HEAVEN: Psalm 78:24; see Exodus 16.

224 THE EFFECTIVE ONE: *Alēthinos*. This is about bread, which gives the world an order of real life.

CT: What is meant is the bread which one can really trust because it makes possible a perspective of life.

[I take the word "effective" instead of "real" because of TV's interpretation below.]

225 [I AM—THE BREAD OF LIFE: Thus I translate according to CT, "ICH BIN ES: das Brot des Lebens" because TV sticks to this version in his 2006 interpretation. In his 2015 translation, he writes:]

I WILL BE THERE—THE BREAD OF LIFE: At first, it seems obvious to translate: "I am the bread of life." The whole context here is the wandering in the wilderness of the children of Israel and their confrontation with Moses. John emphasizes that even then it was not Moses, but the same God who sends the Messiah today. Just as the God said of himself at that time, "I WILL BE THERE" (*'ehye*, Exodus 3:14), so he says today.

226 ON THE DAY OF THE FINAL DECISION: *Tē eschatē hēmera*. It is always translated as "on the last or [in German] youngest day." This implies that after this last day the days cease and then eternity begins. But the origin of this expression is the Hebrew *'acharith ha-yamim*, "lateness of days" (Buber); "l'après des jours" (Chouraqui). Decisive things happen in the distant future. This is connected in John with the expression *yom YHWH*, "the day of the NAME," 20 times in the prophets and just as often in related expressions such as "day of flaming wrath" (Isaiah 13:13). On that day, the decisive intervention of the God of Israel oc-

6:40 For this is the will of my FATHER:
that everyone who observes the Son and trusts in him
should have the life of the age to come,
and that I should raise him up on the Day of the Final Decision.”

Those who claim not to have seen a sign on the other side of the sea now demand a sign. The disciples are confronted with this demand in all the Gospels (Mark 8:11 par.). Apparently, the emerging Rabbinical Judaism demands evidence from the Messianists that their politics have indeed served Israel well. The evangelists deal with this demand in different ways. With John, this demand virtually becomes an obsession. Again and again, Jesus must legitimize himself.

For the local opponents of the Messianists, who were probably followers of Rabbinical Judaism, Jesus was at best a muddlehead, at worst an impostor, but always the embodiment of a disastrous policy. Here the question is simply, “What are you working, effecting, bringing about? What is the point of all this messianic excitement?” And they immediately refer to the difference between the spectacle of Jesus on the other shore of the sea and the feeding of the people on their forty-year march through the wilderness—as it should be, with a Scriptural quotation (Psalm 78:24).

The opponents are different now. If those who wanted to make Jesus king were short-sighted Zealots, now speak those who are most skeptical of any messianism. What would be the feeding of the five thousand compared with the feeding of Israel in the wilderness?²²⁷ What follows is a fierce debate among the teachers of Israel about the interpretation of central Scriptural passages such as Psalm 78:24 and Exodus 16.

These Judeans are faithful disciples of Moses, Jesus knows that. But he too points to a difference; he turns the tables. First of all, he states that this bread of heaven, the manna, does not come from Moses, but from the FATHER, the God of Israel. Jesus’ answer undoubtedly contains a contradiction. But this contradiction must be written out completely, “Not Moses has given (perfect), . . . my FATHER is giving (present).”

It is often noted that the quote is not literal. We must hear the passage Exodus 16:4 in its context; all other passages, including our original text Deuteronomy 8:3, refer to this passage. The people came to the wilderness of Sin, then it says, 16:2-4,

curs, usually in the form of a trial (against the nations, against Babylon, against disloyal Israel). That day is a matter of life or death. Future and decision combine in *eschatē hēmera*, “Day of the Definite Decision,” the day when it is finally decided who will rise to the life of the age to come and who will not. On the new earth under the new heaven, there will still be days. So it is not about a “last” day. Therefore, “Day of the Final Decision.”

227 The difficulty with John is always the heterogeneity of his opponents: sometimes the emerging Rabbinical Judaism, sometimes the Zealots, sometimes disappointed followers, often referred to by the same word *Ioudaioi*, “Judeans.”

They complained, the whole community (of the sons) of Israel,
 against Moses and against Aaron in the wilderness.
 They said to them,
 If only we had died by the hand of the NAME in the land of Egypt,
 when we sat at the meat pot, eating bread for satiation;
 instead, you have led us into this wilderness,
 to kill the whole assembly of Israel.
 The NAME said to Moses,
 “There, I will rain bread from heaven upon you. . .”

If his listeners do not accept the Messiah, they scorn what keeps them alive, the “bread from heaven.” And that is the *effective* bread, that which really *is working* today. Here we translate the adjective *alēthinos* as “effective,” because it is opposed to a bread that does not really solve the problem, that is not *working*.

The manna stands for the “five loaves” from 6:9. It is about Moses, about the Torah—hence “five”; “Moses” can no longer be the answer today. Just as the five loaves can only temporarily satiate the crowd, just as the manna temporarily satiated the people then, so the Torah of Israel no longer nourishes today under the prevailing Roman conditions. It was precisely this view that Rabbinical Judaism rejected, and which today Judaism vehemently rejects. Under the given circumstances, Torah is non-real—ineffective—, says John, says Paul as well. Among those who vehemently reject this Messianic view is also the Messianist Matthew! It is not our task to express a preference for John or Matthew. We have to interpret John.

Real—effective—, according to John, is only “the bread that descends from heaven and gives life to the world (to humans in their living space),” that is, it allows the world an order through which humans really can live. People know what Jesus is talking about: It is about a new order that makes life possible; people want this bread because they suffer under the ruling world order. It is about politics, and people know it. It is literally about the definitive bread, about the new, definitive (*pan-tote*, “forever”) world order of the Messiah of Israel, about the definitive solution of definitive problems. This is what they want.

Jesus pours them pure wine, he says clearly and unambiguously, “I AM—the bread of life.” John introduces that famous conditional sentence that we hear dozens of times in his text, mostly constructed in a good Aramaic way with a participle, “If someone comes to me (*ho erchomenos*), he will not starve; if someone trusts me (*ho pisteuōn*), he will not thirst, never!”

Of course, seeing and trusting are two different things. A human must be able to recognize in what he sees what is actually happening. This did not happen during the feeding of the five thousand. He who recognizes this, or at least wants to recognize it, is not “repelled”—or rather “excluded, cast out”—by what the Messiah represents.

He becomes clearer. He, the Human, *bar enosh*, does not remain—as in Daniel—standing in front of the throne of God but comes down from heaven. Not his own will is done, but the will of the One who sent him, and this means: he has expelled him from the sphere of heavenly power into the powerlessness of a man who finds no attention. “Becoming flesh” is how the prologue summarizes this painful walk, the *Halakha* of Jesus.

So why all this magic? That people are freed from the prison of the flesh and made into spiritual men? This is what Christianity has been preaching for almost two millennia. No, the purpose is that humans should not perish, not get lost, should not have to lead a life that means almost nothing but misery; rather, that they may lead “the life of the age to come.”

Now the symbolic action of collecting the chunks, “so that nothing is lost,” becomes clear—in both cases the verb *apollesthai*. Another conditional sentence: “Everyone who observes (*theōrōn*) the Son (the *Son of Man*, *bar enosh*), who sees him as he is and trusts him, will reach the life of the age to come, and Jesus will raise him up on the Day of Decision”—the day when “the court sits down and the books are finally opened” (Daniel 7:10), the day of the Son of Man when justice is *finally* done. On that day those who are guided by the vision of this Son can stand upright—all of them, even “the dead in their graves” (5:28). The purpose of the final judgment is that humans should be raised up, not that they should perish. This—and only this—is the will of God.

The expression *eschatē hēmera* literally means “last day,” or, in more sophisticated [German] language, “youngest day.” But the idea of a “last day” after which there are no more days was impossible for the Judeans of those days. *Eternity* in contrast to the limited time (*days*) is a Christian, not a Jewish conception.

In the Qurʾan that day which John calls “the last day” is the day of judgment. In almost every one of the 114 suras of the Qurʾan, this day occurs. Afterward, a new time begins, in which those problems that determine and burden our lives have been solved.

In the Tanakh, this expression is well known: *be-ʾacharith ha-yamim*, “in the lateness of days,” Martin Buber translates; the Greeks translate *epʾ eschatōn tōn hēmerōn* or *en tais eschatais hēmerais*. And if it really is about a “last day,” then simply about the last day of a certain series of days, for example, the *Sukkot* week, Nehemiah 8:18. The Tanakh does not know an absolute last day. But it does know days when decisive things will happen, for good (Deuteronomy 4:30) or for evil (Ezekiel 38:16).

That the dead can live again is a traditional idea; a very drastic example is the vision from the book of Ezekiel. The prophet was asked whether the many bones that lay around in a wide plain could live again,

and there were very many of them, very dry . . .

“Human child, will these bones live?”

He said, “My Lord, Eternal, you know it!” (Ezekiel 37:2-3)

These are the remnants of people who were not buried, people who were denied a dignified conclusion to life, victims of the annihilators of Israel. “Will these bones live?” It cannot be that these died in vain. It is the eternal question of all who must mourn for those who were murdered, who had to die long before their time.

This thought from the book of Ezekiel has occupied many since the Maccabean period. The Perushim were among them, they firmly expected the resurrection from the dead. And this happens on that *day* when “the court sits down and books are opened,” *after the days* of the beastly rule of the world powers. Then the days of the Human are coming, which will be completely different days, but will remain just earthly days. The *last* day is the day of that decision that will make all days new; it is the last day in the series of days of inhumanity.

As already said, it is the FATHER’s will that everyone who *observes*, who *takes into consideration* (*theōrōn*) the Son, should arrive at the life of the age to come, or, to put it another way, that this Son should make him stand up on the *Day of Decision*—precisely to that “upright walk” of which Leviticus 26:13 speaks and that only really is life. Resurrection to the life of the age to come therefore has to do with a Messianic *theory*, from *theōrein*, “to observe, to regard, to pay attention, to consider exactly.” Freedom is a theory that is a practice, the practice of him who walks his way of life, his *Halakha*, with this Messiah, taking him “into consideration” in all that he does.

8.4.3. Grumbling. Bread of Life, Eating Meat, 6:41-51

6:41 The Judeans were grumbling about him because he said,
“I AM—the bread that comes down from heaven.”²²⁸

6:42 They said,
“Is not this Jesus ben Joseph?
We know who is his father and who his mother.
How can he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven’?”

228 [GRUMBLING: Though TV in 2015 takes “to protest” instead of “to grumble,” I stick to his earlier translation because he refers to it in his interpretation.]

PROTESTING: *Gongyzein*, Hebrew *lun*: The verb is a basic word in the conflict narratives of the book Numbers. There the verb has to be translated as “to protest.” The people fight for their survival and protest against a leadership that deprives them of their means of subsistence (bread, water). (See Ton Veerkamp, *Die Welt anders. Politische Geschichte der Großen Erzählung*, Berlin 2013, 143.)

CT: The verb *gongyzein*, *lun* refers to “grumbling” in the wilderness (Exodus 16:7; 17:3; Numbers 14:27, 29; 16:11; 17:6), i.e. to stubbornness and rejection. In 7:12 *gongysmos*, *thelunoth*, is rather “murmuring.”

6:43 Jesus answered, he said to them,
 “Do not grumble among yourselves.
 6:44 No one can come to me
 unless the FATHER who sent me drags him,
 and I will raise him up on the Day of the Final Decision.
 6:45 It is written in the Prophets,
They will all be trainees of the NAME.
 Everyone who listens on behalf of the Father and is trained²²⁹
 comes to me.
 6:46 Not that anyone has seen the FATHER
 except for the one who is from GOD,
 he has seen the FATHER.
 6:47 Amen, amen, I say to you,
 whoever trusts has the life of the age to come:
 6:48 I AM—the bread of life.
 6:49 Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; they died.
 6:50 This is the bread that comes down from heaven,
 so that one may eat of it and not die.
 6:51 I AM—the living bread that has come down from heaven.
 if anyone eats of this bread, he will live into the age to come.
 And the bread that I will give is my flesh,
 for the life under the world order.”²³⁰

The heavenly bread in the Sin wilderness was the NAME’s answer to the “grumbling” of the children of Israel against Moses and Aaron. It is on this “grumbling” (*lun, gongyzein, diagongyzein*) that John aims; he uses the word here for the first time. With this word, he connects this passage with the disputes in Jerusalem (Chapters 7-8).

The verb “to grumble” disqualifies the real legitimacy of discontent. It is directed against the leadership of Moses in the wilderness, against the leadership of the Messiah in the wilderness of Rome. Is it possible to live on eternal emergency solutions, “always only manna before our eyes” (Numbers 11:6)? Can you live on messianic illusions, is that bread, even “bread of life”? While the grumbling in the wilderness met with a certain understanding—after all, the quails brought relief—

229 TRAINEES OF THE NAME: *Didaktoi theou*, Hebrew *limude YHWH*, Isaiah 54:13 (see also 50:4). The Hebrew root *lamad* means both “to teach” and “to learn,” “to train” and “to be trained.” To be taught is practical; it is “training.” The *Talmud* (same root *lamad*) is the teaching structure for the *halakha*, the walk of life.

230 LIFE UNDER THE WORLD ORDER: It is about life in the world order, thus not “life of the world.” For *hē tou kosmou zōē* is the absolute antithesis of *zōē aiōnios*. The Messianic eon overturns life under the world order. The flesh of the Messiah is precisely his life *under* the world order.

John does not waste much time with such objections: it is grumbling, grouching in a grumpy way. Jesus for Israel plays exactly the same role as the manna in the wilderness: without this “bread from heaven” Israel will not survive the wilderness of Sin and the wilderness of Rome.

“We know you,” say the Judeans, “you are Jesus ben Joseph, we know your father and mother!” They know where Jesus comes from—so much for heaven! Is he to decide who will reach the life of the age to come and who will not?

John does not know a virgin birth, he does not know the metaphysical origin of a God being that is merely hiding in a material shell. The earthly mother of Jesus appears at decisive points. And yet he is the one “who has come down from heaven.” To be, on the one hand, an earthly man with earthly parents, to lead a perishable and vulnerable existence, to be “flesh,” and, on the other hand, “having come down from heaven” is not a contradiction to John. “Having come down from heaven” means to be so completely penetrated by the will of God that there is no longer any room for an existence that would be driven by one’s own concerns.

This is extraordinary, but not unique. From the prophet of Mount Carmel, we do not even learn the name of the father, which in Israel always belonged to one’s name. The name of this prophet has the NAME as its only, all-determining content: *ʾEli-yahu*, “my God is the NAME.” And the son of a certain Joseph from Nazareth, Galilee, has as his name the liberation of Israel by the God of Israel, Jesus as a short form of *Ye-hoshuaʿ*, “the NAME liberates.” That is what “having come down from heaven” means for a text that wants to be understood from the Scriptures of Israel.

“Don’t grumble,” says Jesus, “do not behave as your fathers behaved in the wilderness of Sin.” And then Jesus says that sentence, which could indicate divine arbitrariness, “No one comes to me, except that the FATHER, who sent me, drags him to me.” The verb means something more than just “to pull.” We think of Hosea 11:4, “With a human bond, I pulled you, with ropes of love,” or of Jeremiah 31:2-3 (LXX 38:2-3),

Thus says the NAME,

“They found favor in the wilderness,
the people that escaped the sword,
Israel walked to their rest.”

From far away the NAME allowed to be seen by me.

“With world-age love, I loved you (*ʾahavath ʿolam ahavthikh*),
so my solidarity dragged you (*meshakhtikh chessed, heilkysa se eis oiktirēma*).”

Of course, the Christian interpretation sees here the “grace of God,” which alone is to bring about the conversion of Jews and Gentiles. The interpretation of John is a different one. Just as the love and solidarity (*ʾahavath, chessed*) of his God has dragged Israel through the wilderness (*mashakhthi, heilkysa*), so the NAME/FATHER “drags” or “pulls” (*heilkysē auton*) Israel through the wilderness of Rome. Without

him, without listening to him, Israel cannot survive the Sin wilderness, without the Messiah, Israel will not survive the Roman wilderness. Jesus “will raise them up on the Day of Decision,” for the third time in this speech we hear it.

This is written “in the prophets,” says John: “No one will train his comrade,” Jeremiah 31:33, and “All your sons will be trainees of the NAME,” Isaiah 54:13. “To train, school, teach” (*limed*) and “trainees of the NAME” (*limude YHWH, didaktous theou*) invoke the word “Talmud,” the teaching of Rabbinical Judaism. The sentence is directed against it, “He who listens to the Father and is [thus] trained (*mathōn, math-ētēs*)²³¹, comes to me.”

But he warns that the Scriptures do not convey a vision of God, or, as we would say today, a religious experience. Only he who is “with God” has a “God experience,” and that is only the One sent by GOD. Only he has seen the FATHER. Thus he towers above Moses, who was indeed granted a vision of God, but only “from behind, in passing” (Exodus 33:18-23). This relativizes the polemical sentence.

The Scriptures—and this is all that is “to be heard from the FATHER”—require training, and where there are disciples, there are teachers. Without scribes, there is no way, and anyone who opens the Scriptures at the behest of Billy Graham, or at his own good fortune, and reads them alone, will most likely understand nonsense and possibly take from them life-threatening instructions for action, such as the war in Iraq. Without a rabbi, without the teaching of an “Ecclesiastical Dogmatics,”²³² it won’t work. John was a teacher, a rabbi, though a very peculiar one.

After this is cleared up, Jesus takes up the bread theme again. Now a staccato of theorems is following. The one who trusts in Jesus receives the life of the age to come. This one is the bread of life. This means: If the “I AM, I WILL BE THERE,” is still valid, then only as that *bread* which is the Messiah. The fathers ate the manna and died. It was not by chance that they died, but because they refused to go into the land of liberty, Deuteronomy 2:14. They ate but did not listen to the words of God through Moses, so they died. The Messiah is the bread that comes down from heaven; just as the manna secured the life of Israel in those days, the bread of the Messiah now secures the life of Israel. This *bread* named *Messiah* is the living bread, the bread coming down from heaven, which secures life until the age to come.

Now Jesus becomes concrete. The *Messiah* is the *bread* and as the most vital bread, he leads the earthly-political existence of the Messiah Jesus ben Joseph, whose parents people know. He leads this political, endangered, and vulnerable existence. “Flesh” is what John calls the life of humans under the world order. The short for-

231 In Greek there are two words for the act of teaching: teaching (*didaskein*) and learning (*manthanein*). The Hebrew helps itself with one root, *lamad*.

232 [By this expression TV refers to the “Kirchliche Dogmatik” of the great German theologian of the 20th century, Karl Barth, in which he, bound to the faith of the Church, reflected in detail about this faith, instructed by the Bible.]

mula for the Messiah's existence is, "Flesh for the *life of the world*." "World" does not live; people live, people in the world, that is, people living under the conditions of a real ruling world order. Being human is always to be *in* the world, to be *under* the world order. The existence of the Messiah is *flesh—in* the world, *under* the world order, and thus *for the world*—so that its order can be an order of life. Messianic existence is political existence, otherwise is it nothing at all.²³³

8.4.4. The Dispute among the Judeans, 6:52-59

- 6:52 The Judeans disputed among themselves, saying,
"How can this one give us his flesh to eat?"
- 6:53 So Jesus said to them,
"Amen, amen, I say to you:
Unless you eat the flesh of the *bar enosh*, the Human,
and drink his blood,
you will not live yourselves."²³⁴
- 6:54 The one chewing²³⁵ my flesh and drinking my blood
has life for the age to come,
and I will raise him up on the Day of the Final Decision.
- 6:55 For my flesh really is food,
and my blood really is drink.
- 6:56 The one chewing my flesh and drinking my blood
is staying firmly connected with me, and I with him.
- 6:57 Just as the FATHER, the living One, sent me,
and as I live through the FATHER,
so also that one chewing me will live through me.
- 6:58 This one is the bread that came down from heaven.
Not like the fathers ate—they died.
The one chewing this bread will live until the age to come!"
- 6:59 He said these things, teaching in a synagogue at Capernaum.

233 [In my March 18, 2007 service, "[Flesh for the Life of the World](#)," I addressed the connection of John 6:51 with Numbers 11, Psalm 104:20-22, and Galatians 5:14-15. In a nutshell: Those who lust after "flesh" (Numbers 11) live under the influence of Pharaoh's or Rome's world order and eventually kill the Messiah. The Messiah, however, gives his life freely and thus overcomes the system of eating and being eaten.]

234 CT: *Echete zōēn en heautois*: See the note to 5:26. To live *oneself* is not a life determined by the world order, but by the Messiah (*di' eme*, 6:57).

235 CHEWING: *Trōgein*, "to devour, to eat off, to chew, to gnaw"; the verb occurs nowhere in the LXX. Why does John use a completely unusual, coarse word? He wants to increase the provocation to the unbearable so that the rejection is complete. Therefore, the translation must make this provocation audible. Since there is no suitable noun in Greek for *trōgein*, John must take *brōsis* at 6:55, which is "normal" and means "food."

Some do not come along here anymore, others are undecided, are quarreled (*emachonto*): “How can this one give us his meat to eat?” John would have a chance here to explain what “eating meat” could mean.

John not only undauntedly continues what he has said so far, but he tops it all off: eat the flesh of the Human, *my* flesh, even drink his blood, *my* blood. But what exactly is to eat (*phagein*) here? Chew (*trōgein*) his flesh! Drink his blood, then you will get alive into the world age to come, “I will raise him up on the Day of Decision,” the fourth time. “Only that is food,” says Jesus, only that is really food and drink, that keeps you alive, only that.

The fact that it says “to chew” instead of “to eat” is thus by no means a “stylistic variation,” as Wengst says.²³⁶ John does not have a sense of exercise in style here. Here our text is taking a far-reaching turn. Now he wants provocation. Whoever talks like that does not want any understanding. He wants separation, schism. That is the language of the sect.

We are so blunted by our communion services that we no longer feel the provocation. Jesus does not talk about the wafer or a cup of grape juice, with or without alcohol. The provocation is really intended. Meat is allowed to be eaten in Israel, but, “Meat that has its blood in its soul, you must not eat under any circumstances,” Genesis 9:4. This so-called Noahide prohibition is repeatedly inculcated: the blood must not be eaten, it must be allowed to flow away before eating the meat; it must be kosher. Chewing human flesh and drinking its blood at the same time for every child of Israel is a disgusting violation of the fundamental commandment based on the unconditional reverence for human life, Genesis 9:5-6. Therefore, the Torah declares blood an absolute taboo.

Certainly, by this expression, John means a complete identification with the political existence of Jesus, unconditional discipleship on the path of the Messiah, “He who chews my flesh, drinks my blood, remains united to me, and I to him.” But by formulating this thought in a way that is so repulsive to the Judeans, he obviously does not want them to find any access to this Messiah. This is *scandalous* in the true sense of the word, and John knows it, v.61! Consequently, the group around John ends up in a locked room, “doors locked for fear of the Judeans,” 20:19, 26.

Jesus, the one sent from the FATHER, only lives “through the FATHER.” That means: he does not only work for the cause of the God of Israel, he rather is the cause itself, that—and only that—is his life. And whoever chews the Messiah lives through the Messiah, for he, himself, becomes the cause of God, the cause of the Messiah. He can do nothing else.

236 Klaus Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium*. 1. Teilband: Kapitel 1-10 (ThKNT), Stuttgart 2000, 253.

John summarizes, “This one is the bread coming down from heaven, not like the fathers at that time: they ate and died. He who chews this bread will live until the world age to come.” However “sublime” this theology may be to some, it seems divisive and is therefore worthy of criticism. The provocative, divisive teaching which Jesus presented in the synagogue of Capernaum—and this was probably also the teaching which John presented in the synagogue of his own city—divides his listeners, it divides the Messianic movement. In any case, this sentence marks a turning point. Up to this point in the text, the Messianic community gathered together. From this moment on the disintegration of the community begins. This is a tragedy for him whose political program was the gathering of Israel in one synagogue (11:52).

8.5. The Decay of the Messianic Community, 6:60-71

8.5.1. An Evil Speech, 6:60-66

6:60 Many of his disciples who were listening said,
“Evil²³⁷ is this word—who can listen to it?”

6:61 But Jesus, knowing himself that his disciples were grumbling about this,
said to them, “This is a stumbling block²³⁸ to you?

6:62 What if you were to observe the *bar enosh*, the Human, going up
to where he was before?

6:63 It is the inspiration that makes alive,
the flesh can contribute nothing.²³⁹
The words that I have spoken to you are inspired,
they are life.

6:64 Yet there are some among you who do not trust.”
For Jesus knew from the beginning
which ones would not trust him,
also which one would hand him over.

237 EVIL: *Sklēros* does not mean “difficult to understand.” It rather means “unacceptable.” We find the word in the Greek version of Genesis 21:11. Sarah had demanded of Abraham that he should send his son Ishmael with his mother into the wilderness. The narrator comments: *wa-yeraʿ ha davar meʿod beʿene ʾavraham*, Greek *sklēron de ephanē to rēma sphodra enantion Abraam*: “The word (of Sarah) was to work evil in Abraham’s eyes.” But then God says that regarding the mother (Hagar) and her son (Ishmael) “it will work no evil” (*ʾal-yeraʿ*, Greek *mē sklēron*). In the same way, the speech of Jesus, seemingly evil, will in truth cause nothing evil.

238 STUMBLING BLOCK: *Skandalizein* does not mean that people are angry, but that Jesus is a stumbling block (Hebrew *mikhshol*) or trap (Hebrew *moqesh*) for Israel. The Septuagint translates both words as *skandalon*. The associated verb *skandalizein* means “to walk into the trap of false gods” or “to stumble over the false god in one’s walk of life.”

239 THE FLESH CAN CONTRIBUTE NOTHING: *Ōpheleō*, “to help, to be useful.” But see the scene in Ezekiel 37.

6:65 He said,
 "This is why I told you:
 no one can come to me
 unless it has been given to him from the FATHER."
 6:66 Therefore, many of his disciples went away, backward,
 and no longer walked their way with him.

Many disciples listened to this and reacted like Abraham when Sarah asked him to expel the slave girl and her son: "Evil (*sklēros*) was the speech,²⁴⁰ and very much so, in Abraham's eyes," Genesis 21:11. The Greek word *sklēros* is often used for the Hebrew *chazaq* when referring to a "stubborn heart" (*wayechazeq lev par'o* [e.g. Exodus 7:22]). Pharaoh's heart was *sklēros*. All that Jesus had said seemed to them evil and stubborn, blind to reality, fanatical. This is not difficult, no difficult theology, no, for "many disciples" of Jesus this is fanatical sectarian ranting!

Of course, they too perceive the expression "eating flesh" and "drinking blood" as an evil provocation, but that is not the most important thing. Jesus exactly knows what is going on. He places these disciples alongside the grumbling *Judeans*. He knows that they consider his speech not only as scandalous in our sense of the word but as a stumbling block (*mikhshol*) or a trap (*moqesh*), highly damaging to the Messianic cause. These words stand behind the Greek word *skandalon*. But if, says John, they perceive this speech as a scandal and as a political stumbling block, what would happen if they were to watch the Human rising up? The stumbling block is precisely how the rising will take place: the crucifixion.

Jesus reminds them of Ezekiel 37:5-6,

Thus says my Lord, the NAME, to the dry bones,
 "There, I am the ONE who makes inspiration come: You live!
 And I give you muscles,
 I cover you with flesh,
 I stretch skin over you,
 I give inspiration in you: you live,
 you recognize: I AM—the NAME!"

The two lines about reviving inspiration frame the lines about the muscles, the flesh, the skin. The whole is more than the sum of the parts, the limbs, it is the breath of God, "the breath of life that makes mankind a living soul," Genesis 2:7. This inspiration is the principle; flesh, muscles, skin only live through inspiration, "the flesh can contribute nothing to it."

240 The LXX reads, *sklēron de ephanē for wa-yera' ha-davar*. In Abraham's eyes, Sarah's request to send the slave and Abraham's son Ishmael literally into the wilderness where they are to croak was unacceptable, in other words, "evil, and very much so."

The classical translation, “It is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh is no help, is useless,” suggests an opposition between “Spirit” and “flesh,” which does not exist either in John or in the Scriptures. If the Messiah wants those who trust in him to “chew his flesh,” flesh cannot suddenly have a negative meaning here.

So the sense is enlightened from Ezekiel 37,5-6. The flesh is a part, perhaps also the sum of the parts, only the inspiration is the whole. Without the parts, there is no whole, without the whole the parts are no parts, without the inspiration the flesh decays, but without the flesh, the inspiration has no real basis.

“The spoken words—*rhēmata*—that I have spoken are inspiration and life.” Perfect identification with the *devarim*, the speeches and deeds of the Messiah, chewing and drinking, are all that can inspire life. And he repeats that no human can identify himself with the Messiah if the God of Israel—and this is the Word of God—does not give it to him.

Among the disciples, some do not trust this and still have open questions. In a sect, open questions are not allowed. You may ask whether the unity of the sect does not force a member whose questions are not allowed to betray. John himself sets a connection here. It is precisely the politically intransigent nature of this text that leads to the effect that he seeks to avoid.

“Many” leave the group, and that means to John that they went “backward,” that they no longer walked the Messianic Halakha with Jesus. Whether this means that they turned to Rabbinical Judaism, we cannot say for sure. In any case, they have had enough of this kind of messianism. But not even the fact that the group was decimated was an occasion for critical self-contemplation, at least not in the phase of the group in which this chapter was written. The worst opponents are always the former sect members. More about this in chapter eight. In 8:31 ff. those who once trusted the Messiah and turned away from him have their say.

8.5.2. Words of the Age to Come, 6:67-7:1

6:67 So Jesus said to the Twelve,
 “Don’t you want to leave too?”

6:68 Simon Peter answered him,
 “Lord,
 to whom would we go away?
 With you, there are words of life of the age to come.

6:69 We have trusted, we have recognized:
 YOU ARE—the Messiah²⁴¹—the Holy One of GOD.”

241 THE MESSIAH: The words *ho christos*, “the Messiah”, can be found in several manuscripts, including P⁶⁶. In several other manuscripts—including P⁴⁵, \aleph , and B—they are omitted.

6:70 Jesus answered them,
 “Didn’t I choose you, the Twelve?
 Yet one of you is an adversary.”²⁴²

6:71 He said this of Judas ben Simon Iscariot.
 This one was about to hand him over—one of the Twelve!

7:1 After this, Jesus was walking his way in Galilee,
 for he did not want to walk his way in Judea,
 because the Judeans were seeking to kill him.

“Do you want to leave too?” The question is addressed to the Twelve. In John, this is not a matter of course. Only at this place, the Twelve are addressed as such. Apart from 20:24, where Thomas is described as “one of the Twelve,” the Twelve play no role. In important Messianic communities, the disciples played a leading role because they belonged to the Twelve. John occupies a decidedly isolated position. Simon Peter cannot be negated by John; too unchallenged was his position among the Messianists from the children of Israel. But among his Twelve, precisely those who occupied leading positions in the other Gospels, such as the sons of Zebedee, James and John, play no role. They only appear in the chapter appended to the book, in which it is told how the group had broken through its political isolation, 21:2. In his case, it is Andrew, Philipp, Thomas, Nathanael, and that Judas who does not come from Kerioth.²⁴³ This points to a political rift among the Messianists. But John cannot have the Twelve run away here as well, because the Twelve are the new, Messianic Israel and this Israel is what John is concerned with.

So the decisive answer is given by Simon Peter. The first part of the answer is weak. This could also mean that the others are no better. With Jesus, however, there are “words of the age to come,” thus by no means an “evil speech.” They, the Twelve, have trusted, and consequently, they can say they have realized, “YOU ARE—the Messiah—the Holy One (the Son) of the (living) God.” This confessional answer has been handed down in old variants.²⁴⁴ The Holy One is the character of Daniel 7:25. In the interpretation of the night vision, the *bar enosh*, the Human, is described by the angel as “the people of the Holy Ones of the Most High to whom all kingly power

242 ADVERSARY: See note on 8:44.

243 [This explanation assumes that the name Iscariot would mean *ʿish qerioth*, “man from Kerioth,” a town in Moab, East Jordan, mentioned in Joshua 15:25, Amos 2:2, and Jeremiah 48:24, 41.]

244 When the text was completed, many thought they had to formulate it differently. They have the confession of Peter from Mark in their ears, “You are the Messiah” (8:29; not by chance also there are many variations, including “the Messiah, the SON of the living God”). Confession formulas have a life of their own, and the maker of a manuscript was inclined to adopt the formulation of the respective church liturgy. Here it is not about a dogmatic controversy.

under heaven is given.” Jesus is the Holy One who chooses the people of the Holy Ones, the “Twelve” (see 15:16). Admittedly with a sinister restriction. The dark cloud of betrayal is rising here. For the time being, Jesus wants to walk his way in Galilee. What was still a somewhat far-fetched threat in the fifth chapter now takes on sharper contours. One of those around him will be an instrument for those who seek to kill Jesus, “one of the Twelve!”

Scholion 6: On the Clerical-Sacramental Interpretation of the Bread Speech, especially 6:52-59

We begin with Johannes Calvin:

What Christ brings us, then, can only be felt by those who, after the world has been overcome, have the last resurrection before their eyes. From these words, it becomes quite clear that it would be wrong to refer the whole passage to the Lord’s Supper. For if without distinction, all who come to the holy table of the Lord were certainly to share in his flesh and blood, they too would have to come to life in the same way. But we know that many enjoy it unto death. And it would be foolish and untimely to speak now of the Lord’s Supper, which he had not yet instituted. That is why he certainly speaks here of the constant “food of faith.” At the same time, however, I admit that all that has been said for the faithful actually points to the Lord’s Supper and is true: Christ wanted the holy meal, so to speak, as the seal of this teaching. This is why John does not mention the Lord’s Supper. So Augustine also follows the correct order, in that he, in interpreting this chapter, does not touch the Lord’s Supper until he has come to the end. But then he teaches that the mystery is presented in this sign as often as the congregations celebrate the holy meal, be it here daily or only on the days of the Lord.

So if we reject the sacramental interpretation of John 6, we find support from called mouths. Rudolf Bultmann interprets John 6:51-59 sacramentally and solves the problem by taking the fragment as a later insertion. “Ecclesiastical editors” would interpret the bread speech from the ecclesiastical practice of the congregations. These editors thus proceed not unlike commentators like Barrett, Becker, Bultmann, Schulz, Weiß, Wengst, Wilckens, *e tutti quanti*. Exceptions are Klaus Berger and Boendermaker/Monshouwer. Berger writes, “The Gospel of John stands apart from the actual church practice as it was exercised in churches of the Pauline and Lucanian areas; there they regularly celebrated communion.”²⁴⁵ Boendermaker/Monshouwer are clearer:

245 Klaus Berger, *Im Anfang war Johannes. Datierung und Theologie des vierten Evangeliums*, Stuttgart 1997, 210.

It is not easy to go back behind the conditions that have prevailed in the Western church for centuries. The meal in John, and even the sermon he preached, is far too harmless for a church that made the celebration of the Eucharist the cornerstone of church and ministry and also for a church that made participation in the meal subject to many conditions. Both the Roman Catholic and Reformed traditions have trouble acknowledging that their own habits could probably not have come from an evangelical source.”²⁴⁶

Just as John does not explicitly polemicize against the baptismal practice of the Messianic groups, he does not openly polemicize against the practice of commemorating the Messiah through bread and wine “until he comes.” But he gets along without them. We can at most suspect that John senses the danger of religious mumbo jumbo arising from this practice. If “sacrament,” then with him at most the washing of feet—the sacrament of solidarity.

The churches could not and cannot do much with it because the clerical administration of sacraments—which the Reformation by no means cleared up, but which it had confirmed by an administrative reform—remains the right to exist of all church orders and is not, like the Synoptic Lord’s Supper, a sign of a liberated, Messianic life. After the Second Vatican Council (1962-1966), the Vatican had given the ritual of washing the feet a certain overall ecclesiastical consecration; but the whole thing is no more than religious folklore, as the Lord’s Supper was—and is—a kind of religious magic.²⁴⁷ The speech of the “bread of life” is the speech of an unconditional Messianic discipline and not of a ritual act.

9. *Sukkot*, the Feast of Tabernacles. The Great Struggle, 7:2-10:21

Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles, forms the framework of the great confrontation with the Judeans in Jerusalem. This long chapter can be easily divided:

1. Ascent to Jerusalem, 7:2-10
2. About the Messiah, 7:11-52
- [Intermezzo: Being Put to the Test, 7:53-8:11]
3. The Light of the World, 8:12-30
4. Before Abraham was Born: “I WILL BE THERE,” 8:31-59
5. Of the Blind and Sighted, 9:1-41
6. About the Unity of Israel, 10:1-21

²⁴⁶ Joop P. Boendermaker/Dirk Monshouwer, *Johannes: De evangelist von de feesten*, Zoetermeer 1993, 115-116.

²⁴⁷ See Ton Veerkamp, *Der mystifizierte Messias—das mystifizierte Abendmahl. Abendmahltexte der messianischen Schriften*, in *Texte & Kontexte* 25 (1985), 16-42.

Water and light determine the festival, for the Judeans the highlight of the year, and they also determine the chapter. At the end of the chapter, Jesus unfolds his actual political program: the unity of Israel.

The text problem 8:1-11 was seen very early. There are, despite Franz Hinkelammert,²⁴⁸ no serious objections to the view that this passage was inserted late—probably not until the early 4th century—by a theologian when the text was copied. No one can say where he got the fragment from. The diction reveals proximity to the Synoptic Gospels. After all, the piece has been handed down for fifteen centuries as part of the Gospel of John. We will have to ask ourselves what theological—and that always means political—reasons there were for the insertion.

The traditional festivals *Pascha* and *Sukkot* are festivals that last a whole week. *Sukkot* takes place in the first month, *Pascha* in the seventh month. The new eight-day festival, *Hanukkah*, “renewal,” is not found in the Torah and was added to the festival calendar in the 2nd century BCE. These three festivals are mentioned by John. To him, these festivals are stations on the way from *Pascha* to *Pascha*. *Sukkot*, “leaf huts,” reminds Israel of the time when it stayed in the wilderness. It is a festival of the Torah, of water and light. Another feast day is added to the festival, *Simchat Torah*, “Joy of the Torah.” It is a cheerful festival and closes the first month of the year, the month of the *Rosh ha-Shana* (“New Year”) and of *Yom Kippur* (“Day of Atonement”). To John, the Messiah is the center of the festival: He gives the living water and he is the light. Of course, for those who want to see, even if they were born blind. *Sukkot* is the festival of Israel among the nations. The Messiah brings all of Israel from the land and the countries of the nations together into one yard, like the shepherd brings the sheep into one yard. John tells this in 7:2-10:21.

9.1. Ascent to Jerusalem, 7:2-10

7:2 Near was the festival of the Judeans, *Sukkot*, Feast of Tabernacles.
 7:3 So his brothers said to him,
 “Leave here²⁴⁹ and go away to Judea,
 so that your disciples also can observe the works you do.
 7:4 For no one does anything in secret,
 he seeks to work publicly.²⁵⁰
 If you do these things, manifest yourself to the world order!”

248 Franz J. Hinkelammert, *Der Schrei des Subjekts. Vom Welttheater des Johannesevangeliums bis zu den Hundejahren der Globalisierung*, Luzern 2001, 30 ff.

249 CT: *Metabēthi* from *metabainein*. The verb occurs in the LXX only in the Book of Wisdom of Solomon and in 2 Maccabees. In the martyr legend 2 Maccabees 6, the verb means “to pass over to the side of the enemies.”

250 PUBLICLY: *En parrhēsia*. “S’il cherche la publicité,” translates André Chouraqui. Adverbially as a dative without preposition, *parrhēsia* means “open.”

7:5 For not even his brothers were trusting in him.
 7:6 So Jesus said to them,
 “My minute has not yet come;
 for you, any minute is opportune.”²⁵¹
 7:7 The world order can’t fight you with hate,
 but it does fight me with hate,
 because I bear witness against it that its works are evil.
 7:8 You, go on up to the festival;
 as for me, I am not going up to this festival,
 because my minute is not yet fulfilled.”
 7:9 Having said this, he stayed on in Galilee.
 7:10 But when his brothers had gone up to the festival,
 he too went up,
 not publicly but in secret.

The disciples do expect something from the upcoming great festival, where all Israel was to gather for a week. Of these disciples, it is above all the “brothers of Jesus” who want to see facts created at the *Sukkot* festival. Jesus shall “explain” himself there and thus become the center of the festival. This is what happens, but in a different way than the brothers imagined.

Until the beginning of the modern age, Christianity could not imagine that Jesus had brothers. He had brothers, and these brothers played an important role in the Messianic movement. The Messianic community in Jerusalem was the community of the brothers of Jesus; James, the “brother of the Lord”—not to be confused with James, the son of Zebedee—was their superior. From their direct relationship with Jesus, they developed claims to a leading role in the Messianic movement. All Gospels polemicize against this kind of leadership claims based on kinship, Mark 3,31-35 par.:

His mother and his brothers came.

They stood outside, sent for him, and called him.

251 [John uses two different Greek words—*hōra* and *kairos*—to denote a moment or point in time in which a crucial change shall take place; both should not be translated as “time.” I translate *hōra* literally as “hour” and choose “minute” in the sense of “moment, instant” for *kairos*. To TV’s following note from 2015, I add in brackets a brief addition from 2005.]
 MOMENT: *Kairos*, Hebrew *‘eth*, is the appointed moment, see Ecclesiastes 3. *Parestin* comes from the same verb as *parousia*. In Matthew 24, 1 Corinthians 15, 1/2 Thessalonians, James, 2 Peter, and 1 John 2:28 it is a technical term for the dawn of the Messianic age. To the brothers, the moment is “justified” (*hetoimos*, *hetoimazein*, “to prepare”), hence “opportune” [the Vulgate translates *eukairon* in Psalm 103 LXX as *tempus opportunum*]. Perhaps this is an indication that the community of the “brothers” in Jerusalem is expecting the Messianic change for the very near future in the imminent war. The Messiah, however, has to “go away” first.

Around him sat the crowd.
 And they said to him,
 “There, your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside
 and seek you.”
 He answered them, he said,
 “Who are my mother and my brothers?”
 He looked at those who sat around him, he said,
 “Look, my mother and my brothers.
 He who does the will of God,
 he is to me mother and brother and sister.”

This polemic is directed against the Messianic communities, in which the kinship of Jesus played an important role, and also against the Messianic community of John, where the mother of Jesus had a central position (19:26-27).²⁵²

John polemicizes here against the brothers; they see in Jesus a political asset, “Make yourself known to the world order!” They wanted an open political challenge to the real-existing political power. To them, the politics of Jesus is the politics of a subversive existence; what he does, he does “in secret.” After all that he has shown in Galilee, this should end now. The crowd has recognized the Messiah on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Now he is to reveal himself as Messiah in the center of power, that is, to make his political claim.

To John, the brothers—the Messianic community of Jerusalem—had been sympathizers of the militant Zealot movement. The dispute between Jesus and his brothers is about the word *kairos*. With him, the word occurs only here. John otherwise avoids the word. He prefers to talk about *hōra*, “hour.” Apparently, to him, the word *kairos* was infected with a Zealotic virus. Here he must use the word *kairos*. To the militants, *kairos* is always there; the Zealots always seek the opportunity to make the time “ripe” (*hetoimos*, “ready”) to fight the final battle.

252 This conflict was repeated in early Islam. According to many Muslims, the leader of the Umma, the community of believers, should be a man from the direct kinship of Muhammad. Others wanted to see Muhammad’s successor elected by the community. This led to a far-reaching split. Ali ibn Abu Talib, a cousin of Muhammad and husband of Muhammad’s daughter Fatima, proclaimed himself caliph. The Umayyad family, who came from the city of Muhammad but did not belong to his family, established the caliph in Damascus. The Muslims in Iraq and the highlands of Iran adhered to Ali’s party (*shiʿat Ali*); they are the Shiites. The others recognized the authority of the Umayyads; from them, the Sunnite direction of Islam emerged. The conflict was decided by the sword. Ali’s son Hussain was killed in the city of Karbala by Yazid, commander of the Umayyad army. Hussain is the protomartyr of the Shiites, whom they honor on the 10th day (Ashura) of the month Moharram with scourge processions, among other things. To this day, the great imams of the Shiites derive directly from the family of Muhammad.

Especially in the Diaspora, there were people with militant views. Their war against Rome (115-117) also ended in a catastrophe. Each messianism constantly lives in the temptation to want to shorten the time.²⁵³ Jesus' objection consists in the particle *oupō*, "not yet." We hear this political "not yet" seven times in John, the last time in 20:17.

Even the resurrection of Jesus is subject to the reservation of "not yet." Maria from Magdala is sent by Jesus to his brothers with the message, "I, Jesus, ascend to my FATHER and your FATHER, to my God and your God." Only then, the ascension can begin, it is not yet complete, "I have not yet (*oupō*) ascended to the FATHER." Even the resurrection is no legitimation for the Zealotic *kairos*. Maria from Magdala is sent precisely to the brothers of Jesus, who are still busy with analyses of *kairos*. "Not yet" applies to the year 100, too; it applied to any point in time between the years 60 and 100; more to this, in the discussion of 20:17-18.

The seventh chapter can only be understood against the background of the great march of the Zealot fighters from Galilee to the city of Jerusalem in the year 67, a march to perdition, as John and his community knew. The militants did not think much of a life "in secret," which John saw as the only realistic political option, "Even his brothers did not trust in him."

The reason is the hatred of the world order. We will stick to the view that *kosmos* means the (Roman) world order. Then the question arises, why Rome should not hate the Zealot fighters but Jesus. Rome considers the Zealot fighters to be adversaries who are familiar with it. It fights them with that dispassionate determination with which it has always fought its opponents and almost always dealt with them. The Zealots fight Rome on the same level, with military means. On this level Rome is superior. Why should Rome hate the brothers of Jesus?

"Me, however, the world order hates," says Jesus. To John, hate is always: uncompromising rejection. The world order rejects Jesus uncompromisingly because he is uncanny to it. We ask, of course, why Jesus is uncanny to it; it does not even perceive him. At this point, the question cannot be answered. John answers as late as in the story about the interrogation of Jesus by Pilate. On Pilate's side, this interrogation is a mixture of arrogance and fear. Jesus was uncanny to Pilate. There is only one word for this mixture: hate. Rome does not fight the Messianists with weapons but with hate.

The attitude of the executioners during the so-called persecutions of Christians was always fed by a mixture of contempt and the feeling of uncanniness that the martyrs instilled in them. To this hateful order, you can only reveal yourself if there is an absolute alternative, that is, if "the moment is fulfilled." That is just not the case, and

253 Martin Buber's Chassidic "novel" *Gog and Magog* is about this temptation.

that is why the world order, all who profess it, cannot recognize him as what he is: the Messiah of Israel. He is hidden in what he does and is. The Messianic existence is subversive, that is what the verb *kryptein* says, “to hide oneself.”

Under the circumstances that the brothers want, he cannot and will not go up to the festival. He does not want to have anything to do with the Zealot messianic euphoria. “You may go up,” as so many people have gone up from Galilee. All they could achieve, was at the most riot, being bloodily crushed by the Roman soldiers (Luke 13:1 ff.). To go up “publicly” means nothing but riot, senseless rampage. You may go, he does not go, says Jesus, not with you, not as you go; not as a public figure, with claims to be made publicly (*phanerōs*), but in secret (*en kryptō*).

The next sections deal with the hiddenness, the subversiveness of the Messiah. And we will see that political unambiguity and subversiveness do not contradict each other but presuppose each other. Under Roman conditions, subversiveness without political unambiguity denatures into gangsterism; political unambiguity without subversive practice is only featuring the court jester of the system.

9.2. About the Messiah, 7:11-52

7:11 Now the Judeans were seeking him at the festival, they said,
“Where is he?”

7:12 There was much whispering²⁵⁴ about him among the crowds;
some said, “He is good,”
but others said, “No, he is leading astray the crowd.”

7:13 However, no one spoke about him openly,
for fear of the Judeans.

7:14 When the festival was already half over,
Jesus went up to the sanctuary and was teaching.

7:15 So the Judeans were astonished, saying,
“How does he know about written words,
without having been trained?”²⁵⁵

7:16 Jesus answered them, he said:
“My teaching is not my own,
but from the ONE who sent me.

7:17 If anyone wants to do his will,

254 WHISPERING: *Gongysmos*, Hebrew *theluna*. We translated the corresponding verb *gongyzein* (*lun*) in John 6 with “to protest” [or here with “to grumble”], because it is related to the “grumbling” in the wilderness (Exodus 16:7; 17:3; Numbers 14:27.29; 16:41; 17:5). Here it is rather about rumors, therefore “whispering.”

255 TRAINED: *Memathēkōs*: in Rabbinical Judaism, the activity as a teacher (rabbi) requires a long time as a disciple of one of the great rabbis.
CT: The contrast to the training by the rabbis is the training by the FATHER, 6:45.

- he will recognize from the teaching whether it is from GOD or I speak on my own.
- 7:18 The one who speaks on his own is seeking his own honor; the one who seeks the honor of the one who sent him, he is trustworthy, there is nothing false²⁵⁶ about him.
- 7:19 Didn't Moses give you the Torah? Yet not one of you does the Torah! Why do you seek to kill me?"
- 7:20 The crowd answered, "You are possessed!²⁵⁷ Who seeks to kill you?"
- 7:21 Jesus answered, he said to them, "One work I did, and all of you are astonished.
- 7:22 Therefore: Moses gave you circumcision —not that it came from Moses but from the fathers— and on Shabbat, you circumcise a human.
- 7:23 Although a human receives circumcision on Shabbat so that the Torah of Moses will not be broken, you bawl me out,²⁵⁸

256 [FALSE: As I explained referring to 5:30, it is hard to find English words corresponding to the Greek radical *dik-* which would also be related to each other "by roots". As *adikia* appears only here in John, I take the CJB translation "false" as opposed to *dikaïos*, "reliable". The word "untruthfulness" as an equivalent for the German "Unwahrhaftigkeit" does not seem appropriate to me:]

UNTRUTHFULNESS: *Adikia*: The word with the stem *dik-* stands for the Hebrew root *tzadaq* which we translate according to Buber as "wahr-." *Adikia* is "untruthfulness," i.e. what does not prove itself. The consequence is "injustice," as vv.7:19 and 7:24 show.

257 YOU ARE POSSESSED: *Daimonion echeis*: The expression indicates that a person is controlled by a power outside of him, which he can't control. The LXX uses *daimonion*, *daimōn*, for five different Hebrew words, such as *gad* ("idols of luck") or *sa'ir* ("goat idol," i.e. our horned little devil), never by the way for *satan* (see 8:44). "Being possessed" is the appropriate translation; the emotional value is similar to: "You are bonkers."

258 BAWL ME OUT: *Emoi cholate*, from *cholē*, "gall, bile, choler." The word occurs only once in John. "To enrage" would be too weak. John evaluates the criticism regarding the Shabbat practice of Jesus simply as "ranting, bawling." The text refers to the healing that is told in chapter 5, but this does not give anyone the right to doubt the text that has been handed down to us in this way and to insert vv.7,15-24 after 5:47, like Becker, Bultmann, Wilckens, etc., do. What is to be translated is what was handed down and how it was handed down; however, no such transposition was ever handed down.

- because I made a whole human whole on Shabbat?
- 7:24 *Don't judge according to the appearance,
but judge a reliable judgment!*²⁵⁹
- 7:25 Now some of them of Jerusalem said,
"Isn't this the one they seek to kill?"
- 7:26 There: he is speaking openly, and they don't say anything to him.
Have the authorities really recognized
that this one is the Messiah?
- 7:27 But from this one we know where he is from;
but when the Messiah comes,
no one will have knowledge where he is from."
- 7:28 Now he cried out, teaching in the sanctuary, Jesus said,
"You know me, and you know where I am from!
And I have not come on my own,
but trustworthy is the ONE who sent me;
and him you don't know.
- 7:29 I do know him because I am with him,
that ONE sent me."
- 7:30 Now they sought to seize him;
but no one laid a hand on him;
because his hour had not yet come.
- 7:31 Among the crowd many trusted in him, they said,
"If the Messiah would come, he will do no more signs
as this one has done."
- 7:32 The Perushim heard the crowd whispering these things about him;
and the leading priests and the Perushim sent officials²⁶⁰
to seize him.
- 7:33 Now Jesus said,
"Still a little while I am with you,"²⁶¹

259 Cited from Deuteronomy 16:18-19, where the order of the lines is reversed. "Reliable judgment," in Hebrew *mishpat tzedeq*. That *summum ius* can also be *summa iniuria (adikia)* was also known by the Tanakh: law must prove its value given the social criteria of the Torah. For this reason, both the Synoptics and John re-weight the Shabbat.
[Again, I take the word "reliable" for the Greek word *dikaïos* as referring to the Hebrew word *tzadiq*—see 5:30 and 7:18.]

260 OFFICIALS: *Hyperētai*, plural of *hyp-ēretēs*, originally "rowers," from there generally "servants" and very often "servants in public service." The German translation "Knecht" (Luther) is not exact, Chouraqui has "gardes." More appropriate is the term "officials"; here it is probably about people with police powers, see 18:3.

261 A LITTLE WHILE: *Chronon mikron*: Some manuscripts leave out these words; they will play a big role in the farewell speeches.

and then I go away to the ONE who sent me.
 7:34 You will seek me, you will not find me;
 and where I am, you cannot come.”
 7:35 The Judeans now said to themselves,
 “Where is this one about to go his way, that we won’t find him?
 Is he about to go his way to the Diaspora²⁶² among the Greek
 and teach the Greek?
 7:36 What is this talk that he said,
 ‘You will seek me, you will not find me’; and,
 ‘Where I am, you cannot come’?”
 7:37 On the last day, the greatest one,²⁶³ of the festival, Jesus stood there,
 and he cried out, saying,
 “If anyone is thirsty, he shall come to me
 and he shall drink
 7:38 who is trusting in me,²⁶⁴
 as the Scripture says,
Rivers of living water
will flow from his body!”²⁶⁵

262 DIASPORA: We leave the word untranslated because it has become a generally adopted term for the Jewish population outside Israel. Originally it describes the process of expulsion (*thefutzena*, *diesparē*, Ezekiel 34:5-6).

263 ON THE LAST DAY: The last day of the festival is the decisive and great day of the festival because Jesus is the origin of the living water. (*Sukkot* as the festival of water; in chapter 8, Jesus himself is the light of the world order, which corresponds to *Sukkot* as the festival of light, Joop P. Boendermaker/Dirk Monshouwer, *Johannes: De evangelist von de feesten*, Zoetermeer 1993, 120 ff.).

264 In early modern times, when our division in Bible verses was made, people had difficulties with the construction of the sentence. Verse number 38 stands immediately before “who trusts in me.” The first versions of P⁶⁶ and of Codex Sinaiticus (ⲛ) don’t have “to me” (*pros me*) at the end of v.37 (later in these manuscripts it was added in each case), likewise, it is missing in codex D and several Latin manuscripts. P⁷⁵ and the Codex Vaticanus (B) offer a synonymous *pros eme* instead of *pros me*.

265 RIVERS . . . BODY: *Potamoi ek tēs koilias autou rheusousin hydatos zōntos*: The Scriptural quotation is a combination of two different images of the Scriptures and refers to two different passages of the Gospel. We know the “living water” from the conversation with the woman at Jacob’s well (4:10 ff.), the word *koilia* from the conversation with Nicodemus, “Can a man go back into his mother’s womb and be born?” (3:4) The directly invoked passage of the Scriptures is found in Zechariah 14:8-9, “It shall be in that day: living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem . . .; it shall be: the NAME shall be king over all the land, in that day the NAME shall be the ONE, his NAME the ONE.” This verse again is a midrash about Ezekiel 47:1 ff. (*potamoi*, “rivers”). *Koilias* in the LXX stands 38 times for *beten*, “belly,” 24 times for *meʿim*, “intestines,” *viscera*, and 12 times for *qerev*, “interior.” We translate *koilia* as “body,” the Vulgate writes *venter*, “belly.” *Ek tēs koilias* means “from the

7:39 This he said about the inspiration,
that those who trusted in him were about to receive.
But there was no inspiration yet,
because Jesus had not yet come to his honor.

7:40 On hearing these words, some of the crowd said,
“This one really is the prophet!”

7:41 Others said,
“This one is the Messiah.”
Still others said,
“No, the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he?”

7:42 Does not the Scripture say,
From the seed of David, from Bethlehem—house of bread—,
the village where David was,
comes the Messiah?”

7:43 A schism came about among the crowd because of him.

7:44 Some wanted to seize him,
but no one laid hands on him.

7:45 Now the officers came back to the leading priests and the Perushim,
these said to them,
“Why didn’t you bring him?”

7:46 The officers answered,
“Never a human spoke like this before!”

7:47 The Perushim answered them,
“You have not been also led astray?

7:48 Has any of the authorities trusted him?
Or any of the Perushim?

7:49 But this crowd that does not know the Torah,
they are cursed!”

7:50 Nicodemus said to them
—the one who had gone to him before, being one of them—,
7:51 “Does our Torah judge the human
without hearing from him first and recognizing what he’s doing?”

7:52 They answered and said to him,
“You aren’t from Galilee too, are you?
Explore and see:
From Galilee no prophet arises!”

womb” (see Isaiah 44:2, 24; 49:1, etc.; Jeremiah 1:5). The “water welling up into the life of the age to come” (4:14) is the inspiration that enables a Messianic existence.—See also John 19:34 and 1 John 5:6.

The Judeans were looking for him: "Is he there or not?" At first, they were looking for nothing but an answer to this question. Their interest in him was fuelled by rumors. *They* wonder what to think of him, whether he is good. Good for what? The antithesis answers this question. Good for leading the people. Some thought he was "good" in this respect, others, rather, that he was leading the people astray.

These questions cannot be discussed openly, "for fear of the Judeans." The *Judeans* seek him, there is a fear of *them*; the problem in 7:11-13 is the ambiguity of the subject. There is a tension between the crowd (*ochlos*) and the Judeans (*Ioudaioi*). In any case, the idea of *Ioudaioi*, *Judeans*, *Jews*, is here strictly ambiguous: "Jews" are afraid of "Jews."

The festival is already half over, half of the great time of processions with palm branches and torches. Here a festival is celebrated that is not yet a festival at all. The indication of time in 7:14 is not a neutral determination but rather denotes a blank space. The walk to the festival had been a hidden, subversive one. Now, it seems, Jesus is lifting this hiddenness. In truth, he moves among Judeans who are afraid of Judeans; the Judean crowd protects him from the seizure of Judean officials; the crowd is the precondition for subversive existence.

This part (7:2-12:50) is about the question of who the Messiah is; what he is, proves itself in what he does. The question is answered by the two signs (John 9 and 11). Whether these signs are an answer depends only on trust in the Messiah. The brothers do *not* have this trust. The crowd does not *yet* have this trust, it is wavering (7:31).

Jesus performs as a teacher (*didaskalos*, *rabbi*); in the days before the devastation of Jerusalem, the place of teaching was the sanctuary. In the sanctuary, the teachers authorized to do so taught, who had to go through appropriate training. Apparently, Jesus was not an apprentice of a generally known *rabbi*; he was not "trained" (*memathēkōs*). They asked him where he got his teaching, who his *rabbi* had been or is. Since he cannot present a teacher, his teaching must have come from himself and is therefore not trustworthy.

The answer is that the teaching does not come from himself, but from the One who sent him. This is precisely the problem, and this is precisely what remains the problem, especially in the two chapters 7 and 8. Anyone who is not prepared from the outset to accept the teaching of the Messianic communities must at least remain skeptical, but in most cases reject it. Jesus's point is: All children of Israel must "do the will of God." Those who want to do the will of God must decide whether the teaching of Jesus comes from himself or from God. Every trustworthy teacher must refer to the teaching of his teacher. In fact, the Talmud argues similarly. An assertion is made (the teaching) and reference is made to the teaching of recognized teachers, "Rabbi so-and-so said, etc." The difference here is that Jesus' teacher is God himself, which is unacceptable to the Judeans, the representatives of Rabbinical Judaism. There is no place for Jesus ben Joseph of Nazareth in the line of proven teachers from Moses, Joshua, the elders, the prophets, the men of the great congre-

gation to the teachers Hillel and Shammai, who appeared at the turn of the eras.²⁶⁶ Whatever he is, he has nothing to say to the Judeans, he is simply not trustworthy.

For the fourth time, we hear the verb “to seek.” Trustworthiness, as Jesus says, does not come from a place in the traditional chain of transmission, but only from the fact that the teacher seeks the honor of the one who sent him. Jesus here does not explicitly say that God sent him; the sentence is general: the teacher honors the one who has entrusted his teaching to him, if and as long as he refers to him. Only then he is trustworthy and does not lead the people astray. For 7:18 refers back to the “untruthfulness” (*adikia*) that is in the reproach *planan*, “leading astray” (7:12).

Jesus suddenly switches back²⁶⁷ to the reproach that the Judeans had made to him on the occasion of the healing of a paralyzed man, that he revokes the Shabbat commandment and thus the Torah, i.e. Moses (5:9b-18). All Messianic communities had to deal with this accusation (Mark 2:2 ff. par.). The *bar enosh* was Lord of the Shabbat (Mark 2:28), and in the Synoptic tradition, he had the privilege of performing works on the day of the Shabbat that were prohibited as such.

John argues here in a different, almost *Rabbinical* way. The first argument is a kind of tit-for-tat: If I violate the Torah (Moses), what about you? “None of you do the Torah, why do you seek to kill me?” The crowd is outraged. In fact, John is lumping together Judeans who are afraid of Judeans with those Judeans who instill fear in other Judeans. The outrage of the crowd is therefore justified.

But Jesus’ reproach cannot be dismissed: If he violates a central rule of the Torah, he is, according to the Torah, guilty of death: Performing works on Shabbat is a capital crime, Numbers 15:32 ff.; Mishna Sanhedrin 7:8. Jesus teaches them in a good Rabbinical manner. “Moses has given *you* circumcision.” But beware: why doesn’t he say, “Moses has given *us* circumcision”? The “Lord of the Shabbat, of the Torah,” is not subject to the Shabbat commandment, neither is the God of Israel, “My FATHER works until now; so I also work,” 5:17. Moreover, circumcision had been there long before Moses had prescribed it, before “your Torah” existed, Genesis 17:9 ff.

Be that as it may, it is permitted, indeed prescribed, to circumcise a male child on the eighth day after his birth, even if it falls on a Shabbat; if this were not done, the Torah would be revoked. If it is permitted to make a man a member of the people on the Shabbat,²⁶⁸ why should it not be permitted to “make a whole man whole on

266 These two great rabbis endowed schools that appeared as factions within the political party of the Perushim. This may be one reason why the Perushim were perceived as a heterogeneous group. In the Gospels, Nicodemus is a “befriended” member of the Perushim.

267 For this reason Bultmann had “rearranged” the text; 5:1-47 + 7:15-24 + 8:13-20 / 7:1-13 + 7:14 + 7:25-29 + 8:48-50 + 8:54-55 + 7:30 etc. Whether the text becomes more “logical” by this, maybe decided by everyone. We stick to the traditional text tradition.

268 See Mishna Shabbat 18:3; 19:1.

the Shabbat”? What does this expression mean? Through circumcision, the circumcised child becomes *part* of the people, the *whole* paralyzed man becomes *completely* whole. This stands for the completely paralyzed Israel. “You bawl me out because I healed Israel on Shabbat?”

To do Torah means “not to judge according to outward appearances, but with the proven right,” Deuteronomy 16:18-19. Jesus here does not distance himself from the Torah and neither from the Shabbat. But whoever handles the Torah as if it were a club of injustice (“*your* Torah,” *nomos hymeteros*) distances himself from the Torah itself, “None of you do the Torah,” says Jesus, and that means, “The way you do the Torah, you turn it into the opposite.”

As in 7:12, we hear in 7:25-26 the inner discussion among the Judeans in the crowd. “They” are debating a rumor, “they” are seeking to kill Jesus. But “they” let him calmly say what he thinks in public (*parrhēsia*). Have “they” perhaps recognized that the Messiah is performing here?

The people in this crowd show Messianic knowledge. The Messiah comes, without anyone being able to say from where. He is there and everything will be different. But the people know the origin of Jesus, Jesus ben Joseph from Nazareth, Galilee. For this reason alone, he cannot be the Messiah. Jesus says, “You know me,” my origin, but you know very well that nothing is said with the statement of my official origin; you know very well that I have not “come from myself.” What I am is that I am sent, no matter whether I come from Nazareth, Galilee, or elsewhere, no matter whether my father is Joseph of Nazareth, Galilee, or another. What you do not know is who sent me. I, so Jesus says, know him, I am with him, he has sent me.

“They”—those fear-instilling Jews—have meanwhile recognized that no harmless fool appears here. They try to get hold of him. For the time being this does not work, because his hour has not yet come. Here it says “hour” against “opportune moment,” *hōra* against *kairos*. His hour will come, in this hour all foolish messianic expectations will be shattered.

The discussions continue. Many trusted because they had seen the works that traditionally are associated with the Messiah: The deaf hear, the blind see, the paralyzed can walk, as the prophet Isaiah said in the song *yesusum midbar*, “Let the wilderness rejoice,” Isaiah 35:1 (see above in the discussion of 4:14). The Perushim heard these discussions and knew: This is a highly political matter. They informed the authorities (*archiereis*, “the leading priests”) and ordered the arrest of Jesus. Both leading priests and Perushim are the “official” Judea, although the Perushim were political opponents of the leading priests. Both groups together pursued the goal of arresting Jesus. At the trial, the death sentence, and the execution, the Perushim are absent; they had played their part in the arrest (18:3). Only the leading priests were protagonists there.

Jesus, however, is not very impressed. After *kairos* and *hōra* we hear a third word, *chronos mikros*, “a little while.” It is the “little while” when the Messiah is with his people and especially with his disciples (12:35; 14:9—here *chronos* without *mikros*; 16:16 ff.—here *mikros* without *chronos*). This can be compared with the “long time” (*polyn chronon*) in which Israel was paralyzed, 5:6. *Chronos* means “duration of time,” and the other two words mean “points in time, moments.” The time of the Messiah is a little while, in John, it is a temporary period.

The Messiah is going away to the one who sent him, that is, to a place where they cannot get to. The Messiah enters the hiddenness of God. There every seeking will be in vain. Jesus cryptically expresses himself, the misunderstanding is intended, as in chapter 6. The crowd continues to discuss and puzzle about what is meant, whether Jesus—after he fails in Judea—wants to go abroad, into the Diaspora, to try his luck in teaching the Greeks—the Greek-speaking Jewish Diaspora—or, as we will hear in 8:22, to kill himself. To John, misunderstanding is a literary means of breaking off a discussion that can lead to nothing. It remains hidden from the people who Jesus is as long as they do not trust. The festival is half over and nothing new has happened.

The hiddenness of the Messiah is deepened once more on the last and great day of the festival. Jesus becomes loud for the second time, he calls out:

If anyone is thirsty, he shall come to me,
and he shall drink who trusts in me,
as the Scriptures says . . .
Rivers will flow from his body,
of living water.

Here all exegetes have a problem because the quotation from the Scriptures is nowhere to be found. We must first remember the conversation with the woman from Samaria, where it was also about “thirst” and “living water.” There too we heard the word *pneuma*, “inspiration” (“spirit”). The *water* that Jesus promises to the woman proves to be the life-giving peace between the two peoples inspired by a new *spirit*.

What or who is “living water”? The answer from Jeremiah 2:13 is the clearest: “They have abandoned me, the fountain of living water.” The fountain of *living water* is the God of Israel. The new that is to be created here is like “a way through the wilderness, like rivers through the wasteland” (Isaiah 43:19). The concluding chapter of the great consolation speech in the book of Isaiah begins, 55:1, “O all who thirst, come to the water. . .” (see above in the discussion of 6:7). John Calvin was quite right when he wrote in his commentary that what is meant here is not a “particular Scriptural passage” but “the testimony of the entire teaching of the prophets.”²⁶⁹

But people cannot understand exactly what is meant. John interprets his words himself by anticipating the end of his narrative. “Water” refers to what is called “spirit” in the church and which we have rendered as “inspiration.” This inspiration will come from Jesus, but only when he will have reached his goal (19:28 ff.). More details we do not learn until the great passage “When he comes, the Summoned One (*paraklētos*) . . .,” 15:26-16:15. Jesus has reached his goal when all illusions about the Messiah, all foolish political Messiah projects, will have found their catastrophic end, when Jesus will have been crucified and finally gone into the hiddenness of his God, only then the inspiration will come from him, which will unite all Israel worldwide. “Rivers of living water” will then go out from the Messiah worldwide, and this is exactly what John means by *inspiration of sanctification*.

People suspect that decisive things are happening here. But everything that is politically decisive divides them. Some of them guess here at the Messiah. This presumption is shattered by that pseudo-knowledge with which a new political initiative is talked out of existence everywhere and at all times. The Messiah comes from Bethlehem, says the prophet, Micah,

And you, Bethlehem Ephrata,
too small to become one of the thousands in Judah,
out of you, someone comes forth
who will rule Israel.
His origin is as from the ancient days (5:1).

Like David, the Messiah will come from this place, so he will play the role of David. It is precisely this rumor about the Messiah that John fights against. “David” is a new kingdom for Israel, and such a Davidic Messiah project in Jerusalem in the year 70 ended in a catastrophic massacre. Furthermore, he does not mention David with a single syllable in his Gospel. The Messiah is the biological son of Joseph—Jesus ben Joseph—and not the son of David. If anything, he is the “Son of God”, One like GOD. In John, he does not have blue Davidic blood. The people were divided. Some thought that the works were the Messianic criterion, while others that the right origin had to be added. The matter remains undecided for the crowd, the schism remains.

Some officials try to arrest him; the plan was—still—unfeasible. The officials return to their principals without having achieved anything. They ask them why they had not arrested Jesus. Odd is the reasoning of the officials, “Never has a man spoken like this!” Not a possible resistance from the crowd, in which there were many sympathizers of Jesus, but the power of his words kept them from getting violent. Political unreliability dawned on the Perushim, “Have you too perhaps been led astray?” In the crowd there had also been Judeans who believed that Jesus was misleading

other Judeans (7:12), and neither the authorities nor the Perushim trusted Jesus. The *archontes* (“superiors, authorities”) are not only the leading priests but all those who exercise political power.

The Perushim bring a new argument. They do not accuse the crowd of political ignorance but of *anomy*, lawlessness. They do not know the Torah, they do not recognize the Torah, that is the accusation. And whoever does not recognize the Torah in Israel is cursed according to the Torah. In this respect, the Perushim are right. For the question is whether the crowd does indeed not recognize the Torah. But this is how Judeans interact with other Judeans here, one party cursing the other!

The crowd has an advocate in this panel. Nicodemus says nothing else than what the Torah requires: the accused must be heard and his actions weighed up before he is convicted. Who is the condemned one? Jesus? Hardly. Jesus was to be tried, to be heard, and then condemned. But here the judgment is spoken, “Cursed.” It is Israel, that is condemned by Israel.

The Perushim feel caught; they have condemned the crowd and had no right to do so. Now they accuse Nicodemus of being from Galilee and therefore trust a Galilean messianic pretender—but no Messiah comes from Galilee, as the Scriptures say, Micah 5:1-2. Only terrorists come from there. Jesus will deal with the question of his origin, 8:12 ff.

A theologian from the 3rd century has seen a discrepancy at this point, between 7:52 and 8:12 there is a gap. Room for an instructive intermezzo.

[Intermezzo: Being Put to the Test, 7:53-8:11]²⁷⁰

7:53 (And they went their way, each one to his own home.
 8:1 But Jesus went his way to the Mount of Olives.
 8:2 At daybreak, he went again into the sanctuary,
 all the people came to him,
 on the Chair²⁷¹ he was teaching them.
 8:3 The Torah-teachers²⁷² and the Perushim brought a woman
 who had been caught in adultery²⁷³

270 The famous passage “Who will cast the first stone” was only included in some manuscripts after 350 CE; the earlier ones didn’t have it, many later ones did not follow this practice. The reason why it was inserted at this point is probably the keyword *martyrein*, “to testify,” which will play an outstanding role from 8:12 on. The woman is Israel.

271 ON THE CHAIR: *Kathisas*, “literally, “after he had sat down.” But the word invokes the *kathedra* Mōyseōs, the “Chair of Moses” (see Matthew 23:2). In John, the Messiah is also the Rabbi. The last two lines are not to be found in all textual traditions; apparently, someone wanted to establish the relationship to Matthew 23.

272 [We could as well write “scribes”; the word appears nowhere else in the Gospel of John.]

273 ADULTERY: *Moicheia*, Hebrew *niʿufim*, Ezekiel 23:43, see Hosea 2:4. In the prophets, the

and made her stand in the midst
 8:4 and said to him,
 “Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of committing adultery.
 8:5 In our Torah, Moses commanded to stone such.
 What do *you* say about it?”
 8:6 They said this to test him,
 so that they might have ground to accuse him.
 Jesus bent down
 and was writing with his finger on the earth.
 8:7 When they kept questioning him,
 he straightened up and said to them,
 “Who among you is without aberration,
 be the first to throw a stone at her.”
 8:8 Again he bent down and was writing on the earth.
 8:9 On hearing this, they went away, one by one, beginning with the older ones,
 and he was left alone, and the woman being in the midst.
 8:10 Straightening up, Jesus said to her,
 “Woman, where are they?
 Has no one condemned you?”
 8:11 She said,
 “No one, Lord.”
 Jesus said,
 “Neither do I condemn you.
 Go your way, and don’t go astray anymore.”)

Before we discuss this passage, we make a few brief remarks about the text situation. Some of the old manuscripts of the Gospel of John bring our intermezzo here, others do not. The earliest almost complete manuscript on papyrus and in book form, P⁶⁶ from the time around 200, does not provide it, and it is also missing in important old manuscripts written in capital letters and dating from the period between the 4th and 9th centuries.

Hebrew root *naʾaf* in Piel refers primarily to idolatry, not adultery, as two individuals would commit it together (see John 8:41). The “deceived one” would then be the God of Israel here. This crime provides as punishment stoning to death (Deuteronomy 17:5); in the series of crimes for which stoning is provided as punishment, adultery in the literal sense is missing [see, however, Deuteronomy 22:21, 24]. To incur the punishment of stoning according to the law, the woman would either have had to have cursed the NAME and/or worshipped idols, or she would have had sexual intercourse with a relative or with an animal, see Mishna Sanhedrin 7:4. The facts of the case can be deduced from the context in which the text now stands. Cursed, according to the scribes, is the people of Judea, who does not recognize the Torah, this people is “adulterous.”

Byzantine monks, who produced many manuscripts—mostly written in small letters—also passed on our intermezzo, but not unanimously. A certain family of such manuscripts had a problem here. The monks thought that the passage did not belong here (after John 7:52), but that it was worthy of tradition and inserted it into the Gospel of Luke after 21:38, i.e. after the great speech about the end of the ruling age and before the Passion narrative.²⁷⁴ A Byzantine manuscript decided on an appendix after the Gospel of Luke.

We can see that there have been discussions about the authenticity of our intermezzo already in antiquity or the Byzantine Middle Ages. Moreover, the tradition of the fragment has not been smooth. Sometimes verses 7:53 and 8:1, and occasionally 8:2 are omitted.

The question is not whether John was the author of the fragment. The question is: Does the intermezzo help to understand the context of John 7-8 more precisely?

The fragment is a through-composed whole, it is a literary achievement of a great narrator. Where does it come from, from what context, and why is this context, any known or unknown Gospel, not handed down? There is no satisfactory answer to these questions—unless the theologian inserts a narrative written or found by him to solve the problems he has with the text. Which did he have?²⁷⁵ Why does the narrator have Jesus go to the Mount of Olives all at once, only to reappear in the temple the next morning? And why at this point?

The problem is hidden in the scene with the officials, the Perushim and Nicodemus. The whole people is cursed without having been heard. Against this, Nicodemus objected that the Torah does not condemn a person without his guilt being established. It seems to us that the intermezzo is intended to solve a problem that John invokes but does not solve: What if the guilt is established, how does the Messiah then act? In the preceding scene, a rather absolute and negative judgment is pronounced on the crowd. Nicodemus at least takes this as a condemnation. The passage 8:12-20 is also about “to judge” and “judgment” (*krinein, krisis*). There is a substantial connection with our intermezzo.

The Mishnah (Sanhedrin 7:4) gives a list of those crimes that are to be punished by stoning: incest, bestiality, homosexuality, blasphemy, and idolatry. Also mentioned are cursing of parents, rebellion and serious offenses against parents, and desecra-

274 The maker of the minuscule manuscript 225 from 1392 is not convinced that the episode after 7:52 was in the right place; he, therefore, brought it to 7:36. With this view, he remained without followers.

275 Klaus Wengst—with Hans von Campenhausen—thinks that our intermezzo is of Christian origin, resulting from a debate about whether one should deal with adulteresses in the church as intransigent as the Torah allegedly prescribes. But where are the documents that prove this “Sitz im Leben”? Dead loss!

tion of the Shabbat. In this list, the Mishnah does not go beyond what is recorded in the Torah (Leviticus 20, Deuteronomy 22).

The legal case submitted to Jesus for decision is adultery. We expect Jesus to be told the reasons for the judgment. But he neither asks for witnesses nor does he question the woman. According to Nicodemus, the accused must first be heard before guilt is spoken of. Jesus behaves abnormally. Or is the case completely different?

As Andreas Bedenbender has demonstrated in detail,²⁷⁶ this is not an individual case of private adultery. The woman in the Scriptures represents more than this one unique person. The conversations between Jesus and the crowd were about *anomy*, lawlessness, about not knowing the Torah. The intermezzo is about a woman who was caught in the act of committing adultery. If we read the story as if it were about a private woman, we are dealing with a rather misogynist story. There is no mention anywhere of the male accomplice in adultery—for adultery requires two, and both would be guilty of death according to Deuteronomy 22:22.

In the Scriptures, adultery is almost always a breach of the fidelity relationship between the people of Israel and their God. There can be no doubt with the Christian (!) narrator that Israel has gone astray because it does not trust the Messiah. The woman, the daughter of Jerusalem, is here *pars pro toto* for Israel. Then we do have a different legal case. Israel has been caught in the act. Who judges, who then executes the sentence? That is indeed the actual question. Who can ever judge in this case? The Perushim have judged. They, Judeans, have condemned—*cursed*—those who do not know the Torah, who are also Judeans. “None of you do the Torah,” Jesus has said (7:19). If the Torah is the criterion, who is without aberration (*anhamartētos*)? Whoever is without aberration may execute the judgment.

There is a negative foil, which Bedenbender (op. cit.) pointed out. In the Scriptures, the finger of God writes the Ten Commandments on stone tablets. Here Jesus writes with his finger (agreement) on sand (difference) and without making clear what he writes (difference). Bedenbender supposes that Jesus writes down the sin, but does not chisel it in stone, so to speak durable for eternity, but writes it in the sand, perishable.

We do not think here that the Ten Commandments have been revoked. It is not said what Jesus has written. Torah is no longer valid because Torah is no longer practicable, “No one does the Torah!” The Christian theologian confirms Paul’s conclusion, Romans 7:10, “The commandment to life, precisely this is to death!” Therefore the Messiah does not judge (*krinei*) or condemn (*katakrinei*). That is the main thing.

The passage ends with the sentence, “I do not condemn you either. Go and do not go astray again.” The same he said to the healed paralytic, 5:14. To go astray is not

276 Andreas Bedenbender, Der Sündlose unter euch werfe als erster auf sie einen Stein (Joh 8,7), in *Texte & Kontexte* 58 (1993), 21-48.

to trust the Messiah. The narrator has inserted his story so precisely into the style of the Gospel that one might think it is “Johannine” through and through. Therefore the discussion, whether of John or not, is idle. In any case, the narrative is a very precise commentary on chapters 7 and 8.

9.3. The Light of the World 8:12-30

“I AM—the light of the world.” The light is the light of enlightenment; it enlightens humans about what is wrong with the order of this world. The light makes it possible to walk one’s way under the conditions of the world order. The matter with the light of the world will become clearer when the blind man becomes sighted, in chapter 9.

Sukkot was a festival of lights. The Messiah is the only glimmer of light for the people in a time when everything is dark because of the ruling order. Under the conditions of the world order, you can only walk your way in the world order if you entrust yourself to the Messiah. Otherwise, no matter how loyal to the Torah you act in the world, you would only confirm the world order; you then “walk with darkness.” Under today’s circumstances, says John, the walk (*Halakha*) is only possible with the Messiah Jesus. This whole festival of lights only makes sense to John if you see the light in the Messiah. V.8:12 is a heading for the whole passage 8,13-9,41.

The following sections are difficult and depressing reading. The opponents are both vehement and aggressive, and they talk completely past each other—in a way that does not allow for any understanding. Here, as in the bread speech, the sect around John talks like sects talk, sectarian, self-opinionated, not willing to make concessions. Nevertheless, in these passages, John has very important insights to share. We must listen very carefully.

The eighth chapter in the usual counting falls into two parts. First Jesus speaks to “them,” that is, to those who were his counterparts in the previous chapter, the Judeans, the crowd, 8:12-30; then he speaks to those who trusted him but got in his way, 8:31-59.

9.3.1. “Where is your FATHER,” 8:12-20

8:12 Again, Jesus spoke to them, he said:
 “I AM—the light of the world;²⁷⁷
 whoever follows me will never walk his way in the darkness
 but will have the light of life.”

277 LIGHT: Light will be the keyword from now until the end of this large part: We will hear it eight times until 12:46. It is related to the ceremony with which the Feast of Tabernacles was opened (Mishna Sukka 5:2 ff.). It is about the light for walking the way under the ruling world order. This light is the God of Israel and the one to whom he has given all power, the Messiah.

8:13 So the Perushim said to him,
 “You are testifying about yourself;
 your testimony is not trustworthy.”

8:14 Jesus answered, he said to them,
 “Even if I do testify about myself,
 my testimony is trustworthy;
 because I know where I came from and where I’m going.
 But you do not know where I came from or where I’m going.

8:15 You judge according to the flesh,
 but I don’t judge—anyone!

8:16 But if I judge—myself—,
 then my judgment is trustworthy;
 for I am not alone,
 but I and he who sent me—the FATHER.²⁷⁸

8:17 And in your Torah it is written
 that the testimony of two humans is trustworthy.

8:18 I AM THE ONE—testifying about myself,
 and testifying about me is he who sent me—the FATHER.”²⁷⁹

8:19 So they said to him,
 “Where is your father?”

Jesus answered,
 “You know neither me nor my FATHER;
 if you knew me, you would know my FATHER too.”

8:20 These words he spoke in the guarded treasury,²⁸⁰

278 BUT IF I JUDGE—MYSELF: *Kai ean krinō de egō*: The word *egō*, “myself,” is *in pausa* {i.e. the word is emphasized at the end of the sentence with an acute instead of a grave accent}, the rhythm is Aramaic. Also, the word FATHER is *in pausa*. This results in a *parallelismus membrorum*. The legal process of the opponents is “according to the flesh”; the opposite would be a “trustworthy legal process,” *krisis alēthinē*. *Sarx*, “flesh,” in John, is not a negative concept, see 1:14; 6:51-56. The judgment *kata tēs sarka*, “according to the flesh,” means a judgment in human discretion only, as Bultmann ad loc. also sees. The judgment, of course, that Israel awaits will be a judgment in which the fidelity of the God of Israel to Israel (*alētheia*, *alēthinos*) comes to light, again with Daniel 7 as background. So there are different standards at play, which is why both sides are talking completely past each other.

279 The condition of the number two seems to be fulfilled: I bear witness about myself, and he who sent me does so also. But the number is not fulfilled, for the testimony must come from two other *humans* besides the accused person. The contrast is rather: in “your Torah” two people make the testimony trustworthy but in my case the God of Israel, who testifies for me, the one accused, who pleads not guilty.

280 IN THE GUARDED TREASURY: *Gazophylakion*: The word only occurs here and in Mark (or in the parallel passage in Luke). The precious metal assets of the sanctuary (the “currency reserves” of Judea) are kept in this chamber, and it is the political heart of the sanctuary. It is here that Jesus presents his teaching about the “light of the world.” Without assuming a di-

teaching in the sanctuary.

No one seized him, because his hour had not yet come.

The adversaries are not Judeans in general, but the Perushim, the spokesmen in receiving the unsuccessful officials and in condemning the crowd, which does not know the Torah. Since Jesus, as their teacher, places himself protectively before the crowd, the condemnation also concerns him.

His opponents claim that because Jesus testifies about himself, what he has to say is not trustworthy. Apparently, this passage reflects a discussion between the synagogue and the ecclesia or community of John. The Messiah of the ecclesia is not legitimized by the testimony of any independent witnesses. The answer we get here is hardly suitable to convince skeptical, even hostile observers of the ecclesia.

Jesus says that even if he testifies about himself, the testimony is trustworthy; reason: he knows where he comes from; they, his opponents, do not know. The word “where from” indicates the origin. Origin in Israel can only be the God of Israel. The word “where to” indicates the goal, just that condition in which the will of God will be done. Jesus knows of himself that he acts and speaks only from God and that he knows no other goal than the will of God. Coming and going together mean the *halakha*, the walk according to the word of God. It is the decisive legal criterion in Israel.

His opponents use another legal criterion, the criterion of their political interests, and that is the *flesh*. Thus Jesus cannot and will not judge any human. But if he judges, then his judgment becomes trustworthy because his criterion is the will of God. This is of course a problem; on the one hand, there is no judgment, but on the other hand, judgment is passed. Judgment is made only when the *bar enosh*, the Human, is confirmed in his office of judgment, when he will have reached his goal, the ascension to the FATHER. The basic idea of a final, finally trustworthy justice is common to all Messianic groups. In this, they are no different from Rabbinical Judaism.

Jesus anticipates a provision of the court rules that testimony must be certified by two independent witnesses. He is testifying about himself, but he is not alone. Thus the rules of proceedings prescribed “in your Torah” are fulfilled. Such reasoning is more than questionable. The Torah’s procedural regulations prescribe the testimony of two *humans*, Deuteronomy 19:15, who differ from the accuser and the defendant. But “I and the FATHER” are not two independent witnesses. Misunderstanding is therefore inevitable. First of all, the reproach that Jesus is both accused and a witness at the same time in his trial remains. Second, his opponents do not take the word “father” as the designation of the NAME. They ask, “Where is your father?” —

rect literary dependence of John from Mark, it can hardly be a coincidence that the word appears here. In Mark, the word is in a context that is a scathing criticism of the sanctuary.

namely that Joseph from Nazareth. From the son, says Jesus, you can infer the FATHER, and from the FATHER the son. Since you do not know the FATHER, that is, the God of Israel, you cannot have any knowledge of me, and vice versa: If you knew me, you would have knowledge of God or the FATHER, and then the requirement of the rules of procedure would be more than fulfilled: The God of Israel himself gives testimony about the one he has sent. But the opponents simply have no idea, neither about him, his origin, his purpose, nor about God. They judge according to the facts of their daily politics, simply “according to the flesh.”

All this now in the guarded treasury, the *gazophylakeion*. It was the place in the sanctuary that served as a collecting basin for the fruits of the extra work of the population. This was where the surplus product was collected, which the regional central authority skimmed off. The political staff, the priesthood, and its many helpers lived on it. In the Messianic movement, the place was badly advertised, Luke 21:1-4 and especially Mark 12:41-44, where the guarded treasury appeared as the peak of religious perversion. The widow gives “her whole life” after we heard how scribes and Perushim “devoured houses of widows.” Matthew may have had his reasons for omitting the passage; there can hardly be any doubt that the little story was common in the Messianic movement. The fact that now Jesus presented his teaching just here is understood by his opponents as a direct attack against the sanctuary as the central instance of an order of exploitation. There can be no doubt that the remark in 8:20—the reference to the *gazophylakeion* as the place of the event—had a political point. When we read back from this passage, we understand that these words spoke a true judgment (*krisis alēthinē*) about the community and its central institutions. We then also understand why his opponents have to react with thoughts of imprisonment and killing. They could see Jesus only as an enemy of the state.

9.3.2. “I do what is straight in HIS eyes, ever!”, 8:21-30

8:21 Then again he said to them,
 “I am going away, and you will seek me,
 but you will die from your aberration.²⁸¹
 Where I am going, you cannot come.”

281 ABERRATION: *Hamartia*. In 1:29 we translated *hamartian tou kosmou* as “the aberration of the world order.” The word thus means what is “wrong, errant, crazy” about the actual world order. Here we hear the word for the second time. The two passages are to be related to each other; the “aberration” of the Judeans is to be sought in the fact that through their deeds they accept the “aberration of the world order.” This will become clear in 8:23 and even more so in 8:44 if you translate correctly. Since this world order is judged and condemned according to John and thus is approaching its end, those are condemned to failure who, according to John, have put on the cards of this world order, therefore “to die from your aberration.” The refusal to trust Jesus as the Messiah is not the cause but the consequence of complicity with the world order.

- 8:22 So the Judeans said,
 “Is he going to kill himself?
 For he says,
 ‘Where I am going, you cannot come’!”
- 8:23 And he said to them,
 “You are of what is below, I am of what is above;
 you are of this world order, I am not of this world order.
- 8:24 This is why I said to you,
 that you will die from your aberrations;
 for if you do not trust that I WILL BE THERE,
 you will die from your aberrations.”
- 8:25 At this, they said to him,
 “You? Who are you?”
 Jesus answered them,
 “From the beginning, what I am speaking to you.”²⁸²
- 8:26 Many things I have to speak and judge about you,
 but the ONE who sent me is trustworthy,
 and I:
 What I have heard from him,
 that I speak to the world order.”
- 8:27 They did not recognize that he was talking to them about the FATHER.
- 8:28 So Jesus said,
 “When you will have lifted up the *bar enosh*, the Human,
 then you will recognize that I WILL BE THERE.
 And of myself I am doing nothing,
 rather as the FATHER taught me,
 that is what I am speaking.
- 8:29 The ONE who sent me is with me;
 he did not leave me alone,
 because I do what is straight in HIS eyes, ever.”²⁸³
- 8:30 When he spoke this, many trusted in him.

282 FROM THE BEGINNING, WHAT I AM SPEAKING TO YOU: The phrase is not exactly what you would call classical Greek; in any case, it is an anacoluthon. Chouraqui translates: “Des l’entête, cela même que je vous ai dit.” He refers to *rosh*, *reshith*, as in John 1:1. Probably, however, the background is not *rosh*, but the Hebrew root *chalal*, hence *thechila*, the “beginning,” see *ba-thechila* (or Aramaic *be-qadmeta*?, root *qedam*, Targum Onkelos) in Genesis 43:18, 20, where the LXX has *tēn archēn*. “What am I still talking to you,” as occasionally translated, does not fit the situation, for he *continues* to talk.

283 WHAT IS STRAIGHT: *Ta aresta*, *ha-yashar*: The expression is found above all in Deuteronomy, 6:18; 12:25 etc. The dative *autō* stands in this context for *ha-yashar be-‘ene YHWH*, “what is straight in HIS eyes” (Buber). Jesus does not do the optimum, as the superlative suggests, but what is given to Israel as the way, therefore “straight.”

Jesus takes up the sentence, "I know where I am going; you do not know where I am going." Here it says, "I am going, you will seek me, but in (or: from) your aberrations you will die." Jesus will explain exactly what he means by this harsh word.

John repeats here the thread of the conversation from 7:33 ff. But there are differences:

7:34 You will seek me and will not find me.

And where I will be, you cannot come.

7:36 The Judeans said to one another,

Where then shall he go that we cannot find him?

Will he go into the Diaspora among the Greeks? . . .

8:21 I am going, and you will seek me;

you will die from your aberration.

8:22 Now the Judeans said:

Does he want to kill himself?

For he says, Where I am going, you cannot come.

In Joh 7:33 ff. the word "to find" appears twice. Jesus assumes, at least for some of them, that they want to find the Messiah. In Joh 8:21-22 the word "to find" is suppressed. Instead, his opponents accuse him of suicidal tendencies. Here the atmosphere is poisoned. They no longer want "to find" at all.

Jesus reacts accordingly, "You are of what is below, I am of what is above. You are of this world order, I am not of this world order. Therefore I said to you that you will die of your aberrations." The two terms "above" and "below" are now filled with content. "Above" is, "from God, determined by the will of God." "Below" is, "from the requirements of the valid world order." Thus it is not a matter of religious or Gnostic but of political opposites.

In the current commentaries the word *hamartia* means "sin," and sin is here, it is said, unbelief. This is not formally incorrect, but it does not explain what is meant.

The Perushim pursued a very specific political strategy. In the world order ruled by Rome, it is about finding a place where the Judeans can live according to their Torah. This is not feasible without a political compromise. John thinks that exactly this strategy would mean the end for the Judeans and for Israel in general. In the niches that the Romans leave to the Judeans, they will sooner or later be brought into line politically and ideologically by the Roman power.

"To live according to the Torah of God under the conditions of the ruling world order" was an illusion not only to John but also to Paul and the whole Messianic movement. They were concerned with a completely different, radically new order of the world: not living differently in the world, but actively expecting a different world, that was and is the opposite.

The expression “to die from your aberrations” was not a moral disqualification of the Jews but a political judgment of the opponents’ strategy. The contrast of 8:21-22 is antagonistic; here, no more compromises are possible. The idea of the “antagonistic contradiction” comes from Marxism, and it explains very precisely what is at stake here. Gnosticism is excluded as a frame of explanation. With “above” and “here,” John takes up those trendy—Gnostic—expressions, but he grounds them politically, “below” = *partisan of the ruling system*, and “above” = *no partisan of the ruling system*.

John does away with all mystifications. The sentence “If you do not trust *Egō eimi*, you will die from your sins,” sums up what has just been said. Who, we could paraphrase, does not trust that Exodus 3:14—*’ehye asher ’ehye*” (LXX: *egō eimi ho ōn*)—is still valid, will perish. For *egō eimi* is written here absolutely, without a predicate, and this prescribes the translation: “I WILL BE THERE.”

They have understood the message, but they ask him, “You, who are you?” The answer is, “First, to begin, the things I speak to you.” In the beginning (*archē, tēn archēn*) there must be relentless clarity. The contradiction is between what is called God in Israel, the NAME—or, with John the FATHER—on the one hand, and Rome on the other. *Hic Rhodus, hic salta*. One could still say a lot and judge and condemn, but here it is about the principle, about the *archē*.

Those who do not understand what Jesus says here about the antagonistic contradiction will have no understanding at all. That is exactly what they do not grasp. That is why Jesus will have to show this with his death: If the Human, *bar enosh*, falls into the hands of Rome, he must end up on the Roman cross. The cross is the end of all political illusions and so—and only so!—it will redeem. When they will see him so “exalted,” they will “recognize that I AM—I WILL BE THERE.” Indeed, for his opponents the cross was just the striking argument *against* his messianity; a Messiah does not lose, never!

Here we hear the *egō eimi* absolutely for the second time. The now-current shape of the I WILL BE THERE, the NAME, is this and no other exaltation of the Messiah. We must ask ourselves again and again what is to be redeeming about it, but that is what John tells us.

What Jesus does and says is nothing else than what the NAME, the FATHER, stands for. He does not pursue his own political programs, his program is the God of Israel—nothing else but that. He, Jesus, is with God, and his God is with him. Jesus says this with that Biblical sentence that is only true for very few kings in the history of Israel: They did “the straight (*yashar*) in the eyes of the NAME.” Jesus places himself in the row of the straight ones of Israel. This was convincing, John says, “When he spoke this, many trusted in him.”

9.4. “Before Abraham was born: I WILL BE THERE,” 8:31-59

9.4.1. Fidelity and Freedom, 8:31-36

8:31 Now Jesus said to the Judeans who had trusted him,²⁸⁴
 “If you stay firmly with my word,
 then you are really my disciples,
 8:32 and you will recognize fidelity.
 Fidelity will set you free.”²⁸⁵
 8:33 They answered him,
 “We are the seed of Abraham and haven’t been slaves to anyone, never!
 How do you say, ‘You will be set free’?”
 8:34 Jesus answered them,
 “Amen, amen, I say to you,
 everyone who practices aberration becomes a slave of aberration.
 8:35 The slave does not stay in the house until the age to come.
 The Son stays until the age to come.
 8:36 So if the Son sets you free,
 you will really be free.

The addressees changed. The almost unbearable vehemence by which Jesus attacked these new opponents can only be deduced from the text itself. It is about Judeans “who had put their trust in him” (*pepisteukotas autō loudaious*) but now no longer do so. This requires a past perfect. A sect can talk of apostates only with hatred.

An additional difficulty is that in the further course (8:48), Judeans will be mentioned without further specification. But there too, it is about those very particular Judeans who “no longer walked the way with Jesus,” 6:66. This does not excuse the boundless vehemence by which John harasses the “renegades,” as the apostates

284 HAD TRUSTED HIM: *Pepisteukotas*, “who had trusted.” Otherwise, in John, the perfect forms always reflect a finally reached state. Here, however, we are concerned with those Judeans who followed Jesus in the past, but are now trying to kill him, 8:37. The perfect can, therefore, only be understood here as a pluperfect. These may be former members of the group around John. Who they are cannot be determined. Since they are trying to kill Jesus, they belong, according to John, to the synagogue which excluded the group around John (see note to 16:2). The answer to the question of who Jesus is depends on the answer to the question of who are really the children of Abraham (who is really Israel). Apostates are judged particularly harshly, so words of mutual hatred are spoken here.

285 FIDELITY WILL SET YOU FREE: One of the most famous sentences from John, “The truth will make you free.” About *alētheia* there is something said in the note to 1:7; it does not mean “truth” but “fidelity” (Hebrew *’emeth*). Not a certificate of descent, but the fidelity of the God of Israel decides who the real children of Abraham are, that is, children like Isaac and not like Ishmael, see Galatians 4:22 ff.; Matthew 3:9 par. This was *communis opinio* in all Messianic groups who saw in Jesus the Messiah.

were called among communists. Apparently, the disappointed Messianists accused the group around John of not belonging to Israel, probably, of being members of the *goyim*, non-Judeans. John turns the tables. To him, *they* were “children (seed) of Abraham” and thus “children of the people of Israel,” you, disappointed Judean Messianists, should ask yourselves whether *you* are still “children of Abraham.” This question is the subject of the part that follows.

Jesus passes a fundamental remark that he will repeat constantly in his farewell speeches—especially in chapter 15 according to the traditional counting. The verb *menein* has to do with steadfastness. According to John, the political situation requires steadfastness especially now—after the devastation of Jerusalem. This is missing, as we saw in the discussion of the decay of the Messianic community (6:60 ff.). This steadfastness is not a stubborn conservatism but is based on the fidelity of God to Israel. This is what the word *alētheia* means. This *fidelity* makes people free.

What is freedom? In the Scriptures, the Greek word *eleutheros* stands for the Hebrew *chofshi* or *chor*. Buber translates the latter as noble man, meaning a class that is free from any taxes or work obligations. *Chofshi* is the condition after the release from slavery, i.e. *free* from the obligation to render services to the owner of the slave, *free* as opposed to *enslaved*.

Here it is said, “If you stand firm with my word, you are really my disciples, and you will recognize fidelity, and fidelity will set you free.” When Jesus demands that freedom be given only by focusing on the word of Jesus, they take this as an abandonment of their Judean identity.

In the Mishnah, those people are referred to as *free* or *noble* people (*bene-chorin*) who are engaged in the teaching of the Torah (*thalmud thora*) (Mishna Avot 6:2). Engaging with the Torah therefore sets people free. Although the Mishnaic quotation from the sixth chapter of Mishna Avot (*qinyan thora*) is much younger than John, it is probably an original and essential idea of Rabbinical Judaism that the Torah makes people free: as Judeans, they are “seed of Abraham,” as such never slaves (*doulos*, ‘*eved*) and therefore not in need of liberation. Their identity is freedom. To what else should fidelity liberate them? It says in this passage:

There is no free one for you (*ben-chorin*)
unless he who strives for the teaching of the Torah (*thalmud thora*).
Everyone who strives for the teaching of the Torah,
climbs height after height, for it is written (Numbers 21:19),
From Mattana to Nachaliel, from Nachaliel to Bamot.

As I said, this passage dates from much later times. John was aware of the effort surrounding the *thalmud thora*. His opponents say: If someone strives for the whole Torah and tries to live the Torah, he can never be a slave of the world order. John thinks this is at best an illusion, but actually an evil and grumpy adherence to a tradition that is outdated.

Jesus says, “Fidelity (not the Torah!) makes free, aberration (*hamartia*) enslaves. The children of Israel were “seed of Abraham” and yet they were slaves in Egypt. Anyone who in Rome does not necessarily see salvation, but a *modus vivendi*, is mistaken, he is inevitably made unfree by this aberration, he must take political considerations into account. To be “slave of aberration” in the end means to be “slave of Rome.”

Jesus explains this with a midrash on Genesis 21:9-12, where Sarah asked Abraham to send away the son of the slave woman (*paidiskē*, *ʾamah*). The son of Sarah stays in the house. The son of the slave woman, Ishmael, is a slave and may not stay in the father’s house. At this point, Jesus deviates from the narrative: the son who stays in the house will free the slaves and thus give them a place in the house.

Blessed shall be the seed of Abraham. This is of course a problem for the Messianic communities in the Diaspora, which consist of Judeans and non-Judeans (*goyim*). The *goyim* are not the seed of Abraham. Paul saved himself from the affair by understanding the seed of Abraham as a singular, and this singular, this single person, is the Messiah (Galatians 3:16).²⁸⁶ The question was: Who belongs, who does not? This was also discussed in other Messianic communities. The source shared by Matthew and Luke (Matthew 3:9; Luke 3:8) says, “God can raise children to Abraham from these stones.”

This view is problematic. By saying that the biological offspring from Abraham no longer plays a role, that it is all about trusting in the Messiah, it is only a small step to the disinheritance of the bodily Israel, which is distrustful of the Messiah Jesus: the Christians are chosen, the Jews are rejected. Does John take this step? We leave the question for now.

9.4.2. The *Diabolos* is Not the Devil, 8:37-47

8:37 I know you are the seed of Abraham.
Yet you are seeking to kill me,
because my words have no place in you.
8:38 What I have seen with the FATHER, I speak,
and you do what you have heard with the FATHER.”²⁸⁷
8:39 They answered and said to him,
“Our father is Abraham.”

286 See Gerhard Jankowski, *Friede über Israel. Paulus an die Galater. Eine Auslegung*, in *Texte & Kontexte* Nr. 47/48 (1990), 63 ff.

287 HAVE HEARD: The reading *heōrakate*, “you have seen,” is well testified; but in many manuscripts *ēkousate*, “you have heard,” is used at this point. In the first case, the “seeing” refers to the father Abraham, in the second case the “hearing” refers to the NAME (FATHER). *Poieite* is to be understood as an imperative.
[In the 2005 CT, TV still followed the former reading, and in his 2006 interpretation he also takes the “confusing contrast between FATHER/Father” as his starting point].

Says Jesus to them,
 “If you were children of Abraham,
 you would be doing the works of Abraham.
 8:40 Now you are seeking to kill me,
 a human who has spoken to you of the fidelity
 about which I heard from GOD.
 Abraham did nothing like that.
 8:41 You are doing the works of your father.”
 They said to him,
 “We are not begotten of fornication,
 the ONE we have as FATHER, GOD!”²⁸⁸
 8:42 Jesus said to them,
 “If GOD were your FATHER,
 you would solidarize with me,
 for I came out from GOD and have come;
 for I have not come from myself,
 but that ONE sent me.
 8:43 Why don’t you recognize my speech?
 Because you cannot listen to my word.”²⁸⁹
 8:44 You are from the father, the adversary.²⁹⁰

288 FORNICATION: What is meant is idolatry. In the apocryphal book “Wisdom of Solomon” it says in 14:12, “The principle (*archē!*) of fornication (*porneias*) is the recognition of idols.” The Judeans feel that Jesus reproaches them of the service of idols—the gods of Rome, for nothing else can be meant—and denies them the seriousness of their confession, Deuteronomy 6:4-5. This confession they utter here: “Hear, o Israel, the NAME our God, the NAME is ONE!” Therefore we have to translate, “The ONE we have as FATHER,” and not, “We have only one Father.”

289 SPEECH . . . WORD: In the first line of v.43 it says *lalian*, in the second *logon*. The Judeans do not recognize the speech of Jesus (that is, how he speaks), because they cannot listen to the *logos*, Hebrew *davar*, the “word deed,” the “word of action.” “Hearing” is always “doing” as well. They cannot, because they are otherwise politically determined. This is what the following verse says.

290 THE ADVERSARY: It is all about translating the word *diabolos/satan* factually correct. 32 times the Hebrew root *satan* is found in the Scriptures, 6 times as a verb, 26 times as a noun, 14 times alone in Job 1-2, three times in Zechariah 3. 7 times *satan* is definitely a political opponent (in 1/2 Samuel and 1 Kings); in the Psalms, the verb *satan* means “to combat,” all opponents are earthly. In Zechariah 3 and the Book of Job, *satan* acts as the representative of the accusation in the Court of God. *Satan* etc. is mostly translated as *endiballein*, *diabolos*, *diabolē*, i.e. “to jumble up.” Twice *antikeisthai* is used, “to resist,” further we have *epiboulos*, one who deceitfully gives wrong advice. 3 times the translators simply leave the word *satan* (1 Kings 11). In these cases, *satan* is never what we call the “devil.” 33 times *satanas* appears in the Gospels and the apostolic writings, 36 times the word *diabolos*. This finding does not necessarily require us to conclude that the supernatural influence

The desire of your father you want to do.

He is a murderer of humans on principle,

fidelity is not a standpoint for him,

because there is no fidelity with him.²⁹¹

When he speaks lies and deceit,

he speaks what is his own,

he is a deceiver and father of deceit.

8:45 But me, because I speak of fidelity, you do not trust me.

8:46 Which one of you convicts me of aberration?

If I speak of fidelity, why don't you trust me?

8:47 He who is from GOD is listening to the words of GOD,
therefore you are not listening, because you are not from GOD."

After the concession that his opponents are the seed of Abraham, the harsh accusation follows: The opponents are "indeed" seed of Abraham "but" they seek to kill Jesus.²⁹² This contrast is now explained. We hear the accusation of killing for the sixth time here. Apparently, this thought has become an obsession for John. This has probably to do with the fierce hostility to which his group was exposed by the synagogue in their town. We will go into this in more detail not until in the explanation of 16:2. So much may be said here that the conflict was threatening, even life-threatening, to *both* sides.

Jesus, in explaining that "but," begins by saying that he speaks what he has seen (!) with the *FATHER*; they do what they have heard from *their father*. Thus it is about

of an evil spirit is present. Rather, the word is to be interpreted politically. "Desire of the *diabolos*" is factually identical with *epithymia tou kosmou*, 1 John 2:17, the greed of the world order. What Jesus accuses his opponents of is complicity with Rome, therefore Judas is *diabolos*, "adversary," 6:70; he is the prototype of a collaborator.

CT: The word *diabolos* in the LXX not only stands for *satan*. In the Role of Esther [7:6], the word *ʾish tzar*, the "man of affliction," is intimated with the word, Haman the persecutor of the Jews [Esther 8:1]!

291 BECAUSE THERE IS NO FIDELITY: You have to think of Pilate's question, "What is fidelity?", 18:38! Therefore you must translate *pseudos/pseusthēs* as "deceit" and "deceiver." Truth is an element of fidelity, just as a lie is an element of deceit. "They are doing lie (Hebrew *ʾose shaqer*)", i.e. "they deceive," Jeremiah 6:13-14, for instance by predicting peace "and there is no peace."

292 Charles K. Barrett (Das Evangelium nach Johannes (KEK), Göttingen 1990, 350) writes: "These words seem odd because of v.31 . . . Either John wrote very thoughtlessly, or he thinks that the faith of these Jews was very imperfect." Their faith has been shaken by the events of the *Judean War*. Our commentator pretends that these people were simply unwilling or stupid and had no real reason to turn away from the Messiah. To Christian commentators, the Christian faith is something completely self-evident, and the Jews are stupid and stubborn, they are just still the *judaei perfidi* from the old Roman Good Friday liturgy, which the Second Vatican Council deleted in 1965.

the confusing contrast between FATHER/father. To Jesus, FATHER is the God of Israel, the impulse of his whole life. Also, the opponents act from an impulse, which determines their way of life, from *their* father. They understand this genealogically, their father is Abraham. Your work, so Jesus, is that you seek to kill me; this is not the work of Abraham, but the work of your father. Abraham did not kill his son, GOD (FATHER) forbid! You seek to kill me, the *monogēnes* (1:14, 18), the new Isaac. *Your* god (father) must be the absolute opposite of *my* God.

Now the opponents understand what is meant, “We were not begotten from fornication: The ONE we have as FATHER.” They refer to Deuteronomy 6:4, “Hear Israel, the NAME is our God, the NAME is ONE.” It is about the question of who is the God in Israel, in Israel of the days of Jesus and the days of his opponents. “Fornication,” *porneia*, *zenuth*, in the Scriptures means consistently Israel’s turning away from the NAME as from his God and turning to foreign gods. They have understood correctly, that the *porneia* is paganism, they have become Romans.

Now no more communication is possible. If the members of society can no longer communicate about “God,” about the basic order, civil war is called for. If the Christian listeners do not understand that the ambivalence of the word “God” and the NAME was the theological and therefore political main problem of the Jewish society in antiquity, they will never be able to understand the Scriptures. The “God” is not “non-God,” and “non-God” is not the “God.” The Book of Job explicitly deals with this problem. The question here is: what is working in each case as the FATHER, as the God of Israel?

Jesus demands of his opponents that they see him as he sees himself, as the one who went out and came from God, as the messenger who does and speaks only what he was told. Why, asks Jesus, can’t you understand this, why can’t you listen? Jesus answers this question himself and with it at the same time the question of the respective real fatherhood.

Now the sentence is uttered, which to this day arouses hostility that led to the incomprehensible and unfathomable crime known as Auschwitz. The sentence in the traditional translation is, “You come from the devil as your father, and you want to do the lusts of your father. He was a murderer of humans from the beginning . . .”

We first have to explain the word *diabolos*. In modern languages, the word has been adopted untranslated: *diabolos*, *diablo*, *diable*, *diawol*, *djævel*, *devil*, *duivel*, *devil*. Everywhere the word from the so-called New Testament has penetrated these languages. The association has been similar everywhere. With the word, a superhuman and extremely evil spirit was intimated. But the Greek word *diabolos* stands for the Hebrew word *satan*. This word also belongs to modern languages. The meaning is the same there.

In the Scriptures, the word *satan* occurs 32 times, 6 times as a verb, 26 times as a noun. It appears 14 times in the Book of Job. 7 times *satan* is clearly the political op-

ponent (1/2 Samuel, 1 Kings). In 1 Kings 11, the Greek translators leave the word *satan* untranslated. It is Jeroboam,²⁹³ who rebelled against King Solomon, later waged a secession war against his son Rehoboam, and founded the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Satan also appears in the story of Balak and Balaam. Balaam is supposed to curse Israel on behalf of Balak. When Balaam set out on his way, the messenger of the NAME “as *satan*” came into his way (Numbers 22:22). The donkey of Balaam was wiser than his master, he recognized the messenger of God as an adversary of Balaam’s political mission.

In none of the 32 cases is it a supernatural evil spirit. Also at the heavenly court in the books of Job and Zechariah, a heavenly functionary appeared as a prosecutor and thus as an opponent in the heavenly court proceedings. Whenever a heavenly figure is involved, he is always sent or commissioned by God; nowhere is he the abysmal evil.

Here it is about a mighty adversary, who is not sent by God, thus about a mighty earthly adversary. This opponent has “desires” (*epithymiai*). They are factually identical with the desire—better: “greed”—of the world order (*epithymia tou kosmou*, 1 John 2:16-17). John 8:44 and 1 John 2:16-17 are the only passages in Johannine literature where the word for greed appears, in connection with *diabolos*.²⁹⁴ Satan is an earthly Satan, he is the world order, he is Rome.

All this becomes clear when the leading priests in the scene in front of the praetorium assured Pilate, “We have no king except Caesar!” They explain where there is their unambiguous political loyalty, who is their “god.” For the functional word “god” denotes the convergence of all earthly loyalties. To the leading priests, the point of convergence is Caesar. This passage 19:15 explains our passage 8:44—and vice versa. Jesus accuses his opponents of pursuing the politics of Rome, Rome is their god and father. They let themselves be determined in their political actions by the interests of the ruling world order, it is to this they are in solidarity. Therefore they cannot solidarize with the Messiah (“to love”—*agapan*).

Everybody can know that this Satan, this *diabolos*, is a murderer of humans, after the massacre that the Romans carried out after the devastation of Jerusalem. In this Satan there is no fidelity, he speaks “lies and deceit” (*pseudos*), “in principle (*ap’ archēs*).” Whoever pursues politics with Rome is “a deceiver (*pseustēs*) like his father.”

293 [To be precise, Jeroboam is one of three adversaries who are raised by God against Solomon (1 Kings 11:26 ff.). The word *satan* is used only in the case of Hadad (11:14) and Reson (11:23).]

294 [The adversary who appears near these verses (1 John 2:18, 22) is called antichristos; *diabolos* is spoken of 4 times in 1 John 3:8, 10.]

Jesus is talking about fidelity, about God's fidelity to Israel, and that is the word they do not trust, says Jesus. No one can accuse him of being wrong, of leading himself and others astray, when he is talking about the fidelity of God, a fidelity diametrically opposed to Rome. Since they, as realpolitikers, start from the superior political reality of Rome, they cannot hear what Jesus has to say.

9.4.3. Stones Instead of Arguments, 8:48-59

8:48 The Judeans answered, they said to him,
 "Don't our kind say it nicely that you are from Samaria?
 You're possessed!"

8:49 Jesus answered,
 "I am not possessed,
 I am dignifying my FATHER. But you are degrading me.²⁹⁵

8:50 I am not seeking my honor.
 THERE IS ONE who is seeking it and is judging.

8:51 Amen, amen, I say to you,
 whoever keeps my word,
 death, he will not observe until the age to come."

8:52 The Judeans said to him,
 "Now we have recognized that you are possessed:
 Abraham died, and so did the prophets,
 yet you say,
 'Whoever keeps my word
 will not taste death until the age to come.'

8:53 Aren't you greater than our father Abraham, are you?
 He died; and the prophets also died,
 to whom are you making yourself?"

8:54 Jesus answered,
 "If I honor myself, my honor is nothing.
 It is my FATHER who is honoring me,
 the one about you are saying, 'He is our God,'

8:55 but you have not recognized him,
 I have knowledge of him.
 Indeed, if I were to say that I have no knowledge of him,
 I would be like you: a deceiver.
 But I have knowledge of him, and I am keeping his word!

295 [In German, TV can translate *timaō* and *atimazō* in parallel into German as "würdigen" and "entwürdigen." In English, there is no corresponding parallel to "dignify." Most translations have "to honor" and to "dishonor," but these words I reserve for Greek words of the root *dox-* as in the following verse.]

8:56 Abraham, your father, was overjoyed that he would see my day.
He saw it and was glad.”

8:57 Now the Judeans said to him,
“You’re not yet fifty years old,
and you have seen Abraham?”

8:58 Jesus said to them,
“Amen, amen, I say to you,
Before Abraham came into being:
I AM—I WILL BE THERE!”²⁹⁶

8:59 They picked up stones to throw at him.
But Jesus hid himself,
he went out of the sanctuary.

To the reproach that “you cannot listen because you are not from God,” only the answer can come, “You are possessed” (*daimonion echeis*). Not only that; Jesus is also made a Samaritan (*Samaritēs*), that is, one with whom the Judeans do not associate

296 I WILL BE THERE: It cannot be emphasized often enough that in the sentence *egō eimi* the subject is the God of Israel and not Jesus. The first part of the sentence: “before Abraham (was born)” (*prin Abraam genesthai*,—Genesis!) poses a problem that several manuscripts have also seen; they omit *genesthai*. Do these three Greek words stand for Hebrew *beterem ’avraham yulad* or *beterem ’avraham yihye*? In the latter case, interpreting *genesthai* as “to happen, to become,” a parallel emerges between *avraham yihye* and *’ani ’ehye*. Then we would have to translate: “Before Abraham was (or: happened), I WILL BE THERE (or: HAPPEN).” This is possible. But *genesthai* can also mean “to be born,” thus: “Before Abraham was born, I WILL BE THERE.” There is much to be said in favor of this possibility. Jesus has defined himself as the one who speaks “of fidelity,” fidelity to Israel. This fidelity, i.e. the NAME, is there before Israel became the firstborn among the nations. For the understanding of this verse, the correct reading of the book *Tholedoth/Genesis* as the story of how Israel became the firstborn among the nations is necessary (see Frans H. Breukelman, *Bijbelse Theologie I/2. Het eerstlingschap van Israel*, Kampen 1992). [Unlike TV, I think that also Jesus himself can be understood as the subject of the *egō eimi*. Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ. Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*, Grand Rapids/Michigan 2003, makes a convincing case that Jesus was worshiped very early on by those who saw him as the Messiah of Israel, along with the FATHER, as the unique embodiment of the NAME. Such worship, which he calls “binitarian,” was already uncontroversial practice even in the so-called Jewish Christian communities at the time Paul came into contact with the Jerusalem community (167), “As far as we can tell from Paul’s letters, there was never any conflict or complaint from Jerusalem leaders, or from those Jewish Christians who made it their aim to correct features of Pauline Christianity, about the Christ-devotion that was practiced in Pauline congregations. The most natural inference is that the pattern of devotional practices was not very different from that followed in the Judean circles with which Paul had these contacts.” Therefore, the opponents of Jesus in the Gospel of John are probably not wrong in their assessment that he at least *also* understood himself as the subject of the *egō eimi*.]

(4:9). As we have seen in John 4, the Samaritans are among the children of Israel. It is not the word *Samaritan* that degrades, but the intention to remove Jesus from the community of Judeans, that is, of Israel. Jesus understands the accusation as “degradation” (*atimazete*). Jesus does not receive his dignity (*timē*) and honor (*doxa*) from humans but from the one who “seeks and judges.” What does Jesus’ God seek? Those “who bow down before him inspired by fidelity” (4:23). This one will “judge,” Jesus does not have to defend himself here.

Immediately Jesus switches to the old theme of the life of the age to come, with the expression *Amen, amen*, by which the following statement gains special weight. Judgment is God’s business, we have heard this repeatedly, and whoever hears the word judgment thinks of death. He who keeps the word of Jesus will not see death until the new epoch begins (*eis ton aiōna*). To the opponents, this seems to be total nonsense. We shall all die, all have died, from Abraham to the prophets, “To whom do you make yourself?”

The theme “honor” resounds again. The honor comes from that God whom also the opponents consider their God. But they do not recognize him. If both parties use the word “God,” they each mean something else. If I, so Jesus, were to say that I do not know God, I would be like you, a deceiver. He has identified himself with the God of Israel in such a way that everything he says and does comes from God himself, “His word I keep!” Whoever does not want to hear this shows that he does not know God.

What remains is the topic of Abraham. *Life of the age to come*—what does it mean, they ask; even Abraham died, so what is this talk about “not dying”? To whom are you making yourself?

Thus Abraham. Abraham has died, but he is not yet finished with life. His goal in life, says Jesus, will be achieved when “his day” has come. Abraham, your father, rejoiced that he should see Jesus’ day. *Your father*—this is never denied. Jesus tells them that their father should cheer the day of Jesus. He, who according to the opinion of all the Judeans, including Jesus, lives in the hiddenness of God, has actually seen it. The Gospel often speaks of Jesus’ hour, but only here of his day. The day at issue here is *hēmera eschatē*, the Day of Decision.

As so often, Jesus puts up with the inevitable misunderstanding. Jesus is not a very old man, not even fifty years old, so Abraham cannot have seen his day. This is not a flat interjection, how else should they react?

The interjection is the occasion for the decisive sentence, “Before Abraham was born: I WILL BE THERE.” To understand this verse, it is necessary to read the book *Tholedoth/Genesis* correctly. It tells how Israel became the firstborn among the nations. It is the book of *geneseis* (plural), in Hebrew, *tholedoth*. The book is structured by a series of *geneseis*, *tholedoth*, from Adam to Jacob: *tholedoth* ²Adam (5:1),

tholedoth Noach (6:9), *tholedoth bene-Noach* (10:1), *tholedoth Shem* (11:10), *tholedoth Terach* (11:27), *tholedoth Yishma'el* and *tholedoth Yitzchaq* (sons of Abraham, 25:12 and 25:19), *tholedoth 'Esaw* and *tholedoth Ya'aqov* (sons of Isaac, 36:1 and 37:2).²⁹⁷ The expression *tholedoth Avraham* does not appear anywhere.²⁹⁸ Abraham was begotten by Terach, his father. He is the subject of the begetting of his son Isaac. But this is an element of the *tholedoth Yitzchaq*, Genesis 25:19:

These are the begettings of Isaac.

Abraham begat Isaac.

Isaac was a forty-year-old,

when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Betuel the Aramean . . .

The content of the chapter *Begettings of Terach* is the life path of Abraham. That Abraham begat Isaac was the determining moment in Isaac's life. *Prin Abraam genesthai* must not be translated as "Before Abraham was, I am." This is ontology, not Scriptural interpretation. Rather, *yabad*, "to beget," is to be thought of, therefore, "Before Abraham was begotten/born, the NAME is there," who made Abraham the father of the first-born among the peoples; before the decisive turn in the begettings (*tholedoth*) of humankind (*'adam*) already applies: I WILL BE THERE, *'ehye, egō eimi*.

Jesus' political program in John is the restoration of Israel as the firstborn among the nations, 10:16 in connection with 11:52. Abraham was the beginning, and Jesus is the completion of Abraham's life. Therefore, Jesus Messiah is given the title *monogenēs*, "only begotten"; it is the honorary title of Isaac, the Only One (*yachid*, *monogenēs*) of Abraham, Genesis 22:2. The Only-Begotten was the joy of Abraham. He sees that what his God began through him is completed through Jesus, the begettings of Israel, *tholedoth yisra'el*. It is about the becoming of Israel (*Genesis*), and only about that. The NAME is there, always, before the genesis of Israel, after the completion of Israel; before Abraham, your, our father, was born, *is* the NAME.

The opponents have not understood this reading of the Book of Genesis by John. The formulation of 8:58 is taken by them as a provocation. The opponents can only see here a "blasphemy—touching, infringement (see 10:36) —of the NAME" (Leviticus 24:11. The "I" they refer to Jesus himself, who, evilly, claims the *'ehye* of Exodus 3:14 for himself. According to them Jesus "blasphemes the NAME." For such a "blasphemy" the Torah provides the death penalty by stoning. Apparently, the "cult" of the Messiah Jesus—"My Lord and my God," John 20:28!—in the Messianic communities has led the synagogue to insinuate such blasphemy. Admittedly, John or his Messianic community does not make much effort to dispel this suspicion.

297 See the book of Frans H. Breukelman, *Bijbelse Theologie* I/2. Het eerstlingschap van Israel, Kampen 1992.

298 See the passage "Not of the will of the flesh," in the discussion of John 1:13 above.

Anyway, we have reached here the point, where stones replace arguments. Jesus evades confrontation, “he hid himself.”

9.5. From Blind and Sighted People, 9:1-41

The narrative talent of John is shown in this story of the healing of a man born blind. The first verses insert the narrative into the whole chapter about the *Sukkot* festival and especially the festival of lights on the last day of the festival. The narrative is the “light of the world” put to the test. Then follows the healing itself, the reaction of the neighborhood, and the interrogation by the authorities of the Perushim. The narrative with the confession to the Messiah and with a principled statement about what is seeing and what is blind.

Jesus saw “in passing.” He is on his way from the confrontation with the Judeans to the confrontation with Rome.

9.5.1. The Works of God, 9:1-5

9:1 In passing, he saw a man blind from birth.²⁹⁹
 9:2 His disciples questioned him, they said,
 “Rabbi, who went astray, this one or his parents,
 that he was born blind?”
 9:3 Jesus answered,
 “Neither this one nor his parents went astray.
 Rather the works of GOD shall be made manifest in him.
 9:4 We must work the works of the ONE who sent me
 until day happens.³⁰⁰

299 BIRTH: *Genetē*, “begetting” or “birth” (*genesis*); *gennēthē*, “begotten” or “born.” The noun occurs in the NT only in John, and in the LXX only in Leviticus 25:47. This narrative is not about the individual fate of a human, but about the paradigmatic function. Israel must be begotten anew; the theme of *tholedoth yisra’el*, touched upon in 8:58, is carried out here. It is not about the transgressions of three individuals, but about the works of God. The works of God always refer to Israel and these works must be revealed; here the work is the healing of Israel’s delusion. In the Book of Genesis, “to beget” (*holid*) is the verbal form used 59 times to describe the becoming of Israel and the nations. Since this chapter is told in the speech field of the Tanakh, especially of Genesis, we would have to write “to be begotten” here, but: “blind from the begetting” misses the reality. Embryos are at first always blind; now, therefore, “birth.”

300 UNTIL: Some important manuscripts have seen the problem and replace the word *heōs*, “until,” with the word *hōs*, “while, as long as.” But the first one makes more sense. Work is done until the day when it is finally Shabbat, a holiday, see 5:17, “The FATHER works, and I am also working,” just on the traditional Shabbat. This is the reason for the conflict that is now arising, Jesus heals on the Shabbat. He must do this as long as people need healing, Shabbat or not. As soon as they are “whole,” Shabbat (still pending, therefore “day” with-

9:5 There comes a night when no one can work.
 As long as I am in the world,
 I am the light of the world.”

Since Job, we know that misfortune is not the result of the mistakes or aberrations of an individual or his family. No one is entitled to judge whether the man born blind himself is to blame for his misery or his parents. Job was the victim of a god who had forgotten that he is the God of Israel, a god who thought he was an Olympic god; in other words: in the decades before the Maccabean revolution, Hellenistic conditions determined society and not the social vision of the Torah. Under such circumstances, anyone who was faithful to the Torah must go to rack and ruin, even if he is as wealthy as Job. No, neither the blind man nor his parents are to blame for the misery of no longer being able to see what is real. Of course, we must not read with bourgeois eyes, which only know individuals and individual guilt. What is to be done? Under a world order that makes invisible the works of God, “the works of God must be made manifest” precisely in a person who is blind from birth. God must finally “appear” (*phanerousthai*).

Now we understand the strange verses from the fifth chapter after the healing of the paralyzed man, just on a Shabbat, 5:17, “My FATHER works until now. So I too am working.” Especially on a Shabbat, the works of God must be revealed.

Now John changes the subject. In 5:17 we hear “I,” and in 9:4 “we,” “We must *work* the *works* of the One who sent me.” This is just as little bad English as John’s *ergazesthai ta erga* was bad Greek: it is about the “works,” about the *erga*. It is about a real question: Who is to blame for this misery? It is not the opponents of Jesus who ask such a question, but the disciples; they do not want to *test* Jesus, as the scribes and Perushim of 8:3 ff. They really do not know. And now the “we” resounds. Jesus has been sent to this work, and to this purpose, the disciples will also be sent, 20:21.

As long as it is “day,” one can do the works; when it is “night,” no one can work—bring about—anything. “Night” is not the time of day here when people rest and do not go about their work. “Night” is the night of Rome. In it, no man can see, on principle not, not from birth. The works of God, which the disciples must work, are possible only in that light which is the Messiah. The work of God is the seeing human, created in his image and according to his likeness.

out the definite article) can happen (*genesthai*, Hebrew *haya*), 7:23. This is the unanimous opinion of all evangelists. John often uses a procedure that prepares the conflict to be told by linking keywords. The keyword “day” links the theme of Shabbat with the theme of light through the keyword “work.” The keyword “night” (also without the article) indicates that condition where the work of healing humankind is interrupted; it is the condition of lack of trust: 11:10; 13:30; 21:3.

In 9,4 the small *additional clause* “until day happens” caused problems early and many handwritings have replaced “until” (*heōs*) with “as long as” (*hōs*). It refers to the day Abraham rejoiced over. Only when this day has come the works of God are completed, then is rest, Shabbat. Shabbat is the opposite of “night.” Therefore the reading “until” is better.

9.5.2. “All at once I see,” 9:6-12

9:6 Having said this, he spat on the ground,
made mud with the saliva,
and anointed with the mud his eyes.

9:7 He said to him,
“Go, wash in the immersion bath of Siloam,” —translated “sent one.”
So he went away, he washed,
and he came—seeing!

9:8 His neighbors, however,
and those who previously had observed him begging said,
“Isn’t this the one who used to sit and beg?”

9:9 Others said,
“He is the one.”
Still others said,
“No, but he looks like him.”
That one said, “I am.”

9:10 So they said to him,
“How were your eyes opened?”

9:11 He answered,
“A human called Jesus made mud,
anointed my eyes, and told me,
‘Go to Siloam and wash!’
So I went away, I washed,
and all at once, I saw.”

9:12 And they said to him,
“Where is that one?”
He said,
“I don’t know.”

“When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud of the saliva and anointed it. . .” This “dirt of the street” (*pēlos, tit*, Micah 7:10, Psalm 18:43, etc.) must be washed away.

We should not be surprised that the man has to wash in the pool Siloam (Hebrew *Shiloach*) of all places. In John, we are still in the days of the *Sukkot* festival. On the

last day of the feast, water is fetched from the Siloam to perform the great purification ritual in the sanctuary. In general, the water of the Siloam seems to have played an important role in the purification of those who had ritually contaminated themselves. The Mishnah remembers such rituals in Jerusalem before the war (Mishna Para 3:2, Mishna Zabim 1:5). The purification symbolizes the reintegration of a person into Israel who was excluded from Israel through impurity (sin, aberration).

John “translates” Siloam as *apestalmenos*, “sent one, messenger,”³⁰¹ he reinterprets the ritual function of the water of Siloam and gives the whole festival a new direction. Siloam is not the pool the water of which has ritual cleansing power. The sent one is Jesus. He purifies, only he. John takes the festival very seriously, rituals that have become obsolete need not be reinterpreted.

9.5.3. The Interrogation and the Exclusion, 9:13-34

9:13 They took the man who had been blind to the Perushim.
 9:14 It was Shabbat, the day when Jesus made mud and opened his eyes.
 9:15 Now, the Perushim also questioned him
 how he could see all at once.
 He said to them,
 “He put mud on my eyes,³⁰²
 I washed,
 and I could see.”
 9:16 Some of the Perushim said,
 “This one is not a human with divine order,³⁰³
 because he doesn’t keep Shabbat.”
 But others said,
 “How can an erring human do such signs?”
 A schism came about among them.
 9:17 So again they said to the blind man:
 “What do you say about him, since he opened your eyes?”
 He said:
 “He is a prophet.”
 9:18 Now the Judeans did not trust him
 that he had been blind but could see all at once,

301 This is what presupposes *shiloach*. For *shiloach* in Isaiah 8:6, the Greek translation (LXX) writes *Siloam*.

302 CT: *Epethēken* (“put on”) and not *epechrisen* (“anointed”). The anointing is a Messianic act; here it is to make clear that it is about an act that is forbidden on Shabbat.

303 WITH A DIVINE ORDER: *Para theou* (without the article), “from the divine,” *para tou theou*, “from God.”

until they called the parents of the one who could see at once.
 9:19 They questioned them, they said,
 “Is this your son, who you say was born blind?
 How then can he see now?”
 9:20 His parents answered, they said,
 “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind.
 9:21 How he can see now, we do not know,
 or who opened his eyes, we do not know.
 Question him, he is an adult,
 he may speak for himself.”
 9:22 The parents said this because they were afraid of the Judeans.
 For the Judeans had already agreed:
 If anyone confesses³⁰⁴ him as Messiah,
 he would become one without a synagogue.³⁰⁵
 9:23 This is why his parents said,
 “He is an adult, question him.”
 9:24 So a second time they called the human who had been blind,
 they said to him,
 “Give honor to GOD,
 we know that this one is an errant human.”
 9:25 That one answered,
 “Whether he is errant I don’t know.
 One thing I do know:
 I was blind, now I see.”
 9:26 Now they said to him,
 “What did he do to you?
 How did he open your eyes?”
 9:27 He answered them,
 “I already told you, and you didn’t listen.
 Why do you want to hear it again?
 You don’t also want to become his disciples, do you?”
 9:28 And they railed at him, they said,

304 CONFESSES: *Homologēsē* (subjunctive), Hebrew *yode* (a hiphil of the root *yada*), “to confess,” but with the connotation “to praise publicly.”

305 ONE WITHOUT A SYNAGOGUE: *Aposynagōgos*. This word is the creation of John. The synagogue was the meeting place of the Jewish ethnic group in the cities of the empire. There they regulated their affairs and possible civil disputes among members according to the status that the Empire granted them as *ethnos*. Those who were excluded from the assembly lost all rights of participation and became a subject without rights. Since their own group was no substitute in legal terms, such exclusion could have far-reaching consequences.

“You are a disciple of that one,
 but we are disciples of Moses!
 9:29 We know that GOD has spoken to Moses,
 of that one, we don’t know where he is from.”
 9:30 The human answered, he said to them,
 “What a strange thing that you don’t know where he is from
 —considering that he opened my eyes!
 9:31 We know that GOD doesn’t listen to errants,
 but if anyone fears GOD and does his will,
 to him, he does listen.
 9:32 Since time immemorial³⁰⁶ was never heard
 of someone’s opening the eyes of a man born blind.
 9:33 If this one were not from GOD,
 he couldn’t do a thing!”
 9:34 They answered and said to him,
 “You are a misbirth, altogether,³⁰⁷
 and you want to teach us?”
 And they threw him out.

First of all, the healing is perceived as a physical impossibility. Neighbors and authorities doubt both the identity of the healed person and the fact of the disease according to the principle, “That which must not, cannot be” (Christian Morgenstern).

Let us note that the Perushim are authorized to conduct a legal proceeding. This speaks for a phase in which the synagogue is recognized by the Romans as a competent self-governing body of the Jewish people. This organ, therefore, has a certain power over people. The parents of the man born blind “feared the Judeans.”

The juxtaposition of Judeans and Perushim shows that the Perushim act and speak for the whole people of the Judeans. Since the great rabbis undoubtedly come from the tradition of the Perushim, and since they were in fact at least regionally accepted by the Romans, the conflict is a conflict between the synagogue and the Messianic community, a conflict from which the parents would like to keep out as much as possible. They let their adult son speak for himself and take no responsibility for him.

306 SINCE TIME IMMEMORIAL: *Ek tou aiōnos*, literally “from the age.” Means “from the beginning of all ages of the world,” that’s why I translate it freely.

307 CT: A MISBIRTH ALTOGETHER: *En hamartiais sy egennethēs holos*, literally, “with aberrations or transgressions you were wholly begotten or born.”
 [What TV translates as “Fehlgeburt, misbirth,” the CJB thinks of an insult as *mamzer*, which is—according to [Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mamzer)—a person born from forbidden relationships or from incest (as defined by the Bible), or the descendant of such a person.]

The fear of being turned into *aposynagogoi* by the synagogal authorities, that is, of being excluded, is real. The self-governing bodies also have a duty of care for the people. If they exclude people, the latter lose the right to political and social protection. We will deal with this in the discussion of 16:2.

After the healed man had to answer the same questions again and again, he dared to ask the Perushim whether they wouldn't like to become disciples of Jesus as well. They reply harshly that they are disciples of Moses: Moses is our teacher, *Moshe rabbenu*, only he, no one else. In this word, the self-confidence of the great rabbis is shown, and the same self-confidence is shown by the answer of the Perushim to the healed one, "You are a disciple of this one, we are disciples of Moses." To the Perushim this is an irreconcilable contrast. To Moses God spoke, on Sinai, and entrusted him with the Torah, but where does this Jesus come from?

In their eyes, by healing on Shabbat, Jesus tears down the fence around the Torah. The "men of the great assembly" gave their followers the advice, "Be perfect in judgment, let many disciples stand up, and make a fence around the Torah" (Mishna Avot 1:1). Whoever acts like Jesus is going the wrong way, he is an errant —"sinner"—in our traditional translations. Whoever tears down the fence gives away the whole, and that would be the end of the whole people of Israel.

To the man born blind, the world has become a different one. He says, "One thing I know: I was blind, and all at once I see." Everything else does not interest him. Whether Jesus goes astray or he was healed on Shabbat: he does not care. Exactly this attitude is a provocation to the Perushim, and that is why they must react like this. The narrative is composed in such a way that all the sympathy of the readers is for the blind man, all their antipathy is for the Perushim. But we must see the other side as well. If the fence around the Torah is torn down, it is all over with Israel, which the rabbis want to preserve.

After the destruction of the great synagogue in Alexandria in the so-called *Diaspora War* 115-117,³⁰⁸ after the annihilation of the assimilationist and self-confident Jewry of Alexandria, there was no other Jewish option than that of Rabbinical Judaism. To "fence around the Torah" means to preserve Israel's view of a society of *autonomy and equality* within the world of nations. Of course, the fence was also a defensive measure, defense, however, creates alienation.

The Perushim pronounce the contradiction straightforwardly: Whoever is a disciple of Moses cannot be a disciple of Jesus; whoever is a disciple of Jesus cannot be a dis-

308 Mishna Sota 9,14 mentions a *pulmos shel Qitus* (other manuscripts have *shel Titus*). Qitus is the Roman general Quietus, who crushed the uprising in northeast Africa. Since then, it is said that, as a result of the war, it was forbidden for "a man to teach his son Greek," practically the impossibility of assimilation that characterized Hellenistic Judaism in the empire. Thus remains de facto the dissimulation strategy of Rabbinical Jewry.

ciple of Moses. To the Perushim, a man who is completely indifferent to the Shabbat and the whole Rabbinical “concept of sin” is a great political danger, “They threw him out.” Reason: “You are a complete misbirth and you want to teach us?” The disciples had asked, “Who was wrong, he or his parents, to be born blind?” This recalls their sentence of 7:49, “But these people who do not know the Torah shall be cursed.” Teachings of such people as the man born blind were not accepted, because the Perushim had the authority to teach. These practically decide who “belongs” and who does not. Before John deals with this question, it must be clarified who is acting in this act of healing and what is actually happening here.

9.5.4. “Your aberration remains,” 9:35-41

9:35 Jesus heard that they had thrown him out;
he found him and said,
“Do you trust in the *bar enosh*, the Human?”
9:36 That one answered and said,
“And who is he, Sir, so that I may trust in him?”
9:37 Jesus said to him,
“You have seen him, and the one speaking with you—that one he is.”³⁰⁹
9:38 He declared,
“I am trusting, Lord.”
And he bowed to him.
9:39 And Jesus said,
“For judgment, I came into this world order,
so that those who do not see might see,
and those who do see might become blind.”
9:40 Some of the Perushim who were with him heard this and said to him,
“So we’re blind too, are we?”
9:41 Jesus answered them,
“If you were blind, you would be without aberration.
But now you say, ‘We see.’
Your aberration remains.

Jesus *finds* the one who has been excluded, as he *finds* the healed paralytic in 5:14. But there are great differences. The paralyzed man is questioned, but only when he knows that it was Jesus who had healed him does he go to the authorities, here called Judeans, 5:15. Immediately afterward, we hear for the first time that the

309 CT: Almost, in the same way, the answer to the woman from Samaria, “I AM HE—the one speaking with you” (4:26).
[But in his interpretation below, TV will rather emphasize the differences between the two passages.]

Judeans are persecuting Jesus, 5:16. Jesus had told the paralyzed man not to go astray any more so that nothing worse might happen to him.

Nothing of this sort is said to the blind man. Instead, he is asked a question, “Do you trust the *bar enosh*, the Human?” The latter had taken Jesus for a prophet, that is, for a man who had important things to say and do in Israel (9:17). He knows nothing about a “Son of Man”; “Who is he?” Here Jesus conspicuously avoids the *egō eimi*. “You have seen him,” it says. And then, “He is that one (*ekeinos*) speaking with you.” Let us remember the Samaritan woman who had said that—when the Messiah (*ekeinos*) came—he would announce everything. Jesus had answered, “I AM HE—who is speaking to you.” The Samaritan keeps her distance, she does not bow to him. Here Jesus maintains the distance, “*That one* he is.” It is left to the healed one to remove the distance. He does it by saying, “I am trusting, Lord.” He bows before him.

John wants his listeners to listen carefully and notice the differences between the Samaritan, the paralyzed, and the blind. All are in some way excluded. The Samaritan finds illusory support in her ethnic identity; she does not have to bow to Jesus the Judean. The paralytic seeks refuge with Rabbinical Judaism. The blind man has lost his Jewish identity through his exclusion, but excluded are they all. The Messiah finds these excluded ones.

Then Jesus goes into the basics. To Rabbinical Judaism he says, “Do you not see what you are doing with your politics? You drive the people out. You cripple Israel.” And now he takes the judicial authority of the one whom Daniel has called *bar enosh*, the Human. He, who constantly said that he had not come to judge, passes judgment, “Those who do not see might see, and those who see become blind.” This is a political, not a moral judgment.

The Perushim understand what is said here, “Are we too blind?” Jesus replies: If you would admit that you do not know how to go on either, you would be open to a new perspective. Precisely because you think your policy is the only right one, and because you think you are the only ones who have the insight, it remains a policy that leads astray, “Your aberration remains!” And this is what Jesus will explain in detail subsequently.

9.6. About the Unity of Israel, 10:1-21

There is hardly any other Messianic text that has given so much cause for Christian kitsch—in all Christian churches and sects—as John 10, known as The Good Shepherd. Nowhere else does John get as politically clear as here, if we disregard 11:47-53. The passage is structured very clearly. A parable, 10:1-6; interpretation of the parable, 10:7-18; the reaction of the Judeans, 10:19-21.

9.6.1. A Comparison, 10:1-6

- 10:1 Amen, amen, I say to you,
he who does not go into the courtyard³¹⁰ of the sheep through the door
but ascends³¹¹ from elsewhere is a thief and a terrorist.
- 10:2 He who goes in through the door is the shepherd of the sheep.
- 10:3 To this one, the doorkeeper opens,
the sheep listen to his voice.
He calls his own sheep by name,
he leads them out.
- 10:4 When he throws out all his own,³¹²
he goes on ahead of them,
and the sheep follow him,
because they know his voice.
- 10:5 They will by no means follow someone else,³¹³
but flee from him,
because they do not know the voice of one else.
- 10:6 This comparison³¹⁴ Jesus said to them,
but those did not recognize what he was speaking to them about.

310 COURTYARD: *Aulē*, Hebrew *chatzer*. The Hebrew word occurs 145 times in the Tanakh and means “courtyard,” mostly the courtyard of the sanctuary in the wilderness (Exodus 27 ff.) and in Jerusalem (Ezekiel 40-48). In any case, it does not mean “sheep pen.”

CT: “Door” is the symbol of the officially appointed leadership of the sanctuary (of the “court”). Only Jesus replaces this leadership, the others are usurpers.

311 ASCENDS: *Anabainōn*, “ascending.” “To ascend” is a standard term for the ascent to Jerusalem. Those who “ascended” from Galilee to Jerusalem in the Judean War to occupy the city and the temple, in the eyes of John were not Zealot freedom fighters, but “thieves and terrorists.”

312 THROWS OUT: If we translate *exebalon* as “they threw out” in 9:34, then we must also translate *ekbalē* here as “he throws out.” The verb occurs 6 times in the Gospel, once with a negation (6:37); in all other cases, the verb has all kinds of unwanted items as its object, from the traders in the sanctuary to the leader of the world order (12:31). The transition from *exagei*, “he leads out,” in v.3 last line, to *ekbalē*, “he throws out” in v.4 first line obviously is intended. The Messiah “throws” his disciples out of the sanctuary in response to the throwing out of the disciples from the synagogue (9:34; 16:2).

313 SOMEONE ELSE: *Allotrios*, in Hebrew *tzar*. *Tzar* is a collective term for people who do not belong, such as the “sojourner” (*thoshav*) or the “day laborer” (*sakhir*). Thus a connection is made between *allachothēn* in 10:1 and *allotrios* here. Who is meant by this explains 10:10 f.

314 [By the Greek word *paroimia* John refers to the Hebrew *mashal* which—according to the [Jewish Virtual Library](#)—might be rendered as “comparison, saying, and derived meanings.” For the interpretation of John’s *paroimia*, the following explanation on the mentioned web-site may be helpful, “No distinction is made in biblical usage between parable, allegory, and fable; all are forms of the *mashal* and have the same functions of illustration and instruction.”]

All commentators assume that the parable speaks of a sheepfold. The Zurich Bible has sensed a difficulty here, “What is meant is a walled place in the open field where sheep and goats are driven for the night.” The word *aulē* never means sheep pen and the Hebrew word for *aulē*, *chatzer*, means “sheep pen” just as little.

Chatzer occurs 145 times in the Tanakh. The word 115 times refers to the courtyard of the central sanctuary, alone 28 times to the courtyard of the tent sanctuary in the Book of Exodus and 47 times in the plan for the new sanctuary, Ezekiel 40-48. In the writings of the so-called “New Testament,” *aulē* also means a courtyard of the sanctuary, for example, John 18:15. Sheep and goats were driven into the village for the night; here *chatzer* stands for “homestead” or “village” (Joshua 31 times) [which, however, is translated into Greek not as *aulē*, but as *epaulis* or *kōmē*].

We have come to know the verb *anabainein*, “to ascend,” in the Gospel as a technical term for the ascent to Jerusalem (7:1 ff.).³¹⁵ The combination of *aulē* and *anabainein* points without any doubt to the sanctuary. The sanctuary is the central institution of the Judean society.

Anyone who ascends *allachothēn*, from elsewhere than through the door, is a thief or a terrorist. In the Gospel, only Judas Iscariot and Barabbas are described as thief or terrorist respectively. Both stand for parts of the Judean society, Judas for corruption, and Barabbas for the Zealot terrorists.

The sheep know the shepherd by his voice, and the shepherd “calls” the sheep “by name.” We find this expression frequently in the Scriptures, especially in the first part of Deutero-Isaiah (Isaiah 40-48). Isaiah 43:1 reads,

And now, so speaks the NAME,
he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel,
fear not, I have redeemed you,
called you by your name,
mine are you!

As the shepherd calls Israel by its name, it listens to him. The word *idios* has no Hebrew equivalent. Sometimes it only serves to paraphrase a possessive pronoun, as in Deuteronomy 15:2. Only if the shepherd is not someone else or a stranger (*allotrios*, *tzar*) the sheep are “his own.”

This own “he throws out completely.” This translation is required because it reflects the reaction of the shepherd to the throwing out of the blind man—in both cases, the verb *ekballein*, “to throw out,” is used—the more so as John uses the word for “to lead out” (*exagein*) in v.3. This hard transition from *exagein* to *ekballein* is intended. Jesus says to the Perushim, “You are throwing out my disciple? I also cast out my disciples, away from you, out of your court, out of your sanctuary.”

315 In the CT, we translated *anabainein* as “to climb in.” “To ascend” is a bit clumsy, but—because of the connotation “ascent to Jerusalem”—factually more correct.

The sheep listen to the voice, they follow the shepherd of Israel. The *allotrios*—one who enters *allachother*, “from elsewhere”—we know very well from Deutero-Isaiah, 43:11-12,

It is I, it is I, the NAME, no liberator but me alone,
I report it, I liberate, I let it hear,
No other (*tzar, allotrios*)³¹⁶ (god) with you, you are my witnesses,
announcement of the NAME: I am GOD.

They will not at all follow this *other* but flee, because they do not know the *other* voice. The shepherd, the God of Israel, has a voice—and this voice is the Messiah.

The listeners cannot do anything with the parable. Neither the Scriptural wording of the parable nor the political actualization through words like *thief* and *terrorist* has made them listen attentively, therefore, our commentators are in good company. They, too, see the parable as a purely cattle-raising process. These people should now be helped.

9.6.2. The Interpretation of the Comparison, 10:7-18

10:7 So once again Jesus said to them,
 “Amen, amen, I say to you,
 I AM—the door³¹⁷ of the sheep.
10:8 All those who came before me³¹⁸ are thieves and terrorists,
 but to them, the sheep didn’t listen.
10:9 I AM—the door.
 Whoever goes in through me will be liberated:
 He will go in, he will go out,
 *he will find pasture.*³¹⁹

316 Buber: “Unzugehöriger, not belonging one.”
 [Here I could not translate *allotrios* by using compositions of the English word “else” as I did in John 10:1, 5.]

317 DOOR: Some manuscripts have “shepherd” instead of “door” here. In this way, they do away with the discrepancy that exists between door and shepherd (10:9). *Egō eimi* as “shepherd” is understandable because God is the shepherd. But how is God “door”? There is a similar “discrepancy” in Ezekiel 34, where God himself is the shepherd of the sheep (34:15) and his servant David is to be a shepherd (34:23).

318 BEFORE ME: *Pro emou*, E. Nestle/K. Aland, Novum Testamentum Graece²⁷, Stuttgart 2001, doubt whether this originally belongs to the text. However, the two words belonged to the text very early, for example in P⁶⁶.

 CT: Meant are those—messianic or other ones—who claim leadership in the place of the *bar enosh*.

 [In this older version TV had explicitly translated *pro emou* as “instead of me.”]

319 A combination of Numbers 27:10 and Lamentations 1:6.

10:10 The thief does not come
except to steal, slaughter, and destroy.
I have come that they may keep life,
and keep it in abundance.

10:11 I AM—the good shepherd.
The good shepherd is putting his soul in for the sheep.³²⁰

10:12 The day laborer, who is not a shepherd,
not the owner of the sheep,
observes the wolf coming,
he leaves the sheep behind and flees,
and the wolf robs and scatters them.³²¹

10:13 Because he is a day laborer, he does not care about the sheep.

10:14 I AM—the good shepherd,
I recognize my own, and my own recognize me,
just as the FATHER recognizes me,
so I recognize the FATHER,
and I am putting my soul in for the sheep.

10:16 And other sheep I have,
they are not of this courtyard.³²²
Those also, I must lead,
they will listen to my voice;
and there will be,
flock: one; shepherd: one!³²³

10:17 This is why the FATHER is solidarizing with me,
because I am putting my soul in,
all the more so that I take it.

10:18 No one is taking it away from me,

320 PUTTING HIS SOUL IN: *Tithenai tēn psychēn*, Hebrew *sim nafsho (be-kafo)*. The expression is rare, and then only in connection with *be-kafo*, “to put his soul into his fist,” i.e., to use all available power [1 Samuel 19:5]. This may mean as an extreme consequence the loss of one’s own life, but it does not have to. One should not translate *psychē* as “life.” Some manuscripts, including very old ones, replace *tithenai* with *didonai*, “give his soul.” The correction is done from John 18-19.

321 SCATTERS THEM: *Scorpizein* is the technical term for the expulsion of Israel. The condition of Israel, having to live worldwide as “scattered,” is just the condition that the Messiah has to put an end to, 11:52. The disciples expect a similar fate as Israel when the Messiah is arrested, they are scattered, 16:32.

322 What is meant is not the *goyim*, but the Diaspora of Israel. See note to 7:35. The talk is not of a unity of Jews and Christians, as is often heard, but of the unity of Israel, see 11:52!

323 FLOCK: ONE; SHEPHERD: ONE: The background is Ezekiel 34:23: “I will raise one (*’echad*) to them as a shepherd,” and Ezekiel 37:22, “I will make them one people and one (*’echad*) as king will become king to them all.” Thus the breach, reported in Zechariah 11:14, is healed.

I am putting it in from myself.
 Authority I have to put it in,
 all the more I have authority to take it.
 This commandment I took from my FATHER.”³²⁴

Jesus begins the interpretation with the same emphasis as the parable itself: “Amen, Amen.” What follows is an *allegorical* interpretation: “I AM—the door.” The historical criticism that has been prevalent for two centuries—which has rightly done its work!—has brought allegory into disrepute. But that is wrong; we should take seriously those allegories which the Scriptures themselves present.

Those who enter *allachothēn*, “from elsewhere,” come *instead* of the Messiah Jesus. The translation “before” is not incorrect, but it conceals the current danger. *In place* of the Messiah (*pro*), still others are coming. It is about those who pretended and still pretend to be the Messiah of Israel, therefore the present tense *eisin*, “are.” They are thieves—like Iscariot (12:6)—or terrorists—like Barabbas, who was sentenced to death because of terrorist activities (18:40). The *lēstēs* is a member of the guerilla—fighting against Rome and its collaborators. And Judas anticipates the thief John of Giscala, as Barabbas anticipates the Zealot underground fighter Simon bar Giora.

Some of the Zealots *ascended* to Jerusalem in late 67 CE, occupied it under the leadership of John of Giscala, and established a dictatorship. John of Giscala soon had to share power with another Zealot leader, Simon bar Giora. When Flavius Josephus was still commander of the insurgent troops in Galilee, he claimed to have endeavored to bring discipline to the troops and drive out their unjust actions, *adikēmata*, including theft, terrorism, and rapine (*klopai te kai lēsteiai kai harpagē*³²⁵). Now it is

324 These two verses 17-18 are difficult. *Palin*, “all the more,” is a reinforcement. To put in the soul (*tithēmi tēn psychēn mou*) means to bring into action oneself, one’s life. This commitment happens “the more so that (*hina*) I receive it (the soul or the life).” The play of words with *tithēsthai* and *labein* corresponds to *apolyein* and *phylassein* in 12:24, to destroy the soul to preserve it.

[Three times in vv.17-18 I use the word “to take,” in the first line of v.18 to translate *hairein*, in the 3rd or 4th line of both verses for *lambanein*. TV interprets Jesus’ own *taking of his soul* as an increase of his *putting in of his soul* in the sense of a conscious decision (out of political strength) to expose himself to being murdered by the world order—contrary to a view that his soul was taken away from him, against his will. With no single word TV refers to the traditional interpretation of the word *lambanein* in the sense of “to receive, to get back again”—as if it were about Jesus’ resurrection: that he would get back his life and in this respect, everything would not be so bad.

325 [TV cites Flavius Josephus, *Geschichte des Jüdischen Krieges*. Aus dem Griechischen übersetzt von Heinrich Clementz. *Durchsicht der Übersetzung, Einleitung und Anmerkungen* von Heinz Kreissig, Leipzig 1978. I refer to Flavius Josephus, [A History of the Jewish Wars, Translated from the Original Greek by William Whiston, Hartford, Conn. 1905, 2, 20](#). At fur-

difficult to assume that John read the report of Flavius Josephus, but these three words also appear in John's chapter on the "good shepherd." If one does not know the political context of John, words like "courtyard, to ascend, thief, terrorist, robbery, etc." cannot be assigned.

John 10 is an anti-Zealotic text. The liberation that the Zealots had feigned to themselves and others is a caricature of what John imagines by liberation, "If anyone goes in through me, he will be liberated; *he will go in, he will go out, he will find pasture.*" Here we find a mixed quotation from Numbers 27:17 and Lamentations 1:6. This combination is intentional.³²⁶ The passage of Numbers is about Joshua, Hebrew *Yehoshua*^ς, Greek *Iēsous*, the name of whom means, "The NAME liberates!" He is appointed as Moses' successor. His task is to go ahead of Israel and to lead it back again,

And Moses spoke to the NAME, he said:
May the NAME, God who inspires all flesh,
prescribe a man over the community,
who goes ahead of them,
who comes back with them,
who leads them out,
who brings them back,
so that the community doesn't become
like a flock of sheep without a shepherd.

The first song from the role "Woe" [Lamentations] mourns the downfall of Jerusalem. In v.6 it says,

From the daughter of Zion, all glory went away,
their leaders became like deer without finding pasture,
without strength, they fled before the pursuer.

The new leadership of Israel should be like Joshua. Instead, "The thief does not come except to steal, slaughter, and destroy." It can hardly be doubted that John here refers to the Zealot leaders of Jerusalem. From the outcome of the Zealot war, John judges the whole Zealot movement and its motivation: stealing, slaughtering, destroying. The new Joshua on the other hand will liberate Israel, he will find pasture. This evaluation of the Zealot war against Rome need not be adopted, but it is John's evaluation.

Now the interpretation of the comparison takes a new turn. It is no more about the Zealots, but about those who graze the sheep on behalf of the owners of the sheep.

ther mentions, I refer to this work with the abbreviation "Bell."]

326 The only other passage in the Tanakh, 1 Chronicles 4:39, is about the sons of Simeon who wandered, seeking, and finding pasture. It is less meaningful for our context.

A good shepherd puts in his soul for the sheep. He may give his life for the sheep, but that is the extreme form of what is meant by “putting one’s soul in.”

John again quotes the Scriptures, this time the first *word of burden* that was added to the book of Zechariah.³²⁷ In all the Gospels we find several motifs from the two *burdens* at the end of the book of Zechariah: the donkey of Zechariah 9:9, the thirty pieces of silver of 11:4 ff., the striking of the shepherds of 13:7 ff. Apparently, many Messianic communities must have studied these two *burdens* intensively to understand and process the events surrounding the death of Jesus and the destruction of Jerusalem. John makes the understanding of the Scriptures a prerequisite for the understanding of those dramatic events that affect the disciples (John 2:22; 20:9). Obviously, these texts deal with serious leadership crises in Israel/Judah, and it is useful to remember the Maccabean period. After 70, the Messianic community is without leadership and orientation.

Now, Zechariah 9-14 can also be interpreted as a midrash of Ezekiel 34. In this famous chapter, Ezekiel deals with “the dismissal of the shepherds,” i.e. the kings of Judah, who delivered the sheep (the people) defenselessly to the wild beasts of the field (the peoples, especially the Babylonians). The wolf must be seen against this background. In John’s parable, the wolf stands structurally in the place occupied by the wild animals in Ezekiel 34:2b-5,

Woe to you shepherds of Israel who have grazed themselves!
Should not the shepherds graze the sheep?
You consume the milk, you clothe yourselves with the wool,
you slaughter the fat ones, you have not grazed the sheep.
You have not strengthened the sick, you have not healed the infirm,
You have not bandaged the broken, you have not brought back the displaced,
you have not searched for the disappeared.
With strength, you have trampled them down, with force.
So the sheep were scattered because they are without a shepherd,
they became food for all animals of the field, were scattered.

This devastating reckoning with a ruined regime is behind John 10, admittedly in a broken form. John takes the refraction of the image from Zechariah 11:15-17,

The NAME kept speaking to me,
“Take the equipment of a false shepherd.

327 Zechariah 9-14 confronts the exegesis with great problems that have not been solved satisfactorily until today. Perhaps they represent a bridge to apocalyptic literature, which played a major role in the Maccabean period. Some fragments are an early response to the challenges posed by the conquest of the region by the Greeks under Alexander. The text of the “unworthy shepherd” (*roʿe ha-ʾelil*, Zechariah 11:17) is very difficult to interpret, we are still far from understanding what real events it refers to.

But ME—I will raise up a shepherd in the land:
 He does not integrate the driven out,
 He does not look for the young,
 He does not heal the broken,
 He does not supply what remains to stand,
 He eats the fat flesh, smashes its claws:
 Woe to the unworthy shepherd who abandons the sheep.
 Sword over his arm, over his right eye!
 His arm wither, his eye shall be blotted out, wiped out.”

The expression “good shepherd” (*poimēn kalos, ro‘e thov*) does not exist in the Scriptures. Most shepherds were anything but good. “I raise up the one shepherd, my servant David, who shall feed them,” says Ezekiel 34:23. The prophet still figured on the re-establishment of a purified monarchy from David’s house. Zechariah 11 does not figure on this anymore; rather, he reckons violently with the new monarchy that arose under the house of Judah Maccabi.³²⁸ It is a matter of false shepherds, of unworthy shepherds. They are shepherds who leave the sheep when the wolf comes, says John. To him, these prophetic words are of tremendous relevance.

In many commentaries, you can read that the hired shepherds do not care for the flock, because it is not their property. That is a thoroughly bourgeois idea. But here it is about the only owner whom the Scriptures acknowledge, the NAME, the God of Israel, “Mine is the land, all of you are tenants and strangers compared to me,” Leviticus 25:23. *Hired shepherds* are therefore all those who graze the sheep on behalf of the owner.

So it is about the political leadership of Judea in the years before the *Judean War* and during the war. Who abandoned the sheep? Some think of Yohanan ben Zakkai, who, according to the founding legend of Rabbinical Judaism, left the besieged city and went into the care of the Romans. If we are considering the flight of Zakkai, we should also think of the flight of the Messianic community of Jerusalem, led by the “brothers of the Lord.” They also abandoned the children of Israel. We know from 7:2 ff. that John had a low opinion of Jesus’ brothers—and that means of the community in Jerusalem. Finally, we are told about the disciples themselves, “You will leave me (Jesus) alone,” 16:32 (here and there *aphiesthai*). Here John enlightens his Messianic community about the total failure of the priestly leadership of the people at that time and the leadership of the Messianic communities as well.

Who is the wolf? Rome? There’s a lot to be said for it, the wolf is the mother of the founders of Rome, Romulus and Remus. It is more likely that John is thinking of texts like Ezekiel 22:23-31,

328 This then presupposes a very late dating of Zechariah 11 in the late 2nd century BCE.

The superiors in the land are robbing, they rob like wolves,
shed blood, destroy souls,
make profit, profit (v.27).³²⁹

In John, it says, “The hired shepherd watches the wolf coming, abandons the sheep, flees—the wolf robs and scatters. The authorities were certainly “day-laborers” of Rome, but during the Judean War, a part of the priestly aristocracy joined the fighting people. After the Romans’ defeat at Beth Horon in 66 and the increasing radicalization of the resistance, many of the respected Judeans left the city.”³³⁰

For the second time, we hear, “I AM—the good shepherd.” The first time “good” is filled with the attitude by which the shepherd puts his soul in for his sheep, and the second time by “knowing.” This knowledge is based on reciprocity. The basic form of this reciprocity is the mutual “recognition” between FATHER and shepherd. For *ginōskein* means, “to recognize and trust one another.” The basic relationship between the God of Israel and the Messiah determines all other relationships. To know, to recognize, to acknowledge, to trust means in consequence: to put in one’s soul.

“Good shepherd” means “good regiment.” If a state (“just king,” Psalm 72!), then “good shepherd.” As a rule, however, a state is an apparatus that tends to develop a momentum of its own, in the worst case it becomes the corrupt self-service store of Ezekiel 34.

In v.16 the text seems to lose the thread, which it takes up again not until v.17. Obviously, the author seems to want to prevent a threatening misunderstanding. The people who hear these words might think that they, the Messianic Judeans, are the sheep, they alone. But there are others to whom the same commitment applies. After two thousand years, Christianity can think of nothing but a “pagan mission” here. John merely says that it is not only about the sheep of this courtyard, not only about the Judeans of Jerusalem, that there are other children of Israel, for example, the woman from Samaria, and also those who live widely scattered throughout the Roman Empire. Among them are certainly also the non-Jewish sympathizers of (Hellenistic) Judaism, the “Greeks” from John 12:20 ff. The Messiah wants to unite them all: they shall all become “one flock, one shepherd.” Among those who “are not of this courtyard” may be members of other peoples (*goyim*). But they will belong to Israel—and not vice versa Israel to a completely new people of God, such as the Christian church! The ONE, the NAME, is the shepherd of Israel, Psalm 23:1; 80:2; Ezekiel 34:13-15, etc.³³¹

329 Similarly, Zephaniah 3:3: “The rulers are like roaring lions, the judges like Arabian wolves.”

330 Flavius Josephus, [Bell. 2.20](#).

331 We can also recall our interpretation of John 2:6. There were six stone water jugs at the wedding in Cana. “Half of Israel,” we said. Does John here, 10:16, mean the other half?

Verses 17 and 18 take up the thought of v.16 again. The FATHER recognizes the shepherd Jesus, the Messiah, to whom the political pastoral office was given (Daniel 7:14). The shepherd recognizes the FATHER and this recognition consists in “putting in his soul for the sheep.” This is the statement of v.15. Why is the FATHER, the GOD of Israel, in solidarity with Jesus? Not because he is the Son of God, but because he puts in his soul for Israel (for the sheep). Not because he is the Son, he puts in his soul, but vice versa: because he puts in his soul, he is the Son.

Then there is a cryptic subordinate clause, “again so that I take it,” or, “all the more so that I take it.” What does “to take” mean? The expression “to take a soul” means “to kill”; for instance Psalm 31:14, “They plot to take my soul.” That cannot be meant here. Rather, the Aramaic verb *qebal* stands behind “to take.” It is the verb we heard in mAvot 1:1ff.,

Moses accepted (*qibbel*) the Torah of Sinai.

This corresponds to the last line of v.18, “This commandment I took from the FATHER” (*elabon, qibbel*). The word *palin* doesn’t only mean a repetition, but also a re-inforcement. “To put in one’s soul” means “to take the soul.” The only and real task of his soul, his life task, is to put in his soul, his life, for the sheep. The death of the Messiah, as the most extreme form of the putting in of his soul (“to take away” the soul, *airein*), does not happen because those who kill him would have the authority (*exousia*) to do so, but because he himself—and unhindered by others—went this way; he puts in his soul of himself. To this, he has the authority, he is commissioned with it, and in such a way that he accepts this commission from himself. His path of life is the consequence of the commission that the God of Israel gave him; to accept the commission to take his soul, his life’s work, is his decision. The purpose of this argumentation is to make it clear to the people that the assassination of the Messiah was not a sign of his political weakness, but that he *goes this way of his own accord*. To this, he has the authority.

In the background, there is the question, pronounced or unspoken, of what use is a Messiah if, in the end, he had to become the victim of prevailing conditions after all? This path, says John, is a consciously taken, political path. Whether it was the only possibility, we must ask ourselves.

9.6.3. Schism, 10:19-21

10:19	Again a schism came about among the Judeans because of these words.
10:20	Many of them said, “He is possessed, he’s raging! Why do you listen to him?”
10:21	Others said, “These are not the words of a man possessed. Can possession open the eyes of the blind?”

The clear political interpretation of the parable makes some of the listeners pensive, while others stick to their judgment. The demeanor of the Messianic community causes discussions among the Rabbinically oriented Judeans. Some consider the Messiah, the Messianic congregation, to be “possessed,” a crazy bunch of sectarians. But others see that Jesus makes people “see”, that they get a perspective. These Messianic groups “enlighten” other people; this, they say, is surely something else than the possession of fanatics.

Thus John ends the passage on *Sukkot*, the Festival of Lights. Now follows the Festival of Renewal, *Hanukkah*.

10. *Hanukkah*, the Festival of Renewal. Living and Dying, 10:22-11:54

10.1. The Messiah and God, 10:22-39

- 10:22 At that time it happened:
Hanukkah in Jerusalem.
It was winter.
- 10:23 Jesus was walking his way in the sanctuary—in Solomon’s Colonnade.
- 10:24 Now the Judeans encircled him and said to him,
“Until when are you going to lift up our soul?”³³²
If you are the Messiah, tell us publicly!”
- 10:25 Jesus answered them,
“I told you, and you are not trusting.
The works I am doing in my FATHER’s name
are testifying about me.
- 10:26 But you are not trusting,
because you are not from among my sheep.
- 10:27 My sheep are listening to my voice,
I recognize them, they are following me.
- 10:28 I give them life for the age to come,
they will not be destroyed until the age to come,
and no one will rob them from my hand.
- 10:29 My FATHER, who gave them to me, is greater than all,
no one can rob them from the FATHER’s hand.³³³
- 10:30 I and the FATHER: ONE we are.”³³⁴

332 LIFT UP OUR SOUL: *Tēn psychēn hēmon aireis*. We know the expression “to lift up the soul” only from the Psalms, “To you (God), I lift up my soul,” Psalm 25:1; 86:4; 143:8. So the questioners want to know from Jesus: Why do you raise Messianic expectations in us?

333 The background may be Deuteronomy 32:39: *we-ʾen mi-yadi matzil*, “no one snatches it out of my hand,” although the LXX does not have *harpazein*, “to rob,” here. This passage invokes God’s rescuing Israel, despite Israel’s rebelliousness.

334 ONE WE ARE: *Hen esmen*, Hebrew *ʾechad nihye*. About the verb *einai*, Hebrew *haya*, the

- 10:31 Again the Judeans dragged stones in order to stone him.
- 10:32 Jesus answered them,
 “Many good works I showed you from the FATHER.
 For which one of these works are you stoning me?”
- 10:33 The Judeans answered him,
 “We are not stoning you for any good work, but for blasphemy,
 because you, a human, are making yourself GOD.”
- 10:34 Jesus answered them,
 “Isn’t it written in your Torah,
*I have said, ‘Gods you are’?*³³⁵
- 10:35 If it now calls those gods to whom GOD’s word happened
 —and the Scripture cannot be dissolved—,
- 10:36 to the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world you say,
 ‘You are blaspheming—infringing the NAME!—’³³⁶
 because I said, ‘I am like GOD (Son of GOD)’³³⁷
- 10:37 If I do not the works of my FATHER,
 do not trust me.
- 10:38 But if I do them, then, even if you don’t trust me,
 trust the works,
 so that you may understand and recognize
 that the FATHER is with me, and I am with the FATHER.”
- 10:39 Again they sought to seize him,
 he got out of their hand.

necessary is said in the note to 1:1. It is “Semitic” here and not “Greek,” it is not about the identity of being. If anywhere, it is necessary here to thoroughly distance from Christian orthodoxy. The God of Israel and his messenger represent one issue, and that is Israel. In this matter, there is no difference between God and the *bar enosh*, the Human. The unity consists in the fact that God entrusted Israel (“sheep”) to Jesus; they are in the hand of Jesus as in the hand of God, and no one robs them.

335 I HAVE SAID, ‘GODS YOU ARE’: Psalm 82:6.

336 [BLASPHEMING—INFRINGING THE NAME: Translating *blasphēmeis* as “you infringe the NAME,” TV follows Martin Buber who renders *wayiqav* in Leviticus 24:11 as “er tastete den NAMEN an.” As “to infringe” doesn’t exactly match the German word “antasten” (literally „to touch at”), and John already used the Greek word *blasphēmein* in 10:33, I put both translations side by side.]

337 LIKE GOD: *Hyios tou theou*. Several manuscripts have instead: *hyios theou*, without article. *Theos* without the article can be taken as *theios*, “divine.” The manuscripts that omit the article apparently want to make it clear that Jesus is to be absolved of the charge that he saw himself as God. They have overlooked the Semitic coloring of the expression. In both cases, “son of (the) God” actually means “like God,” as the Psalm quotation in 10:34 (Psalm 82:6) already suggests. The article means “like the God of Israel,” so that there is no suspicion of a general divinity. See note at 1:34.

Antiochus IV, Great King of the region of Syria-Mesopotamia—roughly on the scale of the New Babylonian Empire—had taken the city of Jerusalem on the 15th of the month of Kislev in 167 BCE. Since he also wanted to make his empire a unified entity ideologically, he issued a decree according to which all peoples had to abandon their respective traditional legal systems and adopt the royal legal order (1 Maccabees 1:41).³³⁸ The king converted the sanctuary in Jerusalem into a state sanctuary, erected the statue of Zeus Olympiakos there, and decreed that sacrifices were to be made to the state god on the traditional sacrificial site. Daniel called this the *abomination of desolation* (Daniel 11:31). Three years later, Judah Maccabee liberated the city of Jerusalem, after he had defeated and chased away the armies of Antiochus IV, and purified the sanctuary from the Hellenistic state cult. This act is called *Hanukkah, Encainia*, “renewal.”

Judah and his brothers said,
 “There, our enemies have been crushed, let us ascend,
 we purify the sanctuary and renew (*enkainisai*) it.”
 He gathered the whole army camp and ascended to Mount Zion.

...

They cleansed the sanctuary
 and threw the defiled stones into an unclean place.

...

There was great joy among the people, very much,
 and the shame by the *goyim* was undone.

Judah and his brothers and the whole assembly Israel decided,
 that the days of renewal of the sacrificial site shall be celebrated annually,
 for eight days, counting from the twenty-fifth day of the month of Kislev,
 with joy and cheerfulness” (1 Maccabees 4,36-37, 43, 58-59).

This whole section 10:22-11:54 is about the renewal of Israel. In the days of John, the sanctuary was devastated. The Roman emperor Titus in the year 70 not only desecrated the sanctuary and the sacrificial site, as his predecessor had done but razed it to the ground. His advisors probably made it clear that the sanctuary was the center of the social life of the Judeans. If there should never again be an uprising against Rome by this people, the sanctuary and the city would have to be completely destroyed. The question is: How should the place and thus the life of the people be renewed? Where is the Messiah?

“It was winter. Jesus walked his way in the sanctuary—in the Colonnade of Solomon.” The phrase “it was winter” seems redundant. But in Mark, the Messiah asks his disciples to pray that the great catastrophe of the end times may not hap-

338 Probably it is—if at all—a targeted decree against the province of Judea and not a decree for the whole empire.

pen “in winter” (13:18). Perhaps John wants the listeners to make the connection with Mark 13:18.

On the ceiling of the colonnade stood the chambers of the priests. This is where the Messiah walks *his way*. This is something different than a stroll. *Peripatein* always means a way of life according to the will of God. Jesus’ way of life is the way of life of the Messiah. The Judeans feel this, they literally encircle him.

Following the logic of the narrative, “Until when do you take up our souls, do you keep our souls in suspension?” The narrator’s logic says, “Is there anything more to come like the Messiah?” The two levels must be carefully separated. The level of the narrative is the event around the year 30, and the level of the narrator is the event after the year 70. This interplay between the two levels is continuing.

Jesus or the Messianic community has always claimed that Jesus is the Messiah, but the Judeans do not trust him. They cannot see that trusting in this Messiah changes anything about the dismal situation. “The works that I am doing in the name of my FATHER testify about me,” Jesus replies. On the narrative level, the refusal to trust Jesus seems dishonest. But on the level of the narrator, is it worthy of trust to point to works done long ago that no one can verify and that have demonstrably changed nothing in the situation of the people? We do not want to give up our role as an impartial interpreter. One can understand the skepticism of John’s Jewish opponents. After all, John is that realistic: Those who do not belong to his community can neither understand nor believe, and certainly not trust.

The arguments are not new, we know them from the great speeches and discussions of the previous chapters. They are now brought into the context of the parable about the flock of sheep. “Life of the world to come” means in this connection, “No one will rob them out of the hand of my FATHER. In the Messianic community they are safe from the rapacity of Rome. They are safe “in the hand of the FATHER.”

Reason: “I and my FATHER, ONE we *are*,” 10:30. “To be” here is a Semitic “to be,” an event, not a statement of identity. The sentence means: The actions of the creator of heaven and earth, the liberator and the covenant partner of Israel, and the actions of the Messiah have one direction, one goal: the unity of Israel. The unity of the flock and shepherd derives only from this uniform action of God and his Messiah. From the Scriptures, John cannot be interpreted differently.

At the same time, the narrator knew very well what he was provoking with this formulation. He knew that the Judeans must understand this as an “infringing of the NAME.” He knew it since 5:18, since the reaction to the healing of the paralyzed man on Shabbat. Stones are the expected response to the provocation.

The *good* shepherd does “*good works* from my FATHER.” This expression is another term for the unity of action of the FATHER and the Messiah. Why the excitement? The unity of action is in fact at such a level of perfection that those who listened had

to conclude on the unity of (Greek) being, on the unity of essence—later it will be called *homoousios*! That is why they strongly suspect that this is about blasphemy.³³⁹ The opponents assume that Jesus makes himself God. That would be blasphemy, a special form of idolatry, which is also a capital crime (Mishna Sanhedrin 7:6). In the eyes of the Judeans, the worship of Jesus in the Messianic community is idolatry, blasphemy.

Jesus/John knocks the argument out of the opponents' hands with a Scripture quotation. Such arguments are often battles of quotations, not only between Jews and Christians or between different kinds of Christians, even among Marxists! Such discussions have never led to understanding.

Nevertheless, it is worth listening to Psalm 82, from which the quotation "Gods are you" is taken. Yes, "Gods they are, they are like the Most High (*bene 'elyon*) / but like mankind (*ke-'adam*) they must die." In itself, therefore, a human can be called "God" or "Son of God (the Most High)," at least as long as the Scriptures ("your Torah") are still valid.

However, that is not the point. The point is the practice of the cult of Jesus in the Messianic communities, a cult that goes far beyond the veneration of Moses by the Judeans. Even we, who do not, as usual, condemn "the Jews" for their unbelief, but strive to understand both sides, find it difficult to see the unbridgeable gulf between both sides.

Jesus, however, turns the conversation in the other direction, saying that the Judeans should trust the works when they do not trust him. The goal, the erection and unity of Israel, originates from the mission, the sending, of the FATHER. That is what they too should want. The healing of the paralyzed and the blind, the nourishment of the five thousand: these works serve the revival of Israel. Why can they not at least trust these works?

At this point the chasm becomes unbridgeable. Everything the opponents say and do will deepen it. Rabbi Gamaliel, according to Luke in the Book of Acts, advised his people to remain calm. Either the strategy (*boulē*) or the practice (*ergon*) of the Messianists is purely human; then they dissolve by themselves, or it is from God, then nothing can be done about it, Acts 5:33 ff. Such a serenity offers itself if the opponent is called Luke. But if the opponent is John? A practice that tears down *the fence around the Torah* (the Shabbat)—see section 9.5.3—could never be a practice from God (*ergon ek tou theou*).

339 The word *blasphēmia* hardly appears at all in the Greek translation of the Scriptures; there it stands for *neʿatza*, "contempt," Ezekiel 35:12. But factually this refers to Leviticus 24:10-12, where it is about "infringing of the NAME" (*naqav*) or "cursing of the name" (*qalal*). [The Greek word *blasphemein* also appears in 2 Kings 19:4, 6, 22; Isaiah 52:5; Daniel 3:29 (LXX 3:96), among others as the translation for *gadaf*, "to revile."]

It all seems silly to us, why do the Jews make such a fuss about their Shabbat? Besides, the “Son of God” might have the right to do what he thinks is right on Shabbat. This *Christendom-like* attitude toward the opponents of Jesus is not only unfair, but it is also—when it appears in “scientific” commentaries—factually wrong. For the Judeans at that time, the fence around the Torah was a matter of life and death. That is why you may call the conflict “tragic”—although tragedy is not a characteristic of the Scriptures but of Hellenistic culture—tragic because everything the opponents say and do will render the contrast incurable. The Judeans could do nothing else but arrest Jesus and put him on trial. After all, this was a step forward compared to the vigilante justice of 10:31.

Jesus evaded his arrest.

Scholion 7: Legalism

Franz Hinkelammert, the sociologist from Costa Rica, wrote a book about the Gospel of John in 2001 under the title: *The Cry of the Subject*. It is an exegetical book, but it is not a classical interpretation. It is rather an attempt to appropriate a basic text of Christianity in a part of the world that is deeply marked by this Christianity, but does not belong to the “Western world.”

As a rule, Christianity served to imprint obedience in people to the prevailing political, social, and economic systems. People were to understand themselves as objects of the legality of such ruling systems and accept themselves as such. The *theology of liberation* in Latin America was and is an attempt to subvert the ideological subjugation of people to the laws of the systems with the same instrument by which the subjugation was ideologically organized, the Bible. As heterogeneous as the *theology of liberation* may be, it is a continuous subversive reading of the Bible; it is a *contrary reading*. The book of Hinkelammert is to be seen against this background.

Against the treatment of people as *objects*, people raise their voices; this is the cry of the *subject*. According to Hinkelammert, the Gospel of John is the cry of humans against a law that makes them objects. His attempt is therefore not only legitimate, but it is also necessary.

To Franz Hinkelammert, the passage 10:22-39 is central. It is about the divinity of humans. According to Hinkelammert, Jesus not only felt the claim to divinity as a prerogative of his own, but all people have this prerogative, “You are gods!” Humans stand above the law, just as the Son of Man stands above the law of the Shabbat, “This is the meaning of the criticism of the law and the understanding of sin committed in fulfillment of the law” (133).

According to Hinkelammert, John makes this clear in that his narrative is not the description of individual salvation through the salvation history of Jesus, but rather the representation of a “world theater.” In fact, no other Messianic narrator and writer

made Rome his theme as much as John. The subtitle of Hinkelammert's book reads, "From the world theater of John's Gospel to the dog years of globalization." Hinkelammert shows that the priests who want and bring about the death of Jesus do not act out of irrational malice, but highly rationally. The laws of the Roman Empire require rationality on the part of the actors which they cannot escape. What is the death of one human against the continued existence of a community (see p. 78 ff.)? And so he reads the Gospel against the rationality of a global system that unfolds its deadly effect precisely on his continent.

Those who are familiar with Hinkelammert's book can easily see that our interpretation follows other paths. Our aim is to make it clear that the Torah is more than "law." The whole Torah, all five "Books of Moses," is a Grand Narrative of liberation, and the laws are functioning within—and only within—this narrative of liberation. That the Perushim (Pharisees) insist on the Torah against the Messiah of John's Gospel is not a grumpy traditionalism; they rather want the vision of autonomy and equality to be preserved, even at the price of far-reaching compromises. We must accept that the law is a *discipline of freedom*.

The reproach of the Messianists was that what once—under the conditions of autonomy—could function as a *discipline of freedom*, can no longer function under the global conditions of the Roman Empire, but becomes a law in the sense of Hinkelammert. It would then mean a retreat into traditionalist niches. Any compromise with Rome would mean the end of the Torah as a discipline of freedom. It would then no longer have any social relevance.

To the Messianists, not the *different life* in an evil world, but life in *a different world* was the solution. Life in the *different, earthly* world: this is the original meaning of what is called "eternal life" in Christian circles. This is the eternal debate between *what is* (making the best of it) and *what ought to be* (the better world). The last shape of this debate was the bitter discord in the labor movement between social democrats and communists.

We are therefore more hesitant than Hinkelammert in our interpretation of the opponents' position, but his concern (the subject's cry for humanity) is also our concern (the goal is the life of the age to come). However, the better world, let alone the *age to come* of the Messianists *did* not come. Securing the niches did not really make life safe for the Jews.

The anti-Judaism of the descendants of the Messianists, the Christians, has its deepest root in the *feeling* that the ecclesia adapted itself to the world even more thoroughly than the synagogue ever did. The Jews provoked by their sheer existence the bad conscience of Messianism in the Christians. Precisely because all this was almost always *feeling*, it could have such a devastating effect.

Rational argument, that is, the concession that the position of the opponents—their legality—was and is rationally justifiable, brings the opponents out of the realm of

the unconscious and brings them into the cool light of reason. Reason is the absolute prerequisite for the effectiveness of tolerance. Franz Hinkelammert's book is an attempt to understand the legality and polemics of John's Gospel politically. Our interpretation is to be seen as a supplement and clarification.

10.2. Where It All Began, 10:40-42

10:40 He went away, again beyond the Jordan,
to the place where John at first had been immersing,
he stayed there.
10:41 Many people came to him and said,
"John did no sign,
but everything John said about this one
was trustworthy."
10:42 And many there began trusting in him.

The short note 10:40 ff. is more than an editorial conclusion. Commentators regularly rack their brains over where to find Bethany, whether there are several locations named "Bethany." This is an old tradition. Producers of very old manuscripts thought that Bethany was located in Judea, near Jerusalem, and therefore they gave the baptismal site other names, Betharaba or Bethabara. However, the interpretation is not primarily concerned with the exact geography, but with the function of the place name in the narrative.

Bethany is the place on the other side of the Jordan where John was immersing. It was in this place that the Messiah was first testified. There Jesus "found" the core of the new Israel. Of course, "beyond Jordan" can mean the whole area east of the Jordan Valley, but *peran tou Iordanou*, "beyond Jordan," is the area where Israel gathered to "inherit" the land "freedom," as the Book of *devarim*, "speeches" (Deuteronomy) repeatedly says. This is where it all began. In John, "beyond the Jordan" is not the land of exile, but the land of the beginning. Here, *beginning* means "the place where John first immersed." That is exactly where Jesus goes. He does not flee.

Many came to this place. They know that John did not do signs. His act was the preparation of Israel for the "signs" of the one he was talking about. The Messiah healed Israel, and John attuned Israel to this healing. Now Jesus returns to the place where it all began. It will be the place where he will do his last and greatest sign. Many have trusted the Messiah here. How this came about is told in the next passage.

10.3. You will see the honor of God, 11:1-45

The middle of the narrative in John 11 takes place in the conversation between Martha and Jesus. Martha and her sister Mariam live among the Judeans as the Messianic community lives among the Judeans. All of them, the two sisters and their

Judean environment, are affected by the death of Lazarus, but this concern is nothing compared to the agitation of Jesus. The narrative is the center of the Gospel and is not accidentally placed in the middle of the text.

We subdivide,

Lazarus, 11:1-16,

Martha, 11:17-27

Mariam, 11:28-37

“Untie him and let him go,” 11:38-45.

10.3.1. Lazarus, 11:1-16

11:1 Someone was sick,
Lazarus³⁴⁰ of Bethany,
from the village of Mariam and Martha, her sister.
11:2 It was that Mariam,
*who anointed the Lord with balm
and dried his feet with her hair,*³⁴¹
whose brother Lazarus was sick.
11:3 So the sisters sent to him, saying,
“Lord, look: the one you are friends with is sick.”
11:4 On hearing it, Jesus said,
“This sickness is not to death,
but to the honor of GOD,
so that through it the Son of GOD may be honored.”
11:5 Jesus was attached in solidarity with Martha and her sister and Lazarus.
11:6 When he now heard that he was sick,
he stayed where he was for two days.
11:7 Then, after this,³⁴² he said to the disciples,
“Let’s go to Judea again.”
11:8 The disciples said to him,
“Rabbi,
the Judeans just sought to stone you,
and you want to go there again?”
11:9 Jesus answered,
“Aren’t there twelve hours of the day?
If someone walks his way by day, he doesn’t stumble,³⁴³

340 LAZARUS: *Lazaros*. The Aramaic form is *Elʿazar*, from *eliʿezer*, “(my) God helps.”
CT: The LXX writes *Eleazar*, Numbers 20:28, etc., but also *Eleazaros*, 2 Maccabees 6:18, etc.

341 WHO ANOINTED . . . WITH HER HAIR: Probably a quotation from a song known to the community of John. For the first line see Amos 6:6.

342 *Epeita meta touto*, “then after”: an Aramaicism, *kol-qobel dena*, among others Daniel 3:8.

343 STUMBLE: *Proskoptein*, Hebrew *kashal*. In 6:61 John used the word *skandalizein* for *kashal*.

because he sees the light of this world.
 11:10 But if someone walks his way by night, he does stumble;
 because the light is not with him.”
 11:11 This he said, and afterward, he said to them,
 “Lazarus, our friend, has laid down;
 but I go there in order to tear him from sleep.”³⁴⁴
 11:12 The disciples said to him,
 “Lord, if he has laid down, he will be liberated.”³⁴⁵
 11:13 Now Jesus had spoken about his death,
 but they thought he had been talking about laying down to sleep.
 11:14 So then Jesus said to them openly,
 “Lazarus has died.
 11:15 And for your sakes, I am glad that I wasn’t there,
 so that you may trust.
 But let’s go to him.”
 11:16 Now Thomas—called Didymus, “twin”—said to his fellow disciples,
 “Let us go too, that we may die with him!”

Lazaros is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Eleazar (*Elʿazar*). The name means “God helps.”³⁴⁶ Eleazar occurs more than seventy times in the Scriptures. In almost 70 percent of the cases, Eleazar is the name of a priest, the oldest son and successor of Aaron, Numbers 20:25-28. After Aaron’s death, Moses and Eleazar led the people through the wilderness. Eleazar was a witness when Moses introduced Joshua to his office as his successor (Numbers 27:18-23). Joshua (*lēsous*) and Eleazar were the successors of Moses and Aaron.

The leading priests in Jerusalem were named after the descendant of Eleazar, Zadoq, *bene tzadoq*, “Sadducees.” According to 2 Samuel 8:17, Zadok was David’s state priest. John goes back behind this Zadok to his father Eleazar, from the state priesthood to the priestly people of the wandering in the wilderness. This is a procedure that we know well. In his announcement of the new monarchy, the prophet Isaiah goes back to David’s father Jesse, “Then a shoot goes up from the stump of Jesse,” Isaiah 11:1.

344 TEAR HIM FROM SLEEP: Why it is usually translated here as “to raise (from the dead)” is obscure; *exhypnizein* (“to tear from sleep,” *ex hypnou*) is a rare word. In the LXX it occurs only four times, in the evangelic and apostolic writings only here.

345 LIBERATED: *Sōthēsetai*. The disciples do not say *hygiathēsetai* or *hygiēs genesthai* (see 5:6), “he will be healed,” because they understand Jesus correctly. Lazarus/Israel is in a political condition, which is compared to sleep, from which it can be freed; of course, Jesus must make himself clear (*parrhēsia*): this condition is death, according to human judgment Israel cannot be liberated from the condition after the *Judean War*.

346 See the German name “Gotthelf.”

Lazarus from Bethany, from the *theological*, not the geographical place where John once immersed—this Lazarus embodies by its name the priesthood, the leading political class in Judea. In the current political constitution of Judea, the priesthood is the representation of the whole people. It is about the fatal illness of a human who, as we will hear, is the “exemplary concentration”³⁴⁷ of Israel. To Israel, it is a matter of life and death. “Someone was sick, Lazarus from Bethany.”

Lazarus was also the brother of Mariam and Martha. Mariam was very well known to the listeners of John, that Mariam whose name was remembered in all the Messianic congregations of the Syrian-Palestinian region, probably also in a song. The Hebrew-Aramaic verse rhythm is unmistakable,

who anointed the Lord with balm
and dried his feet with her hair.

Martha is the female form of the Aramaic word *mar*, “master.” So she was not a maid, but a *mistress*. The tradition behind Luke 10:38-42 may also have been known in the group around John. Mariam and Martha were well-known figures in the Messianic movement and Lazarus is *their* brother.³⁴⁸ John will have both women play a decisive role in his narrative.

Along with Simon Peter, Martha will pronounce the Messianic confession, when faced with the death of Lazarus/Israel, 11:27. It is she who will see the honor of God. Lazarus can only be understood from the perspective of the two women. Both women are concerned about Lazarus. They urge the Messiah to finally take care of the deadly ill Lazarus. The one “you are friends with” is sick. Because Lazarus is the friend of the Messiah.³⁴⁹ The fact that Lazarus was connected to Jesus like a friend is a key element in the interpretation. We come back to this in the discussion of 11:25-

347 I owe this expression to the Dutch professor of Old Testament Han Renckens. In his book “De godsdienst van Israel,” Roermond/Maaseik 1962, 62, he writes, “It is a genuinely biblical procedure to concentrate what has been a slow-growing, so to speak, in a certain person at a certain time. . . . Abraham is more than a historical figure, he is a biblical figure; that is: he is the exemplary figure of the people of God and the faithful man of all times. In short, he is the father of faith.” Similarly to Paul, the Qur’an also deals with Abraham as *chanif*, the “rightly guided,” paradigm of all Muslims.

348 In Luke 16:19-31 there is a completely different Lazarus. This one is a needy man (*ptōchos*); he is the Job of the Messianic scriptures. It is difficult to tell whether the Lukan Lazarus was the inspiration of the Johannine one or vice versa, or whether there were two independent traditions. For this reason, the tales of Luke 16 and John 11 must be interpreted independently of each other.

349 The thesis “Lazarus = beloved disciple” is already advocated by Johannes Kreyenbühl, *Das Evangelium der Wahrheit*, 1900/1905 (Rudolf Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (KEK), Göttingen 1941, 302). But Lazarus is no “disciple”; in the narrative, he only has the function of representing Israel. And the disciples are *friends* of the Messiah not until they say farewell, 15:15.

26. This special bond was no secret; the Judeans will mention it in this narrative, 11:36, “See how deeply he was friends with him (*pōs ephilei auton*).”

Lazarus is Israel, Israel in a state of death. The Messiah remains closely linked to Israel in life and death. In John, the Messiah is not a universal savior but remains the Messiah of Israel also for us, non-Jews. In the farewell speeches and the stories about the suffering, death, and resurrection of the Messiah, the disciple emerges *to whom the Messiah was related like a friend*. Thus the mystery surrounding this anonymous disciple is not solved, but both play the role of *exemplary concentration*, Lazarus as the exemplary concentration of the people of Isra’el in the state of death, that disciple as the exemplary concentration of the Messianic community.

The sisters let Jesus know that the one “you are *friends* with” has fallen ill; the narrator mentions the solidarity between Lazarus and Jesus. According to Bultmann, the verbs *philein* (“to be united in friendship”) and *agapan* (“to be in solidarity”) are used indiscriminately.³⁵⁰ Nevertheless, it should be noted that friendship (*philia*) includes solidarity (*agapē*), but not vice versa. One can and must be in solidarity with every person; therefore only *agapē* can be the epitome of the “new commandment” (13:34), not *philia*. One cannot and must not demand of anyone that he be a good friend to everyone, not to speak of “love” at all. Messianism is not philanthropy.

Lazarus, the friend of the Messiah, is chosen to demonstrate in his body—well, in his corpse—that his illness does not lead to death. He is chosen to the honor of God, “that the *bar enosh*, Human, may be honored.” The honor of God is the living Israel. For the Messiah, the friend is the suffering, terminally ill, even decaying Israel of his days. Solidarily united (*ēgapa*) was Jesus to Martha and her sister “and to Lazarus,” as the narrator adds. The solidarity with the two women has a different emphasis than that with Lazarus.

The Messiah is in no hurry, he stays two days. Two days also the disciples, also Maria from Magdala, will have to wait, two days after the death of the Messiah.

“Let us go to Judea again,” says Jesus, to the dismay of the disciples. Just to the very place where the Judeans are waiting for Jesus, with stones in their hands. In such a case, Jesus or John tend to go into the basics,

“Aren’t there twelve hours of the day?
If someone walks his way by day, he doesn’t stumble,
because he sees the light of this world.
But if someone walks his way by night, he stumbles,
because the light is not with him.”

This statement is introduced by a rhetorical question, “Aren’t there twelve hours a day?” Twelve hours to do the works of the One who sends the Messiah, it says at the beginning of the story of the man born blind. Now it is about *peripatein*, about

350 Rudolf Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (KEK), Göttingen 1941, 302.

the *halakha*, the walk. Only the light of this world makes it possible to walk the path of God under the conditions of the ruling world order. The night is the time without light. Then you stumble and fall into the trap that this world order—which is darkness—sets for humans.

The light, the listeners meanwhile know, is the Messiah, “I AM—the light of the world,” 8:12. It does not say, When it is night, there is no light. But, Because one does not go without this light (in the night), one must stumble and go into the trap of this world order. Without a Messianic perspective and the alternative it promises, the whole life becomes dark.

The conversation with the disciples goes on. In v.11 it says, “He said this, and afterward . . .” Thus John gives great emphasis to what has just been said. When this is clear, the story can go on.

“Lazarus, our friend, has laid down, but I’m going so I can tear him from sleep.” The misunderstanding is intentional. The disciples say that sleep is healthy, he will recover and “be liberated!” Scholars like Bultmann consider such a thing “clumsy.”³⁵¹ John considers the disciples worthy of criticism, but to him, they are not “clumsy.”

John wants to have the prevailing illusion clearly expressed, the condition of Israel is a temporary downturn, it will soon get better again, and Lazarus sleeps himself healthy. Nothing gets better, not to speak of liberation, neither in a Zealotic nor in a Rabbinical way. He relentlessly says, “Lazarus/Israel has died.” Here is indeed the night in which nobody can do anything anymore, see 9:4. Over and done with, *rien ne va plus*.

“I am glad for your sakes—so that you may trust—that I was not there.” A strange phrase that gets stuck in the air. John inserts the real goal of the story as a tiny interjection. The point is that the disciples are to trust that the death of a person, a people, is not the last word.

Now it is time for the first appearance of Thomas. He stands for the type of Messiah-ist, who is in solidarity with his comrades, but actually can no longer believe in the usefulness of the Messianic struggle. He is part of it, and he stays with it—let’s go down together!

Even after Lazarus is called out of the grave, Thomas will not know where the journey goes. 14:5, “Lord, we do not know where you are going.” On the first day of the week after the death of Jesus, Thomas is not convinced by the resurrection testimony of the other disciples, “We have seen the Lord.” Maybe you have, but not me! Among the Synoptics, Thomas is not known as Didymos, as a twin. The nickname is an invention of John. He is always two, the solidary and the skeptic.

So they are leaving.

351 Rudolf Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (KEK), Göttingen 1941, 304.

10.3.2. Martha, 11:17-27

11:17 On arrival, Jesus found that he had been in the tomb four days already.
 11:18 Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about fifteen stadia.
 11:19 And many of the Judeans had come to Martha and Mariam
 to give them comfort³⁵² for the sake of their brother.
 11:20 So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him;
 but Mariam continued sitting in the house.
 11:21 Now Martha said to Jesus,
 “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.
 11:22 But even now I know:
 Whatever you ask of GOD,
 GOD will give you.”
 11:23 Jesus says to her,
 “Your brother will rise again.”
 11:24 Marta says,
 “I know that he will rise
 with the resurrection on the Day of Decision.”
 11:25 Jesus said to her,
 “I AM—the resurrection and the life.
 Whoever trusts in me will live, even if he dies.
 11:26 And everyone living and trusting in me
 will not die until the age to come.
 Are you trusting in this?”
 11:27 She says to him,
 “Yes, Lord, I am trusting,
 I have trusted³⁵³
 that YOU ARE—the Messiah,
 the Son of GOD, coming into the world.”

352 GIVE THEM COMFORT: *Paramythesthai*, Hebrew *nicham*. The word is unusual, the LXX does not use it but has *parakalein*. The Greek version of Symmachus has *paramythesthai* for *nicham* in 2 Samuel 10:2, which refers to a condolence delegation from Jerusalem to Ammon, or Job 2:11, where Job’s friends had come to nod to him and give him comfort.

353 AM TRUSTING . . . HAVE TRUSTED: We follow here [Papyrus 66](#), which has *pisteuō*, *egō pepisteuka*, all other manuscripts have only *egō pepisteuka*. A Semitic perfect points to an action that was started and completed in the past, a Semitic imperfect points to an action that started in the past and was not completed, or to an action that is just beginning, that has an *open end*. This can be translated into Greek with the imperfect or present tense. Martha does not make a statement here, “I have trusted,” but rather makes a confession, “I am trusting,” or rather, “I want to trust.” The death of her brother (the downfall of Israel) has destroyed her, “I have trusted that you . . .” Her trust was settled (“completed,” therefore perfect) by the past of the war. Now she wants to trust once more. This is the interpretation of P⁶⁶, and this is what the Greek present says.

On his arrival, Jesus *finds* Lazarus in his grave, having been there for four days. All this “near Jerusalem.” What will happen here is in close proximity to what *has* happened. Jerusalem *has been* destroyed, the people *is* a victim of the genocide by the Romans, it *is* dead and more than dead. This is the state of affairs, a dark future for the characters of the story, a horrible present for the narrator.

Jesus had waited for two days. He comes on the fourth day. So the third day is left out. With good reason. What happens on the fourth day is made possible by what will happen on the *third* day. It will take Jesus three days to rebuild the torn-down sanctuary, speaking of his body (2:19, 21). This gap indicates that John 11 can only be understood from John 20; the tomb of the Messiah is the tomb of Israel. The resurrection of the Messiah will be the resurrection of Israel.

The Judeans offer comfort to the two sisters, for the sake of their brother. Judeans keep company with those who are friends with Jesus. Both are united in mourning for Israel, because Lazarus, as I said, is the exemplary concentration of an Israel, which does not see any future. “Jews” in John’s eyes are not the gray mass of a homogeneous hate object. In times of deepest national mourning and deepest humiliation by the enemies, they are all *Jews* here. An old communist of Jewish origin said, “I do not believe in God, I do not believe in Zionism, but as long as there is still one anti-Semite, I am a Jew.”

Martha walks toward Jesus, alone. In the form of an accusation, she will ask the question that all Messianists will ask after the destruction of Jerusalem, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” The question is no other than that of the 74th Psalm, 74:9-11,

We no longer see any sign for us,
not even a prophet,
none of us knows until when!
Until when, God, the strangler may mock,
the enemy despises your name forever?
Why do you draw back your hand, your right hand,
from the center of your chest, altogether?

How often did this people have to sing such songs? How often did it ask, “Where is God?” Martha is not the first, not the only one to say, “If God had been there, we would still be alive!” This Messiah cannot prevent anything, even if Martha thinks she knows that God will give the Messiah what the Messiah asks for. In the so-called farewell speeches, this subject is treated (14:13; 15:7; 16:23). But there, the farewell of the Messiah is already anticipated.

Jesus’ answer is the classical teaching of Rabbinical Judaism and the Messianists: the dead will rise. “Judgment shall be established, books shall be opened” (Daniel 7:10), everything that was in disorder shall be put in order, and the dead shall live. Jesus, “Your brother will rise.” That he will rise on the “Day of Decision” does not comfort her. The “Day of Decision” (*eschatē hēmera*) is beyond the reach of human life.

Now resounds, “I AM—the resurrection and the life,” words that have been said countless times at the graves of Christians, sometimes giving comfort, very often not. We are like Martha.

Jesus added, “He who trusts in me will live even if he dies, and he who lives and trusts me will not die for the age to come.” What does this mean? John knows that people will die. But they die knowing that the Day of Decision has come and that things will be made right! Inside? Spiritually? In the hereafter? This is not about *life after death*. It is about *life despite death*, the omnipresent death, despite the omnipotence of the death power of Rome.

If anywhere, the Gospel of John has had a resounding effect here. These sentences of 11,25-26 are generally understood as a confirmation of the continued life of the individual person after death. But Lazarus is not only an individual personality. A revival from individual death does not help him, he would have to die again. There is no statement, no narrated deed of Lazarus. He has no personality in the narrative—on purpose. This is not due to a lack of narrative talent. The woman from Sychar, the man born blind, also Nicodemus, also Thomas Didymos: they all have personality. Lazarus’ personality is completely absorbed in the function it has in the narrative: to represent the deadly condition of Israel. Whoever trusts the Messiah—as a child of the people—will die just as little as the people. If Israel remains, the name of each child of Israel remains.

What happens to me as an individual when I die? To this question, John does not answer at least here. If you had been there, Lazarus would not have died: This is not a question, but an accusation. Jesus replies, I AM, I WILL BE THERE (*egō eimi*), Lazarus is alive, even if his body is decaying.

Does Martha trust this word, this *fact (davar)*? “I have trusted, *pepisteuka*,” she says. The perfect is almost unanimously documented—almost. But the oldest almost complete text, Papyrus 66, writes a present tense, “I am trusting, *pisteuō*.” The present tense could read, “I want to trust that YOU ARE (*sy ei*), the Messiah, coming *like God* into the world order.” Does this trust remove death from the world, the death of the world order of death?

The sentence is the confession of the Messianic community. Such confessions of faith are not seldom spoken well-behaved. The decency out of Martha’s mouth can hardly conceal her skepticism, as we will hear at her brother’s open grave. Ecclesiastically, the perfect is identical with the Christian creed, the confessional state is the achieved state of the church. P⁶⁶ distrusts the ecclesiastical credo. Given the state of affairs, an empire under the administration of the first soldier emperors, and the increasingly severe persecutions of the Messianic communities, trust is always standing on the edge of the abyss. This was the situation of the one who prepared the manuscript P⁶⁶ around the year 200. We consider the present tense to be appropriate.³⁵⁴

354 [In his later translation (see the previous note), TV acknowledged that P⁶⁶ has both verb

10.3.3. Mariam and the Judeans, 10:28-37

- 11:28 And having said this, she went away,
she called Mariam, her sister, and said secretly,
“The Teacher has arrived³⁵⁵ and is calling you.”
- 11:29 When that one heard this, she got up quickly and went to him.
- 11:30 Jesus had not yet come into the village
but was still in the place where Martha had met him.
- 11:31 The Judeans now, who had been with her in the house giving her comfort,
saw Mariam get up quickly and go out.
They followed her,
thinking she was going to the tomb to weep there.
- 11:32 Now when Mariam came to where Jesus was,
she saw him, fell at his feet, and said to him,
“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”
- 11:33 When now Jesus saw her weeping,
and also the Judeans who came with her weeping,
he snorted with rage, very much, he was utterly shaken.³⁵⁶
- 11:34 He said,
“Where have you put him?”
They said to him,
“Lord, come and see.”
- 11:35 Jesus shed tears.

forms, present *and* perfect.]

355 ARRIVED: *Parestin* invokes *parousia*, the final coming of the Messiah.

356 SNORTED WITH RAGE: *Enebrimēsato tō pneumatī*. The verb is rare. In the LXX it occurs only in Daniel 11:30, the only place in the LXX, where also the word *Rōmaioi*, “Romans,” is written. In the Synoptic Gospels, the verb occurs several times. The Hebrew verb here is *za’am*, it has shades of meaning from “to insult” to “to imprecate solemnly, to curse.” In other Greek versions, the word is used to reproduce *za’am*, in Ezekiel 21:36 *za’ami be-’esh ’evrathi*, “I snorted with the fire of my anger,” and Lamentations 2:6 *be-za’am apo*, “the snorting of his wrath.” Outside the Scriptures, it means “snorting (of a horse).” In Mark 1:43, Jesus threatens the leper healed by him; in Mark 14:5, the disciples reviled the woman who had anointed Jesus’ feet. [A translation like the one of the CJB—“he was deeply moved and also troubled”—is too weak.] Jesus curses this death and is appalled at the condition Lazarus/Israel is in: decaying, more than dead. The addition *tō pneumatī* means “completely” (see Matthew 5:3; Isaiah 57:15 etc.).

CT: *En tō pneumatī* does not mean “in the spirit,” i.e. inwardly, but it is reinforcement. *Shefal-ruach*, Isaiah 57:15, does not mean “humbled in spirit” but “completely humbled” or “humbled in a way that there is no longer any spirit of life in him.” The LXX translates *shefal-ruach* as *oligopsychois*, “little of soul.” The *ptōchoi en pneumatī* of Matthew 5:3 are not “poor in spirit,” but “wholly poor,” they suffer poverty that touches their spirit of life. UTTERLY SHAKEN: *Etaraxen heauton*, see 13:21.

11:36 So the Judeans said,
 “See how deeply he was friends with him!”
 11:37 But some of them said,
 “He opened the blind man’s eyes.
 Couldn’t he have kept this one from dying?”

Martha calls Mariam, but her call was not meant for the public (*lathra*). Even among the Synoptics, *lathra* aims at an action beyond the public sphere (Matthew 1:19). Martha’s call is not meant to become a public matter here. This can hardly mean anything other than the lived, non-public, even subversive way of existence of the Messianic community for which Martha stands. This subversive strategy, however, is followed by the further course of the narrative.

One cannot shake off the Judean public in this way, and since John here tells the story the way he tells it, he doesn’t want to either. The existence of the Messianic community is the existence in the face of Israel. John does not want a Jewish secret sect. That he of all people ends up in a closed room—“the doors locked for fear of the Judeans” (20:19, 26)—is the tragedy of this text, which the appendix —John 21— tries to escape.

What connects the Judeans and Mariam is the mourning for Lazarus. The mourning of a dead person is a public affair, everyone participates in the mourning and shows it. Martha and Mariam are two faces in the Messianic community, one in the “room with the locked doors,” and the other in the confrontation with the Judeans.³⁵⁷ The first face—Martha—is the face of the “confessing church,” the second—Mariam—is the face of the communities mourning for Israel with the Judeans. The Messianic community will never be without the Jews. This does not spare both sides the fundamental debate about the walk—*halakha*—in and against the world order.

Jesus has not left his place, and the words that Mariam addresses to him are the same as the words of Martha. The scene is very different from that with Martha. Martha begins to speak immediately, Mariam “fell at his feet.” No conversation takes place. Jesus saw the grief of Mariam and the grief of the Judeans. In the face of this grief, the Messiah was beside himself and was seized by a quite furious shock (*enebrimēsato, etaraxen*).

Some commentators see this shock as the wrath of Jesus directed against the disbelief of Jews and Mariam.³⁵⁸ Others see here a protest of Jesus against the omnipo-

357 In an earlier attempt, I overstretched the representational function of the characters in the narrative. It is not about the different types of Messianic congregations, it is about the identity and difference of the one Messianic community in Israel (Ton Veerkamp, *Auf Leben und Tod. Eine Auslegung von Joh 10:40-11:54*, in *Texte & Kontexte* 49 (1991), 14-36, here 16 ff.).

358 Charles K. Barrett (*Das Evangelium nach Johannes* [KEK], Göttingen 1990, 396; Rudolf Bult-

tence of death. They are thus concerned with death in general.³⁵⁹ The endemic anti-Judaism of Christian exegetes proliferates in them like a cancer of the mind. The Jew John is mourning with his fellow Jews; but to these professors, John is not a Jew but a Christian, so the mourning of the Jews must be a false, “unbelieving” mourning. If some enlightened readers of this interpretation think that this anti-Judaism has been overcome, they are greatly mistaken. The ever more widespread Christian fundamentalism is vehemently anti-Jewish. Let us return to the text.

Lazarus’ death is concrete, the death of Israel. He asks, “Where have you put him?” The answer—“come and see”—we know from the reaction of Philipp, when Nathanael doubted that something good could come out of Galilee, 1:46. Here, of course, not the good is to be seen, but the opposite. Jesus shed tears. To this day, weeping (*klaiein*) and shedding tears (*dakryein*) in the Orient is the public mourning of a dead person, which is associated with violent emotional outbursts.

The Judeans note the deep friendship between Jesus and Lazarus. In other words, they see how the Messiah or the Messianic community is concerned about the fate of Lazarus/Israel. All the more justified is the question: Why did the Messiah not prevent this, given that he had made blind people see? What good is a Messiah if something may happen that must not happen, the downfall of Jerusalem, the death of Lazarus? If such a question is suppressed, every Messianism becomes not only silly but dangerous.

10.3.4 “Untie him and let him go,” 11:38-45

11:38 Jesus, again snorting with rage to himself,³⁶⁰ came to the tomb.
It was a cave, and a stone was lying in front of it.
11:39 Jesus says,
“Lift the stone away.”
The sister of the accomplished one,³⁶¹ Martha, says to him,

mann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (KEK), Göttingen 1941, 310.

359 Ulrich Wilckens, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (NTD Band 4), Göttingen 2000, 179. The widespread poisonous anti-Judaism of the commentaries on John in the 19th century is found in Bernhard Weiß (“Oberconsistorialrath and ord. Prof. at the University of Berlin”), *Das Johannesevangelium* (KEK) ⁸1893, 412f., “What he was angry about, the context reveals through *hōs eiden—klaiousantas*, which is explicitly contrasted with the weeping of the deeply feeling Mary (*klaiousan*) and is thus recognized by him as an empty condolence ceremony, so that he becomes angry in deep moral indignation at this hypocritical *klaiein* of the Jews, which is coupled with the bitterest enmity against the beloved friend of the mourner.”

360 JESUS . . . TO HIMSELF: It does not say *en pneumatī* here, but *en heautō*. Hence “to himself.”

CT: He does not direct his anger against others but against himself.

361 [All common English translations have “of the dead (man)” here, although John doesn’t use the word *tethnēkōs*, “dead”, as in John 11:44. By using the German word “der Vollendete,”

11:40 “Lord, he is already stinking, it is the fourth day!”
 Jesus says to her,
 “Didn’t I say to you,
 If you trust, you will see the honor of GOD?”
 11:41 So they lifted the stone away.
 Jesus lifted up his eyes and said,
 “FATHER, I thank you that you have heard me.
 11:42 I myself had known that you always hear me,
 but I said this because of the crowd standing around,
 so that they may trust that you have sent me.”
 11:43 Having said this, he cried out with a great voice,
 “Lazarus, come out!”
 11:44 The deceased came out, his feet and hands wrapped,
 and his face wrapped around with a sweat cloth.
 Jesus said to them,
 “Untie him, and let him go away.”
 11:45 At this, many of the Judeans who had come to Mariam
 and had viewed what Jesus did,
 began trusting in him.

Jesus snorted in anger again (*embrimōmenos*). He stands at the grave cave, a stone has been rolled to the front. We know the stone very well, Mark 15:46 ff. In Mark the stone was rolled away as if by ghostly hands, Mark 16:4. Here people are asked to roll away the stone.

Now Martha speaks, “the sister of the accomplished one (*teteleutēkotos*).” Jesus will name his own “end” differently; he uses a slightly different verb (*telein*, “to achieve his goal,” *telos*, instead of *teleutan*, “to reach the end, to accomplish”). We will have to take this difference into account in the discussion of 19:28, 30.

“Lord,” she says, “he is already stinking, it’s the fourth day.” That is, “He is dead and more than dead. He is not accomplished, but perished!” The stench of decay is more than one reason for her skepticism. One can take leave of the living, of the dead perhaps, but not of those who are stinking and are more than dead. One buries them and leaves them to the tranquility of decay. If Lazarus is Israel, and everything suggests it is, Martha says, “Everything is over and more than over.” For some, and

which I try to render into the English language with “the accomplished one,” TV tries to make clear that John deliberately wanted to imply a secondary meaning of “over and done with.” After all, Martha speaks of Lazarus already stinking because he lies in the grave for four days. In 19:28, 30, John—instead of the word *teleutaō* used here—will take two other words—*teleō* and *teleioō*—derived from the same root *tel-* to express that Jesus *accomplished his purpose* in his death and that he thus *fulfills* the Scriptures.]

even more so for the Messianists, the destruction of the sanctuary and city was the end of Israel, especially as it dates back a generation if we assume a common dating of the Gospel of John around 100 CE. If this is so, the Grand Narrative of Israel will no longer help. Skepticism and confession, 11:39 and 11:27, are not mutually exclusive. “He who trusts will see the honor of God.” But how? But when? But where? Despair was nothing new in the history of this people. At a similar moment, a prophet had said the following shocking words, Isaiah 26:18-19,

Pregnant we were, writhing,
and when we gave birth, it was wind.
No liberation was done to the land,
By no means the inhabitants of the world did fall.
May my dead live,
may my corpses rise,
may they awake, rejoice, those who dwell in the dust.
That dew of the lights dew you,
the land of the ghostly falls apart.

Some in Israel never wanted to admit that it was all over. One of them was the prophet Isaiah, and one of them was Jesus. He lifts up his eyes—as in 17:1. It is the attitude of the praying and hoping of Israel, “To YOU I lift up my soul” (Psalm 25:1), “To the mountains I lift up my eyes” (Psalm 121:1), etc. He gives thanks, as he thanked when he fed Israel, 6:11. In John, the word is not a technical term of the church communion but precedes the decisive signs for the erection of Israel. He says, “I thank you that you listen to me. But I know that you always listen to me.” In the psalms, Israel calls again and again, “God, listen to my voice,” Psalm 130:2 and the like. The Messiah of Israel is the praying Israel, and the praying Israel is heard:

And Elijah the prophet approached, he said,
“YOU, God of Abraham, Isaac, Israel,
today may be recognized,
that you are God in Israel, and I am your servant,
and that I do all these words according to your word.
Answer me, *Adonai*, answer me,
that they, this people, may recognize,
that you are the God,
that you changed their heart back.”

This prayer of Elijah in 1 Kings 18:36-37 is related to the prayer of Jesus. In both cases, the situation was hopeless, 1 Kings 19:10,

“I have been zealous, zealous for YOU, God of hosts,
those of Israel have left the covenant,
they have ravaged your slaughter-site and killed your prophets with the sword.

I alone am left,
they seek to take away my soul."

The "retransformation of the heart of Israel" is the revival of the dead Lazarus. In the case of Elijah, the people is "to recognize," here it is "to trust." The people shall *recognize* through the life-giving rain after three years of famine, and the people shall *trust* in a new life after years of devastation. Therefore, Jesus says what is necessary: that there is a God and his fidelity (*alētheia*) in Israel. Therefore Lazarus must live. From the Tanakh, this passage shows that there is no hocus-pocus of an incantation of the dead, but that death in Israel must not be the last word, Ezekiel 37:1 ff.,

The Hand of the NAME happened above me.
He led me, inspired by the NAME,
he set me down in the middle of a plain, full of bones.
He drove me around and around them,
there, many, very many were on the plain,
there, withered they were, very.
He spoke to me,
"Human child, shall these bones live again?"
I said, "My Lord, YOU, you know it."

We can only understand the narrative of the revival of Lazarus if we read it from these texts. Jesus cries it out with a "great voice," *phōnē megalē, qol gadol*. In the Synoptics, Jesus cries with this "great voice" at the moment before his death. Here his "great voice" resounds at the grave of Israel. He screams, he roars. This is not a sign of calm assurance in God, it is an angry command.

The deceased came out, but as a wrapped corpse, hands and feet bandaged, the face covered. This may no longer be a dead man, but it is far from being a living one. Hence the order, "Untie him (*lysate*) and let him go." Not until this order is carried out, the dead will become living. We also hear the verb *lyein*, "to untie, to loosen, to make free," in the psalm of a humiliated, despondent man who pours out his lamentation to the NAME. We hear (Psalm 102:19-23),

It is written for a later generation:
that a people to be created may praise the NAME,
that he looks down from the height, the NAME,
looks down from his heaven to the earth,
to hear the groaning of the bound,
to set free (*lysai*) the sons of death,
that they tell HIS name in Zion,
his praise in Jerusalem,
that the nations may gather together,
the kingdoms serve the NAME.

If you listen to the last passage of the story of Lazarus' revival together with this psalm, you know what this is all about. Rome is the entirety of the peoples who went out united to destroy Jerusalem (Gog of Magog, Ezekiel 38-39). This is their present situation. The revival of Lazarus is exactly the opposite. It is the hope of John and with him of Israel. The mission of the Messianic community is to "untie" the no longer dead and not yet living Israel, to *release* it from the bond of death. The Messianic community is pointed out to humankind (Matthew 28:19) to do to it what it should do to the no longer dead and not yet living Lazarus, "to loosen" it.

10.4. Dying for the Nation, 11:46-54

- 11:46 But some of them went off to the Perushim,
they said to them what Jesus had done.
- 11:47 The leading priests and the Perushim gathered together in the Sanhedrin,³⁶²
they said,
"What are we going to do?
This human is doing many signs.
- 11:48 If we let him do so,
everyone will trust in him,
then the Romans will come
and bring ruin to both our place and nation."³⁶³
- 11:49 But one of them, a certain Caiaphas, the high priest of that year,
said to them,
"You don't know anything!"³⁶⁴

362 SANHEDRIN: *Synhedrion*, "court of law." The Mishna treatise *Sanhedrin* describes the competence of the individual courts. A court of three judges can decide property crimes; capital crimes are decided by courts of 23 judges, Mishna Sanhedrin 1:5. This is the "Great Sanhedrin." This court is what John means; so it is about a political capital crime.

363 BRING RUIN TO: *Arousin hēmōn ton topon kai to ethnos*, "devastate our place [the holy place, that is, the sanctuary] and abolish the status of self-government." *Airein* usually means "to take up, to lift, to abolish" (Hebrew *nasa'*), but in Isaiah 51:13 it stands for *shicheth*, "to destroy, to ruin." *Ethnos*, in Hebrew *goy*, means people as a political entity, so we translate it with "nation."

364 HIGH PRIEST: *Archiereus*, in Hebrew *kohen gadol*. The text suggests that the office changed annually. In itself, a successor was always to be appointed only upon the death of the office-holder, but the Romans dismissed high priests and appointed them as they pleased. Caiaphas, of all people, a very skillful politician, held office from 18-36 CE. The exaggerated reference to "the high priest of that year" is intended to emphasize that the high priests are basically functionaries by the grace of Rome. The high priest was the highest functionary in the Torah Republic since the Persian period and then again after the abolition of the monarchy by the Romans in the year 5 CE. He represented the interests of the nation and the people (*laos*, see note to 11:50). One of the most important tasks was to negotiate the amount of the tribute, i.e. the tribute of Judea to the Romans. This is about big politics, and

11:50 You don't consider³⁶⁵ that it is in your interest
if one human dies on behalf of the people,³⁶⁶
so that the whole nation won't be destroyed."
11:51 He did not say this of himself,
rather as high priest of that year he prophesied
that Jesus was about to die on behalf of the nation,
11:52 and not for the nation alone,
but for gathering the scattered GOD-borns into one.³⁶⁷
11:53 So from that day on they were determined to put him to death.
11:54 Therefore, Jesus no longer was walking his way openly among the Judeans
but went away from there into the region near the wilderness,
to a town called Ephraim.
There he stayed with his disciples.

John proceeds structurally like his great predecessor Ezekiel. Between the great vision of the Book of Ezekiel about the revival of the more than dead Israel and the unification of the two houses of Israel and Judah (Ezekiel 37) on the one hand and about the reconstruction of the sanctuary or the new community (Ezekiel 40-48) on the other hand, the ghostly chapters about "Gog of the land of Magog" are inserted. The united destructive power of the peoples returns once more to destroy the land. So here in John as well. After the vision of the revival of Israel/Lazarus, the sober evaluation of the political situation is following.

Jesus was an element of big politics here.

365 CONSIDER: *Logizesthai*, Hebrew *chashav*, "to consider, plan, calculate, assign, estimate." Caiphas reproaches them that the death of a human "to the benefit of the nation" was not an element in their political planning games. The death of a human "to the benefit of the nation" is to be subordinated to the preservation of the internal political status quo. This was then also decided.

366 OF THE PEOPLE: *Laos*, Hebrew *ʿam*, "people, national community." *ʿAm* has the same root as *ʿim*, "with" (*ʿim-anu-ʾel*, "with us is God"). "To die for or on behalf of the people" (*hyper*, Hebrew *ʿal*) means "to take upon oneself the death fate of the people." Jesus will, therefore, "die for the people," not for the nation. For the real existing nation of the priestly henchmen of Rome, Jesus will indeed not die, but for a completely different nation, for a nation of all those God-borns who have been scattered (*tekna tou theou dieskopismena*, see note to 1:12), that is, of all the children of Israel worldwide; a nation, of course, which is open to all who, according to 1:12, trust Jesus as the Messiah of Israel.

367 GATHERING . . . INTO ONE: The verbal form *synagagē* clearly suggests the counter model against the *synēgagon* of 11:47 but also against the synagogue of the emerging Rabbinical Judaism. "Gather into one": Here the vision of Isaiah 66:20-24 is in the background. Against the big politics of the leading priests and the Perushim (the appeasement of the Romans, the compromise with Rome) John sets the uncompromising anti-Roman political program of his Jesus. Here we can find the actual impulse of the whole text.

Some of the Judeans went to the Perushim. For the fourth time in John's Gospel, a schism occurs among them [see 7:43; 9:16; 10,19], and for the second time (see 7:44 ff.) the schism is followed by a consultation at the highest level.

The situation is precarious. The problem is Jesus or rather the many signs he does. "If we allow him to do so," they say, ". . . then the Romans will come." It is the only time that the word "Romans" appears in the Gospels. The Sanhedrin fears that the appearance of Jesus might bring the end of the place and the nation.

The political leadership and the Perushim as the official opposition do not want any changes to the status quo. They do not see that society has already fallen apart. The sign of the unstoppable disintegration of society is the death of Lazarus. There is no example in history that any political leadership can decide of its own accord that its system is finished and that something radically new must begin. The new would mean the end of the system.

However, they do not see the global system, the *kosmos*, but only their own local system, which functions within the global system. Their problem is the *abolition* of their system, Rome is not the problem for them. *Arousin*, "they take away, abolish," is the word.³⁶⁸ "To abolish the place" can mean to take the place away from the hands of the population and their leadership. This is consistent with "abolish the nation." "The place (*ha-maqom*)" is not only the city but the sanctuary as its political heart.

Now we must draw attention to the difference between "nation," *ethnos*, and "people," *laos*. *Ethnos* is *goy* in Hebrew, and *laos* is *ʿam*. Deuteronomy 4:6 both words meet in one sentence, "What a wise and reasonable people (*ʿam-chakham we-na-von*), this great nation (*ha-goy ha-gadol ha-ze*)." An *ethnos/goy* is a people as it acts outward, to the outside world. A *laos/ʿam* is a people as it is held together inwardly. The Romans are dealing with an *ethnos/goy*; if they recognize the people as *ethnos/goy*, they grant them a certain degree of self-government. To "abolish the nation" is to deprive a people of the right of self-government. This is precisely what the political leadership fears.

Consequently, the *kohen gadol* (*archiereus*), the high priest, is in demand. He acts as the predominant chairman of the board of directors, who must put the helpless management ("You know nothing") back on track. He does not appeal to morals, but to interests, "You do not consider that it is in your interest (*sympherei hymin*). To save the sanctuary and thus the people as *laos/ʿam*—and that means, in the eyes of the leadership, preventing the downfall of *ethnos/goy*—a human must die. Political interest ranks before morality; Caiaphas says, as Brecht later said, "First foods, then

368 Only once the Greek translators choose *airein* for the Hebrew word *shicheth*, "to perish, destroy," in Isaiah 51:13, "You were constantly horrified by the burning fury of the oppressor to destroy you (*arai se*)."

morals.” They are not interested in the people, but in their model of self-government, in the status of the *ethnos loudaiōn*. Their political interest is the maintenance of *local self-government*. For it is on this that their idea of the “place,” *maqom*, is reduced. They are not concerned with “the place (*ha-maqom*) that the Eternal One chooses to make his Name live there (Deuteronomy 16:2, etc.).

This cunning confusion of terms, this contamination of *laos* with *ethnos*, is part of the constant repertoire of all politics. *Hyper tou laou*, “for the sake of the people,” is the propagandistic element here. The hesitant leadership collective has to understand that Jesus must be killed both *in their interest* (the real reason) and *for the sake of the people* (propaganda).

Here the political writer John intervenes. Caiaphas does not say all this out of himself, out of jest and whim, writes John, but as the great priest of the year he must act as a prophet, that is, he must point to what is politically mandatory. Within the Sanhedrin, he gives a governmental declaration (which here means *prophēteuein*) that Jesus should die for the sake of the nation, and so for the sake of the people. But, says John, here, in the Sanhedrin, it is not about the people (*laos*), but about self-government (*ethnos*). Jesus will die, not only for the sake of self-government (*ethnos*), as Caiaphas said, but “also to bring together into one all the children of God who have been scattered.”

To bring together all Israel, all the children of God, wherever they live under the ruling world order, in one synagogue (*synagagein*): this is the goal of Johannine politics. When all the *God-born* have been brought together, then there will be the place where the God of Israel will allow his name to live. For the *God-born* are not the children of Adam, or even the children of God—humans in general—but rather certain humans, the children of Israel. And a child of Israel is the human who accepts “the light,” “who is not begotten of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man (Abraham), but divinely,” 1:13.

Diaskorpizein, “to scatter,” always refers to the fate of Israel after the destruction of the first sanctuary. This centrifugal movement, which determined the life of Israel in the Diaspora since the first destruction of the place, is reversed into a centripetal movement, toward the one place. This is not an invention of John, but a good prophetic tradition.

The message in John is not that “Jesus died for all humans” and that Israel according to the flesh has had its day, but that the humans, as far as they “accept the light,” find their destiny in the newly created people (*‘am nivra’*) of Psalm 102:19. In John, this is something else than the heathen mission and the Christian church.

To the leadership, the whole story has only the consequence of planning the elimination of the Messiah; the decision is hereby taken. Like a good CEO, Caiaphas has asserted himself in management. The consequence for Jesus is that he no longer wants to appear publicly (*parrhesia*) among the Judeans (*peripatein*, “to walk his

way"). In this part about the hidden Messiah (John 7:11-11:54), there is always the contrast between "publicly" and "in secret," 7:1 ff. The constant attempts to arrest him or stone him (7:30, 44; 8:59; 10:31, 39) make his public, Messianic walk among the Judeans impossible. Exactly where he must be the Messiah, he cannot be the Messiah. This will become clearer to us in the discussion of the King's entry, 12:12-19.

Jesus goes to a city near the wilderness called Ephraim. It is the biblical *‘Ophrah*, the commentators say. But the place is written very differently in the Greek scriptures, *Aphairenem*, *Phophera*, *Phara*, *Aphar*. There is a city of Ephraim in the war report of Josephus.³⁶⁹ Barrett writes, "The name Ephraim has no allegorical or other special meaning, it is probably traditional."³⁷⁰ Which tradition? Barrett remains silent.

Ephraim, like Bethany, is a theological place, not a geographical one. In fact, the name is traditional, only different from what Barrett thinks. Jesus resumes his mission of bringing Israel together, for Ephraim is an allusion to Israel of the ten tribes of the North. To make the reunion of all the children of Israel possible, Jesus moves to the vicinity of the wilderness, the place where once Israel was united as one people through the discipline of freedom. He acts in fulfillment of the vision of the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, who speak of "the house of Judah and the house of Israel." In a text of the Scriptures, the word "wilderness" (*‘eremos*, *midbar*) always has this meaning: the place of renewal, *Hanukkah*. It is not only the renewal of the *ethnos* Judah, the political community of the two tribes Judah and Levi, it is also the renewal of *Ephraim*, the scattered ten tribes of the whole of Israel.

This is a meaningful conclusion to the passage about the festival *Hanukkah*. From now on there will be only Passover with John.³⁷¹

11. The Nearness of the Passover, 11:55-12:50

11.1. A Funeral Meal, 11:55-12:11

11:55 Near was the *Pascha* of the Judeans.
Many from the country went up to Jerusalem
to sanctify themselves for *Pascha*.³⁷²

369 Flavius Josephus, [Bell. 4, 9](#). P⁶⁶ does not mention the place at all, manuscript D writes *Samphourin*. Some people were at loose ends with *Ephraim*.

370 Charles K. Barrett (Das Evangelium nach Johannes (KEK), Göttingen 1990, 404.

371 [Originally, TV had placed the now following section 11 of his interpretation in his major part III, since everything from John 11:55 onward happens "near Passover." But later on, he regards the summary of Jesus' teaching (12:44-50) and the negative reaction of the Judeans (12:37-43), which led to the final retreat of the Messiah into hiddenness (12:36), as the actual end of part II about the hidden Messiah. Therefore I let part III begin not until John 13:1—"Before Passover"—as TV also does in his 2015 translation.]

372 SANCTIFY: *Hagnizein*, Hebrew *hithqadesh*, "to sanctify oneself." The word aims at those ac-

- 11:56 They were seeking Jesus,
and as they stood in the sanctuary they said to each other,
“What do you think?
He won’t come to the festival, will he?”
- 11:57 The leading priests and the Perushim had given orders
that anyone knowing where he is should denounce him,³⁷³
so they could seize him.
- 12:1 Jesus however came to Bethany six days before *Pascha*.
There was also Lazarus whom Jesus had raised from the dead.
- 12:2 They made a meal for him there, and Martha was hosting.³⁷⁴
Lazarus was one of those reclining with him [at the table].
- 12:3 Mariam then took a pound of nard balm, *pistikos*,³⁷⁵ very precious,
anointed the feet of Jesus and dried his feet with her hair.
The house was filled with the fragrance of the balm.
- 12:4 But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples,
who was about to hand him over, said,

tions that remove obstacles to participation in the festival. In Numbers 11:18; Joshua 3:5, etc., the people are asked to sanctify themselves. Here they go to the city to celebrate the festival, and for this purpose the people from the country, probably because they have not always been able to keep themselves cultically pure, must sanctify themselves. Therefore also *hittaher*, “to purify oneself,” may be meant, or *hithchate*?, “to free oneself from aberration.” All three translations are possible, but “to sanctify oneself” is a comprehensive concept.

373 DENOUNCE: *Mēnyein*. The word in the Messianic and apostolic writings—except Luke 20:37—has negative connotations, “to inform to denigrate someone,” Acts 23:30; 1 Corinthians 10:28; but especially 2 Maccabees 6:11 and 14:37, “to denounce.” The mere “to inform” is too weak.

374 WAS HOSTING: *Diēkonei*. The words *diakonein*, *diakonos*, *diakonia* are almost completely missing in LXX; only in the Book of Esther [1:10; 2:2; 6:3, 5], do we hear the words *diakonos* and *diakonia*. Here it is about high-ranking and respected officials (Hebrew *mesharthim*) of the Great King Ahasuerus. The background is the root *sharath*; Joshua in Exodus 24:13 is the *meshareth* of Moses, the first minister (bailiff) and later successor. For ‘avad, ‘eved, ‘avoda the LXX has *douleuein*, *doulos* (*pais*), *douleia*. The apostolic writings and the Gospels very often have *doulos* for the service of God or the Messiah. The “normal service” is that which Jesus demonstrated, “the servant (*doulos*) be no more than his Lord,” John 13:16. *Diakonia* is a service that goes beyond the ordinary one (see Acts 1:17, etc.). Martha had a service of honor, like those *diakonoī* at the wedding festival of Cana, 2:5, 9, people who did the honorary service at the table of the Messianic king. Neither here nor in Luke 10:40 is Martha a maid, but the “mistress of the house,” who had to take care of everything that a banquet required.

375 PISTIKOS: *Pistikos*. Whether this word has anything to do with *pistis*, “faithful,” is uncertain, so the translation “genuine, unadulterated” seems doubtful. Some suspect the Aramaic *pis-taqa*, “pistachio.” One ingredient of this balm would then be pistachio oil. We leave the word as it is. See note to 11:2.

- 12:5 “Why this balm was not sold for three hundred *denarii* and given to the needy?”
- 12:6 He did not say this because he cared about the needy, but because he was a thief and having the money-bag took away what was put therein.
- 12:7 Now Jesus said,
“Leave her alone!
She kept this for the day of my burial.
- 12:8 The needy you keep with yourselves all the time, but you do not have me all the time.”³⁷⁶
- 12:9 A large crowd of Judeans recognized that he was there and they came not only because of Jesus, but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.
- 12:10 The leading priests however deliberated to put Lazarus to death too.
- 12:11 For because of him many Judeans were coming and trusting in Jesus.

The people move to Jerusalem, the designated place for the celebration of the Festival of Liberation. All must “sanctify” themselves, everything that hinders them from taking part in the festival must be cleansed. Certain rites are provided for this. The exhortation: “Sanctify yourselves (*hagnisasthe*)” serves as preparation for decisive events, such as the first crossing of the Jordan, Joshua 3:5, or the renewal of the covenant under King Josiah, 2 Chronicles 29:5.

Most people, neither the mass of the pilgrims nor the disciples of Jesus, do not guess what a decisive day lies ahead of them. There is one who does, Mariam, the sister of Lazarus.

Again, people seek Jesus, but the search is done under dire circumstances. The members of the Sanhedrin issued a decree calling on all to denounce.

Jesus belongs to the pilgrims, and his way is via Bethany. To John, the way of the Messiah is always via Bethany. There the way began, there he enlivened Lazarus, the representative of Israel. There a meal takes place.

This meal is embedded within two notes on the Judeans’ search for Jesus Messiah, 11:55-57 and 12:9-11. Jesus only twice has meals in John’s Gospel. The first meal is a

376 THE NEEDY YOU KEEP WITH YOURSELVES: See Deuteronomy 15:1 ff.

CT: It is striking that the *ptōchoi*, the needy, occur only in this passage in John, in marked contrast to the Synoptics. To John, the political dimension (*autonomy*) is so dominant that the social dimension (*egalitarianism*) all but disappears. No social ethics can be made with this Gospel, and the *agapē*, “solidarity,” refers only to the members of John’s group, at most to the members of other Messianic groups.

public affair, “Many people of the Judeans recognized that he was there,” 12:9. Only after Jesus’ failure in the Judean public is ascertained, 12:37-50, the second meal takes place in a closed circle, 13:1 ff. At the meal at Bethany, the female disciples play the leading role, at the meal before Passover, the Twelve.

“Martha was hosting,” we translate. The deaconess is not a maid but belongs to the king’s court. The verb itself, *diakonein*, “to serve,” does not appear once in the Greek Scripture. We find the nouns *diakonia*, “hospitality, catering,” and *diakonos*, “privileged servant,” in the Role of Esther. There are seven *sserissim* who “served in the presence of King Ahasuerus,” Esther 1:10.³⁷⁷ They probably acted as the models for the seven deacons in Acts 6. Martha’s duty is therefore a distinguished service.

What constitutes *Messianic Diakonia*, we will see later in this passage (12:26). During the meal at Bethany, there is a kind of foot washing. It is a prophetic-priestly ministry to the Messiah, but a very special kind of ministry. What Jesus will do later, during the meal with the disciples, will be slave service of the Lord, *douleia*, not *diakonia*, “The slave is not greater than his master” (13:16). Jesus does the slave service of washing the feet. He is the master, the disciples are in any case subordinated to him. Only during the long conversation after the meal do the disciples become friends (15:15).

Lazarus was one of those who “reclined” at the table, but the leading role is played by the sister of Lazarus and Martha. The scene of the anointing of Jesus was a common narrative element among Messianic groups. It is important to see how John *alienates* the narrative by rearranging the individual elements. All three Synoptics know them.

Mark and Matthew, like John, have the scene shortly before Passover, but unlike John *after* the arrival in Jerusalem. In their case, the house of the meal belongs to a certain Simon: in Mark and Matthew it belongs to the “leprous Simon,” and in Luke, this one becomes “Simon Parush (Pharisee).”

The woman who performs the anointing in Mark and Matthew is not specified, but she anoints the *head* of the Messiah. The anointing is an anointing of the King. In Israel, the priests perform the liturgical anointings. The king who is to be appointed in place of another (1 Samuel 16:12 ff.; 2 Kings 9:1 ff.) is anointed by the prophet. Luke has the story in a completely different place, 7:36 ff., in the so-called “little travelogue.” Luke pursued a different purpose than John, Matthew, and Mark. The woman must be a “woman of aberration” in Luke so that Jesus can make something clear to Simon Parush. Every host was obliged to give his guests water to wash their feet.

377 The verb *sharath* means a higher category of service. This ministry was performed by Joseph in the house of Potiphar; he was his *major-domo*, Genesis 39:4; Joshua was the first assistant (*meshareth*) of Moses (Exodus 24:13), Elisha the first assistant of Elijah (1 Kings 19:21). The LXX renders this “service” as *therapōn* or *leitourgos*.

The washing itself was slave labor. The “woman of aberration” took over the duties of the defaulting host. As for the other three Gospels, the anointing is a prophetic-priestly action.

John takes the element of *foot* washing from the narrative tradition from which Luke also draws, but gives it a completely different significance. From Mark and Matthew, he borrows the proximity to the entry into Jerusalem. It shall be an anointing of the King, but the Messianic King will be a *completely different* king than all other kings and not a new David. For the explanation, we must wait until Pilate’s interrogation of Jesus. The Messianic King will have his feet anointed, not his head. What this means, the washing of feet after the meal with the disciples will show: The Lord is the servant who washes the feet. The anointing of the feet, therefore, has a hidden meaning: this Messiah is different than everyone thinks. This is what Mariam is all about. You do not anoint the King with ordinary goods, but with selected balm, not the head, but the feet.

In John, the house in Bethany is the house of the three siblings. John wants to give the classical narrative a place within the framework of his own narrative. Mariam is not the weeping woman, after the revival of Lazarus she has no motive to do so. Mariam is the one with whom the Judeans are associated. Consequently, they appear immediately after the story of the anointing, 12:9-11. Mariam appears as the representative of the Judeans who trusted Jesus. She of all people will take over the office of embalming Jesus, who is still alive but approaching death. She does not yet know this, Jesus will make it clear to her and the Twelve, especially to Judas Iscariot.

Another detail is changed by John. In Matthew and Mark, the Twelve or unspecified “some” are outraged. The only one who is outraged in John is Judas, the thief and treasurer. In the Synoptics this is not surprising, since the needy, *ptōchoi*, *’evyonim*, play a central role in them; in John, they are notably absent. Here the needy ones serve as a hypocritical pretext of a predatory treasurer who mourns lost prey. John regards him as a traitor and thief because he rejects the kingship of Jesus, above all a kingship that “does not function according to the ruling world order,” and makes money out of the Messianic movement.

In 13:29, Judas is, so to speak, the administrator of poor relief. John is mainly concerned with *big politics*. The social question is an eternal question, says John, but here first of all the political question is in the foreground. That is why he quotes Deuteronomy 15 (especially v.11). This great Torah text deals with “social matters,” debt relief, distribution of wealth. A society that is based and wants to be based on the equality of all families of the people must do so. But here, in John, it is about the political line of kingship for all Israel. Shortly before the face-to-face confrontation of the Messiah with the representative of the world order (18:33 ff.), social policy must take a step back. Who, like John, lets the poor appear only in connection with the traitor (12:5, 8; 13:29) and otherwise not at all, wants to tell about Jesus from Nazareth completely differently. This can be understood as political criticism of the

group around John against the Messianic communities from the oriental Judeans. By the predominant concern for the poor, they would lose the big political line, the policy of the great alternative.

Mariam's action makes it clear that the Messiah is a king, but one like none before. Judas Iscariot—*'ish qeriyoth*, the man from Kerioth—sees this as silly political capers: Would it not have been better to give all that money to the needy, to deepen the support of the people? That may have been how Judas thought. John interprets Judas as the one who blocks Johannine politics.³⁷⁸

But Mariam anoints the living Messiah who will die. She celebrates in advance the farewell of the Messiah, the King, who is not like all the others. He is the King who goes away, who says farewell, who is buried. To John, Mariam is decisively more political than Judas and the Twelve, who probably sympathized with Judas here. For Jesus' answer is addressed to all the disciples, "The needy *you* keep . . ."

Now Mariam's companions, the Judeans, are coming, and a large number of them. Jesus and Lazarus are a sensational attraction to the Judeans; they come to see the Messiah and the revitalized Israel. What would be more legitimate to the children of Israel? To the leading priests—the Perushim are left out by John here—the fatal consequence of this popularity is that the elimination of the Messiah leads to the extermination of the revived Lazarus. Jesus must go. Then Lazarus has to go too. The leadership of Israel also wants to kill the one who represented Israel—dead *and* alive. Leadership kills its own people. It was not the first time that leadership sacrificed its people; it will not be the last.

11.2. The Messianic King, 12:12-19

12:12 On the following day, a large crowd came to the festival.
They heard that Jesus is coming to Jerusalem.
12:13 They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting,
"Hoshia^c na—set us free—,
blessed is he who comes with HIS name,
the King of Israel!"³⁷⁹

378 Mark and Matthew argue in the same direction, but the accusation is directed against "some" or "the disciples."

379 *Hoschia^c-na*, "set us free." The first two lines are from Psalm 118:25, the psalm from the so-called "Hallel" (Psalms 113-118 and Psalm 136), which according to tradition was sung by Moses after the liberation from Egypt together with the Song of Miriam and is still a firm part of the Paschal Liturgy today. Psalm 118 also served as a welcoming song for the pilgrims who came to the sanctuary in the city: The people in Jerusalem sang, and the pilgrims answered, "His solidarity lasts until the age to come." John retrospectively interprets this hymn of welcome as a greeting to the Messianic King, 12:16. The last line of 12:13 is rather from Zechariah 9:9. He who comes "with HIS name" is the King, and the King is Jesus, as is

12:14 Jesus found a little donkey,
he sat on it as it is written:
12:15 *Fear not, daughter of Zion,
there, your King is coming,
sitting on a donkey's colt.*³⁸⁰
12:16 His disciples did not recognize this at first,
but when Jesus had come to his honor,
then they remembered that this was written about him,
and that they had done this for him.
12:17 Now the crowd that was with him continued to testify
that he had called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead.
12:18 Therefore the crowd came to meet him,
because they had heard that he had done this sign.
12:19 The Perushim said to each other,
“Look, you’re getting nowhere,
there, the world is going after him!”³⁸¹

In John, the narrative of the entry into Jerusalem differs substantially from the narrative of the Synoptics. The event itself is the same to all: Jesus rides on a donkey, the crowd greets him by waving branches of the olive tree and singing Psalm 118. John describes the entry as a normal event, at least, that is how the disciples experienced it. Only later, they did remember that it was not a normal event, but that the rejoicing was for the one who had awakened Lazarus.

All evangelists know the public liturgy—a real folk festival!—by which the Passover pilgrims are greeted. Psalm 118 served as a welcoming song to the pilgrims—in the alternate chant between the pilgrims and the inhabitants of the city. It begins with an alternating chant (vv.1-3):

Thank the NAME:
because of his solidarity until the age to come!

shown in 12:14-15. When reading aloud, this word should be pronounced “Hebrew”—as two words, *hoschia*^c and *na*. The translation should then be read along with it, “deliver us, set us free.”

380 The quote is from Zechariah 9:9. The two evangelists who bring this quote, Matthew and John, change the text. Instead of “Rejoice very much, daughter of Zion,” John has, “Fear not, daughter of Zion.” The Messianic King has features that are directed against the militancy of the Zealots, for the text of Zechariah 9:9 continues, “I will smash chariot from Ephraim / cavalry from Jerusalem / I will break the bow of war / I will proclaim peace to the world powers . . .”

381 GOING AFTER: *Apēlthen*, actually “goes away.” *Opisō autou*, Hebrew *ʾacharav*, “after him, behind him.” 1 Kings 18:21 shows that “to go after one” is the recognition of who God is, and what order should prevail. The world seems to be “going after Jesus.” The world order seems to be “Jesuan,” Messianic. But after this climax comes the anticlimax.

Let Israel say:
because of his solidarity until the age to come!
Let the house of Aaron say:
because of his solidarity until the age to come!

This is followed by a longer “solo” from v.5 onwards until vv.17-18,

I will not die, for I want to live,
the deeds of the NAME I will tell.
Chastened, the NAME has chastened me,
but he has not delivered me up to death.

Then the alternating chant starts again (vv.19-27a),

Open to me the gates of reliability.
Through them, I will go to thank the NAME.
This is the gate to the NAME,
The reliable ones get through.
I thank YOU, you have humbled me,
but YOU have become my liberation.
The stone that the builders rejected,
has become the main cornerstone.
From the NAME this has happened,
it is a marvel in our eyes.
This is the day the NAME has made,
a day for us to rejoice, to be glad.
Oh YOU, set us free (*hoshia^c na*),
oh YOU, give us success (*hatzricha na*).
Blessed is he who comes in his NAME,
we bless you from the house of the NAME.
God is the NAME, he gives us light . . .

In the Messianic communities, this psalm has played a great role. We need to know this Psalm to understand what is happening here. In all great Christian liturgies, songs with words of this Psalm open the Holy Week. To all evangelists, v.25 (“set us free,” *hoshia^c na*) was crucial. In Christianity, the abraded form of the exclamation *hoshia^c na*, “Hosanna,” has become a completely debased phrase, not only linguistically, that arouses disgust in outsiders.

Then John inserts the word “King” after the Psalm verse, “Blessed is he who comes with his NAME: the King of Israel.” The Messianists turn a Jewish liturgy of welcoming pilgrims into an entry of the Messianic King. In Mark 11:9-10 it says, “Set us free, blessed one, coming in his NAME—blessed the Kingdom of David—set us free, in the heights.” Matthew 21:9 gets even clearer, “Set us free, Son of David, Blessed One, coming in his NAME, set us free, in the heights.” Luke 19:38 finally, “Blessed is the King, coming in his NAME.” A kingdom from the house of David is suppressed by

John. As we saw, he does not know any Davidic origin of Jesus; to John, he is simply *Jesus ben Joseph from Nazareth, Galilee*. Of course, Jesus is King to him, but not like David (18:36-37)!

Amid the turmoil when the pilgrims entered the city in the week before Passover, “Jesus finds a little donkey.” In the Synoptics, the donkey is “ordered” in advance, so to speak, so that a royal entry can take place. Here Jesus gives a hint which obviously is not understood by anyone. Cheered by the crowd was the one who awakened Lazarus and therefore should be king. This reaction is none other than the one after feeding the five thousand, 6:15. In fact, the crowd is cheering the Messianic King, but not a Zealot king, which is what they actually want. Therefore Jesus “invents” the little donkey. To Wengst, “this king was not a ‘high lord’ . . . but comes in lowliness”.³⁸² The danger of such remarks is that the Messiah is a nice, modest king. The mistake of most commentaries is that they do not take seriously the Scriptural evidence that John brings and do not explain it to today’s readers. Thus these do not learn to read John “from the Scriptures.”

The quote is from the first of the three “burden words” added to the Book of Zechariah. Zechariah 9:1-9 probably describes the conquest of the east coast of the Mediterranean Sea from Tyre to Ekron (from Lebanon to the Egyptian border) by Alexander the Macedonian. All this happens so to speak “under the direction” of the God of Israel, “The NAME has an eye on mankind and all tribes of Israel,” 9:1. Then follows the fragment from which the quotation John 12:15 is taken, Zechariah 9:9-10:

Rejoice loudly, daughter of Zion,
 blow the trumpet, daughter of Jerusalem.
 Your King comes to you,
 a true one, a liberator he is,
 a humbled man, riding on a donkey,
 on a colt, the child of the donkey.
 He exterminates chariots from Ephraim, cavalry³⁸³ from Jerusalem,
 the war bow is eradicated:
 Peace will be granted to the nations,
 its government permanently, from sea to sea,
 from the great river to the edges of the earth.

In the Book of Zechariah, the messianic king brings peace to the city. We do not know exactly what situation this text is aimed at. In any case, the king ends the war between Ephraim and Jerusalem, the great theme of the conversation between the

382 Klaus Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium*. 2. Teilband: Kapitel 11-21 (ThKNT), Stuttgart 2001, 55.

[As for “Jesus ‘invents’ the little donkey”: TV uses a German wordplay here: the word “erfinden,” “to invent,” in German goes back to the word “finden,” “to find.”]

383 *Ssuss*, “horse,” a collective noun, horses used for war.

Messiah and the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. The king of Zechariah 9 may have been Alexander. People tend to consider such great kings as Cyrus the Persian or Alexander the Macedonian to be Messiah.

John is fed up with such great Messiahs. This disillusionment is a consistent feature of the Messianic groups. If king, then one on a little donkey. No more great kings. The condition for peace between Ephraim/Samaria and Jerusalem/Judea is world peace for the peoples. This is exactly what the crowd may want, without really knowing they want it. They do not know that world peace is nothing but the other side of the revival of Lazarus/Israel. They do not know it and the disciples do not know it either. Only later they will know; they will understand "the Scriptures," including the Scriptural passage Zechariah 9:9-10. Jesus' "invention," an invention of the whole Messianic movement—the little donkey (*onarion*)—is the fruit of the study of the Scriptures in the Messianic communities.

The Perushim, skilled in the Scriptures, understand very well what is going on here. "It's no use," they say, "the world has gone after him." Mostly this sentence is understood as an announcement that even harder means are to be used now. What other means do they have left? No, the sentence is resigned. They do not know what to do. But the priests know!

11.3 "He hid himself from them," 12:20-36

This passage has three parts. 1) The grain of wheat; 2) My soul is shaken; 3) Who is this *bar enosh*? Parts 1) and 2) are joined by the words *psychē*, "soul", and *doxa*, "honor," parts 2) and 3) by the word *hypsothēnai*, "to be exalted." Once again, the question is who the Messiah is and what will happen to him.

11.3.1. The Grain of Wheat, 12:20-26

12:20 There were some Greeks³⁸⁴ among those who went up to bow at the festival.

12:21 They came up to³⁸⁵ Philipp, the one from Bethsaida in Galilee, they questioned him and said,

384 GREEKS: These Greeks are not "Gentiles," because "Gentiles" do not come to Jerusalem to bow down before Israel's God (*hina proskynēsōsin*, Hebrew *hishthachawu*). They may have been *sebomenoi*, those who worship the God of Israel. Luke calls them together with the Jews, Acts 13:43, 50; 16:14; 17:4, 17; 18:7, 13. According to John, they belong to Israel.

385 CAME UP TO: *Prosēlthon*, aorist of *proserchesthai*. This verb is frequent in the Synoptics, especially in Matthew, in John, it only occurs here. These Greeks might have been "Hellenistic Jews"; see Acts 6:1. But it is equally possible here to think of *prosēlytoi*, that is, of people who "came to the Jews from the nations." To John, at any rate, they all belong to Israel. Exactly that the Pharisees saw differently. As a contrast to *proserchesthai*, in the following verse *erchesthai* is used without *pros-*, and in the present tense.

“Sir, we want to see Jesus.”
 12:22 Philipp comes and tells Andrew,
 Andrew and Philipp come and tell Jesus.
 12:23 Now Jesus answers,³⁸⁶ he says,
 “The hour has come
 for the *bar enosh*, the Human, to be honored.
 12:24 Amen, amen, I say to you:
 If the grain of wheat that falls to the earth shall not die,
 it stays by itself alone;
 but if it dies, it bears much fruit.
 12:25 The one loving³⁸⁷ his soul,
 is destroying it,
 but the one hating his soul in this world order
 will keep it into the life of the age to come!
 12:26 If someone will serve me,
 let him follow me,
 and where I am, my servant³⁸⁸ will be there too.
 If someone will serve me, the FATHER will dignify him.

About the Greeks of 12:20, the exegetes have speculated a lot. Some saw in them Diaspora Jews, others proselytes, some *goyim* (“Gentiles”), and still others religious-minded people who sympathized with Judaism (*sebomenoi*, (God’s) worshipers, Acts 17:4, 17, and others). There is much to be said for the latter. These are Greeks who went up to the festival of the Judeans. They do not want to “sanctify themselves” in the same way as the Judeans, but “bow down” to God.

They want to meet the Messiah, but they have no direct access to the Messiah. The connection to the Messiah is only through the mediation of the disciples. The contact person is Philipp. To the Greeks he is a person of respect, they call him *kyrie*, “Sir.” [See note to 4:11] Alone, Philipp does not see himself in a position to make a decision. He consults Andrew, who like himself and Simon Peter comes from the same place Bethsaida in Galilee. Both then go to Jesus. This cumbersome procedure shows how difficult it was for the Messianic group around John to integrate people

386 CT: Jesus “answers,” present tense (*apokrinetai*). 79 times the verb *apokrinesthai* is used, only three times in the present tense, once here and twice (in very dramatic places) in 13:26, 38. The change in the narrative from past tense to present tense is not easy to explain. The translator must not omit it.

387 LOVING: *Philein* can only be translated here as “to love.”

388 SERVE; SERVANT: See the note to 12:2.

[TV here translates *diakonos* into German as “beamteter Diener,” roughly equivalent to “minister.” But this could easily be misunderstood, and the connection with “to serve” would no longer be apparent. In his interpretation, TV explains what he is getting at.]

who are not from Israel into the Messianic movement. This confirms our thesis that John does not know any “heathen mission” as a genuine Messianic mission. On the other hand, access is not completely excluded. But a high hurdle is set up.

Jesus immediately informs his present and future disciples about the conditions that the disciples have to fulfill. The direct contact with Jesus did not take place, at least if we refer the sentence, “Jesus answers,” to Philipp and Andrew and not to the Greeks. The Greeks are not rejected, but they are not invited either. John is skeptical about Paul’s project of a Messianic community of Judeans and *goyim*.

The Messianic movement, viewing Jesus as the Messiah of Israel, was extremely fragmented when John wrote. A uniform Messianism spread over the whole (*kath’ holon*) Roman world was not in sight at that time. By the end of the 2nd century, you could speak of something like a catholic church. The Roman Empire stabilized in the 2nd century, and revolutionary *Messianism* had become a *Christian* religion.

John, of course, did not foresee this development but feared that a significant entry of “Greeks,” or even of *goyim*, would make the Messianic community of the new Israel something else than the place where the scattered children of Israel were to be brought together. A community of Judeans and *goyim* is something different than the great unified synagogue of Israel mentioned in 11:52, John’s main political goal. That is why John (Jesus) impedes the conditions of admission. With his disciples, as we will hear in 13-16, he will talk very differently.

Although the instruction on discipleship is not copied from the Synoptic tradition, it does show an understanding of the conditions of discipleship that was common to all Messianic groups. For example, the concept of the seed that bears rich fruit.

The saying of the grain of wheat that falls into the earth, dies, and only thus bears fruit, is the image of the one who “hates his soul in this world order.” The “dying” of the grain of wheat in this connection is not a natural process, but the following of the Messiah, who will be murdered. This is shown by “hate the soul, love the soul.”

Often the word *psychē* is translated as “life,” but “soul” has a different coloration of meaning. The soul is the core of life. Solidarity with the God of Israel, “with your whole heart, with your whole soul, with your whole passion,” Deuteronomy 6:5, occupies the whole person undivided.

“Soul in this world order” describes the existence of a person who adapts to the world order. Exactly this form of existence (“soul”) is to be hated. Here no attitude toward martyrdom is beatified. No one is required to hate his life, no one should be condemned who loves his life. The words “in this world order” are decisive. What according to the measure of this world order is a matter of the heart and soul for men is to be hated by those who want to follow the Messiah, and this is because otherwise, they destroy “their soul,” that is, that which is deeply “dear to their heart.”

In John, the negation precedes the position. The position is that of discipleship. “Whoever wants to enter the service of the Messiah (*diakonē*, not *douloi*!), follow me.” Mark (8:35) puts the position first:

If anyone wants to liberate his soul, let him destroy it;
if anyone destroys his soul for my sake and the Gospel’s, he shall set it free.

In all Messianic communities the Messiah and the “Gospel of Jesus Messiah” is the matter of the heart or soul, and everything else is void by comparison. We find a similar thought in Paul, “What was gain to me, for the sake of the Messiah, I consider as loss” (Philippians 3:7).

This attitude is incomprehensible to all who have established themselves in the respective ruling world order. But it is familiar to those who want to replace the current order with a radical alternative. All truly convinced revolutionaries of the 20th century have lived this way, at least for a time.

Whoever gets involved in a truly Messianic existence must walk the whole way with the Messiah, “Where I am, there my servant will be.” The *diakonos* will belong to the court of the Messianic King. This future will be a dignified one, “If anyone wants to serve me, the FATHER will dignify him.” The Greeks must accept this word if they want to see the Messiah. How difficult this will be, the Messiah himself says.

11.3.2. “Now my soul is shaken,” 12:27-33

12:27 Now my soul is shaken.
What can I say?
FATHER, *free me* from this hour?³⁸⁹
But this is precisely why I have come to this hour.
12:28 FATHER, *honor your name!*³⁹⁰
At this, a voice came out of heaven,
“I have honored it, and I will honor it again!”
12:29 The crowd standing there and hearing it said,
“That was a thunderclap.”
Others said,
“A messenger from heaven has spoken to him.”
12:30 Jesus answered, he said,

389 FREE ME: *Sōson me*, Hebrew *hoshi'eni*, Psalm 6:4-5. “My soul is shaken, YOU, until when? / Turn it around, YOU, save my soul, free me for the sake of your solidarity.” See John 13:21; 14:1. *Hoshia' na*, says the crowd; *hoshi'eni*, says Jesus. This very hour liberates, that is the core of John’s political theology, and that connects him with Paul and the other Messianic preachers.

390 HONOR YOUR NAME: Hebrew *lo lanu YHWH lo lanu / ki le-shimkha then kavod*, “Not to us, YHWH, not to us, but to your name give honor,” Psalm 115:1. This Psalm ends, “Not the dead praise the NAME / but we bless the NAME.”

“This voice has not happened for my sake but for yours.
 12:31 Now the judgment is upon this world order,
 now the ruler³⁹¹ of this world order will be thrown out.
 12:32 And I, when I will be exalted³⁹² above the earth,
 I will draw all to myself.”
 12:33 This he said, signifying³⁹³ what death he would die.

“Now my soul is shaken.” We hear this sentence in Psalm 6:4. We find similar sentences in the Psalms in great numbers; the subject is often “my heart” or “bone.” The wealth of Hebrew verbs expressing a strong emotion poses problems for the Greek language: One verb *tarassein* is used to translate more than forty different Hebrew verbs. It then covers emotional ranges from anxiety to total mental breakdown.

This shock felt in the soul is not new for Jesus. The grief of Mariam and the Judeans had *shaken* Jesus, 11:33. When he comes to speak of the imminent betrayal of Judas Iscariot, he will also be *shaken*, 13:21. Jesus knows what is about to come: betrayal and death. He explicitly admonishes the disciples not to let themselves be overwhelmed by this fierce emotion, “Your heart shall not be shaken,” 14:1 and 14:27.

In John, the four verses 12:27-31 take the place that the scene in Gethsemane takes in the Synoptics. All who took the Messiah’s cause seriously knew that the Messianic existence implies a hardly bearable burden. The temptation to steal out of responsibility is great, “What shall I say: Free me—*hoshi^ceni*—from this hour?” The popular cheering *hoshia^c na* is here turned into a desperate prayer *hoshi^ceni*.

391 RULER: *Archōn*, “political leader, ruler” like Nicodemus (3:1). *Archontes* are the leading forces of Judea, 7:26, 48; 12:42. The LXX translates more than 30 Hebrew words as *archōn*. Among them, the following three words are the most common: *nasi^c*, “exalted,” *rosh*, “head,” and *sar*, “leading personality,” from the overseer of forced labor to the commander-in-chief, emperor (Caesar). There can hardly be any doubt that this emperor is meant here.

[TV in his note adds the sentence: “Precisely because the word ‘Fuehrer’ has a sinister coloring in Germany, it is appropriate here.” But I don’t use the word “Fuehrer” in the English translation, because unlike in German, this word is exclusively fixed on the ruler of Nazi Germany.]

392 EXALTED: *Hypsōtō*, Hebrew *rum*. The root almost always means “to be exalted,” also in the social sense of the word. Jesus is hung on the cross “high above the earth.” Just so he receives the position which is his as *bar enosh*, as John indicates in 3:14. This elevation is liberation (as in 3:14), which is “a scandal to the Jews, a folly to the *goyim*,” 1 Corinthians 1:23.

393 SIGNIFYING: *Sēmainōn*. John declares the death of Jesus, the exalted one, to be *sēmeion*, “sign,” the final sign that Jesus sets with his death. This death is liberation. The task of an interpretation of this text is to make clear the political significance of this conception of the death of the Messiah.

“This is precisely why I have come to this hour,” says Jesus. We ask, *because of what precisely?* Because of the honor of the NAME. The honor of God is the living Israel. Jesus had told Martha at the tomb, “If you trust, you will see the honor of God.” Jesus prays here, “FATHER, honor your name!” Here we have to think of Psalm 115,

Not to us, YOU, not to us, no, give honor to Your name,
because of your solidarity, because of your fidelity.
Why should the nations speak,
“Where is their God?”
Our God is in heaven.
Everything that corresponds to His pleasure, He does . . . (vv.1-3)

This psalm sings about the uniqueness of the God of Israel, mocking the nullity of the gods of the nations,

Their wooden blocks with silver and gold, concoctions of human hands.
They have a mouth and do not speak, eyes they have and do not see. . . (vv.4-5)

The song ends with the proud lines,

Not the dead praise you, not those who descend into muteness.
No, we, we bless you, from now until the age to come. (vv.17-18)

Those who hear the words, “give honor to Your name,” know the song, the third song of the great Hallel³⁹⁴ of the Passover festival, by heart. Especially in an hour when life and death are at stake, this song must resound. The request of Israel and the Messiah was, “Honor your name.” The answer is, “I have honored (at the grave of Lazarus), and I will honor again (at the grave of Jesus).” Jesus accepts the imminent death, but interprets it as “exaltation.”

The crowd hears the sound, but not the voice. We have to listen to Deuteronomy 4:11-12 with this passage,

You came closer, stood under the mountain,
the mountain burning with fire to the heart of heaven,
darkness, clouds, thunderstorm darkness
(the LXX adds: *phōnē megalē*, “great voice”).
And the NAME spoke to you out of the midst of the fire.
You heard a voice of words,
You have not seen any shape at all,
voice only (*zulathi qol*).

The answer to Jesus’ outcry came as a “voice from heaven.” In Israel, the God always is “only voice,” but always a “speaking voice” (*qol devarim*, *phōnē rhēmatōn*). The crowd is different from the people at the foot of Mount Horeb. They hear some-

394 Psalms 113-118 were sung during the slaughter of the Passover lamb and the Passover meal, Mishna Pessachim 5:7; 10:5-6.

thing, but not a *speaking* voice, and if they do, then a voice from some heavenly messenger.

Nevertheless, the voice happens because of the crowd. Jesus is now the voice, “Now the judgment (*krisis*) is upon this world order.” The word “now” invokes the expression “and this is now” from the conversation with the woman at Jacob’s well (4:23) and from the speech after the healing of the paralytic (5:25). Jesus will say this again to his disciples: now the *bar enosh*, the Human, will be honored, 15:31. The exaltation of the Messiah is happening *now*, the abolition of this world order is also happening *now*.

The meaning of the word *krisis* is determined by the source from which the word in John is taken, Daniel 7, where a trial is being held. In the course of this trial a political monster is disempowered, and its power, indeed all power to come, is given to a figure like a man (*bar enosh*). This, according to Jesus, is happening *now*.

Accused is “this world order” and, as *pars pro toto*, “the ruler of this world order” or, if you like, “the principle of this world order (*archōn tou kosmou toutou*),” the Emperor of Rome. This ruler or principle is “thrown out,” that is: excluded, no longer playing a role. The judgment in this trial is that this world order has played out. That is the negative aspect of this judgment.

The positive aspect is, “When I am exalted from the earth, I will draw all to myself.” “All” means “not only the nation, but all the scattered children of God,” 11:52, and perhaps people like those Greeks if they meet the conditions of discipleship. The whole trial, accusation and judgment, happens “when I am exalted from the earth.” But this exaltation is the sign of his death. But what does “exaltation” mean, and “now”?

11.3.3. “Who is this *bar enosh*, Human?”, 12:34-36

- 12:34 And the crowd answered him,
 “We have heard from the Torah,
 the Messiah stays until the age to come.
 How do you say
 the *bar enosh*, the Human, has to be exalted?
 Who is this Human, *bar enosh*?”
- 12:35 Jesus, therefore, said to them,
 “Still a little while the light is with you.
 Walk your way while you have the light,
 lest the darkness overpowers you.
 He who is walking his way in the darkness
 cannot know where he is going.
- 12:36 While you have the light,
 put your trust in the light,
 so that you may become like the light.”

This is what Jesus said.
He went away,
he hid himself from them.

None of the interpretations we have consulted answers this question [what does “exaltation” mean, and “now”?] They are Christian interpretations, they do not see a problem here, because the immortality of the soul and eternal glory are the way out of this dilemma. Our question is not a question to them, and from this certainty, they interpret the Gospel of John. Only Calvin shows that he at least knows this question:

Therefore Christ proclaims that the prince of the world must be driven out; for it is from here that confusion and disfigurement originate because as long as Satan reigns, injustice also reigns. So, when Satan is cast out, the world is called back from its apostasy to the rule of God. If someone asks how Satan could have fallen at the death of Christ, who continues his unceasing struggle against God, I answer that this expulsion does not refer to any limited period of time, but that here is shown that unique effect of Christ’s death which is manifested daily.³⁹⁵

But every day, the power of “Satan” or “the government of injustice” makes itself felt. Calvin too has no answer, at least none that would be satisfactory to us. So we do not understand what could be meant in real terms.

Perhaps it can be said in this way: if we devote ourselves with our whole souls to the cause of the Messiah, the world order ceases to be our inescapable destiny. We begin to live differently. This is a triumph of the Messiah.

But if “Satan continues his fight against God unceasingly,” we ask: When will the world finally stop being the place of the “murderer of humans from the beginning,” when at last? It is the task of theology to at least keep this question open if it cannot yet answer it.

John takes this into account by having our—and probably also his—concerns formulated by the crowd, “We have heard from the Torah that the Messiah remains until the age to come.” This is a traditional idea: the Messiah is the definitive solution to all problems. Jesus speaks of a *bar enosh*, of a Human, who must be exalted. But who is this *bar enosh*? In plain English, “We see no change, so what is the purpose of that exalted, that is, crucified Human?”

There is no direct answer to this question, but rather a repetition of what was said in the Gospel of John from the first chapter on. It seems to us as if John wanted to say—or better: suggest—that there is no such thing as a Messiah as a definitive so-

395 Johannes Calvin, *Auslegung des Johannesevangeliums* (1553), übersetzt v. Martin Trebesius und Hans Christian Petersen, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1964, 321.

lution to all our problems. This very light merely is “a short time with you. Walk your way while you have the light, lest darkness overwhelms you.” The darkness is that empire of death. Whoever lives with a Messianic perspective, the empire has no final power over him, “As long as you have the light, trust the light, that you may become like light (become sons of light).” Unfortunately “the light of the world” has been murdered. The relativity of the Messiah relativizes everything that considers itself to be absolute—above all the emperor of Rome: this is the message.

The reality is quite different. If, however, the empire seems to be quite consolidated, quite definite, then darkness seems to have overwhelmed us. The disciples did not understand this. Therefore, John has to deal with the problem again and then even more clearly. This is done in the conversation between Jesus and the disciples who are allowed to ask the actual questions—Thomas, Philipp, Judas non-Iscaiot (John 14)—and especially in the big passage, “When the advocate arrives who I will send you” (15:26-16:15) and in the speech about the “little while” (16:16-24).

In the meantime, the Messiah has withdrawn into hiddenness. To the Israel, which represents the multitude of Judeans, he remains hidden. Even our Christian Easter festivals will not remove this hiddenness. The hiddenness is final. Not only to the world order and to the Judeans but also to the Messianic community. The Messiah will say farewell. What remains is the inspiration that will arise from him. Whether this answers our questions has to be rethought by every new generation. The now following verses should also be understood as words that refer to the Christians.

11.4 Conclusion, 12:37-43

12:37 Though he had done such signs before them,
they were not trusting in him,
12:38 so that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled,
*Who could trust what came to our ears,
the arm of the NAME, to whom was it revealed?*³⁹⁶
12:39 Therefore they could not trust, as again Isaiah said,³⁹⁷
12:40 *He has blinded their eyes,*

396 Isaiah 53:1 ff. The people around John know that with these two lines, the whole song of the suffering servant is meant. A Messiah like a “suffering servant” is not someone the Judeans want to trust, says John.

[This is the only place in John where—in a Scriptural quotation—God is addressed as *kyrie*. Traditionally, this would be translated as “Lord.” But I follow TV omitting the address completely, as it is done in the original Hebrew text of Isaiah 53:1—and because we can’t easily take his usual rendering of YHWH as “NAME” in a salutation.]

397 Isaiah 6:10, admittedly quoted quite freely by John. But all who heard these words knew how Isaiah continued, “I said: Until how long, my Lord, and he says, until the cities are devastated, no inhabitant, no houses, no more mankind, and the land is utterly wasted.” It is hardly possible not to relate this here to the outcome of the Judean War in the year 70.

*made their hearts as hard as stone,
so that they do not see with their eyes,
understand with their hearts,
and turn around, so that I could heal them.*

- 12:41 This is what Isaiah said because he saw His honor and spoke about Him.³⁹⁸
 12:42 Nevertheless, many of the authorities also began trusting in him,
 but—because of the Perushim—were not confessing to it,
 so that they are not excluded from the synagogue.
 12:43 They loved human honor more than the honor of God.

John 12:37-43 is a bitter summary. “Though he had done such signs before them, they did not trust him.” The keyword “trust” is followed by a word from the Book of Isaiah as a *fulfillment* quotation. The first lines of the song Isaiah 53 immediately invoke the whole song to all who hear it,

Who could trust what we heard,
 the arm of the NAME, to whom was it revealed?
 He was like a sapling, like a root sprout from the earth,
 no shape, no shine, that we might be aware of him,
 no reputation that we should desire him.
 He was despised, not worth mentioning,
 a man of torment, recognized as an invalid.
 He must hide his face from us,
 despised, without attention.
 And yet: he carried our diseases,
 he dragged our torments with him,
 pierced because of our rebellion,
 beaten for our crimes.
 Chastisement came upon him so that we might have peace,
 through his scourge wounds, we are healed.

Isaiah 53 shows the contempt of his compatriots for a man unknown to us, a man who reminded them of their origin and their future in the Babylonian exile. This is also the fate of the Messiah Jesus, nothing unusual for a prophet in Israel. The text ends in a deep depression. No more can be done here, says John. How could this happen?

Again Isaiah [6:1 ff.]. We quote first the Hebrew version and then the rather free version in John. Isaiah had a vision of seeing the NAME. His lips were purified with burning coal so that he could say to the people only what was to be said. The divine voice cries, “Whom can I send, who will go for us?” Isaiah answers, “Here I am. Send me!” Then follows (vv.9-10),

398 ISAIAS . . . SAW: See Isaiah 6:1.

He said, "Go and say to this people,
'Listen, yes, just listen, but do not understand,
look, yes, just look, but do not recognize.'
Make the heart of this people fat,
make its ears hard of hearing,
make its eyes smeared,
otherwise, it would see with its eyes,
hear with its ears,
understand with its heart,
that it could turn around and
He would heal . . .!"

John translates the last lines of Isaiah 6:9-10 like this,

He has blinded their eyes,
made their hearts as hard as stone,
so that they do not see with their eyes,
understand with their hearts,
and turn around,
so that I could heal them . . .

Here John has quoted quite freely. But his community knows how the text continues, v.11,

I said, "Until how long, my Lord?"
He said,
"Until the cities are devastated,
no inhabitants, no houses, no more mankind,
the soil destroyed, wasteland . . ."

The devastations of the year 70, says John, are the result of blind eyes, deaf ears, and an obese heart. Today, he says, it is no different than it was then. Also today the Judeans could have seen with their eyes, heard with their ears, and understood with their hearts that everything must go wrong unless they would turn around to the Messiah. Then they would be healed, and the land would never have been devastated.

"This is what Isaiah said," writes John, "because he has seen *His* honor and spoken about *Him*." The question is, who is meant by "Him"? "To see the honor" refers to the vision of Isaiah, which is described in Isaiah 6:1 ff., "The earth is filled with HIS honor." This very God has made the heart of this people fat, the ears hard of hearing, the eyes glued shut.

If a people exists in a condition of political blindness, every appeal to reason is not only in vain but leads to increasing hardening. The narrative of Moses' and Aaron's negotiations with Pharaoh results in nothing but stubbornness, "I will make him hardhearted," Exodus 4:21. The slave owner's confrontation with the demands of

freedom necessarily confirms his attitude, otherwise, he would have to stop being a slave owner and Pharaoh. The consequence is that violence has the last word, “I will kill your son, your firstborn,” Exodus 4:23.

“Nevertheless, many from the leadership trusted,” 12:42, concludes John. But the public manifestation of this trust would have deprived them of the honor of man, about which they were after all concerned, and not the honor of God. We do not know whether it was actually “many from the leadership” who trusted the Messiah. But the price would have been expulsion from the synagogue. It was not only about pure human honor, which was at stake. Under Roman conditions, the synagogue meant some degree of protection from life-threatening entanglements. We will come back to the expulsion from the synagogue and its consequences in the discussion of 16:2.

11.5 Summary of Jesus’ Teaching, 12:44-50

- 12:44 And Jesus cried out, saying,
“He who is trusting in me
is not trusting in me,
but in the ONE who sent me.
- 12:45 He who is observing me
is observing the ONE who sent me.
- 12:46 I have come as light into the world order,
so that everyone who is trusting in me might not stay in the darkness.
- 12:47 And if anyone who hears my words, but does not keep them,
I do not judge him,
for I did not come to judge the world order,
but to liberate the world.³⁹⁹
- 12:48 He who is betraying me⁴⁰⁰ and not accepting my words
has his judge:

399 WORLD ORDER; WORLD: The “world order” in the third line of v.47 and the “world” in the fourth line is equally *kosmos* in John. The world order is judged by judging the principle inherent in it (*archōn*), 16:11. But the world, as the living space for humans, can and will be liberated. That’s why you first have to translate *kosmos* as “world order” and then as “world.” Liberation is the liberation of the world of humans from the order of Rome, which defaces it.

400 HE WHO IS BETRAYING ME: *Ho athetōn eme*, Hebrew *boged bi*. The background is Jeremiah 5:11; Isaiah 24:16 and the like. The LXX has capitulated before the fivefold repetition of the root *bagad* in Isaiah 24:16, it paraphrases *’oi li bogdim bagadu uveged bogdim bagadu* (“Woe unto me! treacherous ones betray, treachery betrayed treacherous ones”) as *ouai tois athetousin, hoi athetountes ton nomon*, “woe unto the treacherous ones that betray the Torah.” The meaning is clear: it is about more than contempt, it is about the betrayal of the Word of God (the LXX, therefore, interprets: “betrayal of the Torah”)—a betrayal that results in a catastrophe (Isaiah 24:16-23).

12:49 The word that I spoke will judge him on the Day of Decision.
 For I did not speak from myself,
 but he who sent me—the FATHER,
 he himself has given me a commandment
 what I should say and what I should speak.
 12:50 And I know:
 His commandment is the life of the age to come.
 What then am I speaking?
 Just as the Father has told me,
 so I am speaking!”

The last seven verses of the second major part are a summary of the Messiah’s teaching. All the decisive words of the Gospel appear here: to trust, to send, to watch, light, world order, to judge, Day of Decision, commandment, the life of the age to come. In this respect, these verses are a counterpart to the great prologue, John 1:1-18. We make a few remarks.

We hear Jesus say that he did not come to condemn the world but to set the world free. We heard it already in the conversation with Nicodemus, 3:17. Of course, it says 5:30, “As I hear, I will judge, and my judgment is reliable.” John, like the Perushim and most of the Judeans, reckons with a final judgment, 5:27-29.

But the judgment has already been pronounced: If someone *betrays* the Messiah, he is already condemned. It is a matter of betrayal of their own cause, and John invokes the association with a word of Isaiah, where betrayal becomes an obsession, “For the betrayers have betrayed, with betrayal the betrayers have betrayed”—five times the root *bagad*, “to betray” (Greek *athetein*) in Isaiah 24:16. *To betray the Messiah* means *not to accept* the (spoken) words of the Messiah.

The penultimate sentence says everything that needs to be said, “He who sent me, the FATHER, commanded me what I should say and what I should speak.” The commandment of Israel’s God is the life of the age to come. Jesus has nothing else to say, in short, “What then am I speaking? As the FATHER has told me, so I am speaking.”

*

As announced, Jesus and the Messianic community withdraw into hiddenness. What Jesus has to say in the remaining part of the text takes place in secret. The Passion goes on in public, but what happens there is hidden from it. Amid the preparation for Passover, the encounter of Jesus and the Messianic community with the Judean public breaks off.

In no other text of the Messianic writings (“New Testament”) is what people associate with the idea of the *Messiah* problematized as much as in the Gospel of John. It shows that the reservations against this kind of messianism also existed among

the Messianists themselves, among those “who trusted Jesus,” 8:31, and among his disciples, 6:60. And the reservations that John puts in the mouth of Judeans are reservations that he must suppress in them and himself. Even in the inner circle of leadership, there are not only traitors but also faithful ones who have understood nothing of the matter. The crisis has long since gripped the circle of the faithful, 14:9, “So long have I been with you, and you have not recognized me, Philipp?”

No other Messianic text knows a Messiah who says farewell that absolutely. This is shown in the next section.

PART III: *PASCHA*—THE FAREWELL OF THE MESSIAH, 13:01-20:31

The third part tells the great Passover of the Messiah. The leaving of the Messiah is the new exodus of Israel. It has five passages, in our counting the passages 12-16, separated by indications of time:

12. Before the Passover, 13:1-30a
13. “It was night,” 13:30b-18:28a
14. The First Part of the Passion Narrative: Early in the Morning, 18:28b-19:13
15. The Second Part of the Passion Narrative: ‘*Erev Pascha*, 19:14-42
16. Day One of the Shabbat Week, 20:1-31.

The center of the last part is the long section about what happened during the night. It is the night of the Messiah’s farewell from the Messianic community and the delivery of the Messiah into the hands of the enemy through the leadership of Judea. Passover is the great festival of liberation. The Gospel of John is the “Easter Gospel” par excellence. This festival is always “near,” from the beginning, 2:13.

On the main day of the festival itself, nothing happens; everything happens immediately before and after the festival. This day is the great and decisive gap. It shows that the theology of the Gospel of John is a *theologia negativa*. The “handing over of inspiration” is the essence of the farewell, 19:30. The acceptance of this farewell is the “acceptance of inspiration,” 20:22. It enables the Messianic community to live a Messianic life without the Messiah.

12. Before the Passover, 13:1-30a

Now we have reached the immediate vicinity of the Passover festival, the eve of *paraskeuē*, the preparation day for the Passover festival, which the Jews call ‘*erev pascha*.

The time before ‘*erev pascha* is divided into three sections: the time of the last supper (13:1-30a), the night (13:30b-18:28a), and the early morning (18:28b-19:13). You

can see that the sections of the night are the main focus. This center is framed by two shorter pieces: *The Meal* and *Early Morning in front of the residence of the Roman authorities*. The first piece shows that the Messiah is called Lord, but is the slave. The second piece of the frame clearly shows that the Messiah is King, but a completely different King than all the others before him and after him. Only as a slave, the Messiah is King.

During the long night between evening and early morning, Jesus will try to explain the essence of his Messianity and the consequences for the disciples. We begin with the evening. The passage 13:1-30a can be divided well:

13:1-17 Lord and Teacher as a slave

13:18-30a Lord, who is it?

12.1. Lord and Teacher as a Slave, 13:1-17

13:1 But before⁴⁰¹ the festival of *Pascha*⁴⁰²
In awareness⁴⁰³
that Jesus' hour had come to pass from this world order to the FATHER,
being solidarized with his own under the world order,⁴⁰⁴
his solidarity with them came to its goal,

401 BEFORE: *Pro* with genitive means both "before" and "instead." The old church, especially in the West, took *pro* to mean "instead." In the so-called Quarto Deciman quarrel, at the end of the 2nd century, the struggle about the interpretation of *pro* was fought (Susanne Hausmann, *Alte Kirche. Zur Geschichte und Theologie in den ersten vier Jahrhunderten*. Band 1: Frühchristliche Schriftsteller. "Apostolische Väter", Häresien, Apologeten, Neukirchen/Vluyn 2001, 117 ff., Ton Veerkamp, *Die Welt anders. Politische Geschichte der Großen Erzählung*, Berlin 2013, 359-360).

402 PASCHA, PASSOVER: We recall that John distancingly referred to Passover as "the *Pascha* of the Judeans," 2:13; 6:4; 11:55. Seven times the word occurs without this reference, including once with the addition of "festival," just in 13:1. To John and his group, Passover is no longer the festival of liberation, but rather the "exaltation" of the Messiah, for which the handing over of the Messiah by Judas Iscariot is the precondition. The unusually extended and solemn introduction (*deipnou genomenou—tou diabolou ēdē beblētokos—eidōs*) shows how the text prepares the decisive turning point. This implies the separation of the synagogue and the Judeans from the group around John: The Judeans had no reason to see *Pascha* differently from the festival of Pharaoh's liberation from Israel. *Pro de tēs heortēs tou pascha*, therefore, means: Before the festival happens what according to John would give the festival a completely new orientation.

403 IN AWARENESS: The verb *eidenai* (participle *eidōs*, indicative *oida*) means that a process of cognition (*ginōskein*) has found its conclusion in knowledge and that this knowledge has become a component of awareness. Therefore vv.1, 3 "in awareness," v.17: *ei oidate*, "if you are aware of this."

404 UNDER THE WORLD ORDER: We translate *en tō kosmō* as "under the world order." It is not about a neutral "in," but about the fact that the world order is fighting them with hatred (15:18 ff.; 17:11 ff., etc.) and that the Messiah and the disciples suffer from this hatred.

13:2 and after a meal was held,⁴⁰⁵
 —after the adversary⁴⁰⁶ had already set
 the heart of Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, to hand him over—,⁴⁰⁷
 13:3 in awareness then,
 that the FATHER had given everything into his hands,
 that he had come from GOD and went to God:
 13:4 He gets up from the meal,
 puts off his garments,
 and taking a linen apron⁴⁰⁸ girded himself.
 13:5 Then he pours water into the basin,
 began washing the feet of the disciples
 and drying them with the apron that he had girded himself with.
 13:6 He comes to Simon Peter, this one says to him,
 “Lord,
 You are washing my feet?”
 13:7 Jesus answered, he said to him,
 “What I am doing you do not understand yet,
 you will recognize after this.”
 13:8 Peter says to him,
 “You will not wash my feet until the age to come!”
 Jesus answered him,
 “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.”⁴⁰⁹

405 AFTER A MEAL WAS HELD: *Deipnou genomenou*. John does not have Jesus and his disciples hold a Passover meal; what happens, according to him, the act of washing the feet (an example of “putting in the soul,” 13:37-38; 15:13) on the evening before the Shabbat evening and the walk to Pilate and Golgotha, is the new Passover on the day of *paraskeuē*, the preparation of the Passover; see John 19:14. In John, the break between the two, the Passover of the Judeans and the event told in chapters 13-20/21, is almost absolute.

406 ADVERSARY: *Diabolos, satan*, see note to 8:44. The word *diabolos, satan*, in John occurs only in 8:44 and twice in connection with Judas Iscariot. The adversary is Rome, and this Judas is the henchman of Rome *par excellence*, as we will learn in 18:3.

407 Both parts of v.2—about the meal and the adversary—are constructed in parallel, each with a *genitivus absolutus*, the first in the aorist, the second in the perfect. Action and counter-action, solidarity and betrayal, are linked together, and therefore one must translate in parallel.

408 LINEN APRON: *Lepton*, a word that does not appear in the Greek language before the 1st century CE and stands for the Latin *linteum*. John uses an unusual word to indicate the uniqueness of the situation.

409 CT: *En cheleq šimakh, ouk estin meris meta sou*, “he has no part with you,” Deuteronomy 14:27; it is about the Levite, who has no property and no part apart from the landowning extended families, who is a person of lesser right and therefore in special need of protection like orphans and widows. Jesus says that Simon, in the kingship of the Messiah, “will have no part besides the Messiah,” that is, he will be a person of an inferior right like the

13:9 Simon Peter says to him,
 “Lord, not only my feet but also my hands, my head.”
 13:10 Says Jesus to him,
 “He who has bathed needs nothing but to wash his feet,
 he is clean, entirely.
 You too are clean, but not all of you.”
 13:11 For he knew of the one who would hand him over;
 this is why he said, “Not all of you are clean.”
 13:12 When he now had washed their feet,
 taken his garments and reclined again to the table,
 he said to them,
 “Do you recognize what I have done to you?
 13:13 You call me ‘Teacher’ or ‘Lord,’
 you say that well because I am.
 13:14 Now if I—the Lord and Teacher—wash your feet,
 you ought to wash each other’s feet as well.
 13:15 For I have given you an example:⁴¹⁰
 as I have done to you,
 you shall do as well.
 13:16 Amen, amen, I say to you:
 The slave is not greater than his master,
 the sent one no greater than the one who sent him.
 13:17 If you are aware of this,
 you will be happy if you do so.

The part begins with a monumental sentence, built over two bridge pillars, the two active participles *eidōs*, “in awareness,” and *agapēsas*, “in solidarity,” on the one hand, and the repetition of the participle *eidōs*, “in awareness,” on the other.

In between are two so-called *genitivi absoluti*, a grammatical figure denoting accomplished facts: The meal is over, the enemy has taken possession of a disciple.

This sentence is a prefix, the main sentence begins in v.4, “he gets up from the meal . . .”

The prefix contains in a very concentrated form all the themes that will be discussed in 13:1-17: the awareness and solidarity of Jesus. Both determine the action to come. Jesus, the Lord and Teacher, acts as a slave so that no one among them can

Levite if he does not have his feet washed and does not act accordingly toward his brothers.

410 [Here I don’t follow TV who translates *hypodeigma* into German as “Weisung,” “instruction, order,” possibly referring to *hypodeiknymi* in 2 Chronicles 15:3.]

become Lord: this is solidarity. That it is solidarity is not named until after the break of the betrayal: the words *agapē* and *agapan*, “solidarity” and “to solidarize,” we hear first in the great prefix about the awareness of Jesus and then again in 13:34, in the night.

Jesus’ awareness contains four moments: Jesus knows that his hour has come to leave this world order to go to the FATHER, that his solidarity with his own has reached its *telos*, its “goal,” and, after mentioning two accomplished facts, Jesus *knows* that all power has been given to him because his whole life is “moving from God to God.” These four moments: the hour, the goal, the power, and the way, summarize the first twelve chapters of our text. It is from this knowledge that Jesus is acting.

The first *genitivus absolutus*: “when the meal was over.” So the decisive thing happens *after* the meal. The meal that is held here is not the Passover meal. The word *deipnon*, “meal,” occurs four times in John, once in 12:2-3, where Mariam anointed the feet of the Messiah, twice here and then again in Galilee, on the shore of the lake, 21:20, but where reference is made to this meal here.

So there are only two meals, the first was the anticipated funeral meal where Lazarus was present, Martha did the Messianic honor service, and Mariam “anointed the Lord with balm and dried His feet with her hair” (11:2 and 12:3 ff.), six days before Passover (“Monday”); the second meal was one day before *‘erev pascha* (“Thursday”). Does the *deipnou genomenou* refer to the first meal?

The second meal is linked to the first meal. After the meal, where Mariam anointed the feet of the Messiah, Judas ben Simon Iscariot will bring the poor into play to discredit the anointing. After this meal was done, Simon Peter sought to prevent the action of Jesus on the disciples, the washing of feet, and Judas is asked to leave Jesus and the disciples. Again, the needy are mentioned (*ptōchoi*). After the first meal, the death and burial of the Messiah are anticipated; after the second meal, the new commandment of solidarity is established. After the first meal, it is made clear that now was not the hour of the needy; after the second meal, the new commandment of solidarity among the disciples is proclaimed.

The second *genitivus absolutus*, “After the adversary had put Judas ben Simon Iscariot in his heart to hand him (Jesus) over.” Judas acts on behalf of the adversary, *satan*, *diabolos*, not of an evil supernatural spirit, but an evil inner-worldly order. He acts on behalf of and as a henchman of Rome, we see him here, we see him going away (13:30), we see him again as the head of a mixed force of police of the Judean authority and soldiers of the enemy, 18:3. When the Scriptures use the word *satan*, it does not mean demons; for these, it has other words. We recall here what we said at the discussion of 6:70 and 8:44.

Once again Jesus’ *awareness* is emphasized before he is washing the feet of the disciples. He knows that he is the one to whom all power has been transferred, like the *bar enosh*, the Human. He has gone out from God, he returns to him, in this *awareness*

he takes off his garments and takes an apron, the clothing of a house slave. The act of washing the feet of the guests at a banquet was an obligation of the house slaves. Jesus takes over this role, to the horror of the disciple Simon Peter.

Why he? Were the others not horrified? Of course, because even a slave of Israelite origin is not obliged to wash the feet of his master.⁴¹¹ Jesus is acting like Abigail who said to David, 1 Samuel 25:41, "There is your handmaid as a slave to wash the feet of my master's slaves." Jesus is acting like the slave woman Abigail. The horror of Simon is emphasized because he embodies the leadership of the Messianists. John deliberately gives Simon the role of resisting the request of Jesus. Jesus knows that if he does not persuade Simon to submit to this act of Jesus, his future role as "shepherd" and so the whole is at stake; otherwise, Simon (the Messianic movement) would have no part in him.

Simon's desire that Jesus should wash his hands and his head is strange, for the Scriptures never speak of washing the head but of washing the hands; the latter is in any case related to the commandment of purity. Jesus should wash those parts of his body that are not covered by clothing, that is, feet, hands, and head.

Jesus takes this up by using the word "to bathe." He who has bathed is pure. They have bathed, they have gone through the immersion of the words of the Messiah. The suggestion of Simon is therefore absurd; he has bathed, his feet, hands, and head are "bathed." The washing that Jesus performs here is not for purification. Only one is unclean, the henchman of Rome.

Foot washing is about something else. That is what Jesus must explain. The disciples relate to Jesus, to the Lord and Teacher, just as the disciples of a rabbi relate to the rabbi. Jesus could claim this role for himself in this circle, *eimi gar*, "for I am," namely Lord and Teacher. But he is the slave (*doulos*, 'eved).

The conclusion is not a religious one, such as, "Because God (the Messiah) loves men and serves them, they shall love God (the Messiah) and serve him." On the contrary, if the one "like-God" (*hyios theou*) makes himself a slave (*doulos*) of these humans these humans must be slaves *to one another*: from the vertical ("I for you") follows the horizontal ("you for one another"); in the language of Bonhoeffer this would mean "pro-existence." The relationship of God to the Messiah and of the Messiah to the disciples is strictly exemplary, "As God to me, as I to you, so you to one another." In John, there is no universal love of neighbor, and in him, there is certainly no religion.⁴¹²

411 Hermann L. Strack / Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch II*, München 1974, 557.

412 [Here we could discuss whether what TV describes here, namely a pro-existence that emerges from the solidarity of God, would not also be called religious.]

12.2. “Lord, who is it?”, 13:18-30a

- 13:18 Not about all of you do I am speaking;
I know which ones I have chosen,
but that the Scriptures may be fulfilled:
*The one chewing⁴¹³ my bread
lifts up his heel against me.*⁴¹⁴
- 13:19 From now on, I am speaking to you before it happens,
so that when it does happen,
you may trust that I AM—I WILL BE THERE.
- 13:20 Amen, amen, I say to you:
The one receiving someone I send is receiving me;
The one receiving me is receiving the ONE who sent me.”
- 13:21 When saying this, Jesus was totally shaken,⁴¹⁵
he testified and said,
“Amen, amen, I say to you:
one of you will hand me over.”
- 13:22 The disciples looked at one another,
puzzling over who he is speaking about.
- 13:23 One of his disciples was reclining,
borne by Jesus in his bosom,
the one Jesus was attached to in solidarity.⁴¹⁶
- 13:24 To this Simon Peter motions
to inquire who it is he is speaking about.
- 13:25 Leaning now against Jesus’ chest,⁴¹⁷ that one says to him,
“Lord, who is it?”
- 13:26 Jesus answers,
“It is the one to whom I will dip the bite and give it.”
Having dipped the bite, he gives it to Judas ben Simon Iscariot.

413 CHEWING: *Trōgōn*, not *esthiōn*, see 6:54.

414 BREAD . . . HEEL: Psalm 41:10 (LXX: Psalm 40:10). John “explains” a Hebrew phrase “making a big heel against someone,” i.e., taking advantage of another person’s situation in a deceitful way. The verse reads in the original: “Yes, the man of my peace, / of which I was sure / ate my bread // made great against me his heel (*higdil ‘alay ‘aqev*; LXX: *emegalynen ep’ eme pternismon*).

415 TOTALLY SHAKEN: *Etarachthē tō pneumatī*, see the note to 11:33.

416 ONE OF HIS DISCIPLES . . . : The disciple belongs to an inner circle of disciples to whom Jesus wants to entrust his legacy. Here it doesn’t say *en stēthei*, “at the chest,” but *en tō kolpō*, “which Jesus carried in his bosom”; the text itself explains the expression *en tō kolpō*, “the one to whom Jesus was especially attached,” see 1:18 and the note there. Only in v.25 is *stēthos* written.

417 LEANING NOW . . . CHEST: Some manuscripts additionally offer the word *houtos*, “so,” after the “now.”

13:27 And after the bite, the adversary went into him.
 So Jesus says to him,
 "What you are doing, do quickly."
 13:28 None of those who were reclining at the table recognized,
 to what end he said that to him.
 13:29 For some thought,
 that since Judas had the money-bag, Jesus would have said to him,
 "Buy what we need for the festival,"
 or that he give something to the needy.
 13:30a So that one took the bite and went out, immediately.

After this exemplary act of Jesus, there is the dissonant counterpoint, "Not about all of you do I speak." The text does not linger long with psychological attempts at explanation. Judas is the evildoer of the Psalms, and he is the one who commits crimes against the people. The "I" of the Psalms always stands for Israel too.

Even the man of my peace,
 on whom I relied,
 who ate my bread,
 attacks me from behind.

So it says in Psalm 41 (v.10). John has his own Greek version of the psalm. Instead of "eating" (*ʾakhal, esthiein*) he has "chewing, gnawing" (*trogein*) as in the bread speech 6:54 ff. The parallel is intentional: Judas was the one who chewed the flesh of the Messiah, that is, he was one of those who did not go away despite the scandalous sayings of the Messiah in the bread speech. It does not mean, then, that he took part in a Christian communion and then betrayed the Messiah; it means that he was fully engaged with the Messiah (chewing his flesh, drinking his blood). It is he who hands the Messiah over to the Romans and their collaborators, Judas ben Simon Iscariot, who once was chewing the flesh of the Messiah, drinking his blood.

Psalm 41 ends with a double Amen, "Bless the NAME / the God of Israel / from ages to ages / Amen and amen!" After Jesus announces what will happen before it happens, "so that you may know: I WILL BE THERE," he takes up the double Amen: "Amen, amen, I say to you." Here again, the dialectic of the vertical and the horizontal, "Whoever accepts someone whom I will send (a Messianically inspired person) accepts me, the Messiah."

John then leads the break in the narrative over foot washing and solidarity in a ghostly scene to a climax or an absolute low point. This narrative of the break leads from the shaking of Jesus (*etarachthē tō pneumatī*) in v.21 to "it was night, however," in v.30b. It begins with the double *Amen* of Psalm 41:14, this time turned into darkness, "Amen, amen, I say to you: one of you will hand me over." The four acting persons are Jesus, Simon Peter, the apprentice "to whom Jesus was attached in solidarity," and Judas ben Simon Iscariot. Jesus' shaking is the same as the one in the face

of the death of Lazarus. He prays the Psalm of the Shock (6:4) in 12:27, “Now my soul is shaken.” The Messiah is completely and deeply shaken (*tō pneumatī*) in the face of the corruption, the inner decay, prevailing in this people. Lazarus was the decaying Israel, Judas ben Simon Iscariot the son of his people, eaten up by corruption.

We do not want to add our own speculation about the disciple with whom Jesus was friends. The text passes him on anonymously, and we should respect that. In any case, here begins the strange alliance between Simon Peter and the so-called beloved disciple. The disciple to whom Jesus was united in solidarity (*ēgapa*) or in friendship (*ephilei*) is not necessarily identical to Lazarus, who was also in friendship with Jesus (*hon phileis*, 11:3). He is the disciple who walked the whole way with Jesus, from the garden to the court of the great priest, from the court to the cross, from the cross to the open tomb, from this tomb to the fishing boat, from where he was the only one who recognized the stranger as “the Lord.” He is the exemplary disciple who will always remain until the Messiah comes, 21:22. He is the structural transformation of Lazarus. This one was the exemplary concentration of the dead and to be revived Israel, the disciple in the Gospel of John is the exemplary concentration of living Israel, the Jewish—not Christian!—Messianic community.

At the level of the narrative, the traitor remains unknown; Jesus knows, perhaps that anonymous disciple knows, all the others will know only when they see him again in the garden beyond the brook Kidron. Jesus hints at it, but in such a way that nobody recognizes who is meant. Jesus gives the dipped bite to Judas, and the disciples assume that it is aimed at the story of Ruth and not at Psalm 41. Here the passages of the Scriptures, Psalm 41:10 and Ruth 2:14, are fulfilled. The second passage is turned into its opposite so that it can point to the first.

This is exactly the instant when the adversary “entered,” a truly “Satanic” reversal of the gesture of Jesus, distinguishing Judas ben Simon as a housemate. So says the Scripture passage Ruth 2:14. Ruth came as a refugee from Moab to Boaz, the owner of a farm in Bethlehem, and asked for permission to gather barley after the harvest. Boaz said to Ruth at mealtime,

“Come closer; you may eat from the bread,
dip your bite into the sour dip.”

She sat down beside the reapers,
and he handed her roasted grain.

She ate, was satisfied, had some left over.

Thus Ruth was accepted by Boaz as a housemate. By accepting the dipped bite, Judas accepts recognition as a fellow housemate of the Messiah and deceives those present. He hides from those present by accepting recognition as a housemate that he will hand over Jesus. He accepts the role that Rome—the *Satan*—assigns him.

Jesus wants this theater to end quickly, “What you are to do”—namely, to carry out the assignment of the adversary, Rome—“do it quickly.” John keeps up the tension

by having the disciples puzzle; they suspect nothing of what is really going on. “Immediately (*euthys*) he went out.” It is the first time we hear the word *euthys* in John. Twice more we will hear this word. Judas knows that the hour of Judas has come at the same time as the hour of Jesus: He could no longer remain in the “house of the Lord.”

13. “It was night,” 13:30b-18:28a

13.1. The New Commandment, 13:30b-38

- 13:30b It was night, however.⁴¹⁸
- 13:31 And when he had gone out, Jesus says,
“Now the *bar enosh*, the Human, began being honored,
and GOD began being honored with him.
- 13:32 If GOD began being honored with him,
GOD will also honor him with himself,⁴¹⁹
and, immediately, he will honor him.⁴²⁰
- 13:33 Children, still a little while⁴²¹ I am with you.
You will seek me,
but, as I said to the Judeans,
where I am going, you cannot come,
so I say it to you now.
- 13:34 A new command I am giving to you:
that you are solidary with each other,
that—just as I was solidary with you—
you are also solidary with each other.
- 13:35 By this everyone will recognize that you are my disciples,
if you are practicing solidarity with each other.
- 13:36 Simon Peter says to him,
“Lord, where are you going?”
Jesus answered,

418 NIGHT: In this third main part of the Gospel, John structures the material by the time: Before the Passover (13:1), It was night (13:30b), Early morning (18:28b), Eve of the Passover (19:14), Day One (20:1).

419 WITH HIMSELF: *Heautō* instead of *autō*, with several important manuscripts.

420 This verse has been badly passed down. Many manuscripts simply omit the first line of v. 32; the shorter version is supported by the oldest manuscripts. The verb *doxazein*, Hebrew *kibed*, refers to the *kevod* YHWH, the honor (“force, brunt”) of the NAME. “Glorification” has become commonplace, but is misplaced.

421 STILL A LITTLE: *Eti micron, me^cat*, a little (see Exodus 17:4: little was missing, or . . . etc.). The meaning is explained in detail in 16:16 ff.

“Where I am going, you cannot follow me now;
you will follow later.”
13:37 Peter says to him,
“Lord, why can’t I follow you now?
I will put in my soul for you!”⁴²²
13:38 Jesus answered,
“You will put in your soul for me?
Amen, amen, I say to you:
The rooster will not call until you have denied me three times!

“It was night, however.” Now *the night of the Messiah* begins. The reading of our text up to this point has shown what night meant; it is the time without the Messiah, in which you cannot walk the way, but you must “stumble” (11:10), in which “no one can work,” 9:4. The night of Rome without the Messiah is the end of all hopes and all plans. But this night is the night of the Messiah.

John tries to make it clear to the group that the Messianic community also lives in the night. It must learn to decide whether its night is the night of the Messiah—a night in which the Messianic light shines upon it—or whether its night is the night of Rome—then it really can do nothing. How is it possible to live in the Messianic night without the Messiah? John seeks an answer to this question in the so-called farewell speeches.

The word “honor” (*doxa, kavod, gloria*) becomes increasingly important in the course of the Gospel. From Chapter 11, the revival of Lazarus, to Chapter 17, the prayer of the Messiah, that *doxa*, “honor,” is a main theme. The glory of God is not like the quickly offended glory of men. The honor, *kavod*, actually “force, brunt,” is his assertiveness in the realization of his “project” Israel.

At the revival of Lazarus we heard how sickness and death serve to “honor the one who is like God,” and Martha’s despair is met with the word, “If you trust, you will see the honor of God.” What is happening at the tomb of Lazarus means that “the honor of God” is that Israel is alive.

Whenever Jesus’ shaking is reported (11:33; 12:27; 13:21), the “honor of God” comes into play. The Messiah prays, “FATHER, honor your name.” The “voice from heaven” declares, “I have honored it, and I will honor it again,” 12:28. And here, after the shaking experience that one of the Twelve betrays the Messiah, Jesus says: “Now the *bar enosh*, the Human will be honored; with him, God will be honored . . . , and God will also honor him with himself, and *immediately* (*euthys*) he will honor him.”

422 PUT IN MY SOUL: See note to 10:11; *tithēmi tēn psychēn* can, but does not have to mean: “give his life.”

We know what the honor, the power of God is: that Israel lives. This happens at the moment when the apparent doom is introduced by the betrayal: The Messiah is murdered, Israel lives! This is realized immediately, at that very moment when Judas ben Simon enters the ranks of the enemy. We can understand this only when we hear the word *euthys* a third and last time, 19:34.

What happens here is unique; the attempt to imitate the Messiah is an illusion, “Where I am going, you cannot come,” he said to the Judeans (7:34), and he has to tell this to the disciples as well. Thus the question of Simon Peter is anticipated and, at first, answered negatively. Positively, the place is shown to him where he can and must go. This place is solidarity, the new commandment. The washing of feet is the sign of the new commandment. Here Bultmann is right,

There is no love directed directly at Jesus . . . as there is no love directed directly to God (1 John 4:20-21). Jesus’ love is not a personal affection, but rather a liberating service; its response is not a mythical or pietistic Christ-intimacy, but the *allēlous agapan*.⁴²³

This inner solidarity of a political underground group seemed so urgent to John that he, the *Judean*, repealed Deuteronomy 6:5, “You shall *love* the NAME, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your passion.” It says, for the Rabbinical Judeans as well as for the Messianists, “Where I am going, you cannot come.” God—to whom the Messiah goes—is *inaccessible* to men. This is a basic insight of the Scriptures, “The human cannot see ME and live,” Exodus 33:20. But according to Rabbinical Judaism, “love” for God is not only a possibility but an unconditional obligation of Israel. In John, there is the solidarity (“love”) of God and the Messiah with humans, but not vice versa. For humans only solidarity among themselves is possible—but then this is an unconditional obligation as well. Solidarity with (“love” for) the Messiah is to follow his commandment, we will hear this emphatically, 15:1 ff. In this way and only in this way God is *honored*. No double commandment in John.

The question after the defeat of the year 70 is: What is the point of a messianic vision? The crushing defeat in the year 70 meant the end of messianism for many messianists. To Rabbinical Judaism, messianism should no longer be a political priority for the time being. To the group around John, this is the real challenge. If the Messiah is not on the agenda, what is this group still doing among the children of Israel?

The Messiah goes to a place that is inaccessible to all, “Jews” or “Christians.” Even Simon Peter cannot follow him, “later you will follow,” is the enigmatic answer to Simon’s question in this regard. Only in chapter 21 will this become clearer: Simon Peter will have to go through the same defeat through which the Messiah likewise goes.

423 Rudolf Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (KEK), Göttingen 1941, 404.

Simon-Peter conjures to Jesus his readiness for the messianic *jihad*, his *Zealotism*, because that means *tithesthai tēn psychēn*, “to put in his soul.” Jesus rejects the request of Simon by announcing his denial. This expression “to put in one’s soul” does have a vertical dimension: the Messiah as the shepherd puts in his soul for his sheep, because he has received authority to do so (10:18). From this vertical dimension, however, only a horizontal dimension results for the disciples (see 1 John 3:16); you can put in your soul for the brothers, but not for the Messiah, let alone for God.

In the garden beyond the brook Kidron, Simon will try to follow the Messiah in his own way, with the sword drawn. In the courtyard of the great priest, Simon will do the obvious: he will deny Jesus; he will understand that there is no chance with the drawn sword, he will finally and politically understand the Messiah.

The Messiah does not value the denial; he only notes that Simon, faced with the choice in the courtyard of the great priest, *cannot* follow the Messiah at this moment. He will *have to* “deny” him, i.e., do the opposite of what John four times calls *homologeîn* (“to confess, to admit”) (1:20 (twice); 9:22; 12:42).

The point of Simon’s words here is the call for a new heroic or Zealotic adventure. “Why can’t I follow you now? I will put in my soul for you,” means, “Why don’t we fight? Let us fight the Romans for a new Messianic world order.” Such succession would be the march to ruin—and *was* the march to ruin in the years 70 and 135.

13.2. Three objections, 14:1-14:260

13.2.1. The First Objection: “We don’t know where you are going,” 14:1-7

14:1 Your heart shall not be shaken.⁴²⁴
Trust in GOD and trust in me.
14:2 In my FATHER’s house, there is for many a place of permanence.⁴²⁵
If not, would I have told you
that I am going to found a place for you?⁴²⁶

424 YOUR: Some manuscripts (including a Latin one from the 4th century) have at this point, “And he said to his disciples: Your . . .” Obviously, a break was felt early on. But the connection arises from 13:33, “Where I am going . . .” This connection remains until 14:28, “I am going to the FATHER,” and 14:31, “Let’s leave here . . .” The denial of Simon-Peter has to do with the complex, “to go away . . . to follow.”

425 A PLACE OF PERMANENCE: *Monai*, the plural of “place to stay,” is difficult. In the LXX the word does not exist (except in 1 Maccabees 7:38, where it probably means *maqom*). We have said in the note to 1:32 about the verb *meneîn* that it has as background ‘*amad* or *qum*. Of course, the next line says *topos*, *maqom*. *Monē* shows the aspect of duration, a permanent place. But “place to stay” has the meaning of “roof over your head” in contemporary language. We have to paraphrase this very specific *maqom*, “for many a place of permanence.”

426 TO FOUND A PLACE FOR YOU: *Etoimasai topon hymin*. In 1 Chronicles 15:1, it is said that

14:3 And when I have gone and founded a place for you,
again I am coming to accept you to myself,⁴²⁷
so that where I AM, you may be also.

14:4 And where I am going—you know the way.”

14:5 Thomas says to him,
“Lord, we do not know where you are going.
So how can we know the way?”

14:6 Jesus says to him,
“I AM—the way and the fidelity and the life.
No one is coming to the FATHER except through me.”⁴²⁸

14:7 If you have recognized me,
then you will also recognize my FATHER.
And from now on, you recognize him and have seen him.”

Of course, they are shaken. How can they not be shaken by the catastrophe of the year 70? Jesus says he is going so that the disciples will be there where Jesus will be there. Therefore their souls shall not be shaken, as the soul of the Messiah was shaken in the face of the friend's death, 11:33, and he admitted this before the crowd, 12:27. Now he does not want to pray Psalm 6:4, “My soul is shaken.” Rather, defeat will be the turning point. The cross is his exaltation, and the exaltation is the turning point; he will draw all to himself. So we heard it in 12:27-33.

Now Jesus goes into detail: he will “found a place.” Very soon, these words were understood to mean that Jesus will establish a permanent dwelling place beyond this earth and this life for those who believe in him. This is a putting off to a hereafter that John did not know at all. Nevertheless, in his eyes, the real-earthly perspective of *zōē aiōnios*, the life of the coming world age, moves into a far distance. Although “heaven” is for John the realm from which the *bar enosh*, the Human, comes and to

David founded or donated a place to the covenant shrine (Hebrew *wa-yakhun maqom*, Greek *hētoimase ton topon*). In any case, *topos* in this context is not just any place, but the most important place, the house of God (the FATHER), pars pro toto Jerusalem or the land of Israel (see Genesis 13:14, where the land that God shows to Abraham is called *maqom*, “place”). The house of God (the place, *maqom*, which God chooses to make HIS NAME dwell there, Deuteronomy 12:11, etc.) is the only place for that Israel which trusts the Messiah. The Messiah founds a place that, unlike the house of God in Jerusalem, will be a place of permanence (*monē*), a place that will not be destroyed. Heaven is certainly not meant by this, but rather the Messianic community itself.

427 AGAIN: *Palin*; see the note to 16:16. Jesus does not go to heaven to return, but he goes the way he must go, the way to his death; he comes on day one of the Shabbat week (20:19) to give the disciples the inspiration of sanctification. Then the place is established where Jesus and his disciples are, the Messianic community.

428 The God of Israel is the way, the fidelity, and the life. No one finds the way there, except through the Messiah.

which he returns, nowhere is heaven a perspective for humans. We cannot understand the text if we are guided by a widespread (early) Christian transcendence. Jesus does not search for heavenly homes for the disciples. The *monē* is a permanent residence on earth, “residence for many.” The house of the FATHER is not heaven.⁴²⁹

In need of interpretation is the difficult sentence, “Again I come to accept you to myself.” The statement of this sentence is determined by the following final sentence, “so that where I am you may be also.” In Matthew, the matter is clear: the *bar enosh*, Human, is coming on the clouds of heaven to judge the living and the dead, the acquitted come “into the kingdom prepared for them, *basileian hētoimas-menēn*,” 25:34. John says something else. In his case, too, something is “prepared” (*hetoimazein*), instead of the kingdom, in John it is the place. John does not have a final trial (final judgment). Whoever does not trust the Messiah Jesus is already condemned, he is lost, he has no more perspective. For such a person only comes what is already there anyway: the death order of Rome.

Nevertheless, there is a tension between *going* and *coming again*. This tension is intensified in 20:17 by the word “not yet.” The place is without any doubt that synagogue into which Jesus will bring all of Israel together. This is the place of Jesus, where the disciples will be. In John, in the whole Scriptures in general, it is not heaven but the earth that houses the place to come (see Psalm 115:16).

In the conversation with the Samaritan woman, there was mention of the *time* when one is “inspired to the FATHER (NAME) and bows to him in fidelity” (4:23), but not of the *place*, or rather of the *non-place*: neither in Jerusalem nor on this mountain (Gerizim).

But here it is about the *place* and not about the *time*. In the conversation after the expulsion of the merchants and money-changers from the sanctuary, there is mention of the breaking down of the sanctuary and its erection after three days (2:19), but John says explicitly that Jesus means *the sanctuary of his body*. The place, *ho topos*, *ha-maqom*, is the sanctuary. To John, the place is the sanctuary, which is erected after three days, the body of the Messiah (*sōma Christou*, see Ephesians 4:12), the Messianic community.

But the “coming” is not only the establishment of the body of the Messiah, the Messianic community. By the word “rather,” *palin*, there remains an open space. *Rather*, a Jew hears in the word “place” the political earthly center of Israel. The coming of the Messiah has as its goal (11:52) the reunion of the God-born who have been scattered apart, and for this purpose an earthly place is necessary. Under the real Roman conditions, the Messianic community is a temporary place. The Messianic com-

429 Not only in Rabbinical Judaism but also in circles that created apocalyptic literature, there has been a lively debate about what happens to the righteous after they die and before the age to come. For this time, the *gan ʿeden*, the Garden of Eden, serves as a temporary place.

munity keeps the earthly, place-bound future of the Messiah open for Israel. We will have to go into this “coming” again in the discussion of 21:22.⁴³⁰

What is coming is the inspiration of sanctification. It can only come if the Messiah goes, “Where I am going: You know the way.” Thomas immediately teaches him better. “We don’t know where you’re going, how can we know the way?” Thomas—focused on the real political power balances—doubts that there can be a Messianic strategy. He said, “Let us also go with him, that we may die with him,” 11:16. Thus not, like Simon, “let us fight.” Jesus’ answer does not convince Thomas, “If I cannot physically convince myself of the future of the Messiah, I will not get involved,” says Thomas, as 20:25 can be paraphrased. The words handed down are not suitable for a psychological profile of the historical Thomas, but are sufficient for the political attitude he has to represent here: Under Roman conditions, there is no perspective anywhere.

Jesus answers in a saying that is one of the most quoted in the Gospel of John. In the traditional translation, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me.” By this saying, the absolute claim of Christianity is justified.

We have translated differently, “I AM—the way and the fidelity and the life.” This translation [fully capitalized “I AM” and breathing space indicated by a dash] first of all suggests that the statement is not a declarative clause, “I am the way . . .” The subject of the sentence is the Messiah. The definition of the Messiah is “the one sent by the FATHER (NAME).”

The definition of Moses was also “the one sent” of the NAME: *’Ehye* sends me, the NAME sends me, Exodus 3:14. But the unity of the sent Messiah with the sender—the NAME/FATHER—has a different quality to John. Moses has spoken about way and life. In Deuteronomy 30:15-16, it says,

Look,
I have given you today:
life and good,
death and evil.
As I command you today,
to love the NAME, your God
to walk on his way,

430 “In John, there is actually no future anymore,” I wrote in the interpretation of the farewell speeches (Ton Veerkamp, *Der Abschied des Messias. Johannes 13-17*, in *Texte & Kontexte* 95/96, 2002, 30). Thus I clearly missed the target. Everything is indeed decided in the “going” of the Messiah, including the “coming.” But precisely in this way, the earthly future remains open for Israel. At that time, I had blatantly underestimated the little word *palin*, “again” (or “rather”).

to keep the commandments, the laws, the legal regulations,
and you will live,
you will be many,
the NAME, your God, will bless you,
in the land where you come to inherit it.

Here, “way” and “life” are in clear relation to the “NAME.” In the song “Listen, oh heavens,” it says of the God of Israel, Deuteronomy 32:4,

The rock, perfect his work,
all his ways are just,
a God of fidelity, without deceit,
a trustee is he, straight ahead.

The God of Israel is “way, fidelity, and life” for Israel. Jesus is the way of God for Israel, he embodies the fidelity of God and is, therefore, the life for Israel. As the NAME happened by sending Moses—and Moses is the Torah—so the NAME happens today through the Messiah Jesus, 1:17. Moses proclaimed the way, fidelity, and life that God is for Israel. Now, Jesus is the only embodiment of the way of God, the fidelity of God, and the life that God promises.

Here is a contrast, but Christianity has turned it into an antagonistic contradiction: Moses *or* Jesus. The contradiction is not absolute, but conditional. It is the new conditions that suspend the old conditions and ask new questions. They demand a new answer: this is the basic view of all Messianic groups of all tendencies. Without this new answer, nobody comes to the FATHER.

To “come to the FATHER” means to walk in his ways, to act according to his commandments. Under the new conditions, it means, to walk in the ways of the Messiah, to act according to his new commandment. He who knows this new answer, the Messiah, this Messiah, is recognizing God. “From now on, you recognize him, and you have seen him.” There seems to be a contradiction here, “No one has ever seen God,” says John 1:18 (1 John 4:12), following the word Exodus 33:20, “No human sees me and lives.” This remains unchallenged and undeniable for him. And now, all at once, “You have seen him!”

13.2.2. The Second Objection: “Show us the FATHER, and it is enough,” 14:8-21

14:8 Philipp says to him,
“Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.”
14:9 Jesus says to him,
“This long time I am with you,
and you have not recognized me, Philipp?
Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.
How can you say,
‘Show us the Father’?”

- 14:10 Are you not trusting
that I am with the FATHER, and the FATHER is with me?
The words that I am saying to you, I am not speaking from myself.
The FATHER, permanently united with me,
is doing his works.
- 14:11 Trust me, that I am with the FATHER and the FATHER with me.
But if not, then trust because of HIS works.⁴³¹
- 14:12 Amen, amen, I say to you,
the one trusting in me will do the works I do,
and even greater ones he will do,
because I am going to the FATHER.
- 14:13 Whatever you will ask for⁴³² in my name,⁴³³
I will do,
so that the FATHER may be honored with the Son.
- 14:14 If you ask me for something in my name,
I will do it.
- 14:15 If you are in solidarity with me,
you will keep my commandments.
- 14:16 I will ask the FATHER,
and he will give you another advocate,⁴³⁴
to be with you until the age to come,

431 HIS: *Autou*, according to P⁶⁶ and some other manuscripts. The majority has *auta*, “the works themselves.” The meaning remains the same. Jesus does nothing but the works of the FATHER, and the work of HIS hands is Israel, the revival, unification, and liberation of Israel.

432 YOU WILL ASK FOR: *Aitēsete*. The verb *aitein* or *aiteisthai* and the verb *erōtan* stand for the Hebrew *sha’al* or the Aramaic *she’al* or *be’al*. These verbs mean “to ask, to demand, to inform, to ask, to wish.” When Jesus turns to God “asking,” *erōtan* is used. If this verb is related to human objects, “to ask for” in the sense of “to beg, to request,” is more likely to be used. For “praying” the Hebrew has the root *palal* (*hithpalel*), Greek *proseuchesthai*. Here it is about “asking for” (when people ask something of God) and “asking” (when the Messiah addresses God).

433 IN MY NAME: *En tō onomati mou*, “in my name,” is *in pausa* [see note on 8:16]; it has a special emphasis. People should not ask for anything, but only for that which is in accord with the name of the Messiah.

434 ADVOCATE: *Paraklētos*. The word is missing in the LXX. In the Greek versions of Aquila and Theodotion, it serves as a translation of *menachem*, “comforter.” *Paraklēsis* occurs more often, it means “comfort, consolation, putting off!” However, the Hebrew root *nacham* is more comprehensive, “to comfort, to regret, to be tired, to have compassion.” In Romans 12:1, Gerhard Jankowski translates *parakalein* as “to encourage” (see Gerhard Jankowski, *Die große Hoffnung. Paulus an die Römer. Eine Auslegung*, Berlin 1998, 262.264). Since it is about court and legal proceedings, “advocate” (“the in-voked one,” *ad-vocatus*) is appropriate (see 16:8-11).

14:17 the inspiration of fidelity⁴³⁵
 which the world order cannot accept,
 because it is neither observing nor recognizing it.
 You are recognizing it,
 because with you, it is staying continuously,
 with you, it will be there.

14:18 I will not leave you as orphans,
 I am coming to you.

14:19 Still a little while, and the world order no longer is observing me,
 but you are observing me,
 for I am living and you are going to live.

14:20 On that day you will recognize
 that I am with my FATHER,
 and you with me, and I with you.

14:21 Whoever has my commandments and keeps them,
 that one is in solidarity with me.
 Who is in solidarity with me,
 he will experience solidarity through my FATHER,
 I will be in solidarity with him,
 I will prove myself real to him.⁴³⁶

Philipp takes this up immediately, “Show us the FATHER, and it is enough for us.” Apparently, there were doubters and skeptics in the group who almost drove “John” to despair. But just as obviously he takes this fraction very seriously.

435 INSPIRATION OF FIDELITY: *Pneuma tēs alētheias*, “inspiration of fidelity.” The fact that God is faithful to Israel is the only inspiration by which these people can live; fidelity is visible and audible in the Messiah Jesus. The inspiration of fidelity is, in any case, anti-Roman (to Rome, it does not matter and is therefore not to be recognized). The role of that advocate would need further explanation. This happens in 16:13-15; see the note there.

436 [I WILL PROVE MYSELF REAL TO HIM, this translation differs from the one given in 2015:] I WILL MAKE KNOWN MYSELF TO HIM: *Emphanizein* occurs twice in the LXX, both times in Exodus 33, in v.13 for “to be recognized,” and in v.18 for “to be seen” (but there only in one manuscript). Since chapter 14 is about “seeing God,” Exodus 33 could be the background. The core sentence there, “the human cannot see ME and live” (33:20), is the basic requirement for the theology of John; see 1:18 and also 1 John 4:12. No theophany is thought of; here the LXX always writes *ōphthē*. The translation, mostly chosen in 14:21-22, as “to reveal” is less suitable. For “to reveal, make public” John always uses *phaneroun*. “To see God” means to recognize Jesus as Messiah.

CT: The book “Wisdom of Solomon,” probably from Alexandria around the beginning of our era, has the rare word and its derivatives seven times. It means “apparition, to appear,” in the sense of “to prove oneself real.” This paraphrase lends itself well.

Their skepticism is justified, but it paralyzes the group in its struggle for a political perspective. In Jesus' reply, this despair resounds unmistakably about those who say, "I want security." Like this: we would be in this phase and that phase, it would take so and so long until the whole realm of death would collapse at its inner contradictions, and then . . . what comes then? The Messiah? These people must see that the God of Israel is faithful to Israel only by smashing unreal messianic expectations at the cross of shame of Rome.

So, unlike the Synoptic Gospels, John does not have the Messiah on the cross pray the 22nd Psalm, "My God, my God, why do you forsake me?" Not for a single moment was the abandonment of God a reality in the life of this Messiah. This is the main content of the message—from the beginning. Philipp was present from the beginning (1:43), and Philipp was an important figure in this narrative (1:43 ff.; 6:5, 7; 12:21-22). "So long have I been with you, and you have not recognized me, Philipp?"

He who sees the Messiah sees God, he who trusts the Messiah trusts in God. No other and no legitimate experience of God ("seeing") is possible than seeing the Messiah, this Messiah, this failed Messiah! This seeing and recognizing is a practice. The practice of the disciples, if they see, recognize, trust, is that of the Messiah, and this practice will be more convincing than that of the Messiah himself ("greater works"). This Messianic practice is the honor of God, it and only it.

If you pray for it, it will be given, because praying for this practice requires seeing, recognizing, and trusting. The practice that arises from solidarity with the Messiah is the keeping of the Messiah's commandments. In 15:12, it is again made clear what was demonstrated in Chapter 13: Solidarity with the Messiah = solidarity with one another = serving as slaves of one to the other disciple, of the other to the one disciple.

Instantly, it seems, sentences appear which refer to the prayer of the community. But the question is whether it is about "prayer." For "prayer" the Scriptures have another word, *hithpalel* or *proseuchesthai*. If Jesus addresses the God of Israel (FATHER), then John uses a different word than if the disciples (should) do so. The Messiah "asks" (*erōtan*) for another "advocate," that is, he will "request" him. The disciples "ask for" (*aitein*), and the utterance of this plea is in connection with the keeping of the commandments, here and in 15:7 and 15:16. This is not about rewards that the disciples would have earned by keeping the words or commandments of the Messiah. Rather, the point is that they then ask for exactly what meets the commandment of solidarity and the being with the Messiah. But this proves to be extremely problematic and is discussed in detail in the passage 16:23-28.

What comes now has given rise to a wealth of speculation as well as useless and therefore unscientific discussions: Who is the figure that John calls *paraklētos*, the Paraclete? We translate "advocate" according to his function in the court (16:7 ff.).

The word can mean "comforter" because it comes from *parakalein*; this verb originally meant "to summon" and in a derivative sense "to comfort, to encourage." It

derives from the Hebrew root *nacham*. In this sense, it is often used in the apostolic and evangelical writings, as is the related word *paraklēsis*, “comfort, encouragement.” The word group is missing in John, except for the word *paraklētos*, which in turn is missing in all other writings of both testaments. The word is found only in John and only if the world order is spoken of.

And John explains it: It is “the inspiration of fidelity,” which “the world order cannot accept or adopt.” One—the inspiration of fidelity—excludes the other—the world order of deceit—because the latter neither considers nor recognizes the former (fidelity is not an element of politics, not until today), and recognizing is *to act following knowledge* in the Scriptures.

Whatever or whoever the “Paraclete” might be, it or he is, in any case, the absolute contradiction to what is common practice in the world order of Rome. That is why this inspiration stays continuously with the disciples. *Paraclete* is what makes fidelity the center of all political practice. You don’t have to picture it as a “figure”; in this tradition, imagination (“images”) is impossible. If you know that fidelity is downright an apolitical category to Rome (Pilate, “What is fidelity?” 18:38) and that *paraklētos* or *pneuma* has just fidelity (*alētheia*) as its essence, then you know enough. The *advocate*, the *inspiration of fidelity*, is given when the commandment of solidarity with the Messiah and with one another is kept. The place of solidarity, the Messianic community, is inspired *by fidelity* and is thus the counterdraft to the ruling world order.

A last element of the answer to Philipp is the estimation of the absence of the Messiah. It does not mean that the Messianic community is orphaned. To Rome, this absence means that the Messiah no longer plays a political role; Rome has executed him, and the problem is dealt with. To this day, problems are settled by force in the Roman manner. Still “a little” (*mikron*), and the world order will no longer consider the Messiah (*theōrei*), but the disciples will consider him. The word *mikron*, which already sounded in 13:33, will still prove to be a huge problem, 16:16 ff.

Here the disciples are assured, “I live and you will live.” To consider the Messiah means, “I with my FATHER, you with me, and I with you,” that is the recognition. The recognition is threefold,

He who keeps the commandments and keeps them,
it is he who is in solidarity with me. (1)

Who is in solidarity with me,
he will experience solidarity through my FATHER. (2)

Consequently:

And I will be in solidarity with him, (3)
I will prove myself real to him.

The paraphrase for *emphanizein* is “to prove oneself real.”⁴³⁷ The Messiah is real for those who trust him, are in solidarity with him, and keep his commandment; he determines the lives of those who trust him. Beautiful. But is this more than an imagination of the group, more than a hallucination of people who have maneuvered themselves into isolation? It doesn’t change the course of the world order. Nothing more or less than the reality of the Messiah and the sense of reality of the Messianic community is at stake.

13.2.3 The Third Objection: “Why are you real to us and not to the world order?”, 14:22-31

- 14:22 Judas—not the Iscariot—says to him,
“Lord, what has happened,
that you are about to make yourself known to us
but not to the world order?”
- 14:23 Jesus answered and said to him,
“If someone is in solidarity with me,
he will keep my word,
and my FATHER will be in solidarity with him;
to him, we will come.
We will make ourselves a place of permanence with him.”⁴³⁸
- 14:24 He who is not in solidarity with me is not keeping my words.
And the word you are hearing is not mine
but of the ONE who sent me, the FATHER.
- 14:25 These things I have spoken to you while I am staying with you.
- 14:26 But the advocate, the inspiration of sanctification,
which the FATHER will send in my name,
he will teach you everything,
he will remind you of everything I have said to you.
- 14:27 Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you,
not as the world order gives, I give you.⁴³⁹

437 [To the translation and its reasoning, see the previous note on 14:21.]

438 A PLACE OF PERMANENCE: *Monē*, Hebrew *maqom*, “location.” The phrase means that the one who demonstrates his solidarity with the Messiah by keeping his word becomes *meqom ’elohim*, “location of God,” a similar thought we find in 1 John 4:12, “If we are in solidarity with one another, God remains steadfast (*menei—monē!*) with us.” A minority of the manuscripts have changed the medium *poiēsometha* to Active: *poiēsōmen*. Obviously, the medium was not understood, i.e. it was not understood how God and his Messiah could make *themselves* a place. The faithful one (*pisteuōn*) is the place of God. “Make our home with him” has the aftertaste of “move in with him,” which is silly.

439 The world order dictates the conditions of surrender. The fulfillment of these conditions is the price for the world order to refrain from the use of further military force. It is this con-

May your heart not be shaken nor timid.
 14:28 You heard that I said to you,
 ‘I am going and I am coming to you.’
 If you were in solidarity with me,
 you ought to be glad
 that I am going to the FATHER,
 because the FATHER is greater than I.
 14:29 And now I have said it to you before it happens
 so that when it does happen, you will trust.
 14:30 Not much more will I speak to you,
 for the ruler of the world order is coming.⁴⁴⁰
 With me, he has no concern at all,⁴⁴¹
 14:31 however, that the world may know
 that I am in solidarity with the FATHER,
 that I am doing as the FATHER has commanded me.
 Get up! Let us leave from here!

The reality of the Messiah is the solidarity of the disciples. Judas non-Iscaiot—the disciple, one of the Lord’s brothers⁴⁴²—understands this as a lack of sense of reality, “So why not real to the world order?” This objection corresponds to the request of the brothers of Jesus to publicly manifest himself as the Messiah, 7:4, “Show yourself to the world order (*phanerōson seauton tō kosmō*).” Then the problem would be solved. But the Messiah has answered with his hiddenness.

dition that—after the year 70—it calls “peace.”

440 RULER OF THE WORLD ORDER: The Emperor of Rome, see note to 12:31.

441 HAS NO CONCERN AT ALL: *Ouk echei ouden*, literally, “has nothing.” Some manuscripts do not understand the verb *echein*; they add “in me, he finds nothing” or “in me, he has nothing to find.” The Greek verb has no equivalent in the Semitic languages. John uses it for any kind of assignment between subject and object, in this case, Caesar (*archōn*) and nothing (*ouden*). The “nothing” is assigned to Caesar, an Aramaic figure of speech, to indicate an absolute contradiction, for example, “He and I are connected only by the nothing,” so there is no relationship at all. This must be made clear in the translation. The German expression “mit jemandem etwas haben” (“to have something with someone”) reflects an intense relationship, “mit mir hat er nichts” (literally, “with me, he has nothing”) is, therefore, a “zero relationship.”

[Instead of the literal translation of the German paraphrase just mentioned, “has no concern at all” seems more appropriate to me.]

442 [TV identifies this Judas as a brother of Jesus because of his attitude, which corresponds to Jesus’ brothers in 7:2-10. He might also think of Jude 1, where *Jude* (written in Greek as *Ioudas*) presents himself as “a slave of Jesus the Messiah and a brother of James”—the latter of which is known as the Brother of the Lord.]

This problem is extremely urgent in all Messianic circles. Since the Messiah does not prove to be the decisive reality toward Rome, the confession of Jesus ben Joseph as the Messiah of Israel is completely hollow and dangerous for Rabbinical Judaism. His disciples might be tempted to prove the reality of the Messiah to Rome with a weapon in their hand, through renewed military but completely hopeless adventures. Therefore this kind of messianism should be fought.

Jesus' answer has two parts. First, the summary of the teaching, 14:23-26; then the alternative: what peace does Rome bring, what peace does the Messiah bring, 14:27-31?

The summary sharpens some things. Solidarity with the Messiah is the keeping of his commandments, and the commandments coincide with the one, new commandment. Then the God of Israel shows his solidarity with Israel (*agapēsei*); here, *agapē* is in substance congruent with *ʾemeth*, "fidelity." This solidarity or fidelity is expressed in the fact that "we come to him and make ourselves with him a place of permanence (*monē*)." Here the announcement of 14:2 is specified, and it becomes finally clear that it is not a matter of a "dwelling in heaven." The direction is, if you like, from top to bottom and not from bottom to top. We do not get into heaven; if at all, heaven comes to us.

God and the Messiah become real through his indwelling in the solidary human.⁴⁴³ God and the Messiah become unreal if there is no solidarity. Thus Jesus explains the verb *emphanizein* to Judas, "to become real."

This is the sum of what the Messiah said, "while he was staying with them." This is the persistent "teaching of the Messiah,"⁴⁴⁴ it must remain in living "memory," and this is the work of that "advocate" who here takes on the shape of a teacher: Only the "inspiration of sanctification" can teach the disciples all that the Messiah has said.

For the advocate, *paraklētos*, *advocatus*, works from God as "inspiration of fidelity," *pneuma tēs alētheias*, and works on people as "inspiration of/for holiness," *pneuma hagion*. In the Scriptures, "holy" is following God, Leviticus 20:7-8, that is, not a religious category, but a category of political practice, the practical implementation of the Torah.

This inspiration means "to remind." Without solidarity, there is no living memory of the Messiah, and without this living memory of the Messiah, there can be no solidarity in the long run. The Messianic *reality*, that which manifests itself as *real*, is the coherence of the group. There, and only there, is God, is the Messiah, *real*.

John's view of reality is a very condensed one. You get the impression that Judas non-Iscaiot, with his very legitimate question, gets fobbed off by a very shortened

443 With the strange word *monē* John may indicate what later in Judaism and, especially, in its mysticism will be called *Shechina*, indwelling in the scattered Jewish people.

444 *Genitivus subjectivus*, thus no Christology, teaching about the Messiah, *Genitivus objectivus*!

answer. This will have far-reaching consequences in the history of Christianity during the modern age—especially in pietism. The *life of the age to come* will become the individual *eternal life* beyond earthly places and times. But in John, the indwelling of God in the Messianic community is not the inner experience of a small circle but also a challenge to the world order.

The second part of Jesus' answer is the challenge and refers to the absolute contradiction between the *pax Romana* and the *pax Messianica*. Peace is a desire because almost never was peace, and what was considered as peace was shabby, "greasy" (Ezekiel 13:10, 16!) violence, on a large and small scale, Jeremiah 6:13-14,

From small to large,
as profit takers, they profit;
from prophet to priest:
all their activity is a lie.
Allegedly they heal the rift through the people
and recklessly, they say:
"Peace, peace!"
But there is no peace.⁴⁴⁵

But this is *pax Messianica*, Psalm 72,

God, give your right to the king,
your truthfulness to the king's son.
He shall judge your people truthfully,
over your oppressed ones with justice.
Then the mountains bring peace to the people,
and the hills in truthfulness.
He shall create justice for the oppressed of the people,
liberate the needy,
crush the oppressor.
Awe for you remains as long as the sun,
and the moon, generation by generation.
He may descend like rain on the meadow,
like dew trickle to the earth:
in his days the true ones flourish
and peace increases until there is no more moon . . .

Peace, truth, and justice belong indissolubly together in this Grand Narrative. Where there is no justice for the oppressed, where the exploiter flourishes, there is no peace. Peace happens to a people to whom justice happens, and justice is liberation from the oppressor, liberation from need. This *pax Messianica* is meant.

445 Very similar to Ezekiel 13:1-16.

But where Rome appears, interferes in civil wars like the civil war of the Judeans in the province of Judea, there it does not heal a rift in the people, but it destroys a part of the people and grinds down the house of its God. *Pax Romana* is war by other means, but no peace. Such “healing” always leads to wars—until today!

Why they should rejoice that he is going away remains unanswered here. That the Father is greater than the Messiah is no great consolation, since the presence of the Messiah is supposed to be the proof of the faithfulness of the God of Israel. We must wait for the reasoning 16:5 ff.

The Messiah has to say all this before the hour of probation comes; it comes when the “ruler of the world order” comes.⁴⁴⁶

What the Messiah has to do here serves to make the world order recognize that nothing and no one can drive a wedge between the Messiah and the God of Israel; they are to recognize “that I am in solidarity with the FATHER.” He must give himself into the hands of this ruler (literally, because Pilate is the representative of this ruler, the priests call him “friend of Caesar,” 19:12). Jesus will testify before him that there can be no mediation between the pacification by Rome and the peace of the Messiah: Between Caesar and the Messiah, there is only the connection of nothing, “With me, he has nothing [no concern at all],” it says. There is no mediation, no third, just “nothing,” *ouden*. The contradiction is absolute.

The departure of the Messiah is the “commandment of the FATHER,” because, under the real circumstances created by Rome, defeat is the only possibility of victory. On the cross, the world order is put in the wrong once and for all. This is the final unmasking of Rome. Unmasking is not the victory that we actually want, but Rome is in any case no longer *fate*, and there is no longer any reason for *resignation*. “Get up, let’s leave from here,” says Jesus.

Is everything clear? Nothing is clear. Jesus has to explain everything again before they can really “leave from here.”

13.3. The Parable of the Vine. Solidarity, 15,1-17

15:1 “I am the faithful vine,⁴⁴⁷
and my FATHER is the vintner.⁴⁴⁸

446 [TV also explains here why in the German version he says “Fuehrer” instead of “ruler” of the world order:] For a long time, we have hesitated to translate *archōn* as “Führer.” But to John, Caesar is a “murderer of humans” (8:44), and the soiled word “Führer” is appropriate.

447 I AM: Here, *egō eimi* must be translated as a simple predicate sentence because Jesus is different from the FATHER: I the vine, HE, WHO WILL BE THERE, the FATHER, the vintner.

448 VINTNER: The *georgos* in 15:1, second line, must not be translated here as “farmer” but as “vintner.”

15:2 Every branch⁴⁴⁹ in me bearing no fruit he takes away,
and every one, bearing fruit, he cleanses, so that it may bear more fruit.

15:3 Already, you are clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.

15:4 Stay united with me,⁴⁵⁰ as I with you.⁴⁵¹
As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself,
if it does not stay united with the vine,
so you can't if you do not stay united with me.

15:5 I am the vine, you are the branches.
The one staying united with me and I with him,
he is bearing much fruit.⁴⁵²
Apart from me, you can't do anything.

15:6 If someone does not stay united with me,
he will be thrown out like a branch and dries up.
Such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

15:7 If you are staying united with me,
and my words may be staying firmly in you,
ask for whatever you want,
and it will happen for you.

15:8 By this, my Father is honored
that you may bear much fruit
and become my disciples.

15:9 Just as the FATHER was in solidarity with me,
so I was in solidarity with you.
Stay firmly with my solidarity.

449 [TV translates *klēma* into German as "Traube," "grape," but only in v.2. As in vv.4-6, he takes "Rebe," "[vine] branch," I translate *klēma* as "branch" here as well. His following remark can be related to my translation as well:]

GRAPE: *Klēma*, Hebrew *qatzir*, means the inflorescence of the grapevine. The disciples—sprout for the Israel of the Messiah—are the fruit-bearing part of the vine; without the Messiah (the plant) all their efforts for Israel are *fruitless*. The vine is Israel, it is also the Messiah. This collective interpretation of an individual figure (see Isaiah 53!, the tortured and killed slave is—as an outstanding member of the people—Israel itself!) comes from Daniel 7:27, where the messenger Daniel collectively interprets the *bar enosh* as "the people of the saints of the Most High."

450 STAY UNITED: *Menōn* has the connotation of "to stand firm" and "to stay firmly united"; see note to 1:32.

451 AS I WITH YOU: *Kagō en hymin*. The *kai* in *kagō* has, as so often in John, a meaning that goes beyond the mere "and."

452 [TV translates *karpon polyn* into German as "viele Früchte," "many fruits," explaining:] MANY FRUITS: In the original singular: *karpon polyn*. In Semitic languages, the singular often has a collective meaning similar to our plural.
[But in the English language "to bear fruit" is the appropriate translation, as well, so I take "much fruit."]

15:10 If you keep my commandments,
you will stay firmly with my solidarity,
as I have kept my FATHER's commandments
and am staying firmly with HIS solidarity.

15:11 This I have spoken to you
so that my joy may be with you,
and your joy will be fulfilled.

15:12 This is my commandment:
that you are in solidarity with each other
as I was solidarizing with you.

15:13 No one has greater solidarity
than someone putting in his soul for his friends.

15:14 You are my friends
if you do what I command you.

15:15 I no longer call you slaves,
because a slave does not know what his master is doing.
You, I have called friends,
because everything I heard from my FATHER
I made known to you.

15:16 Not you did choose me,
but I chose you,
put you to go and bear fruit,
fruit that will last,
so that whatever you ask for from the FATHER in my name,
he may give you.

15:17 This is what I command you:
that you are in solidarity with each other.

Here the "farewell speech" was finished. Obviously, the passage John 13-14 did not dispel the concerns of the group. John 15-16 summarizes another (phase of) discussion in the group. At first, this is done in a long monologue, 15:1-16:15, but then John resumes the form of dialogue characteristic of him, 16:16-17:1a. The same themes from Chapters 13 and 14 are discussed again.

This discussion starts with a classic Israelite metaphor, the vine. Three texts are in the background of the first verses of this section, 1-7.

The first one is Isaiah 5:1 ff.,

I want to sing for my friend,
the chant of my friend's vineyard.
My friend had a vineyard,
on a fatty slope.

He dug it up, freed it from stones,
 planted it with red vines (*soreq*, *ampelos sorēch*),
 built a watchtower in the middle of it,
 hit a wine press pit from him.
 He hoped for a grape yield,
 it carried only rotten fruit.

Then Jeremiah 2:21,

I myself have planted you as a red vine (*soreq*),
 all faithful seed.
 How you have transformed yourself to me,
 wrong, foreign vine?

In the Greek version,

I myself have planted you,
 fruit-bearing vine (*ampelos*), very faithful.
 How have you turned to bitterness,
 you, foreign vine (*ampelos*)?

Then the song “Shepherd of Israel, listen” (Psalm 80). In this song, Israel is compared to a vine that God brought up from Egypt into the land, “its root rooted in . . . its branches stretched out to the sea.” The keywords of our parable John 15:1-2 (*ampelos*, “vine,” and *klēmata*, “branches, flowering twigs”) are also found in this song. The theme of the song is the decline of Israel, which has become the prey of foreign peoples. The refrain of the song (four times, v.4, 8, 15, 20) reads,

God: let us return,
 let your face shine,
 we will be liberated.

The texts see Israel as a vineyard where the vines bear fruit: Israel’s hoped-for yield is the legal order of its God. But in fact, Israel is the foreign vine that bears no fruit, and if it does, then only *be’ushim*, “rotten fruit.” To the desires for the restoration of Israel, the Messiah answers, “I AM—the faithful vine.” In Psalm 80, of all places, there is talk of a *ben ’adam* (the Hebrew form of the Aramaic *bar enosh*), v.18-19,

Let your hand be over the man of your right hand,
 over the Human, you made strong for yourself.
 Never again we want to turn away from you,
 let us live, who are called by Your name.

This background makes us understand what is said in this parable. The Messiah of Israel is that *bar enosh*, Human, and so Israel itself, Daniel 7:27. He is the absolute opposite of that deceptive Israel, that “wrong, foreign vine.” To describe Israel as a collective, the metaphor “vine” is used. The vine is the Messiah, the members of the

group are the flowering branches, the grapes. They must be provided for so that the grapes bear fruit. This is not the work of the Messiah, but the vintner, the God of Israel. The work of God is “to cleanse.” Through the word (*logos, davar*) of the Messiah the disciples are clean, 15:3, that is, through the word, the disciples “already” fulfill that condition of purity which has always been fulfilled for each member of the people to participate in the community.

This is based on the intense connection with the Messiah, “Stay firmly with me, as I with you.”⁴⁵³ The Messianic vision is the basic condition for a truthful life. If you are not really confident that the prevailing conditions, namely the “world order,” are not unchangeable, but that “life in the age to come” (*zōē aiōnios*) is a real perspective for the life of people on earth, you cannot do anything: For “separated from me (*chōris emou*) you can do nothing.” Otherwise, all doing is useless, barren, unfruitful.

To stay united with the Messiah is to stay united with his spoken words (*rhēmata*). And if you are firmly united with the Messiah, every prayer will be heard—admittedly based on this union—because the words dictate, so to say, what is to be asked for. These words are—so we shall hear—commandments.

The second part of this section (vv.8-17) is structured according to strict logic. First, however, it is stated what “to honor God” means to John. “To be a disciple of this Messiah” and “to be fruitful” is the Johannine definition of a truthful life that is worth living. The basic figure is always: *The Father is in solidarity with me, I with you, you with each other*. So that this figure may become real, a basic condition is formulated, “If you keep my commandments, then you will stay firmly in my solidarity.” To keep the commandments is, therefore, the union with the Messiah and thus a condition for fertility. The Messiah’s solidarity with the God of Israel is the keeping of his commandments. Therefore, what is required of the disciples is strict *imitatio Christi*, following the Messiah.

Before we hear the exact content of the commandments, the sentence about joy resounds. Four times we hear in the Gospel, “Joy is fulfilled.” Once it is said by John, three times by the disciples. It is both the joy *of* the Messiah and *about* the Messiah being fulfilled (3:29; 15:11; 17:13). John says that the bridegroom’s friend “rejoices with joy” when he hears the bridegroom’s voice; “this my joy is therefore fulfilled: He must increase, I must decrease,” 3:29. Twice the joy of the Messiah is fulfilled in the disciples, 15:11 and 17:13; once the joy of the disciples is fulfilled like the joy of a woman who has given birth to her child, 16:24. In the parable of the vine and its interpretation, joy is fulfilled through fruitfulness in the work of solidarity. It is about the fruitfulness (the works!) of the Messiah himself, which becomes real in the disci-

453 To this translation of the verb *menein*, “to stay,” see the note on 1:32.

ples. In the case of John, fertility had to decrease so that the Messianic fruitfulness could be all the more evident.⁴⁵⁴

“This is my commandment: that you are in solidarity with each other.” For the group around John, which is going through a most difficult phase—the people are running away from it, 6:60 ff., they are quarreling and hereticizing each other, 1 John 2:18; 2 John 10; 3 John 9—the group’s coherence is vital. Solidarity is entirely focused on the group itself. As I said before, there is no trace of universal charity or philanthropy.

The move into sectarianism rubs off on Jesus himself: No one has greater solidarity than putting in his soul for his friends, he says, calling the disciples “friends” and no longer slaves. This should be compared with Romans 5:7 ff., where this commitment in its most extreme form—the giving of one’s life—is not for the sake of friends but for the sake of those who have gone astray! The friendship of this tiny circle with the Messiah is based on the fact that Jesus “made known to them what he had heard from his FATHER.” They are the preferred—and at first the only—addressees of this announcement.

John himself senses that despite all friendship the proportions must remain clear. Not the disciples chose the Messiah, but the Messiah chose the disciples, stating the purpose of this election, “To bear fruit = to be in solidarity with one another.” We will have to come back to the election at the discussion of 15:19. The friendship of the Messiah has the effect that he will obtain the answer of the FATHER to their prayer. Friendship is a gift of the Messiah; there is no legal title for it.

Once again we draw attention to the very narrowly defined area in which solidarity is effective. We can hardly imagine it. To us, the disciples are simply the placeholders for all Christians. Since Christianity has at times been presented as congruent with the whole of humankind, solidarity among the few friends becomes a general virtue. But this makes it impossible to understand our text correctly. We have called solidarity a combat term and interpreted it analogously to the solidarity in the labor movement of the 19th and 20th centuries.⁴⁵⁵ In the sectarian milieu of the Gospel of John and the Letters of John, *agapē* was primarily an in-group virtue. Only when the sect broke through its isolation and John became a church text, did the Johannine solidarity become politically fruitful. Admittedly, in church use, solidarity, as a Messianic virtue par excellence, became general human love and thus lost its political power. It *was* once coherence in the fight against the world order of death. It *became* the general philanthropy sauce that was poured out over the world order of death. Such moralization is foreign to John.

454 See the interpretation of John 3:22 ff. above.

455 In my interpretation of the First Epistle of John, Ton Veerkamp, *Weltordnung und Solidarität oder Dekonstruktion christlicher Theologie. Auslegung und Kommentar* (= Texte & Kontexte 71/72 (1996)), 35ff.

13.4. The Fight, 15:18-25

15:18 If the world order is fighting you with hatred
recognize that it has fought me as the first of you.

15:19 If you were of the world order
the world order would be friendly to its own.
Because you are not of the world order
but I have chosen you out of the world order,
therefore, the world order is fighting you with hatred.

15:20 Remember the word that I said you,
'A slave is not greater than his master.'
If they persecuted me, they will persecute you too;⁴⁵⁶
if they kept my word, they will keep yours too.

15:21 But they will do all this to you on account of my name
because they have no knowledge of the ONE who sent me.

15:22 If I had not come, had not spoken to them,
they would not have gone astray.
Now, they have no pretext⁴⁵⁷ for their aberration.

15:23 The one fighting me with hatred
is hating my FATHER too.

15:24 If I had not done the works among them
which no one else did,
they would not be in their aberration.
Now, they have seen them
and have fought with hatred both me and my FATHER.

15:25 But that the word might be fulfilled which is written in their Torah:
*They hated me for no reason at all.*⁴⁵⁸

In this passage, mention is made of the world order (15:18-19) and the synagogue (15:20-25; 16:1-4). The two verses 15:26-27 anticipate the next section.

456 IF THEY PERSECUTED ME: Here, the subject changes. It is clear from the context that the passage 15:20-16:4 does not refer to the world order but to Rabbinical Judaism.

457 PRETEXT: *Prōphasis*. The word is rare in the LXX; it stands for the Aramaic *ʿillah* (in the Greek Bible translation of Theodotion twice in Daniel 6:5-6). There, certain men bring "false accusations" against Daniel before King Darius. In Mark 12:40 par. the scribes or Perushim eat the houses of widows under the pretext—*prophasei*—of long prayers. "Excuse" would be too weak. This is about pretexts: They act as if the Messiah had never spoken to them.

458 HATED ME . . . FOR NO REASON AT ALL: Hebrew *sonʾay chinnam*; see Psalms 35:19; 69:5. Psalm 69 was already quoted in John 2:17. Both psalms are songs of those who, in the days of the Maccabean revolution, were persecuted for their "zeal for your house." Nevertheless, to John, it is a word not from his Torah, but from "their" Torah!

The keyword for the attitude of the world order toward the Messianic community is *misein*, “to hate.”⁴⁵⁹ Since this is a political process, it is advisable to write “to fight with hate.” “To hate” alone would describe the emotion. The world order, Rome, can fight Messianism and does so consequently but dispassionately because it is vastly superior to its enemies. To mobilize its subjects for the dispassionate fight against the political enemies, they must be made to feel the passion of hatred. The hatred of the commissioners themselves is unemotional, completely rational, and calculated; the hatred of the performers is blind, must be downright blind so that the threshold of violence which is present in every living being can be crossed.

In the Psalms, the group of words “to hate, hater, hate” occurs very often. Here it is about more than envy, weariness, and jealousy between individual people; it is always about the enemies of Israel, to whom the “I” of the Psalms—Torah-abiding Israel—is almost hopelessly inferior. You can get an idea of this if you allow the following words to work on yourself, Psalm 139:21-22,

Your enemies, ETERNAL,
shouldn't I hate them?
Who rebel against you,
Shouldn't they disgust me?
With all my hatred, I hate them,
enemies they have become to me.

The reason for this “hate” is political enmity. Why does Rome treat the disciples as political enemies? Because it hated the Messiah “as the first,” because it had to fight the one who stands for the radical alternative to Rome “in principle” (this is how the word *prōton* can be paraphrased here), with extreme cruelty, just “with hate.”

The world order maintains friendly relations (*ephilei*) with those who think and act according to its orders and principles, which here means “from the world order” (*ek tou kosmou*). Why do the disciples not come “from the world order”? This is not self-evident. Rather, it would be natural for the disciples to behave like most other people who have adapted to the world order. Adaptation is the normal thing, it is often a sheer survival strategy.

Unadapted behavior, even more so unadapted political behavior is something astonishing and life-endangering. They are not adapted, not because they chose it them-

459 The Hebrew word *sanaʿ*, “to hate,” covers a wide range of emotions; Lea “hates” Rachel because Lea “is hated” by Jacob and Rachel is his lover (Genesis 29:31; see the legal consequences for this case: Deuteronomy 21:15 ff.). The brothers “hate” Joseph; he is more than his brothers the beloved child of Jacob, Genesis 37:4 ff. The basic emotion here is envy and jealousy. Amnon raped Tamar, his half-sister; after this brutal and inhuman act “he hated her with very great hatred, greater was the hatred with which he hated her than the love with which he loved her,” 2 Samuel 13:15. Such emotions are excluded from the interpretation of John 15:13 ff.

selves, but because they were “chosen out of the world order,” the same words *ek tou kosmou*, but with a completely different thrust. To be chosen means: they were unexpectedly confronted with an alternative that they could not have considered of their own accord.

In the Scriptures, the chosen one is Israel, *bechiri*, “my chosen one,” Isaiah 43:20; 45:4; 65:15, etc. The verb “to choose,” *bachar*, is more frequently used in Deuteronomy and the Book of Isaiah (especially Isaiah 40-66). Both books aim at an unexpected new beginning, Isaiah 43:22; 44:1,

And not you called on me, Jacob,
would you have toiled for me, Israel?

. . .

But now listen, Jacob, my servant,
Israel: I choose it!

Or Deuteronomy 7:7-8,

Not because you are more than all nations
the NAME has attached itself to you,
he has chosen you,
because you are the least of all nations.
No, because he loved you . . .

The election is a sovereign act, like love; there are no legal claims and no rational reasons. You do not justify love. Therefore, *agapan* is to be translated here as “to love.” Only when he had “made a covenant with his chosen one” (Psalm 89:4), there are legal titles.

The election of the disciples is told by John in 1:37-51. Above all Nathanael makes that clear. He did not call for the Messiah, did not strive for a Messiah, rather, he says, nothing good can come from Nazareth. He sees and hears what he did not expect at all. A completely new political perspective can completely tear a human out of the course of events, he can begin a completely different life overnight; John’s formulation—“to be chosen out of the world order”—is thus very precise.⁴⁶⁰ If the thought *As the Lord, so the slave* in 13:16 could perhaps demand a mere moral *imitatio Christi*, in 15:20 a common political fate is undoubtedly meant: common struggle, common fate: *to be persecuted, to be hated*.

460 Like Messianism affected these Galileans, the workers’ movement affected not a few bourgeois artists around 1900. The workers’ movement had a messianic effect on them, as Georg Lukács writes in “Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein. Studien über marxistische Dialektik,” Berlin/Neuwied 1970, 5 ff. Many poems by the radical leftist opponent of Lenin, Herman Gorter, froth with messianic enthusiasm; the Russian poetry of the revolutionary period 1917-1930 also had messianic features. The workers’ movement had, so to speak, “chosen” these poets, but they had not chosen the workers’ movement.

But now the subject changes, from “world order” to “they.” There can be no doubt that by this plural Rabbinical Judaism is meant. They “persecute, fight with hate, exclude from the synagogue, do not recognize.” The object is “the disciples,” the reason “because of my name.” The object of hatred, John interprets, is not so much the disciples, but rather the Messiah and the God of Israel, the FATHER.

To John, this is incomprehensible. He cannot understand why the synagogue behaves in such a way toward the Messianic community, and he includes himself among those who were hated for no reason in Israel, Psalms 35:19; 69:5 or Psalm 109:1 ff.,

God of my praise, do not be silent.
For the mouth of the criminal
and the mouth of deceit
open themselves against me.
Speeches of hatred surround me,
are waging war against me for no reason (*dōrean, chinnam*)!
Instead of love, they are a *satan* for me,
me—a prayer!⁴⁶¹
They do evil to me instead of good,
hate instead of my love!

Without reason, *chinnam, dōrean*, in Israel is always a very serious reproach. Thus the Book of Job accuses the God of his fate of devouring the righteous without reason.

Rome’s hatred against the Messiah is not justified, but it is reasoned. This can be understood. The hatred of the synagogue is not rationally comprehensible to John. They have only “pretexts” (*prophaseis*) for this hateful fight. If the Messiah had not done these works, then . . . ! But now it says with the psalm, “Hatred instead of my love.”

If anywhere, it is clear here that a rational discussion of political paths between ecclesia and synagogue has not been conducted; both are irrational for each other. In the case of Rome, you might understand this; it has reasons to “fight the Messiah with hatred.” But the Judeans. They have seen the works, “which no one else has done.” They fight him and us, says John, “without reason.”

We are not biased here. We only have to state that with the accusation “without reason” a conversation, let alone an understanding, becomes impossible. We observe that John does not want to look for reasons among his opponents—and the search for reasons on both sides would be the basic condition for a conversation be-

461 The passage is unexplainable. The LXX saves itself from the affair and writes: “Their prayer has become a sin.” According to Job 24:12, instead of *thefilla* (“prayer, praise”), one could perhaps read *thifla* (“dirt”), which is possible in consonant writing. Then we would have, “me—the piece of dirt!”

tween both sides. John, for his part, assumes without any reason (!) that Rabbinical Judaism cannot have any reasons. He makes no effort at all here. The interpretation must state what is irrational in the vocable *chinnam*, *dōrean*, without being a party to this conflict.

13.5. The Farewell, 15:26-16:15

This passage is structured clearly and concisely:

“When he comes, the advocate” (*hotan elthē ho paraklētos*), 15:26;

“That one comes” (*kai elthōn ekeinos*), 16:8;

“When that one comes” (*hotan de elthē ekeinos*), 16:13.

13.5.1 “When he comes, the advocate, the inspiration of fidelity,” 15:26-16,7

- 15:26 When he comes, the advocate, whom I will send you from the FATHER —the inspiration of fidelity that is going out from the FATHER— that one will testify about me.
- 15:27 And you are testifying too because you are with me from the beginning.
- 16:1 These things I have spoken to you so that you do not stumble.⁴⁶²
- 16:2 They will make you people without a synagogue, in fact, the hour is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is doing a work of public service for God.⁴⁶³
- 16:3 And they will do so because they recognized neither the FATHER nor me.
- 16:4 But this I have spoken to you so that when their hour comes, you will remember what I said to you. I did not say to you this from the beginning, because I was with you.
- 16:5 Now I am going away to the ONE who sent me, and none of you is questioning me, ‘Where are you going?’
- 16:6 But because I have spoken these things to you, the pain has filled your heart.
- 16:7 According to fidelity I say to you,⁴⁶⁴

462 STUMBLE: *Scandalizesthai*, related to *skandalon*, Hebrew *mikhshol*, *moqesh*, “trap” or “stumbling block.” The word always has to do with false gods, see note to 6:61.

463 WORK OF PUBLIC SERVICE: *latreian prospherein*, Hebrew *‘avad*, *‘avoda*. The “service” which is meant here, is always the service in the sanctuary, and the sanctuary was the central political institution of the Judean state. Six times *latreia* appears in the LXX, three times in connection with *Pascha* (Exodus 12:25-26; 13:5). Politically, exclusion means that the excluded must get along without the protection of the officially recognized *ethnos* of the Judeans, which in the worst case could be life-threatening.

464 ACCORDING TO FIDELITY I SAY: *Tēn alētheian legō*. Of course, Jesus also tells the “truth,” he is not lying. But in the Gospel, *alētheia* has the scope of *’emeth*, of fidelity. Adverbial use of

it is to your advantage that I go away,
for if I wouldn't go away, the advocate will not come to you;
however, if I do go, I will send him to you.

The advocate (*paraklētos*) is sent by Jesus “from the Father.” He is the “inspiration of fidelity”; the adherence to God’s fidelity to Israel and to that exemplary concentration of Israel, which is the group (“the Twelve,” 6:67), inspires the disciples. The inspiration comes from the God of Israel; it does not bring a new world religion, but what is said and done with the word FATHER = God of Israel. This needs to be explained in more detail, and John does this in 16:13-15. Now it is about the testimony: That which comes from the God of Israel testifies of Jesus. And to this testimony, the disciples are enabled, “inspired.”

The word “beginning” plays a predominant role in the Gospel; “in the beginning” literally stands “at the beginning” of the text. John distinguishes between *ex archēs* and *ap’ archēs*. The first means “at the beginning” [in the temporal sense, 6:64; 16:4]; the second [in 15:27; cf. 8:44], it seems to me, is “from that beginning,” which is the *basic principle* of the Gospel (*en archē*, 1:1). The “principle” of the disciples is the Messiah, who is the “Word in the beginning,” the principle Word of the God of Israel. The testimony of the disciples is: Our principle is the Messianic epoch to come; this *inspires* our lives and aligns them because *we are—in principle—with the Messiah*. This is how the last words of 15:27 can be paraphrased. This also explains the present tense *este*, “you are.”

Rabbinical Judaism now makes the disciples people “without a synagogue” (*apōsynagōgōi*). This, says Jesus, should not be a trap or a stumbling block for them, the word *skandalon* means both. The threat of expulsion is supposed to make impossible both—as a trap—the Messianic perspective, and—as a stumbling block—the walking on the chosen Messianic path.

The synagogue was not a church, not a religious community. Rather, it was both a place of assembly and an organ of self-government, where the children of Israel were able to manage their affairs within the framework of the status of an ethnic group recognized by the Romans with their permitted cult (*religio licita*, *politeuma* in Alexandria). This meant not insignificant protection against administrative sanctions and arbitrariness by the authorities. The degree of autonomy varied according to time, city, and region.⁴⁶⁵ The synagogal status was something between full citizenship and the status of a stranger and an immigrant.

derivatives of the root *ʾaman* (*ʾaman*, *ʾomna*, *ʾumnam*, *ʾomnam*) is reproduced in the LXX with *ep’ alētheias*, *alētheia*. But you can also think of the Greek *accusativus respectus*.

465 For details see Shimon Applebaum, *The Legal Status of the Jewish Communities in the Diaspora*, in S. Safrai/M. Stern (Hgg.), *The Jewish People in the First Century* (CRINT I/1), Assen 1974, 420-463, here 420 ff.

But the status was precarious; there is ample evidence that privileges were confiscated and that there were expulsions and pogroms tolerated or even instigated by the authorities, such as the pogrom 37/38 in Alexandria. The synagogue, therefore, had to take care that groups with views hostile to the state did not gain the upper hand.

Apparently, the leadership of the synagogue at the place where John and his group were staying had concluded that they posed a danger to the synagogue. It was therefore their duty to expel such groups. The leadership of the synagogue, where John's group belonged, represented the line of Rabbinical Judaism, but John made no secret of his aversion to this line. The exclusion was a legitimate and politically understandable act of synagogal leadership. This is the reason we can see and must see, and therefore the word "without reason" (*chinnam, dōrean*) is misplaced. It is part of the self-evident duty of non-Jewish exegetes to understand the conflict also from the perspective of the synagogue and not to take sides with "Jesus and the apostles" from the outset. As I said, John does not even bother to search as to the reasons for the exclusion. Here we do not have to be disciples of John.

If, on the other hand, a group is expelled from the synagogue, it loses status and protection, and the members of that group must deal with the Roman authorities individually. This meant danger to life. The execution of anti-state elements was an act of political loyalty, and such loyalty at that time was *ipso facto* religious. Whoever took part in such persecution performed a "public service" (*latreia*) to that God who was the God of the State.

According to John's view, the followers of Rabbinical Judaism participated in the persecution. There is no evidence of this outside the Gospel. Messianists ("followers of a certain Chrestos," wrote the governor of Bithynia, Pliny, to Emperor Trajan around 110) were executed by Romans; members of the Judean ethnic group hardly had this possibility, but they had the possibility of denunciation. Whether they made use of this possibility, we cannot know. But the synagogue could not kill anyone. While there may have been murder and manslaughter among the opposing factions, this happened at best privately and certainly not as a "public service" (*latreia*).⁴⁶⁶

In any case, the political consequences of the exclusion explain the sharpness in which John turns against Rabbinical Judaism; and they also explain why John could not find rational reasons for their attitude among his opponents. "You seek to kill me," 7:19; 8:40; 8:59; 10:31; 11:53; 12:10, is the constant reproach. Given the persecution and murder of Messianists by Rome, which began early on, this accusation is not completely unfounded; the exclusion meant danger to the lives of the ones excluded. "One does not do such a thing; there are no justifiable reasons for an ex-

466 Luke reports an attempt by the synagogue in Corinth to turn the dispute with the Messianist Paul into a political affair. The governor Gallio declared himself not to be in charge and the affair ended in the presence of Gallio with a spanking for Sosthenes the head of the synagogue and Gallio did not care, Acts 18:12 ff. Such brawls were not *latreia*!

clusion which means danger to the life of the excluded,” thus the reproach of John can be paraphrased.

Admittedly, the political orientation of the Messianists is rationally comprehensible as well. If under Roman conditions the situation of the children of Israel is precarious inside and outside the country, then they must not hope to find niches in which they can survive, but then they need a completely different world. Paul says this no less clearly than John.⁴⁶⁷ The fact that there is no mediation between survival and world revolution makes the conflict tragic in the truest sense of the word. We can discover rational reasons on both sides from a safe distance of two millennia. But for those affected at the time, a rational confrontation was not possible.

To John, the synagogue places itself outside of Israel, “They recognize neither the FATHER nor me.” “Not recognizing God” is the revocation of the covenant that the God of Israel has made with the fathers and with the children of Israel. In contrast to the accusation of killing, this accusation that Rabbinical Judaism has given up its commitment to the God of Israel is definitely unfounded; we must contradict it. If Rabbinical Judaism is reproached with this, if this sets a precedent—and it has—Israel will be disinherited by Christianity. The accusation is strictly analogous to the accusation of atheism that the Roman authorities will put on the Christians. However, John had no power, and the accusation could be dismissed as ridiculous. But when Christianity became a state religion and the Christian church a state institution, the accusation had far-reaching political consequences.

Jesus warns his disciples, “But this I have spoken to you, that when *their* hour comes, you may remember what I have said to you.”⁴⁶⁸ The slave is no more than his master, and the master will be crucified as long as Rome is standing. *Ap’ archēs*, “from the beginning” (15:27), the disciples were with him; it became their life *principle* to be disciples of this Messiah. But what this means under the prevailing circumstances, the Messiah did not say at first, *ex archēs*, “at the beginning” (16:4). That the *principle* must prove itself in persecution and death, he has made clear to them

467 The Jewish philosopher Jakob Taubes said about Paul in 1987, “Not the Nomos, but the one who was crucified by the Nomos is the Emperor. That is outrageous, and against it, all little revolutionaries are nevertheless void! This revaluation turns Jewish-Roman-Hellenistic upper-class theology upside down, the whole mishmash of Hellenism” (Jakob Taubes, *Die politische Theologie des Paulus*, München 1993, 38).

468 In late antiquity, more than a few copyists of the text of John asked themselves how it was supposed to happen that *their* hour—namely, that of the words about persecution—was to come? His hour, yes—but *theirs*? So they omit the pronoun. These manuscripts were written after Constantine, after the persecutions, under the impression that their hour was over, the hour of those words announcing the persecution. The omission is more than a lapse. The omission says that the Messiah Christ, Messianism, Christianity, and the Church—which no longer suffer under the authority—have become authority themselves.

not until now. For the time being, the great priests and Pilate have the final say. This world order, their hour.

The Messiah is well aware of it, “Pain has filled your heart,” your heart is now only pain, only sheer despair: He goes, we stay; what remains for us, is anything coming at all? The question of Simon Peter, 13:36, and the skeptical question of Thomas, 14:5, are not even asked here, nor is Philipp’s justified request, “Show us the FATHER” (14:8), nor the other Judas’ call, “Show to the world order who has the power” (14:22): All this no longer comes up here, they know in the meantime what is in store for him and them; there is nothing else to be seen at all anymore but defeat, only defeat. The “going to the Father” is, after all, going to a terrible death.

Most commentators make it pretty easy for themselves. The saturated existence of professional theologians obstructs their view of a situation that could not have been more desperate: completely marginalized, with no prospect of a change for the better, let alone the life of the age to come. To them, and for countless others who follow them in a similar situation, this is the end, not the turning point. To the commentators, the disciples are always the stupid ones who do not have the perspective; to Bultmann, the pain was a “misunderstanding.”⁴⁶⁹

At this point, John gets even with a very specific messianism as a political strategy. The departure of the Messiah “is useful,” *sympherei*. This expression occurs again in John 11:50 (and its echo in 18:14). There the great priest presents the death of Jesus as politically useful. The political utility is meant here as well. As long as the people think that the Messiah in the fight against Rome will eliminate the problem that the world order represents for the people by a military victory, they will think in categories of the world order. The basic category must be fidelity; therefore Jesus says “according to fidelity” (*tēn alētheian*) that it is according to the policy of fidelity not to win a quick victory but to go away to his destiny, the FATHER. This path leads only through defeat. Here John is clearly directed against the messianism of the Zealots. In this way, you cannot conquer victorious Rome, and that advocate cannot come. What will happen when he comes?

13.5.2. “That one comes and accuses,” 16:8-12

16:8 That one comes and accuses the world order,
 because of the aberration,

469 Rudolf Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (KEK), Göttingen 1941, 430, “They do not ask where he is going—the answer would, of course, be: to the Father; and thus the riddle would be solved . . . The *lypē* of the disciples is based on a misunderstanding . . .” We wonder how Bultmann—when writing his famous comment, in 1941—could not see that the concentration camps were full of those to whom the unspeakably agonizing end was the only perspective, and how he could speak of “misunderstanding.”

because of the reliability,
because of the judgment.
16:9 Admittedly, as to the aberration,
that they are not trusting me;
16:10 but as to the reliability,
that I am going to the FATHER and you are no longer observing me;
16:11 and as to the judgment,
that the ruler of this world order has been judged.⁴⁷⁰
16:12 I still have many things to say to you,
but you cannot bear them now.

This advocate is the inspiration of fidelity, in other words: as long as the disciples remain faithful to the vision of God's fidelity to Israel, that is, to the vision of the Messiah, no one else can come and make them believe, for example, that with Rome it could be worse, that you should also see the positive things about Rome, that times have changed and that you should adapt to them.

Messiah *kata pneuma*, Messiah "according to inspiration," John says here in a manner analogous to Paul; what remains of the Messiah is the inspiration. Thus the Messiah *kata sarka*, Messiah "vulnerable in his human existence" is not abolished, because God's fidelity to Israel is attached to the Messiah "according to the flesh," says John in the preface, 1:14. You must therefore not forget the expression "according to the flesh" when it is here about the *pneuma*, the "Spirit."

For which purpose is the inspiration? Its task here is to "accuse." The word underlying the Greek *elenchein* is the Hebrew *yakhach*. It has a range of meanings from "to argue" and "to admonish" to "to accuse, to reject." Since it is about a court trial, "to accuse" is appropriate. Accused is the world order, in terms of aberration, reliability, and judgment. And all are on trial: Rabbinical Judaism, the Messianic community, and the political leadership of the world order.

470 The construction of vv.9-11 runs over the particles *men . . . de . . . de*, "admittedly . . . but . . . but." The aberration is the negation of reliability. The lack of trust in the Messiah makes it impossible to come to a final reckoning with the ruling world order; this is the one level of conflict. The other level is that the advocate represents the disciples at the court by acting as a prosecutor against the ruler of the world order. The disciples have to prove themselves as reliable because the Messiah can no longer be an element of their "theory" [because they can no longer "observe" him, *theōreite*] (because he is going away); the life of the Messianic community is the life without the Messiah and lives only from the inspiration of the fidelity that comes from the FATHER and the Messiah (vv.13-15), that is, from the Messianic inspiration. Finally, the Messiah's reliability will show itself in the annihilating judgment on Rome, see Daniel 7:12. Thus, you must not suppress these three particles in the translation. This reliability, in contrast to the aberration of the Perushim and in contrast to the judgment of the court on Rome, becomes, so to speak, "known to the court." It is the suspension of both levels of conflict.

First. Rabbinical Judaism did not trust the Messianic vision as embodied in Jesus. A strategy of the “safe place” without a Messianic vision would be a capitulation to *satan*, the enemy, to Rome. This is the basic political error, the *hamartia*, Hebrew *chata*⁷¹.

If we were to get into the habit of finally translating these words as “aberration, error, being misguided,” and not as “sin,” we would be rid of the moralistic stale that is associated with “sin.” *Hamartia* is the opposite of the path of life in the light, enlightened by the Messianic vision (11:9; 12:36). *Chata*⁷¹ is, therefore, the walk in the politically wrong direction.⁴⁷¹ Whether John or the rabbis are right is another matter, but in any case, this is what is meant by *hamartia*.

Second. The Messianic community, of course, has to be made responsible precisely for the fact that it does not prove itself, because it cannot explain to itself and its environment the departure of the Messiah and precisely this departure. It is the attitude that Luke also knows, “We had hoped so,” his disciples of Emmaus say. This Messianic community had a ready-made opinion about the Messiah, his political ways, his prospects, his certain victory.

John summarizes the political views of these people with the word *theōrein*. Almost all commentators consider this verb a synonym for *blepein*, “to see.” But it rather has to do with what we call “theory,” with the Messiah theory of the community. The departure, this very departure, did not actually exist to them. It would have thrown their common Messiah theory (Christian theologians call it *Christology*) overboard. Defeat as a victory? Heaven forbid! This is about the answer to Judas non-Is-carriot’s question: what is the effect of the Messiah on the world order?

The fact that their theories are still stuck to a certain image of the Messiah shows that they are not proving themselves as reliable, *ouketi theōreite me*, there is no place for me in your theory. In this Messianic community, there would be no *dikaio-synē*, “reliability.” The central importance of this matter is shown in section 16:16-22, where it is about “seeing” and “observing.” The inspiration of fidelity convicts the Messianic community of following the old Zealot ideas of the Messiah and, once these were shattered, no longer “considering” this Messiah (“me”).

Third. Rome, so the inspiration of fidelity makes clear, is already condemned, *kekri-tai*, perfect. The leader of this ruling world order has no future, the verdict is final, it corresponds exactly to the verdict on Antiochus IV, that tenth horn of the monster

471 The basic meaning of the Semitic root *chata*⁷¹ is “to err.” The Arabic verb *chatti’a* means “to make an error”; the causative form *achta’a* “to cause an error, to miss the goal”; the nouns *chit* or *chata* therefore “aberration, error.”

[However, I am reluctant to accept the radical alternative that TV presents here. Is *hamartia*, in fact, *only* political aberration and not *also* personal misconduct? Can we expect an ancient Jew to separate thus religion and politics, collective and individual?]

of political Hellenism (Daniel 7). Just the defeat—on the cross and in the year 70—confirms this. There is nothing good about this world order and its emperor.⁴⁷²

This is hard to explain to people, especially if this world order continues to prevail for the time being. More than four centuries later, the North African Augustine formulated a fundamental critique of Rome in the first ten books of his major work (*De Civitate Dei*, “The City of God,” written between 412 and 417).⁴⁷³ The inspiration of fidelity here means being convinced: It is over with Rome. Nothing was over with Rome; its great time, 98-180, is only just ahead. Therefore, the people around John are very skeptical.

Much could be said about it, Jesus says, but that will not work. Now, before the departure of Jesus and the arrival of the inspiration of fidelity, this would be hard to understand. Nor after; that is why John writes his Gospel with the farewell speeches and their desperate questions. This sentence probably means that the statements of the theologian “John” were still under debate. The text is a temporary result of ongoing discussions in the group. But the fundamentals are said here: To go astray means not to trust. To persevere, but without messianic-Zealotic illusions, means reliability. In any case, the final and decisive word has been spoken about Rome.

Nevertheless, John must turn against further opponents in the Messianic movement who think, “Now we are doing something different, something new.” Against this view, John sets his own theology, namely a *trinitarian* theology, as we shall see.

13.5.3 “When that one comes, the inspiration of fidelity,” 16:13-15

16:13 But when that one comes—the inspiration of fidelity—, it will lead you on the way with all fidelity.⁴⁷⁴

472 All comments consulted by me are seeing the “devil” here. Evidence is missing; where evidence is given, it does not refer to the “devil.” Barrett, too, on 12:31 sees that the Rabbinical *sar ha-‘olam* “does not refer to Satan.” Nevertheless, *archōn tou kosmou toutou* from 16:11 is the devil for him as well. Siegfried Schulz writes about 16:11, “It was not the Nazarene who was judged on the cross of Jerusalem, that is, of the world, and of Rome, but precisely in his death on the cross the supposedly judged and murdered man triumphed over the world and its actual ruler, the devil.” The simple reversal would have been: not Rome had judged the Messiah, but the Messiah had judged Rome. But for centuries the concept of the devil has been so firmly rusted in that everybody looks at that imaginary devil, but of course never at the factual “worldly authority,” the only true physical “devil.”

473 Aurelius Augustinus: *De Civitate Dei Libri XXII*. Recensuit et commentario critico instruxit Emanuel Hoffmann, CSEL Vol. XXXX, Wien 1899.

474 LEAD YOU ON THE WAY: See Psalm 25:5, also 143:10; often *hidrikh* and *nacha* (Greek *hodēgein*), “to lead on the way” and “to guide,” respectively, are associated with *limad*, “to teach.” The inspiration makes new the Torah and the path of life (*halakha*). It is the tale (*angelia*) of what is to come, and what is to come is the age that is coming from the Messiah Jesus. This inspiration from the God of Israel and the Messiah binds both testaments,

Not will it speak of itself
 but what it will hear it will speak,
 and it will announce to you what is to come.
 16:14 That one will honor me,
 and what it will receive from me, it will announce to you.
 16:15 (Everything the Father has is mine;
 this is why I said, what it receives from me, it will announce to you.)⁴⁷⁵

Now when “that one” (the advocate) comes, “the inspiration of fidelity,” it leads the group “along the way (*hodēgēsei*),” “with whole fidelity.” This fidelity, *’emeth*, *alētheia*, is the fidelity toward Israel. It leads the group on the Messianic path. It does not speak “of itself.” Its speech has the honor of the Messiah as its goal; that is what is to come. What belongs to the Messiah—and only that—it will receive and announce. And what belongs to the FATHER, to the God of Israel, is what belongs to the Messiah. The inspiration allows the disciples to speak only what it, the inspiration, itself hears: namely, the fidelity of God to Israel, and this fidelity, according to John, ultimately takes shape in the Messiah Jesus. *FATHER, Messiah, inspiration of fidelity, this is an unbreakable unity*. Here, and only here, is the root of what Christianity will call the *Trinity*.⁴⁷⁶

Tanakh and Gospel, indissolubly together. Church dogmatics means nothing else, “FATHER (Tanakh) and SON (Gospel), indissolubly united in the HOLY SPIRIT.”

475 This whole verse is omitted by P⁶⁶, Codex Sinaiticus, and some Coptic manuscripts. Of course, the verse is not a mere repetition. This inspiration brings nothing new; the Messiah does the work of the God of Israel; this inspiration incites nothing but the restoration of Israel. The verse serves as an explanation of 16:14 because some have seen early on with the “Holy Spirit” the announcement of a new “historical” epoch, a new religion. The unity of FATHER-MESSIAH-INSPIRATION is the unity of the whole way of Israel, from Genesis to Chronicles, and the walk of the Messianic community under the world order.

476 Under these circumstances, what is the unity of FATHER and SON and HOLY SPIRIT? That the Scriptures of Israel are not by chance the Scriptures of the Ecclesia is also what the Dogma of Nicaea tries to clarify. But the unity here is not an ontic unity carried out in the reality of the people of God, but an ontological unity, a unity formulated using the categories of being of the scientific language of late Hellenism. No Jew then or now—not even a heretical child of Israel from the days of the Emperors Domitian or Trajan—could ever have understood such a thing. Under the prevailing circumstances of compromise with the system of exploitation of the colonate of the new empire (Constantine and his successors), nothing better had been possible. Nicaea and Chalcedon were the best the Church could have decided not to cut the ribbon with Israel, even theoretically, for good. Practically, the result was a tritheism Father, Son, Holy Spirit, even tesseratheism, plus the Theotokos Mary, and Judaism had to go to the ghetto. The “Trinity” of the 1st letter of John, “Water, Blood, Inspiration” had a different point (Ton Veerkamp, *Weltordnung und Solidarität oder Dekonstruktion christlicher Theologie. Auslegung und Kommentar = Texte & Kontexte* 71/72 (1996), 109ff.).

This means: there is no new project of God. The Jewish philosopher Jakob Taubes sees the tendency toward a new project, and that is in the case of Paul,

The *foundation and legitimation of a new people of God* are pending for Paul. After two thousand years of Christianity, this does not seem very dramatic to you. But it is the most dramatic process that one can imagine in a Jewish soul.⁴⁷⁷

If Taubes interprets Paul correctly, then the verses John 16:13-15 are a direct polemic against Paul, at least against what the Messianic-Pauline communities are said to have made of Paul's theology. God's fidelity to all Israel presupposes the trust of this Israel in the Messiah, for "all that is of the FATHER is also mine." This unity is the main theme of the whole Gospel, the unity with the God of Israel. The project of a new people of God separates John from Paul. His horizon is *kol yisra'el*, the whole of Israel, including all heretics and such "bastards" as the people of Samaria. This separates him from Matthew and his *kol ha-goyim*, all peoples, even if they have to learn the whole Torah of the rabbis⁴⁷⁸ from him (Matthew 28:20). For this reason, the group around John later accepted Simon-Peter as their shepherd, i.e. the leadership of the Messianists of Judean origin, despite apparently serious reservations (John 21). Luke made a grandiose attempt to link both Messianic directions ("Peter" and "Paul") with each other. But nowhere the physical affiliation of Jesus to Israel ("flesh") has been emphasized as much as in the school of this John.

Inspiration does not speak of itself, it does not invent a new religion of the spirit. What it hears is the word of the Messiah, "this is what it will announce." The word of the Messiah is the word of the FATHER. So what the inspiration announces is the word of the FATHER, which is also the word of the Messiah. The one word is the God of Israel, the Messiah of Israel, the inspiration of the Messiah of Israel. This is the Johannine Trinity.

What therefore is to be announced and proclaimed is the unity of the FATHER, the Messiah, the inspiration of fidelity. The unity has its material accomplishment in Israel, sharpened in that Son of Israel, who as the Messiah of Israel is the exemplary concentration of his people. Certainly, this inspiration is presented as something that will "hear" and "announce what is to come," but its effect is like *pneuma*, like wind, like air to breathe, like the inspiration that comes from what is heard, and inspiration that comes from what is to come, the age to come (*erchomena*, *ha-ba'*, *ʿolam ha-ba'*, *ho aiōn ho mellōn*).

This is the vision: that all things go on toward their true and just destiny, that not everything remains as it is. What is to come is the *new*, but it is not the *other*, and certainly not the *new religion*. Given the ruling world order, *kosmos*, *ʿolam ha-ze*, the

477 Jakob Taubes, *Die politische Theologie des Paulus*, München 1993, 37.

478 Written Matthew 5:18, and oral, 23:2-3.

inspiration of fidelity to the covenant of Israel is the actual content of the announcement. Out of this inspiration of the God and of him who is “like God” (*hyios theou*) the disciples and their followers will live.⁴⁷⁹

And the task of the inspiration of fidelity is to “announce, announce, announce (*anangelein*) this,” three times! If we want to rethink the central tenet of Christianity, the dogma of the triune God, at all, then we must begin with this Johannine Trinity.

13.6. The Hour of the Woman, 16:16-28

16:16 A little while,⁴⁸⁰ and you are observing me no more,
a little while in contrast,⁴⁸¹ and you will see me.”

16:17 At this, some of his disciples said to one another,
“What is this that he says to us,
‘A little while, and you are observing me no more,
a little while in contrast, and you will see me’?
and,
‘I am going to the Father’?”

16:18 So they say,
“What is this ‘a little while’?
We don’t know what he’s speaking about.”

479 To us, the dispute between the Orthodox Churches and the Churches of the West about the *filioque* [“and the Son”] is bizarre. In John, the dispute has long since been settled. The inspiration (“Spirit”) proceeds from the Messiah (“Son”); “everything that belongs to the FATHER belongs to the Messiah,” consequently the inspiration proceeds from both: the Messiah and God. Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt shows the relevance of the old controversy very clearly in the second volume of his Christology, “According to Eastern theologian tradition, the Holy Spirit does not blow from the Son, not from Jesus to us, but as direct God-power from the eternal Father, which does not need any historical mediation.” (Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, *Das christliche Bekenntnis zu Jesus, dem Juden. Eine Christologie II*, München 1991, 49.) This is why the dispute with the Orthodox Churches is not without significance—especially not for the fight against anti-Judaism in their area.

480 A LITTLE WHILE: *Micron*, 13:33. The background is Isaiah 54, the song *rani*, *‘aqara*, “rejoice, barren woman.” Verses 54:7-8 have the same style as John 16:16, “For a little while (*rega‘ qaton*, LXX: *chronon mikron*) I have left you, with great mercy (*be-rachamim gedolim*) I will bring you back.”

481 IN CONTRAST: *Palin*, “back, again, in contrast,” 45 times in John. In the LXX the word stands for *shuv*, “return,” combined with a verbal form; but rarely for *hosif* with an infinitive or for *‘od*; the latter words give a continuity, “so, and so forth.” In this sense, John also uses the word, for instance, 1:35; 4:3, etc. In other cases it means “in contrast,” 6:15; 16:28; there the discontinuity is in the foreground. This also applies to 16:16 ff. The birth of a child, which puts an end to pain, is not a repetition and not a reunion, but something entirely new, therefore “in contrast.”

- 16:19 Jesus recognized that they wanted to question him,
so he said to them,
“About this, you are searching among yourselves because I said,
‘A little while, and you are observing me no more,
a little while in contrast, and you will see me.’?”
- 16:20 Amen, amen, I say to you:
You will weep and wail,
the world order will rejoice.
You will have pain,
but your pain will turn to joy.
- 16:21 The woman, when giving birth, has pain because her hour has come.
But when she has born the child,
she no longer remembers her tribulation,
because of the joy that a human was born into the world.
- 16:22 You also have indeed grief now,
but the more I will see you,
your heart will rejoice,
and no one will take your joy away from you.
- 16:23 And on that day, you will not question me anymore.
Amen, amen, I say to you:
Whatever you ask for from the FATHER in my name
he will give you.
- 16:24 Until now, you have asked for nothing in my name.
Ask, and you will receive,
so that your joy may be complete.
- 16:25 These things I have spoken to you in parables.
An hour is coming
when I will no longer speak to you in parables
but will openly announce about the Father.
- 16:26 On that day you will ask for in my name,
and I do not say to you that I will ask the FATHER on your behalf.
- 16:27 For the FATHER himself is a friend to you,
because you have become my friends⁴⁸²
and have trusted that I came on behalf of GOD.
- 16:28 I came on behalf of the FATHER and have come into the world order.
Again, I am leaving the world order and going to the FATHER.”

482 IS A FRIEND / HAVE BECOME MY FRIENDS: *Philei . . . pephilēkate*. Since the disciples are no longer *douloi*, “slaves,” but *philoī*, “friends” (Perfect, see 15:15), it is clear that God’s solidarity with Israel (*agapē*) toward the disciples as the core group of Israel is being raised to a new level, that of “friendship.”

But the problem of the disciples is somewhere else. For them, *time* is the problem. The Messiah has gone away, is the Messiah still coming, and when? John explains the sentence 14:19, “Still a little while and the world order no longer observes me, but you observe me, for I live and you will live.” So here the opposite is said, “A moment, and you—like the world order!—will no longer observe me.” He takes up again the accusation of 16:10—known to the court—, and begins with a saying that no one understands.

In former times, this passage was read in the Roman Catholic liturgy on the third Sunday after Easter, in the Latin of the Vulgate, *modicum et iam non videbitis me et iterum modicum et videbitis*, “Little, and you will see me no more; little again, and you will see me.” This is abracadabra, and this is also because the old Latin manuscripts and Hieronymus as well have translated badly here. They suppress the difference between *theōreite* and *opsesthe*, between “you will observe” and “you will see.”

Of course, the entire commentators’ guild is well informed. A sample, Ulrich Wilckens at 16:16 ff.,

The readers know, of course, the first time they read it, what is meant by the succession ‘in short’ and ‘again in short’: after Jesus’ death, his resurrection will follow on the third day (see 1 Corinthians 15:4) . . .⁴⁸³

John could have had Jesus say here, as in the Synoptics, “The Messiah is handed over, crucified, he dies. But after three days he will rise from the dead.” John does not do that. Easter and faith in Easter do not solve the problem of time. John rather has the saying of Jesus heard three times.

On the level of the story, the disciples naturally do not know what will happen in the coming hours and days. They are puzzling about the word. But why must John present a baffled, restlessly discussing circle of disciples? Apparently, on the level of the text, one or two generations later, the problem is acute. Rome has triumphed; it seems to have eternal life, not to see a Messiah far and wide.

After the dispute about the breaking down of the sanctuary in 2:22, it was said, “Now when he was raised from the dead, the disciples remembered what he had said, they trusted the Scriptures and the word that Jesus had said,” and, at the open tomb, “Admittedly, they did not yet have any knowledge of the Scriptural passage according to which he must rise from the dead,” 20:9. This means: the inability to understand the word “a little, etc.” has to do with a lack of understanding of the Scriptures (see 12:16)!

In Luke, Jesus has to explain the Scriptures to the disciples of Emmaus; “beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he translates to them what is (written) about him in the Scriptures,” 24:27. John has Jesus answer with a general announcement that pain will turn into joy.

483 Ulrich Wilckens, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (NTD Band 4), Göttingen 2000, 254.

It seems now that Jesus gives a nice example: A woman is in great pain at the birth of her child; when it is there, she forgets her pain. Ulrich Wilckens refers with Nestle-Aland to Isaiah 26:17. It is indeed about a situation similar to the situation of the disciples, “ETERNAL, our God, our Baals play the Lord, unlike you,” 26:13. But then it says, 26:17-18,

Like a pregnant woman about to give birth,
she writhes, screams in her labor pains.
This is how we have become,
away from your face, ETERNAL!
We were pregnant, we writhed,
wind, we have born.
Liberation was not done to the country;
the settlers of the earth did not fall . . .

As everybody can see, this reference does not explain our passage; in John 16 no wind is born, but a child! Jesus answers rather with a midrash of the song “Rejoice, barren woman (*rani ʿaqara*) Isaiah 54:1-17. In v.7-8, it says,

For a little moment (*chronon mikron, regaʿ qaton*) I left you,
with great mercy I brought you back;
With a flood of anger, I hid my face
a moment before you,
with agelong affection I have had mercy on you:
said the NAME, your redeemer.

And the song began like this, 54:1-2,

Rejoice, barren woman who did not bear,
break out in jubilation, rejoice who were never in labor,
more are the sons of the desolate
than the sons of the wife of Baal,
said the ETERNAL.

The group does not understand the Scriptures, so they cannot understand John/Jesus. What happens to Israel after the defeat against Rome and the destruction of the place [*maqom*, the temple of Jerusalem] is not the first time. The *mikron* of 16:16 is *the little moment* of Isaiah 54:7-8. The birth of the child of the woman of pain, who transforms her pain into joy, is the return of Israel from the desolation of the deportation to Babylon.

Now the decisive reversal takes place. The Messiah seems to have played out his role with the disciples through his defeat, they are no longer observing him, the Messianic vision is so overwhelmed by the massive fact of the power relations that Messiah becomes a silly vision (*ouketi me theōreite*). This will take “a little while” (*mikron*).

But then they will see. But they can only see when they *are seen*. Here, 16:22, the syntax changes: the subject becomes the object, and the object becomes the subject, “The more I will see you and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you.”

The disciples do not say farewell to the Messiah, but the Messiah says farewell to the disciples. The disciples will not (any longer) observe the Messiah, but the Messiah will see *them*, and then they will see *him* as the *Lord* (*kyrios*), “The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord” (20:20), but only after the wounds on the hands and chest were shown to them. They *see* that the murdered man—as the murdered one—is the *Lord*, in the place of those who act as masters. But that is still a long way off, as we will see in the example of Thomas. Back to the farewell.

“On that day, you will ask me nothing,” it says. On which day? On the day when the disciples will realize “that I am with my FATHER and you with me and I with you,” 14:20. For then, there will be no more distance between the Messiah and his disciples. Now, this distance is there (they do not observe the Messiah). Once again, the reassurance: the FATHER will give what the disciples will ask for in the name of the Messiah. And then the statement, “Until now you have not asked for in my name.” Obviously, the group’s prayer practice did not happen in the name of the Messiah. What is to be prayed for here, we will hear in the prayer of the Messiah.

Now “openly” comes up, what will be “on that day.” Questions are no longer necessary. Then they will ask for in the name of the Messiah, and no more intervention of the Messiah is needed: the disciples will then be not only in solidarity but in the friendship of God: the FATHER himself is a friend to them. And he will be so because the disciples will have realized the friendship with the Messiah and the trust in the Messiah. This is what the two perfect tenses *pephilēkate* and *pepisteukate* denote.

The next sentence comes abruptly: The Messiah went out from the FATHER and came into the world order. All the more he leaves the world order and goes to the FATHER. The movement, the life movement of the Messiah, is a departure from God—what the coming into, well, *under*, the world order really is. Leaving the world order is not only simply going away and leaving the world order as it is. We will hear the opposite in the last sentence of the farewell talk, again a Johannine perfect: *nenikēka ton kosmon*, I have defeated the world order. The walk to the FATHER is the transformation of the world order. As long as this movement is not accomplished—and it is not accomplished with the resurrection—the walk to the Father is not accomplished. But this becomes clear only in the encounter with Maria from Magdala, 20:11-18.

13.7. Conclusion of the Farewell Talk, 16:29-17,1a

16:29 His disciples said,
“Look, now you are speaking openly,
not a single parable, you say.

- 16:30 Now we know that you know everything
and you don't need anyone to question you.
Therefore, we are trusting that you went out from GOD."
- 16:31 Jesus answered,
"Now you are trusting?
- 16:32 There, an hour is coming
—and it has come—,
when you will be scattered, each one for himself,⁴⁸⁴
and leave me alone.
But I am not alone,
because the FATHER is with me.
- 16:33 These things I have spoken to you
that you may have peace with me.
Under the world order, you will be in tribulation.⁴⁸⁵
But fear not!
I have conquered the world order!"
- 17:1a These things Jesus had spoken about.

The disciples say they have understood. Jesus has unfolded everything, no more riddles. Jesus immediately dampens the euphoria. The hour is coming, the hour of probation. And this probationary hour, they do not pass.

All commentators think of the hour of the arrest. But this hour is not meant. Simon is fighting, two disciples are following the police force that arrested Jesus. The "beloved disciple" is standing under the cross, in clear deviation from the Passion narrative of the Synoptics. Unlike Matthew and Mark, John avoids the reference to Zechariah 13:7 in the narrative of the arrest, "Strike the shepherd, and the flock of sheep will be scattered."

484 SCATTERED: *Skorpisthēte*, Hebrew *nefotzothem*, a process related to the scattering of Israel (see 11:52).

485 TRIBULATION: *Thlipsis*, Hebrew *tzar*, *tzara*. It is a word of the Psalms. In the LXX the word *thlipsis* occurs 124 times, 36 times in the Psalms, and means "to be constricted, to see no way out." In the book of Nehemiah, the eight Levites in their great intercession for the people summarize the situation of Judea under foreign rule as follows, "We are in an almost hopeless situation," *u-ve-tzara gedola 'anachnu, en thlipsei megalē esmen*, Nehemiah 9:37. This is more than "being afraid." Under the prevailing conditions of the Roman world order, the disciples will be harassed and put under pressure, necessarily. Hence the call *tharseite*, *'al thira'u*, "do not be afraid." The background is Exodus 14:13, Moses' word to the oppressed people in the face of Pharaoh's army; he adds: *'al thira'u . . . u-re'u et yeshu'ath YHWH*; LXX: *tharseite . . . kai hōrate tēn sōtērian para tou theou*; "you will see the liberation through the NAME." This is factually identical with what Jesus says, "I have conquered the world order." It is the eve of liberation, the eve of the preparation day of the Passover Festival.

At this point, John leaves the level of the narration (*fiction*) and enters the level of the narrator (*reality*). This is the hour in which the group is dispersing, the hour that Jesus foretold and which is an element of the narrative at the end of the bread speech, “For this reason, many of his disciples went away, backward, their walk was no longer with him,” 6:66. The moment they are without a synagogue, the tragedy of separation is repeated. They gave up their Messianic vision. “Leaving the Messiah alone” is nothing else than abandoning the Messianic vision, and according to John, the abandonment of the Messianic vision occurs at the moment when—faced with the choice between this Messiah and the synagogue—they remain with the group or turn to the synagogue.

Once again it is emphasized that the unity between the God of Israel and the Messiah remains, the cause of the Messiah is the cause of God, and the cause of God remains Israel. Once again the theme of peace of 14:27 is taken up, but this time with a different tendency. There, 14:27 ff., the contrast between the *pax Messianica* and the *pax Romana* is established. Now we hear,

This is what I have said to you (=14:27 ff.),
that you have peace with me:
Under the world order, you will be in tribulation.

What is new is the experience that *having peace with the Messiah* necessarily means *having tribulation with the world order*. *Thlipsis*, *tzara*, was and is the normal condition of Israel among the peoples and even more so under Rome. John assures the group that tribulation can only be endured if they see the peace of the Messiah as a real political perspective for themselves. That is why he weaves the connection to Exodus 14: John chooses the word that he avoids in his narrative about Jesus walking on the water. The Synoptics have at this point, *tharsei*, “be undaunted.” In most cases, the translators of the Scriptures of Israel, like John in 6:20, have the usual *mē phobeisthe* (*ʿal thiraʿu*), “do not fear.” In some cases, however, they choose the positive *tharsein*, “to be undaunted.” Among other things at a crucial point. The people spoke to Moses, Exodus 14:12,

Was this not the speech we spoke to you in Egypt,
“Depart from us, we will serve Egypt,
because it is better for us to serve Egypt,
than to die in the wilderness”?

Moses responds, Exodus 14:13,

Fear not (*ʿal-tiraʿu*, *tharseite*)
line up,
see the liberation through the NAME,
by which he will free you today.
For as you see Egypt today
you will see it no further, agelong!

The NAME will fight for you,
so be silent!

This is exactly the word John chooses. What is Egypt in the Torah, is the *kosmos* in the Gospel, the world order, is Rome. Jesus thinks of this victory of the NAME over Egypt when he says, “I have conquered the world order.” Because the NAME has defeated Egypt. Of course, *nenikēka ton kosmon*, “I have conquered the world order,” is a slogan of perseverance. No really serious person can get along in crises completely without slogans of perseverance. But this slogan of perseverance has a degree of reality in the memory of the events of Israel’s liberation from the tribulation among the peoples. The perfect here is the perfect of Exodus 14:30,

The NAME freed Israel on that day (*wa-yoshaʿ YHWH*)
from the hand of Egypt.
And Israel saw Egypt
dead on the shore of the sea.

There are no idylls in the Scriptures. In the ruling world order, there are no idylls either. With this sentence, “I have conquered the world order,” the farewell talk ends. But here, Egypt is not dead; the tribulation remains. That is why no Miriam sings here as in Exodus 15, but the Messiah prays the great intercession for the Messianic community.

13.8. The Prayer of the Messiah, 17:1b-26

17:1b And he lifted up his eyes toward heaven, he said,
“FATHER, the hour has come,
honor your Son,
so that the Son may honor you.
17:2 Thus you gave him authority over all flesh,⁴⁸⁶
that he will give them all you have given him:
Life for the age to come.
17:3 And this is the life for the age to come:
to recognize you, the only trustworthy GOD,
and whom you sent, Jesus Messiah.
17:4 I honored you on the earth
by accomplishing the work
you gave up on me to do it.
17:5 And now honor me, you, FATHER, with yourself,
with the honor, I had with you

486 Background: “To him, the *bar enosh*, the Human, was given power (Aramaic *shaltan*, Greek *exousia* or *archē*), honor and kingship, all peoples, communities, language groups shall serve him,” Daniel 7:14.

before the world order came into existence.
 17:6 I made your name manifest to the humans
 you gave me out of the world order.⁴⁸⁷
 They were yours, you gave them to me,
 they have kept your word.
 17:7 Now they have recognized
 that everything you have given me
 is happening on your behalf.
 17:8 For the spoken words you gave me⁴⁸⁸
 I have given to them;
 they accepted them and recognized with trust
 that they went out from you.
 They began trusting that you sent me.
 17:9 I am asking for them
 —I am not asking for the world order,
 but for those, you have given to me,
 because they are yours;
 17:10 all that is mine is yours, and yours is mine,—
 (I am asking) that I am honored in them.
 17:11 I am no longer under the world order,
 but they are under the world order,
 and I am coming to you!
 FATHER, HOLY ONE,⁴⁸⁹
 keep them with your NAME you have given to me,
 so that they may become one, just as we are.⁴⁹⁰
 17:12 When I was with them,

487 OUT OF THE WORLD ORDER: *Ek tou kosmou*, “out of the world order,” belonging to it no more.

488 SPOKEN WORDS: *Rhēmata*, not logous. See above, the explanation of 5:47.

489 FATHER, HOLY ONE: The background is the second part of the book of Leviticus; nine times we hear the word “holy” or “sanctifying” in connection with the NAME, the God of Israel; e.g. Leviticus 19:2: “Become holy, for holy am I, the NAME, your God.”

490 [TV translates the Greek *einai* corresponding to a Hebrew *haya* into German as “zu einer Einheit werden, to become a unity,” instead of a simple equation “to be one.” I merely allude to the difference between “to become one” and “to be one.” Here is his explanation:] THAT THEY WILL BECOME A UNITY: *Hina ōsin hen*. We translate “to become a unity” because the Semitic *haya* is more powerful than the Greek *einai*. The subjunctive *ōsin* after the particle *hina* indicates that “to happen as a unity” is a state that the Messiah sets as his goal (11:52!). Here, of course, it is not, as Barrett and all the others would have us believe, about the unity of the church, because John never knew anything like the church. Christians and Christianity were outside his field of vision. That the unity of the FATHER and the Messiah is a provocation we heard in 10:30 ff.

- I kept them with your NAME you have given to me,
I guarded them, and not one of them was destroyed
except for the son of destruction,⁴⁹¹
so that the Scripture may be fulfilled.
- 17:13 Now I am coming to you,
and I am still speaking this under the world order
so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves.
- 17:14 I have given them your word,
and the world fought them with hatred,
because they are not from the world order,
just as I am not from the world order.⁴⁹²
- 17:15 I do not ask you to take them out of the world order,
but to protect them from evil.
- 17:16 They are not from the world order,
just as I am not from the world order.
- 17:17 Sanctify them with your fidelity;
your word is fidelity.⁴⁹³

491 [I don't translate *hyios tēs apōleias* as "apostate" or the like because John 18:9 refers to this verse and he there—as almost always—understands *apollymi* as "to (let) be destroyed"; and unlike TV, I stick with the Semitic phrase "son of destruction." Nevertheless, the meaning "son of destruction" may also be compatible with TV's reference to Isaiah 57:4 (see below). The word field *apollymi* seems—at any rate in John—to denote both sides of an attitude rebelling against the God of liberation: both transgressing God's commandments and the resulting perishing or being lost of the transgressor.]

THE APOSTATE: *Hyios tēs apōleias*. In E. Nestle/K. Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graecum*²⁷, Stuttgart 2001, you will find the reference "Isaiah 57:4." If this is indeed the background, then *hyios tēs apōleias* stands for *yilde-fesha'*, "sons of apostasy, rebellion, transgression," i.e., "apostates, rebels, transgressors." If the reference to 2 Thessalonians 2:3, is pertinent, then it cannot be Judas Iscariot, but Rome, as soon as it reveals itself as anti-god (2:4). Here, in John 17:12, it is clearly about "one of the Twelve"; in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 it is about the apostate in general. Judas is the henchman, the apostate in 2 Thessalonians is "the divine" (*hoti estin theos*, v.4) and so "anti-god" (*antikeimenos*, *anti* in the meaning "instead of": the divine takes God's place).

492 *Ek tou kosmou ouk eisin/eimi*. Verses 14-16 have already given up many riddles. P⁶⁶ simply omits the last two lines of 17:14, 17:15-16 are again omitted by other manuscripts: for them, the repetitions were simply too much; Bultmann had predecessors early on! Perhaps the staccato "not from the world order" is important after all, for it is precisely this that must be inculcated.

493 "Sanctify them in the (through the) truth, your word is (the) truth," is translated (Luther, Becker, Schulz, Wilckens, Zurich Bible, etc.). But just the almost hopeless situation of this tiny group from Israel under Roman conditions without the protection of the synagogue shows that it is less about the truth of God than about his fidelity to this Israel. "Sanctify them": this imperative has as its background Leviticus 19:2 and the like. God is the *meqadishkhem*, "who sanctifies you," and the disciples accordingly are *mequdashim ve-*

17:18 As you sent me into the world order,
I sent them into the world order.

17:19 For on their behalf I am sanctifying myself,
so that they too may be sanctified through fidelity!

17:20 I am asking not only for these,
but also for those who are trusting me through their word,

17:21 that they all may become one:
as you, FATHER, are with me, and I with you,
so that they may be (one) with us,⁴⁹⁴
so that the world may trust that you sent me.

17:22 And I have given to them the honor which you have given to me,
so that they may become one, just as we are one,⁴⁹⁵

17:23 I with them and you with me,
so that they may become completely one,
so that the world order recognizes
that you sent me and were in solidarity with them
just as you were in solidarity with me.

17:24 FATHER,
I want⁴⁹⁶ those you have given me
to be with me where I am
so that they may observe my honor, which you have given me
because you were in solidarity with me
before the rejection of the world order.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁴ *’emeth*, “sanctified by fidelity.” The combination *qadosh*, “holy,” and *’emeth*, “fidelity,” as far as I see, does not appear in the Scriptures in this way.

494 ONE: *Hen*, according to the great codices Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, Ephraemi rescriptus and many other manuscripts; but no less convincing is the omission by P⁶⁶, the Vaticanus, and the Codex Bezae, and some others. Nestle/Aland opts for omission because the addition seems to be an attempt at textual harmonization. However, thus a theological debate is being conducted. The makers of the Codex Vaticanus, for example, may have been reluctant to equate the “unity” between God and the Messiah with a “unity” of the disciples “and us.”

495 AS WE ARE ONE: *Kathōs hemeis hen*. Here can be translated as “to be” because the copula does not occur; only in a minority of the manuscripts appears *esmen*, “we are (become).”

496 FATHER: I WANT: With some of the textual witnesses; the others have, “FATHER, what you have given me, I want . . . etc.”

497 BEFORE THE REJECTION OF THE WORLD ORDER: *Pro katabolēs kosmou*.

1. *Katabolē* occurs 11 times in the Messianic writings. Of these, the phrase *apo katabolēs kosmou* accounts for six to seven occurrences (depending on whether one counts Matthew 13:35 or not); three times we find *pro katabolēs kosmou* here (namely, in addition to John 17:24, in Ephesians 1:4 and 1 Peter 1:20). In Hebrews 11:11, *katabolē* has the special meaning of “outflow of the sperm [Abraham’s into Sarah].” In the LXX, *katabolē* is encountered only in 2 Maccabees 2:29 (without a preposition). There it means “downfall.”

17:25 FATHER, TRUTHFUL ONE,⁴⁹⁸
 the world did not recognize you,
 but I recognized you,
 and these recognized that you sent me.
 17:26 And I made your name known to them,
 and I will make it known
 so that the solidarity in which you were solidary with me
 may be with them, and I with them."

The prayer of the Messiah takes the place of the scene that the Synoptics insert between the departure from the room of the meal and the arrest. No "angel" comforts the Messiah here, because the "shaking of the soul" is already mentioned and overcome.

The concern of the Messiah in this prayer is the opposite of the *skorpizesthai*, being scattered, of 16:32; it is the unity of the Messianic group.

The Messiah prays as Israel prays, Psalms 121:1; 123:1, etc., "he lifted up his eyes to heaven." Heaven is where the Messiah comes from, but it is not a place. Heaven, inaccessible to humans, is the hiddenness of God. The Messiah comes out of the hiddenness of God and goes back into the hiddenness of God. That is, what is entitled to claim our ultimate allegiance, namely "God," eventually escapes all we can plan, design, and execute. The Messiah is and remains *from heaven*.

2. The underlying verb *kataballein* occurs 44 times in the LXX; all passages have a background of violence. The nine Hebrew verbs translated *kataballein* are verbs of violence except for *laqach* (once). And even *laqach* can mean "to kill," namely, "to take the soul" (Ezekiel 33:4). Therefore, it must be asked whether the 11 *katabolē* passages in the Messianic writings should not all be translated in such a way that the dark coloring of *katabolē* becomes clear.

3. Oriented to 2 Corinthians 4:9 and Hebrews 6:1-2, where *kataballein* means "to subdue" or "to reject," one can work with the meaning "subjection, rejection" in *katabolē*.

4. *Apo katabolēs kosmou* then means "since the subjugation of *thohu wa-bohu*, the world order of war and ruin"; see Jeremiah 4:23 ff. *Pro tēs katabolēs kosmou* has a similar tendency. Thus, for John 17:24, the meaning is: Even before the human order—*kosmos*—was rejected, God is in solidarity with the *bar enosh*, with the Human, see Genesis 6-9!

[I largely agree with TV, except for his view of the passages Maccabees 2:29—which has more to do with laying the foundations of a house than with a downfall—and Hebrews 6:1-2—which, after all, is more about going beyond the basics of instruction to advanced instruction. John can be thought to have intended the word, in fact, not simply to refer neutrally to the "foundation" of the world; in other places, however, the word may yet have been "abraded" in meaning, even if it originally referred to the overcoming of the *thohu wa-bohu* of Genesis 1 and Jeremiah 4.]

498 TRUTHFUL ONE: *Dikaie*, Hebrew *tzadiq*, "truthful." The God of Israel proves himself, therefore he is a proven or truthful one.

In principle, heaven is closed for humans. The second work of God's creation, that "dome" (*raqia'*) of Genesis 1:7, hermetically seals off that heavenly realm from earthly reality. Heaven can never be the destination of humans, of human life. The Messiah remains "there," but never as an element of our planning. Fixing his eyes on the closed heaven, Jesus says, "FATHER, the hour has come, honor your Son." The hour is the hour of honor. The phrase is tied to 12:27-28,

"Now my soul is shaken, and what can I say?
FATHER, free me (*hoshi'eni*) from this hour?
But this is precisely why I have come to this hour.
FATHER, honor your name!"
At this, a voice came out of heaven,
"I have honored it,
and I will honor it again!"

"Honor your Son, so that the Son may honor you." Son is here the "Son of Man" and the "Son of God," he is the *bar enosh* and thus the one "like God," as we always translated *hyios theou*. The hour is the fulfillment of God's mission, which determines his whole essence. It is for the honor of God, which is the honor of the Messiah, as the honor of the Messiah is the honor of God. And the honor of God and the Messiah is Israel, namely Israel freed from the worldwide slave house of Rome.

The honor of the Messiah presupposes that he has defeated the world order and that those (of Israel) whom the FATHER has given him will have the life of the age to come. This is the honor of God, and now God shall honor him with that honor which he had with God "before the world order came into existence."

This expression is without great mysteries for the Christian orthodoxy. *Kosmos* here would be simply "world," that is, cosmic space, that is, creation. Here John, so the orthodoxy says, thinks of the pre-existence of the second person of the Trinity. What John may have been thinking of, we know only from the text before us. Neither a metaphysical nor a theological-orthodox pre-existence emerges from the text. But this will become clear only in 17:24, *pro katabolēs tou kosmou*, before the rejection of the world order.

This long passage has two "stanzas," each with a rhyme of thought at the end, 17:11 fourth line; "that they may become one like us." And 17:23, "I with them and you with me, so that they may become completely one." This unity is a matter of the heart for John. His political program was to bring Israel together for unity. Therefore, there must be an unbreakable unity from the beginning and to the end between the Messiah and God, "I and the FATHER: ONE we are!" (10:30).

With great confidence, John says that what is prayed for in the name of the Messiah will be given. What is prayed for is Messianic unity. This unity is demanded by the Messiah. This is what those who have been given by God to the Messiah will pray for; nothing else comes to their mind. They keep the words that the Messiah has

given them because they confidently (*alēthōs*) accept and recognize that this Messiah goes out from this God.

Then in v.9, there is a sentence that could be of utmost importance for the practice of later generations. “Not for the world order I desire.” Apparently, there was an effort to pray for the world order and its agents to be made serviceable to God; this is so far from John’s mind that he must emphasize it again here: the world order—and that means the supporters of the real ruling order, government, kings, prefects, their hangers-on, and henchmen—can never and must never be the object of intercession. For “king and fatherland” is not to be prayed here. The prophet Jeremiah did not demand this from the people who were carried away in Babel.⁴⁹⁹

The object of prayer are those whom God has given to the Messiah because they are the Israel of God and because they are of God, they are also of the Messiah. In them, the Messiah has “received his honor,” *dedoxasmai*, perfect, as *nenikēka*, “I have conquered.” That there may be such, that is what is to be prayed for. All other praying is nonsense or superstition. The honor of the Messiah takes place in the Messianic community!

With all unity, there is a difference in the situation. The Messiah goes into the hiddenness of God (“to the FATHER”), the community remains under the world order. When this is made clear, the Messiah can pray, “guard them!” And this for the unity, which can be none other than the unity between the God of Israel and his Messiah, between the Messiah and the community, between the members of the community among themselves.

The Messiah “kept” the disciples with the NAME that God had given to the Messiah. “Name” always means that life task which a human has and which only he can fulfill. The name “Jesus” has to do with *yashaʿ*, “to liberate.” The liberation of Israel is the name of the Messiah. Liberation is the Messiah, the doctrine of liberation (*soteriology*) is the doctrine of this Messiah (*Christology*), and vice versa.⁵⁰⁰

499 “Search for the peace of the city where I have carried you off, and pray to the ETERNAL for it, and with its peace, there will be peace for you also,” Jeremiah 29:7. This is not a contradiction of John 17:9. Jeremiah had quite definite views about peace, as we heard in the discussion of 14:27. May there be for you, Jeremiah said, a condition also in Babel worthy of the name peace.

500 In the Scriptures, there is the *name*, no *persons*. Therefore I cannot follow Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt where he writes, “On the other hand, Christology should not be absorbed in soteriology: as if one may calmly forget the person behind his work and his social role . . . A human is not equal to his work” (Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, *Das christliche Bekenntnis zu Jesus, dem Juden. Eine Christologie II*, 1991, 39). That a “bourgeois distinction” is made here, Marquardt himself says, and this may also be “an inalienable gain in humanity” (op. cit.). But the work of the Messiah and the works he expects from the disciples and us are not comparable to the social achievements of individuals in bourgeois society. Otherwise, neither God nor the Messiah would be entitled to a judgment at the Day of Decision, ac-

The God of Israel *is* his NAME, that and only that, by which he wants to make himself known to the people. His essence is and remains inaccessible to us. The NAME by which alone we can know God is “He who leads out of the slave house.” This NAME is remaining.

The Messianists among the Judeans mean that “now” the God of Israel makes Himself known to the people with the NAME “Jesus Messiah,” not only to the people of Israel but also to the people of all nations. John means restrictively: To the children of Israel who live among the nations, and to those from the nations who identify with Israel.

But also the Messiah is in the hiddenness of God. He cannot be incorporated into any of the human undertakings. It is true that the Messiah leaves his commandment of solidarity to humans and *inspires* them permanently, but he is never within our reach. Everything we say and do is *toward him*, insofar as it comes *from him*, that is, it is *inspired*. The NAME of the Messiah is thus a spelling of that NAME of God who sends Moses to lead Israel out of the slave house, Exodus 3:11 ff.

This NAME “keeps” the disciples. It thus “guarded” them from going the way of the “renegade,” who had committed himself to the world order. This is an utter joy, like that of 16:21-22: that the barrenness has been taken away from Israel, “Joyful mother of children,” Psalm 113:9. The utter joy is contrasted with the hateful suppression of the disciples by the world order because the latter knows that to it the mere existence of a Messianic community is an unacceptable contradiction.

No Messiah can wish that God takes away this community from the world order because the perspective and the alternative would be an otherworldly one. They would have liked it, and Rome liked it very much, this whole world of mysteries and religions, which promise people a little place in a little heaven. Although the whole thing was a bit too colorful for the conservative patricians of Rome, they did not fight the mystery world of the East, because it was not a serious opposition, but rather a stabilizing factor in the East, which was always inclined to rebellion. But from the disciples of “a certain Chrestos” danger can very well come, especially in the rebellious East of the Empire.

The hatred of Rome cannot be spared by any Messiah to these disciples, he cannot ask the FATHER for it. Temporarily the Messianic community lives *under* the condi-

cording to which each person is compensated according to his *practice*, Matthew 16:27; the *practice* is the totality of his works, Matthew 25:31 ff. When we take care of the least of His brothers, we are who we should be and can be: this is the name by which God calls us, these works, this is us! Jesus wanted to be known *in* his works. Melancthon said, *Christum cognoscere est beneficia eius cognoscere, non quod isti docent eius naturas, modos incarnationis contueri*, “To know Christ is to know his benefits, not what those teach, consider his natures, the ways of his incarnation” (Loc. Comm. I, Opera XXI, 85). In English: The doctrine of the Messiah is the doctrine of the works of the Messiah.

tions of the world order (*en tō kosmō*). In no case, the Messianic community is determined *by* the world order (*ek tou kosmou*). It shares, as said (15:18-19), with the Messiah the life in the world order, because the Messiah had been sent into this life. Such a life (*under*, but not determined *by*, the conditions of the world order) is a “holy life.” This is nothing new, but the endurance of a life that was given up to Israel, Leviticus 18:3-4,

As they do in the land of Egypt, where you dwelled, do not do;
as they do in the land of Canaan, where I brought you, do not do,
according to their laws, do not walk your way.
My law do,
My statutes keep,
to walk the way according to these.
I AM—the NAME, your God.

Here begins the second part of the Book of Leviticus, what the critical research called “holiness law,” “For holy am I, the NAME your God” (Leviticus 19:2; 20:26; 21:8) and, “Become saints” (19:2; 20:7; 21:6, 8). “Sanctify them with fidelity” (*hagiason autous en tē alētheia, haqdashem ve-’emeth*) thus has Leviticus 19:2 as its background. God is *meqadishkem*, the sanctifier of you, and the disciples are accordingly *mequdashim ve-’emeth*, “sanctified by fidelity.” The holiness of Israel here consists in the keeping of the Torah (Leviticus 18-26), by which Israel in the sixth century BCE departed from the normal ancient Middle Eastern world of exploitation.

In John, too, the disciples take leave of the normality of the world order. The fidelity of the God of Israel “sanctifies” the group and takes them out of the world order, although they must remain under the world order. The world order no longer sets the norms and is no longer the normality for the group. The group’s response is to keep the Messiah’s speech: trust in the Messiah, and solidarity among themselves.

This is a different model than what Israel seeks to realize with its Torah. Only a proper translation brings this fact to light. Psalm 119:160 says, *rosh-devarkha ’emeth*, “The main thing of your speech is fidelity!” The conclusion that Rabbinical Judaism draws with Psalm 119:142 is quite different from John’s, “Your probation is proven agelong, and Your Torah is fidelity,” *thorathkha ’emeth*. To John, the Word (*logos, davar*) is the Word of God, and the Messiah Jesus is now the Word. Therefore, Nestle-Aland’s reference is correct for 119:160, but not for 119:142. In John, “Word” just isn’t identical to “Torah.” It is, after all, “your Torah,” as he repeatedly says to the Judeans (8:17; 10:34; see 15:25).

The fidelity of the Word of God is the prerequisite for the mission of the Messiah and for the mission with which the Messiah commissions his disciples. Their mission in or under the world order is no other than that of the Messiah, and it will also have the same consequences. The fidelity of God “sanctifies” them, makes them people who do not live from the world order. This is not the new world religion, but it is the

infinitely condensed Torah of an isolated sect under completely new conditions, the *new commandment*.⁵⁰¹

Here John leaves the time level of the narrative and enters the time level of those who generations later will have to struggle with this vision and, above all, for it. For them, the Messiah desires that these all find themselves in that unity of Israel, which is the unity of the God of Israel with the Messiah of Israel. In the following sentences, we hear the word “one” or “unity” (*hen*) five times. John has the Messiah invoke the unity of the Messianic community precisely because it is internally torn. It is tormented by the questions posed by Thomas, Philipp, and Judas [non-Iscaiot].

And then there is an almost unbelievable subordinate clause, “That the world order may trust that you have sent me.” After all that John has said, for example, about the inspiration of fidelity that the world order cannot accept, this cannot be true. Does the text here become contradictory in itself? Only if this world order gives itself up as *this* order in the process, coherence is maintained. Only if the world is no longer Roman world order, no longer considered the space of the *pax Romana*, but finds itself the living space, a *world of people*, which would be according to the fidelity of God to Israel, if it becomes the *pax Messianica*, then it can trust that the Messiah is the messenger of this God. This is also a biblical vision, Isaiah 66:18,

And I,
to take all nations, all language groups out of their doing, out of their planning,
I have come.
And they come, and they see my honor.

If the world order of all nations in the Roman Empire trusts the Messiah, it is “taken out of its doing and planning.” Then it is just no longer the *ruling world order*, *kosmos*. This vision of Israel from the times of the so-called Tritojesaja, where Greece has already made itself felt as a factor (*yawan*, “Ionia”), makes this incredible subordinate clause understandable.

But this depends on the principle, “I with them, you with me, so that they have finally come to unity.” Only then, the world order will recognize what is the matter: God sent him and was in solidarity with the disciples because he was in solidarity with the Messiah. A world order capable of recognizing this is then a completely different one. And this is the point here, this is what Isaiah 66 was about. The goal of biblical politics is a different world order, one that can trust the Messiah because it would then have Messianic contours. Would have . . . irrealis! To achieve this, the real existing world order has to be subjected. It is already subjected, we will yet hear that in this prayer.

501 A disciple of John attempted to describe the indissoluble link between the old and new commandments, 1 John 2:7-8.

The Messiah asks that the disciples may be where the Messiah will be. The goal is (*hina*) that they may “observe” that the Messiah will be honored. The honor of the Messiah is the unity of the Messianic community as the archetype of the coming unity of Israel. In other words, they may experience a situation where the Messiah and his Messianic order will be the measure of all things. Here we hear again the verb *theōrein*. What they are unable to observe now, 16:10; 16:16 ff, is to become possible and real. To the prevailing world order, Messiah does not come “into consideration”; *in* it, the only thing that is Messianic is the solidarity of the disciples with each other.

In a note to 17:24, we have given detailed reasons why we write here “rejection of the world order” and not “foundation of the world order.” The world is always a concrete world order: Roman organized human society. And in John, this order is always condemnable. The verb *kataballein* (“to reject”), which stands behind *katabolē*, has an exclusively negative meaning in the Greek version of the Scriptures. John chooses the word because it fits the negativity of the world order.

Before the conditions among humans were ordered in such a way that they had to suffer under them, “before the world order came into existence,” 17:5, the Messiah had the “honor with God” (17:5). Here again, the “honor of the Messiah” is spoken of. He had the honor before this order came into existence, he will have it after the judgment on the world order, its *katabolē*, its rejection, will have come into effect, and he has the honor now that the judgment has been pronounced (*kekritai*, 16:11) but not executed. Why?

Because the God of Israel is in solidarity with his Messiah, his *bar enosh*, who represents “the people of the saints of the Most High” (Daniel 7:27), that is, with Israel, and that even “before the rejection of the world order.” The Messiah—that is, Israel—is not dishonorable and undignified under the prevailing conditions of the world order. Rather, the hour has come when the Messiah—and Israel with him—will be honored. With the rejection of the world order, Israel—and with it, all humankind—is not rejected, but will be honored.

The circle that was opened at 17:5 is closed. God does not act as he once acted, Gen 6:5 ff,

The NAME saw
that the wickedness of humankind increased on the earth,
that all the imaginings of the thoughts of their hearts
were only evil, all the days,
the NAME was sorry
that he had made humankind on the earth,
it saddened him in his heart.
The NAME spoke:
I will wipe away humankind, which I created,
from the face of the earth . . .

As the hope of humankind is based on the fact that the future is not annihilation, but that through the Messiah all God-born who have been driven apart will become partakers of God's solidarity, this sentence 17:24 is the main sentence of the doctrine of liberation (*soteriology*). The solidarity with the humans is valid despite the ruling world order; the subjugation of the world order is not the annihilation of the world, according to the oath of God in Genesis 8,21b,

“Never again will I curse the face of the earth for the sake of humankind, because the heart of humankind was an image of evil from its youth, never again will I continue to strike all life that I had made.”

The world order, so the sentence continues, did not recognize the FATHER; the Messiah recognized him; therefore, the God of Israel was in solidarity with the Messiah, not with the ruling world order. Any other interpretation is hardly possible in this context. The recognition of God is based on the insight that the Messiah is the messenger of this God. The NAME is what this God does to Israel; this NAME is made known by the Messiah. The NAME now means, John says, that God is in solidarity with the Messiah and the Messiah is in solidarity with these humans. Only with this sentence in our ears can we bear what John has to tell us in the next two chapters.

13.9. Arrest and Interrogation, 18:1-28a

What is told now is entirely determined by the immediate nearness of Passover. In general, Passover is always “near.” The word *pascha* is used ten times, three times in connection with the word “near,” three times with determinations such as “before,” “six days before,” and once as “preparation” (*paraskeuē*). Twice the Passover was an occasion, 2:23 and 18:39. Once *pascha* means the Passover lamb, 18:28.

Neither Jesus nor the disciples celebrate the great feast of liberation in John's narrative. Passover here is a pure future. Liberation can not be celebrated until all of Israel has been brought together by the Messiah into one synagogue. “Easter” is not an accomplishment, but, as we hear, a beginning, the beginning of the mission of the disciples. If Christians were to follow John, they would probably have to be a little more humble and not take their Easter as a Passover superlative.

We heard in 13:30, “But it had become night,” the night of the Messiah. This night continues until Jesus will really be handed over into the hands of the Romans, “But it had become early in the morning,” 18:28b. The walk into the garden marks the beginning of a new and decisive phase of the Messiah's night. Jesus is no longer in the circle of the disciples but enters the confrontation with the world order, publicly, and first with the collaborators of the enemy, the leading priests.

This final section of the night of the Messiah, “Arrest and Interrogation,” has two parts: 18:1-14 the Arrest and 18:15-28a the Interrogation. The actual Passion narrative does not begin until 18:28b. It is advisable to separate the section “Arrest and Interrogation” from the actual Passion narrative, as John does with his time entries.

John uses traditional material, but he adapts it to his political purposes. To be sure, the leadership of Judea hands Jesus over to the Romans, but the Messiah dies in the fight with Rome, not in the fight with the Judeans. Except for the women and the friend under the Messiah's cross, there are no more children of Israel. Jesus is alone with the Roman soldiery. This is a significant political difference from the Synoptics' account. Even in the scene of arrest and interrogation that now follows, there is no longer any confrontation with the Judeans. Jesus, we will hear, has told them all that needed to be said. Now it is about the *kosmos*, about the world order as such.

13.9.1. Arrest, 18:1-14

18:1 After Jesus had said this,
he went out with his disciples beyond the brook Kidron,⁵⁰²
there was a garden.
Into it, he himself went with his disciples.

18:2 Judas, who handed him over, also knew the place,
because Jesus often met there with his disciples.

18:3 Now when Judas had taken over the military cohort
and officials of the leading priests and the Perushim
he went there with torches, lamps, and weapons.

18:4 Now Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him,
went out and said to them,
"Whom do you seek?"

18:5 They answered him,
"Jesus the Nazorean."
He said to them, "I AM."
Also standing with them was Judas who handed him over.

18:6 When he now said to them, "I AM,"
they went backward from him and fell to the ground.

18:7 Again, he questioned them,
"Whom do you seek?"
They said,
"Jesus the Nazorean."

502 BEYOND THE BROOK KIDRON: This location differs from what we find in the Passion narratives of the other canonical Gospels. "Beyond the brook Kidron" is a fateful place. David had to leave his city after the coup of Absalom by crossing this brook, 2 Samuel 15:23; in the valley of Kidron, 1 Kings 15:13, 2 Kings 23:4, the kings Asa and Josiah burned wooden images of idols.

[I add 1 Kings 2:37, where we are told on what condition King Solomon will let live a man named Shimei who had pronounced a curse against Solomon's father David: "On the day you go out and cross the brook Kidron—so know that you must die of death; your blood then come on your head!"]

18:8 Jesus answered,
 “I said to you that I AM.
 So if you seek me,
 let these go.”

18:9 Thus should be fulfilled the word he had said,
 “Of those you have given me,
 I let not anyone become destroyed.”

18:10 Simon, however, Peter, having a sword,
 drew it, struck the slave of the leading priest,
 and cut off his right ear.
 The slave’s name was Malchos.

18:11 Jesus said to Peter,
 “Put your sword in its sheath!
 This is the cup the FATHER has given me; am I not to drink it?”

18:12 So the cohort and the tribune,⁵⁰³
 together with the officials of the Judeans,
 arrested Jesus,
 they bound him,

18:13 and first presented him to Annas.
 For he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas,
 who was the great priest of that year.

18:14 It was Caiaphas who had advised the Judeans
 that it would be in their interest if one man dies on behalf of the people.

John, in the second part of his Gospel, portrayed the Messiah as “the hidden one.” This did not only refer to the fact that the Messiah was not recognized as such by the greater part of the people, i.e. remained “hidden” from them. He also had to physically hide himself again and again (7:10; 8:59; 12:36).

Now Jesus enters the place where he was hiding, the garden beyond the brook Kidron. They serve to describe a hiding place that was known to insiders only—among them Judas Iscariot. Judas ben Simon Iscariot was among the Twelve a representative of the enemy, a confidential informant of the Roman authority and not of the temple elites, a *satan*, an *enemy*, as John calls him, 6:71. This man leads a mixed police force of officials of the self-governing authority and Roman soldiers into the garden.

Jesus knows that the time of hiddenness is over; he knows “all that is coming upon him.” Again, the word “to seek.” He knows that he is being sought to have him put to death. “Jesus the Nazorean,” that’s the Roman warrant of apprehension, and

503 TRIBUNE: *Chiliarchos*, “leader of a thousand men”; it is difficult to match Roman ranks with those in use today. “Colonel,” “captain,” etc. are therefore not appropriate.

that's what Pilate's reasons for the judgment will call him. This is also how he is called in Matthew and Luke; in John, the surname occurs only here. As "the Nazorean" (the prince⁵⁰⁴) he was known to the police. "I AM," says Jesus, with the same emphasis with which the NAME made himself known through the mouths of the prophets of Israel. He is a wanted man for them (see 11:57!), but he is more than that.

"Judas, who handed him over, was standing with them," is said here; he is only a part of the police force, no more. And he backed away with the others from the majestic self-confidence of the Messiah and fell as if struck by lightning.

Once again: question, answer, self-confession. The game does not repeat itself. Jesus' only interest is to prevent his disciples from coming to death with him. It is they, only they, who are to proclaim the NAME of the Messiah, they must remain alive, lest any possibility of Messianic existence die with Jesus, "If you seek me, let these go." To John, the words of Jesus have the same rank as the Scriptures of Israel: they will be "fulfilled" or must be fulfilled; here we are concerned with 6:39 and 17:12. The future of the Messianic movement depends on the rescue of the disciples. They are what Jesus is concerned with. We will discuss this later considering the denial of Simon Peter.

The latter, however, shows which policy he wants to pursue: that of open and armed struggle. Simon is indeed the Zealot. The Synoptics know a second Simon as one of the Twelve and call him "Simon the Zealot" (Mark 3:18). John does not allow this difference, and he wants to show which dead-end the Zealot policy of armed struggle leads the Messianic movement. In John, Simon the *Rock* is also Simon the *Zealot*. He has not the slightest understanding of the real situation. He is fighting the battle on the field where he has to lose, the military field. On this field, only one can win, Rome.

This realistic argument is made by Matthew, "All who take up the sword will perish by the sword," 26:52. John argues differently here. Jesus is not a pacifist even with him, and, all the more, he does not crave bloody martyrdom. He must, whether he wants to or not, go his way to the bloody end. There is no way around this end. This is the cup that *must* be drunk. This is why Simon shall put away his sword, not because Jesus is "against violence" in principle, but because the path leads to victory over the defeat that is truly taken note of. The people of the Judeans, in the country,

504 There are two forms of this surname, *Nazarenos* and *Nazōraios*. Matthew only knows the second form and does not think of the town of Nazareth, but of the Hebrew *netzer*, "sprout," from Isaiah 11:1 (Matthew 2:23). Luke 18:37 also has this second form, thinking of *nasir*, "prince." A blind man is told *lēsous Nazōraios* is passing by, and the blind man calls out to him, "Son of David," Luke 18:38. So the inscription on the cross (John 19:19) refers to that Jesus, the prince, the king of the Judeans (*lēsous ho Nazōraios ho basileus tōn loudaiōn*).

but also the Diaspora, must take note twice more, that the sword leads to the downfall and the consciously accepted defeat leads to life: *Diaspora War*, 115-117 and *Bar Kochba War*, 131-135. However, Rabbinical Judaism will draw completely different political consequences from this than the Messianists.

The police force, under the command of a high Roman officer—a military tribune, *chiliarchos (tribunus)*—brings Jesus bound to Annas, the father-in-law of the officiating grand priest Caiaphas. We have already met the latter at 11:47 ff. and he will have the last word as far as the Judean authorities are concerned because he formulated the political interest of politics in Jesus' execution most clearly.

13.9.2. Simon's Discipleship. Jesus before the Great Priest, 18:15-28a

- 18:15 Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus.
This disciple was known to the great priest.
He went with Jesus into the courtyard of the great priest.
- 18:16 Peter yet was standing by the door, outside.
So the other disciple, the one known to the great priest, came out;
he said something to the doorkeeper, and she led Peter in.
- 18:17 Now the maid, the doorkeeper, says to Peter,
"Are you not also one of the disciples of this human?"
He says,
"I am not."
- 18:18 But the slaves and the officials were standing around,
having made a charcoal fire because it was cold,
they were warming themselves.
Peter also was standing with them, warming himself.
- 18:19 Now the great priest questioned Jesus
about his disciples and about his teaching.
- 18:20 Jesus answered him,
"I have spoken publicly about the world order,⁵⁰⁵
I always taught in a synagogue and in the sanctuary
where all the Judeans come together,
and I spoke nothing in secret.

505 I HAVE PUBLICLY SPOKEN ABOUT THE WORLD ORDER: *Parrhēsia lelalēka tō kosmō*; the translation "I have spoken publicly to (all) the world," that is, to all kinds of people, is certainly permissible. But in the context of John's argument, the high priest is interested in what Jesus spoke politically, what political teaching he proclaimed, see 11:47-50. [I wonder if another alternative translation is not even closer. Shouldn't *tō kosmō* be translated in a context with 7:4 and 14:22? But then a contradiction in content arises, for both of the earlier passages assume that Jesus just did *not* address the world order. But can *tō kosmō* indeed be translated as "about the world order"?]

- 18:21 What are you questioning me?
Question the ones who have heard what I spoke to them.
There, they know what I said.”
- 18:22 When he had said this,
one of the officials standing by slapped Jesus in the face,⁵⁰⁶
he said,
“This is how you answer the great priest?”
- 18:23 Jesus answered him,
“If I spoke evil, testify about the evil.
But if good, why are you beating me?”
- 18:24 So Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the great priest.
- 18:25 Simon Peter, however, was standing and warming himself.
They said to him,
“Are you not also one of his disciples?”
He denied it, he said,
“I am not.”
- 18:26 One of the slaves of the great priest,
a relative of the one whose ear Peter had cut off, says,
“Did I not see you with him in the garden?”
- 18:27 So again Peter denied;
immediately a rooster called.
- 18:28a They led Jesus from Caiaphas to the praetorium.⁵⁰⁷

Two disciples followed the police force, as one may assume, at a due distance; Simon Peter and “another disciple.” This other disciple is the disciple who was present at the crucifixion. It is necessary for the narrative that some disciple was recognized by the guard outside the court of Annas as “an acquaintance of the grand priest.” Otherwise, Simon’s access⁵⁰⁸ “with Jesus” would hardly have been possible. At the decisive moment, the anonymous disciple from the environment of the priestly elites will stand at the side of Simon, here and at the opened grave.

506 SLAPPED JESUS IN THE FACE: *Edōken rapisma*, “gave him a blow in the face.” See note on 19:3.

507 PRAETORIUM: *Praitōrion*; John leaves the Latin word *praetorium* untranslated. For his listeners a well-known institute, the official seat of the governor in the province.

508 [All common translations and commentators take it for granted that, at first, only the other disciple enters the courtyard and afterward comes out again causing the doorkeeper to bring Peter into the courtyard as well. But it seems more consistent with an unbiased view of the Johannine text to assume that Peter also went into the courtyard “with Jesus” and that afterward, the other disciple wanted to take him into the courtroom itself, but this seemed too dangerous to Peter after the exchange of words with the doorkeeper. In 2015, however, TV also returns to the usual assumption.]

This one hung around the access door to the room of the interrogation, where a maid kept an eye on the audience. All the Synoptics know the maid who approached Peter about his acquaintance with Jesus. Here she is a doorkeeper. She makes a guess, Peter has to answer with a denial. He withdraws from the door because otherwise, his importunity would have made him suspicious. The fire provides a good reason for the withdrawal, “because it was cold.” We let ourselves be carried along by the narrative; the whole narrative not only has a point but is itself the point. The narrator acts as a good film director. Change of scene.

Here, Annas acts as an investigating judge who must decide whether further proceedings were necessary. Judges like Annas usually ask about things they have long known. The questioning serves the appearance of legality of the proceedings.

Annas asks Jesus about his disciples—accomplices in his eyes—and about his teaching, that is, about his political intentions. Jesus lets the judge come to nothing. First of all, Annas knows all about it long ago; secondly, he would have to question those who have listened to Jesus during his public speeches. They could give more objective information than he could.

This calm and composed response of Jesus unmasks the whole arrangement and casts Annas in a ridiculous light. This catches the eye of one of Annas’ eager officials. He slaps Jesus in the face and justifies his action by pointing to Jesus’ insubordination. Jesus’ reaction is meant to arouse our indignation. Indeed, Jesus’ attitude challenges violence. The narrative of the trial of Jesus is a timeless one; this is what happened to all who engaged in political resistance to an autocratic regime and were arrested as a result. Jesus is a political prisoner among the many others before him and after him who had no chance of being treated fairly.

So far, so good, if we didn’t have the word *rapisma*, “blow in the face.” The word means “to lash (across the face).” In the Greek Tanakh version, the Septuagint (LXX), the word is rare. The corresponding verb *rapizein* occurs only three times, *rapisma* itself only in Isaiah 50:6. The verb for “to strike” or “to slay” in the Tanakh is *nakha*. The LXX has forty different words for this verb, but only two are used frequently, *patassein* and *typtein*.

Rapisma and *rapizein* are found in the Messianic writings only in the Passion accounts of Matthew (26:67) and Mark (14:65). The famous passage in the Sermon on the Mount 5:39 (“If anyone slaps you on the right cheek . . .”) is to be interpreted from its use in the Passion of Jesus. The passages in Matthew, Mark, and John invoke a passage from the second chant of the “Slave of the NAME” in Isaiah. Isaiah 50:5-6 reads,

My Lord, the NAME, opened my ear,
I was not rebellious, I did not turn back.
My back I gave to the thugs, my cheeks to their fists (LXX: *eis rapismata*),
my face I did not hide from scorn and spitting.

This text will also be of concern to us when discussing the scene with the crown of thorns.

John points us to the role Jesus must play here, the role of the “Slave of the NAME.” The word *derein*, “to flay,” is very rare in the LXX and is only used there for flaying a sacrificial animal (Leviticus 1:6).⁵⁰⁹ In the Messianic writings, it means “to thrash.” The apostles had experience with this (Acts 5:40), and Paul, in his days as a fanatical member of the Perushim, had his opponents thrashed soundly (Acts 22:19).

Here the official feels authorized to anticipate an order punishment of the court and to execute it immediately, without anybody having judged the statement of Jesus as an offense against the dignity of the court. The reaction of Jesus proves this. Without knowing it, the henchman of Annas acts here to point out the role of Jesus as a “suffering slave of the NAME.” Meanwhile, the investigating judge sees no grounds for release and refers the matter to the next instance. Change of scene.

Simon Peter warms himself and—for the second time—is recognized as a disciple of Jesus. Simon denies. Things get dicey when a relative of Malchos, who was injured by Simon, says, “Didn’t I see you in the garden with him?” Each time, the suspicion is expressed in the form of a guess. Because of the darkness, Simon could deny convincingly; at least, he could get out of the affair.

The rooster crows. John does not go into the state of mind of Simon, unlike Matthew. What Simon does here is not a brilliant performance, but John spares reproach. Rightly so. Jesus had only predicted that Simon would deny him three times before the rooster crows and announces the morning of the day of execution. Those who, like Wengst, speak of cowardice here,⁵¹⁰ miss the point. One must rather ask whether an open confession for Jesus would have had any political sense in this situation. Simon would have been killed at the same time. In the resistance, it was and is the highest commandment not to incriminate fellow fighters, not to speak of self-incrimination. Moreover, Simon was not a coward; otherwise, he would have made off in the garden. He was the only one who resisted Jesus’ arrest with a weapon in his hand.

For a correct understanding of this text, it is necessary to read the narrative in its context. Simon Peter was the undisputed leader of a political Messianic movement. No one questioned his leadership position. Nevertheless, after the *Judean War*, people generally criticized him—and that means the political quality of his leadership. To Paul, Simon’s wavering between fidelity to the Torah and overcoming that fidelity in favor of fidelity to the Messiah was worthy of criticism, Galatians 2:11 ff. To John, the criticism of the Messianists’ leadership consists of their wavering between

509 [At this passage, however, the verb is *ekderein*, as in 2 Chronicles 35:11 and Micah 2:8; 3:3. Only in 2 Chronicles 29:34, the word *deirein* appears in the LXX.]

510 Klaus Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium*. 2. Teilband: Kapitel 11-21 (ThKNT), Stuttgart 2001, 213.

Zealotry and denial. The narrative of the triple denial, which was common throughout the Messianic movement, is, in John, a critical inventory of the Messianic movement during the Judean War, combining loyalty to Simon and harsh criticism of him. Change of Scene.

The penultimate instance is Caiaphas, the officiating great priest. From him, Jesus has nothing to expect. For Caiaphas, the death of Jesus was a necessary political sacrifice. He immediately referred the matter to the jurisdiction of the Romans.

They took him to the praetorium, the administrative seat of the procurator of the province of Judea. *They*: the police group and those who were present at the interrogation by Annas and Caiaphas. *They* are the *Judeans* of the following sections. They are very *specific* Judeans; for the understanding of what follows, this “they” is of vital importance. The Perushim are not there, nor is the crowd arguing about whether or not Jesus was the Messiah. There is no crowd (*ochlos*) before the praetorium. It is very specific members of the people who want to see Jesus on the cross. John was not an anti-Judaist or even an anti-Semite! He was very much an enemy of the Judean leadership and their satellites.

14. The First Part of the Passion Narrative: Early Morning, 18:28b-19:13

The Passion narrative itself, 18:28b-19:42, has two parts, divided by two points in time: “Early Morning” and “It was *‘erev pascha*, about the sixth hour.” The first part begins with the open exposure of world power, 18:28b-19:13. If anywhere, the “structure of contradiction with dominant” (Althusser⁵¹¹) is evident here. The dominant is the contradiction between Jesus and Pilate or Rome. It dominates the opposition between Judeans, here represented by the leading priests—the Perushim no longer play a role—and the Messiah Jesus. The second part of the Passion narrative, 19:14-42, answers the question of who is the King of Israel and tells how the King dies and is buried.

14.1. “What is fidelity, anyhow?”, 18:28b-38a

18:28b It was early morning.
They themselves did not go into the praetorium
lest they should defile themselves but might eat the Passover.⁵¹²
18:29 Pilate, therefore, came outside to them, saying,
“What accusation are you bringing against this human?”
18:30 They answered and said to him,
“If this one were not a criminal,
we would not have handed him over to you.”

511 Louis Althusser, *Für Marx*, Frankfurt/M. 1968.

512 This verse provides a contrast intended by John to the political complicity with Roman authority at the end of the passage in 19:15.

18:31 Pilate said to them,
 “You take him and judge him according to your Torah.”
 The Judeans said to him,
 “It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death,”
 18:32 so that Jesus’ word might be fulfilled which he said,
 signifying by what death he was going to die.
 18:33 So Pilate went back into the praetorium.
 He called Jesus and said to him,
 “Are you the king of the Judeans?”
 18:34 Jesus answered,
 “Are you saying this of yourself,
 or have others made a statement about me?”
 18:35 Pilate answered,
 “Am I a Judean?
 Your nation and the leading priests have handed you over to me.
 What have you done?”
 18:36 Jesus answered,
 “My kingship is not of this world order.
 If my kingship were of this world order,
 my officials would have struggled
 that I would not have been handed over to the Judeans.
 But now, my kingship is not from there.”
 18:37 Pilate said to him,
 “So you are a king, after all?”
 Jesus answered,
 “*You* say I am a king.
 I have been begotten to this and have come into the world to this
 to bear witness to fidelity.
 Everyone who is from fidelity is listening to my voice.”
 18:38a Says Pilate to him,
 “What is fidelity, anyhow?”

The night of the Messiah, the betrayal, the farewell, the arrest, and the interrogation are over. From now on, Jesus is only on his own. In this whole passage, Jesus and the procurator are *in* the building, and his opposing compatriots, the Judeans and especially the leading priests, are *in front of* the building. Entering the praetorium makes one unclean, that is all John says. To derive from this sentence a general rule according to which entering *any* building of the *goyim* makes unclean is allowed at most by some passages of the Mishnah.⁵¹³

513 The Mishna passage Mishna Ohalot 18:7-10 confirms the uncleanness of the houses of the *goyim* but not the degree of uncleanness. A lesser degree of uncleanness could be removed by a cleansing ritual before evening. John does not dwell long on such subtleties.

To the leading priests, the praetorium is off limits; a Judean makes himself unclean when he crosses the threshold of the praetorium. Jesus, on the other hand, is already unclean in their eyes; he is no longer a child of Israel. The refusal to enter the praetorium creates a political distance between them and the Roman authority on the other hand. John has a politically elaborate dramaturgy. The main contradiction is and remains that between Rome and the Judean people. Now, by instrumentalizing Pilate for the elimination of a Judean—formally mindful of their purity and so of distance—they will have to give up any distance from Rome, “We have no king unless Caesar.” Their formal distance is belied by their political commitment to Caesar. It is not Jesus who will be excluded from Israel, they will exclude themselves from Israel. Before this happens, many things have to happen.

Every authority is anxious to declare itself not in charge, even more so in a case that brings it trouble. Pontius Pilate, the procurator, asks about the nature of the crime, indicating that he probably does not have jurisdiction. He is told that Jesus is an “evildoer,” that is, a person who commits acts that are punishable by the Romans. Pilate is stubborn, not he but they are responsible; they have their self-government (autonomy) recognized by Rome to proceed according to their laws.

They answer that they do not have the right to put any human to death. The answer is incorrect. They have the right to execute death sentences, and they tried to do so, 7:53 ff; 8:59; 10:31. But the political leadership of the self-government wants to achieve two goals: first, the elimination of an internal Judean opponent, and second, to prove their political reliability to Rome. This is a political interpretation of the historical fact of the death on the cross of Jesus ben Joseph from Nazareth, Galilee, by Messianists like John. This political interpretation is what is at stake, and that is why the trial is told as John does.

So we have here *fiction*, no *reality*, no historical documentation. We have no documents, no trial record, no eyewitness evidence that such a trial took place.⁵¹⁴ It is even questionable whether the authorities, Judean and Roman, would have made much of a fuss with any Galilean fanatic in their eyes, for instance, through a public trial. Romans everywhere used to make short work—that is, without any trial—with suspected rebels. We know nothing.

But we have four narratives. Here we are told: A political leadership delivers a disliked member of the people to an occupying power in order not to jeopardize its business basis for a proper and probably profitable relationship with the occupying power. It is not the task of an interpretation to establish historical facts, especially since the endeavor would be futile. Its task is to interpret the narrative in its internal

514 The earliest written reference comes from Paul, but he was not an eyewitness. That Jesus was crucified cannot be doubted, but how the execution came about, we do not know and cannot know until some historical document on the subject appears. This, however, seems completely improbable.

contexts and to place it in a known socio-political context of contradiction. This is true for the Gospel as a whole and even more so for the Passion narrative. It cannot do more but at least it should do this.

Pilate acts here as the supreme judge. He asks Jesus if he is the king of the Judeans. Jesus answers with a counterquestion. He wants to know where Pilate got this information. Did the Romans investigate themselves or had he been denounced? Pilate confirms the latter assumption. He, Pilate, was not a Judean, he had no reason of his own to take action against Jesus.

The arrest involved “officials of the Perushim” (Pharisees), the great opponents of Jesus; they are not represented at the trial before the Roman court. In John’s Gospel, the Perushim stand for the emerging Rabbinical Judaism. They were and are the opponents of John’s Messianic community. But he does not hold them responsible for the transfer of Jesus to Roman jurisdiction.

This argument *e silentio* is important. The eternal anti-Semitic accusation that the Jews—and all Judaism was Rabbinical Judaism until modern times—killed Jesus finds no support in John. The Gospel’s accusation of killing refers to the exclusion of the Messianists around John from the synagogue, as we saw above, in the discussion of 15:26-16:15.⁵¹⁵

The triangle of actors in the Passion narrative thus consists of *Pilate* (Rome), the *leading priests* (the Judean government) or *their followers*, and *Jesus*. The Judean government has put it to Pilate that Jesus is striving for political power, i.e. kingship. For the Romans, this is interesting information. They, as the real authorities, need to know who might be challenging Roman power, or if it is an internal dispute on power in self-government. So Pilate asks, “Your nation and the leading priests have handed you over to me, what have you done?”

Jesus’ answer to this double question is a three-liner:

- (1) “My kingship is not of this world order.
- (2) If my kingship were of this world order, my officials would have struggled so that I would not have been handed over to the Judeans.
- (3) But now my kingship is not from there.”

Jesus refers to the royal history of recent times among his people and to the discussion about kingship that had been going on in Israel since the return from Babylon, especially in the Maccabean period. Pilate is unaware of this discussion. He, therefore, has no idea what to make of Jesus’ answer.

The answer has three lines; the first and the third are almost identical; the kingship of Jesus is determined negatively, it is “not of this world order.” Here *kosmos* is

515 See above, 13.5. The farewell.

clearly to be translated as “world *order*.” The middle line brings the definition of the kingship of this world order; it was the product of a military struggle. The negation of the third line is further defined by the second line, this is shown by the introductory particles of the third line *nyn de*, “but now.” Thus, the kingship of Jesus is not defined by the military.

Pilate and not a few of us do not know the Scriptures. Therefore we point out some important passages of the Tanakh.

In the Torah, the king of Israel occurs only in one place, Deuteronomy 17:14-20. A king not necessarily has to be, all the more so a king “as among all peoples” (*ke-khol ha-goyim*). But if the people of Israel absolutely want a king, then they are to take a “king from the midst of the brothers” by all means.

The further restriction of a possible kingship is first: not too many horses = armor, cavalry; second: not too many wives = alliances with foreign powers (see 1 Kings 11:1 ff.); third: not too much silver and gold = exploitation of the subjects.

According to the Torah, a king’s duty is to obtain a copy of the Torah—the constitution of liberty and justice—and, sitting on the throne, to “read in it all the days of his life.” There has never been such a king.

This brings us back to Psalm 72,

God, give your right to the king, your truth to the king’s son,
that he may judge your people by truth, your oppressed by justice.
The mountains carry peace to the people, the hills justice.
He establishes justice for the oppressed of the people,
he frees the needy,
he crushes the exploiter.

According to this text, the core task of every king, that is, of every state, every government, is truth and justice. And that is justice for the humiliated and needy (‘*anaw*, *evyon*). The measure by which one measures the king, the state, the government, is what is called in the Scriptures *tzedaka*, “truth, probation, reliability.” *Truth* in the Scriptures has justice as its *true* content. The *tzaddik* is a *truthful one* and so a *just one*. Justice is *proven* only by what happens to the humiliated and poor of a people.

This is *kingship*, and Jesus means this kingship. He, the Messiah, is the Son of the King for whom the psalmist prays here. Jesus as the Messianic King is different all along the line and in its essence from kingship according to this world order, *basileia tou kosmou toutou*. Jesus’ kingship is a radical alternative, but it is not something otherworldly, purely spiritual or inward. It is a radically this-worldly, earthly kingship.

With the Torah, Israel has taken leave of the normality of ancient Middle Eastern oppression and exploitation, of the “production” of ‘*anawim we-evyonim*, of the oppressed and needy, “there shall be no needy among you,” Deuteronomy 15:4. Jesus’ response only ties in with the hallowed tradition of the Torah republic of the ancient

Judeans. Jesus does not want an unheard-of new thing; he wants a kingship according to the Torah. Since, as I said, there has never been such a kingship, Jesus wants unheard-of novelty. It is precisely the traditional that is the novelty!

The paraphrase of the “king of this world order” in Hebrew is, *melekh ke-khol ha-goyim*, “king as among all peoples.” This is exactly what the elites of Israel demand of Samuel, 1 Kings 8:4 ff.,

All the elders of Israel gathered together.
They went to Samuel in Ramat.
They said, “There, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now, hire a king over us; he will establish justice for us as for all the peoples.”
Evil was this word in the eyes of Samuel,
because they said, “Give us a king, that he may do us justice.”
Samuel prayed to the NAME.
The NAME said to Samuel,
“Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you.
For it is not you, they have rejected.
Me they have rejected, that I should be King over them.”

This is exactly what will happen here again, John 19:15, “We have no king unless Caesar!” Samuel then shows what the king’s legal order (*mishpat ha-melekh*) is, 1 Samuel 8:11 ff,

This is the legal order of the king who will be king over you:
He will take your sons and make them his charioteers and soldiers,
that they may go before him and his chariots.
He will make them captains over a thousand and captains over fifty.
He will make them plow his land and reap his crops.
He will have them make implements of war and chariots.
He will take your daughters as beauticians, cooks, bakers.
Your fields he will take, your vineyards, oil groves, the good ones;
he will give them to his ministers . . .
. . . and you will be his slaves.
On that day, you will cry out because of your king whom you have chosen.
But the NAME will not answer you on that day.

We have quoted these texts in such detail so that we can get a Scriptural idea of the *basileia tou kosmou toutou*. The kingship of God, in which Jesus is the Messianic King, is absolutely different from that “legal order of the king (*mishpat ha-melekh*).” What Samuel describes fits all the great empires of antiquity, and it fits Rome even more. The kingship of the Messiah, the third line, is, according to the Torah and the Prophets, the absolute alternative to the *malkhut ke-khol ha-goyim*, to Rome.

Pilate cannot understand this. He understands only one thing, that Jesus is somehow a king. Therefore he formulates his question in such a way that the answer

must be positive. Jesus reacts wisely. Wisely, because he does not want to incriminate himself in the sense of the Roman court order, “*You* say (not *I*!) that I am a king (but not a king, as you think).”

The answer continues. Twice we hear *eis touto*, “to this.” This can refer to what precedes, the kingship of Jesus. It can refer to what follows, “bearing witness to fidelity.” Both are meant. In Israel, the king of Psalm 72 embodies God’s fidelity to Israel. For this purpose he was “begotten and came into the world,” namely, to be a righteous, right-making shepherd of the people and to keep the individual members of the people (the sheep) together. The real kings of the nations and also of Israel usually did and do the opposite (see Ezekiel 34).

Why “was begotten”? “Came into the world” would be quite enough (see 11:27). John, however, invokes the association to Psalm 2:6-7,

I have appointed you my King,
over Zion, the mountain of my sanctification.
I will tell it, the decree:
The NAME said to me, “My son you are.
This day have I have begotten you.”

With the words “to this, I have been begotten, to this, I have come into the world,” we hear at the same time “how the nations rage” (Psalm 2:1), how “the kings of the earth, their illustrious ones, call together a session, against the NAME and his Messiah (‘anointed one,’ *meshicho*, *christou autou*, 2:2).” This is exactly what is happening here.

“Ask, and I will give you the nations as an inheritance, for your possession the edges of the earth (the Roman Empire), you may shatter them with a rod of iron, smash them like a device of clay” (Psalm 2:8-9). This is a language we don’t like. But the exaltation of this Messiah is the end for Rome, the shattering of that empire, the destruction of the *mishpat ha-melekh*, the legal order of the king. To this end, John lets us hear Psalm 2. In times after the catastrophic defeat of 70, the second psalm is the straw to which John’s isolated Messianic community clings.

Pilate understands nothing of it. The word “fidelity” seems “Greek” to him anyway. Fidelity has no place in realpolitik. Politics is a game of intrigue, lies, betrayal, and false friends who are just waiting for an opportunity to trap their rivals. The gods of Greece and Rome were also notoriously faithless. From this circumstance, the great tragedian poets drew their material. “What is fidelity?” Pilate, shrugging, turns away from Jesus and toward the Judeans outside the Praetorium.

14.2. “There, the Human,” 18:38b-19:11

18:38b Having said this, he went out again to the Judeans and says to them,
 “I find no case against him.

18:39 However, you have a custom that at *Pascha* I release someone to you. Do you want me to release to you the king of the Judeans?"

18:40 They cried out again, saying,
"Not this one but Barabbas!"
But Barabbas was a terrorist.⁵¹⁶

19:1 Pilate then took Jesus in and had him flogged.

19:2 And the soldiers wove a wreath of thorns,
put it on his head, and threw a purple robe around him.⁵¹⁷

19:3 They went up to him, saying,
"Hail, king of the Jews!"
And they slapped him in the face.⁵¹⁸

19:4 Pilate came outside again and says to them,
"There, I am bringing him outside to you,
that you recognize that I find no case against him."

19:5 Now Jesus came outside,
wearing the wreath of thorns and the purple robe.
(And says to them, "There, the Human!")⁵¹⁹

19:6 Now when the leading priests and the officials saw him
they cried out, saying,
"Crucify, crucify!"
Says Pilate to them,
"You take him out yourselves and crucify him,
for I find no case against him."

19:7 The Judeans answered him,
"We have a Torah,

516 TERRORIST: *Lēstēs*, a militant Zealot and freedom fighter. In the mouth of the authorities, the word has an incriminating connotation. Hence, "terrorist." Barabbas, son of the father, is a common name. In John, *bar abbas* is a contrast to *bar enosh*. John is an anti-Zealot text, see note on 10:1.

517 A PURPLE ROBE: *Himation porphyroun*, Hebrew *beged argaman*. The purple robe is the emblem of royalty (Judges 8:26, etc.) and of the leading priests (Exodus 28:2 ff.; Numbers 4:14 LXX, etc.).

518 The scene is inspired by Isaiah 50:4-9, especially 50:6, where, in the LXX version, both words, "flogging" (*mastigoun*) and "slapping in the face" (*didonai rapisma*) occur: "My back I gave to those who flogged me, my cheeks to those who slapped me, my face I did not turn away when they mocked and spat on me." This is the anti-Zealot "strategy" of the Messiah that John the Baptist already announced. See note on 1:29.

519 THERE, THE HUMAN: This phrase is omitted by P⁶⁶ and by some old Latin manuscripts. Barrett, for example, refers to Zechariah 6:11-12 as a reference. The priest there is Joshua (*Ye(ho)shua*). He is given a wreath or crown of silver and gold (v.11) and told on God's behalf, *hinne-ish tzemach shmo*, "There, a man, sprout his name." Should this be the reference, Jesus is the absolute contrast. To P⁶⁶, the phrase interrupts the logical progression of the narrative.

and according to the Torah, he ought to die,
because he made himself a divine.”⁵²⁰

19:8 Now when Pilate heard this word,
he was even more afraid.

19:9 He went into the praetorium again and says to Jesus,
“Where are you from?”
But Jesus gave him no answer.

19:10 So Pilate says to him,
“You don’t speak to me?
Do you not know
that I have authority to release you,
and I have authority to crucify you?”

19:11 Jesus answered him,
“You have no authority over me at all
unless it is given to you from above.
This is why the one who handed me over to you
is committing a greater aberration.”⁵²¹

Pilate did not understand that Jesus wanted an absolute alternative to the Roman world order. And if he had already understood this, he could not have recognized

520 A DIVINE: *Hyion theou*. The article *tou* is missing. *Theos* without the article means “divine.”

521 The verse is difficult. There are two text versions. First, *echeis*, present tense, “you have”; second, *eiches*, imperfect tense, “you would have.” If you choose the second version, as usual, you opt for the irrealis; you then have the problem of explaining the absence of the particle *an*. You then get, “You would have no authority against me at all if it were not given to you from above.” This amounts to God sanctioning the Roman power—against the Messiah! If you choose the first version, and this first version (ⲛ, A, D, L, N, Ψ, 054, 23, 565, 1241 al.) is better attested than the second (B, W, Θ, f^{1.13}, al.), which is followed by the Latin versions), then you choose a main clause in the indicative, “You have no authority at all,” and a qualifying clause, “unless it had been given to you from above” (*ei mē* = Hebrew *ki ʾim* or *bilti ʾim*, see Genesis 32:27). Mentally you then have to add, “But you have no power,” because it has just not been given to him from above (*anōthen*). This very “above” is clear in John’s Gospel, 3:3, 7, 31, and especially 8:23, where the Messiah says, *egō ek tōn anō eimi*, “I am from above.” Pilate has no idea of what is really taking place. Nestle/Aland’s reference to Romans 13:1 is typical. They choose *eiches* and decide politically-theologically for the ordinance of state authority by God. This cannot be because of John 16:33—“I have defeated the world order (of which Pilate is the representative)” —, among other things. The conflict between the two versions is political and has been carried on across textual groups since at least the 4th century. In the first version, Rome/Pilate is denied any claim to power; in the second version, Rome has at most a temporary (Romans 13:1) margin of power; this would be Augustine’s situation but by no means John’s. In both versions, human power is always aberration (*hamartia*). But more than Pilate, someone else transgresses against Jesus. Not Judas Iscariot is meant here, but Caiaphas. Judas was a petty henchman; it was Caiaphas who handed Jesus over to the Romans, 18:28a.

any acute political danger in him. Jesus has no desire to have divisions or legions. Such do-gooders may be annoying, but they are not dangerous. It would be best to negate him and let him go, "I find no cause at all for a trial against him." The Judeans have a different view. They know about the danger posed by Jesus and those like him. They know the Scriptures and know what political force traditionalism represents in Judea.

Pilate, on the other hand, knows his Judeans, and being a shrewd politician, he proposes a horse trade to them. He had another political prisoner, a certain Barabbas, a *lēstēs*, "terrorist." Mark 15:7 adds that Barabbas was captured on the occasion of an insurrection in which a murder was committed. Barabbas was most likely a Zealot, a militant fighter for a Judea where the Torah would have unlimited validity. Pilate invokes an alleged customary law by which the authorities can release a prisoner. This customary law is asserted by our Gospels, but there is no other evidence for this assertion. For the narrative, however, it is an important element.

Rome confronts the Judeans with the choice of demanding a harmless, non-Zealot, in Rome's eyes "non-violent" do-gooder, the so-called "Prince (*Nazorean*), King of the Judeans," or a violent freedom fighter who poses a far greater danger to them. But they demand Barabbas. The devout Christians are outraged here: the Jews want a merciless murderer instead of a gentle Son of God. But the text is not moral; it is political. These Judeans have indeed engaged in the armed struggle; they have indeed chosen Barabbas.

The Messianists who referred to Jesus disagreed, John says. You may doubt this, you even have to, as long as you stay on the level of the narrative. Simon Peter drew the sword, he wanted the fight, the armed fight. Only after the catastrophic outcome of the *Judean War*, that is, only in the present time of the narrator, the spokesmen of these Messianists, that is, Matthew, Mark, etc., have been finally cured of their sympathies for the Zealots. Therefore, they weave into their narrative the incident surrounding the release of Barabbas to make it impossible for their communities to have any flirtation with the Zealots, who were politically active even after the war.

Pilate gets nowhere with his horse trade; he makes a concession. He has Jesus flogged. The punishment is almost a death sentence. Many did not survive the ordeal. The scourging of Jesus, like the whole following scene, is surely meant as a fulfillment of Isaiah 53:4-5,

But he was pierced because of our transgressions,
crushed because of our crimes.
Chastened to pacify us,
by his scourging bruises, we were healed.

The soldiers have their fun playing the game. If this one made himself king, then we will treat him as a king, endow him with purple and crown, "Hail, King of the Jews."

And they beat him with their fists, *rapismata*, like the official of the great priest, 18:22.

Pilate reckons that his concession has appeased his opponents. He says he finds no guilt in Jesus, proving his cynicism, and showing, without realizing it, how much Jesus has become one with the servant of the NAME of Isaiah 53. He brings Jesus out in full royal regalia, with purple and a crown of thorns, and says, “Look at the human!” He quotes, without knowing it, Isaiah 53:3,

Despised, avoided by men (*ʾishim*), a man (*ʾish*) of pain,
aware of illness, without a face, hidden from us,
despised, we no longer esteemed him.

The Hebrew text speaks of *ʾish*, “man”; whereas the Greek version speaks of *anthrōpos*, “human.” In John, the word also refers to the *hyios tou anthrōpou*, *bar enosh*, “Human.” Pilate, of course, does not know the *bar enosh*. But John’s audience must learn that the Human does not “come on the clouds” as in Matthew (25:31), but comes in the guise of one who has been maltreated and made contemptible. This, and only this, is how liberation happens, John says.

The Messiah concept of a “suffering servant of the NAME” is traditional indeed, but this tradition is not popular. Jesus is the total and absolute antitype of the Zealot Messiah. Many may have great problems with this liberation figure. Suffering does not save, they say; it leads to annihilation no less than the Zealot adventure 66-70. John says: The Human is presented like this, here in front of the Praetorium. This one is the Human.

Nevertheless, Christians should not make it too easy for themselves to say, “By his scourging bruises, we were set free.” Christianity has relied on the sword rather than on vicarious suffering throughout its history.

Every new generation should think anew about this Human as about our Messiah and Liberator. This theological task cannot be anticipated by any interpretation of the Gospel of John. In any case, no Messiah miracle man comes anymore, even less one with the sword. What is liberating about the Human of pain—faceless, despised? Whatever it is, it is the end of all illusions that the power that Pilate represents can be met with a power of the same caliber.

What Pilate may have thought or felt when he presented Jesus, John did not tell us. His narrative figure Pilate is not quite a humane figure. Pilate can only mean the word “human” disparagingly. He wants the people outside the praetorium to see Jesus as a pitiful figure from whom no danger can come either for them or Rome.

We know an incident from the account of the *Judean War* by Flavius Josephus. A certain Jesus ben Channan (“Jesus, the son of Ananus”) ran through the city in the year 62 with a cry of woe, “A voice from the east, a voice from the west, a voice from the four winds, a voice against Jerusalem and the holy house, a voice against

the bridegrooms and the brides, and a voice against this whole people,” like Jeremiah (7:34). Day and night he shouted, he got on the people’s nerves so much that they handed him over to Albinus the procurator. The latter had him “whipped till his bones were laid bare.” He continued to cry out even under the ordeal. Albinus, convinced that he was dealing with a madman, let him go.⁵²²

We do not know if this incident had anything to do with the scene of scourging in our Gospels. Pilate, however, could have acted with Jesus ben Joseph as his successor Albinus acted with Jesus ben Channan thirty years later.

But Jesus was crucified, and John has Pilate play the role of the unaware prophet again, just as he had Caiaphas play that role, 11:51. “Look at the human” is, from the mouth of the cynical Roman, the fulfillment of the Scriptural word Isaiah 53:3.

Apparently, Pilate assumes that the image of this maltreated and mocked man would be enough to appease the mob outside the praetorium. The opposite is the case. They want to put him on the cross. Pilate is tired of it; he gives in.

In one respect, he remains stubborn; he does not want to have established guilt in Jesus. This is not enough for the elites of Jerusalem. According to their Torah, Jesus is guilty and must die; he has made himself the “Son of God.” This is to be established officially. The Torah provides for stoning as the death penalty for “infringing the NAME,” Leviticus 24:14. In general, the oral Torah provides for only four types of killing: Burning, beheading, stoning, and strangulation, Mishna Sanhedrin 7:1. Crucifixion is not one of them. Crucifixion is the Roman way of settling accounts with rebels.

Who calls himself the “Son of God” fulfills the facts of the blasphemy in the sense of the Torah *and* the high treason in the sense of Rome. They want both to be established. The political calculation of the leading priests was the exposure of Jesus as a criminal in the sense of Rome. They want a political trial before a Roman court. In the case of condemnation, only the sentence remains: Death by the cross. Only if Pilate pronounces the sentence “death by crucifixion” the leading priests have taken him into their political boat.

The accusation that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God is much more serious, even for Romans, than the accusation that Jesus claimed to be the King of the Judeans. Pilate has nothing to do with the Torah, but he does with one who claims divine dignity for himself. Only Pilate’s highest master, the emperor of the Roman Empire, the real “son of God,” one *like God*, has this right. Pilate’s fear is not of magico-religious but of political origin. He must fear all the more that there is more behind this prisoner than some local fool. Perhaps he is, after all, someone who challenges the emperor as “God’s son” and behind whom there is a serious political movement. Then

522 Flavius Josephus, [Bell. 6, 5](#).

the emperor would hold him, Pilate, liable for letting an adversary of the emperor himself go free.

Pilate must therefore get to the bottom of the matter. He wants to conduct the questioning in camera, as he did the first time. Again he has Jesus led into the praetorium and asks, "Where are you from?" This question was often asked of Jesus, especially by his opponents, 8:25. He is silent.

The Roman puffs himself up that he has the power to have Jesus crucified or to release him. That a maltreated man, beaten almost to death, can display such sovereignty as Jesus does is hard to imagine, but there have been such examples in recent history. John wants to make it clear that Jesus "defeated the world order (Rome) (16:33)" and that the "leader of the world order (the emperor) was thrown out (12:31)."

We must insert a small text-critical digression here. The problem with Jesus' answer in v.11 is that there are two versions, both well attested. The first version has the present tense, "You have no authority over me unless it is given to you from above." The second has the imperfect tense, and for most translators, this has an irrealis, "You would have no authority over me unless it had been given to you from above." The decision between the variants must be made from the Gospel itself.

Jesus comes "from above" (*anōthen*). Can Pilate's power then come "from above"? Pilate's power comes from Rome and not "from above." Now the irrealis requires the imperfect but at the same time the particle *an*. But this is missing in all versions. The normal translation [for example of the CJB] reads, "You *would have* (*eiches*) no power over me if it hadn't been given to you from above." The logical continuation is, "The power is given to you from above, therefore you have power over me." In the structure of John's Gospel, this cannot be.

It has to be translated, "You have (*echeis*) no authority over me unless it had been given to you from above." In this case, the logical continuation is, "Authority has not been given to you from above, so you have no authority over me." The police force also had no authority over Jesus (18:6).

Therefore, the idea that God gave Pilate authority is absurd. Pilate may have had leeway, but not authority. He should have used his leeway and released Jesus, yet he does not use it. This is an aberration ("sin"). A greater aberration is committed by him "who handed me over to you."

Was Judas Iscariot meant here? Hardly. It was Caiaphas who handed Jesus over to Roman jurisdiction, 18:28, for political reasons alone, 11:50. Pilate himself says, "Your nation and the leading priests handed you over to me," 18:35. They commit greater aberration. Here we see what *chata*⁷ is actually. Caiaphas is shown here not so much to be a morally reprehensible man, rather he commits an unforgivable and catastrophic error, he delivers his people with Jesus entirely into the hands of the Romans. We will hear this more clearly.

Scholion 8: Authority from God?

We interrupt here to point out the ideological bias of theologians. Nestle-Aland, the 27th edition, refers to Romans 13:1. They assume that state power is from God (*exousia . . . hypo theou*). The real existing state power (*ousai*) is ordered by God (*hypo theou tetagmenai*). Apart from the fact that *hypo* should not be translated as “from” but as “under,” the theologians construct a state-theoretical uniform mush in the so-called New Testament. There is no such thing, and John’s attitude toward Rome is different from Paul’s.⁵²³

From his point of view, Martin Luther had good political (less theological!) reasons to radically reject Thomas Muentzer’s communist experiment in order not to endanger the superior experiment of the Reformation. For this, he needed the theological anchoring of the real existing state power as wanted by God in these circumstances.

So the theologians construct as follows. God has given authority to every state and thus to Rome as well, and Pilate legitimately exercises this God-given power in his area. Jesus, therefore, submits to this divine decree. But why then “sin” or, as we say, “aberration”? Let us listen to Rudolf Bultmann:

The peculiar intermediate position of the state between God and the world is also indicated by the continuation of Jesus’ words, “Therefore, he that handed me over to you has the greater sin.” The state, if it really acts as a state, performs its actions without personal interest; if it acts objectively, there can be no question of *hamartia* [“sin,” TV] with it at all. If it acts unobjectively, by allowing itself to be abused by the world for its desires—as Pilate is in danger of doing and actually does—its action still retains something of its authority. At least the form of law is still preserved and the authority of law recognized so that the unjustly condemned must submit [follows a reference to the example of Socrates, TV]. The state, while it still acts in any degree state-like, cannot act with the same personal enmity, with the same passionate hatred, as the world does—however much it may ruin its authority by lack of objectivity. It may become addicted to the world, but its motives are never identical to those of the world. And in the present case, it is clear: Pilate has no personal interest at all in the death of Jesus; he does not persecute him with hatred like the Jews who handed Jesus over to him. They bear the greater sin, the actual responsibility. And their sin is, so to speak, double, because to their hatred of Jesus comes the abuse of the state for their own purposes.⁵²⁴

523 Gerhard Jankowski, *Die große Hoffnung. Paulus an die Römer. Eine Auslegung*, Berlin 1998, 275-276.

524 Rudolf Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des John (KEK)*, Göttingen 1941, 513. Klaus Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium. 2. Teilband: Kapitel 11-21 (ThKNT)*, Stuttgart 2001, 239 refers to a *retractatio* of Bultmann, who deleted the following sentence in 1957, “His (Jesus’) words prove that the authority of the state does not originate from the world, but is founded by

The issue here is not so much Lutheran “state piety”⁵²⁵ and Bultmann’s hostility to Jews as demanded by the Hitler state. They may speak for themselves. Our concern is that the exegete Bultmann missed the real point of John’s Gospel all along the line. If he had been guided by images of resistance at that time, he would have read the Gospel quite differently. He would then have chosen the variant *echeis*.

Pilate had no authority over Jesus. He could exterminate him, but he had no authority over him. The Gestapo henchman who interrogated Sophie Scholl had no authority over her. He even had to offer her a golden bridge, “If you tell me your accomplices, I will see to it that you can get your head out of the noose.” Sophie Scholl rejected the request, and at that moment the Gestapo had no authority (*oudemia exousia*) over her.

Or one thinks of a famous picture. A huge SS man has built himself up in front of a feeble prisoner. This prisoner was Carl von Ossietzky. The SS man could swat Ossietzky to death with one blow like a fly, but he had no power over him.

Such prisoners might reflect on who had the greater “sin,” the state, from which nothing else could be expected, or the traitor or collaborator who turned them over to the state. Jesus was of the latter opinion. To deduce from this a right of a criminal state—and to John and many Messianists, Rome was a criminal state—as Bultmann and the editors of Nestle-Aland did and do, maybe due to the ideological mind cuffs of German Protestantism, it has nothing to do with John.

Augustine read John. His method is not our method, but he understood John better than Bultmann & Co. Augustine sees Rome as John saw Rome, “*Remota igitur iustitia quid sint regna nisi magna latrocinia?* Without justice, what are kingdoms but great dens of robbers?”⁵²⁶ The legitimate state derives here from justice, and biblical justice at that, and not vice versa, justice from the respective real existing state. To Augustine, Rome was never “an authority decreed by God,” but throughout its history a state of injustice and demonology. This did not prevent him from demanding

God,” Bultmann 1941, 512. Wengst mentions, however, that Bultmann retained the distinction between state and world even there. Rather, Bultmann saw no reason to revise his view that “the Jews” committed the greater (and double!) sin. Meanwhile, we are beginning to see and combat the hostility of evangelical theology to the Jews. Lutheran state piety, however, is vitally alive in the churches—not only the Protestant ones!—more than sixty years later.

525 Luther himself was a political man and anything but subservient to state authority; see the great Luther chapter in Ulrich Duchrow’s book, *Christentum und Weltverantwortung. Traditionsgeschichte und systematische Struktur der Zweireichelehre*, Stuttgart ²1983, 437-573. Just as most Christians have not understood the “Christ,” most Lutherans have not understood Luther.

526 Aurelius Augustinus: *De Civitate Dei Libri XXII. Recensuit et commentario critico instruxit Emanuel Hoffmann*, CSEL Vol. XXXX, Wien 1899, I, 4:4.

state intervention by a state that had become Christian in the meantime against the Donatists and the radical Circumcellions. But neither in Augustin nor in Luther is the state a *theologoumenon* [i.e. a theological statement or concept].

14.3. Friend of Caesar, 19:12-13

19:12 From then on, Pilate sought to release him.
But the Judeans cried out, saying,
“If you release this one, you are no friend of Caesar!
Everyone who makes himself king
is contrary to Caesar!”

19:13 Now when Pilate heard these words,
he brought Jesus outside
and sat down on the judge’s seat,
in the place called Lithostrotos—Pavement,
but in Hebrew Gabbatha.⁵²⁷

“From above” can only be understood by Pilate as “from Rome.” Jesus does not seem to pose any danger to him. For this reason (*ek toutou*), he tries to release him. But this does not depend on him.

The leading priests now play their best card, they blackmail Pilate exactly where he can be blackmailed, his relationship with the Roman center, with the emperor. Their argument is strikingly simple and logical. Whoever makes himself king—apparently against the will of Rome—puts himself in a contradiction (*antilegei*) with Rome, and is an enemy of Caesar. Whoever bears the almost official title of “friend of Caesar” can hope for lucrative posts in the provinces. Whoever supports someone who is at odds with Rome puts his friendship with the emperor and thus his function at risk. The one who releases someone who opposes Rome is not a friend of Caesar, say his opponents in front of the Praetorium. If the self-government insists on a death sentence, he, Pilate, must act accordingly; otherwise, they will file a complaint against him with the central office.

He will make his opponents pay a high price for trying to corner him. Do they want a court judgment? Well, they shall have it, but not as they think. He sits down in the judge’s seat, *bēma*, a stonewalled tribune, *Lithostrōtos*, *Gabbatha*. John chooses his words carefully. It is indeed a judge’s seat, known to the Aramaic-speaking inhabitants of Jerusalem as *Gabbatha*, which John must translate for his Greek-speaking audience: there it was, right there! Pilate will act as Caesar’s friend, even more as Caesar’s representative, he will not disappoint the trust that Emperor Tiberius had put in him.

527 IN HEBREW GABBATHA: What John calls “Hebrew” is Aramaic, for Aramaic was spoken in Jerusalem at that time. The word itself cannot be satisfactorily explained.

15. The Second Part of the Passion Narrative: ‘Erev Pascha, 19:14-42

What happens now—from the sixth hour until sunset on the preparation day of Passover—is indeed the preparation for the festival of liberation. Nowhere in the Gospel is Passover, ever. We are only ever in the “nearness of Passover,” but we do not get beyond *‘erev pascha*, the eve of Passover. Just as slaughtering the Passover lamb was the necessary preparatory act to be able to celebrate Passover, so what is being told now is the necessary preparation for the Messianic, ultimate Passover.

Also what is told “on day one of the Shabbat week” belongs to the prelude of the Messianic Passover. “Not yet,” the Messiah Jesus will say to Maria from Magdala.

The *‘Erev Pascha* is about the King of Israel (14-21), the goal the King achieved on the cross (22-37), and his burial (38-42). In all three sections of 19:14-42, there is an explicit reminder that all of this occurs on *‘Erev Pascha*. The recognition of the King, his death and burial: this, and only this, is, to John, preparation for the Passover, *‘Erev Pascha*.

15.1. King of the Judeans, 19:14-22

- 19:14 It was *‘Erev Pascha*, the eve of the Passover,⁵²⁸
about the sixth hour.
And he said to the Judeans:
“There, your king!”
- 19:15 But they cried out,
“Upward, upward, crucify him!”
Pilate said to them,
“Your king, I shall crucify?”
The leading priests answered,
“We have no king except Caesar.”
- 19:16 Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.
So they took over Jesus.
- 19:17 He himself carried the cross
and went out to the so-called *Kraniou topos*— place of the skull,
called in Hebrew *Golgotha*.⁵²⁹
- 19:18 There they crucified him
with him two others, one here, the other there, Jesus in the middle.
- 19:19 Pilate also had a title written⁵³⁰

528 *‘EREV PASCHA: Paraskeuē tou pascha*, Hebrew *‘erev ha-pessach* (like *‘erev shabat*), “eve of *Pascha*,” the time when the preparatory work for the festival or Shabbat was done.

529 GOLGOTHA: Again, this is probably an Aramaic word. *Gelal* in Aramaic means “something that rolls,” i.e., a round stone; *galgal* is “wheel,” *gulgalta* (Hebrew *gulgolet*) is “skull, head.”

530 [TITLE: I do not think it is necessary to paraphrase the legal term “title” with “grounds for the judgment” as TV does in German:]

and put it on the cross.
 It was written,
Jesus the Nazorean, the King of the Judeans.
 19:20 Now many Judeans read this title,
 because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city.
 And it had been written in Hebrew, Roman, and Greek.
 19:21 The leading priests of the Judeans now said to Pilate,
 “Do not write, *The King of the Judeans*,
 but, *He said, King am I of the Judeans.*”⁵³¹
 19:22 Pilate answered,
 “What I have written, I have written.”

Now Pilate shows that he was the more savvy politician after all. He faces a popular assembly that was not one. The Perushim, the official opposition, are absent. Only the priestly elites and their staff are present. The whole thing is a democratically dressed-up farce.

Now he doesn't say, “Look at the man,” now he says, “There, your king.” They roar, “Upwards, upwards, crucify him.” Pilate demands the “democratic” legitimacy of the death sentence, “Your king shall I crucify?” He has them where he wants them. The leading priests—not the people of the Judeans—say, “We have no king except Caesar.” What they probably don't realize is that they are solemnly declaring that they want a *melekh ke-khol-ha-goyim, basileia tou kosmou toutou*, a king according to this world order. This is the political price that Pilate demands from them. So they do.

Let us try to understand the process. Jürgen Becker describes Pilate as one who has to “run back and forth between the Jews outside and Jesus inside. A demonstrative piece of ridiculousness! He can't get along with the Jews . . .”⁵³² As little as Peter is “cowardly,” Pilate is “ridiculous.” Pilate does his “job” on behalf of Rome not badly. True, he has a man executed to whom he attaches no weight and whom he actually would like to let go, but he forces a political commitment to Rome by the Judean self-government. The emperor would be pleased with him. We always tend to ridicule politicians we detest. Understandable as a psychological relief tool, but often politically unwise. John takes Pilate (Rome) very seriously. Interpretations should do the same.

JUDGMENT REASON: *Titlon, titulum*, from Latin court language. “Debt title” in German has to do mainly with monetary debt. We paraphrase it as “grounds for judgment.”

531 KING AM I OF THE JUDEANS: *Basileus eimi tōn loudaiōn*. This is unusual; normal would be *basileus tōn loudaiōn eimi*, see 19:19 and the first line of 19:21. The leading priests separate by *eimi* the word *basileus* from *tōn loudaiōn*. We attempt to reflect this linguistic conspicuousness in the translation.

532 Jürgen Becker, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes. II. Kapitel 11-21*, Gütersloh ³1991, 664.

John relates an event that happened at least two generations ago and fits it into his political situation. He wants to make two things clear. First, that the Messiah was executed or murdered by Rome, that is, by what he calls *kosmos*, “world order.” Second, that the representative of this world order was pushed by the political leadership in Jerusalem to kill an internal opponent of that leadership. The leadership does this because they are part of this world order: The emperor *is* their king, and they are now an element of the imperial world order.

John knows how the intrigue between priests and Roman authority works; he knows what politics is: a field where suspicion, cynicism, theater, and mass manipulation are the decisive factors. “What is fidelity,” he has Pilate ask. Both parties achieve their goal: the Messiah is eliminated, and Pilate forces the self-government to a confession of unconditional political loyalty.

The actual winner of this evil game is the Roman authority. The priests have gambled away their legitimacy with their confession of a goy as their king—in the flagrant desecration of the Torah.⁵³³ By deciding against the Messiah, they necessarily decided for Caesar as their king and for Rome as their god. Necessarily: a third was excluded. This is how John interprets the behavior of priestly leadership. They have finally said farewell to the Israel that John wants.

John does not make it quite that simple. The principle of the “excluded third” would mean that everyone who decides against the Messiah decides *ipso facto* for the world order (*kosmos*). It would have been a trifle to have the Perushim also appear in his narrative of the death sentence as companions of the priests. The Perushim also vehemently reject Jesus as Messiah. They, too, want the elimination of a political opponent, but not at the price of having to share the political confession, “We have no king unless Caesar.” That is why John does not have them appear here. This blank space in his narrative is telling: the Perushim are and remain political opponents in the struggle for Israel, but they are not the enemy, they do not belong to the *kosmos*, to Rome, without ifs and buts. That is why John leaves them out of the game. After the arrest, they appear nowhere.

John knows the political business, he knows what to say and what not to say. Let us recall the description of the appearance of Caiaphas when he tried to win over his colleagues in the Sanhedrin for the elimination of Jesus, 12:50 ff. No Messianic writer has illuminated the political processes between the occupying power and the collaborating local elites as mercilessly as John.

We leave the praetorium and the back and forth between Rome, the Judean government, and the Messiah. But even on the way between the *Lithostrōtos*, *Gabbatha*,

533 “You shall appoint, appoint a king whom the NAME your God shall choose. From among your brothers, you may appoint a king over you. You shall not appoint over you (as king) a foreign man who is not your brother,” Deuteronomy 17:15.

the Roman judgment seat, to the place of the skull, *Kraniou Topos, Golgotha*, the theme of the king remains the dominant motif. The king himself carries the instrument of his execution. John emphasizes this, not only because the condemned had to carry their cross themselves, but primarily to indicate that this is exactly what Jesus wants. Jesus did not incline martyrdom, he is not a suicide perpetrator. Nevertheless, he chooses himself and completely consciously the way from Gabbatha to Golgotha, because this is the only one on which the people find their peace and healing from their political adventurism, “Did he not thus bear the error of the multitude?” asked Deutero-Isaiah, Isaiah 53:12. The Human, this Human as the King. He is crucified between two others. Also here the song of the suffering slave resounds, “He bared his soul until death, among the rebellious he was reckoned,” Isaiah 53:12.

Precisely at this point, the Messiah asserts himself against Rome and his Judean opponents. The reason Rome had Jesus executed is that he is the King of the Judeans. This officially seals the Kingship of Jesus, the absolute contradiction to the Kingship of Rome, in three languages, Aramaic, Latin, and Greek. Many of the Judeans—from all over the world, for it was Passover—read this reasoning.

But the leading priests of the Judeans sensed political mischief. It must be made clear that this was an illegitimate claim by Jesus. Otherwise, such reasoning would call into question the legitimacy of the power of leading elites. Pilate should correct this.

Now Pilate asserts himself against the leading priests. They had demanded that he should write, “He said, ‘King am I of the Judeans,’” instead of “King of the Judeans.” Pilate rejects the request harshly; what he had written, he had written. That’s the way it is: Jesus from Nazareth is the King of the Judeans, the priests themselves have demanded his crucifixion, and now they have no other king than Caesar! They are no longer legitimate authorities because they have demanded the crucifixion of their true king. This is not a shabby retort of Pilate, who is supposed to have lost the game against the priests. No, he is sticking to his guns: Jesus is the Messianic King, and Rome is killing him at the request of the leadership of the priestly elites. Rome’s authority now seems definitively established, the leadership recognizes Caesar as their only legitimate king, and Rome has won. Has it?

15.2. At the Cross, 19:23-37

15.2.1. First scene: “Over my garment, they cast lots” (Psalm 22:19), 19:23-24

19:23 When the soldiers had crucified Jesus,
they took his clothes
and made four shares, a share for each soldier.
In addition, the under-robe.
The under-robe was seamless, woven all the way through from the top.

19:24 So they said to one another,

“Let us not tear it
but cast lots as to who it shall belong to,”
so that the Scripture might be fulfilled which says,
They share among themselves my clothes,
over my garment, they cast lots.⁵³⁴
This is exactly what the soldiers did.

Roman mercenaries were not lavishly paid, so they took advantage of the estate of a condemned man. The estate of Jesus consisted only of the clothes on his body. For the Messianic narrative, this detail is important because it is a fulfillment of the Scriptures—here the 22nd Psalm. The psalm is one of Israel's most harrowing songs. We cannot discuss it, but ask the readers to read the whole psalm at this point. You will understand why in this song of a desperate child of Israel, the Messianic communities saw the Messiah Jesus. The psalm begins (vv.2-9),

My God, my God, why do you abandon me?
I cry out, far is my liberation.
My God, I call by day, and you do not answer,
at night, and I cannot keep silent.
Are you the Holy One, dwelling in the praises of Israel?
In you, our fathers found security,
safe they were, for you allowed them to escape.
To you they called, you let them flee,
they were safe with you, they were not put to shame.
But I am only a worm and no human,
scorned by humans, despised by the people.
All who see me mock me,
they pucker their lips, shake their heads,
“Blame it on the NAME, may he let him escape,
may he save him, if he feels like it!”

The Synoptics have the onlookers pass by the crucified Messiah and say, “Others he has set free, himself he cannot set free. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, descend from his cross, and then we will trust him . . .,” Mark 15:31-32. These Bible-believing onlookers are absent from John; here are only *goyim*. Psalm 22 goes on to say, vv.16b-19,

Into the dust of death, you drag me.
For dogs surround me,
the assembly of the wicked encircles me,

534 SHARE . . . LOTS: Psalm 22:19, the song that begins with the words, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”

they bind me hand and foot,
I can count all my bones.
They stare, they look at me,
they share my clothes,
over my garment, they cast lots . . .

The commentators provide interesting information about the unseamed robe. John deviates from the psalm. He has them soberly consider, “It would be a shame to tear the good piece; let us roll the dice.” John wants to show that they indeed “know not what they do.” To him, it’s all part of their bloody job. Behind the backs of the perpetrators, the great drama takes place, in which they play along unconsciously: Rome is fulfilling the Scriptures here. The Messiah of Israel is not the radiant commander of the end-time victory; he is the slave of Isaiah 53; he is the maltreated one of Psalm 22.

“What do I get out of it?” This question of the redemptive or liberating value of this bloody spectacle is the question we encounter again and again. To be sure, the psalm ends like this, vv.28-32,

They will remember, they will turn back to him, the NAME,
all the edges of the earth.
They will bow down to your face,
all the clans of the nations,
for the kingdom belongs to the NAME,
he rules over the nations.
Those who devour all the fat of the earth,
bow down,
they go down on their knees before him, all of them,
who have sunk down to the dust—
and their soul does not remain alive.
But the seed may serve him.
It is told of my Lord to the coming generation.
They will announce his reliability to the people to be born,
what he has done.

In Israel, no downfall is final. That is why Psalm 22 must be prayed along with every account of the Passion of the Messiah.

“So this is what the soldiers do,” John says.

15.2.2. Second Scene: Mother and Son, 19,25-27

19:25 Standing by the cross of Jesus were
 his mother,
 his mother’s sister Maria the wife of Klopas,

and Maria from Magdala.⁵³⁵
 19:26 When now Jesus saw his mother
 and, standing by her, the disciple he was attached to in solidarity,
 he says to the mother,
 “Woman, there, your son.”
 19:27 Then he says to the disciple,
 “There, your mother.”
 And from that hour on, the disciple took her to his own.

The women who followed Jesus keep a great distance in the Synoptics. After all, they followed him on his way to death. The male disciples are conspicuous by their total absence. In John, there is no such difference. Four of those close to Jesus are there at the moment of death, three women and one man.⁵³⁶ Of these four people, three play an important role in the narrative. We know nothing further about Maria of Klōpas.

Maria of Magdala, on the other hand, has been a well-known personality of the early Messianic communities. She will be the first to bring the message of the “not yet” to the disciples—and thus to humankind, 20:17-18.

The disciple Jesus was friends with is the disciple who leaned on Jesus’ chest, 13:25, who saw and trusted at the open grave, 20:8, who recognized the Lord, 21:7, who remains until the Messiah comes, 21:22; he may also have been the same as the “other disciple” who was in Annas’ court, 18:16.

The mother of the Messiah mediates between the wedding guests (Israel) and Jesus. There it was about the missing wine, about what should make the wedding a Messianic wedding. The mother of Jesus has no name of her own in John; we never hear her called *Maria(m)* in his work. This must have some significance, for the name of Jesus’ father is given by John (1:45; 6:42). The mother of the Messiah had led Jesus to show his honor publicly for the first time, and she did so by telling the “servants” (*diakonoī*) to do what Jesus would tell them to do. She is thus the admonisher who is always to urge the Messianic community to do that—and that alone—what Jesus says.

The mother of the Messiah is to accept the “beloved” disciple of Jesus as her son, and the latter her as his mother. Also, the name of the beloved disciple is not mentioned. Both nameless ones, the mother of the Messiah and the beloved disciple,

535 CT: The sister of Lazarus is called *Mariam* in John, but the two women under the cross are called *Maria*. Both names are Aramaic forms of the Hebrew name *Miryam*. In the Qur’an, the mother of Jesus is called *Maryam* (Sura 3:31, etc.). The naming of the Magdalene is not consistent, sometimes *Maria*, sometimes *Mariam* (20:16, 18). Even within individual manuscripts, the form changes. We stay with *Maria* in her case.

536 Or four women, if you distinguish “his mother’s sister” from “Maria of Klōpas.”

are literal *prototypes*. The mother represents the Messianic community as such, the beloved disciple stands for the disciple (male and female) as such.

The mother of the Messiah, the Messianic community, is the admonisher, “What he will say to you that you shall do!” As the admonisher, she is the authority over the disciple. The disciple must accept her, the community, as a mother, precisely as that admonishing authority. The two other women serve here as testamentary witnesses: it is therefore about the last will of the Messiah.

“From that hour on, the disciple took her to his own, *eis ta idia*.” This hardly means something like “taking her home,” and it certainly does not mean the bodily care of the old and defenseless mother. That would be pious kitsch. The writer of the prologue says, “It (the word) comes into its own (*ta idia*), yet its own (*hai idioi*) do not accept it.” “The own (*hai idioi*)” are the children of Israel, the Judeans, but they have not accepted the word, 1:11. These people are the very milieu of the word, precisely “the own (*ta idia*).” This own is from now on the place where Israel will gather around the Messiah, the Messianic community. She, the new Messianic Israel: *Mother of the Messiah!*

Scholion 9: Peace among the Messianic Communities

You might ask about the meaning of this “last will” of the Messiah. It must have something to do with the very difficult relationship between the individual Messianic communities. The community of the “brothers of Jesus” in Jerusalem around the middle of the first century certainly had a leading role. Paul had to get his legitimation for the proclamation of the Messiah among the nations from there, Acts 15:12 ff.⁵³⁷ To understand this, we need to remember a fragment from Mark’s Gospel, 3:31-35; we had briefly mentioned this passage in our discussion of John 2:1 ff.,

His mother came, also his brothers.
They were standing outside, and they sent for him, had him called.
A crowd was sitting around him.
They said to him,
“There, your mother, your brothers, your sisters are outside, seeking you.”
He answered and said to them,
“Who is my mother, who are my brothers?”
And looking around him at the crowd sitting all around him, he said,
“There, my mother and my brothers.
Whoever does the will of God is my brother, sister, and mother.”

537 See Gerhard Jankowski, Und dann auch den Nichtjuden. Die Apostelgeschichte des Lukas. 2. Teil (9,32-21,14), in *Texte & Kontexte* 98/99 (2003), 66 ff.

We know from John himself that he did not think much of the brothers of Jesus, 7:1 ff. This aversion is a clear rejection of the Messianic community in Jerusalem, in any case of its claim to leadership, which James, “the brother of the Lord,” raised, see Acts 15:13; Galatians 2:12 ff. John’s community, in which the mother of John must have played an important role, must therefore have taken precedence over the community in Jerusalem, for the mother of John was also the mother of James, “the brother of the Lord.”

The whole thing points to a kind of ranking competition between the different communities. The Synoptic Gospels vehemently reject this ranking, “Let it not be so among you,” they admonish their communities (Luke 22:24 ff., Mark 10:42 ff., Matthew 20:25 ff.).

Some people speak of the Messianic movement as a unified liberation movement. That there was a difference between the “Hellenistic community” and the so-called “Jewish Christianity,” the Messianists from Israel, had already been noticed in the 19th century. This “Jewish Christianity,” however, was a completely heterogeneous entity, and the idylls that were traded under the label “Jesus movement” in the 1970s and 1980s were left-wing kitsch; left-wing because of the alleged kinship with the liberation movements of the 20th century, but kitsch nonetheless. The “Jesus movement” was rather a hodgepodge of quarreling groups and grouplets.

The main disciples of Jesus, the Twelve, do not come off particularly well in all the Gospels. They led the Messianic movement into a dead end, with the consequence that it was completely disoriented after 70. The communities that emerged from Paul’s activity may have been in a different position, but for the Messianic communities in the Syrian-Palestinian region, the situation was bleak. The communities that stood out in any way by having family members of the Messiah in their ranks were put in their place by the words of Jesus as handed down by Mark and adopted by Luke and Matthew.

Luke tried to bring them together in the second part of his narrative, the “Acts of the Apostles.” Between the Ascension and Pentecost, his narrative has them all persevering, “unanimously (*homothymadon*) in prayer,” the Twelve “with the women and Mariam, Jesus’ mother, and his brothers,” Acts 1:14, all suggestive of the various Messianic groups. Apparently, Luke felt that sectarianism was politically disastrous for Messianism and that all these quarreling communities were obligated to come together in awaiting the inspiration of the Messiah. Therefore, as a result of this gathering together, he invented the idea of a unified (original Christian) “Early Church.”

There never was such an Early Church. There were clusters in Jerusalem and Galilee. And the communities moved apart rather than toward each other. The idea that all nations must become radical Torah-loyal Judeans, as Matthew had in mind, must have been completely absurd to John, probably also to Mark, and even more so to

Paul. There were many early churches, and the one around John was one of them. A preliminary stage of a unified Christianity can at best be recognized in Luke.

John was still far away from this striving for unity. It must have been late that the group around John came to realize that they only had a political chance if they submitted to Peter's leadership, that is if they joined the other churches from the Syrian-Palestinian region (John 21).

In light of this background, the scene at the cross is not exactly edifying. We have to turn off our feelings here. It is not about the reverence of the son who entrusts the lonely mother to a beloved disciple. When she appears in the Gospel, she doesn't give the impression of being dependent on such caring. In the competition among Messianic communities, it was true that whoever "has" the mother of the Messiah has an advantage in the ranking of Messianic communities. To those who belittle the "value" of the mother of the Messiah, as Mark does in 3:31 ff, by this scene is said that the membership of the mother of Jesus in the congregation of the "beloved disciple" was ordered by the Messiah himself and in a dramatic moment. Since the mother of Jesus was also the mother of the "brothers of the Lord," the Messianic community of the disciple Jesus was friends with was entitled to special respect.⁵³⁸

What John says remains *human words* and, as such, is not free from self-interest. At the same time, John also teaches us that the Messianic community and in its succession the general ("catholic," not "Roman Catholic") church and the communities in which this church exists have to do only what the Messiah says and nothing else. By taking the Messiah's mother to his own, the disciple takes up the voice of the woman who says, "What he says to you, that you shall do." This kind of *Mariology*—not all the fuss that the Roman Catholic Church has made of it—is part of the essence of the Messianic, catholic church worldwide. In this respect, the group-ego, interest-driven *testament of the Messiah* becomes the Messianically inspired word of God. John is then more than John! But this is true for the whole *Holy Scripture*.

15.2.3. Third scene: "The goal has been achieved," 19:28-30

19:28 After this,
 in awareness that all things had already achieved their goal,⁵³⁹

538 According to Rudolf Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (KEK), Göttingen 1941, 369, 521, the scene is symbolic; the mother represents Jewish Christianity, the beloved disciple Hellenistic Christianity. This view is to be filed in the folder "blooming imagination."

539 ACHIEVED THEIR GOAL: The verb *telein* occurs in John only here and in 19:30. For "to accomplish," John uses the verb *teleioun*. This stands for the Hebrew root *kalal* (*kala*), see John 4:34; 5:36; 17:4: to complete the work that the FATHER instructed Jesus to do, further as a synonym for *plēroun*, "to fulfill," in the third line of 19:18. But here, in the second line, John uses the unusual *telein*, to reflect the unique thing that happens at the cross. The goal is *this end for this Messiah* and the condition for the absolute beginning on "day one,"

Jesus, in order to fulfill the Scriptures, says,
 “I am thirsty.”⁵⁴⁰

19:29 A vessel full of sour wine was there.
 They put a sponge full of the sour wine around a hyssop
 and brought it to his mouth.

19:30 Now, when he had taken the wine, Jesus said,
 “The goal has been achieved!”
 He bowed his head,
 he handed over the inspiration.⁵⁴¹

The narrative of the death of the Messiah is linked to the introduction of the narrative of the washing of the feet, with the words *eidōs*, “in awareness,” and the word *telos*, “goal.” The solidarity with the disciples reached its goal; here we are told how the goal was reached. To this, John uses the verb *telein*, belonging to the word *telos*, in the perfect-passive, *tetelesthai*. In John, the death of the Messiah is a fully conscious process. Through death, the goal of solidarity is realized. The realization of the goal is the handing over of inspiration.

20:1 ff.

540 I AM THIRSTY: Psalm 69:21b-22, “I hoped for a nod—none! For a comforter—I did not find him. They put gall in my drink; for my thirst, they watered me with vinegar.” Like Psalm 22, this song is a lament of those children of Israel who were mocked, persecuted, and killed for their fidelity to the cause of God.

541 HANDED OVER THE INSPIRATION: *Paredōken to pneuma*. The Synoptics have *exepneusen* (Mark, Luke) or *aphēken to pneuma* (Matthew) at this point, i.e., “despirited” or “gave away his spirit.” *Paradidonai* is used in John only for “to hand over to the enemies” (subjects: Judas Iscariot, the nation, the leading priests, Pilate). *Pneuma* we have always translated as “inspiration.” We have to translate, to be consistent, as “he handed over his inspiration.” The reference is certainly intentional on John’s part: the protagonists of this world order “hand over” a man to his enemies, Jesus, on the other hand, gives his inspiration into the hands of his disciples (“hands it over”), which is the meaning of his departure, 16:7! Consistently we hear in 20:22, *labete to pneuma hagion*, “accept the inspiration of sanctification.” The “handing over of inspiration” finds its completion in the “accepting of inspiration.”

[Furthermore, since in German the word “ausliefern,” “to hand over” cannot mean both handing over to one’s enemies and handing over to one’s friends as it does in English, TV explains why he uses the German word “übergeben” here.

The translation of *ekpnein* in Mark 15:37 as “to despirit” goes back to Ton Veerkamp, *Vom ersten Tag nach jenem Sabbat. Der Epilog des Markusevangeliums: 15,33-16,8*, in *Texte & Kontexte* 13 (1982), 5-34, here 16:

“By this unusual word, Mark wants to represent the death of Jesus as a negation of his ‘spiriting’ after the baptism. The spirit—the holy spirit!—is taken away from him. The translation: ‘he gave up the spirit’ is therefore not good. It is not an elevated expression for ‘to die,’ but the theological scope of this dying. Therefore the suggestion to say ‘to despirit’ here, is to draw attention to the completely unusual word.”]

Everything is done that had to be done, everything is “accomplished,” as the perfect tense *tetelesthai* is usually translated. The hour in which the Messiah goes to where he had come from, to his God, who is the God of Israel, is the hour of union with God, not the hour of abandonment of God.

The Synoptics interpret the death of the Messiah as the sign of God’s people’s abandonment of God: Their sanctuary destroyed, their city annihilated, their land taken possession of by foreign powers. John rejects this depressive account of Mark. He knows Psalm 22 and interpreted it as the soldiers distribute the clothes of Jesus among themselves: the Messiah is abandoned by his people. But he is not abandoned by God.

John does not have the Messiah pray the first line of Psalm 22, “My God! My God! Why have you abandoned me?” Rather, he says, “I thirst.” Jesus prays a different psalm. The commentaries all refer to Psalm 69. In v.22 we hear, “They put poison in my food; they quench my thirst with vinegar.”

The bystanders hear the word “thirst” and fulfill the Scriptures by soaking a sponge with sour wine and handing it to Jesus; Barrett⁵⁴² rightly notes that the bunch of hyssops is not appropriate for the presentation of the sponge. The hyssop served to smear the blood of the Passover lamb on the door so that the angel of death would pass by the houses of the Israelites, Exodus 12:21 ff. Mark does not have this connection, for he has the sponge attached to a cane (15:36). John, according to Barrett, altered Mark’s account to portray Jesus as the true Passover lamb. But this interpretation is difficult because there is no mention of blood in this passage. Otherwise, hyssop is an element in the purification ritual (Leviticus 14, Numbers 19, Psalm 51:9). We do not find a plausible explanation for the use of hyssop. But one must also think of Psalm 42:2-4,

As the deer pines for the brook of water,
so my soul pines for you, God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the divinity of life.
When may I come, may I be seen before the face of God?
Tears have become my bread, day and night,
because all day long they say, “Where is your God?”

Thirst, like hunger, has a special meaning in John’s Gospel. We heard the word in the conversation with the Samaritan woman, John 4:13 ff, in the speech about the bread from heaven in the synagogue at Capernaum, 6:35, and in the speech of Jesus during the feast of *Sukkot*, 7:37. The thirst for God fills Jesus. His whole life was never anything but the thirst for his God, the God of Israel. John reminds us of both Psalms. Psalm 69 ends like this (vv.36-37),

542 Charles K. Barrett (Das Evangelium nach Johannes (KEK), Göttingen 1990, 531.

For God will liberate Zion, he will build up the cities of Judah;
 They will return there, they will inherit them.
 The seed of his servants will have them as their property,
 those who love his name will dwell there.

The death of the Messiah will be the liberation of Zion and the rebuilding of Judah. That is why Jesus, “having taken the sour wine, says, *tetelestai*, the goal has been achieved.”

John uses two different verbs for “to accomplish”: *teleioun* and *telein*.⁵⁴³ The first verb is used mainly with the word *ergon*, “work,” 4:34; 5:36; 17:4. It then means: to complete a work, to accomplish. In 17:23 something similar is suggested; the unity of the disciples is the work to be accomplished. *Telein* means, “to achieve the goal”; the related noun *telos* means “goal.” *Telein* points to the endpoint of a movement, *teleioun* to the completion of a task. In 19:28 both verbs occur, *telein* and *teleioun* (“to fulfill” the Scriptures). In 19:28 and 19:30 John uses the verb *telein*. Here a verb is reserved to reflect the unique act that happens at the cross.

The perfect tense in John always indicates something final and definitive. Jesus, at the moment of his death, has achieved the goal that the FATHER has set for him. The translation, “It is accomplished”—sanctified by tradition and by the music of Bach’s St. John Passion—is implied in what the perfect *tetelestai* wants to say. In the accomplishment (*teleioun*) of the work that the FATHER has given him, the political goal of Jesus’ life is achieved (*telein*). Therefore, John does not write *teleiōtai*, “it is accomplished,” but *tetelestai*, “the goal has been achieved.”

It was all about this moment. The Messiah achieves the goal that Psalm 69 indicates: the liberation of Zion. His death is neither the end nor the accomplishment of Jesus; this death is the end of Rome. Through Jesus’ death, “the leader of this world order is cast out,” 12:31. Jesus has a future in and through this death because his death means that he passes on his inspiration. This inspiration will ensure that Jesus will be spoken of as Messiah (Christ) throughout the millennia and that people will “do works” in his name and through this inspiration that will be “greater” than Jesus’ works, 14:12. Rome, however, no longer has a future.

This is what John says and hopes.

“Jesus bowed his head (*klinas tēn kephalēn*),” it says. The expression does not occur in the Greek version of the Scriptures; in the Messianic writings it occurs only in Matthew 8:20 and the parallel passage in Luke 9:58, “Foxes have dens, birds have nests, but the HUMAN has nothing where to incline his head (*tēn kephalēn klinē*).” So the expression does not have to mean dying.

543 If we disregard the past participle *teteleutēkotos*, “the accomplished one” (Lazarus), 11:39. It comes from *teleutan*, which means “to accomplish through death.” This is precisely what is not meant to be said here.

For the final act of Jesus' life, John uses the expression "to hand over (*paradidonai*) the inspiration (*to pneuma*)."⁵⁴⁴ After all, we have learned about the *pneuma*, "inspiration," just in John, we must explain this expression from the overall context.

Matthew has "to give away the inspiration" (*aphienai to pneuma*), Mark "to despirit" or "expire" (*ekpneuein*). Luke adopts Mark's uncommon word and explains it with a quotation from Psalm 31:6.⁵⁴⁴ Apparently, there has been difficulty in finding the right word here. What happens here is more than "to die" for all the evangelists.

The verb John uses, *paradidonai*, up to this point meant a political or police *handing over*. The *paradidous* par excellence is Judas Iscariot. What Jesus does by dying must be related both to his announcement of sending the inspiration as an advocate and to his being handed over to the Romans. He works exactly the opposite of what Judas Iscariot and the political leadership of the Judeans intend: the elimination of the Messiah. By Jesus dying, his inspiration takes effect, his disciples become "inspired." As inspired people, they will bring about the liberation from Rome—exactly the opposite of *being handed over to Rome*. This death is the "going away" of the Messiah, 16:7, and precisely this is the condition for inspiration.

The expression "to give up the ghost" used in everyday language⁵⁴⁵ comes from a superficial interpretation of John 19:30. "To give up the spirit" is also "to die," but at the same time much more than "to die." We must wait until the discussion of 20:22, where "handing over the inspiration" (*paradidonai to pneuma*) becomes visible as one side of the *same* reality, and "accepting the inspiration" (*lambanein ton pneuma*) as the other. We will see this more clearly in the following scene.

15.2.4. Fourth Scene: The Stabbed One, 19:31-37

19:31 Since it was *‘Erev Pascha*,
—the bodies were not to remain on the cross on the Shabbat,
for great was the day of that Shabbat,—
the Judeans asked Pilate
if they might break their thighs and take them off.
19:32 So the soldiers came and broke the thighs of the first,
and also the other who had been crucified with him.
19:33 But when they came to Jesus
and saw that he was already dead,
they did not break his thighs.
19:34 However, one of the soldiers stabbed his side with a spear,
and immediately, blood and water came out.⁵⁴⁶

544 But there "to commit my spirit to your hand (*paqad*)" just does not mean to die.

545 So you may say of a car engine, "It has given up the ghost."

546 Verses 32-34: The event is handed down only by John; later, some manuscripts (κ, B, C, L, Γ,

19:35 And he who saw it has testified,
trustworthy is his testimony.
And that one knows that his testimony is trustworthy,
so that you too may trust.

19:36 For these things happened to fulfill the Scriptures:
*His bones will not be broken.*⁵⁴⁷

19:37 And again, another passage says,
“They will look at him whom they have stabbed.”⁵⁴⁸

The penultimate scene in the narrative of Jesus’ death begins with a simple phrase, “The Judeans now asked Pilate if they . . .” Between the subject and the verb, John interposes an intervening clause. At first glance, this intervening clause is rather awkward. Between two determinations of the day, “it was preparation day (*‘erev pascha*)” and “it was even a great Shabbat,” John quotes the Torah, Deuteronomy 21:22-23 (see Mishna Sanhedrin 6:4),

If an aberration worthy of a death sentence is found on a man,
you have hanged him on a tree trunk,
do not leave his body overnight,
but bury him, bury him on the day itself.
For a hanged man is a curse to the NAME.

Jesus’ body is therefore not allowed to hang on the cross overnight. The Judeans are not present at the execution; they remain near the chief representative of Rome, Pilate. John wants to present the execution of the death sentence as a matter that takes place exclusively between the Messiah and Rome.

According to John, the Passover Shabbat fell on the seventh day of the week, hence “great Shabbat.” The Torah prescription in itself has nothing to do with Shabbat or the day before Passover, but the fact that the great Shabbat of Passover is imminent makes it all the more urgent to get the bodies off their crosses before sundown. To do this, the condemned must first be dead. So soldiers step forward to carry out the sentence once and for all. What happens to the bodies of the executed afterward is decided by the court that had pronounced the death sentence, in this case, Pilate.

etc., plus the Vulgate) have added a phrase based on v.34 to Matthew 27:49. To John, the event has a decisive significance since he not only mentions it as a fulfillment of the Scriptures but takes it as an occasion to attribute the credibility of the event to the testimony of an eyewitness. In the text itself, there is a reference to 6:53-56 (blood) and 3:5, 8; 4:10; 7:38 (water).

547 HIS BONES WILL NOT BE BROKEN: The passage Exodus 12:46 reads, “You shall eat (the lamb for Passover) in one house, you shall not bring the meat out of the house into the street, and you shall not break its bones.”

548 Zechariah 12:10. The quotation brings only keywords.

The intervening clause serves to make clear the connection between the Passover and the exaltation of the Messiah through death on the cross. The entire section 11:55-19:42 is dominated by the nearness of the Passover. We approached the festival gradually, *six days before the festival* (11:55), *before the festival* (13:1), and finally *on the preparation day before the festival*, 19:14. For the first time, we heard the word *paraskeuē*, ‘Erev Pascha, at the moment when the Roman court pronounces the death sentence against Jesus. Now we hear it for the second time.

We know that the preparation day is also the day when the lamb intended for the Passover is slaughtered. John wants to link both, the slaughter of the Passover lamb and what happens after the death of Jesus. Jesus is dead, and a—Roman!—soldier thrusts his lance into Jesus’ chest—“he’s gone,” he means to say, “don’t bother.” One can take this as an “official statement of death.” A Roman soldier cannot do anything else on his own. But he does more for John’s audience. He does what has been part of the basic knowledge of the Messiah in all Messianic communities for a very long time. Paul wrote at least a generation earlier, “Our Passover (lamb) is slaughtered: the Messiah,” 1 Corinthians 5:7. With his unconscious act, the soldier “fulfills the Scriptures.” Everything in the Scriptures, according to John, comes down to this moment. This is John’s view of the Scriptures, “That one (Moses) wrote about me (Jesus),” 5:46.⁵⁴⁹

Then follows, “And immediately there came out (*exēlthen euthys*) blood and water.” We hear the word *euthys* for the third time. Judas Iscariot took the dipped bite and immediately went out (*exēlthen euthys*). Cultivated language demands that the two words should be in reverse order: *euthys exēlthen*. Therefore, some not unimportant manuscripts “improved” the order. But both passages are to be related to each other by the same word order, 13:30 and 19:34. The honoring of the Messiah is a process, initiated by the “immediate departure” of Judas ben Simon, “And immediately he [God] will honor him [the HUMAN, *bar enosh*],” 13:32. This process continues in the immediate (*euthys*) departure (*exēlthen*) of water and blood.

What is meant by “water” we know from 4:14 and 7:38. The Samaritan woman is promised water that will “become a spring of water in her, welling up to the life of the age to come.” This becomes clearer in the second quotation. In the sanctuary during the Feast of *Sukkot*, Jesus speaks of “rivers of living water from his body.” To avoid any misunderstanding, John adds, “This he said about the inspiration that those who trusted in him were about to receive. But there was no inspiration yet because Jesus had not yet come to his honor,” 7:38-39. The hour of his death is the hour of his honor. Immediately inspiration proceeds from Jesus. Our interpretation of Jesus’ death as the handing over of inspiration is thus confirmed.

549 This view of the Scriptures is and remains difficult. See the scholion on 5:46, “Christocentrism and disinheritance of Judaism.”

“Blood,” we know from the great speech of Jesus in the synagogue at Capernaum, “Whoever is chewing my flesh and drinking of my blood will be given life in the age to come, and I will make him rise in the day of judgment. For my flesh is food to be trusted, my blood drink to be trusted,” 6:54-55. The word “blood” occurs in John only here and in the speech in the synagogue of Capernaum (if we disregard the verse 1:13). The point here is the inspiration, the enabling of the life of the age to come. And this happens through the death (the blood) of the Messiah. The blood is the blood of the Passover lamb. Then, the lamb’s blood saved from death in Egypt; now, the blood of the Messiah saves from death at the ruling world order. The death of the Messiah is to be understood as the slaughter of the Passover lamb: the necessary condition for the final festival of liberation to be celebrated. Death in both cases is a *prerequisite* for Passover, namely Passover itself. Passover is what will happen one day; Passover is *not yet*. This becomes clear only in 20:17.

To John, this is the true climax of his narrative. He names himself as an eyewitness; he, the author of our text, appeals to his listeners to trust the events reported here. In the Gospel, a testimony is trustworthy when it is confirmed by Scriptural evidence.

The Messiah is the Passover lamb, therefore “his bones should not be broken.” The phrase occurs only once in the Hebrew version of the Passover statute, Exodus 12:46, twice in the Greek version, 12:10, 46. Today, John seems to be saying, that liberation no longer occurs through the traditional slaughter of the Passover lamb, which takes place in the sanctuary precisely on the preparation day of Passover, but has already occurred through the officially sealed death of the Messiah.

John, however, goes one step further. He interprets his account of the death of the Messiah as a *midrash* on Zechariah 12. The second gives a political orientation to the first Scriptural quotation. For the equation Passover lamb = Messiah allowed in a Gnostic milieu a symbolic orientation; the newness of the liberation would then be an inner redemption. But John is about the liberation of the people and their world from the order that weighs on it. That is why Zechariah 12:10 is to be read in its context, 12:1-4, 9-11,

Burden word, a speech of the NAME over Israel:

Proclamation of the NAME.

Who spreads out the heavens, establishes the earth,
who forms breathing spirit within humans:

I set Jerusalem as a tumbling basin for all the peoples around,
even over Judah in the siege of Jerusalem.

It will come to pass on that day:

I set Jerusalem as a stone of burden for all the nations,
the whole burden, on it they shall chafe, well, chafe,
all the powers of the world joining together.

On this day—proclamation of the NAME—

I strike the whole cavalry with confusion,

the whole chariots with errantry.

. . .

It will happen on that day:

I seek to cut off all the world powers that came against Jerusalem.

I pour out on the house of David, on all the inhabitants of Jerusalem,
the inspiration of mercy and amnesty.

Then they will look up to me.

Over him whom they have stabbed, they will mourn,
as with the mourning over the only one [LXX: *agapēton*, “beloved one”],
become embittered for him, as with the bitterness for the firstborn.

On that day, there will be great mourning, the mourning in Jerusalem,
like the mourning for Hadad-Rimmon in the Valley of Megiddon.⁵⁵⁰

As is well known, the last six chapters of the book of Zechariah are difficult to interpret. No one knows exactly whom Zechariah meant by the “stabbed one” and what political situation was in the background.

The stabbed one, over whom is mourned, is the “only one” (*yachid*). This calls to mind Isaac, who is called *agapētos* in Genesis 22:2 according to the Septuagint, as in Zechariah 12:10. The context is the house of David, and the place names suggest King Josiah, the reform-oriented king whose policies Jeremiah so passionately defended. Josiah’s death marked the end of all efforts to secure the city’s future. “Only one” and “firstborn” are ciphers for the only thing that promises a future.

John quotes the passage neither from the Hebrew text nor from the Septuagint, but “freely,” “They will look up to him whom they have stabbed,” and applies the phrase to Jesus: he is the “only one” and the “firstborn,” he is the future of Israel, he has been stabbed. As always, a brief quotation invokes the immediate context that the listeners have in their ears. We have already noted in discussing the entry into Jerusalem (John 12:12 ff.) that the Messianic communities studied the latter part of the book of Zechariah intensively. Immediately before the quotation, Zechariah [12:10] speaks of the “outpouring of inspiration (*shafakh ruach, ekchein pneuma*).” John connects the events of the cross with the situation of the city against which “the nations around”—Rome—had come, and he implicitly announces the gift of inspiration with this quotation.

15.3. The Burial, 19:38-42

19:38 After this, Joseph of Arimathea,⁵⁵¹ a disciple of Jesus
—but a secret one for fear of the Judeans—,

550 Probably the place where the king Josiah was mortally wounded, 2 Chronicles 35:22 ff.

551 ARIMATHEA: *Arimathaia*, Hebrew *Ramatayim*; the place was in the province of Samaria before the Maccabean period, later in Judea, on the border with Samaria.

asked Pilate if he might take away Jesus' body.
 Pilate gave his consent.
 So he came and took the body away.
 19:39 Also Nicodemus came
 —who at first had come to him by night—,
 and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes,
 about a hundred pounds.
 19:40 They now took Jesus' body,
 wrapped it up in linen sheets with the spices,
 as it is the burial custom among the Judeans.
 19:41 At the place where he was crucified was a garden,
 and in the garden a new tomb where no one had ever been buried.
 19:42 So there, because of *'Erev Pascha* of the Judeans,
 and because the tomb was nearby, they buried Jesus.

When Rome seizes a human to execute him, that human still belongs to it after his death. The act of reverence toward a deceased person was an unconditional duty in ancient times. This reverence was denied to an executed person; he was literally disposed of as a piece of dirt. The disciple named Joseph from the village of Ramatajim wanted to prevent at least that.

He is a "hidden disciple." The reason was "the fear of the Judeans." We heard the expression already in 7:13, where they were afraid to speak publicly about the Messiah Jesus. Two days after the death and burial, we will find the disciples in a room that was locked "for fear of the Judeans." John's Messianic community could not imagine a situation where one could be a disciple of Messiah Jesus without fear of the Judeans. In John, all disciples are hidden disciples. The word *phobos*, "fear," exists in John only in connection with the Judeans. For the second time, we hear "fear of the Judeans," and for the third time, we encounter Nicodemus, the prototype of the hidden disciple. The whole funeral is determined by this fear.

They carefully wrapped Jesus' body in cloths, along with "about a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes." The unusually large quantity of balsam herbs corresponds with the "very precious pound of nard balm" used by Mariam, Lazarus' sister, for the anticipated burial of Jesus, 12:3 ff. The endowment of Jesus' burial is the endowment at the burial of a king.

Jesus was buried "according to the custom of the Judeans," even in his death Jesus remained a child of Israel. Since haste was required because of the advanced hour—the great Shabbat of Passover, which in that year coincided with an ordinary Shabbat, began at sunset on the day of preparation—Jesus was buried in a new tomb in a garden nearby. Between the two gardens, the Garden of Betrayal and the Garden of the Tomb, the dramatic events of the *'erev pascha*, the *paraskeuē* of that Passover, took place. John passes by this "Passover of the Judeans" in silence. The corpse remains behind, wrapped in cloths.

16. Day One of the Shabbat Week, 20:1-31

Preliminary Remark: The Time Specification “Day One”

This chapter consists of four narratives and a conclusion. We must begin with a detailed linguistic exposition. The Hebrew language distinguishes between the ordinal number *rishon* (“first”) and the cardinal number *’echad* (“one”); in the case of the number 1, the cardinal number has a different root than the ordinal number.⁵⁵² The Hebrew text of the Scriptures writes the cardinal number in special cases where we would expect an ordinal number, e.g., in the specification for the day number of a month, “It happened in the thirtieth year, in the fourth (month) on the *five* (fifth) of the month.” The days of the week are indicated with normal ordinal numbers.

In the narrative of the creation of heaven and earth, we hear,

In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth.
The earth became crazy and mazy.⁵⁵³
Darkness over the surface of chaos,
stormwind roared over the face of chaos.
God spoke,
“Let there be light!”
Light came about.
Gott saw the light—that it was good.
And God separated between the light and the darkness.
God called out to the light: Day.
To the darkness, he called out: Night.
It became evening, it became morning:
Day one (*yom ’echad*).

The further days of creation are marked with ordinal numbers: *yom sheni*, *yom shlishi*, *yom revi’i*, and so on. The first day, however, is not “first day,” *yom rishon*, but “day one,” *yom ’echad*. The Greek translation has followed this anomaly. It too counts *hemera mia* (not *prōtē* as usual), then, as usual, continues *hēmera deuterā*, *hēmera tritē*, *hēmera tetartē*, etc. The Vulgate is no different: *dies unus* (not, as usual, *primus*), *dies secundus*, *dies tertius*, *dies quartus*, etc. In the famous Torah commentary of Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac, called Rashi, from the late 11th century, we read,

Yom ’echad (one). According to the ordinary order of language in this chapter, it should have been written, *yom rishon* (first). Why is *’echad*, “one,” written?

552 Other Semitic languages proceed similarly. Aramaic *chad/qadmay*, Arabic *vahid/avval*. In the order of those indicated by an ordinal number, “first” plays a special role. Compared to all others, the first has a prominent meaning. In Hebrew, the first is the “head,” in Aramaic the one who *precedes*, in Arabic the one who *goes back*, the original one.

553 *Thohu wa-bohu* means “Irrsal und Wirrsal” in the ingenious translation by Martin Buber.

It is because the Holy One, blessed be He, was alone (*yachid*) in His world, because the angels were not created before the second day, as explained in Bereshit Rabbah [a 5th-century midrash collection—TV].⁵⁵⁴

You need not agree with this explanation, but the problem was seen early on. All important translations from the late classical period have left the anomaly standing.⁵⁵⁵

The Gospels adopted this theological usage from Genesis 1 for the day after the Passover Shabbat when Jesus was in the grave. Just as at the creation, the day of the creation of light was not just a “first” day in a series of similar days, but a day that is a prerequisite for all days to come, so to all Messianic communities, the day after that great Shabbat is not just a “first” day of a new week, but a prerequisite for all days to come. Our translations must take this fact into account. Just as the day of distinction between light and darkness is norming all the distinctions to come, such as heaven/earth, sea/dry, so day one of the Shabbat week is norming the whole life of all the disciples of Jesus.

The translations we are familiar with translate *tē mia tōn sabbatōn* as “on the first day of the week.” Factually, this is correct at first glance. The “great Shabbat”—the Passover of the Judeans—is skipped; a new week begins. That we are dealing with a fundamentally new day is indicated by the expression *mia tōn sabbatōn*. Now *mia* is the feminine form of a cardinal number. The ordinal number would be *prōtē*.

John’s specification of the time places him in the middle of the mainstream of Messianism. Like the other evangelists, John skips the great Shabbat. It is not celebrated.

The great silence on the Shabbat, however, does not mean a devaluation of the Passover. Rather, the festival of Israel’s liberation from the house of slavery is and remains the foundation. But Israel, according to all Messianic communities, is in the slave house today. It must be liberated once again—and this time for certain.

This definitive liberation is manifested on day one of the Shabbat week, according to those who saw in Jesus the Messiah of Israel, a new calendar, so to speak. This is quite in accordance with the Tanakh. The Book of Jeremiah also knew the surpassing of the Passover, 23:7-8. Paul speaks of a new creation (*kaine ktisis*, *beria chadasha*) in 2 Corinthians 5:17. You have to read John 20 and Genesis 1 together.

16.1. The Tomb, 20:1-10

20:1 On day one of the Shabbat week,⁵⁵⁶ Maria from Magdala comes

554 See Salomo ben Isaak (Raschi), Pentateuch-Commentar benevens eene nederlandse verklarende vertaling door A. S. Onderwijzer I-V, Amsterdam 1895 (Reprint 1985), 5.

555 Also the Targum Onkelos, a widely accepted and very early translation into Aramaic. It has *yoma chad* (cardinal number) instead of *yoma qadmaya* (ordinal number).

556 ON DAY ONE OF THE SHABBAT WEEK: *Tē de mia tōn sabbatōn*, Aramaic *chad shabata*. Like Mark, John uses an Aramaic expression, not so much because he had insufficient knowl-

—early, darkness is still—⁵⁵⁷
 to the tomb;
 she sees that the stone has been taken away from the tomb.
 20:2 So she is running,
 she comes to Simon Peter and to the other disciple
 Jesus was friends with,
 and says to them,
 “They took away the Lord out of the tomb,
 we don’t know where they buried him.”
 20:3 Now Peter and the other disciple went out and came to the tomb.
 20:4 The two were running together,
 but the other disciple ran ahead, faster than Peter.
 He came to the tomb first.
 20:5 Stooping down, he sees the linen sheets lying there but did not go in.
 20:6 Then, following him, Simon Peter also comes
 and went into the tomb.
 He also observes the sheets lying there,
 20:7 and the sweat cloth that had been on his head
 lying not with the sheets
 but folded up separately in a certain place.
 20:8 Then the other disciple who had come to the tomb first also went in;
 he saw, and he began trusting.
 20:9 Admittedly, they did not yet have knowledge of the Scripture passage
 that he has to rise from the dead.
 20:10 So the disciples went away again to themselves.

Maria(m)⁵⁵⁸ of Magdala appears in all the Gospels. She is a constant witness of the resurrection. In John, she is the only woman who brings the decisive news. Why it is women that the Gospels cite as chief witnesses to the resurrection, probably has little to do with sudden feminist conversions.

edge of the Greek language as to suggest a “first day” of an entirely new quality. Matthew, Mark, and Luke proceed in the same way. This Aramaism has been retained by the Latin translations (*una sabbatorum*). The plural indicates the “Shabbat period” (i.e. “week”). Therefore, you have to translate “unusually” because the “unusual” was intended here. The procedure is derived from Genesis 1:5, where a cardinal number is also used, *yom ’echad*, “day one.” All other days of creation are designated by ordinal numbers.

557 DARKNESS IS STILL: *Skotias eti ousēs*. “It was still dark” seems natural, but misses the meaning that “darkness” (*skotos*, Hebrew *choshekh*, Genesis 1:2) has in John, see *skotos* John 3:19, and *skotia* John 1:5 (twice); 6:17; 8:12; 12:35 (twice); 12:46. To walk in darkness is to live without Messiah and Messianic inspiration. Hence the unwieldy translation, “darkness is still.”

558 The spelling varies: *Maria* in 19:25; 20:1, 11; *Mariam* 20:16, 18.

Paul knows only one tradition, according to which the “rising”—we will explain why we do not say “risen”—Messiah appeared exclusively to men, including “five hundred brothers” (!), 1 Corinthians 15:1-10. No trace of women.

The “male” tradition of the resurrection dates from the time before the *Judean War*, and the “female” tradition from the time after. This is where you would have to start. Those who were considered less than the male apostles in the Messianic communities here become the evangelists of the actual message. The leadership of the Messianic communities had failed before and in the great war, and they had no answer to the catastrophe of 70. Now others—women—become the promoters of the decisive message. They were the first to see “the honor of the Messiah,” as Jesus announced to Martha at the tomb of Lazarus, of Israel, 11:40.

There is no need to have any illusions about the position of women in the Messianic communities. The patriarchal shaping of all social relations in antiquity will hardly have stopped at the Messianic communities.

In the narrative about Jesus, all of a sudden, those play a key role, who otherwise were only intended for the minor parts. But now, there is a radically new situation, which is reflected by the time designation explained above. Now, not Kephas, the Twelve, the five hundred brothers, James, the brother of the Messiah, all the apostles mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15, and last of all the “misbegotten among the apostles” (1 Corinthians 15:8), Paul, play the role of the protagonists of the resurrection narrative, but the women known in all Messianic communities.

The Messianic movement was led by those mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15. The Judean War meant at the same time an existential crisis of the communities in the Aramaic-speaking area, Syria-Palestine. It could not continue as it was until then, and therefore the resurrection had to be told completely new and completely different.

In important places, four women played key roles in John up to “day one”: the mother of the Messiah at the Messianic wedding in Cana/Galilee, the living water and the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well near Sychar in Samaria, and the two sisters Mariam and Martha at the revival of Lazarus = Israel and the Messianic meal in Bethany.

Now comes the fifth woman, Maria from Magdala. In John, she has no past. John has no idea of the seven demons that, according to Luke, Jesus cast out of Maria (8:2). Her role is first to note that the stone has been rolled away from the entrance to the tomb. She cannot interpret the event; she carries the news to the leadership of the Messianic movement.

To John, the Judean movement consists of two components. One is represented by Simon Peter (Kephas), the other by “the disciple Jesus was friends with,” the central figure of the group around John. Maria from Magdala sets in motion these two protagonists of Judean Messianism—and how! “The two were running (*etrechon*) together,” and then “the other disciple ran ahead (*proedramon*),” faster than the oth-

er, the leader of Judean Messianism recognized by all, Simon Peter. The whole triangle of acting persons brings to light, barely concealed, the complicated relations in the Messianic movement. The apprentice is the first to come to the tomb, he is the first eyewitness but gives way to Peter. This is not explained until the appendix, 21:15 ff. The last two chapters of our text also tell how the rather isolated group joined the Messianic movement as a whole and submitted to the leadership of Simon Peter.

This running to the tomb is a clear sign. Why is this image—the two ran together, one of them ran faster—chosen? The verb *trechein*, “to run,” occurs in three resurrection narratives; Mark does not have the verb here, and in Luke 24:12 may have been inserted later under the influence of John’s Gospel. The news of the empty tomb at first gives the impression of horror. Mary finds the open tomb and *runs* to Simon; Simon and the other disciple *run* to see for themselves the open tomb and the disappearance of the body.

All three assume a grave robbery. The meticulous description of the condition—shrouds and sweat cloth are lying separately and not in a heap, the latter carefully folded—suggests that no robbers were at work here; thieves and robbers are always in a hurry. The whole thing seems like “securing evidence.”

What Simon thinks is not handed down; the other disciple who enters the tomb after Simon “saw and trusted”—namely the announcement of Jesus in 2:20 and the explanation to it, 2:21-22. This disciple—and probably Simon Peter and Maria of Magdala after him—first had to see to trust. John will speak about this dialectic of seeing and trusting in detail. Trust in the Messiah presupposes the *understanding of the Scriptures*; the carefully folded cloths are at best a confirmation that no grave robbery has taken place here. Here as in 2:22, the non-understanding of the Scriptures is the cause for the lack of trust in the Messiah.

What passage of the Scriptures is it about? Many psalms are songs of lost people, who were close to the downfall and were rescued by God from the danger of death. But the song Isaiah 53 is probably the Scriptural passage par excellence. We used it in discussing and interpreting 1:29 (“Lamb of God”), 12:37-38 (“Blinding of Israel”), and 19:5 (“Look at the human”). Here, too, the song suggests itself, 53:9 ff.,

They gave him his grave with the criminals, his death with the rich,⁵⁵⁹
although he never did violence, never was deceit in his mouth.
The NAME wanted to crush him, to make him sick,
so that He could use his soul as a guilt offering.
But he will still see a seed, prolong his days.
This is what the NAME wants: to save him by His hand.

559 Questionable: *ʿashir* = “rich man,” LXX *plousious*; conjecture: *ʿosse raʿ* = “evildoer” instead of *ʿashir*.

Without pain for his soul, he will see, will be satiated.
 By this knowledge, he will prove himself for the many
 —proven one, my servant—,
 because he bore the burden of their transgression . . .

All Messianic communities of Israel had to try to understand from the Scriptures what had happened and had to happen. The Messiah of Israel was both the *bar enosh*, the Human, and the suffering representative of his suffering people. This too is common knowledge in all Messianic communities. Whatever the consequence of the resurrection, in any case, a new reading of the Scriptures begins in the Messianic communities.

The mysterious guest of the disciples of Emmaus “interpreted to them, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, in all the Scriptures (what was written) about himself.” Only after they “recognized” the guest “in the breaking of the bread” did they realize “that our hearts were burning as he spoke to us on the way, as he opened to us the Scriptures” (Luke 24:27, 32).

It was widely believed by the Perushim that on the Day of Judgment, the dead would rise, but no one expected someone to be raised from the dead before the Day of Final Judgment. A constant in all resurrection narratives is the fact that Jesus’ resurrection was completely unexpected. The Jews do not read the Scriptures—e.g. Isaiah 53—as referring to Jesus.

Biblical theology is proof that the Messiah rising from the dead is understandable from the Scriptures—and only from them. This is something completely different from the traditional interpretation of the Scriptures by Christians “toward Jesus.” The Grand Narrative has an open end and remains good for any surprise. For example, it nourishes the confidence that death does not have the last word, and certainly not the death of Jesus, decreed by the representative of the principal (*archōn*) of the ruling world order.

One element of this first narrative of day *one* is still not explained. What is the meaning of the two disciples running and the statement that the “other disciple” ran faster? A nice and vivid description of the events? In John, you need not jump to conclusions about incidental details for the sake of pleasing literary embellishment.

There is a strange narrative in the Second Book of Samuel. The rebellion against David had been put down, and Absalom, the author of the rebellion, had perished. Ahimaaz, the son of the priest Zadok, presented himself to Joab, the commander of the army; he would like to bring to David the “gospel” of the victory (*ʾavasera, eu-angeliō*, “I will proclaim,” 2 Samuel 18:19). Joab strongly advised him not to. Instead, Joab sent the Ethiopian mercenary to bring the message to David. The Ethiopian ran, but Ahimaaz ran after him and faster than him. The “gospel” of victory over Absalom was indeed “good news,” but not only. To David, whose kingship was saved, the victory came at an almost unbearable price, the death of his beloved son, “My son Ab-

salom, my son Absalom. What would I have given if I had died in your place, Absalom, my son, my son,” 2 Samuel 19:1. The “gospel” (*besora*) was not just “good news”; nor is the *besora* of the empty tomb just “good news.” As is now reported.

16.2. “Not yet,” 20:11-18

20:11 But Maria was standing outside by the tomb, weeping.
As she was weeping, she stooped down into the tomb.

20:12 She observes two messengers in white sitting there,
one at the head and one at the feet,
where the body of Jesus had lain.

20:13 They say to her,
“Woman, why are you weeping?”
She says to them,
“They took away my Lord,
and I do not know where they buried him.”

20:14 Having said this, she turned around backward;
she observes Jesus standing there, but she did not know it was Jesus.

20:15 Jesus says to her,
“Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?”
She, thinking he is the gardener, says to him,
“Sir, if you carried him away,
tell me where you buried him,
and I will take him away.”

20:16 Jesus says to her,
“Mariam!”
Turning, she says to him in Hebrew,
“*Rabbouni!*”—that is, Teacher.

20:17 Jesus says to her,
“Do not touch me,
for I have not yet gone up to the FATHER.
But go to my brothers and say to them,
‘I am going up to my FATHER and your FATHER,
to my GOD and your GOD.’”

20:18 Mariam from Magdala goes and announces to the disciples,
“I have seen the Lord!”
—and this is what he had said to her.⁵⁶⁰

560 The transition from direct to indirect speech is hardly elegant to translate. Some manuscripts—among them the Codex Bezae (D) from the 5th century—have improved, “‘I have seen the LORD,’ and what he had told her, she reported to them.”

Mary had followed the two men. They had moved away from the tomb, and Mary was alone at the tomb. She also bent down and saw what the men had not seen: two messengers.

Mary wept, not in mourning for the dead, but in despair that she had been deprived of the opportunity to do what was a human duty in the ancient Orient: weeping for the dead. That Jesus should have been resurrected did not occur to her, not even after the messengers asked her why she was weeping. She sticks to her opinion.

She cannot see Jesus from herself, even if he were there himself. She takes him for a gardener who was responsible for the order in the garden and who had taken away the corpse hastily buried before the great Shabbat on the day after Passover. Jesus is not to be recognized unless he makes himself known. This is true not only to Maria but it is also true in general. You can read and explain our texts as politically—indeed, materialistically—as you like, the Grand Narrative remains closed to the outsider. The circumstantial evidence in the abandoned tomb is just that, no proof is given here. To every human, also to Maria, the death of Jesus, like the death of every other human, was simply the last word. There is just the gardener, who also does not know more than Maria and can only ask, “Woman, why are you crying, who are you looking for?” No one can see anything else than the gardener here.

Jesus does not make himself known until he pronounces Mariam’s name. The moment she knows herself being addressed, she can recognize him as her teacher. The relationship between Jesus and Maria from Magdala has given rise to the wildest imaginations. In John, the relationship is clear: he is the teacher, and she is the disciple. John explicitly explains his Aramaic *rabbouni* by the Greek *didaskalē* to avoid any misunderstanding. She is addressed by the teacher and his teaching, and she lets herself be addressed. But also this happens only because he addresses her, not because she gets involved with him. Faith, trust, is not a “work,” but trust is awakened when the one who trusts is addressed by her or his name, by the one who is trusted.

Jesus then says, “Do not touch me.” John does not tell us that Maria was about to fall and clasp his knees. Several manuscripts found this illogical and added, “She ran up to touch him.” But we have an absolute prohibition, which is also reasoned, “For I have not yet ascended to the FATHER.”

We need to discuss here the Torah passages Leviticus 11 and Numbers 19. In Leviticus 11:24-40, it is said that touching animal corpses (*thnēsimaion*, *nevela*) impurifies. The touch causes “uncleanness until evening.” Numbers 19:11 ff. says,

He who touches a dead human being, whosoever,
becomes unclean for seven days.

He who has thus defiled himself, make himself free from defilement
on the third day and on the seventh day;

he becomes clean.

If he does not make himself free from aberration

on the third day and the seventh day,

he will not be clean.

Anyone who touches a dead person, a human soul that has died

and does not make himself free from aberration:

he has defiled the dwelling place of the NAME.

Extirpated is that soul from Israel . . .

The verb *haptesthai*, *naga*^c, “to touch,” quite frequent in the Synoptics, is found in John only in this one place 20:17. The untouchable one is the Messiah completely marked by death. He will not show himself differently to the disciples.

The command and its reason explain each other. At the death on the cross, inexorably begins the honoring of the Messiah, inexorably begins the ascent to the FATHER. We have seen this in the discussion of 12:28 ff. But this death and resurrection are not an accomplishment. The perfect tense John uses for accomplished facts is here determined by not yet: “I have *not yet* ascended” (*oupō anabebēka*). The perfect, as we have seen, is John’s rendering of an action completed in the past. The “not yet” does not refer to the verb itself, but to the tense, to the perfect; not the *ascent* itself, but the perfect is negated.

With this negative message, Maria from Magdala is sent as the first evangelist to the brothers of Jesus, “Not yet have I ascended to the FATHER,” perfect tense, but then with the decisive positive message, “I am ascending,” present tense. The brothers of Jesus—in the flesh—belonged to the original Messianic community, 2:12, where a distinction is made between “the brothers” and “the disciples of Jesus.” This distinction is made clear in the confrontation of Jesus with his brothers on the occasion of the ascent to Jerusalem for the Feast of *Sukkot*. As it says in the following verse 20:18, Mary then goes to all the “disciples” after all. The fact that Jesus calls them “brothers,” however, clearly underlines the extent to which the leading circles of the Messianic community in Jerusalem were still Zealotically infected in John’s eyes. They must be told, “I *am* ascending.”

The present tense is a Semitic present tense, it indicates an action that has been started and that continues into the future. Even if the grave cannot hold Jesus, he, the living one, remains nevertheless a dead one, a living corpse, which you must not touch—both! Therefore, the perfect would be out of place. The movement to the FATHER begins on day one. That is the only thing, but it is everything. There are no guarantees, but on day one the death history of the ruling world order is open again.

On the level of the narrative, that is, John’s situation after the year 70, this means that the community of the brothers of Jesus, which in the period before the war had or still is claiming a prominent position among the Messianic communities, must be told, “Nothing is completed; neither cross nor resurrection completes the move-

ment.” Obviously, the present tense contains a clear criticism of the policy of the congregation of the brothers of Jesus.

But the present tense and the criticism do not cancel out the fundamental common ground. Jesus remains connected to the community in Jerusalem despite all the fierce disputes (7:1 ff.), “my FATHER, *your* FATHER, my God, *your* God.” The conflict then, 7:1ff, was about the *kairos*. That *kairos* has now come, but quite different than Jesus’ brothers thought. John placed them in the vicinity of the Zealot adventure of an illusory seizure of power. To the successor of the community of Jesus’ brothers after the war is to be said: The *kairos* is the beginning of a process, unstoppable perhaps, but not finished.

Scholion 10: Death and Resurrection of the Messiah; Once and for All?

The author of Hebrews seems to emphasize: Unlike the annual celebration and experience of the Passover night, the death of the Messiah is an event “once for all” (*ephapax*, Hebrews 7:27; 9:12; 10:10; see Romans 6:10).

During the Jewish celebration of Passover night, the son must ask the father, “Why is this night different from all other nights?” And according to the son’s comprehension, the father instructs him. “He begins with the Jewish people’s disgrace and concludes with their honor,” Mishna Pessachim 10:4. Annually this night is lived through and celebrated.

Christians do not do otherwise, at least not if the annual liturgy of the Easter Vigil is somewhat Scriptural. The *ephapax* is like the liberation of Israel. If the people was liberated once and uniquely from the hand of Pharaoh, this unique event would determine the whole history of the people. At the same time, this liberation had to be fought for again and again, and to be fought for, it must be remembered again and again.

The classic document of the “again and again” is the Book of Judges: there, liberations are taking place, again and again, but the Passover was never celebrated in that time, 2 Kings 23:22! The Passover of the Jews is like the Christian Easter: what happened once is still pending. Pharaoh was defeated, and Pharaoh continued to reign. Rome is defeated, and Rome continues to reign. The night of the Messiah is unthinkable without the night when the Angel of Death passed by the doors smeared with the blood of the Passover lamb.

We must therefore treat John’s distancing expression, *pascha loudaiōn*, the Passover of the Jews (2:13; 6:4; 11:55), with great caution. Here no Jewish Passover is abolished, but the same Passover is sharpened under completely new, Roman circumstances: as a promise for all peoples. Therefore, according to John, the Christian Easter is not a substitute for the Jewish Passover. We must not underestimate this difference.

Even if John, according to our reading of the Gospel, limited his Messianic mission to worldwide scattered Israel including the ten lost tribes (Samaria), he sees himself in the tradition of Jeremiah 31:31. There, the NAME makes a “new covenant” (*berith chadasha*) with Israel. A “New Testament” with a new era was not a Christian but a Jewish invention! Of the Passover, Jeremiah (23:7-8) says,

Therefore:

There, days come—announcement of the NAME—,
there you no longer say:
May the NAME live,
who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of Egypt.
No! May live the NAME,
who brought up, who caused to come,
the seed of the house of Israel from the land of the north,
from the lands where they were carried away,
and shall dwell on their ground.

Just as Jeremiah did not see the liberation from Egypt as outdated, so too the death of the Messiah does not outdate the liberation from Pharaoh’s slave house. To Paul and Luke, probably also to Matthew, and ultimately also to the school of John, Passover is a promise for the nations. Exactly at that point, the ecclesia and the synagogue diverged. The death of the Messiah makes liberation a worldwide perspective for all peoples—not just any liberation, but the liberation of Israel from the house of slavery: The God of the Christians is the God whose NAME can only be pronounced as the one “who led Israel out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery,” Exodus 20:2.

The opening of this perspective has happened “once and for all.” We cannot and must not go back behind this “once and for all.” Israel and the nations, the Jews and the Christians must admittedly say with the school of John, 1 John 3:2, that

it will not yet be revealed what we will be.
We know: When he (the Messiah) shall be revealed,
we will be like him,
because then we will see him as he is.

The decisive thing has happened, that is John’s message, but this decisive thing is determined by that “not yet.” The ascent to the FATHER means the liberation of the world. This is the moment, the *kairos*, for which we are waiting. The very *kairos* of the Messiah “is not yet fulfilled,” 7:8. At that time, the ascension to the festival had to be “not publicly (*phanerōs*) but in secret (*en tō kryptō*),” 7:10. Even the resurrected Messiah remains the hidden Messiah. The two passages 7:8, 10, and 20:17 presuppose each other.

“Not yet,” however, has as a consequence “again and again.” Nikos Kazantzakis wrote a novel after World War II about a young shepherd who tried to live like

Christ and was murdered like Christ. The title of the novel is *Ho Christos xanastaurōnetai*, “Christ is Crucified Again.”⁵⁶¹ The novel is a parable; it is set in the mountains of Western Anatolia just before Atatürk expelled the Greeks from Asia Minor. The shepherd Manolios, the hero of the novel, is more than any Greek at a particular moment in Greek history. Christ appears to him and tells him to tell his people, “I am hungry, go to the doors of the village, and ask for alms.” And Manolios says what he should say.

He is among us again and again, the Messiah. And people like Manolios are crucified again and again until “it will be revealed what we will be” (1 John 3:2). The crucial thing is that this murdered Messiah is among us, again and again, because he has not yet ascended. In Kazantzakis’ novel, the wind of Messianic inspiration is blowing. Because everything is decided, we must and can always start again from the beginning. The Messiah is there just as he and she, who are inspired by him. They live because and insofar as they are inspired by the Messiah. Their life is *even now* and *not yet* the “life of the age to come.” It is not revealed, it is hidden, as the Messiah is hidden.

At this moment it becomes clear, John tells us. Behind this moment no one can go back. Therefore *ephapax*, “once for all.”

16.3. The Locked Doors, 20:19-23

20:19 When it was late, on that day one of the Shabbat week,
and where the disciples were the doors were locked for fear of the Judeans,
Jesus came,
placed himself in the middle,
and says to them,
“Peace be with you!”

20:20 Having said this, he showed them his hands and his side.
The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

20:21 Once again Jesus said to them,
“Peace be with you!
As the FATHER has sent me,
so I am sending you.”⁵⁶²

20:22 Having said this, he breathed on them and says to them,
“Accept the inspiration of sanctification!”

561 The F. A. Herbig Verlagsbuchhandlung had thought to publish the German translation under the improper title “Griechische Passion,” “Greek Passion.”
[The English title of the book is “Christ Recrucified.”]

562 [For the two different verbs *apostellein* and *pempein*, “to send,” TV uses the two German verbs “senden” and “schicken.” In English, I did not find a second word that would have been completely equivalent in meaning to the verb “to send.”]

20:23 If you forgive someone's aberrations
may they be forgiven.⁵⁶³
As far as you let remain with them hardening,
they remain hardened."⁵⁶⁴

That a Messianic group with a worldwide perspective finds itself in a room with locked doors is absurd in itself. The situation description "locked doors" remains in the next scene. The group finds itself in political isolation that cannot be more total. The reason is "the fear of the Judeans." We should reflect on this.

The separation from the Judeans, even more so from Israel, must lead to political isolation. The group isolates itself from the very ones Jesus wanted to "bring together in one" (11:52), to gather in a unified synagogue, and turns his very goal into the opposite. The rising Messiah breaks the isolation from the outside, but the disciples do not break it from within. Even though Jesus allows himself to be seen twice by the disciples, they remain trapped within a locked room.

"Jesus came and placed himself in the middle." He says, "Peace be with you!" This is more than an Oriental "good day"—*shalom* or *salam* *ʿalaikum*. The Messiah's peace is in sharp contrast to the "peace" that the world order tends to enforce, 14:27. That is why he shows them the gaping wounds in his side and his hands. He is concerned with more than proof of identity. Indeed, the rising Messiah is still marked by death. Peace in a locked room full of fear-stricken people is indeed a contradiction in itself!

563 FORGIVE . . . BE FORGIVEN: *Aphēte, apheōntai* (or *aphientai, aphiontai, aphethēsetai* in some manuscripts), alternating between present subjunctive and perfect subjunctive passive. *Aphienai* stands for Hebrew *ssalach*." *Ssalach* in the Tanakh has only God or the NAME as a subject. That is why the majority of manuscripts write the subjunctive, "may they be forgiven (by God)."

[In his interpretation below, however, TV still refers to his earlier translation, in which he uses the difficult German word "aufheben" (see note 588):]

CT: "If you take away their aberrations, they are taken away from them."

564 HARDENED: The verb *kratein* very often stands for the Hebrew *chazaq*. The background is Exodus 10:20, "The NAME hardened Pharaoh's heart (*YHWH yechazeq*); he did not send the children of Israel free." This is an alternation between *hecheziq* (causative) and *chazaq* (basic stem), which John renders in Greek by alternating between the present subjunctive and the perfect passive. The events in the struggle for Israel's liberation, like the hardening of Egypt, are the result of an act of the NAME: the fronts necessarily harden because either Egypt must cease to be the house of slavery or Israel must give up the willingness to become children of freedom. The indicative perfect *kekratēntai* indicates, as always in John, a definite state.

[The LXX, however, doesn't translate the hardening of Pharaoh's heart as *kratein*, but as *sklērynein*. In the surrounding context, on the other hand, the word *krataia cheiri* often refers to the "mighty hand," *bechozeq yad*, with which the NAME leads the Israelites out of Egypt. Only in Exodus 9:2 is *enkratein* used for Pharaoh's stopping of the Israelites.]

The disciples rejoice nonetheless. The joy will have been limited because, as we will hear, the doors will remain locked for the next eight days.

Once again the Messianic wish for peace. Then Jesus says how the process of rising will continue, "As the FATHER has sent me, so I am sending you." There is no essential difference between the two verbs *apostellein* and *pempein*, "to send." Both verbs reflect the sending of the Messiah by the God of Israel and the sending of the disciples by the Messiah. Now, when the verb is changed in a sentence, a difference between the two sending processes suggests itself. We can only say that the FATHER sends the Messiah and the inspiration that comes from both; however, people are not sent by the FATHER, but only by the Messiah. Here, no messengers are coming directly from God, and the messenger who did so, Moses, is superseded by the Messiah in John's group. Also in Matthew, all sending is a sending through the Messiah. So the Messiah sends the disciples, and this mission is equal to the mission of the Messiah through the FATHER: to put in his soul for the sheep, i.e. the children of Israel, 10:15.

Then Jesus "inspires" his disciples physically, he breathes over them. Within the Messianic writings, the verb *emphysan* occurs only here, in John 20:21. In the Greek version of the Scriptures, the verb is rare. It stands for the Hebrew verb *nafach*. The verb means "to blow (with the mouth)," with two opposite effects: to animate and to burn. The original meaning is "to breathe on (a fire)," Isaiah 54:16; Job 20:26. God's anger is breathed on as fire against his rebellious people (Ezekiel 22:20-21). In Genesis 2:7, on the other hand, we hear,

The NAME, God, forms mankind as dust from the field.
He blows (*wa-yipach*, *enephsen*) into their nostrils breath of life.
Thus, mankind became to be living souls.

The intimidated people in this barricaded room are, so to speak, dead people in a house of the dead. They must be revived. The great vision Ezekiel 37:1 ff. has already been quoted in the discussion of John 6:63. The prophet is led before a field full of withered bones, and the NAME asks him (Ezekiel 37:3-6),

"Human child, can these bones revive?"
I said, "My Lord, ETERNAL, you know."
Thus my Lord, the NAME, said,
"Testify as a prophet over these bones, you shall say to them,
'You withered bones, hear the word of the NAME!'"
Thus says my Lord, the NAME, to these bones,
"It is I, I cause inspiration to come into you, and you revive!
I give you muscles, draw flesh, stretch the skin over you.
I give inspiration over you; you live up, you recognize,
I AM—the NAME."

Only from such central texts of the Scriptures, we can understand what Jesus is doing here. He says, "Accept the inspiration of sanctification." We announced this pas-

sage in our discussion of 19:30, Jesus “gave the inspiration.” Here, 20:22, we have the corresponding complementary injunction, “Accept . . .” “It is the inspiration that makes alive, the flesh can contribute nothing,” we heard in 6:63. The threatened, vulnerable existence of these intimidated people, flesh, is inspired and shall be transformed into Messianic existence. This is not told here; for the time being, the isolation, the locked room remains. Only when the group goes to Galilee, the transformation will become a reality. The inspiration coming from the Messiah, wounded and killed, animates these people and enables them to fulfill their mission.

The following sentences are difficult to translate and even more difficult to explain. Let us say in advance: The Sacrament of Confession is not established here, as the Catholics read.

It is about aberration (*hamartia*, *chataʿ*, “sin”), about taking away (*aphienai*, *ssalach*), and about to have become hardened (*kratein*). The verb *kratein* occurs only here in John, while the verb *aphienai* occurs fourteen times. Except for 20:23, the latter means “to leave, to let go.” It is then translated as “to remit sins, to forgive.” Because we avoid the word “sin” because of its moralistic flavor and speak of “aberration,” we must paraphrase *aphienai* with an expression like “to do away with.” In the Scriptures, “sins” are “forgiven” only by God, “aberrations” are “covered” (*kipper*, see *Yom Kippur*) or “canceled” only by God, see Mark 2:7. The verb *ssalach* (“to forgive”) has no other subject in the Scriptures than God or the NAME.

What happens if aberrations are done away with? The first chapters of the Book of Leviticus talk about going astray. The one who has gone astray must offer a sacrifice; he must destroy something, burn a handful of flour, or slaughter an animal. He shows drastically that something has been broken because of his aberrations. When he shows this awareness—with a drastic sacrifice—the aberration is covered and can no longer develop its society-destroying effect. So people can do again what their real destiny demands from them.

The Hebrew verb *chataʿ* means something like “to miss a target.” “To forgive” then means “to reorient toward the original goal.” As I said, in the Scriptures, this reorientation comes only from God. “Who can do away with aberrations except for God?” ask the Perushim at the healing of the paralytic in Mark 2:7. Indeed, aberrations cannot be eradicated by “forgiving them.” The original destiny of human beings is restored by God—from whom this destiny comes—making it again the destiny of human beings. In the authority of “God,” the Messiah can do this, and in the authority of the Messiah, the disciples inspired by the Messiah can do it. In other words, only if a person again accepts God and his social order—the Torah—as his sole destination “has he been forgiven” (*nisslach lo*, *aphethēsetai autō*).⁵⁶⁵ This au-

565 The technical term for this is the passive form (*nisslach*); we find it nine times in Leviticus 4 and 5 alone.

thority is granted by the Messiah to the disciples through his inspiration of sanctification.

Kratein is the opposite. *Kratein*, “to seize, to arrest.” We should remember John 9:41. Jesus told them, “If you were blind, you would be without aberration. Now you say, we see. Your aberration remains.” So, when the disciples find that people are (politically) in error, that this aberration is “fixed” in them, such as when they claim they are on the right path, then there is nothing left but to let them go in the wrong direction, then the aberration “has been made fixed” in them, this is how we can paraphrase the passive perfect *kekratēntai*.

The disciples and their Messianic communities should be encouraged to “do away with (*aphienai*) the resignation and powerlessness toward the world order.” However, those who take the supremacy, even omnipotence of the world order as a fact without alternative, their aberration then is so deep-seated that they can no longer move. This is stubbornness, hardening. By demonstrating the alternative, even by living it, the disciples turn political blindness into obduracy. Thus, in a way, they cause obduracy.

We need not take this passage as a reason for the Sacrament of Confession but try to understand it in the light of the fulfillment quotation Isaiah 6:10, which John 12:37-43 made us hear in a bitter summation. There it was about hardening. The disciples are to do and speak like the prophets, like Ezekiel, “that the erring man who turns back from his error may keep his soul alive” (Ezekiel 18; 33:1-20); like the prophet Isaiah: a people “with a fatty heart, hard of hearing, and smeared eyes” will perish (Isaiah 6:10). Not an enviable task for the inspired disciples. Prophets are rarely heard!

16.4. To See and to Trust, 20:24-29

20:24 But Thomas, one of the Twelve, called “Twin,”
was not with them when Jesus came.

20:25 So the other disciples say to him,
“We have seen the Lord!”
But he said to them,
“Unless I see in his hands the striking place of the nails,
put my finger into the place where the nails were struck,
and put my hand into his side,
I will not at all trust.”

20:26 And after eight days his disciples were inside again,
Thomas was also with them.
Jesus came in—the doors were locked—,
placed himself in the middle and said,
“Peace be with you!”

20:27 Then he says to Thomas,
"Take your finger here, see my hands,
take your hand and put it into my side.
Do not become trustless, but have trust!"
20:28 Thomas answered and said to him,
"My Lord and my God!"
20:29 Jesus says to him,
"Because you have seen me, you have trusted me.
Happy those who did not see but began trusting."

Thomas, the solidary skeptic, the Twin, represents the Messianic community that wants to see but cannot. This community wants to be instructed. To the message of his fellow disciples, "We have seen the Lord," Thomas reacts with great skepticism. He wants a palpable certainty, regarding the trustworthiness of a martyred and slain Messiah. He seems to be saying, "This is supposed to be your Lord, *Kyrios*, this one marked with death?" So he wants to know if these are real mortal wounds. The Messianic community, which sees no perspective after the catastrophe of Israel, even less a Messianic one, cannot understand that and how the signs of death are supposed to be the real, Messianic signs of the *Lord*.

The man is to be helped now. The Messiah is amid the disciples again, with his greeting of peace right in the middle of the times of war and destruction. Nothing has changed in the situation of the community; its room remains firmly locked. Thomas must feel out the reality. "If I do not see in his hand the striking place of the nails, do not put (*balō*) my fingers into the place where the nails were struck, do not put my hand into his side, I do not at all trust," he had said. Thomas cannot trust a Messiah who was really dead, even is.

In Paul, the resurrection overrides death, "Death is swallowed up in victory. Death, where is your sting; death, where is your victory?" (1 Corinthians 15:54-55) This would be hollow triumphalism given the bleak situation of Israel after 70. To Paul, the dead were "sown in perishability, raised in imperishability, sown in unworthiness, raised in honor," 1 Corinthians 15:42-43.

The rising Messiah was not a glorious dead man in John. Thomas said to his fellow disciples: a Messiah still marked by death cannot be, that contradicts all Messianic hopes of Israel. Precisely this dead with this death is the hope of Israel. That is what this text wants to say.

"Take (*phere*, not put, stick, *bale*) your finger, here," Jesus invites Thomas. He shall do it with the necessary gentleness. The wounds are real wounds, not pious *insignia*, not healed scars. It is not reported whether Thomas complied with the request.

Jesus says to him, "Do not become a faithless one, but a faithful one." Thomas was never a faithless one but a skeptic one who was yet unreservedly solidary in all his

skepticism (14:5), “Let us go with him, let us die with him” (11:16). At least he *wanted* to be in solidarity; when the hour came, he did *not* follow the Messiah to death. The type of skeptical Messianist was so common that John gave him three appearances. The skeptic was not condemned in the community. John allows him of all people to pronounce the actual confession of the community to the Messiah Jesus, “My Lord and my God!” Lord, *Kyrios*, is the title claimed by the rulers of the world order. “God” is the absolute loyalty that the bearers of this title “God” demand. *Dominus ac Deus* is what the Flavian emperor Domitian (81-96) had himself called. This confession is a declaration of war against the empire, not anticipation of orthodox Christology.

The last word of Jesus—for the time being—is, “Happy those who did not see and trusted.” These words are addressed over the head of Thomas to the generation that comes after the eyewitnesses. The eyewitness was the author of the Gospel, 19:35, “He who saw—namely, the blood and the water from the chest of Jesus—bore witness . . . that you also might *trust*.” This is “the other disciple who had come first to the tomb and saw and *trusted*,” 20:8. It is the disciples and Maria from Magdala. All the others did not see.

Jesus’ words to Thomas do not imply a disqualification of those who “saw and trusted.” Thomas, too, is now among the witnesses who saw and trusted. Jesus’ words apply to the generation of Messianists who saw nothing after the *Judean War* and yet trusted. Death is the last word, because without this death, this departure of the Messiah, nothing can go on. The dead, rising from death (present tense!) Messiah is *Dominus ac Deus*. Exactly *this* is not to be seen. *This* must be trusted.

Conclusion: “That you may trust,” 20:30-31

20:30 Although Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples,
which have not been written in this book,
20:31 but these have been written,
so that you may trust that Jesus is the Messiah, Son of GOD,
and that by this trust you may have the life (of the age to come)
with his NAME!⁵⁶⁶

The trust is happening based on the testimony of the eyewitnesses. These last words are followed by the original conclusion of the Gospel. John writes what purpose he had with his text. He wanted to describe a part of the signs of Jesus, which

566 [Literally, here are only the words *zōēn echēte en tō onomati autou*, “you may have life in his name.” The word *aiōnios* is missing. But according to TV’s entire reading of the Gospel, the life promised here definitely means the eternal, fulfilled, this-worldly life of the age to come. And the name spoken of here is the liberating NAME of the God of Israel—fully embodied by the Messiah and Son of GOD, Jesus, therefore written fully capitalized.]

he did before his disciples. Many are not included in his book. So he made a selection: the sign of the Messianic wedding in Cana, Galilee, the healing of the son of the royal official in Cana, Galilee, the healing of the paralytic in Jerusalem, the feeding of the five thousand, the healing of the man born blind, also in Jerusalem, and the reviving of Lazarus in Bethany. This shows that John knew several other traditions, but these six paradigmatic signs were written down to trust that Jesus is the Messiah, the *one like God*. This trust has a purpose: those who do not see, yet trust, receive the life of the age to come “with his name.”

The Gospel as a text of the Messianic movement could not end here and like this. It was at first just the self-understanding of a group in a locked room, so to speak the text of a closed society. Only the 21st chapter according to the traditional counting, which was mostly called an appendix inserted later and to which we now turn, tells how the group around John could break its isolation, how it became part of a Messianic movement, and how his text became a Messianic, later an ecclesiastical text. It had a hard enough time as it was to be generally accepted, harder than the letters of Paul, harder than the Gospel of Matthew, the ecclesiastical Gospel of the second century, and the counterpart of Paul.

PART IV: GALILEE, 21:1-25

17 By the Sea of Tiberias, 21:1-25

Chapter 21 is not a corollary that was “added” for the sake of completeness and would contribute nothing essential to the argument. The question of who is supposed to have added it and when is beside the point. Linguistically, there are some indications that it could have been written by another hand, but still trained by “John,” yet this is not certain. The Gospel has never been handed down without this chapter; it is an integral part of the Gospel and makes it, so to speak, “catholic” — from *kath’ holon*: meant for the whole.

17.1. “We also come with you,” 21:1-14

21:1 After this, Jesus let himself be seen again publicly by the disciples, at the sea of Tiberias.⁵⁶⁷

567 21:1-24: The whole chapter has only one theme, “Simon Peter.” This figure represents a particular type of Messianism represented by the three Synoptic Gospels, each in its way, and distinct from the Pauline type. Luke documented this difference and attempted mediation between the two types. After the death of Simon Peter, John’s group (6:67-71; 13-17; 20:19-29), originally completely isolated, sought and found a connection with this Messianism. The “sons of Zebedee” appear in John’s Gospel only here. They play an important role in the Synoptic Gospels. The fact that they appear here of all places shows how the group found the connection to the Synoptic Messianism. The document of this connection is this

He let himself be seen as follows:

21:2 There were together
Simon Peter, Thomas, called “Twin,” and Nathanael from Cana, Galilee,
the [sons] of Zebedee, and of his disciples two more.

21:3 Simon Peter says to them,
“I’m going fishing.”
They said to him,
“We also are coming with you.”
They went out and got into the boat,
and that night they caught nothing.

21:4 But when it already had become early morning, Jesus stood on the beach,
the disciples, however, did not know that it was Jesus.

21:5 So Jesus says to them,
“Lads, don’t you have anything to eat?”⁵⁶⁸
They answered him,
“No.”

21:6 But he said to them,
“Throw in the net on the right side of the boat,
you will find.”
So they threw it in and were not able to pull it up,
because of the amount of fish.

21:7 Now that disciple Jesus was attached to in solidarity says to Peter,
“It is the Lord!”
Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord,
he girded himself with the outer garment, for he was naked,
and threw himself into the sea.

21:8 The other disciples came with the boat,
for they were not far from shore, about two hundred cubits,
dragging along the net with the fish.

chapter; it is at the same time the document of the break out of the sectarian isolation. For dating purposes it is unsuitable; first, we do not know when Simon Peter was put to death; second, we do not know when Chapter 21 was added to the Gospel. In any case, this chapter documents the process of how the group went from being a sect to being part of a comprehensive movement, but its text went from being a sect paper to being the basic document of a movement and then to being an “ecclesiastical” document. That there must have been heated discussions in the group around John about the future of the group is documented by the Epistles of John. John 21, therefore, became an integral part of this Gospel, because this chapter turned John’s Gospel from a text of an isolated sect into the basic document of a Messianic movement.

568 [ANYTHING TO EAT: Thus TV renders freely the seldom word *prosphagion*, “side dish.” Later on—in 21:9, 10, 13, referring back to 6:9, 11—John will take the word *opsarion*. Both are normally translated as “fish” because the disciples caught fish as a side dish.]

21:9 Now when they went down ashore, they saw a charcoal fire burning, side dish lying on it, and bread.

21:10 Jesus says to them,
“Bring some of the side dish you have caught now.”

21:11 So Simon Peter went up and dragged the net ashore.
It was full of big fish, a hundred and fifty-three.
but even with so many, the net did not tear.

21:12 Jesus said to them,
“Come, eat.”
None of the disciples dared to sound him out,
“Who are you,” knowing full well that it was the Lord.

21:13 Jesus comes,
takes the bread,
gives it to them,
and the side dish likewise.

21:14 This was now the third time
that Jesus was seen publicly by the disciples,⁵⁶⁹
raised from the dead.

The passage opens with a peculiar phrase. In the Gospel, the verb *phaneroun* has the meaning “to make known publicly.” In the resurrection narratives in John 20, the verb *phaneroun*, “to make public, to reveal,” does not occur. In the Gospel, the verb serves to denote the Messiah as a public and political figure, 1:31 and 7:4, the public honor of the Messiah, 2:11, and his works, 3:21; 9:3, and his name, 17:6. Everywhere the public is an essential element of the verb. So we would have to translate, “After this, Jesus again allowed himself to be seen publicly by the disciples.” The traditional translations help themselves with “appear.” Spirits or ghosts appear, Jesus is neither one nor the other. Here, again, the verb has the meaning “to make oneself known publicly” or “to be seen.”

In Chapter 20, Jesus just did not let himself be seen publicly. He was not recognized by Maria of Magdala, he made himself known as a teacher because he had pronounced her name. He was seen by the disciples only in the locked room. Now it is a matter of publicity. So we have to translate it as “to be seen publicly.” But this, as far as we can see, is unique.⁵⁷⁰ The use of the verb indicates that the group will be released into the Messianic public; the use of the particle *palin* in the meaning specific to John, “rather,” shows that something decisive will now happen. How and to which purpose is told in this final chapter.

569 WAS SEEN PUBLICLY: Here it says *ephanerōthē*, passively, and not *ephanerōsen*, as in 21:1, hence “was seen publicly.”

570 If Paul reports such events in 1 Corinthians 15, he uses the passive *ōphthē*. Only in the so-called inauthentic ending of Mark, this use of *phaneroun* is documented, 16:12, 14.

Of the Twelve, seven are together. To our astonishment, we encounter the two sons of Zebedee, who play a prominent role in the Synoptics but were not mentioned with a syllable in John. The two are portrayed on the level of the narrative as professional comrades of Simon Peter; on the level of the narrator, they are chief representatives of the Messianic movement—the one that originated in Judea. To Paul, “they were considered pillars,” Galatians 2:9, and this meaning must have been known to the narrator. They represent the Messianic public into which Jesus releases the until then isolated group.

Simon Peter is there; it will be about him. Then Thomas, called the Twin, the solidary skeptic, and Nathanael, the Israelite, in whom there was no deceit. Then two others. One is the apprentice Jesus was solidary with. He remains without a name, as does the other. This is a strange company. Neither Andrew nor Philipp are present; at least, we do not learn their names. Seven is a full number, but seven is not twelve. We have seven people. The week has seven days. The stranger on the beach is the eighth person. The eighth day is *yoma chad*, “day one.”

Simon now goes about his business, fishing. This, too, has not been mentioned so far. Simon takes the initiative; he is the protagonist in the narrative. “I’m going fishing”; the others join in, “We’re coming with you, too.” The seven go fishing; they are a professional collective here, not yet a Messianic community. They are a timid group of people who had once embarked on a Messianic adventure. Now they are going fishing again. People have to do something to eat; fishermen go fishing, they are not Messianists anymore, despite the “experience” in the locked room after the death of Jesus.

The nightly venture is fruitless. Nothing goes on. On their return, the fishermen see Jesus standing on the beach, not knowing that it is him. This is what Maria from Magdala also experienced. She also perceived a figure without knowing that it was Jesus; she thought he was the gardener. The rising Messiah is not recognized; he makes himself known.

Jesus addresses the disciples as *paidia*, something like “lads.” He had once called them *teknia*, “children,” 13:33. He asks for “food added to (bread),” *pros-phagion*, we translate “something to eat.” The word did not exist in the Greek language until then, the narrator invented it. The fishermen are literally monosyllabic: *Ou*, “no.” To them, the man is a stranger, an outsider.

The stranger advises them to cast the net on the right side of the boat. This they do. Why these professional fishermen take professional advice from a stranger is odd, especially since it doesn’t matter whether the net is cast to the right or left of the boat. If there are fish, they catch; if there are no fish, they don’t catch, whether to the left or the right. But they do what the man says, and that is *because* he says it and not because the right side is supposed to be the lucky side. They would have thought of that on their own.

Now they catch, and the success is unheard of: they cannot drag the net because of the amount of fish. From this, the disciple “Jesus was solidarily attached with” recognizes who it is and says to Simon, “It is the Lord.” Jesus is called “Lord” here. This is the confession of the Messianic community.

Simon reacted as if he was reminded of something he had forgotten or, better, repressed: when he “heard that it was the Lord,” he throws on his coat and goes into the water. In this final chapter, John makes up for what he had missed in the narrative about Jesus walking on the water to meet the disciples. There, diverging from the Synoptic version of the narrative, he leaves Simon in the boat. Now Simon goes into the water.

He knew that he was naked, and he also knew that he had to cover his nakedness. Under non-paradise conditions, nakedness is a disgrace (Genesis 3) and a sign of extreme neediness. Therefore, it is a human duty to give clothing to the naked (Ezekiel 18:16; Matthew 25:36). Simon knows about his nakedness, about the isolation of the former disciples of the Messiah. “He put the outer garment around himself,” it says. The word (*diezōsato*, from *zonnydaki*, “to gird”) invokes the scene where Jesus will announce to him that another will gird him (21:18).⁵⁷¹ Still, Simon can act and overcome his nakedness that isolates him. For isolation is isolation from the Messiah.

The disciples follow and do the hard work of bringing the catch to shore. The disciples come with the fish; Simon is already on shore. The disciples go down from the boat (*apebēsan*), Simon goes up on the boat (*anebē*), and he drags the net, full of big fish, 153 in number. The leader of the fishermen completes the heavy work. The number 153 is unexplained until today. John surely wanted to make something clear with it, but he does not tell us what. We also capitulate before this riddle and are in good theological company.⁵⁷²

Despite the amount, the net held. It is hardly due to an overflowing allegorical imagination if we interpret this net as the great assembly (*ekklesia*) of all Messianists. For this narrative undoubtedly has something to do with the unification of the Messianic movement under Simon Peter after its fragmentation in the years since the catastro-

571 [And it invokes the scene when Jesus girded himself to wash the feet of his disciples, 13:4. Now, Peter seems to be ready to follow unreservedly the example of his Lord shown in the washing of the feet.]

572 Calvin, who revered Augustin, however, writes about Augustin’s interpretation of this number, “One should not look for a mysterious meaning in the number of the fish. Augustin very astutely associates it with ‘law and gospel’ [*one* God who first speaks in the *five* books of the Torah, then reveals himself in the gospel as a *triune* God]; but on closer reflection one will find that this is a childish gimmick” (Johannes Calvin, *Auslegung des Johannesevangeliums* (1553), übersetzt v. Martin Trebesius und Hans Christian Petersen, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1964, 488).

phe of the *Judean War*. What is happening here, the unification of the Messianists, is hardly less of a miracle than what had happened at the feeding of the five thousand in the same place. But for the time being, we are not yet dealing with Messianists here, but with Galilean fishermen.

The Messiah stands at the charcoal fire. There is a charcoal fire in the Messianic scriptures only here and in the courtyard of the court of the great priest, John 18:18. The two fires have something to do with each other. Now Jesus speaks the invitation, "Come, eat." The odd verb *aristan* occurs twice in John (here and in v.15) and once in Luke. In the Septuagint, the word occurs four times. In 1 Kings 13:7, it stands for *ssa'ad*, "to fortify, strengthen," in Genesis 43:25 it stands for "to eat bread." The disconcerting expression wants to suggest that a very special meal is involved.⁵⁷³

The situation is admittedly uncomfortable. The disciples are aware that the stranger is the Lord. They do not dare to ask exactly, "You, who are you?" The knowledge that it is Jesus does not cancel out his strangeness. Everyone knows about the charcoal fire in the courtyard of the great priest. At that time it was impossible to confess to the arrested Jesus. Simon at that time, when asked if he was one of those who belonged to Jesus, answered, *Ouk eimi*, "I am not." This was, as we said, politically wise. And yet, that charcoal fire reminded Simon of his past. Everything was there again, the time with Messiah Jesus, the impossibility of staying with him and professing him and his own Messianic expectations.

The silence of the disciples at the meal is speaking, "We were with you, we left you, we no longer observed you (*theōrein!*), we are just back in a desolate present without a trace of the Messiah." Could they now ask, "Is it really you? Beautiful! After everything that happened in Jerusalem, in the year 30, in the year 70." When something like that goes through your mind, you are struck with dumbness.

All resurrection narratives testify to the hopelessness of these people after the destruction of Jerusalem. Paul had it easier, everything was still possible, but now? Jesus, as the host, gives out the bread, also the side dish. The meal with Jesus has become something completely different and new. No, it is not an ordinary meal, it is a Messianic meal, where the Messiah himself is the host, and the guests hesitantly get involved.

The whole seems to be an update of John 6:5-24. Between the narrative of the feeding of Israel, 6:5 ff, and the narrative of the Messianic meal, there is a connection of structural transformation. The bread and the side dish, indicated by the rare word *opsarion*, which occurs only in John and not in the Greek version of the Scriptures, connect both passages John 6 and John 21. At that time there were only two fish—

573 Charles K. Barrett (Das Evangelium nach Johannes (KEK), Göttingen 1990, 556) notes here that the verb is used in late Greek for the first meal of the day. A common dictionary (Gemoll) provides *aristan*, "to have breakfast," 3.11.

“What is that for so many?” asks Andrew. Here Andrew, if he had been present, would have had no occasion for such a question: seven disciples, 153 fish! This is the contrast between the two narratives. There, in John 6, the abundance appeared only afterward (twelve baskets with the chunks of the five barley loaves), here there is an abundance from the beginning. There, in 6:11, Jesus says the traditional prayer of thanksgiving of the Jews, “Blessed are You, our God, King of the world, who causes bread to spring up from the earth.” Here he distributes without this prayer because he himself has been made “King of the world” and “Bread of life” by the God of Israel.

“It was the third time that Jesus allowed himself to be seen publicly by the disciples.”⁵⁷⁴ Through the meal on the beach, the disciples knew that Jesus is the *Lord*. Now, this awareness becomes a matter to the public, and thus, the two encounters between the disciples and Jesus in the locked room also become public events. Initially, they were not. They had only led to the disciples having to go back to that *profession* from which Jesus’ call of succession (1:35-51) had called them to their Messianic *vocation*. The events in the locked room had remained without consequence. Only by the interference of the initially unrecognized Messiah in their profession, they could find their way back to their vocation. *They* did not break their isolation; it was broken open *for them* by the Messiah. How this happened is told in the next section.

17.2 The Shepherd, 21:15-19a

21:15 Now when they had eaten,
 Jesus says to Simon Peter,
 “Simon, son of John,
 are you solidary with me, more than these?”⁵⁷⁵
 He says to him,
 “Yes, Lord,

574 In v.14 John chooses the passive *ephanerōthe* instead of the reflexive *ephanerōsen heauton*. There is no difference here since the passive also has a reflexive meaning.

575 SOLIDARY WITH ME: Here is a change between *agapan* and *philein*. Jesus asks about the *agapē* of Simon, who responds with *philō*, “I am your friend.” *Agapan* aims at an attachment to a person for the sake of a common matter, hence “solidarity”; *philein*, on the other hand, aims at a person-to-person relationship. Jesus gives Simon a functional task, that he should “become a shepherd,” that is, take on a political leadership function; we know what this entails from chapter 10:1 ff. Twice Jesus asks about solidarity, twice the question is misunderstood, probably because of the triple denial. The third time Jesus takes up the personal level to translate it into the functional sphere of the task. It is not about style here, because in these texts it is not about “lively” style, but listening carefully. Any relationship with the Messiah is to be measured by the fulfillment of the Messianic task. With any “love for Jesus,” the task would not be served. Therefore, taking into account the differences, we translate emphatically brittle.

you know I am your friend.”
 He says to him:
 “Tend my lambs!”
 21:16 He says to him again, the second time,
 “Simon, son of John,
 are you solidary with me?”
 He says to him:
 “Yes, Lord,
 you know I am your friend.”
 He says to him:
 “Shepherd my sheep!”⁵⁷⁶
 21:17 He says to him, the third time,
 “Simon, son of John,
 are you my friend?”
 It pained Peter that he said to him a third time,
 “Are you my friend?”
 He said to him,
 “Lord, you know everything.
 You do recognize that I am your friend!”
 He says to him,
 “Tend my sheep!”
 21:18 Amen, amen, I say to you,
 When you were younger, you girded yourself,
 you walked your way where you wanted.
 But when you will be older,
 you will stretch out your hands.
 Someone else will gird you and bring you where you do not want to go.”
 21:19a He said this signifying by which death he will honor GOD.

In the question conversation between Jesus and Simon Peter, we have a problem. For three phenomena John has two synonyms.

For what our translations call “to love,” John has *agapan* and *philein*. We have translated the former as “to be solidary with” and the latter as “to be friends with.” The second verb has a stronger emotional value than the first.

576 SHEPHERD: In vv.15 and 17 the verb is *boskein*, but here it is *poimainein*; both stand for the Hebrew root *raʿa*. John has a reason to vary here. *Boskein* aims at the content of the task, “to tend, to pasture,” *poimainein*, on the other hand, at the function of the one who shepherds, “to shepherd.” The shepherd has to tend, but the tending can only happen if there is a shepherd. Peter now has to tend the whole flock, all the Messianic groups, lead the small group around John into the whole movement, and the group has to recognize Peter as the shepherd.

The second pair of synonyms is *boskein* and *poimainein*. Both verbs mean “the human leading of a herd of animals.” In the Synoptics, *boskein* occurs only as “herding pigs,” Mark 5:11, 14 par. and Luke 15:15. *Poimainein* occurs eleven times in the Messianic writings. Only in two cases does the word have a livestock meaning, Luke 17:7 and 1 Corinthians 9:7. Otherwise, it has a political meaning; it means leading a people, the community of God, the nations (in the Book of Revelation throughout).

Finally, there are two different terms for the animals of the flock, *arnia* (“lambs”) and *probata* (“sheep”). The plural *arnia* is found only once in the Messianic writings, in John 21:15. The singular *arnion* is only found in the Book of Revelation, but there are 29 times. It is the main word of this book: the slaughtered lamb is the victorious Messiah. The “sheep” (*probata*), as we know from the parable of the Good Shepherd, are the members of the people of Israel. In the Septuagint, *arnia* and *probata* occur, as it were, in the same breath, “When Israel went out of Egypt . . . the mountains leaped like rams, the hills like the lambs of the sheep (*arnia probatōn*),” Psalm 114:4, 6 (LXX Psalm 113).

Let us put the findings of 21:15-17 together so that the questions, answer, task, and flock are each written in a line one below the other:

- 1) Are you solidary with me, more than these?

I am your friend.

Tend

the lambs.

- 2) Are you solidary with me?

I am your friend.

Shepherd

the sheep.

- 3) Are you my friend?

I am your friend.

Tend

the sheep.

Let’s roll up the puzzle from behind. The lambs (*arnia*) are the young sheep (*probata*). So it is about the relationship between the young animals of the flock and the old ones. Simon Peter must shepherd and lead both groups.

“To tend” and “to be a shepherd” are two different things, and “lambs” and “sheep” are two different kinds of flock animals. Since our fragment is about the bringing together of John’s group with the Messianic movement under Simon Peter, the twofold suggestion of leadership activity in each case must have to do with the bringing together of two different groupings.

Suitability for leadership is associated with a very definite relationship to the Messiah Jesus, being in solidarity *and* friendship with Messiah, and in fact—in the first

question—“more than the others.” Simon answers the question by replacing “being in solidarity” with the emotionally stronger “being friends.” In doing so, he responds to the “more than the others.” Only being more in solidarity with the Messiah proves qualified for the office of leadership. The task then is “to tend my lambs,” to keep the group together with the newly arrived Messianists. It is about Simon’s relationship with Jesus. The attitude of the disciples toward Jesus must be a solidary one; they must know themselves to be one with the life task of the Messiah. But the one who is given the office of leadership must know himself to be one with the Messiah more than the others.

Jesus repeats the question, this time without the addition “more than these.” Simon repeats his answer. This time he is assigned the office of the shepherd. From John 10, we know what “being a shepherd” means. Not only must he keep the flock together (“to tend”), but he must go ahead as a shepherd, pointing the way, putting in “his soul” (*psychēn*) for the sheep, like the Messiah (10:11). On the evening of the washing of the feet, Simon Peter had said, “My soul I will put in for you” (13:37). At that time, this was not up for debate. At first, Simon has to deny the Messiah—he *has to*, do we say, because he has no other choice in the courtyard of the great priest. This time he must be the shepherd, and that means, “to put his soul in.”

In the third question, Jesus takes up the word “friend.” Now, with the special bond to the Messiah, he has to keep the whole flock together. Even those who lived their own lives in isolation for a long time, the group in the room with the locked doors.

He has to be asked three times now, with such urgency that it hurts. When Simon was one of the disciples, he had to deny three times that he belonged to the Messiah. Now he has to confess three times as a solidary friend of the Messiah. Three times he is assigned the office of leadership. Not until then can Simon do what he first wanted to do: to follow and put in his soul for Jesus, 13:37.

In summary: The use of the triple pair of synonyms *agapan/philein*, *boskein/poimainein*, and *arnia/probata* signifies, on the one hand, the striving for unity in the Messianic movement and, on the other hand, the preservation of the identity of the group that does not belong to the Messianic mainstream but follows the Messiah on its own paths.

The following sentences carry great weight, for they are introduced thus, “Amen, amen, I say to you.” The narrator’s note interprets the sentences: They indicate the death by which Simon Peter will honor God.

However, there are major problems with the traditional explanation of the statement that Peter, as long as he was young, could gird himself as he wished and go wherever he wished. But when he is older, he will stretch out his hands, another one will gird him and carry him wherever he does not want to go.

So, they say, as an old man he would stretch out his hands to be nailed to the cross, and he would be carried where he did not want to go, namely by raising the cross to

which he had been nailed. Now there is no mention of crucifixion, and a truly reliable document about the crucifixion of Peter has not yet been found.

“To stretch out the hands,” *ekteinein tas cheiras*, never does mean, “to stretch out the hands for bondage.” Usually, this is a sign of power, especially in the Book of Exodus. And in the Synoptics, when someone is asked to stretch out his hand, it is to heal them, Mark 3:5 par. *Peripatein* we always translate as “to walk one’s way.” What is meant by this verb is “to walk with the Messiah” or “with the light of the world,” John 8:12; 11:9-10; 12:35.

The opposites are: “young” and “old” / “girding oneself” and “being girded by another one” / “walking the way” and “being carried by one” / “wanting” and “not wanting.” Only “to stretch out one’s hands” has no counterpart; the expression stands on its own. “To be old, to be girded, to be carried and not to want” means: no longer being able to freely dispose of one’s actions.

You can, like Bultmann, treat this “prophecy”—without connection to the pastoral task—as an independent *logion*. This is always a more convenient way. We prefer to see a text as something structured and coherent in itself.

The shepherd can no longer walk his own way. He will be girded. The verb “to gird oneself” (*zōnnynai, hagar*) occurs 44 times in the Scriptures. The object is usually a sword or weapon, 16 times. Likewise, the expression “to stretch out one’s hands” often meant “to stretch out one’s hands for the sword,” especially in the Books of Joshua, Judges, and Samuel. Not infrequently, the object of “girding” is a priestly girdle and priestly belt, eight times. To gird oneself with the penitential garment of sackcloth occurs six times. To gird oneself without object or to gird one’s loins means to make oneself ready to travel (six times). But nowhere is “to be girded by another one,” a synonym for “to be tied up.”

When Simon was young, he walked his own Zealot way and “drew his sword,” 18:10. When he is old, he will stretch out his hands, but not for the sword, let himself be girded, but not with the sword. Then there can be no question of his own freely chosen path. He will be carried by that “other.” This “other” is the Messiah. The Messiah is the shepherd who puts in his soul for the sheep, until the end, until death, as it is told. Now Simon Peter is the shepherd. He will walk the way of the Messianic shepherd, with the same consequence: until the end, until death, with which he will honor God, as the Messiah honored God through his death. Simon Peter will honor God through his death like the Messiah.

17.3. “Follow me,” 21:19b-23

21:19b When he had said this, he says to him,
“Follow me!”

21:20 Peter turned around,
he sees the disciple Jesus was attached to in solidarity following,

the one who, during the meal, had leaned against his chest and said,
 “Who is the one handing you over?”
 21:21 Now seeing him, Peter says to Jesus,
 “Lord, what about him?”⁵⁷⁷
 21:22 Jesus says to him,
 “If I want him to persevere until I am coming, what is it to you?
 You, follow me!”
 21:23 Therefore the word went around among the brothers
 that disciple would not die.
 However, Jesus did not say to him he would not die,
 rather, “If I want him to persevere until I am coming . . .”⁵⁷⁸

Now a last, in itself incidental, but troublesome question must be clarified. What happens to the independent and probably also quite stubborn group around John within the unified Messianic movement? So it is about the relationship between a local Messianic group around “the disciple Jesus was attached to in solidarity”—a group that follows a deviant path—and the supra-regional Messianic movement under the leadership of Simon Peter.

The disciple in question is referred to here as the one who asked at the chest of Jesus, “Lord, who is the one who will hand you over?” It is the disciple who ran to the tomb with Peter and “saw and trusted” at the open tomb. It is the disciple who had very special access to Jesus and to whom Peter was very important.

If we take these two actors of the narrative as representatives of different Messianic groups or directions, the relationship is clear. Simon Peter is the definite leader of the whole Messianic movement; at the same time, he is dependent on the unity with that disciple, i.e. with the group around John. “John” understands himself here as an element of the great Messianic narrative, but he has a prominent significance to it. The narrator of John 21 thus wants to ensure two facts. The group has to see itself as part of an overall movement, but at the same time, it has to hold on to its own identity, which is different from the Messianic mainstream.

The question of Simon to Jesus, “What about that disciple,” does not primarily concern the death of that disciple, but his relationship to him. The question then means, “Shall he continue to go his own way?” After all, the passage was introduced with the remark that Peter sees the disciple following Jesus. So it is about the particular way in which the group follows the Messiah. The narrator, the spokesman of John’s group, has Jesus reply harshly, “If I want him to persevere until I come, what

577 In this section, the group asks itself, “What will become of us, of our group’s particular political orientation, of the group’s teacher, if we join the other groups?”

578 UNTIL I AM COMING: Here, several manuscripts add again, *ti pros se*, “what is it to you.” Other important manuscripts, however, omit these words. The Nestle/Aland text edition varies. There, *ti pros se* is in the main text, but in square brackets.

is it to you? You follow me!” Unity is not to consist in dogmatic uniformity, but in following the Messiah.

The inclusion of the Johannine community, the opening of its isolation, is one thing, the independence of the group within a movement is another thing. In the world-wide Messianic movement, there should be different forms of discipleship. The Messianic movement is a political movement, but not a political party and consequently, there is no party discipline in the Messianic movement. The appendix of John 21 was read with great care by the ancient and later Roman Catholic church, but only up to v.19. Had they read further, they would have used the *anathema* sit [„let him be accursed“] more sparsely.

Remain the words “until I come.” The Gospel of John is not very familiar with this thought. What is coming is the inspiration of sanctification. The idea of Jesus coming only appears in 14:3, “I am going to found a place for you. Again, I am coming to accept you to myself.” We have interpreted this passage as a paraphrase of what is meant in 11:52 by “bringing together into one” the scattered children of Israel.

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the Messiah *comes* to finally and definitively establish justice. In the meantime, the group may have understood that although the Messiah has come and no other Messiah is to be expected, the work of the Messiah was just as incomplete as the creative work of the God of Israel, 5:17. The Messianists have freed themselves not only from spatial isolation but also from the prison of the pure Messianic present, they have a future; and the world also has a future, a future without the order that now oppresses it. This is what the group learns from the Messianic movement under Simon.

But the text remains restrained here as well. Too deep is the rejection of Zealotry, which wanted to force the coming of the Messiah on the clouds of heaven with the sword in the hand. The coming of the Messiah, in the context of the whole Gospel, means that the works of the FATHER and the Messiah are completed. The verb *menein*, as repeatedly shown, means “to withstand, to persevere, to stay firm.” The life of a person who follows Jesus is nothing but *persevering, enduring, and staying firm*. “If I want this disciple to persevere until I come,” thus means: Until the disciple perseveres, until the work of the Messiah will be completed, the gathering together into one synagogue of the God-born who have been driven apart, 11:52. Nothing changes for Simon, he is to follow Jesus.

The narrator or final editor refers to a rumor circulating in the Messianic community around John, namely that the leader of this community who was thought to be the disciple Jesus was attached to in solidarity, will stay until the goal of the Messiah is achieved. The meaning of the statement, however, was that the community would go its own way, as Simon went his way. Even though the group around John accepts Simon’s leadership, it places importance on its own history and its own ideas. Apparently, the discussion in the group about its status in the Messianic movement of Messianists originating from Israel was still ongoing.

Signature: “This is the disciple,” 21:24-25

21:24 This is the disciple who is testifying about these things
and who has written them down.
And we know that his testimony is trustworthy.

21:25 There are also many other things Jesus did,
but if they were all to be written, one by one,
I do not think the world itself could contain the books
that would have to be written!

The author of “Denkwürdigkeiten aus dem Leben des deutschen Tonkünstlers Adrian Leverkühn” is a Doctor Serenus Zeitblom in the story. In the story, which is by Thomas Mann, Zeitblom is the author.⁵⁷⁹

In the narrative that we have interpreted, the beloved disciple is one of the seven who saw “the Lord” on the beach of the Sea of Galilee. The research may try to find behind Serenus Zeitblom the “Thomas Mann” of this Gospel. For the interpretation of the story about *Jesus ben Joseph* from Nazareth, Galilee, the success or failure of such attempts is irrelevant. The Doctor Serenus Zeitblom of our narration, the beloved disciple, has given a truthful and trustworthy testimony about Jesus ben Joseph.

“I am not lying to you,” he says, “you can rely on these written words.” The narration is a selection; we already heard that in 20:30-31. Even that ancient “Zeitblom” knew that others brought *their* selection. Everything cannot be written down; the world is not big enough to contain all the books that could be *written* about it. So these 21 chapters will have to do.

They are indeed sufficient to understand the Messiah concept of that radical Messianic group, which is no longer isolated.

Epilogue**1 [The Gospel of John and Anti-Semitism]**

The work on the translation and interpretation, which was completed in 2007 with issue No. 113-115 of the journal “Texte & Kontexte,” began in the fall of 2000. However, the systematic study of the Gospel of John began much earlier. In April 1989, the first attempt at interpretation appeared. John 18:28-19:16 was discussed under the title, “Der Priester, der Büttel und der Narr.”⁵⁸⁰

579 [Thomas Mann, [Doktor Faustus. Das Leben des deutschen Tonsetzers Adrian Leverkühn, erzählt von einem Freunde.](#)]

580 Texte & Kontexte 41 (1989), 14-43.

Another attempt two years later: “Auf Leben und Tod. Eine Auslegung von Joh 10,40-11,54”⁵⁸¹ had an important occasion. In the journal “Kirche und Israel” (1989/2), the Jewish philosopher Prof. Micha Brumlik wrote, “We can—according to my thesis—do nothing, nothing at all with this book [the Gospel of John—TV] within the dialogue.” It is “a message of demarcation, fear, anxiety, and hatred . . . In the eighth chapter of the Gospel, religious primal motives and delusions, which can only be explained politically and socio-psychologically, merge into a consistent Satanology that no longer leaves the Jews the slightest chance in a doctrine, which cannot be otherwise described as proto-racist.”⁵⁸²

The editors of “Texte & Kontexte” at that time thought that the Gospel of John had to be dealt with more thoroughly, not so much to refute Brumlik’s thesis but rather to answer the question of whether we could still refer to this text at all after all that Christian anti-Judaism had brought about over the centuries, and even more so after the genocide of the Jews in the years 1939-1945.

That was almost twenty years ago, and since that time we have been struggling with John. To summarize the result following the reading of this interpretation: The Gospel is a Satanology indeed. And the “Jews” of John 8:31-59 are indeed children of this Satan. However, Satan is not a figment of a morbid metaphysics of evil, but a very earthly figure: the emperor of Rome; the “Jews” are, in John’s eyes, those who carry out the desire of this Satan, the *deus mortalis* or the Leviathan—to speak with Thomas Hobbes—by seeking the historical compromise with Rome. Therefore, to John, they are collaborators with the Romans. This is exactly what John saw as treason.

We tried to demonstrate, especially in our discussion of John 16:1 ff, that John’s political accusation, while understandable, was nevertheless dishonest. Therefore, we tried not to be biased in our interpretation; we were not and are not a priori “pro-Jesus” and “anti-Jews.” We tried to understand what was at stake and how serious the conflict was at that time—to both sides. The 1991 interpretation of John 11 mentioned above was a first, not very satisfactory, attempt to understand the conflicts in the Gospel.

Christianity has turned the *diabolos*, Hebrew *satan*—Buber translates as “hinderer”—into a supernatural eternal evil spirit, consequently the Jews into “children of this father,” thus devil spawn. While to John that *Satan* or Rome was a “murderer of *humans* from the beginning” (or: “. . . on principle”), Christianity made of the Jews murderers *of God*.

Now no author can exclude from the outset that later his text is turned into something completely different from what he meant by it. Nietzsche cannot be accused

581 Texte & Kontexte 49 (1991), 16-44.

582 Micha Brumlik, Johannes: Das judenfeindliche Evangelium, in Kirche und Israel 4, 1989, 102-113, here 111, 103, 104.

of the misuse of his thought by German fascism; admittedly, Nietzsche furnished his contempt of the bourgeois-Christian society and morals with metaphors that the fascists could easily use for their delusions of “*ubermensch* and *untermensch*.” The Jew John attacked certain Jews—possibly defectors of the Messianists to Rabbinical Judaism (8:31)—with such immoderate aggressiveness that later Christian anti-Semitism had an easy job with such a model.

With John, Christianity produced a doctrine of anti-Semitism that was not only pro-racist, but original racist, and which left the Jews no chance to survive as human beings. To interpret John means to be constantly aware of this history of impact. However, text and impact history are to be distinguished.

We have no choice but to make this distinction because otherwise, we cannot at all work on the text. We have to treat the text like any other historical text. We try to understand it as an intervention in the discourses of its time.

But to Christianity, John is not only a historical text. The doctrine that it thinks to discover in it today, is understood as the *Word of God*, as a *commandment of God*, to be involved in the discourses of our days in this way and not in any other way. The text is indissolubly linked to its history of impact, which consists in understanding it also as the *Word of God against the Jews*.

If in our translation we write *Judeans* instead of *Jews*, *Perushim* instead of *Pharisees*, then we take into account the fact that the words *Jews* and *Pharisees* arouse anti-Semitic associations. If in any Christian service, we have Jesus railing against the Jews and the Pharisees during the reading of a relevant text from John, then the anti-Semitic mechanism is set in motion against our will and our political correctness. None of us can meet a Jewish person with the same impartiality that we show when meeting non-Jewish people.

Something similar is seen in the encounter with people of African origin. The reason here is colonialism. Anti-Semitism and racism are by no means stupid missteps of our “civilization,” they belong to the core of the occidental tradition. We must laboriously learn to free ourselves from anti-Semitism and racism. We will hardly become completely free from this mental deformation.

We cannot read John without encountering in ourselves traditional anti-Semitism. The text has become identical with its history of impact during two thousand years of Christianity and *is*, therefore, its history of impact. Our trick of saying *Judeans* instead of *Jews*, *Perushim* instead of *Pharisees*, may have the effect of a certain de-Christianization of the text in a meeting of a House of Study;⁵⁸³ however, the fact

583 [TV alludes here to activities within the framework of the “Verein für politische und theologische Bildung LEHRHAUS e. V.,” Dortmund (founded 1978), which also publishes the exegetical journal “Texte & Kontexte.”]

that we have to take recourse to such tricks shows the fragility of the ice of our *political correctness*.

In our interpretation, we have to be abstract. We must first abstract from the history of the text's impact and pretend that it is just a strange text from the periphery of 1st century Judaism. Knowing that the conflict in John's Gospel was not determined by anti-Semitism is not a *happy science*; we are immediately caught up by its anti-Semitic impact history. Anti-Semitism is not the concern of a brutally dull residual society of so-called "die-hard Nazis"; with them, it is virulent, with us it is latent at best.

John as a Jewish figure is indeed not responsible for our later anti-Semitism, John as the basic text of Christianity very much is. Whether we can still preach John—i.e. *proclaim* him—is a question we cannot go into here. This much we can state: Many pastors are no longer able to do so, or they omit the objectionable passages and turn John into a quarry from which they extract lofty, Platonic-inspired, and quite unrealistic wisdom.

So Micha Brumlik is right: John is useless in Christian-Jewish dialogue. But perhaps the dialogue itself is an impossible undertaking, just as the currently popular interreligious dialogue, not to speak of interreligious services.⁵⁸⁴ It may be doubted that these undertakings are conducive to the togetherness of people if the social gap between groups of people is widening and the ruling social order demands unconditional conformity to its so-called values.

To free oneself from Christianity does not help either. This is shown by some passages in the correspondence between Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels—just there, where they did not write for the public, but to each other! Engels said, "Marx was of stock Jewish blood . . . many of our best people were Jews."⁵⁸⁵ Such defense shows how the problem of anti-Semitism also played its role in the socialist workers' movement, not only at that time in Vienna, but also later in the Soviet Union, in Poland, and so on.

Nevertheless, we have to undertake the distinction between text and history of impact to be able to deal with the conflict at all. This has nothing to do with "reparation." There is no "reparation" and no forgiveness for what happened. We undertake the attempt to overcome anti-Semitism *for ourselves* because it is a mutilation of our souls. Precisely because we are deeply disfigured by anti-Semitism and racism, we are a danger to the Jews, to all humanity, and not least to ourselves. It is a matter of course that Christians, Jews, and others have to talk to each other about how to combat the plague of anti-Semitism and racism in our society. *This* dialogue is a sheer duty.

584 [Based on my own experience in dialogue with Jews, Muslims, and members of other religions, I do not share this doubt about interreligious dialogue, including interfaith services in the "Nordstadt" of Giessen. See <https://bibelwelt.de/interreligioese-feiern/>.]

585 Arbeiter Zeitung (Vienna) No. 19, May 9, 1890, MEW 22, 49 ff.

2 [Socialism and Messianic Inspiration]

The author of this interpretation belonged—and still belongs—to those people who only can imagine the future of a human world as a socialist world. The difference between what the Gospels called the “kingship of God” and what those people called “socialism” was often not duly taken into account in the blind zeal of the 1970s’ heat of the moment. Nevertheless, socialism can be an *anticipation of the Messiah*.

Socialism as a *state-capitalist* dictatorship of modernization—the adjective coined by none other than Lenin himself!—was possibly the only form it could have taken in the epoch 1921-1989. But perhaps, despite the adverse circumstances of the Cold War, it could and should have been different and more human. Modernization dictatorship and Stalinism are not congruent. Nevertheless, this deficient socialism was and is no more a refutation of socialism than the Christian church was and is a refutation of the Gospel.

As the *anticipation of the Messiah*, socialism can never be the wiping away of tears from the eyes of all people, the eradication of suffering and crying and pain (Revelation 21:4). It can, however, be the pushing back of all superfluous suffering, of all superfluous exploitation and neglect, of hunger, misery, and war to the very edge of the earth and beyond. In a humane life, there would still be enough parting and suffering, and our eyes would not remain dry even then. But we would no longer have to weep for avoidable injustice. In 1989 those forms of socialism broke. With them, the *anticipation of the Messiah* did not come to an end.

The title of this interpretation, “The Farewell of the Messiah,” was initially, “The Farewell to the Messiah.”⁵⁸⁶ The difference is anything but subtle. We projected our farewell to that *anticipation of the Messiah*, the failed state socialism, back into the Gospel of John, where the failure of the Messianic project was stated straightforwardly, 12:37 ff. John’s conclusion is not the farewell to the Messiah, but rather the farewell of the Messiah. “It is to your advantage that I go away,” Jesus says to his disciples, 16:7.

The farewell to the Messiah would be nothing else than the admission that the disciples had been mistaken. If John had been of this opinion, he would have written something like Flavius Josephus’ “Wars of the Jews.” The farewell of the Messiah, however, says two things. It unmask the Messianic illusions of the Messianists, whether they were disciples of Jesus or Zealot militants who had their own view of the Messiah. No human policy can ever be Messianic; no human policy can definitively solve the problems of humankind.

586 Thus in the article Ton Veerkamp, *Der Sieg des Titus oder: der Abschied vom Messias*, in *Texte & Kontexte* 87 (2000), 3-17.

[For this publication—instead of “The Farewell of the Messiah”—I suggested choosing the title “Solidarity against the World Order” because it highlights the political objective of the interpretation from the outset.]

If the Russian Bolsheviks had seen through their own messianism, their revolutionary project would not have become Stalinism so quickly and thoroughly. Every *messianic* policy inevitably becomes some form of Stalinism. The farewell *of the* Messiah liberates politics from any messianic pressure to perform; what is truly Messianic eludes all political efforts. This is the first aspect.

But the second is the *Messianic inspiration*, called by John *Paraclete* (Advocate), the *inspiration of fidelity*, classically translated as *Spirit of Truth*. This *Messianic inspiration* renders all politics *tentative*, at best consisting of temporary measures for the improvement of people's living conditions.

In doing so, it is oriented by the *life of the age to come* (*zōē aiōnios*). Better living conditions are, at best, steps on the way to a goal that politics never achieves and never should achieve, but which is our deepest longing. Without this goal, all life becomes pathless. Messianic inspiration is, as John says, what "leads us along the way" (*hodēgēsei*). The way does not lead to some afterlife, some heaven, some life after death, that would be religious distortion. It is not about *eternal life after death* in the otherworld of the earth, but about a Messianic life (*zōē*) in a coming era (*aiōn*) on this earth.

Messianic inspiration means in any case that the sentence, "*There is no alternative to the factual and ruling world order,*" is a hopeless, godless, evil sentence, a real "sin against the Holy Spirit." Messianic inspiration means that *something of the Messiah should appear* in all politics. This "something" in John is the *agapē*, the solidarity among the members of the Messianic community.

3 [Messianism: Origin, Failure, Preservation]

This solidarity may be too little for a political existence in the world. John's Messianism, like all messianism, is political in nature, but at the same time, it is also a farewell to politics, because it did not want a gradual improvement of the world order, but a completely different one; it wanted to be an *absolute* counternarrative.

Messianism had a long history even then. It is rooted in the confrontation of the Judean people with Hellenism. The so-called apocalyptic texts are documents of consciousness that with Hellenism a completely new type of exploitation enters the political stage. The preliminary work had already been done by the Persians. By demanding the tribute that the conquered and annexed territories had to pay in monetary form, the individual farms had to sell a part of their products, and this meant that they had to orient their operations to the market mechanism. In the third century BCE, the collection of tribute was leased to private individuals by the Hellenistic kings. These *tax lessees* leased out parts of their tax territory to other private individuals. This not only meant that the tax burden became heavier due to the involvement of more and more intermediate authorities. Rather, the reification of social relations through the money form permeated the entire social body and depersonalized the lives of individuals.

Michel Foucault would call this “*biopouvoir*” (“biopower”), and the politics that organizes this power accordingly “*biopolitique*” (“biopolitics”): the control of the entire life of people—of all together and of each individual person for himself—not only concerning the body but also concerning the soul. Between the exploiting strata and the exploited strata slipped precisely this objective power. More than any direct and brutal intervention by the armed power, the objective power of the monetary form eroded the traditional life of the Judean society.

The militant resistance of Judah Maccabee was bound to fail. The Maccabean revolution, which sought to restore traditional life, *had to have* as its result a *Hellenistic* monarchy. Political, even military resistance has a chance of success only if the power to be defeated is territorially defined. It can be chased back from its own territory into the territory of the enemy. To be sure, the Hellenistic and Roman powers had locations and bases, but they were universal powers. They remained even when their armies were defeated and their occupation personnel was driven out. The traditionalist project of the Maccabees was bound to fail, and resistance carried out on the level and the terms of the system could produce nothing but a new edition of the system. Had the Messiah Jesus ben Joseph prevailed as King after he entered Jerusalem, he would have become nothing but a Hellenistic, Roman prince. The system cannot be overcome within the system.

This insight was where the specific Messianism of the Gospels and Paul’s letters came from. We have no Messianic texts from Judea and the adjacent Aramaic-speaking areas from before the great war against Rome. Much evidence suggests that the Messianists of the land had hoped that the Messianic revolution would prevail through the travails of the final war. Instead, the place and the sanctuary were destroyed and the people was massacred. No Messiah came. The war and its outcome were for many the end of all hopes of resistance, militant or “peaceful.”

The Gospel of John leads its Messianism into the *dead end* of the room with the locked doors, Chapters 13-17 and 20. It is necessary to finally take this basic narrative figure of the Gospel seriously. The great works and the great speeches, the great controversy, the unbending of the Messiah before the representative of the world order in Judea—all this finds its end in this hermetically closed room. Closed for the disciples, also for Thomas, who spoke the anti-Roman confession, “My Lord and my God.” A confession to the four walls. No other Gospel text has presented the situation of its own group as unillusioned as John’s Gospel. The group, with its Messianism, is hopelessly isolated—and at an end. Their political goal was the gathering of all the children of Israel, in the land, in Samaria, and the Diaspora, “Flock: one; shepherd: ONE,” 10:16. Instead, fear of those who wanted to unite Israel worldwide isolates them. How can you let a narrative end like this? The same question must be asked after reading the Gospel of Mark. The last word there is, “For they were afraid,” Mark 16:8.

That is why these Messianists put the cross at the center of their political thinking. Their Messiah had to die from the system itself to be Messiah, “and that by death on the cross, *thanatou de staurou*” (Philippians 2:8), the cross of the Romans. Precisely this is the victory. We begin to understand how serious was the phrase John 16:33, “Fear not: I have conquered the world order.” If to Paul the cross is the beginning of peace between Israel and the nations, to John the cross is the beginning of the irresistible attraction of the “exalted Messiah,” 12:32. Both believed that no military or political strategy could solve the problem of a tradition-bound Israel among the nations; the solution had to come strictly from outside the system, from a Messiah who would not seize power according to the laws of the system. The gathering around this Messiah Jesus is capable of overcoming the system, and this victory begins in the Messianic community. That is why John has the rising Messiah say, “I am going up,” present tense, and not, “I have gone up,” perfect tense, 20:18.

Instead, John's group finds itself in a locked room; and the opponents who instilled so much fear in the group, the emerging Rabbinical Judaism, created what John wanted: the gathering of Israel, not around Jesus and his commandment of solidarity, but around Moses and the Torah.

All the projects of the Messianists have failed: Paul's project of the Messianic community of Jews and Gentiles as the nucleus of world peace; the fulfillment of the prophetic hope of the eschatological gathering of Israel as proclaimed by John; the Messianists' walk to the ends of the earth to teach all peoples the whole Torah, as Matthew wanted—none of this has even begun to be realized.

Instead, something came into being that nobody wanted, a new world religion *without* and consistently *against* the Jews. Christianity has not only spread illusions but has generally talked and acted in such a way that the religious faith has lost the world and the world has lost the believers. It had and has *put aside*⁵⁸⁷ the Messianic inspiration in religion. But *to put aside* means above all “to preserve.” For the Messianists themselves, probably only an underground existence was possible in the stabilizing Roman Empire. Therefore, they were not allowed to see death as the end of life. Rather—according to a Pharisaic-Jewish tradition—death was seen as a repository for the *earthly* life of the age to come.

We have drawn attention to the precarious existence of Messianic communities in Anatolia. Pliny, the governor of the province of Bithynia, inquires in Rome around 110 what to do with the disciples of a certain Chrestos. The answer: establish guilt and punish accordingly with death. In light of the precariousness of Messianic exis-

587 [TV here uses the German word “aufheben,” literally “to uplift,” its varied meanings ranging from “to rescind, to abrogate, to cancel,” to “to keep, to save, to put aside.” I take the latter word here because it best captures what TV means: doing away with Messianic inspiration not by throwing it away, but by locking it away well.]

tence, the so-called *love* commandment takes on the significance of a survival strategy. Politics is here reduced to the necessary—survival and preservation of hope! Often nothing else remained and remains possible. The solidarity of the members of such underground groups among themselves was vital. Around 200 Tertullian wrote:

Such a very great effect of love is known to us and has come to the knowledge of some. Look, they say, how much they love one another; but those [non-Christians—TV] hate one another. These are ready to die for one another, but those rather to kill one another.⁵⁸⁸

In the underground, the Christians live the absolute counter project to the world order of Rome, this is exactly what Tertullian wants to show. The appropriate political place of the Messianists was the catacombs of Rome. Or the locked room. Or the march from the locked room to the catacombs of Rome. John sensed that the great time of the empire was yet to come. And he suspected that the real area of his Messianism could only be a locked room.

The group wrote the 21st chapter of the Gospel and joined a larger Messianic movement. Nevertheless, like the other groups of that movement, it remained a phenomenon of a non-Jewish subculture. Tertullian knew. The Messianists, now called *Christians*, were noticed but not taken seriously. Only since the epoch of the great persecutions under the emperor Decius (250-251), the empire began to take this subculture seriously as a sign of a great crisis—150 years after John. But the empire was already at its end then. De facto Christianity was allowed; Emperor Gallienus (259-267), a patron of the philosopher Plotinus, considered Christianity a popular edition of Neoplatonism. To be sure, Diocletian tried once again in the Great Persecution of 303-305⁵⁸⁹ to eradicate Christianity and replace it with a military cult. The attempt, which cost thousands of lives, failed miserably. His successors, Constantine and Licinius, officially allowed the underground religion as a *permitted religion* in 313.

Then, in the fourth century, Christianity displaced all other religions and became the *only permitted religion* under Emperor Theodosius (379-395). The Christian era began. One could conclude from this: The great counternarrative of Messianism *against* the ruling world order becomes a Christianity that functions as an ideology *of* the ruling world order.

To be sure, Christianity was for long periods a religious sanctioning of the prevailing order. But deep within is hiding the Grand Narrative of Israel, which was the impetus of the Messianism of the Gospels and the apostolic writings. For the Book of the

588 Tertullianus, Apologeticum 39, in J. P. Migne, Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina (ML) 1, Paris 1844 ff., 471.

589 In the eastern part of the empire, the bloody persecution continued with brief interruptions until 311.

Grand Narrative, which the church passes on to each new generation, was again and again more powerful than any ecclesiastical attempt at discipline, than all religious counterfeits, and all attempts to domesticate the Grand Narrative of Israel. The “undoing” or “putting aside” of Messianism was and is specifically the *preservation* of the Grand Narrative of Israel. Thus, the *inspiration of fidelity*, or, classically, the *Holy Spirit*, worked and continues to work. This effect was made possible by the *farewell of the Messiah*. In the church. Not infrequently against the church.

4 [Liturgies of Resistance against Our World Order]

We suspect and fear that the great time of global capitalism is still ahead of us. We have to live under the conditions of this prevailing world order, *en tō kosmō*. We have yet to write our 21st chapter because we do not have to live according to the conditions of the world order, *ek tou kosmou*, in other words, we have to join those who believe another world order is possible and therefore say “No” to the prevailing world order. The underground seems to be destined for them and us, the underground of a ridiculed minority with its desperate liturgies of demonstrations, its defiant publications, and its still powerless actions. It is a minority that, for the time being, they do not even intend to pursue resolutely, a minority in which “not many are wise according to the flesh, not many are powerful, not many are highborn,” but rather “are foolish in the eyes of the world order,” 1 Corinthians 1:26-27. This minority guards the *anticipation of the Messiah*.

We live under a world order against which there is *currently* nothing visible of a radical counter-power and a political strategy of radical world change. “For me, the moment, the *kairos*, has not come,” John has his Messiah say, 7:6. How difficult this *was* to endure is shown by the desperate discussions in John 14-16. How difficult this *is* to endure is shown by the bewilderingly many contradictory actions and discussions of the opponents of the world order that rules over us. But in both cases, the goal was and is the “absolute antithesis of the spirit of imperial law”—as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri say in their book “*Empire*” about the emergence of Christianity.⁵⁹⁰ The Messianists were dealing with the *Imperium Romanum* at that time, with the *Roman Empire*. We are likewise dealing with a world order that Hardt and Negri call “*Empire*.” They say,

We believe that to challenge and resist the Empire and its world market, it is necessary to locate any alternative on an equally global level. Any proposal of an isolated, particular community, defined racially, religiously, or regionally, that “disconnects” from the Empire and seeks to protect itself from its power through fixed borders, inevitably ends up in a kind of ghetto.

590 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*. Die neue Weltordnung, Frankfurt/M. 2003, 36. The next quote is on page 218 of this book.

Resistance today is either running amok or liturgy. The liturgy of resistance may for the time being change little in the power relations of the prevailing world order, but the liturgies of the Messianists then kept alive the hope for the absolute alternative, and the liturgies of resistance today will do the same. Within the resistance of this minority beats the heart of the Messiah. John's enemy, the world order, is still our enemy because a life according to the standard of the Human, *bar enosh*, is not possible in it. This is what John teaches us.

This teaching applies.

Lemgow- Schmarsau, March 2007

Ton Veerkamp

Glossary of Key Terms

—as far as they differ from the traditional translation

New Translation

Greek

aberration

hamartia

to achieve the goal (19:28, 30)

telein

age to come

aiōn, aiōnos

all the more (10:17-18; 16:22),

in contrast (16:16, 17, 19)

palin

to be friends with

philein

to be in solidarity with,

solidarize with,

be attached to in solidarity

agapan

to betray

athetein

to be there . . . as, to happen . . . as

einai

Traditional Translation

Hebrew/Aramaic

sin

chata'oth

to finish, accomplish

ʿasa (in Jes 55:11)

eternity, eternal

ʿolam (ha-ba)

again

shuv, hassif

to love

ʾahev

to love

ʾahev

to reject

bagad

to be

haya

born of God <i>tekna tou theou</i>	children of God — (<i>ben Hosea 11:1</i>)
to bow <i>proskynein</i>	to worship <i>hishthachawa</i>
courtyard <i>aulē</i>	sheep-pen (courtyard in 18:15) <i>chatzer</i>
day laborer <i>misthōtos</i>	hired hand, hireling <i>sakhir</i>
Day of the Final Decision <i>hē eschatē hēmera</i>	Last Day (<i>ʾacharith ha-yamim</i>)
day one (20:1) <i>mia tōn sabbatōn</i>	the first day <i>yom ʾechad / jomaʾ chad / chad shabata</i>
deceit <i>pseudos</i>	lie <i>sheqer</i>
to degrade <i>atimazein</i>	to dishonor <i>qala</i>
to denounce <i>mēnyein</i>	to inform, let know —
to dignify <i>timan</i>	to honor <i>kibed</i>
enemy, adversary <i>diabolos</i>	devil <i>satan</i>
to err, practice aberration, go astray <i>hamartanein</i>	to sin <i>chataʾ</i>
ewe <i>amnos</i>	lamb <i>rachel</i>
fidelity; trustworthy, faithful <i>alētheia, alēthinos</i>	truth; true <i>ʾemeth</i>
to fight with hate <i>misein</i>	to hate <i>sanaʾ</i>
to hand over <i>paradidonai</i>	to betray <i>nathan</i>
honor <i>doxa</i>	glory <i>kavod</i>

to honor <i>doxazein</i>	to glorify <i>kibed; hikhbid</i>
to infringe (the NAME) <i>blasphēmein</i>	to blaspheme, commit blasphemy <i>naqav (qalal)</i>
inspiration <i>pneuma</i>	Spirit <i>ruach</i>
Judeans <i>loudaioi</i>	Jews <i>Yehudim</i>
to liberate <i>sōzein</i>	to save <i>yasha^c</i>
Liberator <i>sōtēr</i>	Savior <i>moshia^c</i>
to (make) manifest, be seen publicly <i>phaneroun</i>	to reveal, make known, appear <i>gila</i>
nation <i>ethnos</i>	nation (people) <i>goy</i>
to observe (consider, view) <i>theōrein</i>	to see, look <i>chaza, ra^a</i>
<i>bar enosh</i> , the Human <i>hyios tou anthrōpou</i>	Son of Man <i>ben ’adam / bar enosh</i>
One like GOD, Son of GOD <i>hyios tou theou</i>	Son of God <i>ben ’elohim / bar elahin</i>
<i>Pascha</i> <i>pascha</i>	Passover, Easter <i>pessach</i>
person on duty (2:5); minister, servant (12:26) <i>diakonos</i>	servant <i>meshareth</i>
Perushim <i>Pharisaioi</i>	Pharisäer <i>Perushim</i>
public service (for God) <i>latreia</i>	service, worship (to God) —
rejection <i>katabolē</i>	foundation —

reliability, probation <i>dikaiosynē</i>	righteousness <i>tzedāqa</i>
reliable <i>dikaios</i>	just, right, righteous <i>tzedeq</i>
to remain hardening/hardened <i>kratein</i>	to hold sins, withhold forgiveness <i>chazaq</i>
to serve (12:26); host (12:3) <i>diakonein</i>	to serve <i>sharath</i>
slave <i>doulos</i>	servant ʿeved
solidarity <i>agapē</i>	love (<i>chessed</i>)
solidarity (in 1:14.16f.) <i>charis</i>	grace <i>chessed</i> (<i>chen</i>)
someone else <i>allotrios</i>	stranger <i>tzar</i>
terrorist <i>lēstēs</i>	robber —
title (grounds for the judgment) <i>titlos</i> (from Lat. <i>titulus</i>)	inscription, notice —
to trust <i>pisteuein</i>	to believe <i>heʿemin</i>
to view <i>theasthai</i>	to see, look <i>raʿa</i> , <i>chaza</i>
to walk one’s way (Halakha) <i>peripatein</i>	to walk, walk by, go about <i>halakh</i>
with <i>en</i>	in <i>be-</i> (ʿim)
word (speech) <i>logos</i>	word <i>davar</i>
world, world order <i>kosmos</i>	world (ʿolam)

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Appendix: On Translating and Editing the Text

The Original Translated Texts

This book brings together the content of three issues of the German exegetical journal “Texte & Kontexte” and draws on the content from two other issues produced over 14 years, from 2002 to 2015.⁵⁹¹ In a telephone conversation on January 9, 2021, Ton Veerkamp expressly agreed that the English translation of this book should be published on my website “<https://bibelwelt.de>.”

⁵⁹¹ In consultation with TV, several errors from the original texts have been corrected.

The main part of the book is Ton Veerkamp's **interpretation of the Gospel of John**, which was published in 2006 and 2007 without the translated text of John itself:

Ton Veerkamp, Der Abschied des Messias. Eine Auslegung des Johannesevangeliums, I. Teil: Johannes 1,1-10,21, in *Texte & Kontexte* 109-111, 2006, II. Teil: Johannes 10,22-21,25, in *Texte & Kontexte* 113-115, 2007.

Originally, this interpretation referred to the following **translation of the Gospel of John** published the year before (*colometric translation*, abbreviated as CT):

Ton Veerkamp, Das Evangelium nach Johannes in kolometrischer Übersetzung, in *Texte & Kontexte* 106/107 (2005).

Since the author published this translation again ten years later in a revised form, I add the English translation of this issue—highlighted in yellow—to the interpretation by Ton Veerkamp:

Ton Veerkamp, Das Evangelium nach Johannes. Übersetzt und mit Anmerkungen versehen, 2., grundlegend überarbeitete Auflage, in *Texte & Kontexte Sonderheft Nr. 3* (2015).

From this 2015 translation, I also have taken

- **all explanations of the Gospel translation** in notes while from the 2005 colometric translation (CT), I only take comments when they deviate from the later translation,
- the **introduction**—that comes first in the book—exposing the political aim of TV's reading of the Gospel of John,
- and at the end—after TV's epilogue—a **glossary of key terms** as far as they differ from the traditional translation.

In 2002, TV had already translated and interpreted Chapters 13 to 17 of John:

Ton Veerkamp, Der Abschied des Messias. Johannes 13-17, in *Texte & Kontexte* 96/96 (2002).

From this issue, I take the **introductory remarks on John's language** on pages 5-13 and preface them in the second place of this book before the continuous translation and interpretation of John's Gospel.

As the two translations—2005 and 2015—were originally published independently, the addition of their explanatory notes to the detailed interpretation results in overlaps in content. Such redundancy seems justifiable to me; in my experience, it even facilitates understanding, since it allows insight into the conceptual process of dealing with particular problems. It also shows that this reading of John's Gospel is not about views set in stone but the initiation of a learning process to understand an ancient text that has been thoroughly misunderstood for almost two millennia.⁵⁹²

592 See Ton Veerkamp, Auf Leben und Tod. Eine Auslegung von Johannes 10,40-11,54, in *Texte*

It is worth noting what Veerkamp wrote in the preface to his 2015 translation:

With all the changes, one thing has remained: the intention to definitively remove any legitimacy from the anti-Judaic misuse of John's Gospel.

All quotations cited by Ton Veerkamp I translated into English myself, even if he took them from English works translated into German since these were not accessible to me in the original language.

Transliteration of Hebrew and Greek Terms

To render ancient **Hebrew** terms, I use a simple transcription that does not distinguish between single and double consonants, nor does it indicate the different lengths of vowels (thus an *e* can stand for *tzeire*, *segol*, *chataf segol*, and *shwa na*).

The letters *beth/veth*, *gimel*, *daleth*, *hei*, *zayin*, *tet*, *yud*, *kaf*, *lamed*, *mem*, *nun*, *pei/fei*, *quf*, *reish*, and *sin* are rendered with their initial letter; in the case of *cheth*, *tzadi*, *shin*, and the soft *khaf*, the first two letters are necessary.

Unusual are the following transliterations: *vav* = **w** (to distinguish from *veth*), *thav* = **th** (to distinguish from *tet*), *samech* = **ss** (to distinguish from *sin*). Except for the two signs ʾ and ʿ for the glottal stops ʾalef and ʿayin, I do not use diacritics. Silent consonants at the ends of words (ʾalef, *hei*, *vav*, and *yud*) are omitted.

Ancient **Greek** letters are rendered with their English equivalents. The two *t* sounds are distinguished by **t** and **th**, and the long *e* and *o* vowels are marked with **ē** and **ō**.

English Translation of the Gospel of John

The translation of the Gospel of John into English presented here has no models known to me in this form. However, I am grateful that I am allowed to use the **Complete Jewish Bible** (Copyright Dr. David H. Stern. Used with Permission from [Messianic Jewish Publishers](#)) as a basis for this translation and to publish the result on my homepage without royalties (abbreviated **CJB**). With the CJB I share the concern to make clear in the translation of New Testament texts that they ultimately are writings that in their way of thinking and content can only be understood from the Tanakh of the Jews. Their language is Hebrew or Aramaic disguised in Greek words.

& Kontexte 49 (1991), 16-44, here 44, "Questions. If there is one thing we have to learn from Judaism as gathered and saved by the rabbis, it is this: there is no orthodoxy, but always only questions. And answers: Rabbi A says this, Rabbi B says that, Rabbi C says that; and you have to know all these answers and not be satisfied with any of them, but keep asking, keep going, keep doing. Like those. In the House of Study. Until the Messiah comes? Who knows . . ."

However, about one-third of the text and its typeface do not agree with the CJB, for the following reasons:

Names

First of all—although that was the reason I became aware of this translation—I do not follow the CJB where it deliberately changes the text, for example, to make Greek names recognizable in their Hebrew or Aramaic original form instead. Just as John himself did not use this original form to facilitate the reading of his readers, some of whom do not know Aramaic or Hebrew, Ton Veerkamp in his translation of 2015 has also largely returned to the use of the names that are more familiar to a broad modern audience, in order not to unnecessarily complicate the text being read out aloud.⁵⁹³ That's why I use the common English names for biblical books, persons, and geographical details—with only one exception, the Aramaic equivalent for the "Pharisees," namely "Perushim," because the word "Pharisee" is virtually loaded with prejudicial meanings.

In the case of the Greek word *loudaios*, I take—like TV in his introduction, section "Contradictions"—the slightly alienating literal translation as "Judean" because this word does not simply mean the same as we do when hearing the word "Jew." To use the Hebraizing names *Yehudim* and *Yehuda* for *loudaioi*, *loudaia*, and *loudas*, respectively, would become strange at the latest when, for example, a Hebrew word like *Yehude* is also put into the mouth of a Pilate (John 18:35).

Finally—like TV and the CJB—I render the title *Christos*, used primarily in the Messianic writings for Jesus, not as "Christ," but as "Messiah," to emphasize that there is more to it than simply a surname.

Style and Grammar

Second, I do not follow the CJB where it alters the Greek text for stylistic reasons to make it more pleasant to read in English or to approximate colloquial language, for example, to avoid repetition or to make it more vivid. That John had his reasons for repeating certain words monotonously (e.g., "Jesus answered, he said") and making other differences all the more prominent (which in the CJB are often just made unrecognizable by the use of the same words, as in the translation of *philein* and *aga-*

593 Preface of the 2015 translation, 3: "Most noticeable is the substitution of proper names for their traditional form: *Yeshua* became *Jesus* again, *Yochanan* became *John* again, etc. The reasons for using the original Aramaic/Hebrew proper names are still valid. We are not dealing with 'old acquaintances.' On the other hand, I wrote, 'I have endeavored to translate in such a way that the text can be read aloud.' But the reading aloud must be for listening. The use of the Aramaic-Hebrew forms of names makes—as my experience and that of others has shown—listening more difficult than necessary; a concession to the listening habits of the listeners seems to me justified. The translation itself demands enough readiness to renounce what is traditional and beloved, such as the 'Lamb of God' in favor of the translation 'the ewe coming from God.'"

pan as “to love”) may be evident from the text of the interpretation and annotations. Moreover, when the CJB renders an expression such as “Amen, amen, I say to you” as “Yes, indeed, I tell you,” it is being unfaithful to its own concern to allow a basic Hebrew word such as *ʾaman* to remain visible in Jesus’ language.

I also refrained from smoothing out John’s jumping back and forth between different temporal verb forms. It is because, in Hebrew and Aramaic, there are no temporal forms for past, present, and future, but modal verb forms, which denote, for example, the continuing course or the completion of an action or an event. The difference is easier to pick up in English than in German because the *progressive forms* make it possible to translate continuous forms in the Greek present or imperfect tense appropriately, while punctual actions in the present or past from the present or aorist were more likely to be translated with the normal “present” or “past tense.” And also the perfect tenses of Greek, by which John, as in the Semitic languages, designates an event as completed, are more clearly rendered by the perfect in English than in German. Thus not all grammatical oddities in my translation must be due to my lack of English feeling as a non-native speaker! Nevertheless, I am grateful for any critical feedback and correction of my translation where it indeed goes linguistically astray—and I am sure that there are many such places despite all the checking.

In a paper by Dr. Marco Ritter⁵⁹⁴ I found Ton Veerkamp’s insight confirmed that the Koine Greek verb forms of the New Testament express verbal aspects more than tenses. In particular, he deals with the aorist, which in the New Testament (4) “is not a tense of the past! It is an aspect! It is impossible to limit the aorist to a completed past.” And although the “aorist is also said to have a ‘perfective verbal aspect,’ i.e., the direction of view of the time word as completed . . . this very property of the aorist applies extremely rarely in the New Testament Koine Greek!” Quite the opposite is true (12): “in the Koine of the New Testament the aorist is used as an unfinished past tense . . .”

He particularly emphasizes that (4)

with the punctual aspect [of the aorist] no statement about the continuation or the persistence of an action or state is made yet, but only the punctual beginning of an action or a state is named.

I further found it interesting that Marco Ritter classifies the aorist in the New Testament as a narrative verb form that corresponds to Hebrew narrative forms in the Old Testament (4-5):

594 Marco Ritter, [Der Aorist im Neuen Testament](#). The following page numbers refer to this work.

The aorist is by far the most frequently used tense in the eyewitness accounts of the Gospels. This corresponds as a “reporting tense” to the Hebrew form of *narrative* (see Latin *narrare* = to report, to tell) or *vav-imperfect*. Predominantly, the aorist is used to describe a unique event that occurred in the past used of a process begun, even completed, but continues into the present.

For these reasons, I wonder if it is appropriate, for example, to translate *egeneto* in John 1:3.10.14 as “began happening” rather than “is happening.”

As an instructive example of the use of the aorist in this sense as distinct from the present and imperfect tenses, he cites Acts 12:1-4 (7):

In Acts chap. 12 Luke reports about the oppression of the church by Herod, the imprisonment of Peter and his liberation as well as the end of Herod. All (!) actions describing the progress of the events are in the aorist tense. Only the background information such as ways of thinking, attitudes, and accompanying circumstances are in the present or imperfect tense and interrupt the narrative chains of the aorist . . .

In the few verses 1-4, the aorist is used ten times, but only twice the present tense and once the imperfect. The very nature of the tense words dictates the tenses: . . . “to be well pleased,” “to be,” “to intend”—these words do not describe actions, but circumstances for which the present or imperfect tense is the appropriate tense. In this short section, statistical analysis reveals the finding that approximately 77% of the report is in the aorist tense and only 13% is in the present or imperfect tense. The aorist is the main narrative tense!

Correspondences to Hebrew Semantic Fields

Third, the most important difference is that Ton Veerkamp learned from Martin Buber to trace the Greek terms John uses to their Hebrew models in the Torah. This is also a concern of the CJB, but in the interest of a more elegant or lively style of language in English, it does not go far enough in this.

Above all, much of what is meant is lost if no attention is paid to the fact that words like *agapē* or *alētheia* are not to be understood from their common meaning in Greek philosophy, but from the Tanakh. Martin Buber had been concerned to translate, if possible, every word of a particular Hebrew root by a corresponding word of a corresponding German root and did not shy away from new, sometimes seemingly absurd word creations. When Everett Fox presented a similar type of translation in English—“the text in English dress but with a Hebraic voice”⁵⁹⁵—for the Torah and

595 Thus Everett Fox in his translator’s preface, ix, of “The Five Books of Moses. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. Standard Edition,” New York 1983-1995. About his own translation work in comparison with the rendering of the Scriptures into German by

the Books of Samuel, he proceeded more cautiously. Like Fox, I tried not to overdo it in this respect.

Colometry

Fourth, and finally, in the typeface, I have adopted Veerkamp's custom, following Martin Buber, of arranging the text in the form of lines that can be read aloud in one breath (this model has also been followed by Everett Fox).

English Translation Motivated by Books of Adele Reinhartz

An essay by Micha Brumlik was the most important occasion for Ton Veerkamp to translate and interpret the entire Gospel of John. Brumlik had described this writing as unsuitable for Jewish-Christian dialogue because of its anti-Semitism.⁵⁹⁶

In a very similar way, it was a series of books by the Canadian religious scholar Adele Reinhartz that motivated me to tackle this translation. As a Jewish woman, she had repeatedly dealt with the Gospel of the Beloved Disciple throughout her life, but in her last book, she felt compelled to conclude with John once and for all.⁵⁹⁷ In my eyes, however, her judgment about the Gospel of John as hopelessly anti-Semitic is based on its Gentile-Christian history of impact. To such a misunderstood Gospel of John, her assessment is true that it proclaims a cosmology of the hereafter where the unbelieving Jews must inevitably be assigned a place in hell. But Reinhartz does not seem to have encountered a Jewish messianic reading, combined with a political cosmology, such as that presented by Ton Veerkamp, in the academic world so far, and thus could not deal with it. She herself does not rule out further readings of the Gospel of John. At the end of her book "Befriending the Beloved Disciple," she even wrote:

Buber and Rosenzweig he wrote (xxi-xxii): ". . . in the attempt to make the German translation mirror the Hebrew original Rosenzweig did not hesitate to either create new German words or reach back into the German literature of past ages to find forms suitable for rendering certain Hebrew expressions. To perform a corresponding feat in English would simply not work; the language is not flexible, and usages change so quickly that an artful appeal to the past seems futile except for the benefit of linguistic historians. While I have endeavored to produce an English text that reflects the style of biblical Hebrew, I have in the main shied away from pushing the language beyond reasonable and comprehensible limits." Also, see Everett Fox, "Give Us a King! Samuel, Saul, and David. A new translation of Samuel I and II with an introduction and notes," New York 1999.

596 See TV's epilogue to his interpretation, section 1.

597 I read her following three books on John: Adele Reinhartz, *The Word in the World. The Cosmological Tale in the Fourth Gospel*, Atlanta/Georgia 1992; Adele Reinhartz, *Befriending the Beloved Disciple. A Jewish Reading of the Gospel of John*, New York 2003; Adele Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant. Jews and Anti-Judaism in the Gospel of John*, Lanham 2018.

Despite the gap in worldview and in ethical sensibilities, I look forward to future meetings with the Beloved Disciple, and to ongoing conversation.

I wonder if she could enter into a fruitful conversation with the disciple Jesus was attached to in solidarity as interpreted by Ton Veerkamp.

Ton Veerkamp's ignored reading of the Gospel of John

Of course, I won't go so far as to say that Ton Veerkamp's reading is the only legitimate reading of the Gospel of John today. During my work as a pastor in a psychiatric clinic, I also gained something from the depth-psychological interpretation of the Gospel presented by Eugen Drewermann.⁵⁹⁸ And as recently as Christmas Eve 2020, I was presented with a translation of the Gospel of John by Elmar Rettelbach, which is strongly imbued with the spirit of mysticism, and, like Veerkamp, emphasizes the Hebrew-Aramaic background of the Johannine language but then goes a different way in its interpretation.⁵⁹⁹

By now, I think that such a focus on inwardness misses John's original message intention in its essential core. Instead, I let Ton Veerkamp convince me that John can only be understood from his liberation-theological context: the Messiah Jesus proclaimed by John embodies the NAME of the God of Israel in a political struggle against the Roman world order, fought from the "inspiration of fidelity" with the means of "solidarity."

598 Das Johannesevangelium in der Übersetzung von Eugen Drewermann, Zürich und Düsseldorf 1997. See however TV's harsh criticism of such drafts in the essay cited in the last note, 43-44: "The . . . hype about the Messiah Jesus, you can spiritualize, psychologize, preferably with C. G. Jung, as in the case of Hannah Wolff, Drewermann & Co.—liberation for the dented soul of the German Protestant-Catholic educated bourgeoisie longing for "wholeness"—and thus perpetuate the Messiah. . . . John and his people, meanwhile, had other concerns. Actually, the world of Roman death should be changed, liberated, John 3:17. Is the *'olam ha-ba'* perhaps only a trick: the passion for the final transformation, so that it comes at all now and then to some small changes, "a little more right for a little more people," as Huub Oosterhuis said in an obituary of Salvador Allende? . . . We must . . . ask how that can happen then, that the world will be liberated. We must ask what use is a Messiah if the world remains as it is—and it has remained as it was, murderous, a den of thieves. If we are asked, "How then, you are teachers of the Church and you do not know this?", we are in good company, that very Nicodemus whom Jesus asked similar things (3:10)."

599 Evangelium nach Johannes, neu übersetzt und kommentiert von Elmar Rettelbach. Unter Berücksichtigung seiner hebräischen Denkstrukturen und Begriffsvorgaben, auf der Basis der griechischen Urtexte und aus der Erfahrung kontemplativ-meditativen Umgehens mit dem Text, Würzburg ⁴2015 (¹1991). [Translation of this title: Gospel according to John, newly translated and commented by Elmar Rettelbach. Taking into account its Hebrew thought structures and conceptual specifications, on the basis of the Greek original texts and from the experience of contemplative-meditative handling of the text, Würzburg ⁴2015 (¹1991).]

However, I like the mentioned approaches of Drewermann and Rettelbach in the fact that they also see the Gospel of John anchored in the Jewish Holy Scripture and reject to trace it back to Hellenistic or even Gnostic time currents. In this, they meet with the efforts of the theologian Larry W. Hurtado, who in his book “Lord Jesus Christ” rejected the attempt of Wilhelm Bousset’s school of religious history⁶⁰⁰ to attribute the divine worship of Jesus to Hellenistic influences instead of explaining it out of genuine Jewish-messianic origins.

In my view, Veerkamp’s reading is the only way to understand John’s sharp opposition to Rabbinical Judaism without interpreting his book as anti-Semitic from the beginning. Therefore, I consider it essential to take his political reading of the Gospel of John seriously at least as one of several possible alternative understandings of the Gospel of John. I can’t understand why Veerkamp’s interpretation did not find any academic resonance even in Germany, where it has been available for 14 years. Rather than good reasons being put forward to declare such a political reading anachronistic or to brand it as an unscientific work of art, no, it has just been ignored.

Is this because the author, as a former student pastor, does not have enough reputation in the scientific world for anyone to deal with him or even refer to him? In that case, my project of translation into English will certainly not be dealt with differently, since I, too, have neither a doctorate nor a habilitation and am “merely” a retired pastor with forty years of professional experience in parish and hospital ministry.

But maybe it is precisely the political direction of Ton Veerkamp’s reading of John’s Gospel that has so far prevented its reception. He views himself as a socialist in a sense that rejects all Stalinism and totalitarianism but considers today’s capitalism as no less hostile to life and contrary to the will of the God of Israel than the ancient oriental oppressor states from Egypt to Babylon and the first global exploitation machinery of Hellenism and the anything but peaceful “Pax Romana.” Who rejects Ton Veerkamp’s reading of John’s Gospel for such reasons, however, must allow himself to be asked whether he has ever taken the biblical Torah and the concern of the Jewish prophets and apocalypticists seriously, from which alone also the Messianic writings of the “New Testament” are to be understood adequately.

Gießen, February 2021

Helmut Schütz

600 Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ. Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*, Grand Rapids/Michigan 2003; Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos. Geschichte des Christusglaubens von den Anfängen des Christentums bis Irenaeus*, Göttingen 1913.