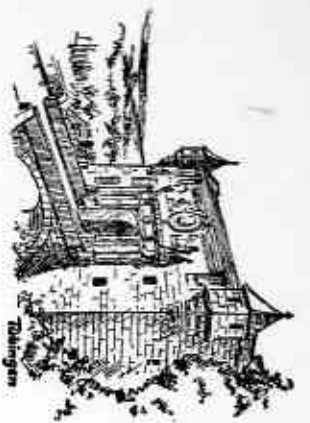


**JESUS  
and the  
CHURCH  
in  
JOHN**



A Lecture delivered by

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A Few Words To Introduce This Lecture

Dr. Klaus Haacker, a lecturing staff-member of the Institutum Judaicum of Tuebingen University, presented the following lecture in Dec. 1971 as a guest of the Tuebingen "Auslaender Kolloquium". This colloquium of visiting scholars and professors meets every two weeks during the semester in the Institute for the Study of Christian Origins in order to discuss important problems in Christian thought and life with various members of the Protestant and Roman Catholic Faculties of the University. Dr. Haacker's lecture made such a solid contribution to our understanding of the Gospel of John that I immediately asked him if he would share his manuscript with the English-speaking friends of our Institute. He graciously agreed to this proposal, and I am very pleased that you can come to know this promising young scholar through this fine piece of research and reflection.

Dr. Haacker is a graduate of the theological faculty of the University of Heidelberg where he majored in Old Testament studies under the direction of Prof. Claus Westermann. His further studies, primarily in the exegesis of the New Testaments, were directed by Prof. Gustav Staehlin in the University of Mainz, under whom he wrote his recently published doctoral dissertation on the theology of John. Dr. Haacker's special interest is in using his knowledge of both Testaments and the period between them in order to clarify the problems of "Biblical Theology."

Since 1945 there has grown up in Germany a new and deep interest in understanding the particular emphases and inner consistencies which can be found in the manner by which each of the New Testament writers used and modified the tradition about Jesus which came to him through the early Christian communities. That is, interest has shifted from the sources of the tradition to the final products (i.e., the books of the New Testament) in light of the research which has been done on the sources. Now the clarification of the special point of view and theology of each writer has become the object of much Biblical scholarship. In this lecture, Dr. Haacker builds on such research on the Gospel John in order to ask important questions about "the place of the church in the whole structure of John's thinking."

Among Dr. Haacker's provocative points is his conclusion that "discipleship is the basis and essence of the church's life." Many readers may find his treatment of the relation between the "Spirit" and "Tradition" to be a good occasion for considering again the complementary roles which the entire New Testament and the Spirit are meant to play in our life together. There is certainly solid material in this lecture for the enrichment of sermons as well as for your personal study of the Gospel of John -- and I commend it to your careful reflection.

Dr. S. Scott Bartchy  
Director  
Institute for the Study of Christian Origins

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#### JESUS AND THE CHURCH IN JOHN

##### Introduction:

Contemporary theology shows an increasing interest in John's concept of the church. This should not surprise us. The doctrine of the church has been a focal theme of theological reflection and discussion for at least half a century. After the rediscovery of apocalyptic eschatology in the New Testament and after the changes in European society during the 19th century and following the First World War, Karl Barth and his friends re-emphasized the fundamental difference between "church dogmatics" and general humanistic culture. In the "church struggle" of the Hitler period Protestant Germany experienced the first serious conflict between the church and the state, forcing the church into a new awareness of her distinctive features. The Ecumenical Movement expressed and increased a consciousness of the church's world-wide dimensions and tasks. Moreover, in Roman Catholicism the past hundred years have witnessed a considerable development in the official statements on the nature and structure of the church as well as in academic discussion of this theme. It is quite natural that this general scenery also affects Biblical exegesis and encourages studies which contribute Biblical aspects to theological reasoning.

A study in the ecclesiology of the Fourth Gospel, however, is anything but natural. It is by no means certain that John has such a thing as a doctrine of the church. John nowhere speaks of

the ekklesia. He also lacks several other expressions used for the church by other early Christian writers: "the saints", "the elect", "the called", "the people of God", and "the body of Christ". Thus to speak of a Johannine ecclesiology sounds like a transformation of John's thinking into terms which are not his own. It is indeed questionable whether this procedure can help us in understanding John or in finding guidance for the church today. There is, however, the possibility that the same thing can be labelled and interpreted by different words. This possibility makes it seem legitimate at least to pose the question and then to see whether or not the texts answer this question and what kind of information they yield. John may have spoken of the church in less conventional and rather peculiar terms. The search for such ecclesiological vocabulary must therefore be our first step towards an answer to our question. Such terms will themselves give a preliminary impression of what John thinks the church to be. And once having discovered the church in his writings we must go on and try to evaluate the place of the church in the whole structure of John's thinking.

#### A. Johannine Equivalents for "the Church"

##### 1. The term "children of God" and its historical context

The first and perhaps most important ecclesiological term of the Fourth Gospel is found in the prologue: "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name." (1:12) The "but" at the beginning of this verse marks the crucial point in the development of thought in the prologue (1:1-18). Three times the evangelist has spoken of how the eternal Word has been rejected and defied in the world and even among those who

were specially predestined to recognize and welcome him (vv.4-11). Now John turns from the negative side to the positive side. The positive outcome of the Word's mission is that there is a group of people, a certain number (hosoi) whose reaction distinguishes them from the rest of the world and qualifies them (exousia) as "children of God". This reaction is described as "receiving", according to the picture of a house and its owner used in v.11. This metaphorical description is then translated into theological language by the subsequent participle "those who believe". This is the common Christian term for the relation between the church and Christ. So this group of "receivers of the Word" is shown to be identical with what is called the church in other writings of the New Testament.

This Johannine designation of the church as the "children of God" must be seen within the double context of a tradition and a controversy. The expression is clearly pre-Christian. It had been applied to Israel in the Old Testament (Deut. 14:1; Hos.2:1). Judaism retained it, but the early church claims it for herself. Paul discusses this point where he tries to clarify the relation of Christianity to the Jews and their religion (Rom.9:4,8; Gal.3:26-4:1). In John the open controversy between the two communities comes to its first climax: in John 8:41-44 the Jews who call themselves the children of God are labelled the devil's children. In the prologue, too, it is the Jews who are contrasted with the legitimate "children of God"; they are "his own" who did not admit their Lord to his own house (v.11f.).

As for the content of the term "children of God", we observe that John does not merely continue the tradition which is rooted in the Old Testament. He intensifies its meaning. What originally meant a rank or status now becomes an expression of actual being. To be the children of God

is now not only a question of rights bestowed on men (1:12: exousia) but also of origin or - in the literal sense - of nature. The noun "children" is interpreted in terms of "birth" or "begetting". (1:13; 3:3,5; cf. I John 3:9f.). Thus the notion forms part of what can be called John's spiritual realism.

While there is reason to speak of a Johannine individualism, it is noteworthy that the term "children of God" does not occur in the singular. The decision involved is one between two communities (1:11f.). Even the ecumenical dimension of the church is reflected in the use of this term in John 11:52. The "scattered children of God" of this verse are the believers of pagan origin who will not remain scattered but are to be "gathered" or "collected". So there is also a Johannine "collectivism" - a condition which must be fulfilled if we are to maintain our thesis that John does have a concept of "the church".

## 2. "The world" as a negative ecclesiological term

The world-wide proportions of the church imply a contrast not only to her historical background in Judaism but also to mankind as a whole. This can be traced in the use of the word "kosmos": The development of this word can be compared with that of the Hebrew and Greek words for "nation" ("goy" and "ethnos"). Both have come to designate the negative counterpart of the people of God. The separation of one group from a larger society - in this case, mankind as a whole - produces, in the jargon of this group, a devaluation of the term for the greater whole. "The nations" now means "the rest of the nations" excluding Israel. The word "kosmos" has undergone the same development. In a number of cases in the Johannine writings (and elsewhere in the New Testament) this term means "the rest of the world", i.e. all who do not - and do not want to - belong to the church.

As in the case of "goy" and "ethnos" the "neutral" use of the word "kosmos" remains because the smaller group continues to speak the general language of the surrounding society along with their own peculiar jargon.

That "the world" really is such a negative correlate of the church in John becomes obvious in the fact that all relevant texts save one (14:27) oppose "the world" to the body of disciples or believers. (cf. John 14:17, 19, 22; 15:18f.; 16:20; 17:9, 14; and I John 3:1.13; 4:5). The contexts show that it is no abstract expression for "the rest of the world" but rather the reflection of experiences with "the surrounding world" which cannot stay outside without becoming hostile.

## 3. Metaphorical descriptions of the church

While the terms "children of God" and "the world" are not peculiar to John, there are other, mainly metaphorical, expressions which occur only in the Fourth Gospel.

### a) The vine and the branches

It has often been pointed out that the metaphor of John 15:1-7 has ecclesiological significance. The image of the vine and the branches can be regarded as the Johannine equivalent of the Pauline "body of Christ". Both metaphors emphasize the organic unity between Christ and the church. Both can be misunderstood in a mystical sense, whereas their primary meaning is hortatory.

As Schweizer strikingly observes, the difference between John and Paul lies in the fact that Paul uses the image of the body to clarify the relationship of the members to each other, while John is concerned primarily with the relationship of the individual to Jesus. Paul wants to show how Christians should live together in harmony,

while John tries to visualize that Christians who loose contact with Christ are cut off from their only source of life and effectiveness (v.5: "Without me you can do nothing.").

It is now generally agreed that the metaphorical imagery of John 15:1-7 goes back to Old Testament imagery for Israel which John has strongly modified.

b) The grain of wheat and its fruit

At first sight the metaphor of the grain of wheat (John 12:24) seems to have christological significance and nothing else. After all, it is a word on the necessity of Christ's suffering. But seen in its context, this word answers a question concerning the church. The wish of Greek proselytes to see Jesus (v.20f.) poses the question as to whether Jesus will extend his mission beyond the borders of Israel, thus creating a new and world-wide community. Jesus approves this plea for universalism, as the end of the speech in v.32 shows ("I will draw all men unto me."). But he relates universalism to the cross. The multitudes will be won through Christ's sacrifice. The grain must be "ploughed under" in order to bear fruit.

John 12:24 can be compared with John 15:1-7 in that both texts take a process in nature to illustrate the close connection between Christ and the church. But while John 15 thinks of continuous unity with Christ as a spiritual task, John 12:24 points back to the sacrifice of Christ as the historical origin and once-for-all foundation of the church.

c) The good shepherd and the sheep

With the image of the shepherd and the sheep we return to traditional material used by John. As in John 12, we are inclined to overlook the

ecclesiological implications of the passage. This may be due to a tendency in devotional exposition to blend this text and Luke 15:3-7. Moreover, the polemical impact of the passage in John 10 - when the true shepherd is contrasted with the hireling (v. 12f.) - seems to be purely christological. This chapter, however, is as relevant for ecclesiology as it is for christology. As a matter of fact, we cannot even separate Christ and the church in this chapter. What John is figuratively describing here is the relation between Jesus and the church (as was the case in ch. 15 and 12). The ecclesiological aspect, too, forms part of polemics in the second part of the chapter when Jesus says to his opponents: "You believe not because you are not of my sheep." (v. 26f.)

To equate the "flock" of John 10 with our concept of "the church" is no adaptation of John's thought to a later situation. The ecumenical dimension - one of the essential features of the church - is present here as it is in John 12 (v32) and in John 11, 52. The saying on the "other sheep" who must be "brought" into the "one fold" (John 10:16) refers to the gentiles who will join the believers of Jewish origin.

d) The bridegroom and the bride

With regard to John 3:29 some recent commentators have disputed what earlier exegesis had taken for granted, namely that the bridegroom and the bride in this saying mean Christ and the church. It has been argued that there is no evidence for an earlier Jewish usage of this metaphor for the Messiah and his people and that this makes it difficult to assume it in this gospel context. On the other hand it must be taken into consideration that this usage is found in several independent traditions in the New Testament (2.Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:22-33; Rev. 19:7,9; 21:2,9; 22:17). It has been proposed that the whole tradition can be

traced back to Gnostic origins. But Gnostic parallels cannot possibly account for the evidence in a book so thoroughly Jewish as the Revelation of John. The solution may perhaps be simpler than we expect. Surprising though it sounds, the metaphor occurs already in the Old Testament. It has been overlooked that the Greek text of 2 Sam. 17:3 contains a phrase (which is probably original) where this imagery is applied to the king and his people. There Ahitophel the counsellor promises Absalom "to turn the whole nation to him just as a bride turns to her husband". The Messiah is the king of Israel, as is underlined by John 1:49, just as each king of Israel was an "anointed one". So this is exactly what we read in John 3: "All men come to Christ (v.26), and John - like Ahitophel - is willing to play the part of the best man i.e. to be instrumental in bringing about the alliance between the king and his people, now, of course, in an eschatological context.

#### 4. "His own" as an expression for the church

In John 1:11 "his own" is a name for Israel as the people of God. John does not deny that Israel has a special calling in history (cf. 4:221) and that there is a relationship between Israel and Christ even if Israel does not realize it (cf. 4:44). That is why John does not strip Israel of each of her traditional titles of honour. (cf. Ex. 19:5; Deut. 7:6; 14:2; Mal. 3:17; Ps. 100:2; 135:4). He does, however, tacitly transfer this term, too, to the disciples (cf. 13:1) and to the church as a whole. As an adjective, "idios" occurs several times in John 10 (vv. 3f., 12) within the parable of the shepherd and the sheep. In the exposition of the parable "emos" takes its place (vv. 14, 26f.).

Because of its rather similar meaning, the use of the word "philos" in John 15:13f. can be mentioned under the same heading. The "friends" of

this text are not only the first disciples, but, as the word is explained by the evangelist, all those to whom the revelation of God in Christ extends.

In some places in the Fourth Gospel the "idios" or "emos" is interpreted by a following relative clause which stresses God's active part in the formation of the church. Time and again, Jesus speaks of the men that God has given him (cf. 6:38, 39; 17:2, 6, 9, 12, 24; 18:9; metaphorically also in 10:29). These texts make it perfectly clear that to belong to Christ is a matter of God's grace just as it had been God's election which made Israel the property of God.

#### 5. Discipleship as an ecclesiological concept

It need be no surprise that a gospel refers to the disciples. That Jesus had followers is a fact which cannot be eliminated from the tradition about his ministry. In certain places in the Fourth Gospel, however, discipleship seems to be a phenomenon of the time after his earthly ministry. According to John 8:31, only the future, more exactly the attitude to his word in the future, will show who is truly a disciple of Jesus. According to John 13:35 it is through brotherly love that the disciples of Jesus will be recognized as such in the future. (Before Jesus' departure, everybody could see whether a man did follow Jesus or not!) In John 15:8 it is within the farewell discourses that instruction is given on how to become disciples of Jesus. In this latter instance discipleship seems to imply a continuation of Christ's ministry on earth, alluded to in the phrase of bearing fruit. In all these texts discipleship no longer means living with and listening to a certain teacher and guide, but rather following the course, in thought and life, which the master has shown.

This can be seen most clearly where the expression is used in the controversy between the church and Judaism. In John 9:28 the Jews call themselves the disciples of Moses as contrasted with the disciples of Jesus. Thus the term "disciples" serves to identify a community as the community of a specific founder whose authority is binding to all who call themselves after his name. As for the church, this means that loyalty to Jesus is essential to her existence in history.

We can round up this survey of Johannine equivalents of "the church" by concluding that all these expressions state or imply a close relation to Jesus. John's view of the church can be characterized by the word of Zinzendorf on "the personal connection with the Saviour" as the summary of the Gospel and the basis of spiritual fellowship.

#### B. An outline of Johannine ecclesiology as a whole

Having detected the church as a major topic of John's thinking, we must go on and ask that light falls on the church from the whole of Johannine theology and how his insights can be systematized. Since one lecture is not enough to do this comprehensively, I restrict my consideration to those points which in my opinion are peculiar to John.

##### 1. The historical Jesus as founder of the church

It is a question of definition whether or not and, if yes, how far we can trace back the origins of the church to the earthly ministry of Jesus. If we take the confession of faith in Christ as the distinctive criterion of the church, then it is difficult to speak of the church in the pre-resurrection period. There is universal agreement

among scholars that faith as defined by the early Christian preaching and confession was not held by any group of people before the appearances of the risen Lord. The church is historically a post-Jesus phenomenon, and Jesus, accordingly, a pre-Christian figure in history. How then did the church originate if it does not go back to the lifetime of the man who is in the center of her faith? The New Testament tells us of two events which can be called the birth of the church. The first is the commissioning of the apostles by the risen Lord, the second is the coming of the Spirit on Pentecost according to the tradition of the Acts.

John's view does not conform to this whole picture. Apparently, he does not know the institution of the apostolate; there is no group of disciples called by that name. And as for the Spirit, he gives a report on the bestowal of the Spirit which cannot easily be reconciled with the traditions of Acts. In John 20:19-23 it is the Lord himself who after his resurrection imparts the Spirit to all disciples while commissioning them to continue his work. It seems as if John wants to concentrate the authority of apostleship in Jesus himself. Although the noun "apostle" is not applied to him, the phrase that he is the one whom the Father has sent is a prominent thought of Johannine christology. Moreover, Jesus really assumes the function of the apostles in that it is he who proclaims faith in him and deliberately aims at the formation of the church.

According to John 3:22,26; 4:1 Jesus through his disciples continues the baptismal practices of John the Baptist. It is remarkable that John in this connection uses the same phrase as the great commission in Matthew 28 "to make disciples and baptize". Thus, Jesus himself appears to be the first missionary.



Along the same line, it is Jesus himself who goes beyond the limits of Judaism when he preaches to the Samaritan village of John 4. Although this is historically not outside of the people of Israel, John 4:22 shows that to John salvation history has been narrowed down to the Jewish part of Israel: "salvation is of the Jews". So Jesus crosses the border which he has just affirmed. We have already mentioned that the idea of universalism is related to the passion of Jesus. This is developed in other N. T. writings, too (cf. Gal 3:13; Eph 2:13-16; see also Rom 2:23-30; I Cor 1:22f.) What is typical of John in this connection is that this implication of the cross is described as the explicit intention of Jesus (cf. 10:16; 12:24/32). According to John, Jesus has consciously founded the church of both Jews and Gentiles through the sacrifice of his own life.

## 2. The departure of Jesus as the problem of the church

In the Fourth Gospel the departure of Jesus is set forth with special detail and emphasis. According to Kasemann, the farewell discourses are a full fifth of the total gospel. Moreover, outside of chapters 13-17 (from 3:13 on), we find numerous anticipations of Jesus' departure. The use of the words "hypagein", "poruesthai", and "aperchesthai" can serve as a key to this matter. G. Bornkamm has given an excellent interpretation of this Johannine theme in his discussion with Kasemann:

"The irrevocable end of the life of Jesus on earth and the resulting anguish for a faith threatened by oppression and grief...are here reflected in a depth unique in the New Testament. Jesus goes away, the world remains. Its time goes on, his time ends."

That John is concerned with this problem has also

been emphasized by Ernst Fuchs and Helmut Koester.

Having realized this, there is no need for referring to the delay of the Parousia and the dying of the generation of eyewitnesses in order to account for John's line of thought. John here brings a difficulty of the church out into the open which was there from the beginning of the church. For John, however, this problem becomes piercing because he is so radical in relating the church to Jesus as a man of history. In other words, the problem of Jesus' departure is the obverse side of the conception of Jesus as the Founder of the church. This can be shown from parallels in the history of religions, especially from the traditions concerning the death of Moses. The exclusiveness in which religious existence is made dependent upon a figure of the past can nourish the suspicion that such existence might turn out to be impossible.

## 3. Abiding in Jesus as the task of the church

More than half of the New Testament occurrences of the word "menein" are to be found in the Johannine literature. From this, we can safely conclude that the idea of continuity must be important for John. Especially the "menein en" -- "to abide in" -- which occurs in exhortations seems to be characteristic of John. Outside the Johannine literature, it is to be found only in 1 Tim 2:15 and 2 Tim 3:14 (cf. also "emmenein" in Acts 14:22; and in Gal. 3:10, a quotation from Deut 27:26). In John 8:31 true discipleship is defined as remaining in the word of Jesus. John 15:4-7 speaks primarily of abiding in Christ, but this metaphorical expression is interpreted in v.7 by the phrase "if my words abide in you". This interpretation is neglected by E. Schweizer when he, along with H. Conzelmann, pits the "abiding in him" of the Fourth Gospel against the expression in the Johannine epistles "abiding in the

teaching". As a matter of fact, John 15:7 and 2 John 9 coincide in teaching that there is no real personal relationship with Christ without loyalty to his words as transmitted in the didactic traditions of the church.

These observations are confirmed when we consider the Johannine usage of "terein" - "to keep, or preserve". Half of all the New Testament occurrences of the word are in the Johannine literature (19 out of 39). And if we count only those instances where the word of Jesus is the object of "terein", eleven out of fourteen are Johannine. (cf. 8:51,52; 14:15,21,23,24; 15:10,20; 1 John 2:3,4,5). The other passages with this usage are Matth. 28:20 and Rev. 3:8,10. H. Riensenfeld has correctly put the Johannine use of "terein" on a level with 1. Tim. 6:13f. where Timothy is admonished to preserve the normative tradition-material.

The idea of remembering must also be mentioned in this context. Several times (John 2:22; 14:26; 15:20; 16:4) the remembrance of Jesus' words is a motif in a story or in a promise given. In 18:9 and 18:32 the use of the earlier words of Jesus to interpret later events gives an example of such remembrance. Moreover, to John it is the teaching of Jesus himself which has the structure of tradition or transmission. According to John 3:32; 7:17; 8:26,28,40; 12:49,50b; and 15:15 Jesus only passes on what he has heard, teaches only what has been committed to him by God. It is the same idea as in Pirge Abot 1:1 where Moses, the origin of oral tradition, is the first receiver of tradition the ultimate origin of which is thus shown to be with God. According to John 15:10 Christ's faithfulness in keeping that which God had committed to him is set up as a model for the disciples. Thus John traces tradition back to the structure of revelation in Christ and motivates the process of tradition as the continuation of

Christ's work (cf. 20:21).

This chapter can be summed up by referring to the fact that to John discipleship is the basis and essence of the church's life. The kind of personal loyalty that produces and preserves a tradition has its roots in the relation between a master and his disciples. John in his view of the church seems to deliberately go back to the original structure of the attitude towards Jesus. To John, - heretical though it sounds to modern ears - progress as such is heresy (cf. 2 John 9), and legitimate development of the church's understanding can only mean a deeper realization of what is implicit in the beginnings (cf. 12:16; 13:7).

#### 4. The gift of the Spirit as the strength of the church

The Johannine conception of the church as founded by Jesus has as a consequence the fact that the departure of Jesus becomes the fundamental problem of the church. We have seen how the exhortation in John is related to this problem. Tradition appears as the medium of the continuing contact with Jesus. The church is made responsible for its maintenance. But this is no solution of the problem. If this is all, then there is no reason for the church to despair. Then there is no finished work of Christ, but only an influence fading away as time goes on.

The farewell discourses of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel face this problem. Here the temptation of despair (cf. 16:6, 20ff.) is met with words of promise. The dominant theme of these promises is the gift of the Spirit.

The relation between these promises and the departure of Jesus is evident already in the first introduction of the so-called Paraclete in 14:16. There the "Spirit of truth" is called "another

Paraclete" who will abide with and in the disciples. This implies that Jesus himself was such a Paraclete" (whatever this means). A comparison of the functions of the Spirit according to the "Paraclete sayings" with the work of Christ on earth shows that there is indeed a very close parallelism. The Spirit is the successor to the historical Jesus in his ministry in the world.

The departure of Jesus is directly referred to in John 16:6f; "It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Paraclete shall not come to you." There is no more reason for grief and despair because the gift of the Spirit is the outcome of Christ's return to the Father.

What is that "advantage" involved in the gift of the Spirit? To what extent is this a kind of compensation for the loss of direct intercourse with Jesus?

For this question, it is decisive that the work of the Spirit has the same reference point as the exhortation, namely, the word of the historical Jesus. "He will teach you and remind you of all that I have said to you" (John 14:26). In 14:16 the promise of the Paraclete immediately follows after the exhortation to loyalty. In other words, the continuity that is demanded of the church in its relation to Jesus is made possible by the continuous presence of the Spirit in the church which Jesus promises. Thus, tradition itself appears to be the work of the Spirit.

Now this is a controversial issue. At first it has to be protected against misunderstanding. Catholic commentators have restricted this function of the Spirit to the apostles and their "legitimate successors". The major representative of this position today is F. Mussner. Where John calls the disciples and the Spirit witnesses

(John 15:27), Mussner introduces the institution of the apostolate. But since in 14:16 the Spirit is said to abide forever, this institution must be extended to include the successors of the apostles, too. There is, however, not the slightest hint in the texts that John thinks of an institution. The agreement with Catholic doctrine is made perfect when Mussner adds the word "gradually" to John 14:26. The Spirit will "gradually" lead into all truth. This is neither stated nor implied in the text. On the contrary, the only instances where John speaks of a progress in understanding are in connection with the consummation of Christ's mission in his death and resurrection. (cf. 2:22; 12:16; 13:7; 16:25) These events complement the revelation given in the teaching of Jesus. There is no indication that this is to be taken as a general principle of progressive revelation which can justify the development of the official teaching of the organized church. John does not legitimize a theology which combines tradition and the Spirit by fixing both to an institution or a specific office in the church.

On the other hand the connexion between the gift of the Spirit and tradition must be defended against a tendency to separate both from each other. This tendency is prominent in Protestant theology. It also has affected the interpretation of the "Paraclete sayings" of the Fourth Gospel. This can be seen in E. Kasemann's book on John 17. There he emphasizes the closeness of the connexion between the Spirit and the word. But this word is thought of as the voice of Jesus who speaks from heaven, not from the past. Revelation comes down vertically in time and again. It cannot enter into a process of transmission in time. Any such sediments of earlier revelation as oral tradition or the written word of the Bible must be criticized and can be dismissed on the grounds of later revelation given by the "Christus praesens". Kasemann

comes to this conclusion by reading into the word "Spirit" the idea of spiritualism. He overlooks the fact that "spirit" can mean very different things in different contexts and that John, in fact, has defined "spirit" in a sense rather opposed to spiritualism. To John, the coming of the Spirit of which Kasemann speaks in the present tense (as of the "speaking" of Jesus) actually is an event in history connected with the once-for-all events of Christ's death and resurrection. (cf. 7:39; 15:7)

The same tendency can be detected in E. Schweizer's interpretation of these texts. He, too, takes it for granted that "spirit" refers to intermittent and momentary experiences. This leads him to the same confrontation of the gift of the Spirit with tradition as is proposed by Kasemann. According to him, "the question how the transmission of the testimony from the first witnesses to the church of today must be interpreted--this question is refused and left unanswered because the witness of the Spirit is regarded as the only essential thing." This interpretation misses the mark completely. The question of how the process of transmission has to be interpreted is exactly John's problem, and his teaching on the Spirit answers this question. Schweizer argues that for John there is no problem of distance between the saving events and the time of the church and that it is spiritual experience which links the believer directly with Christ. In reality, John wrestles with this very problem and solves it by claiming tradition for the Spirit as one of his functions and by locating the Spirit in tradition against all tendencies to separate the Spirit from the Jesus of history. So in his teaching on the Spirit John has ultimately solved the problem of Jesus departure by pointing out that the Spirit guarantees the continuity with Christ which is vital for the church. At the same time he has introduced a criterion by which to meet the

ambiguity of spiritual claims and experiences. Thus John steers clear of institutionalism on one side and spiritualism on the other. In my opinion this shows the same connexion of word and spirit which later on was propounded in the Reformation and which is the basis of the evangelical view of the Bible.

#### C. On the relevance of Johannine Ecclesiology today.

Johannine theology seems to presuppose, on the one hand, the complete independence of the church over against Judaism and, on the other hand, an identity crisis within the church. Therefore the theology of John reveals its relevance in situations where the church is in danger of losing its own identity or distinctiveness from other movements in history. Many symptoms suggest that this is to a high degree the situation of the church today, at least in those parts where Western culture is a dominating factor.

If that is, to some extent at least, true, then there are several aspects of Johannine ecclesiology which need consideration and application in theology and in the life of the church today.

The first is the contrast between the church and the world. "kosmos" can mean "society" or "the public". But as the word can take up a special and negative meaning, so in reality "society" can become the body of "outsiders" as contrasted with the church. In a sense, this is a necessary reaction to the Christian proclamation when it makes clear that a decision must be made.

The second point is the necessity for the church to maintain its own tradition in a time where the general situation is marked by a crisis of traditions on all levels. The church is not

called to defend traditionalism as such and in every instance, rather what is demanded is a consequence of Christology that must be realized for Christ's sake.

The third point is the promise implied in the role of the Spirit. If John is right, then there must be struggle within the church to maintain the loyalty to Jesus as the principle of its existence. But in all struggles there is never reason to despair. This loyalty or continuity is our task, but not our work. It is the work of the Spirit whom God has sent in Christ's name.

#### Note

A German version of this paper with extensive notes will be published in the Theologische Zeitschrift of Basle. Part B is based upon chapters of my dissertation Die Stiftung des Heils: Untersuchungen zue Struktur de johanneischen Theologie, Stuttgart 1972.

Publications explicitly referred to in this paper are:

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