

# Rudolf Bultmann on the Christology of the Fourth Gospel

## John 12 as a Test Case

by Takanori Kobayashi

One of the intriguing issues in the Fourth Gospel is its Christology in diversity and unity. M. Hengel has recently remarked: "in no New Testament writing are more christological titles collected than in the Fourth Gospel, but at the same time they are all developed and connected idiosyncratically, to result in an impressive multiform unity derived from "different christologies".<sup>1</sup> This christological diversity and unity has been explained in various ways, but we could categorize them into two major approaches, based on the difference of theories of composition of the Gospel. Ever since the publication of A. R. Culpepper's *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel. A Study in Literary Design* (1983)<sup>2</sup> Johannine scholarship (especially in North America) has shifted drastically towards literary criticism,<sup>3</sup> which tries to read the gospel synchronically and thus holistically as a unified text. This type of reading, like the commentary of E. Hoskyns (1940) written long before the explosion of literary critical studies on John, presents the Christology in a synchronic manner in accordance with the way in which it is depicted in the Gospel as a finished product. On the other hand, the more traditional *diachronic* reading (e. g. source and redaction criticism), which sees the Gospel as having developed in stages, seems to still attract a number of exegetes. This type of approach necessarily results in finding different Christologies which correspond to the different strata one finds in the Gospel, while the task of unifying them is generally assigned to the Evangelist, or to the final redactor. A champion of the latter approach is, needless to say, Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976), whose commentary first appeared in 1941.<sup>4</sup> Even though his approach and theory have been under close scrutiny and received somewhat relentless criticism,<sup>5</sup> it is still worth a visit for any interpreter of the Fourth Gospel, not only because of his long-lasting influence but also because of his lucid exegesis. To analyse Bultmann's interpretation we will focus on John

12, because it provides a good example of his interpretation, and because the problems his approach has presented seem to become most relevant in this particular chapter, especially in 12. 20–36. Our analysis includes his 1) theory of composition of the Gospel, 2) criteria for identifying sources in the Gospel, 3) reading of John 12, and 4) understanding of the Christology in John 12, with 5) some evaluative remarks at the end.

### *1. Theory of Composition*

R. Bultmann represents the second generation of the history-of-religions school which emerged around the end of the 19th century in Germany. His main tools for reading the Fourth Gospel are source and form criticism along with the history-of-religions approach which tries to read the Scripture in its original context particularly with its religious background(s) in mind.<sup>6</sup>

With regard to the theory of composition of the Fourth Gospel, Bultmann maintains that, around the end of the first century, three written sources — the sign (*semeia*), the revelation-discourse (*Offenbarungsreden*), and the proto-Markan passion and resurrection narrative sources — were compiled and edited with additions by the Fourth Evangelist (who was a convert from a baptizing sect which has John the Baptist as a Revealer and has a character of a pre-Christian gnosticizing Judaism<sup>7</sup>) in order to elucidate his own theological perspectives, the centre of which is Christology. Yet, due to a certain (unknown) external circumstance, Bultmann assumes, this work of the Evangelist lost its original order and then was reconstructed, though not successfully, and revised by a later ecclesiastical redactor who is responsible for the Eucharistic interpretation, the futuristic eschatology, the claim of the apostolic origin of the Gospel as a whole, the correction of certain tendencies to make the thought come to terms with the rest of the early church, and so on. With regard to the provenance, Bultmann conjectures that the Fourth Gospel originated in Syria where the Hellenization of the early (Palestinian) Christianity probably occurred.<sup>8</sup> In this reconstruction of the history of composition of the Gospel, what is of primary importance is the work and theology of the Evangelist.

To reach these conclusions Bultmann seems to be heavily involved in

source-critical analysis with form-critical concerns, to an analysis of which we will now turn.

## 2. *Criteria for Identifying Sources*

Although Bultmann did not give a precise explanation of his literary theory, it has been deduced in full by D. M. Smith,<sup>9</sup> whose analysis we will here basically follow. To distinguish the Evangelist's work from his sources, Bultmann employs contextual criteria as well as stylistic and theological ones. Contextual criteria are concerned with any inconsistencies in a narrative or a discourse (*aporias*: 'block' or 'obstruction' in Greek), ideas and motifs peculiar to the Evangelist such as annotations, dialogues between Jesus and his opponents (discourses), and references to dates and places. After these considerations, Bultmann uses stylistic characteristics peculiar to the Evangelist in order to separate his annotating and interpreting work from the sources. Certain theological terms and motifs can be further proof of the work of the Evangelist, playing a supportive role for the contextual and stylistic considerations. One of the main theological criteria is that the more sophisticated and developed idea that the revelation of God is manifested in the human Jesus is of the Evangelist. Any material that is inconsistent with this idea is treated as more primitive and thus belonging to a source.

## 3. *Reading of John 12*

Having applied these criteria, Bultmann claims to have found three different types of sources within John 12. Vv27, 28, 23, 31, 32, (34) 35-36, 44-45 stem from the Gnostic, non-Christian, *Offenbarungsreden* source. This controversial source is conceived of as a main source for the Evangelist especially in his writing of the Prologue and the discourses. Its origin is related to Hellenistic-Jewish Baptist circles with Gnostic tendency in which John the Baptist was regarded as the Son of God/the Revealer become flesh.<sup>10</sup> This source theory is due to Bultmann's finding of the terminological and thematic affinities between the Johannine discourses and the Mandaean literature.<sup>11</sup> 12:37-38 stems from the *semeia* source, and 12:1-5+7, 12-13 (14-15), (24-26) ('Synoptic-like tradition' independent from the Synoptics) and 12:20-22 ('source fragment') from the other sources and traditions.<sup>12</sup>

When he reconstructs the order of the work of the Evangelist as an annotator and interpreter of his sources, Bultmann preserves the order of 11:55–12:33 in its present form and places this in the section of ‘the Way to the Cross’. However, after this section are placed 8:30–40 and 6:60–71, which are followed by 12:37–43 as a conclusion to the first part of the Gospel with its retrospective view of Jesus’ public ministry. Bultmann observes that 11:55–12:19 forms ‘a connected composition’ ‘composed with great artistry’, which however consists of various fragments:<sup>13</sup> the material from the Synoptic-like source (12:1–5+7, 12–13) and the composition of the Evangelist (11:55–57; 12:9–11, 14–19). The text of 12:20–50, Bultmann observes, does not appear to present its original form (as written by the Evangelist), and he treats 12:34–36,<sup>14</sup> 44–50 as part of the discourse on the Light (*Lichtrede*), which is thought to be the Evangelist’s original arrangement. Despite its fragmentary nature lacking a continuation, 12:20–22 is used by the Evangelist as an introduction to 12:23–33. 12:23–33 is a unit, which Bultmann considers as composed and enlarged by the Evangelist on the basis of a text from the *Offenbarungsreden* source (12:23, 27f) with the help of reworked material from the Synoptic-like tradition (12:24–26) and with the addition of a dialogue (v 29) and a gloss (v 33). Bultmann denies a possible use of the ecclesiastical redactor’s hand in our section.

#### 4. *Christology in John 12*

In accordance with his theory of three strata (of the sources, the Evangelist, and the ecclesiastical redactor) in the history of composition of the Fourth Gospel, Bultmann finds a distinctive type of Christology or Christologies in each stratum. This distinction becomes evident especially in the way in which he perceives the characteristics of the sources used and the ways of the Evangelist’s handling of them. For Bultmann the sources he extracted show diverging Christologies. The key task of the Evangelist was then to modify and integrate them into his discriminatingly single-minded christological conviction: Jesus is ‘der Offenbarer Gottes, der nur von seiner Person und seinem Verhältnis zum Vater und von dem Verhältnis der Menschen zu ihm redet’.<sup>15</sup>

For instance, the semeia source, which represents in general a tradition

developed independently of the Synoptics, is concerned with Jesus' miracles which provoke the primitive miracle faith (*Wunderglaube*) in Jesus as a Hellenistic 'divine man' (*theios aner*) who manifests divine powers of miracles in himself in terms of the Hellenistic aretology.<sup>16</sup> To make this come to terms with his main christological thrust, viz. the Revealer Christology, the Evangelist corrected the primitive form of faith and Christology of the *semeia* source.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the function of the signs is also changed to invoke an existential decision concerning Jesus.

The same procedure has been taken by the Evangelist to the *Offenbarungsreden* source which consists of the Gnostic Redeemer myth. In the Gnostic myth, according to Bultmann, 'the redeemed-redeemer' is 'the divine being, the heavenly man' who descended to earth as God's emissary, took human shape and after fulfilling his mission as revealer returned to the heavenly world, elevated and transfigured, to take up the office of judge'.<sup>18</sup> Because of its radical dualism of reality, salvation in Gnosticism, which is achieved by the Redeemer's imparting secret knowledge (*gnosis*) to humanity, is an escape from the realm of darkness to that of light. Bultmann construes that this myth lies behind the Johannine Son of man sayings with the descent-ascent motif. Then, the task of the Evangelist was to transform these sources by means of rejection, demythologization (historicization) and christianization, to such an extent that the finished product could place the reader in the crisis of an existential decision of faith that Jesus is the Revelation of God. As a result, 'The cosmological dualism of Gnosticism has become in John a *dualism of decision*'.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the Revealer, instead of imparting to humanity a knowledge (*gnosis*) of its heavenly origin as in Gnosticism, 'reveals to man his sin, and sets him before the decision to live on the basis of the created world or from the Creator'.<sup>20</sup> In other words, through God's revelation in Jesus, people come to realise their creaturely status, renounce self-sufficiency and adhesion to the visible, transitory world and put faith in the Word of God to live according to God's grace.<sup>21</sup> In addition to all this, the redactor has added to the Evangelist's Christology the sacramental, future-eschatological elements in order to make it come to terms with apostolic Christianity.

Bultmann is consistent with this main thesis in his understanding of the

Christology in John 12. His reconstruction suggests that in 12:1–7 the Evangelist retains the source's import that the occasion of the work of love shown by Mary is the occasion of the prediction of Jesus' death (12:7).<sup>22</sup> If the passage 12:14–15 belongs to the Evangelist, the implication is that the crowd's primitive faith in Jesus as the eschatological messianic (this-earthly) King, as related in the source, is modified by the Evangelist so as to be consistent with the prophecy of Zech 9: 9. For the Evangelist, Jesus is the eschatological messianic King who is to die, and who as the Revealer reveals the misunderstanding of the crowd about his messianic claim.

In John 12:20ff Bultmann finds at work the process of the *demythologizing* of the Gnostic Redeemer myth contained in the *Offenbarungsreden* source (12: 27–32+23). In the Gnostic myth the heavenly messenger in this earthly world (and/or the soul that comes from the heavenly world), who suffers the persecutions to carry out the task of the 'Father' before he leaves for the heaven, laments and then cries out for help, which is answered by a consoling voice from the height and by sending of a helper (Yawar).<sup>23</sup> The arrangement of the sources into the present text by the Evangelist is thought to be brought about in order to *demythologize* or christianize the (pre-Christian) Gnostic myth of the Primal Man-Redeemer by associating it with Jesus (historization). The Son of man's judgement of the world, expulsion of the ruler of this world and drawing all to himself is thought to be a result of the *demythologization* (Entmythologisierung) of the Gnostic Redeemer who judges the demons of the darkness and draws his friends on high.<sup>24</sup> By *demythologization*, Bultmann argues, it becomes clear that Jesus is the Revealer. The death of Jesus is regarded as the high point of the Revelation, because it is depicted as his 'glorification' (12:16, 23) and 'elevation' (12:32) and is accompanied by the judgement of the world.<sup>25</sup>

The passage related to the 'light' (12:35–36) is treated not within the context of John 12 as it stands but within what Bultmann calls the *Lichtrede* (9:1–41; 8:12; 12:44–50; 8:21–29; 12:34–36a; 10:19–21). For Bultmann, 12:34 depicts the crowd's expectation of the Jewish apocalyptic Messiah who, identified with the Son of man, brings about the eschatological age of salvation on earth. In the 'light' passage (12:35–36a), however, Bultmann claims the Evangelist refutes this

this-worldly view of salvation of the crowd, using the Gnostic myth of the Revealer who came to the world and leaves again for where he was before. The encounter with the Revealer makes present for people the (existential) 'moment of decision concerning life and death'. Thus, for Bultmann, the Jewish expectation of the eschatological transformation of the cosmos is transmuted into the existential experience of salvation.<sup>26</sup>

## 5. Evaluation

Although his masterful insights into the fundamental issues of the Gospel with the studious exegesis are to be appreciated in many respects, Bultmann's interpretation of the Fourth Gospel can not go without criticism from several angles.

1) On literary grounds, his displacement/rearrangement theory is without doubt problematic and impossible to prove. Even his assumption that stylistic features such as connective verses can be a criterion for differentiating the literary strata has been proved not to stand against rigid literary scrutinies. Rather, it has been demonstrated persuasively that the Fourth Gospel shows a permeating stylistic unity, in which the same stylistic features assigned to the source by Bultmann are found scattered also in the material assigned to the Evangelist.<sup>27</sup> Also the immense difficulty associated with the application of source criticism to the discourses has been pointed out by other critics such as R. T. Fortna and B. Lindars.<sup>28</sup> Instead of assigning passages separated by supposed logical leaps or aporia to different sources, we must respect the form of the Gospel as it stands and try to find any underlying logic to elucidate what appears to be a logical leap for a modern reader. In this respect, the recent development of literary-critical reading is a welcome contribution to one of the controversial aspects of the Fourth Gospel.

2) On history-of-religions grounds, Bultmann's interpretation is questionable as well. A consensus in recent scholarship is that the Fourth Gospel should be set within a predominantly Jewish milieu. Bultmann was certainly right in recognising the Jewishness in some parts of the Gospel, e. g. the role of the Jewish wisdom tradition in the Logos Christology of the Prologue. But his theory of a Hellenistic *theios aner* Christology within the cycle of miracles has been

rightly criticized and has given way to a tendency to understand Christology of the Fourth Gospel predominantly in a Jewish milieu.<sup>29</sup> The same is true to the hypothesis of the influence of Gnosticism on the Gospel. Such a theory is very tenuous and unnecessary, though it cannot be disproved with ease. The inappropriateness of Bultmann's model of a typical Gnostic Redeemer myth is pointed out by C. Colpe, because, for example, there is no term such as 'redeemed redeemer' and it 'is an abstraction, obscuring the variety of actual gnostic myths in extant texts'.<sup>30</sup> Yet the influence of Bultmann's Gnostic myth theory has been strongly felt in the subsequent Johannine scholarship.<sup>31</sup> However, it is now argued persuasively that the similarities between Gnosticism and the Fourth Gospel have more to do with their derivation from early Judaism.<sup>32</sup>

In this connection, Bultmann's theory concerning the relationship between early Gnosticism and the Syrian origin of the Gospel has not withstood subsequent scholarly scrutiny. The supposed historical connection between John the Baptist and the Mandaean literature is convincingly rejected by K. Rudolph.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, M. Hengel has challenged the theory of a Syrian origin of the 'Hellenistic' Christianity, and consequently Bultmann's theory of a Syrian origin of the Fourth Gospel — Syria is thought to be the locale of gnosticizing sectarian-type Judaism—on three grounds: (i) the paucity of our knowledge of the Hellenization and religious conditions of Syria in the pre-Christian period, (ii) the lack of non-Christian Syrian literature before 200 CE along with the sporadic nature of Syrian cults in the first century CE, and (iii) the longstanding hatred of Jews (and of Jewish Christians) towards Syrian paganism and its cults.<sup>34</sup> The implication of Hengel's observation would be that the Fourth Gospel was most likely free from the influence of early forms of Gnosticism, if such a Gnosticism, which later developed into the Mandaean Gnosticism, existed at all already in the first century CE.

Returning to the religious milieu of the Fourth Gospel, it is noteworthy that what led Bultmann to the recognition of the affinities between the Johannine Son of man and the Gnostic Redeemer in the Mandaean literature is the unusual combination of the term 'the Son of man' and the descent-ascent motif (esp. in John 3.13), since such a combination cannot be found in the Jewish apocalyptic

literature such as Dan 7 and 1 En 37–71. If the milieu of the Fourth Gospel is predominantly OT-Jewish, a solution may be sought within that milieu.<sup>35</sup>

3) On the theological level, some reservations should be made. Bultmann's fundamental insight that the central theme of the Fourth Gospel is *revelation* is undoubtedly valid. But his understanding of the content of the 'revelation' is very problematic. Bultmann contends: 'Jesus as the Revealer of God *reveals nothing but that he is the Revealer*. And that amounts to saying that it is he for whom the world is waiting, he who brings in his own person that for which all the longing of man yearns: life and truth as the reality out of which man can exist, light as the complete transparency of existence in which questions and riddles are at an end'.<sup>36</sup> For the Evangelist, Bultmann conjectures, what matters is not the content of the revelation but the fact of it: 'Der Verfasser interessiert sich nur für das daß der Offenbarung, nicht das Was'.<sup>37</sup> Behind this assertion, Ashton<sup>38</sup> succinctly perceives, there lies Bultmann's mutually-related pre-understanding (*Vorverständnis*) of Christian faith and of the historical Jesus. For Bultmann belief in Christ is exclusively confined to the act of faith (*fides qua creditor*), while to accept any propositions of faith (*fides quae creditor*) is to undermine the former.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, for Bultmann any pursuit of the historical Jesus in the Gospels cannot reveal any detailed portraits of him but a single fact: 'Christ according to the flesh'. So Bultmann's Jesus is not the one who is to be put under historical scrutiny but the one to be understood solely existentially: 'Jesus's life on earth does not become an item of the historical past, but constantly remains present reality'.<sup>40</sup> Thus Bultmann's understanding of revelation is coloured by his negative stance towards the historical credibility of the Gospel's accounts of Jesus and by his existentialist stance. This fundamental thrust of revelation with its existential significance is maintained consistently throughout his treatment of the Christology of the Gospel. But to reduce the revelation in Christ to a bare fact (*das daß*) proves to detract from the other Christological (and soteriological) ideas attached to this central christological thrust of the Fourth Gospel, revelation.<sup>41</sup>

To elaborate our criticism 3) further, at least the following points can be made:

i) The idea of God's revelation in Jesus should be redefined within the OT-Jewish milieu, instead of Bultmann's existentialist understanding of Lutheranism.

ii) Bultmann's skepticism towards the credibility of the historical Jesus is excessive, and the recent historical Jesus research, especially with regard to the Synoptic Gospels, has presented a more positive picture of historical Jesus. Though bypassed by most scholars in the historical Jesus research, it is argued that the Fourth Gospel contains a number of historically plausible accounts on Jesus,<sup>42</sup> and that, despite the majority theory of independence of the Fourth Gospel (R. Brown, R. Schnackenburg, E. Haenchen, etc.), there are affinities between the Johannine Passion Narrative and those in the Synoptics.<sup>43</sup>

iii) His theory of the development of Christology that reaches its climax in the idea of the revelation of God in the human Jesus is to be challenged. For example, 'the Son of man' in the Fourth Gospel, the term which is generally associated with the idea of revelation by Bultmann and others, is found in the context which is very much in line with the Jewish apocalyptic literature and martyr theology<sup>44</sup> and therefore does not have to be placed in a more developed stage of Christology but could belong to the earliest stage of development, even to Jesus himself. Despite the hesitancy of NT scholarship in seeing the Son of man sayings, especially ones in the Synoptics, as authentic, the time has come for a theory that sees a number of the Synoptic ones as authentic and uses them to reconstruct the self-understanding of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>45</sup> Also, in the Fourth Gospel, Jesus' self-understanding of his own mission, as far as the text stands, is deeply embedded in the Son of man sayings.

iv) Bultmann has dismissed the centrality of Christology in the Fourth Gospel in favour of the (theological) anthropology in which a person is seen in two categories: 'Man prior to the revelation of faith' and 'Man under faith'. In this scheme, the existential decision of an individual to believe Jesus and thus depend solely on God's grace becomes the core of soteriology. This means that Christology in John is moulded into, and thus becomes subordinate to, this soteriological scheme. On the contrary, the Johannine Christology seems to be at the core of the Gospel, in which ideas related to soteriology (12.24, 32; cf. 20–22, 35–36), discipleship (12.25–26), ecclesiology (12.36a) and others are embedded; not *vice versa*.

It can be argued that in John 12.20–36 the cosmic conflict between God and

the (hostile) world — which finds its most explicit language in the OT-Jewish apocalyptic literature — depicted throughout the entire Gospel in a law-suit motif, reaches its climax at the death of Jesus on the cross, which is depicted as the coming of the hour for the Son of man to be glorified (12.23). This is conceivable, because the Son of man's death on the cross is an integral part of revelation (1. 51; 3.13–14; cf. 6.53: death seems to be implied by eating the flesh and drinking the blood). That Jesus' ministry reaches in John 12.20ff its climax, at least the beginning of it, is indicated by Jesus' speaking of the coming of the hour for the glorification of the Son of man (12.23, 27; cf. 2.4; 7.(6), 30; 8.20), and that it coincides with his death is inferred from the frequency of the references to his death in the immediate context (11.47–53, 57; 12.7, 10, 24, 32–33).<sup>46</sup> The cross of the Son of man is associated with the combination of the two themes characteristic to the (apocalyptic) martyr-theodicy scene: the judgement of the world and expulsion of its ruler (presumably from the heavenly tribunal in which he acts as an accuser of the righteous sufferers) (12.31: cf. Luke 10.18; Rev 12.8), on the one hand, and the vindication of the (potential) martyrs as righteous sufferers (vv 25–26), on the other.<sup>47</sup> It is noteworthy that the Son of man goes through the vindication/resurrection from his righteous death as a forerunner for those who will follow him (v 26). The language that depicts the Son of man's death on the cross is very similar to that used for the Isaianic Suffering Servant, i. e. the combination of the verbs 'to lift up' and 'to glorify' as in Isa 52.13. This makes it likely that the idea of the atoning death of Jesus for the sake of others lies behind 12.24, 32, though it is not explicitly stated as such (cf. 1.29; 19.36 [Exod 12.46]; 10.11; 11.52). Furthermore, we must account for the Johannine irony in 12.34, in which the everlasting 'Christ' who should be conceived in terms of the Davidic kingly-Messiah (cf. 12.12–19) is identified with the Son of man. All this of course needs further elaboration to see more precisely the way in which unity is achieved in view of this christological diversity. At this point, however, it may suffice to point out that in John 12, especially in 12.20–36, the Evangelist seems heavily involved in a profound reflection on Jesus on the cross, which is the *locus* of salvation and judgement. The post-Easter point-of-view of the Evangelist enabled him to see the cross of Jesus in the light of his resurrection and ascension, which is viewed

as a scene of theodicy in the face of the suffering of the righteous. Thus it may be that, at least as far as John 12 is concerned, the Christology of the cross (and resurrection) constitutes a unifying factor for its christological diversity.

v) Finally, Bultmann's programme of *demythologization* of the myths in the NT for a hermeneutical purpose proves to be ruinous to the time perspective of the Fourth Gospel.<sup>48</sup> Bultmann has reduced the Johannine view of salvation history and eschatology into the timeless 'now' of existential event of decision for the sake of a hermeneutic, which centres on the idea that one is addressed directly by the *kerygma* (the proclamation of the word) 'here and now'. It is true that one should appreciate his attempt to convey the message of the Fourth Evangelist to the readers of 'here and now' to make them confront the saving activity of God in Jesus which leads to a crisis of existential decision. If we take into account the skepticism of the 'liberal school' about the historicity of Jesus of Nazareth, his effort to protect what he regards to be the 'kernel' of Christian faith is to be respected fully. But the means by which he tries to achieve this in terms of the existential dualism of decision at the expense of the time-perspective of salvation history/eschatology in the Gospel, though coherent in his programme, must be questioned.

Over against the programme of *demythologization*, we would propose an alternative one. As it is well known, the Fourth Gospel is full of symbolic language. The function of its symbolic language is to invite the reader to come into its symbolic world in which the reality is to be observed. Particularly, the symbolic world of apocalyptic in John 12.20-36 invites the reader to look at the otherwise distressful cross of Jesus in another, namely heavenly or transcendent, perspective.<sup>49</sup> In this perspective the cross of Jesus signifies the victory of the Son of man, who in the heavenly tribunal symbolises the believers (under persecution for the sake of the gospel), and the defeat of the ruler of this world who symbolises in that heavenly court the hostile world that accuses and persecutes the believers. This symbolic world of the Gospel would not necessarily conflict with our world view, as long as we do not hold a modern myth of a closed universe in which one can communicate with the transcendental reality only in an existentialistic manner. The symbolic world of John, it seems to us, is the one into which

we are invited to observe and live the history of salvation as participants of it, rather than the one which is to be abandoned in the light of a particular modern world view.

To summarise: Bultmann's resolution to the complexity of the Johannine Christology is to understand its diversity by posing a diversity of sources and to attribute its unity to the Evangelist's *demythologization* of the myths to harmonise with Bultmann's theory of existential *revelation* experience in Jesus. But this was done at the expense of other christological propositions and ideas inherent in the Gospel. Bultmann's almost exclusive emphasis that Jesus is the revelation of God remains without doubt of great significance, provided that the content and nature of the 'revelation' should be redefined in the OT-Jewish milieu so as to do justice to what Bultmann abandoned as superfluous, i. e. the other christological (and soteriological) ideas, especially the inseparable connection between the idea of revelation and the cross. This also means that a holistic reading of the text is needed with a view to accommodating both its christological diversity and unity without damaging both aspects. This approach seems to lead us to a profound Christology of the cross (and resurrection) as a core for the 'multiform unity' of the Johannine Christology.

Although loaded with the problematic results of the hypothetical source criticism and coloured with his theological presuppositions, Bultmann's contribution to the Johannine studies is valuable because of a number of insightful, phenomenal and incessant exegetical observations, though not pointed out extensively in this paper. This would be the result of his commitment to the exegetical maxim that '*the exegesis must expound the complete text*, and the critical analysis is the servant of this exposition',<sup>50</sup> though in Bultmann's case 'the complete text' meant the one he restored from what he regarded as a wrongly redacted text.

#### *Notes:*

1. M. Hengel, *The Johannine Question*, London: SCM, 1989, 104.
2. Philadelphia: Fortress.
3. We use the term 'literary criticism' in its broadest sense. Literary criticism developed for secular literature has been widely applied to the Fourth Gospel recently: formalism,

narratology, structuralism, reader response theory, rhetorical criticism, speech act theory, etc.

4. Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes*. 1941; ET by G. R. Beasley-Murray, et al. Oxford: Blackwell/Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971.
5. A lucid analysis of Bultmann's commentary is made by D. M. Smith Jr., *The Composition and Order: Bultmann's Literary Theory*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965. See also R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*. New York: Doubleday, 1966: 1. XXVIII–XXX; B. Lindars, *Behind the Fourth Gospel*. London: SPCK, 1971: 18–26; J. Ashton, *Understanding of the Fourth Gospel*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1991: 44–66.
6. Bultmann, *John*. More systematic treatment is found in his *Theology*, 2.3–92. His 'Die Bedeutung der neuerschlossenen mandäischcn und manichäischen Quellen für das Verständnis des Johannesevangeliums', *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 23 (1925) 100–146, has a comprehensive treatment of the *Offenbarungsreden Quelle* and its Mandaeen background with the *Odes of Solomon*, etc. Also see Bultmann, 'The History of the Religious Background of the Prologue to the Gospel of John'. *Eucharisterion: Festschrift für H. Gunkel II*, (Göttingen, 1932) 3–26. Trans. J. Ashton. *The Interpretation of John*. IRT 9. Ed. J. Ashton. London: SPCK, 1986. 18–35; 'Johannesevangelium', *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* 3. 840–850. The influence of Bultmann's work is discussed by Smith, 'The Sources of the Gospel of John: An Assessment of the Present State of the Problem', *New Testament Studies* 10 (1964) 336–351 (towards the middle of the 60's), and Ashton, *Understanding*, 67–111 (towards the end of the 80's), who aptly explains Bultmann's position along the lines of the history-of-religions school.
7. Bultmann, 'The History', 31–33; *Theology of the New Testament*. 2 Vols. London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951, 1955, 1.167.
8. Bultmann, 'Die Bedeutung', 145; *John*, 8. This view has been influential as is attested by W. G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1987, 247.
9. Smith, *The Composition and Order*, 3–15. R. T. Fortna, *The Gospel of Signs. A Reconstruction of the Narrative Source Underlying the Fourth Gospel*. SNTSMS 11. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970, 24–25, however, regards as important for Bultmann's analysis the contextual criteria and the *Gattungskritik* that finds the similarity of structural types of the miracle stories.
10. Bultmann, 'The History', 31; 'Die Bedeutung', 143; *John*, 17–18; *Theology*, 10–11.
11. Bultmann, 'Die Bedeutung', 104–139. With regard to the Prologue, Bultmann perceives that the Jewish wisdom tradition is crucial for the Logos-Emissary Christology and draws attention to the *Odes of Solomon*, *Sirach*, *Wisdom of Solomon*, *1 Enoch*, etc. But he dismisses the Prologue's affinities to the Jewish wisdom literature and instead employs the Gnostic Redeemer myth for the understanding of the 'Christology of the whole of *John's Gospel*' ('The History', 18–35).
12. Bultmann, *John*, 329, 344–358, 412–433. See also Smith, *The Composition and Order*, 23–44, 51–53. On the other hand, H. Becker, a Bultmann's student, assigns only 12:35–36,

- 44, 47a, 48a, 49 to the source called 'das Licht der Welt' (*the Offenbarungsreden*), and 12:31–33 to the source called 'der Weg, die Wahrheit und das Leben' (*Die Reden des Johannesevangeliums und der Stil der gnostischen Offenbarungsreden*. FRLANT 68. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956, 91–93, 132, 135).
13. Bultmann, *John*, 412–413.
14. The continuity of John 12:34 with 12:23–33 is well defended by Smith, *The Composition and Order*, 160–161.
15. Bultmann, 'Johannesevangelium', 845. Also his 'Die Bedeutung', 102: 'Jesus der Gesandte Gottes sei (z. B. 7:3, 23, 25), der Offenbarung bringt durch Worte und Taten'.
16. Bultmann, *John*, 108 n6, 113 n2; *Theology*, 2.42; Smith, *The Composition and Order*, 37–38. Bultmann also finds a trace of heathen legend ('the Dionysus legend') behind the *semeia* source of the Canna Miracle (*John*, 118–119).
17. J. Becker, 'Wunder und Christologie. Zum literarkritischen und christologischen Problem der Wunder im Johannesevangelium'. *New Testament Studies* 16 (1969/70) 130–148, approves this interpretation by Bultmann over against Käsemann's criticism on his teacher.
18. Bultmann, 'The Prologue', 32. Also *Theology*, 1.175. Bultmann admits his dependence on Bousset and R. Reitzenstein (*Die hellenistischen Mysterienreligionen* [3 1927]). For Bultmann's understanding of Gnostic myths and the *Offenbarungsreden* source see *Theology*, 1.164–183 and 2:10–14 respectively.
19. Bultmann, *Theology*, 21. Also 'Johannesevangelium', 848. For Bultmann the Evangelist abandons the cosmic dualism of Gnosticism with its negative predictions of God, and distinguishes ontology and ethics (*Theology*, 2.26ff, 67).
20. Bultmann, *John*, 9.
21. Behind this understanding, it would be clear, lies the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith. At the same time it is at this point where M. Heidegger's influence is strongly felt. See A. E. McGrath, *The Making of Modern German Christology. From the Enlightenment to Pannenberg*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1986, 137–138.
22. Bultmann, *John*, 414–416. He holds that the Evangelist's addition of 12:6 and the later addition of 12:8 (because of its absence in some MSS) were made for the purpose of subordinating the motif of helping the poor to the main point, the prophecy of Jesus' death.
23. Bultmann, *John*, 421; 'Die Bedeutung', 136. He finds the background of this *Offenbarungsrede* mostly in Left Ginza texts. Cf. Smith, *The Composition and Order*, 15–23.
24. Bultmann, *John*, 432.
25. Bultmann, *Theology*, 2.52–53.
26. Bultmann, *John*, 354–357; *Theology*, 2.79: 'to him [the Evangelist] eschatology as a time-perspective has dropped out because he has so radically transposed eschatological occurrence into the present'.
27. J. Jeremias, 'Johanneische Literarkritik', *TBL* 20 (1941) 33–46; E. Ruckstuhl, *Die liter-*

- arische Einheit des vierten Evangeliums. Der gegenwärtige Stand der einschlagigen Erforschung*, Freiburg: Paulus, 1951/NTOA 5 (1987), which in part developed the criticism of E. Schweizer, *Ego Eimi, Die religionsgeschichtliche Herkunft und theologische Bedeutung der johanneischen Bildreden, zugleich ein Beitrag zur Quellenfrage des vierten Evangeliums*, FRALNT 56. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965. Over against such a claim, Bultmann has suggested that the Evangelist was influenced by his source to such an extent that his own style was also coloured by the style of his source.
28. Fortna, *The Gospel of Signs*, 22–23, n4; Lindars, *Behind the Fourth Gospel*, 23–26.
29. Bultmann's *theios aner* Christology in the *Semeiaquelle* was succeeded by J. Becker, 'Wunder und Christologie', especially 140–141: 'Alle theologischen Wesenszüge der Wundergeschichten in der Quelle [Semeiaquelle] gehören in diese *theios aner* — Vorstellung des Hellenismus' (141). This view has been criticized by R. Nicol, *The Semeia in the Fourth Gospel. Tradition and Redaction*, SNovT 32. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972, 48–68; G. Richter, 'Zur sogenannten Semeia-Quelle des Johannesevangeliums'. *Studien zum Johannesevangelium*. BU 13. Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 1977. 281–287 (originally in *MThZ* 24 [1973] 95–114); O. Betz, 'Kann denn aus Nazareth etwas Gutes kommen?'. *Jesus der Messias Israels. Aufsätze zur biblischen Theologie*. Tübingen; J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1987, 387–397, esp. 396–397. Betz argues that John 1:32–34, 46, 49 should be read against the background of Isa 11:1–3, which is interpreted as a reference to the wisdom of the Messiah in 4Q *mess ar* [4QpIsa] 8–10; thus the milieu is OT-Jewish. For a criticism of Bultmann and Becker similar to Betz's, if not with totally the same results, see H. -J. Kuhn, *Christologie und Wunder. Untersuchungen zu Joh 1,35–51*. BU 18. Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 1988, esp. 389–426, 458–497, 553–555, who finds the Semeia Quelle in John 1:35–42, 44–50. For a well-argued rejection of the existence of a well-established *theios aner* concept in the first century Hellenistic Judaism (Josephus, Philo, and Artapanus), see C. R. Holladay, *Theios Aner in Hellenistic-Judaism: A Critique of the Use of This Category in New Testament Christology*. SBLDS 40. Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1977.
30. Citation is from Meeks, 'The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism'. *The Interpretation of John*, Ed. J. Ashton. IRT 9. London: SPCK, 1986, 142. For more extensive critique of Bultmann's 'Gnostischer Erlösermythus', see C. Colpe, *Die religionsgeschichtliche Schule. Darstellung und Kritik ihrer Bilde vom gnostischen Erlösermythus*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961, esp. 171–208. The weakness and unpopularity of Bultmann's theory on the Gnostic revelation source is attested by Brown, *John*, 1.LII–LVI; Schnackenburg, 'The Gnostic Myth of the Redeemer and the Johannine Christology'. *John*, 1. 543–557; Appold, *The Oneness Motif in the Fourth Gospel. Motif Analysis and Exegetical Probe into the Theology of John*, WUNT 2. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1976, 148–149; E. M. Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism. A Survey of the Proposed Evidence*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983, 30–34; Ashton, *Understanding*, 60–61.
31. Käsemann, *The Testament*, 6ff, 73, thought that the Gospel was originated in a 'conventicle

- with gnosticizing tendencies'. Also see Meeks, 'The Man from Heaven', 142–143, 164–165; D. M. Smith, *Johannine Christianity*, 27–28. A strong advocate of a Gnostic connection of John is L. Schottroff, *Der Glaubende und die feindliche Welt* (1970), who regards the Gospel as the first systematic presentation of Gnosticism.
32. See, for example, J. Fossum, 'The New *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*: The Quest for Jewish Christology'. *JBL 1991 Seminar Papers*. Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1991, 638–646.
  33. See Meeks, *The Prophet-King. Moses Tradition and the Johannine Christology*, SNovT 14, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967, 12–13.
  34. Hengel, *The 'Hellenization' of Judaea in the First Century after Christ*. London: SCM, 1989, 3–5.
  35. Several attempts have been made in this direction, without much convincing results. For example, P. Borgen, 'God's Agent in the Fourth Gospel'. *The Interpretation of John*, 67–78, comparing the *Merkabah* tradition in John, Philo, and a Nag Hammadi document, has contended that the Johannine descent-ascent motif shows close affinities to both the rabbinic *halakah* principles on agent and the *Merkabah* mysticism of Hellenistic Judaism, and that the Fourth Gospel is not dependent on the Gnostic myth but gives a clue to the Jewish background to it. B. Lindars, *John*, 520–521, on the other hand, thinks of the fusion of the descent of Wisdom and the ascent of the Son of man as the background of the descent-ascent motif. But there is no reference of 'ascent' regarding 'like-the Son of man' figure in Dan 7. Most recently, D. Burkett, *The Son of the Man in the Gospel of John*. JSNTSS 56. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991, has argued that behind the Johannine Son of man sayings there lies Prov 30.1–4 where there are a descent-ascent terminology, one of the few occasions in the Old Testament (cf. Gen 28.12; Isa 55.10–11), and a reference to the Son of 'the Man' called 'Ithiel'. His reference to Prov 30 is a welcome one, because of the importance of the theme of revelation associated with the descent-ascent motif, though Burkett fails to emphasize it. Prov. 30 may be a background for John 3.13, but that does not prove John's dependence on it in the other Son of man sayings. His view fails to make a proper attention to the apocalyptic ideas surrounding the Son of man in John 5.27; 12.23ff.
  36. Bultmann, *Theology*, 2.66.
  37. Bultmann, 'Die Bedeutung', 145.
  38. Ashton, *Understanding*, 63–64.
  39. Bultmann remarks, 'Theological propositions — even those of the New Testament — can never be the object of faith; can only be the explication of the understanding which is inherent in faith itself' (*Theology*, 2.237–238).
  40. Bultmann, *Theology*, 2.49. See Ashton, *Understanding*, 65–66.
  41. For a good evaluation of Bultmann's Christology, see McGrath, *Modern German Christology*, 127–160.
  42. Cf. C. M. Hedrick, 'The Tyranny of the Synoptic Jesus'. *The Historical Jesus and the Rejected Gospels*, *Semeia* 44. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988, 1–8; J. P. Meier, *A*

- Marginal Jew. Rethinking of the Historical Jesus. Vol. I. The Roots of the Problem and Person.* New York: Doubleday, 1987 (esp. 47); E. Bammel, 'Ex illa itaque die consilium fecerunt...' *Trial of Jesus. Cambridge Studies in Honour of C. F. D. Moule.* Ed. E. Bammel. SBT 13. London: SCM, 1970, 11–41.
43. Cf. T. A. Mohr, *Markus- und Johannespassion. Redaktions- und traditions-geschichte Untersuchung der markinischen und johanneischen Passionstradition.* AThNT 70. Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1982.
44. Dan 7; 1 En 90, 91; 1QM 1, 12, and 4 Macc 6.28f; 9.8; 16.25; 17.18–20; 18.10–24; etc. There is a close connection between the genre of apocalypse and the theodicy theme with regard to martyrs/righteous sufferers. It is also pointed out that in the vindication of the martyrs an allusion to Isa 53 is made with the effect of introducing the idea of vicarious death of a martyr for others.
45. This line of interpretation has been already suggested by M. Black, 'Jesus and the Son of Man'. *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 1 (1978) 4–18, and a few others. Now see the fine work on the Synoptic Son of man sayings by V. Hampel, *Menschensohn und historischer Jesus. Ein Rätselwort als Schlüssel zum messianischen Selbstverständnis Jesu.* Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirch-ener, 1990.
46. Bultmann is right with regard to John 12.7, but whether or not there is a reference to the death of Jesus in the Evangelist's citation of Zech 9.9 is not certain.
47. It is conceivable that judgement is a counterpart of eternal life or resurrection in the apocalyptic judgement-vindication scene. Cf. M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism. Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period.* Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974, 1.196–202.
48. See especially A. C. Thieselton, *The Two Horizons. New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980.
49. For the function of the apocalyptic language, see J. J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination. An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity.* New York: Crossroad, 1987, 214–215.
50. Bultmann, *John*, 17.

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