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PART I

JOHANNINE CHRISTOLOGY AND  
THE ANTE-NICENE CHURCH

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## CHAPTER I

## THE CHRISTOLOGY OF ST JOHN

At the turn of this century, F. C. Conybeare, in a review of Alfred Loisy's *Le quatrième évangile*, wrote: 'If Athanasius had not had the Fourth Gospel to draw texts from, Arius would never have been confuted.'<sup>1</sup> That is however only part of the truth, for it would also be true to say that if Arius had not had the Fourth Gospel to draw texts from, he would not have needed confuting. Without in any way diminishing the importance of other biblical writings in the development of the church's doctrine, it is St John's Gospel—and the First Epistle of St John—that brings into sharpest focus the problems which created doctrinal controversy in the early church and which indeed still perplex the church today.

Recent study has made it impossible to draw a hard and fast distinction between the Synoptic gospels as basically historical accounts of the life of Jesus and the Fourth Gospel as basically a theological interpretation of the significance of Jesus, a distinction which appears to have originated as early as the end of the second century when Clement of Alexandria wrote: 'But last of all John, perceiving that the external facts (τὰ σωματικά) had been made plain in the gospel, composed a spiritual (πνευματικόν) gospel.'<sup>2</sup>

The distinction was revived by Baur and the Tübingen school during the first half of the nineteenth century,<sup>3</sup> and became axiomatic for nineteenth-century study of the gospels. In *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, A. Schweitzer scarcely mentions the Fourth Gospel. In 1904 A. von Harnack could say dogmatically: 'The Fourth Gospel cannot be used as a historical source. . . (it) can hardly at any point be taken into account as a source for the history of Jesus.'<sup>4</sup> Indeed, almost until the present this radical distinction has been a basic presupposition

<sup>1</sup> *HJ*, VII (1903), 620.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* VI, 14, 7.

<sup>3</sup> A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, London, 1911, pp. 139 f.

<sup>4</sup> *What is Christianity?*, London, 1904, p. 13.

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of what J. A. T. Robinson has called 'critical orthodoxy',<sup>1</sup> and still appears to be a basic presupposition of the post-Bultmannian scholars engaged in 'the new quest of the historical Jesus'.<sup>2</sup> Recent form- and redaction-criticism of the Synoptic gospels has demonstrated that they are themselves theological interpretations of the Christ-event,<sup>3</sup> while on the other hand, in British scholarship at least, increasing emphasis is being placed on the historical element in St John's Gospel.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless the closing of the gap between the Synoptics and St John must not be allowed to obscure the fact that however close they may be brought to each other, striking differences will always remain: in St John's Gospel the work of theological reflection and interpretation has been carried to a greater depth than in the Synoptics, or indeed in any other New Testament writing.<sup>5</sup>

Recently John Knox has shown<sup>6</sup> that within the New Testament three distinct types of christology can be seen, sometimes standing in isolation, often standing side by side in the writings

<sup>1</sup> 'The New Look on the Fourth Gospel', *SE*, 1 (1959), 338–50, reprinted in *Twelve New Testament Studies*, London, 1962, pp. 94–106.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. R. E. Brown, 'After Bultmann, What?', *CBQ*, xxvi (1964), 1–30; especially pp. 28 ff.: 'A third reason for the meagre results of the new quest is the failure to take the Fourth Gospel seriously. The post-Bultmannians take for granted that in John we have the Kerygma so superimposed upon Jesus that very little of what Jesus says or does in John can be taken as historical. Bornkamm (*Jesus of Nazareth*, London, 1960, p. 14) says flatly that "John is to such a degree the product of theological reflection that it can be treated only as a secondary source".'

<sup>3</sup> E.g. R. H. Lightfoot, *The Gospel Message of St Mark*, Oxford, 1950; G. Bornkamm, G. Barth and H. J. Held, *Tradition and Interpretation in St Matthew*, London, 1963; H. Conzelmann, *The Theology of St Luke*, London, 1960.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. A. J. B. Higgins, *The Historicity of the Fourth Gospel*, London, 1960; T. W. Manson, *Studies in the Gospels and Epistles*, Manchester, 1962, ch. 6; C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition and the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge, 1963. In America, Raymond E. Brown is making a valuable contribution to the study of the historical element in St John; cf. his 'The Problem of Historicity in John', *CBQ*, xxiv (1962), 1–14 (= *New Testament Essays*, London, 1965, ch. 9).

<sup>5</sup> This difference is dealt with in a remarkable way by Franz Mussner, *The Historical Jesus in the Gospel of St John*, London, 1967. One way in which he states the difference is: 'The Johannine Christ speaks differently from the Christ of the synoptics; he speaks John's language' (p. 7).

<sup>6</sup> *The Humanity and Divinity of Christ*, Cambridge, 1967. Cf. also R. E. Brown, 'How much did Jesus know?', *CBQ*, xxxix (1967), 26.

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of the same author and, indeed, intertwined with each other, even though ultimately they may be irreconcilable. The first type, for which evidence may be found in the Petrine speeches in Acts (e.g. ii. 22; iii. 13, 19 ff.; v. 31; x. 38 f.), in the Synoptic accounts of the baptism of Jesus (especially in the Western variant reading of Luke iii. 22), and in Paul's letters (e.g. Rom. i. 4), may be called 'adoptionism', although care must be taken not to read into these passages the developed adoptionist christologies of the dynamic monarchians<sup>1</sup> and of Paul of Samosata.<sup>2</sup> The second type, most clearly discernible in Paul and Hebrews, ascribes pre-existence to Christ and results in a 'kenotic' view of his person during his historical existence, the view that the pre-existent divine being 'emptied himself' (ἐκένωσεν, Phil. ii. 7) in order to become man.<sup>3</sup> The third type of christology, which Knox calls 'incarnationism', is that expressed most explicitly in the Gospel and First Letter of St John, the view that God became man in Jesus, in whose earthly existence the divinity is fully present in, with and under the humanity. Knox points out that 'incarnationism' is always in danger of passing over into 'docetism' in which the divinity is so strongly emphasised that the humanity is evaporated into mere appearance or fantasy. Yet in both Gospel and Letter, St John<sup>4</sup> opposes docetism which was already being suggested as a christology in the church or churches for which he wrote. Aware of the dangers of docetism, he strives to hold in balance the divinity and humanity of Jesus.

St John's 'incarnationism' raises, in a way that 'adoptionism' and 'kenoticism' do not, the problems of christology. It may be debated whether it was necessary for the church to go beyond either of the latter to the deeper insight of 'incarnationism', but the fact quite simply is that in the Johannine writings the church did penetrate to this christological depth, and in doing so found itself forced, during the next four centuries, to explicate the double problem posed by the Johannine christology:

<sup>1</sup> See below, pp. 51 ff.<sup>2</sup> See below, pp. 113 ff.<sup>3</sup> There is wide agreement that this idea is pre-Pauline, finding its most explicit expression in the hymn, Phil. ii. 6-11. Cf. R. P. Martin, *Carmen Christi*, Cambridge, 1967, for the most recent exhaustive study of this hymn.<sup>4</sup> The question of identity of authorship for Gospel and Epistle is still an open one. If they are not from the same hand, they are certainly from the same school.

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- (i) the relationship between the pre-existent Logos–Son and the godhead, and
- (ii) the relationship between the divine and the human in Jesus Christ.

‘Church teaching had to develop trinitarian and christological dogma side by side if it was to maintain the divine Sonship of Christ in any true sense.’<sup>1</sup>

A. THE PROLOGUE AND THE LOGOS-CONCEPT<sup>2</sup>

The importance of the Logos-concept, which St John uses in the Prologue of his Gospel (i. 1–18), for later christological formulation can hardly be over-estimated, yet, as G. L. Prestige<sup>3</sup> says, ‘the doctrine of the Logos, great as was its importance for theology, harboured deadly perils in its bosom’. What these perils were will become clear in the course of this study; at this stage it must be asked whether, in fact, St John had ‘a doctrine of the Logos’, what content the Logos-concept had for him and why he chose it as a means of introducing his readers to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Commentators are unanimous in emphasising that the concept of the Logos, or rather a variety of concepts of Logos, was current in the Graeco-Roman world of the first century A.D. Therefore it would make a suitable point of contact for the evangelist as he sought to commend his gospel. That he uses it primarily—we may almost say solely—as a point of contact should be evident from the fact that, having used the concept in the Prologue, he does not use it again, and that in his closing words he says that the purpose of his Gospel is ‘that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name’ (xx. 31).<sup>4</sup> The regulative christological concept of the Gospel is not *Logos*, but *the Christ*,

<sup>1</sup> A. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, London, 1965, p. 93.

<sup>2</sup> The amount of literature on the Prologue and Logos-concept is vast. For a good select bibliography see R. E. Brown, *The Gospel according to St John*, New York, 1966, I, appendix II. Cf. also Arndt–Gingrich, *Lexicon*, λόγος.

<sup>3</sup> *God in Patristic Thought*, London, 1952, p. 129.

<sup>4</sup> It is generally agreed that chap. 21 is an epilogue added by the final redactor of the Gospel. Cf. R. E. Brown, *The Gospel according to St John*, I, xxxvi.

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*the Son of God*. 'The historical redemptive role of the incarnate Son has a full-bodied vitality which the Logos-concept is hardly fitted to express, and the fact that the author drops the term before the Prologue is concluded makes it clear that it is not capable of expressing adequately what he wants to say about Jesus.'<sup>1</sup>

The prevalence of a variety of Logos-concepts in the first-century Hellenistic world, together with the variety of interpretations given to the concept by the gnostics and the early Fathers, makes it important to investigate the meaning which the term had for St John himself, who as far as we know was the first to apply it as a title to Jesus Christ. In Johannine research in the past century the roots of St John's Logos-concept have been found in every type of Logos-speculation that was current in the first Christian centuries and even in later centuries.<sup>2</sup> For a long time it was widely assumed that the Fourth Gospel was the most 'hellenistic' writing in the New Testament, with little or no contact with the Palestine in which the Gospel events took place.<sup>3</sup> Recently, mainly due to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and their remarkable parallels with the Fourth Gospel, increasing emphasis has been placed on the Palestinian-Jewish milieu of Johannine thought and the Palestinian-Jewish tradition on which the Gospel rests.<sup>4</sup> If Johannine thought has

<sup>1</sup> F. V. Filson, 'The Gospel of Life', in *Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation* (ed. W. Klassen and G. F. Snyder), London, 1962, pp. 111 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. P. H. Menoud, *L'évangile de Jean d'après recherches récentes*, Neuchâtel and Paris, 1947; W. F. Howard, *The Fourth Gospel in Recent Criticism* (4th edn. revised by C. K. Barrett), London, 1955.

<sup>3</sup> Another of 'the presuppositions of critical orthodoxy' which J. A. T. Robinson, 'The New Look on the Fourth Gospel', calls in question.

<sup>4</sup> It would not be possible to give a complete bibliography on this point. The following is merely a representative sample: R. E. Brown, *The Gospel according to St John*, 1, lix ff.; 'The Qumran Scrolls and the Johannine Gospels and Epistles', *CBQ*, xvii (1955), 559 ff., reprinted in K. Stendahl (ed.), *The Scrolls and the New Testament*, New York, 1957, pp. 183 ff.; 'Second Thoughts: the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament', *ExpT*, lxxviii (1966-7), 21 ff.; K. G. Kuhn, 'Johannesevangelium und Qumrantexte', in *Neotestamentica et Patristica* (Supplement to *NovT*, vi), pp. 111 ff.; 'Die in Palästina gefundenen hebräischen Texte und das N.T.', *ZTK*, xlvii (1950), 192 ff.; L. Mowry, 'The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Background for the Gospel of John', *BA*, xvii (1954), 78 ff.; W. H. Brownlee, 'A Comparison of the Covenanters of the D.S.S. with pre-Christian Jewish Sects', *BA*, xiii (1950), 71 ff.; F. M. Braun, 'L'arrière-fond judaïque du quatrième

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its roots in Palestinian soil and rests on a Palestinian-Jewish tradition which originated before the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70,<sup>1</sup> it would appear reasonable that the first place to look for the content of St John's Logos-concept would be this same milieu.

A considerable number of scholars have emphasised that 'the roots of the doctrine are in the Old Testament and that its main stem is the *d'bhār Yahweh*, the creative and revealing Word of God, by which the heavens and the earth were made and the prophets inspired'.<sup>2</sup> Pedersen emphasised that the Hebraic *dabhar*-concept is dynamic rather than static,<sup>3</sup> and his insight has been developed by Boman,<sup>4</sup> Macnicol,<sup>5</sup> and Knight<sup>6</sup> amongst others. Macnicol says that in Hebrew thought 'a true word is both speech and action';<sup>7</sup> the Word of God 'is God Himself in action', an effective word 'which is powerful in proportion as this word is the Word of God Himself, uttered by the Almighty, and therefore certain to accomplish that which He pleases'.<sup>8</sup>

évangile et la Communauté d'Alliance', *RB*, LXI (1955), 5 ff.; *Jean le théologien*, Paris, 1959, I, 226 ff.; Millar Burrows, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, London, 1955, pp. 338 ff.; *More Light on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, London, 1958, pp. 123 ff.; M. Black, 'Theological Conceptions in the Dead Sea Scrolls', *SEA*, xvii-xix (1953-4), 80 ff.; W. Grossouw, 'The Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament: a Preliminary Survey', *StC*, xxvi (1951), 289 ff.; xxvii (1952), 1 ff.; W. F. Albright, 'Recent Discoveries in Palestine and the Gospel of John', in *The Background of the N.T. and its Eschatology* (ed. W. D. Davies and D. Daube), Cambridge, 1956, pp. 153 ff.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. J. A. T. Robinson, 'New Look'; R. D. Potter, 'Topography and Archaeology in the Fourth Gospel', *SE*, I (1959), 329 ff.; W. F. Albright, 'Recent Discoveries'; A. M. Hunter, 'Recent Trends in Johannine Studies', *ExpT*, LXXI (1959-60), 164 ff.; C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition*.

<sup>2</sup> T. W. Manson, *Studies in the Gospels and Epistles*, p. 118; cf. E. Stauffer, *New Testament Theology*, London, 1955, pp. 55 ff.

<sup>3</sup> J. Pedersen, *Israel, its Life and Culture*, I-II, Oxford, 1926.

<sup>4</sup> *Hebrew Thought compared with Greek*, London, 1960, pp. 58 ff.

<sup>5</sup> 'Word and Deed in the N.T.', *SJT*, v (1952), 237 f.

<sup>6</sup> *A Biblical Approach to the Doctrine of the Trinity* (*SJT* Occasional Paper 1), Edinburgh, 1953; *From Moses to Paul*, London, 1949.

<sup>7</sup> 'Word and Deed', p. 240.

<sup>8</sup> P. 247. Cf. Boman, p. 67. James Barr (*The Semantics of Biblical Language*, Oxford, 1961, pp. 129 ff.) criticises Pedersen and Macnicol for their treatment of the semantics of *dabhar*. This criticism does not appear to apply to Macnicol's study of *d'bhār Yahweh*, which appears to be valid even if his treatment of *dabhar* taken by itself is open to criticism.

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Grillmeier<sup>1</sup> and Dodd,<sup>2</sup> as well as others before them,<sup>3</sup> have correctly pointed out that along with this Old Testament idea of ‘the Word of Yahweh’, another Old Testament concept closely related to it must be taken into account—the concept of Wisdom (חכמה—σοφία)—even though ‘Wisdom’ is never directly said to be ‘the Word of Yahweh’.<sup>4</sup>

The Wisdom of the Old Testament and the Logos of St John have many features in common. Both exist from the beginning (Prov. viii. 22; Eccclus. xxiv; John i. 1; cf. Gen. i. 1),<sup>5</sup> and dwell with God (Eccclus. xxiv. 4 LXX; Prov. viii. 23–5, 30). Common to both is their work in the world, though this is emphasised more strongly in Proverbs and Ecclesiasticus than, for example, in John i. 3, 10. Wisdom and Logos come to men (Eccclus. xxiv. 7–22 LXX; Prov. viii. 31) and ‘tabernacle’ with them (Eccclus. xxiv. 8 LXX—John i. 14). So strong is the similarity between the Johannine Prologue and Proverbs viii and Ecclesiasticus xxiv that we can speak of a literary dependence.<sup>6</sup>

Grillmeier suggests that St John avoided using the word ‘Wisdom’ on purpose because in both its Greek and Hebrew forms (σοφία—חכמה) it is feminine, and as such would lend itself to gnostic speculation, although there is no evidence that by the end of the first century (the latest possible date for the composition of the Gospel) proto-gnostic speculation had begun to elaborate the system of male–female syzygies which were to be a prominent feature of the more sophisticated gnostic systems which Irenaeus, Hippolytus and Tertullian were to attack a century later.

Some attempt has been made to link the Johannine Logos-concept with the Rabbinic concept of *memra* (מימרא),<sup>7</sup> which

<sup>1</sup> *Christ in Christian Tradition*, pp. 30 f.

<sup>2</sup> *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge, 1953, pp. 273 ff.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. J. Rendell Harris, *The Origin of the Prologue to St John's Gospel*, Cambridge, 1917. Cf. also P. Bonnard, *La Sagesse en Personne, annoncée et venue: Jésus-Christ*, Paris, 1966, pp. 123 ff.

<sup>4</sup> However, in Eccclus. xxiv. 3 Wisdom says, ‘From the mouth of the Most High I came forth’.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Rashi's Commentary on the O.T.* (ed. A. M. Silbermann, London, 1946) at Genesis i. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Grillmeier, pp. 30 f.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum N.T. aus Talmud und Midrasch*, Munich, 1924, II, 302–33; C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St John*, London, 1955, p. 128; R. E. Brown, *The Gospel according to St John*, I, pp. 523 f.

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was used as a reverential periphrasis for the name of God. While it must not be entirely discounted as an illuminating parallel in Jewish thought, the lack of evidence for its use in Judaism contemporary with St John's Gospel makes any argument for dependence of St John upon it exceedingly tenuous.

Passing reference has already been made to the close parallels in terminology and thought-forms between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Johannine writings; these parallels have led many scholars to see in Essene Judaism the 'genuine old Jewish milieu'<sup>1</sup> and 'ideological atmosphere'<sup>2</sup> of Johannine thought. Of particular interest for our present purpose is the remarkable parallel between John i. 3 and *The Manual of Discipline* xi. 11, a passage which is echoed elsewhere in the *Manual* and in the *Hymns of Thanksgiving*:<sup>3</sup>

'All things come to pass by his (God's) knowledge;  
He establishes all things by his design  
and without him nothing is done.'<sup>4</sup>

Brownlee declares this to be 'an approach to the doctrine of the Logos';<sup>5</sup> Cullmann says that here 'the divine thought appears as mediator of creation';<sup>6</sup> while Reicke says that 'what the Qumran text calls "the knowledge" or "the thought" of God is actually his creative intellect or very much the same as what the Fourth Gospel calls the Logos of God'.<sup>7</sup> The parallel is too close to be accidental, and if it is legitimate to speak, as Grillmeier does,<sup>8</sup> of 'a literary dependence' of the Prologue on Prov. viii and Eccclus. xxiv, there appears to be even more justification for speaking of a literary dependence of John i. 3 on this hymn which forms the concluding section of *The Manual*

<sup>1</sup> Grossouw, 'D.S.S. and N.T.', p. 289 (see p. 7, n. 4 above).

<sup>2</sup> O. Cullmann, 'The Significance of the Qumran Texts for Research into the Beginnings of Christianity', *JBL*, LXXIV (1955), 216, reprinted in K. Stendahl (ed.), *The Scrolls and the N.T.*, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> *Manual* iii. 15; xi. 17 f.; *Hymns* i; x; xiv. 27.

<sup>4</sup> G. Vermes' translation in *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, London, 1962, p. 93. It should be noted that the context of this passage and of all the echoes of it is not cosmological but ethical; cf. my article 'Cosmology and the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel', *VC*, XII (1958), 147-53.

<sup>5</sup> 'Comparison of the Covenanters of the Dead Sea Scrolls', pp. 71 ff. (p. 7, n. 4 above).

<sup>6</sup> 'Significance of the Qumran Texts', p. 216.

<sup>7</sup> 'Traces of Gnosticism in the D.S.S.?', *NTS*, I (1954-5), 140.

<sup>8</sup> *Christ in Christian Tradition*, pp. 30 f.; cf. p. 9, n. 6 above.

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*of Discipline.* Furthermore, if, as Grillmeier suggests,<sup>1</sup> St John intentionally avoided using the Greek word σοφία (Wisdom), so also it is possible that he intentionally avoided the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew נֵדָבָה (γνώσις—knowledge) because it was already being used in gnostic circles. That this avoidance is intentional is made almost certain by the fact that while St John uses the verb γινώσκειν more frequently than any other New Testament writer, he never uses the noun γνώσις.

In any investigation of the background and roots of St John's Logos-concept, the possible influence of 'New Testament formulas and ideas which had taken shape before him'<sup>2</sup> must not be overlooked. Elsewhere in the New Testament, particularly in Acts and the Pauline letters, λόγος frequently bears the meaning 'message', i.e. the message of the Gospel (Acts viii. 25; I Thess. i. 6 and elsewhere).<sup>3</sup> For St John the central content of the message is Jesus Christ himself; he, himself, is *the message*, the message made flesh. It is possible to see in the prologue to the First Letter of John an intermediate stage between this extra-Johannine usage of λόγος and the Johannine designation of Christ himself as the λόγος; I John i. 1: τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς —'the word of life' which 'we have looked on... and touched' (i. 1); it 'has been made visible' and 'we have seen it' (i. 2). In i. 5 this λόγος τῆς ζωῆς is equated with ἡ ἀγγελία (= 'message').

None of these concepts—Word, Wisdom, Knowledge—in its pre-Johannine usage has been hypostasised or personalised, although in the Wisdom Literature Wisdom is frequently personified (Prov. viii; Eccclus. xxiv), as also is Logos in the Wisdom of Solomon (xviii. 15).<sup>4</sup> C. H. Dodd attempts to 'account for the whole of the doctrine of the Prologue',<sup>5</sup> arguing that it is necessary to look beyond the concepts of the Word of Yahweh and of Wisdom to the Logos-concept found in the syncretistic Jewish philosophy of Philo of Alexandria.

<sup>1</sup> P. 31.

<sup>2</sup> Grillmeier, p. 31. He cites Paul's description of Christ as 'the wisdom of God' (I Cor. i. 24), as 'the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation' (Col. i. 15).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Brown, *Gospel according to St John*, I, appendix II.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. R. E. Murphy, 'Assumptions and Problems in O.T. Wisdom Research', *CBQ* xxix (1967), 109 ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, p. 273.