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Literary Form in the Fourth Gospel

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It is over fifty years ago now since Matthew Arnold wrote about the Fourth Gospel in these words: "It may be said with certainty that a literary artist capable of inventing the most striking sayings of Jesus to Nicodemus or to the woman of Samaria would have made his composition as a whole more flawless, more artistically perfect than the Fourth Gospel actually is. Judged from an artist's point of view, it has blots and awkwardnesses which a master of imaginative invention would never have suffered his work to exhibit."¹ And elsewhere he observes that the narrative of the gospel "might well be thought but a matter of infinitely little care and attention..., a mere slight framework, in which to set the doctrine and discourses of Jesus,"² Much water has flowed under the bridge since Arnold's day; yet it cannot be said that the difficulties of the literary composition of the Fourth Gospel have been resolved. J. Estlin Carpenter³ confesses that he has no solution of the mystery of its composition, and Percy Gardner⁴ ends his chapter on the gospel as biography by declaring the gospel a tangled skein. On the other hand, F. R. Montgomery Hitchcock devotes one chapter in his book, *A Fresh Study of the Fourth Gospel* (1911) to the

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dramatic development of the gospel and another to its artistic structure.⁵ The climax of the drama is approached by scenes of rising interest; there is development of plot, character, and purpose.⁶ E. F. Scott is also impressed by the numerous marks of a deliberate artistic plan; the gospel unfolds itself, he says, "with something of the ordered majesty of a Greek tragedy."⁷ And Lord Charnwood can even go so far as to declare the gospel "in a very high degree a compact and well-ordered whole, of which every part falls in with a design thought out beforehand"⁸ while Kenneth Saunders compares the structure of the gospel to that of the early Christian basilica.⁹

But the formal literary manner of the writer of the Fourth Gospel is even more apparent in his lesser units. Rendel Harris,¹⁰ Loisy,¹¹ Burney,¹² Bacon,¹³ and a score of others have commented

¹ Quoted by James Moffatt, *Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament*, 1923, p. 563, Note.

² *God and the Bible*, Macmillan, 1883, p. 231.

³ *The Johannine Writings*, 1927, p. 192. See p. 225f. where he proposes his theory of communal authorship.

⁴ *The Ephesian Gospel*, 1916, p.122.

⁵ Chapters V and VI, pp. 102-142.

⁶ Hitchcock, *A Fresh Study of the Fourth Gospel*, p.102.

⁷ *The Fourth Gospel*, 2. ed., 1908, p. 16. Compare with this the remarks of F. R. Montgomery Hitchcock, "The Dramatic Development of the Fourth Gospel," *Expositor*, Series 7, vol. IV, 1907, pp. 266-279.

⁸ *According to Saint John*, 1926, p. 62.

⁹ *The Gospel for Asia*, 1928, p.101f.

¹⁰ *The Origin of the Prologue to St. John's Gospel*, 1917.

¹¹ *Le quatrième évangile*, 1921. The original form of the Prologue was "une sorte d'ode au Verbe incarné, logiquement construite, exactement rythmée" p. 46.

¹² *The Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel*, 1922.

upon the structure of the Prologue. Both as a unit in itself and as a preface to the gospel as a whole, it illustrates the literary quality and form of the gospel. Many passages easily resolve themselves into the acts and scenes of a drama with astonishingly little change of text.¹⁴ The stereotyped form of Fourth Gospel controversy has been frequently observed. Lothar Schmid has demonstrated the feeling for form in the conversation with the Samaritan woman.¹⁵ Hans Win-

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disch, in his contribution to the Gunkel *Festschrift*,¹⁶ discerns a literary plan in the gospel, but the plan embodies a great variety of literary materials. Yet the same definite structure is to be observed within each pericope or witness discourse or detailed dramatic narrative as the case may be. He presents the dramatic interest of the writer by dialogue, stage directions, and division into acts and scenes.

There are few characteristics that are so apparent as the literary, yet it is important to know which characteristics are significant. The value of any literary undertaking will depend largely upon whether the right questions are raised or not. How does the writer begin and end his literary units? How does he develop his theme? How does he articulate his materials? Is there unusual word order? What is the relation of words, phrases, and clauses to each other, and to the whole? We shall naturally be sensitive to those essentials of composition which we were taught to observe in our preparatory school days: unity, coherence, emphasis, and proportion. It is a primary canon of ours that form and content are intimately interrelated. And in the case of the Fourth Gospel, where the dramatic element obtrudes itself so obviously, one will analyze his materials according to setting, inciting impulse, antagonistic forces, presence of obstacles, and the resolution of obstacles and conflicts. Analysis there must be, minute and painstaking, but the chief end should be the perception of the literary unity in which one gains a sense of form, a central purpose, and, if possible, the occasion which inspired the narrative. The more obvious are the signs of literary composition and art, the more important do such criteria become.

The passage selected for our study is the group of Baptist narratives immediately following the Prologue: first, because they begin the gospel proper, and secondly, because attention is usually directed to the longer narratives where the mode of composition is more apparent. The following analysis helps to visualize the structure:

John 1 19-28

A. (19) *And this is the witness of John* (καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ μαρτυρία τοῦ Ἰωάννου) when the Jews sent (ἀπέστειλαν) unto him from Jerusalem priests and Levites to ask him, *Who art thou?* (σὺ τίς εἶ;)

¹³ "Punctuation, Translation, Interpretation," *Journal of Religion*, 1924, pp. 243-260.

¹⁴ See, e.g., F. R. Montgomery Hitchcock, *A Fresh Study of the Fourth Gospel*, Chap. VI; J. M. Thompson, "An Experiment in Translation," *Expositor*, Series 8, vol. XVI, 1918, pp. 117-122.

¹⁵ "Die Komposition der Samaria-Szene," *ZNTW*, 1929, vol. 28, pp. 148 to 158.

¹⁶ Der johanneische Erzählungsstil, *Eucharisterion*, Part II, pp. 174-213.

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a. (20) And he confessed and denied not, and he confessed: "*I am not the Christ.*"

(21) And they asked him, "What then? Art thou Elijah?"

And he said, "*I am not.*"

"Art thou the prophet?"

And he answered: "*No.*"

b. (22) They said therefore unto him "*Who art thou (τίς εἶ)* that we may give answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself?"

Conclusion: (23) "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness,
Make straight the way of the Lord,
as said Isaiah the prophet."

(24) And they had been sent (ἀπεσταλμένοι) of the Pharisees (cf. 19).

B. (25) And they asked him (cf. 19), and said unto him, "why then baptizest thou, if thou art not the Christ, neither Elijah, neither the prophet?"

Conclusion: (26) "I baptize in water. In the midst of you standeth *one whom ye know not* (ὃν ὑμεῖς οὐκ οἶδατε), (27) even he that cometh after me, the latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to unloosen."

(28) These things were done in Bethany beyond the Jordan where John was baptizing.

The gospel proper begins with a demonstrative formula: "And this is the witness of John."¹⁷ It serves as a title for the four following narratives, for it is John's witness that dominates the whole. Such formulae abound throughout the gospel.¹⁸ John's is preeminently a demonstrative gospel. It seeks to prove and convince (cf. 20³⁰⁻³¹). It is centered about the conception of μαρτυρία. The controversies embody contemporary polemic and deal much with testimony. There are seven great self-asseverations of Jesus, all of them with the emphasis upon ἐγώ. The almost invariable result of Jesus' work is to inspire belief. There are frequent side-comments by the writer in order to indicate the true sense and correct interpretation of a word or statement.

The key to the narrative lies in the words addressed to John, "Who art thou?" This must be answered before the more central

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question "Who is Jesus?" can be faced.¹⁹ The figure of the Baptist forms an obstacle which it is the purpose of this section to remove. After the threefold denial, the question is raised again, this

¹⁷ Observe the relation of these words to vv. 6-8, 15 of the Prologue.

¹⁸ Note, for example, 1^{15, 30, 33, 34}; 2¹¹; 3^{8d, 16, 19}; 4^{19, 29, 42, 54}; 6^{39, 40, 50, 58}; 7^{40, 41, 46}; 14²⁵; 15^{11, 12, 17}; 16^{1, 4a, 4b, 25, 33}; 17^{1, 3, 13}; 18¹; etc.

¹⁹ This is the question which the Fourth Gospel seeks to answer. Cf. e.g. 4^{10a}; 8²⁵, etc.

time more urgently and emphatically. The question is repeated, it is paraphrased, and the reason for the request is given. Such repetitions are numerous, but they are usually motivated.²⁰ The effect is dramatic: "Who is he then, this leader with a tremendous following, if he is not the Messiah so many think him to be?" The answer is an accommodation to Synoptic tradition, but the notable difference illustrates the literary quality of John. In the Synoptic gospels the quotation is given as such from Isaiah. In John it is put into the mouth of the Baptist himself and in the first person. The Synoptists give the quotation as part of a straightforward account. The emphasis in Mark and Luke is upon the coming of John; in Matthew, to be sure, the Baptist is directly equated with the voice. In the Fourth Gospel not only the setting and form are dramatic; the emphasis seems to have shifted from "making the paths straight to "the voice crying in the wilderness."²¹ **B** (vv. 22-23) also states its question directly, "Why do you baptize then?" That this was another question in contemporary polemic we need have no doubt. And the answer to the question, evasive as it may seem, is "I baptize in water" without any reference to the greater baptism that is to follow.

The analysis has made clear the form of the pericope. It is set in a very clearly-marked framework with an introductory demonstrative formula as a possible title for all four sections, an introduction to each division, and a conclusion. There are two primary divisions, **A** (19-24) and **B** (25-28). Each has its own important question stated at the beginning, trebly important when read in the light of its historical context, and each its significant answer. Within each division we observe the same sense for form. In **A** (19-24)

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there is the threefold denial, each time with telling and increasing brevity²² and the repetition of the question "Who art thou" just before the dramatic answer. The concluding sentence in the section serves more to separate the two sections than to unite them. That the author conceives them as part of the same section, however, is clear from the contents of **B** (25-28), from the chronological phrases at the beginning of the following section, and from the similar character of many Johannine literary units.²³ The question in **B** (25-28) recapitulates the substance of **A** (19-24) but presses the question further. The answer is most dramatic, and gains in significance when one compares it with the Synoptic parallels. There the statement "I baptize in water" is everywhere paralleled by "he shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit." Here the expected contrast is left incomplete, and in disagreement with the Synoptists John refers to the one whom ye know not who is soon to come and is even now standing in their midst (μέσος ὑμῶν στήκει). This device of dramatic anticipation is not uncommon in the Fourth Gospel. The reply creates an atmosphere of suspense and thus prepares the way for what is to follow. Its vagueness lends a feeling of mystery. We are now face to face with the gospel's one question: WHO IS HE? Like the theme of a symphony, it recurs again and again with infinite variations: now quiet and pastoral, now mystic and passionate, now grand and sublime, now warm and intimate. After the reply the

²⁰ The explanation of Johannine repetitions is both literary and psychological. For opposite view, see Stange, *Die Eigenart der johanneischen Produktion*, Dresden, 1915.

²¹ Thus enshrouding John in mystery and indefiniteness, which are gradually dispelled in the succeeding sentences not by emergence of a clear figure but by his complete disappearance.

²² Cf. the similar style of 9₈₋₉.

²³ Windisch makes **B** (vv. 25-28) a separate *Gesprächfolge*.

second episode is closed, but the writer completes his framework by adding a characteristic stereotyped comment.

Two or three further stylistic elements may be noted. First of all, the solemnity of v. 20. This solemn pronouncement "he confessed and denied not, but confessed"²⁴ at the beginning of the gospel attempts to express the writer's conviction of the significance

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of what he is about to testify. Again the section is for the most part in direct discourse. Indeed, so dramatic is the whole that one should have no difficulty in dramatizing it.²⁵ The plot begins in *medias res*. We ask in vain concerning the history preceding the coming of the embassy, and the response of the Jews to the outspoken "confession." Finally, it may be observed that every characteristic of the pericope finds frequent parallels throughout the entire gospel.

The analysis of the second pericope of the Baptist's witness may be represented as follows:²⁶

John 1 28-34

A. (29) *On the morrow he seeth* (βλέπει) *Jesus coming* (Cf. v. 27) unto him, and saith: "Behold (ἴδε) the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin, of the world."

(30) "This is he of whom (οὗτός ἐστιν ὑπὲρ οὗ) I said, 'After me cometh a man who is become before me: for he was before me.' (31) *And I knew him not*; but that he should be made manifest to Israel;

Conclusion: "for this cause (διὰ τοῦτο) *came* I baptizing in water."

B. (32) *And John bare witness* (ἐμαρτύρησεν) saying, "*I have beheld* (τεθέαμαι) the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven; and it abode upon him. (33) *And I knew him not*; but he that sent me to baptize in water, he said unto me, 'Upon whomsoever thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and abiding upon him, the same is he that baptizeth in the Holy Spirit'."

Conclusion: (34) "*And I have seen* (έώρακα) and have borne witness (μεμαρτύρηκα) that this is the Son of God" (ὅτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ).

²⁴ This type of repetition is included in Stange's list of 'negierte Antithesen' or 'doppelte Umkehrungen' ("eine Aussage wird unmittelbar hernach dadurch wiederholt, da ßder zum Hauptbegriff kontradiktorische Begriff negiert wird"). N.B. 1 3; 2 24-25a; 3 16b, 17, 16-17; 4 14; 5 19, 24; 7 18; 8 12b and c; 10 18; 12 47b, 49; 14 10; 15 4 and 5b, 15, 16, 19b; 16 13, 25-29; 17 9b; 18 20. Cf. also 1 33a-31; 6 51a-48; 7 8b-6a; 10 9-7; 13 8b-1a; 15 5-1; 16 18-17. Numerous other similar examples might be cited. Cf. e.g. Stange's list (II) of 'repetitions for clearness.'

²⁵ Cf. J. M. Thompson in the *Expositor*, 1918, "An Experiment in Translation," pp. 117-125.

²⁶ Windisch makes this Scene 3 of Act I, but refuses to call it a separate pericope. It must be admitted that it does stand in intimate connection with the foregoing section. But its kinship with the following section, which Windisch makes a separate Act, is almost as intimate. The uniform structure of each pericope, according to my own division and quite evidently the author's, seems rather to argue for the above classification.

Again, the evidences of form are most striking. The section is divided into two parts. Each has its introduction, and each its conclusion. Each contains a striking pronouncement from the Witness, and in each the pronouncement is followed by "and I knew him not, but" (cf. the ὃν ὑμεῖς οὐκ οἶδατε of the preceding pericope). This, in turn, is followed by the "witness" exactly as in the preceding pericope after "who art thou." The "on the morrow" binds the pericope with what precedes and what follows. It is a purely

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literary device, nothing more. 'The solemn words "he seeth Jesus *coming* unto him" are designed to furnish the setting, give emphasis to the momentous claim that is to follow, but above all to relate him with the Unknown Coming One of v. 27. The sentence "Behold the Lamb of God ..." is the culmination of the Baptist's witness. It stands out boldly at the moment when Jesus first appears. It is as inadequately motivated as the embassy of the Jews. It has nothing to do with the section as a unit. It stands in the way of the otherwise noticeable unfolding of testimony. It is not elaborated in what follows. On the contrary, the following words, "*this is he*" etc. are the real center of the witness. It equates Jesus specifically with the Unknown One, the ἐρχόμενος of the preceding section. The new figure is coming to the foreground of the Johannine stage, but the Baptist is still there. The question "Why do you baptize, then?" of the preceding pericope must still receive an answer. Here it is plainly given: "in order that he might be manifested to Israel," even though this was an inadequate witness (καὶ γὰρ οὐκ ἤδειν αὐτόν).

The unfolding of revelation progresses more strikingly in **B** (vv. 32-34). This is the Johannine counterpart to the baptism. But in John we have the account given as the direct testimony of the Baptist himself: The emphasis is upon "beheld." But even yet the full significance of his experience does not dawn upon him. It is only when the heavenly token is interpreted directly from God (which acts as corroborative evidence) that he realizes WHO it is that has come to him (v. 29). Here, finally, the incomplete contrast of the preceding section is completed: I baptize in water, he shall baptize in the Holy Spirit. The witness ends most solemnly and climactically: and I have seen and borne witness that this is the Son of God. This is the true literary climax of the section and in a sense the dramatic climax of the whole chapter. A milestone has been reached in the development of the central purpose (20 30f.).

"He must increase, but I must decrease." We have seen this process going on. The third section carries us farther along until the Baptist disappears completely from the scene.

John 1 35-49

A. a. (35) *Again on the morrow* (cf. 29 43) John was standing, and two of his disciples; (36) and he *looked* (ἐμβλέψας) *upon Jesus as he walked*, and saith, "Behold the Lamb of God!"

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(37) And the two disciples heard him speak and followed Jesus.

b. (38) And Jesus turned, and beheld them following, and saith unto them, "*What seek ye?*" (τί ζητεῖτε)

And they said unto him, "Rabbi" (which is to say, being interpreted, Teacher), "where abidest thou?"

(39) He saith unto them, "*Come and ye shall see.*"

Conclusion: *They came therefore and saw* where he abode; and they abode with him that day.

It was about the tenth hour.

B. (40) One of the two that heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. (41) He first findeth his own, brother Simon, and saith unto him, *We have found the Messiah* (which is, being interpreted, Christ).

(42) He brought him unto Jesus.

Conclusion: Jesus looked upon (ἐμβλέψας) him, and said, "Thou art Simon, the son of John: thou shalt be called Cephas (which is by interpretation, Peter)."

The literary features of the passage are at once observable. Its structure is the same as that of the two preceding sections. Again we have the two divisions each with introduction and conclusion. There is a striking dramatic setting, the two figures stand alone in their grandeur, and John's representation of the scene is not without an element of augustness: John is standing, and he looks upon Jesus. His repetition of "Behold the Lamb of God" may seem at first to be at variance with our explanation above. But closer examination of the entire passage as well as of the gospel as a whole substantiates our view. In the first place, this repetition at the beginning of a section of something in a preceding section frequently acts as a transition. So we find the Baptist sections linked to the Prologue and with each other. In the second place, the repetition here gives an effect of solemnity and emphasis. Again, it acts as a summary statement of the Witness. And finally, there is a more specifically literary argument. From one point of view, literary technique would seem to demand "Behold the Son of God;" from another, however, there is good reason for placing a colossal assertion such as John's at the beginning of his witness for its dramatic effect. It is one of many foreshadowings of the Cross which occur

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throughout the gospel. Such evidences of what might appear to be a confusion in literary technique are encountered elsewhere in the Fourth Gospel, but usually the writer's reason for the confusion is not difficult to trace.

The narrative bears, throughout, the marks of literary structure. The central question of **A** (vv. 35-39) is "What seek ye?" (τί ζητεῖτε). The answer is not an indirect but a direct question. "Rabbi" is motivated by theological interest, and the parenthesis accentuates this. Jesus utters the pregnant words: "*Come and see.*" In Johannine style it is added, "They came and saw where he abode," and the conclusion is "And they abode with him that day." The next sentence, "It was about the

tenth hour" has the same purpose as 1²⁴, 2¹², and numerous other similar sentences. These serve as much to separate units as to enclose them in a framework. The same vagueness and obscurity that we have previously observed in the first pericope is seen here. As there we still ask, "Why does John baptize then?" and "Who is the Unknown One?", so here we ask, "What is it that they were really seeking?" or "What did they see?" But whereas in the first pericope we have to wait for a further narrative for a full explanation, here we get our answer in **B** (vv. 40-42).

The introductory clause of the second division (v. 40a) summarizes the introductory sentences of **A** (35-38).²⁷ The prominence of Andrew is one of the many peculiar features of the gospel, and the position that Peter holds here in the center of the stage may be variously explained as a reflection of the contemporary situation or as a Synoptic tradition in Johannine literary setting.²⁸ A comparison with the Synoptic account of Peter's call again reveals the strongly literary character of John. There is a degree of freshness, vividness, and color in the former that is completely lacking here. On the contrary, we feel that behind the Fourth Gospel account there lies a long period of reflection. The writer seems to move in literary grooves. Whereas at the beginning of the narrative John

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looks upon (ἐμβλέψας) Jesus and is impelled to utter his lofty testimony, here Jesus looks upon (ἐμβλέψας) a disciple and confers upon him distinction. Whoever is familiar with Johannine literary method will recognize that such phenomena are not accidental. *We have found the Messiah*: here is the complete answer to section **A** (35-38). The disciples were asking the gospel's pervasive question, 'WHO IS HE? They, come to see, and they find the Messiah (cf. 20³¹). It is a parallel to the vocative "Rabbi" in **A** as is also the parenthetical explanation. The answer to **A**. is the inciting impulse to **B** (40-42). Andrew finds Peter, and the Christian mission continues until Samaritans and Greeks also come seeking Jesus.²⁹

Our final pericope is still a part of the Baptist narratives. To be sure, the Baptist is now completely off the stage, but it is his influence and witness that conditions the narrative here.

John 1 43-51

A. (43) *On the morrow* he was minded to go forth into Galilee, and he *findeth* Philip, and Jesus saith unto him, "Follow me." (44) (Now Philip was from Bethsaida of the city of Andrew and Peter.)

(45) Philip *findeth* Nathanael, and saith unto him, "We *have found* him of whom Moses in the Law, and the prophets, wrote, Jesus the son of Joseph, of *Nazareth*" (cf. v. 41).

²⁷ Is there any such relationship, perhaps, between **A** and **B** of the preceding sections?

²⁸ Peter is second in importance only to the 'beloved disciple.' Cf. Wrede, *Charakter and Tendenz des Johannesevangelium*, pp. 35-37.

²⁹ 4^{30, 36?}; 12²⁰⁻²¹.

(46) And Nathanael said unto him, "Can any good come out of Nazareth I" (ἐκ Ναζαρέτ δύναται τι ἀγαθὸν εἶναι)

Conclusion: Philip with unto him, "Come and see."

B. (47) Jesus *saw* Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, "*Behold* an Israelite indeed in whom is no guile!"

(48) Nathanael saith unto him, "Whence knowest thou me?"

Jesus answered and said unto him, "Before Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, *I saw* thee."

Conclusion: (49) Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art King of Israel."

(50) Jesus answered and said unto him: "Because I said unto thee, I saw thee underneath a fig tree, believest thou? *Thou shalt see* greater things than these."

(51) And he saith unto him: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, *Ye shall see* the heaven opened, and the angels of God descending upon the Son of man."

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The introductory τῆ ἐταύριον indicates not only a transition but also identity of literary grouping. "He was minded to go forth into Galilee" is literary framework. This is the explanation of the constant shifting between Judea and Galilee in the Fourth Gospel. The idea of finding has been a thread running through the narrative ever since the dramatic pronouncement of the discovery in v. 41. This is but one example of what is a most striking Johannine literary characteristic; namely, whenever a significant statement has been made, the author goes back again and again and plays upon and repeats the central words of significance. There are numerous such words in the gospel as a whole; and also in the individual sections. For our purpose here, it is well to see that the repeated references to "finding" enshrine the initial sentence with greater solemnity. The command of Jesus is characteristically brief. The parenthetical comment is also typical. Philip bears the lighted torch farther by *finding Nathanael* and telling him that he has found him whom Moses and the prophets foretold. So Andrew had found Peter and had said, "We have *found* the Messiah." Thus another step is made in the advance of the witness. The cue is Nazareth, which in the Greek appears last in Philip's words. This serves both polemical and literary interests, for *Nathanael* can ask in amazement, "From Nazareth can any good be" (literally), and Philip can answer quite effectively, "Come and see" (cf. v. 39), thus reaching back to the previous pericope and anticipating his discovery of Jesus in the next. And the question implies in the answer *what* (or *who*) is it that can come from Nazareth?

The second division begins in a fashion we have hitherto become familiar with (cf. 29, 35-36, 38). The greeting of Jesus is in the manner of all Johannine utterances which attempt to point out some great fact or introduce a new theme. So John greets Jesus, and so Jesus greets Peter. The short declaration, revealing unexpected insight and hence an unusual personality, is the inciting moment for the dialogue. On this basis most of the following narratives and controversial scenes

are also constructed. To Jesus' manifestation of a secret and higher knowledge and of divine insight, Nathanael can but burst forth in adoring wonder, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art King of Israel!", which serves the purpose of all Johannine narratives and especially of this group

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of pericopes. This declaration of Nathanael is, of course, the climax to the section. The last two verses form the completion of the frame. Work into which the four little pericopes have been set. They were introduced by "Now this is the witness of John," and the "apocalyptic conclusion" is its fitting and, in the quality of its contents, majestic close. The words fit easily and admirably, it must be confessed, into the content and character of the fourth pericope, but their relationship must also be seen as a conclusion suitable to the whole chapter (after the prologue). The twofold introduction to Jesus' words reflects the fervency of the writer and the solemnity and majesty of his words. This is accentuated by the "Verily, verily (only in John) I say unto you." The "things greater than these" is another Johannine theme, and the lofty prophecy at the close together with this phrase is the final and the most dramatic of the anticipations which we have met with in the chapter.

We may, then, conclude our examination of the Baptist narratives as follows:

- 1) The four little sections all exhibit a formal literary manner with a very definite method of literary composition.
- 2) The writer has a powerful dramatic sense. He loves to draw his narrative to a dramatic close. Climactic arrangement is evident everywhere: frequently he begins with some striking pronouncement, but more frequently he ends with the real "witness" of the narrative, and always the conclusion is of the revealing sort. His use of dialogue and his device of focussing the real point in some pithily phrased question accentuate the dramatic character of the whole. Similarly striking is the presence of dramatic anticipations. The element of suspense is well-centered about the major interest of the gospel. It serves the purpose of drawing the pericopes into a unity and of giving progress to the whole.
- 3) A large question, and a difficult one, for the interpretation of the gospel concerns the degree to which one is to allegorize the contents. There are those who discover profound meaning in every sentence. Words and expressions are always being used cryptically. The truth is that this element is undoubtedly present. But to what extent? Commentators are sometimes Alexandrian Philos, only they use the Fourth Gospel instead of the Pentateuch as the ob-

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ject of their elucidations. How inward and spiritual a meaning are we to attribute to such words as *come*, *find*, *abide*, and *see*?

4) Repetitions and paraphrases abound everywhere. Erich Stange³⁰ has made a study of many of these in an effort to understand the workings of the Johannine mind. The above analysis of the Baptist narratives agrees with Stange's conclusion that the older partition theories do not furnish an adequate explanation of the literary phenomena of the gospel.

5) In general the order of the testimony is cumulative. At first it is only John that wins our attention, but John's mission is a self-effacing one. There is the Unknown One who stands over against him. Then the Unknown One appears, a momentous claim is uttered, but this falls out of the cumulative order. It is the Coming One, the One whom John knew not, that appears. The heavenly token reveals One who baptizes not in water, but in the Holy Spirit; And John bears witness that this is the Son of God. Then the mission begins. The disciples seek, and find the Messiah, the one foretold by Moses and the prophets. Nathanael's experience culminates in the witness of "Son of God" and "Sing of Israel."

6) John is the "one who baptizes in water." It is a title designed to remind one of his inferior position. John is disposed of without a single word. After he has served his purpose, the author is no longer concerned with him. No exit is announced. So, too, the delegation in the first pericope is disposed of; so, too, Nicodemus; and so, too, are the Greeks.

7) Finally, one raises the question of the historicity of the narratives. The literary argument seems to tell against them. One may contend, perhaps, that historical material might very well be set in such a framework and dramatic form as have been revealed above. But if likelihood is to be a criterion, then the narratives must be viewed not primarily as historical accounts but as literary moulds embodying a theological theory.

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³⁰ *Op. Cit.*