

The Jesus Narrative embedded in the Fourth Gospel

1. Introduction

1.0 The failure of Jesus research according to Albert Schweitzer

An inevitable shortcoming of all *Life of Jesus* literature seems to be that it is of a devotional – as opposed to critical – nature. When Albert Schweitzer, the famous theologian, physician, musician and philanthropist, set out (in his Dr.theol. dissertation)¹ to give this branch of theology a historical basis,² he soon gave it up and wrote a subsequent study (his *habilitationsschrift* in New Testament and his major contribution to theology), a retrospect on all such endeavours: *A History of the Life of Jesus Research* (as the title should be translated correctly).³ This abandonment was due to the publication, on the same day in 1901, on which his own thesis was published, of William Wrede's book: *The Messianic Secret*,⁴ which provided ample proof that the chronological and geographical framework of Mark (on which Mt and Lk are based) was redactional fiction.

Thus Schweitzer's overview of the Quest for the Historical Jesus became the history of a failure. The descriptive subtitle: *from Reimarus to Wrede*, thus fits well, since Hermann Samuel Reimarus (d. 1723) had been the first to thoroughly doubt the Gospels' historical character. Schweitzer's verdict is still regarded as valid in most New Testament research, viz., that our Gospels are too diverse in detail and too thoroughly shaped by the theological interests of their authors to serve as a basis for historical research.

The problem is well known: The Gospels of the New Testament, not to mention the apocryphal ones, are not biographies.⁵ None of the ancient writers on Jesus managed to present the episodes from oral transmission in a chronological order. Luke may have attempted to arrange the episodes in chronological order, according to his Preface (Luke 1:3); but the sources which he had available lacked an overall structure that might have guided a historian. Nevertheless, and happily, he managed to provide an exact date for the beginning of the historical part of his tale: the "great synchronism" of Luke 3,1-4, pointing to the year 29 AD. This date is confirmed by the Johannine tradition on the end of Jesus' activity.

1.1 The presently known Gospel sources

¹ Beforehand he attained a doctorate in philosophy (on Kant's philosophy of religion) and later also one in medicine (on the psychological soundness vs. sickness of Jesus' consciousness of himself), before leaving Europe for his Lambarene project.

² *Das Abendmahl im Zusammenhang mit dem Leben Jesu*, 1901; ET: *The Last Supper and the Life of Jesus*, 1901). This was intended to be the first volume of a detailed Life of Jesus.

³ First published in 1906; its well-known title from the 2nd ed. (1913) onwards is *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung*; ET: *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, 2001.

⁴ W. Wrede: *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien*, 1901; ET: *The Messianic Secret*, Cambridge 1971. Cp. Kurt Dietrich Schmidt: *Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu. Literarkritische Untersuchungen zur ältesten Jesusüberlieferung*, 1919 (repr. 1969).

⁵ They can be called merely "ideal biographies" in their own right (Detlev Dormeyer), as depictions of a character, concentrated only on him and not interested in chronological arrangement of the events. Thus, Caesar Augustus in his *Res Gestae* preserved in Latin as well as in Greek inscriptions (also called *Monumentum Ancyranum* from the most complete specimen found in an Augustus Temple in Ancyra, Asia Minor) reports his deeds, albeit not in chronological order. Thus it belongs to what came to be called „fragmented history" (Doron Mendels).

Current research, which has considerably progressed since Albert Schweitzer, distinguishes in Luke's text the following sources, all somewhat precarious:

1. The *Gospel of Mark*. Its structure, being composed of episodes (*pericopae*), follows keywords that betray the evangelist's interests. Only the Passion narrative, and there esp. Mark 15,1b to the end of the chapter, follows some chronological order (of which such artificial indications as "third hour", "sixth hour", "ninth hour" have to be put into brackets).
2. The sayings source „Q“ (from German *Quelle* = source): this document is no longer extant but can be reconstructed from literal resemblances between Luke and Matthew where they do not follow Mark, as stated above. Some decades after Schweitzer, in 1946, a complete specimen of such a text (there are many others from pagan Antiquity) was discovered, bearing the title *The Gospel of Thomas*, which consisted of sayings of Jesus. Some of them are known from the canonical Gospels, others, previously unknown, may be authentic; many others, however, bear the mark of a Gnostic re-shaping of the older Jesus tradition. This text tells nothing about the events in the Life of Jesus. It even ignores, as does Q, Jesus' Passion.
3. Oral traditions, according to Luke 1:2 based on eyewitnesses: These form the major part of the so-called Lukan *sondergut* (i.e., what no other evangelist has). Luke may be trusted not to have invented such sayings and short narratives and he managed to give a date (Luke 3:1-4, see above) that can be confirmed by other sources, Christian and pagan. As a writer, however, he is free (as was Mark) to add "redactional" transitions in order to place his *pericopae* into an overall framework. This framework, with a remarkable exception from 9:51 to 19:27, is largely taken over from Mark, and it betrays that Luke's knowledge of the geography of the land of Israel is not much better than Mark's knowledge of the same. He may have lived in Greece and may have accompanied the apostle Paul on his last voyage to Rome, whereas Mark, to make an inference from his Latinisms (including his name) and his even lesser knowledge of Jewish affairs, may have been a Roman.
4. Very recent research has pointed out that the apocalyptic passages in Luke's Gospel find a close counterpart in Rev 11:3-13:8.⁶ There must have been, as there was for Mark's 13th chapter, some early Christian apocalypse commenting – in Luke's case – on the political situation after the destruction of the Temple. Luke made selective use of it, as it seems, whereas in *Revelation* we find a reworking of this text commenting on the situation one generation later. But again, these are Christian texts that contain no reminiscences of the life of Jesus.
5. Far more important as a possible source are the similarities between Luke 24 (i.e. in the Easter *pericopae*) and John 20. Was there a common source for both (as Mark 15 had one for the Passion), or does John simply depend upon Luke? In the latter case, the passages in question belong to what has been listed under # 3, above.

Regarding Matthew, whose Gospel had dominated the Church's view on Jesus for so many centuries, there is little hope of extrapolating from his text anything preceding the above-mentioned documents or personal memories. His *sondergut* is of a legendary character, much as the (chronologically invalid) first two chapters of Luke: e.g. the well known legends around the birth of Jesus (Matt 1-2) or those expanding his trial (e.g. Matt 27:19), let alone the

⁶ See V. Wittkowsky: *Den Heiden ist dies Heil Gottes gesandt. Studien zur literarischen Konstruierung des Heidenchristentums im historischen Kontext des Judenchristentums* (Münsteraner Judaistische Studien, 21), 2012, pp. 146-165, and Th. Witulski: *Die Johannesapokalypse und der Bar-Kochba-Krieg* (forthcoming).

Roman soldiers guarding Jesus' tomb (Matt 27:62-66). As Hermann Samuel Reimarus⁷ already pointed out, this feature of the story would not have failed to attract the attention of the other evangelists, had such a thing ever occurred. These features may be traditional in some sense and not be mere inventions by Matthew, but they are not based on concrete reminiscences of events in Jesus' Life.

1.2 What about John?

In the present writer's opinion, *Matthew* can be completely forgotten in favour of *John*. In 1838 already, at the very beginning of critical – and constructive – Gospel research, Christian Gottlob Wilke had pointed out that all three "synoptic" Gospels (Mt, Mk, Lk) depend on Mark, the earliest of the three.⁸ As to the would-be Petrinian First Gospel, Wilke's comparative analysis showed that Matthew had no further eye witness recollections at his disposal apart from what has been listed above. This, of course, meant the complete eclipse of the Gospel of Matthew as a historical source.

Theologians were very slow to take this seriously. In 2000, Martin Hengel renewed Wilke's thesis that *Luke*, at least in its final (canonical) form, is prior to *Matthew*.⁹ A more accurate account of the Gospels' interrelations is needed, as the traditional "two source hypothesis" (which regards Mt and Lk as mutually independent on Mk and Q) has proved to be too simple. Further research will need a philological *stemma* (a diagram of dependencies) that includes:

- a) all pre-canonical sources (see list above), not only Q, and
- b) the Gospel of John, including the phases of its elaboration as far as they can be discerned, because in earlier phases, it is less likely to have been influenced by the Synoptics (or their respective sources) than later on.

A complete and detailed diagram, elaborated by Vadim Wittkowsky and the present writer, is bound to appear in 2012.¹⁰ Henceforth, we shall concentrate on its "Johannine" branch, because only in this manner will a new structure arise that enables us to furnish that which has eluded most of previous Jesus research, i.e., a plausible account of the public life of Jesus that also works chronologically.

⁷ H. S. Reimarus: *Apologie oder Schutzschrift für die vernünftigen Verehrer Gottes* (vor 1768), ed. G. Alexander, 1972. The edition just cited, is the first (!) complete publication of this onymous manuscript. "Fragments" from this work, as Lessing published them in 1774-77, are found in the current editions of Lessing's works.

⁸ Ch. G. Wilke: *Der Urevangelist, oder exegetisch kritische Untersuchung über das Verwandtschaftsverhältniß der drei ersten Evangelien*, Dresden/Leipzig 1838; esp. p. 461: „der matthäische Kompilator.“ – To be correct, the German writer and theologian Johann Gottfried Herder in 1797 already surmised Markan priority over the other gospels. See Siebert, *Das Leben Jesu* (n. 22), p. 10, n. 4.

⁹ M. Hengel: *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ*, London 2000, pp. 200-207. Mt, to give just one argument, is the first evangelist to use the trinitarian formula (Mt 28,19). There may have been more primitive stages of this Gospel which Luke may have used alongside (or even instead of) Q: such is the hypothesis Wittkowsky attempts to prove (see n. 6, pp. 126-145), thereby challenging the Q research in its entirety. Independently from how far this hypothesis may be proven in the future, it will hardly yield a "proto-Mt" whose structure could be an alternative to that of Mk. If there ever was one, it has been lost in taking over that of Mk. For *John*, the situation is different.

¹⁰ F. Siebert/V. Wittkowsky: "Von der Zwei- zur Vier-Quellen-Hypothese", in: C. Heil/ G. Harb/ M. Hölscher (eds.): *Built on Rock or Sand? Q Studies – Retrospects, Introspects and Prospects*, to appear in Leuven 2012.

1.3 Jesus research in the 20th century: looking back on the three Quests

Albert Schweitzer belongs to – and marks the end of – the first phase of historical Jesus research. This was the so-called **first quest**, which had been conducted mainly by "liberal" theologians. It ended with a despair as to "facts" and forced scholars to concentrate on Jesus' sayings. In 1907, Adolf Harnack produced the first complete reconstruction of the above-mentioned *sayings source* – to be deduced from identical (or near-to-identical) wordings in Luke and in Matthew where they do not follow Mark.¹¹ He established new criteria in order to differentiate between the authentic sayings of Jesus and the teaching of the evangelists. Unfortunately, this enhanced only our knowledge of what Jesus said, not what he did.

The impact of theological presuppositions and dogmatic stances is obvious. For Harnack, Jesus as a teacher of wisdom; his personal fate did not tell him much. Schweitzer, on the other hand, just as many others, including Rudolf Bultmann and his school, now relied on Mark, the evangelist of the Passion, and his more or less Pauline peers within the NT. There was no formal inquiry into the life of Jesus, but there was no dismissal of historical knowledge (or assumptions) either. Thus, in spite of Schweitzer's verdict, critical minds such as Rudolf Bultmann (*Jesus*, 1926), did write on the life of Jesus, attempting to find a compromise between the markan Jesus and the "sayings Jesus" of Q.¹²

After the Second World War, Bultmann's own disciples, mainly Ernst Käsemann, initiated what came to be known as the **second quest** for the historical Jesus. In contrast to earlier theological habits, they took Jesus' Jewishness more seriously: the traditions that contradict this fact were no longer considered "typically Jesuanic", but rather creations of the early Church. The so-called *criterion of dissimilarity* was counter-balanced by the *criterion of coherence* (with Jesus's own social and religious context). Modern Jewish writers on Jesus came to be taken seriously and their views became acceptable. The difficulty now, of course, was to assess the originality of Jesus. Why was there ever a break between Christianity and Judaism? Even in placing it as late as possible, it had to be explained.

The **third quest** for the historical Jesus, resorted, on both sides of the Atlantic, more intensely to Q and additionally to non-canonical sources (*Gospel of Thomas*, *Infancy Gospels*, etc.). Within this third phase, in which the coherence criterion became even more important, scholars produced excellent editions of Q, in the USA as well as in Germany, and a wealth of commentaries. Unfortunately, the penchant to Gnosticism, which is obvious already in the *Gospel of Thomas*, affects this branch of research with a typically Gnostic neglect of history. The third quest yielded a very learned history of texts and of ideas, but not of what must have happened with Jesus. Bultmann's demand of "demythologising" non-historical sources became once more urgent.

The results of all three quests are documented, e.g., in the Handbook by G. Theißen and A. Merz: *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*,¹³ and in the four vols. of John P. Meier: *A Marginal Jew. Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, 1991.1994.2001.2011. An equally four-volume *Handbook of the Historical Jesus* (ed. T. Holmen and S. Porter, 2011) adds a great

¹¹ Adolf Harnack: *Sprüche und Reden Jesu*, 1907; ET: *The Sayings of Jesus*, 1908.

¹² In the Gospel of Mark many sayings are influenced by his theological intentions, above all Mark 10:45, a *leitmotif* of the whole Gospel. This problem, of course, is more intense in the other gospels.

¹³ ET 1998. Cf. J. Schröter/R. Brucker: *Der historische Jesus. Tendenzen und Perspektiven der gegenwärtigen Forschung*, 2002 (BZNW 114); Ibid.: "Die aktuelle Diskussion über den historischen Jesus und ihre Bedeutung für die Christologie", in: Ch. Danz/M. Murrmann-Kahl (eds.): *Zwischen historischem Jesus und dogmatischem Christus. Zum Stand der Christologie im 21. Jh.*, 2010, pp. 67-86.

wealth of various articles, old and new. An annotated bibliographical overview of German and English literature, including many curiosities, is found in Hans-Heinrich Schade: *Jesus von Nazareth*, 2010 (esp. pp. 451-510).

2. Neglected data from the Gospel of John

2.1 A test case: The date of Jesus' Last Supper and death

All efforts to narrate the life of Jesus, be they biblical or not, lack a historically plausible geographical and chronological framework. Even for the important moment in Jesus' life, viz. the last night with his disciples and the trial before Pilate, there is a one-day discrepancy between the Synoptic Gospels and John with which we have to come to grips.

A growing number of writers on Jesus, including pope Benedict XVI, have acknowledged that the Johannine date is the only one possible. Mark, who never lived in Palestine, must be wrong in dating Jesus' last night two days before "the festival of Passover and Unleavened Bread" (Mk 14:1). In the Jewish calendar these are two different days, the latter coming one day earlier than the former. Unleavened bread is made on 14th of Nisan and is served towards the end of that day,¹⁴ together with the Passover lamb, slaughtered beforehand.¹⁵ Here begins the so-called *seder night* which extends well into the 15th of Nisan, the latter counting (as every day in the Mosaic calendar) from the sunset. Obviously, this manner of counting is the cause of Mark's confusion.

Passover thus counts from the 15th of Nisan, a day on which no labour is permitted – all the more so if it coincides with a Sabbath, as Jn 19:31 states in calling it a "great Sabbath" (with a Jewish term). Mark must be wrong in having an execution (and even three of them) occur on that very holy day. He still is correct in telling why such a thing had to be avoided (Mk 14:2); it would have been a violation of the purity of the Land and a provocation of Jewish sentiments that might have aroused the very uproar Pilate wanted to avoid. Mark, however, repeats his dating error in 14:12, and he does not even become aware of it where he (probably correctly) transmits that on the very day of Jesus' crucifixion – the 15th of Nisan – a Jew, Simon of Cyrene, happened to come home from the field (Mk 15:21: *erchomenen ap' agrou*). Could this happen on a "great" Sabbath such as was the 15th of Nisan? Most Western translations "correct" this detail into something else. The other Synoptics, encountering this passage, simply omit it. Mark's dating error, however, remains: too eagerly the Church desired (cp. Lk 22:15) to celebrate its Easter as a new Passover. John, to whom we now turn, is satisfied with a coincidence between the slaughtering of lambs on the 14th of Nisan and the execution of Jesus. It does make much sense, too; and before surmising a theological intention behind Jn 13:1 and 19:31 (these are his dates), we should acknowledge that such a course of events is at least possible. Furthermore, there are other transmissions that confirm that the "quartodeciman" date for the death of Jesus (and for the Christian Easter) is the original one.

¹⁴ It is to be celebrated in the individuals' homes – in Jesus' day mainly in Jerusalem, today everywhere. The Temple was only necessary for slaughtering. That is why, since its destruction, *seder* meals lack the veal.

¹⁵ See Num 28:16 vs. 28:17. Thus the 14th of Nisan was the typical day for slaughtering the lamb, if not the only one, because the immense number of lambs needed: Josephus, *Bell.* 6.421-427 tells that once they were counted, and gives the number of 255.600 (to be multiplied by 10 to assess the number of participants crowding Jerusalem every year). There was a practical necessity to begin slaughtering even prior to the 14th.

They reach from the kerygma formula in 1Cor 5:7 to an express statement by Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 5.23).¹⁶

2.2 The date of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem

Being aware of the possibility that the Fourth Gospel may transmit better memories of the historical Jesus than the other Gospels, let us inquire into the date of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. There is no reason to suppose that it occurred just one week before the crucifixion. Even Mark, whose Passion story has led to the customary representation of all these events within the holy-week, would not have us believe this. Again, the Fourth Gospel is more precise in this detail in depicting Jesus' triumphal entry as happening at the beginning of the feast of Tabernacles; he even mentions the *lulavim* typical of this feast with the definite article (Jn 12:13): they were already at hand. Chanting *hosianna* was, again, typical of the feast of Tabernacles.

Mark, who gives either no dates or incorrect ones, may no longer have been aware of it. Nevertheless he preserved a story in which Jesus' favourite disciples desire to erect a hut: Mk 9:2-8! Wouldn't this tell us that that vision happened during the same holy week? Put together with a mention, in Jn 7:37-39, of "the last day of the feast" (where Jesus make an allusion to a rite of water pouring that again belonged only to the feast of Tabernacles with its prayer for rain), we get a possible frame around a number of pericopae which, thus, precede Jesus' Passion by half a year.¹⁷ According to the *coherence criterion* mentioned above, we begin to gather the relevant details from the Gospel of John, which even permit us to detect other, hitherto neglected, evidence in the Synoptics. In order to do this, one condition has to be fulfilled that runs counter the "canonical approach" as it is in vogue in our day. We have to do with the Fourth Gospel what we already did with the three others: We have to read its discernable layers separately.

The Fourth Gospel, as it is transmitted in many manuscripts from the middle of the 2nd cent. onwards, has no – I should say: no more – narrative coherence. In 6:71 Jesus shuts his mouth in Jerusalem, and in the following verse (7:1) he opens it again in Galilee. Nobody knows how many Passover feasts he attended in Jerusalem: three or four? Part of the problem is that "the feast of the Judeans", frequently mentioned (Jn 5:1; 6:4; cp. 2:23 etc.) is mostly understood to be Passover, which, in Jesus' time, it was not. The main feast as long as the Temple stood was the feast of Tabernacles.¹⁸ Only 7:2 is correct in adding: "Tabernacles". Here an ancient wording has been preserved, whereas the constant emphasis on Passover everywhere else is a later feature. Chronologically, Jn 2:13-25, Jn 7 and Jn 9 have to be read together as referring to one and the same week of Tabernacles (in the autumn of 29 A.D.). Jn 7:14 mentions the middle and 7:34 the last day of that week. As to the time span between it and the Passover week of 30 A.D., Jn 10:22-39 preserves some reminiscence of the Hanukka feast in winter.

Now the hypothesis to be tested in this article is that *once there was* a chronological order in the Fourth Gospel, but it has been lost in its final editing. As a rule of thumb, Semitic writings

¹⁶ See F. Siegert: *Das Evangelium des Johannes. Wiederherstellung und Kommentar* (SIJD 7), 2008, pp. 746-757.

¹⁷ For a detailed proposal, see F. Siegert (and S. Bergler): *Synopse der vorkanonischen Jesusüberlieferungen* (SIJD 8/1), 2010 (table: pp. 28-31).

¹⁸ See, e.g., Plutarch, *Quaest. conviv.* 4.6.1 (671 C-672 B), where his Greek interlocutors compare Judaism to the cult of Dionysus, with precise details taken from the Temple ritual. The situation has changed afterwards when, with the Rabbis, Passover (that could be celebrated at home) became the main feast of the Jewish year, equalled only by the Day of Atonement.

are collective achievements, running under pseudonymous titles (this applies to most of the Hebrew Bible, and to part of the NT), whereas Greek writings are authors' works, bearing their names and giving a much less "edited" wording. Compare Mark and Luke (one Roman, one presumably Greek) with what Wilke already called "the Matthean compiler" – and now with *Ioannes*, again a text bearing a semitic name. Of course, there were many "Johns" in NT times, five of which, at least, in the New Testament itself, and critical scholarship rejects the idea, cherished since the Gospel's reception, that he was one of the fishers of Galilee. This author is far too philosophical to have been the son of Zebedee. Again, Irenaeus' writings help us in mentioning John "the Elder", of Ephesus, the head of the very movement he himself belongs to, and we learn from Eusebius' *Chronicle*, year 96 A.D., that he came to dwell in that town from that point on.¹⁹ As the name "John", in the 1st and 2nd centuries, was only in use in the Land of Israel (where it still referred to one of the Maccabean brothers), we may gather from this how the Fourth Gospel can transmit so many geographical and even chronological details that are verifiable.

2.3 The one year of Jesus' public activity

Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.22.5 quotes another Ephesian tradition from the Johannine circle, which says that Jesus "preached for one year and suffered in the twelfth month". He quotes it even though he does not accept it – he is, after all, an advocate of the edited, canonical Gospels, and he depends on a Johannine Text that has Jesus go back and forth between Galilee and Jerusalem from one Passover to the next. We already saw that this predilection for Passover feasts is redactional and does not come from a concrete memory. We shall be all the more satisfied in finding that the two non-synoptic sources that John had at his disposal, evince a one year chronology.

The synoptic Gospels, in some way, confirm this thesis. Their narrative structure, true, is more or less artificial; what helps us understand the urgency in which Jesus was active, is the very content of his proclamation: "The time has come; the kingdom of God is upon you; repent!" (Mk 1:15 NEB; the text goes on, in Mark's language: "...and believe the Gospel"). In Mt 4:17, this proclamation is *verbatim* identical to that of John the Baptist (Mt 3:2). Both believed that the Last Judgment was at hand, and both summoned the Israelites to prepare for it *now*. This is a call they could not repeat year after year. The Judgment had to come, or those prophets had to disappear. Historically, the latter came true (and theologically, to judge by the symbolism of the Fourth Gospel, even the former).²⁰

Now if there is only one year at our disposal, we may safely date it in accordance with Luke (1.1, above: 29 AD)²¹ for its beginning and with John for its end (4.1, below: 30 AD).²²

Let us now see what can be gleaned from an analysis of the Fourth Gospel's sources.

¹⁹ All we may know of him – which is not little – has been collected in Siegert, *Evangelium des Johannes*, pp. 62-71. Patristic scholars are more likely to be aware of this evidence than NT exegetes.

²⁰ See Jn 3:18; 8:47f etc. In Jn 18-19, Pilate as a powerful, if somewhat ridiculous, judge and Peter as an even more ridiculous warrior trying to use a sword symbolise the battle of Armageddon – the latter being uselessly evoked once more in Rev 16:16.

²¹ There is, as with any date from Antiquity, a margin of insecurity amounting to one year, because the first day of the Roman and other calendars nearly never coincided, and parts of a year, how small they might be, always counted as one year.

²² For details, including calculations of modern paleo-astronomy, see Siegert, *Das Leben Jesu. Eine Biographie aufgrund der vorkanonischen Überlieferungen* (SIJD 8/2), 2010, pp. 19-22. There is no need to resort to such legendary details as the star of Bethlehem.

3. Retrieving the Fourth Gospel's original structure

3.1 The Fourth Gospel's sources

There were some attempts in the last hundred years to isolate the sources of John and to read them individually. Emanuel Hirsch (1936),²³ an amateur to exegesis, stimulated Rudolf Bultmann²⁴ to make his famous (if contested) distinction between a "Signs source" and a properly Johannine "Passion narrative"; others followed.²⁵ Bultmann's commentary, often cited up to this day, remained a Torso; it lacks a synthesis of the text put into pieces, it lacks order and even an introduction.

The first complete presentation of the Fourth Gospel's sources was that by Robert Fortna (1970),²⁶ not much received by his colleagues. The final breakthrough, as the present writer believes, came through Siegfried Bergler (2009)²⁷ who disentangled the Signs source from the Passion narrative. Now Jesus only goes once to Jerusalem, entering messianically during the feast of Tabernacles. The eschatological tension remains for the following parts of the narrative (chronologically half a year); there is no outbreak of the kingdom of God until the death of Jesus and what it followed, unexpectedly and only for some (and may they sum up to 500 – 1Cor 15:6).

In terms of source criticism, two and only two sources (as opposed to assumptions of Bultmann) can be ascertained:

1. The so-called **Signs source** (*Semeia-Quelle*), beginning at 1:6 and running, with many interruptions, through 11:44 (the release of Lazarus). The main problem in reconstructing this source is the way in which the author dissected it about ten times and scattered it throughout his Gospel. Indications of time and place given within the pericopae (and not only in transitions) allow the retrieval of the supposed itinerary of Jesus. – The concluding sentence is found in 20:31; here once again, the keyword *semeion* „sign“ occurs: this term means Jesus' extraordinary deeds, they are called *dynamis* „mighty deeds“ by the Synoptics and "miracles" in later language. It ends with the resurrection of Lazarus, which in the same time is a disguised Easter story. It seems that this was the original end of the text. It served as such as long as the Passion narrative had not yet been committed to writing.²⁸

²³ For details see Siegert: *Evangelium des Johannes*, pp. 174-179. This commentary, regarding its reconstructed text, has been superseded by Bergler (see n. 27) and by Siegert himself (see n. 17, n. 22).

²⁴ R. Bultmann: *Das Evangelium des Johannes, erklärt* (MeyerK) (1941), 1968 (and reprints).

²⁵ P. Hofrichter: *Modell und Vorlage der Synoptiker*, 1997, 2nd ed. 2002. In both editions there is no verse-to-verse analysis, as is the case also in F. Schleritt: *Der vorjohanneische Passionsbericht. Eine historisch-kritische und theologische Untersuchung zu Joh 2,13-22; 11,47-14,31 und 18,1-20,29* (BZNW 154), 2008. There is no reconstruction of a continuous pre-Johannine text.

²⁶ R. Fortna: *The Gospel of Signs* (SNTS.MS 11), 1970.

²⁷ S. Bergler: *Von Kana in Galiläa nach Jerusalem. Literarkritik und Historie im vierten Evangelium*, Münster 2009. This reconstruction is taken over in Siegert/ Bergler, *Synopse der vorkanonischen Jesusüberlieferungen*, mentioned above.

²⁸ Writing down ritual texts and prayers was unusual in Antiquity. Mark's passion account (in which chap. 15 is the oral *vorstufe*) and the rendering of the Lord's prayer in Mt and Lk are early exceptions. This may also explain how the logia Source (Q) could be a Christian text without giving a Passion narrative.

2. A **Passion narrative** not known by the Synoptics, starting at 11:47 (deliberations of the Sanhedrin)²⁹ and with interruptions continuing until 20:20 (appearances of the risen Jesus). This narrative, as with the **Signs source**, but somewhat less, has suffered from transpositions. After due correction, it confirms what the Synoptic Gospels contain.

Both sources are rich in geographical and chronological details (the latter consisting in precise references to the circle of Jewish Temple feasts); they must go back to eye witnesses. Now what facilitates our next step is the fact that one source sets in where the other stops. They only need to be put together in a simple sequence: SQ + PB. The only overlap consists in thematic allusions going from the end of the one (Lazarus, Jn 11 < SQ) to the end of the other (Easter, Jn 20 < PB).

3.2 Getting a structure out of the sources

Thus the all-important result of this de- and reconstruction consists in the geographical and chronological plausibility of its results, as the table (below, 4.2) will show. This result is admittedly based on many assumptions; but, as the English proverb has it, *the proof of the pudding is the eating*.

Meanwhile, the transmitted state of the Fourth Gospel deserves some further explanation. How could it be that the original recollection of Jesus' deeds, with time and place, was so much neglected? One of the reasons is that Jesus' life simply did not live up to the expectations of the Messiah. The kingdom of God had not visibly come, the people of Israel were not set free from foreign domination and the final Judgment had only happened for those who, in a new manner, believed in Jesus as the saviour of mankind. Christian theology re-shaped all of what had been transmitted, and key word structures and other devices generated what was to become the canonical Gospels. The deepest of all transformations affected the Fourth Gospel.

3.3 The Johannine additions

John, the Elder of Ephesus, is to be credited with the magnificent prologue (Jn 1:1-18) and the expansion of the rudimentary dialogues the two sources offered him, e.g., Jn 4:10-15, 20-26, 31-39, even introducing new themes. He develops most of his theology in a dialogical manner, up to the final dialogue (Jn 13, 31-16:33), which only later became labelled a "discourse". Chap. 17, giving a long (but literary, not liturgical) prayer serves as anticipated epilogue.

This gospel, of which no manuscript exists (and perhaps there never was one),³⁰ ended with an expansion of the final sentence, already mentioned, of one of its sources, viz. Jn 20:31.

3.4 The post-Johannine alterations

After John's death, the date of which is given as "unter Trajan" (98-117 A.D.; see Irenaeus 3.3.4, quoted by Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.23.4), the "Johannine" community of Ephesus (there also was a Pauline one, and maybe others) edited the Gospel *According to John*, leaving open, which John was intended. As had been done with the Gospel *According to Matthew*, they suggested "apostolic" authorship (in the sense that it was one of Jesus'

²⁹ Mark's (and the other Synoptics') suppositions regarding this detail come much too late: in 14.55 and 15:1 he wants the nightly interrogation of Jesus to be a Sanhedrin, which is contradicted by the fact that this body never met at night.

³⁰ It may even be surmised that it was not a written text but only existed in the narrator's (John's) memory. See Siegert, *Evangelium des Johannes* (n. 16), pp. 72-77.

twelve favourite companions who wrote it). This phenomenon is well known as "pseudepigraphy" and is completely conventional in Semitic literatures. There was no obligation to remain true to a particular author's words.

Instead, much polemic, mainly anti-Jewish, but also anti-Roman, was added, and the peaceful dialogues of John's original Gospel which, at the utmost, could be somewhat critical of their partners – Jn 3:1-10) were turned into an awkward polemic that often lacks intra-textual motivation (e.g., Jn 3:11f., 19f.). These latest additions to the Fourth Gospel, of course, tell us absolutely nothing about the historical Jesus. Instead, they mirror a situation of religious debate as it obtained in Asia Minor in the 2nd quarter of the 2nd cent. AD.

4. The chronology of the life of Jesus according to the Johannine sources (table)

4.1 The framework of one year (29-30 AD)

Roughly speaking, the one year of Jesus' public activity (or, his "ministry", to use a theological term) falls into three distinguishable parts. Part 1 spans from his initial contact with John the Baptist through his Galilean activity (i.e., from spring 29 AD to some date near Tabernacles, in autumn); part 2 again covers nearly half a year, from his messianic entry into Jerusalem on the feast of Tabernacles to some date near Passover 30 AD. Part 3 is a detailed account of the last days in the life of Jesus, # 66-93 covering Nisan 13th and 14th (= April 6-7 A.D., a Thursday and a Friday). On the 15th of Nisan, the great Sabbath mentioned above (2.1), nothing happened regarding Jesus. The Easter apparitions count from the day after onwards.³¹

4.2 Events of the life of Jesus in a chronological order (table)

The only means to find a plausible course of events in Jesus' public life is re-arranging the Signs source according to the geographical indications and the chronological hints (in connection with the Judean feasts) it gives. In Bergler's reconstruction, adopted here, this source covers about eleven of the twelve months available, i.e. all of Jesus' activity, be it Galilean, be it in Jerusalem (from the feast of Tabernacles onwards), until his stay as a guest in Bethany (near Jerusalem) shortly before Passover. As to the rest, Jesus' Passion), there is ample possibility to correct Mk 15 and Jn 18-19 against each other.

The pericope numbers used here are the same as in Siegert/Bergler, *Synopse der vorkanonischen Jesusüberlieferungen* and in Siegert, *Das Leben Jesu*.³² Pericopae 1-60 follow the Signs source; pericopae 61-99 the Passion narrative.

For the sake of simplicity, parts of verses are counted as verses. For details, see the above studies.

Legend:

parentheses (...): Redactional pericope, in Johannine wording; a source text cannot be ascertained.

bold type has been chosen to point out the seven (or eight) "signs" according to the Signs source and also the three (short) parables the Fourth Evangelist relates.³³

³¹ In some sense even strict historians have to take notice of them; the Church's coming-to-be cannot be explained otherwise.

³² See esp. Siegert/Bergler, *Synopse*, pp. 28-31 (table) = *Leben Jesu*, pp. 25-30 (table). Some minor mistakes in the former are corrected in the latter.

Italics: probable facts and recollections reported *only* in the Synoptic Gospels (restricted to the most important).

Part one: Jesus on the Jordan River, in Samaria and in Galilee

- (1) John 1:6f. (this is the only remnant of the original beginning of the Signs source)
- (2) 1:19-23,28 the activity of John the Baptist
- (3) *Jesus' Baptism*
- (4) 1:32-34 vision of the giving of the Holy Spirit
- (5) *Mk 1:12f.; Q 4:1-13 the Temptation*

ENCOUNTERS WITH JESUS; THE FIRST DISCIPLES; TRAVEL THROUGH SAMARIA

- (6) 1:37-42 Jesus' first disciples
- (7) 1:43-49 Further disciples
- (8) 3:22-24 Jesus baptizes in Judea and Perea
- (9) (inquiry about Jesus' relation to the Baptist; **parable of the Bridegroom's friend**); *cp. Q 7,18-23*
- (10) 4:1,3 Jesus' return to Galilee
- (11) 4:4-9,16-19,28-30,40,42f. dialogue with a Samaritan woman (on Johannine additions, see 3.2, above)

JESUS' MINISTRY IN GALILEE AND THE DECAPOLIS

- (12) 2:1-3,6-11 the first sign: **The Wedding at Cana**; The disciples' faith
- (13) 2:12; 4:44 Jesus in Capharnaum; divided reaction
- (14) 4:46,49-54 the second sign: **Healing of the Official's Servant**
- (15) 6:1 Jesus eludes the crowd; journey into the hills
- (16) *Q 6:20-36,46-49 Sermon on the Plain (resp. of the Mount)*
- (17) *Mk 5:1-20; 7:31-37 healings in the Decapolis*
- (18) 6:5,7-11,14 **the Feeding of the Five Thousand**
- (19) 6:15-17,19-22,25 Jesus appears on the sea
- (20) *Mk 4: parables*
- (21) *Lk 13:1-15; Q 12:13-34 sayings on political and ethical issues*
- (22) (6,60-64 opposition against Jesus); *cp. Mk 3:31-35*
- (23) (6,66-71 the disciples exposed to doubt); *cp. Mk 8:27-29 Peter's confession and misunderstanding; Mk 9:33-48 dispute amongst the disciples about who is the greatest*
- (24) 21:1-6,8,11,14 **Peter's stupendous draught of fish**

³³ The Signs source, astonishingly, has none. – Others in the Johannine text, including the use of Gr. *paroimia* to refer to a kind of riddle, belong to the last additions. This suspicion, to the present writer, even includes Jn 15:1-10, where Jesus not only replaces the Torah (as he does everywhere in Jn), but also the Jewish people (whose prerogatives, in the original Jn, do not seem to be affected; nor does the initial programme (Jn 1:17) which, in the Greek text, has no mark of logical, or semantic, opposition.

- (25) *Lk 7:11-16 the raising of the widow's son at Nain* (a model for John in # 58f.)
 (26) *Q 9:57-62; Mk 6:7-13 Discipleship and mission*
 (27) *Q 14:25-27; Mk 8:34-38 „Anyone who wishes to be a follower of mine”*
 (28) *Lk 8:1-3 female disciples of Jesus*
 (29) *Mk 2:14-17 Jesus' company with tax collectors*
 (30) *Mk 10:35-44; Q 22:24-27 renewed dispute amongst the disciples*

Part Two: Jesus at the feast of Tabernacles and further on in Judea

- (31) 7:1f. Hesitation of Jesus; his own relatives do not believe
 (32) 7:12 he finally decides to attend the feast of Tabernacles
 (33) 12:12-15 messianic entry; scriptural proof
 (34) 2:14-16 the conflict in the Temple
 (35) 2:17f. Jesus' saying about the Temple
 (36) (3,1-10 dialogue with Nicodemus the Pharisee); *cp. Mk 10:17-22 about the entry into the Kingdom of God*
 (37) (3,13-31 same, cont.); *cp. Q 17:22-37 sayings about Judgement Day*
 (38) 8,2-11 Jesus and the adulteress; *cp. Mk 2:1-12 against judging*
 (39) 5:1-9,14 **healing of a paralytic**
 (40) 5:19-24 disputes in Jerusalem; *cp. # 45*
 (41) *Q 7:18-23 The inquiry from John the Baptist*
 (42) *Mk 8:11-13 the non-sign of Jonah*
 (43) 9:1,6-9 **Healing of a blind man**
 (44) (9:15-41 conflicts with the Pharisees; the Sabbath question); *cp. Mk 2:23-28 etc.*
 (45) *Mk 12:13-27 on paying tribute to Caesar; the Sadducee's question about the resurrection* (*cp. # 40*)³⁴
 (46) (12:44-48 on Judgment); *cp. Q 10:16; Mk 9:41*
 (47) (8:12-29 dispute with the Pharisees about leadership claims)
 (48) (8,30-32 on faith and freedom); *cp. Q 17:6 etc. on faith*
 (49) (7:14-18 at the midpoint of the Festival: Jesus teaches in the Temple)
 (50) (7:25-30 attempt to arrest Jesus); *cp. Mk 11:18*
 (51) (7:31-36 another attempt to arrest Jesus); *cp. Mk 8:31-33 etc. announcement of the Passion*
 (52) 7:37-44 events on the last day of the festival; *cp. Mk 9,2-13 the Transfiguration*
 (53) (7:45-52 deliberation of the high priests and Pharisees); *cp. Mk 3:6*
 (54) (10:1,11-18 the Good Shepherd); *cp. Q 15:1-7 the lost sheep*
 (55) (10:19-21 suspicion that Jesus is possessed by a demon); *cp. the Synoptics' exorcisms*
 (56) (10:22-39) impatience at the **festival of the Temple dedication** (Hanukka)
 (57) 10:40f. Jesus' temporary sojourn beyond the Jordan river

³⁴ The placing of sayings and dialogues can only be done approximately in relation to a given occasion. It is probable, furthermore, that Jesus gave similar answers in different situations. Our main concern, however, is with the events.

- (58) 11:1,3 call to Bethany (near Jerusalem), departure
 (59) 11:17-21,23,27-29,41-44 **the resurrection of Lazarus**; *cp. Mk 5:21-24,35-43: revival of the daughter of Jairus³⁵ and # 25, above*
 (60) 20:30f. Conclusion of the Signs source

Part Three: The Passion

a) The Passion proper

- (61) 11:47,53 (only) session of the Sanhedrin, the high priests and Pharisees wishing to kill Jesus
 (62) (11:55–57 Passover approaches; renewed intent to arrest Jesus); *cp. Mk 14:1f.*
 (63) 12:1–7 The Anointing at Bethany (probably from *Mk 14:3-9*)
 (64) (12:20–36 **parable of the grain of wheat**; *cp. 1Cor 15:36–38*)³⁶
 (65) (12:37–44 despite the signs: disbelief; scriptural proofs); *cp. Mk 4:10-12*

THE LAST SUPPER

- (66) 13:1f.,4f.,12–14 The Footwashing; *cp. 1Cor 11:23b-25; Mk 14:22–25 the Last Supper*
 (67) 13:21,26f.,30 Jesus announces Judas' deed

FAREWELL DIALOGUE

This is a Johannine composition, later divided into two discourses: Joh 13:31-14:31/15:1-16:33) and containing, *inter alia*:

- (71) 14:13–29 Announcement of the „advocate“; *cf. Q 22:28–30 (the concluding logion of the Sayings source) and Mk 13:25f. (the announcement of Jesus' second coming)*
 (72) 16:16–33 the „final hour“; **parable of the birthing woman**; *cp. Mk 13 ("synoptic apocalypse")*

JESUS' FINAL PRAYER

- (73-74) (chap. 17); *cf. Q 11:2–4 praying to the Father (and Mt 6,9-13, the Lord's prayer)*

THE ARREST OF JESUS AND INTERROGATION BY THE HIGH PRIESTS

- (75) 18:1–5 arrest of Jesus
 (76) 18:10–12 Peter's attack with the sword
 (77) 18:13–15 Jesus led away to Hannas. The acquaintance of the High Priest
 (78) 18:16–18 Peter's denial of Jesus
 (79) 18:19–22 interrogation before Hannas
 (80) 18:24–27 Jesus before Caiphas. Peter's renewed denial

THE TRIAL BEFORE PILATE

- (81) 18:28f. arraignment before Pilate

³⁵ In Mark this pericope is located in Galilee, a region that bears Mark's special interest, much as Jerusalem bears the interests of Luke and John. The mention of a synagogue in the Markan text, which seems not to be his addition, confirms a Galilean location, because there is no evidence that in Judea proper synagogues existed prior to 70 AD. (The Jerusalem Theodotus inscription uses the term *synagoge* for something quite different from a place of common prayer.) So the Markan location may be correct and the Johannine one a construction, or rather, a conflation, as is the Lazarus pericope in its entirety.

³⁶ At this point, John the Evangelist reacts to Paul. Both use Synoptic imagery (*cp. Mk 4:28 etc.*). As Paul is earlier, the imagery as such may well come from Jesus himself.

- (82) 18:33f. Pilate questions Jesus
 (83) 19:6 the high priests and the attendants clamour for the crucifixion of Jesus
 (84) (19:8–11 „Where are you from?“); *cp. Lk 23:6–12 the attempt at transferring Jesus to Antipas*
 (85) 18:39f. manumission of Barabbas instead of Jesus
 (86) 19:12 protestation of loyalty to Caesar
 (87) 19:13–14 Pilate on the judgement seat. The accusers press the issue
 (88) 19:16,1–3 (*sic*)³⁷ Pilate commands Jesus to be led away; flagellation of Jesus
- CRUCIFIXION AND DEATH OF JESUS
- (89) 19:16–20,23f. The crucifixion of Jesus. The seamless garment
 (90) 19:25 The three Marys (and the disciple, whom Jesus loved) under the cross
 (91) 19:28–30 The death of Jesus
 (92) 19:31–37 Jesus' bones are not broken. Piercing of the side
 (93) 19:38,41f. The burial of Jesus. Joseph of Arimathea

b) The Easter pericopae

THE EMPTY TOMB

- (94) 20:1,2 The discovery of the empty tomb
 (95) 20:3,5,7,9f. Peter at the tomb

APPEARANCES OF THE RESURRECTED JESUS

- (96) 20:11f. Mary Magdalene at the tomb; *cp. Mk 16:1-8 the three women at the tomb*
 (97) 20:14,16-18 Mary's encounter with the resurrected Jesus
 (98) (20:19f. Appearance of Jesus to the disciples; imparting of the Holy Spirit and authority to forgive sins); *cf. Lk 24:36-43 the Emmaus episode*
 (99) (20:24–29 Doubting Thomas; "Blessed are those, who do not see...").

CONCLUDING REMARK

- (100) 20:30f. Epilogue to the "Signs"; Concluding sentence of the Gospel.

Ch. 21 is a wholesale addition, which, however, includes older material in its first part:

Appendix I: 21:1–14 The resurrected Jesus eats breakfast with his disciples (# 24 has been reused here);

Appendix II: 21:15–23 Dispute between Peter and the disciple, whom Jesus loved; 21:24f.: Postscript of the editors.

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³⁷ There are some minor transpositions between Jn 18 and 19 to the effect that Pilate gets into a perpendicular motion between inside and outside the Praetorium. This narratological device underscores the Roman potentate's paradoxical helplessness.