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Descent and ascent in the Fourth Gospel: The Johannine deconstruction of the heavenly ascent revelatory paradigm

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DESCENT AND ASCENT IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL:

The Johannine Deconstruction of
the Heavenly Ascent Revelatory Paradigm

by

C.P. Toby Holleman, Jr.

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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ABSTRACT

DESCENT AND ASCENT IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL:

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by
C.P. Toby Holleman, Jr.

The otherworldly depiction of Jesus in coordination with the origin and function of descent-ascent language in the Gospel of John is the subject of this study. In Chapter One it is found that the gospel explicitly and repeatedly refers to Jesus' heavenly origin, his divine titles, his descent from heaven, and his ascent back to his celestial home in order to emphasize his preeminent revelatory authority. Furthermore, it would appear that the gospel attempts to suppress a competing revelatory point of view in which heavenly visions and heavenly ascensions by mortals are normative.

A review in Chapter Two of the way in which modern scholars have attempted to come to terms with these matters indicates that the Fourth Gospel depicts its protagonist according to one transcultural conceptual paradigm containing a descent-ascent pattern for revelatory figures in order to oppose an alternative paradigm in which both divine descent-ascent and human ascent-descent patterns are present.

Focusing upon ancient Jewish and Christian angel stories, Chapter Three demonstrates that an essential difference between the two paradigms has to do with whether the locus of divine-human discourse is earth or heaven. In the EARTHBOUND paradigm revelation
is transmitted solely upon the earth and the heavenly messenger
possesses unrivaled revelatory authority. But in the alternative
HEAVENWARD paradigm the role and status of the heavenly messenger
are patently subordinated to the mortal who is permitted to see if
not actually journey up into the celestial world.

Chapter Four's selective but narratologically-informed
reading of the Gospel of John shows how the gospel's depiction of
its protagonist according to the EARTHBOUND paradigm methodically
suppresses and deconstructs revelatory and salvific beliefs rooted
in the HEAVENWARD viewpoint. Of particular interest is the way in
which an historically necessary departure from the EARTHBOUND sche-
ma, by ironically representing the ascent of Jesus as a lifting up
upon the cross, effectively puts to death (from the gospel's point
of view) ideas about the possibility of mortals ascending to heaven
with or without Jesus prior to the end of their own lives.
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ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations for ancient documents conform to the list provided by James Hamilton Charlesworth in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and the New Testament: Prolegomena for the Study of Christian Origins*, New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985, with these two exceptions:

The Gospel of John..........................JOHN
The Apocalypse of John.....................ApJn
(Revelation)

The standard abbreviations for these works should be noted (see the Bibliography for full citations):

Bauer’s Greek-English Lexicon..............Bauer
Biblia Hebraica.............................MT
Brown-Driver-Briggs’s Hebrew
and English Lexicon.......................BDDB
Old Testament Pseudepigrapha.............OTP
Septuagint................................LXX
Theological Dictionary of the
New Testament............................TDNT
UBS Greek New Testament...............NT

Also note that:

Johannine.................................Joh
Angel of the Lord........................A.L.
Angel of God.............................A.G.
INTRODUCTION

Rudolf Bultmann describes him as a "definite human being in history" who has "an embassage from without, an arrival from elsewhere." /1/ Ernst Kaesemann, on the other hand, refers to him as "God walking on the face of the earth."/2/ For Wayne Meeks he is neither a mortal hero nor a descending god, but rather "the Stranger par excellence." /3/ In science fiction parlance he might be described as an E.T. who suddenly appears on the earth in human form, bent on a Supermanly mission to rescue the faithful and true from the malevolent forces of the Dark Side by revealing the mysterious knowledge of the Jedi. Who is this superhero of mythical proportions? Not the protagonist of a modern comic strip or film clip, but rather the Jesus of the Gospel of John.

The following study is an attempt to come to terms with this fascinating depiction of the central figure of the Christian faith. As such it participates in a venerable tradition of scholarship stretching back into the latter half of the second century, when a report was being circulated to account for the distinctive Christology of the Fourth Gospel, to the effect that the Apostle John had been commissioned by the Holy Spirit and Jesus' disciples to compose a "spiritual" gospel in order to complement the historically-oriented Synoptic narratives./4/ Ever since that era (if not before!) readers of the Fourth Gospel have felt obliged to provide some explanation for JOHN's rather unique
and striking portrayal of the earthly Jesus as a supremely authoritative, otherworldly, descending-ascending revealer-redeemer. Throughout our own century biblical scholars have sought to solve the riddle of the Johannine (Joh.) Jesus by appealing to a host of religiousgeschichtlichen parallels, involving such mythical figures as Wisdom, the Son of Man, the theios aner, the Hellenistic-Jewish Logos, the Son of God, Hermetica’s Nous, the Shekinah, the Holy Spirit, the Gnostic redeemer, and various angelic beings. Some of these comparative studies have been more successful than others, but none can be characterized as the consensus solution to the riddle of the Johannine (Joh.) Jesus. What is sometimes forgotten in such efforts is that even if a particular mythical figure could be indubitably identified as the model upon which the Joh. depiction of Jesus is based, this discovery in itself would not solve the more important and more difficult problem facing the reader of the Fourth Gospel: Why was this pattern chosen in the first place? That is, why did the author of JOHN decide to paint his gospel’s protagonist in such distinctive otherworldly hues?

Before the search for a compelling answer to this question can begin the investigator must make several critical decisions about the thought-world in which the Fourth Gospel first communicated its message as well as about the methodological approach which (s)he will follow. This study takes as its starting point the widely-held assumption that JOHN’s story of Jesus is firmly rooted in the theologically and socially diverse Hellenistic-Jewish-Christian soil of Late Antiquity, and that its distinctive
qualities—to wit: language about the possibility of unmediated transcendental hearing and seeing, about the significance of revelation in heaven as over against revelation on earth, about the cosmological descent and ascent of revelatory-redeemer figures, about the revealing and concealing of salvific knowledge, about Spirit-possession, spiritual rebirth, and immortality, and finally about communal esoterism and elitism—reflect an indebtedness to ecstatic religious thinking and behavior which was pervasive in the ancient Levant. Walter Bauer, Dieter Georgi, Erwin Goodenough, Jacob Neusner, James Robinson, Gershom Scholem, Morton Smith, and a host of others have largely succeeded in convincing biblical scholarship that terms such as "canonical," "heterodox," "heresy," and "mainstream" are misnomers when applied to first and early second century Judaism and Christianity; for, as they have documented, both religious traditions during and just after the Second Temple period were quite multiform, synthetic, and competitive. Furthermore, their epochal studies have collectively demonstrated that ecstatic religious behavior, whether identified as "mystical," "ascent-oriented," "visionary," "pneumatic," or "magical," can no longer be regarded as a fringe phenomenon within either tradition. Its presence has been detected in the worship of Qumran, in the personal piety of early Rabbinic Judaism and of the Apostle Paul, and even in the theurgic healings of Jesus.

Thus there is nothing remarkable about claiming that an ecstatic approach to religious experience comprises a meaningful part of the religious "world" in which the Fourth Gospel came to be
written. Of course we have not yet determined whether JOHN endorses or rejects this feature of its "world." But we do assume that JOHN is affected by and interacts with it in a significant way. Whether JOHN's conceptual milieu also includes the Synoptic gospels or the traditions which lie behind them is a more difficult question. Quite frankly we are not convinced by any of the various attempts to establish direct literary connections between JOHN and the Synoptic literary circle. No doubt the Fourth Gospel makes considerable use of traditions about Jesus which extend back to a period before the bifurcation of the Joh. and Synoptic trajectories. But in our opinion the Joh. trajectory of Jesus sayings and stories must have been so deeply affected by the ecstatic milieu in which the gospel is situated and by the particular concerns of the Joh. community itself that a rigorous comparison of this gospel with the other three canonical texts would produce more distortion than clarity in an effort to comprehend the purpose and meaning of the otherworldly depiction of Jesus. Consequently, we will for the most part avoid attempting to interpret JOHN on the basis of its affinities to and alleged departures from the Synoptic gospels.

Methodologically this project is largely informed by two rather different but not necessarily incompatible approaches to gospel studies. First of all, in performing the interpretive task we are influenced by some of the principles and terminology commonly associated with Narrative Criticism and Reader Response Criticism. This will become particularly evident in Chapter Four,
when we focus our attention directly upon the text as printed in the third UBS edition of the Fourth Gospel,5/ and endeavor to show how in incremental steps through the unfolding plot of the narrative the author/s/ of JOHN leads the reader/7/ into a more profound understanding of its main character. Since JOHN was no doubt meant to be read/8/ more than once, we will occasionally glance ahead to see how the "informed" reader might have understood a particularly difficult passage, but by and large we will allow the author to instruct us step by step as we journey down the narrative path. Justification for this type of reading will become self-evident as we discover how JOHN employs irony, metaphor, double entendres, misdirection, deferred meaning, and frequent repetitive strategies to provide the reader with progressive rather than instant illumination. Needless to say, in taking the narrative itself quite seriously we will ignore hermeneutical approaches which tend to fragment the text, such as form, source, redaction, and composition criticism. Moreover, we will demonstrate only a minimal interest in sociological matters, and unless the evidence for it is quite strong we will avoid attempting to identify direct intertextual relations.

Despite these important affinities with narrative and reader response reading strategies we do have a keen interest drawing as nearly as possible to the nexus of meaning shared by the author and those in the first century for whom the gospel was primarily written. Full understanding of a text and of the intentionality of the text's actual author is forever elusive, and in this regard the
post-structuralists are most certainly correct. But we are of the opinion that it is possible to recover what Michael LaFargue terms the "mind-set of the author," i.e., the "species of 'competence' which shaped the mind of the author and ought to shape the mind of the reader."/9/ In other words, we desire to understand as well as we can the symbolic world which the real author, his text, and his first readers all shared in common. This does not mean that all of his readers would have read the gospel in the same way, but it does mean that their choices of responsible readings lay within certain parameters established by the conceptual patterns of the community in which they all lived.

In order to simulate a first century Joh. Christian’s reading of the gospel we must engage in a religionsgeschichtlichen study of certain Joh. themes, which in Chapters One and Two we will have identified as critical for a competent grasp of the Fourth Gospel. This study constitutes our second major methodological approach to Joh. interpretation. Again we must emphasize that whatever conceptual similarities between JOHN and contemporaneous literature we may discover do not in themselves provide the answer to our question about the reason for JOHN’s otherworldly depiction of Jesus. Religionsgeschichtliche data are helpful in so far as it informs us of the way in which certain terms and motifs may have been grasped and employed by members of the Joh. community. But only after we have turned back to JOHN and have read its unfolding story in the manner outlined above (albeit while keeping our religionsgeschichtlichen insights in mind) will we be able to
comprehend as fully as possible the significance and meaning of the Joh. portrayal of Jesus as a supremely authoritative, otherworldly, descending-ascending revealer-redeemer.
CHAPTER ONE

THE COSMOLOGICAL DEPICTION OF THE JOHANNINE JESUS

INTRODUCTION

About a quarter of a century ago in a deceptively brief publication/1/ Kaesemann penned the results of his forty-year quest for the historical situation in which the Fourth Gospel should be placed, and in so doing he presented what until this day continues to be for many scholars "a provocative and sometimes irritat ing sketch of Johannine theology."/2/ Its irritation lies in the fact that it boldly and powerfully challenges the popular hypothesis of his teacher, Bultmann, as well as that of traditional scholarship that JOHN is "the champion of the incarnation of the Word."/3/ Whereas Bultmann over at one end of the spectrum avers that "the divinity of the figure of Jesus in John is completely lacking in visibility,"/4/ Kaesemann at the other end maintains that the divine glory of Jesus' presence upon the earth shines so brightly that the human attributes of this figure "represent the absolute minimum of the costume designed for the one who dwelt for a little while among men . . . without himself being subjected to earthly conditions."/5/

Against those who maintain that "John approximates to or complements the Synoptic tradition" by possessing a Christology of humiliation, Kaesemann endeavors to prove that the Joh. Jesus is predominantly a divinely glorious figure
who walks on the water and through closed doors, who cannot be captured by his enemies, who at the well of Samaria is tired and desires a drink, yet has no need of drink and has food different from that which his disciples seek; . . . [who] cannot be deceived by men, because he knows their innermost thoughts even before they speak; . . . [who] debates with them from the vantage point of the infinite difference between heaven and earth; . . . [who] has need neither of the witness of Moses nor of the Baptist; . . . [who] dissociates himself from the Jews, as if they were not his own people, and . . . meets his mother as the one who is her Lord; . . . [who] permits Lazarus to lie in the grave for four days in order that the miracle of his resurrection may be more impressive. And [who] in the end . . . goes victoriously to his death of his own accord. . . ./6/

We cite Kaesemann's argument at some length because it witnesses to the point made in the Introduction to this study that the otherworldly depiction of the Joh. Jesus is a major feature of the Fourth Gospel's message. But despite the forcefulness of Kaesemann's presentation it is in the final analysis not very compelling, for virtually every one of these allegedly unique otherworldly or divine features of the Joh. Jesus has one or more Synoptic parallels. Their Jesuses are also depicted as possessing extraordinary powers of intellect, rhetoric, healing, endurance, and self-assurance. Moreover, the Joh. Jesus possesses more notable human characteristics than Kaesemann is willing to admit: Jesus has a body of flesh, he bleeds and has scars, he eats and thirsts, he weeps and becomes tired, his crucified body dies and must be buried, and last but not least many of his contemporaries seem absolutely persuaded that he is only a human being derived from identifiable human parentage.

If Kaesemann's arguments are unsatisfactory nevertheless his basic perception of the Joh. Jesus warrants reflection. For in
JOHN as over against the Synoptic gospels the heavenly character of Jesus patenty overshadows his mortal qualities, leaving the reader with the distinct impression that this Jesus has far more in common with God than with humankind. But how can this be, particularly in light of the Prologue's statement that the divine Word became flesh (1.14) and the fact that the entire gospel drama is played out upon the earth? What gives Clement and the generations of Joh. readers following him the overwhelming sense that this Jesus is more "spiritual" or otherworldly than the Synoptic protagonists? And secondly, what is the literary or rhetorical function of this striking portrait of a Jesus who essentially belongs in heaven and is but a temporary sojourner upon the earth?

The primary aim of this chapter is to search for answers to these two basic questions about JOHN's divine depiction of the earthly Jesus: first, to identify the various strategies employed by the author which have the cumulative effect of highlighting the otherworldly nature of Jesus' life and work on the earth; and second, to show how this depiction of Jesus as an extraterrestrial figure in human form impinges upon the meaning of his revelatory and redemptive mission. Our investigation will proceed along thematic lines, commencing with terms and statements which point to Jesus' heavenly origin and then moving to expressions which involve his putative descent from heaven to earth and his subsequent return to the celestial domain.

In a nutshell, we will find that by having the earthly Jesus repeatedly allude to his preexistent life (i.e., prior to his
entrance into the human world) in heaven, to his descent prior to the beginning of his mission, and to an anticipated ascent after his task on the earth is completed, the author skillfully directs the reader's attention towards the cosmological dimension of a gospel drama which is paradoxically played out entirely upon the earth. Yet--and this is most significant--the reader is not provided with intimate details about any of these three matters. Jesus' heavenly origin, descent, and ascent are stated as simple facts rather than elaborated upon for their own sake. (Why this is the case we will attempt to answer in a subsequent chapter as we endeavor to locate the intellectual milieu of the gospel's cosmological features.) In the course of identifying those factors which cause the reader to perceive that the Joh. Jesus is a predominantly heavenly figure we will also look within JOHN for the chief purpose which this pervasive cosmological orientation serves. In so doing we will come across what appears to be a polemical edge in the Joh. depiction of Jesus. The apparent conflict between JOHN and some alternative perspective concerning the identity and function of Jesus will be so intriguing that we will return to it again and again as we attempt to determine the fundamental reason for the Joh. Jesus' transcendental character.
A. THE HEAVENLY PREEXISTENCE OF THE JOHANNINE JESUS

1. Explicit Statements about Jesus' Heavenly Origin

On three separate occasions the Joh. Jesus (hereafter simply "Jesus") unambiguously announces that the place from which he originates is heaven rather than the earth. In his Light of the World Discourse Jesus draws a sharp cosmological line between himself and his Pharisaic opponents by claiming that (8.23)

You are from below, I am from above. You are from this world, I am not from this world.

What provokes this bold assertion? It is uttered in the context of a sharp debate between Jesus and the Pharisees over whether he can justifiably claim to be the life-giving "light of the world." Jesus maintains that his self-witness is true while (by implication) their understanding of him is false because he knows the place from which he has come and to which he is going; they, on the other hand, know neither (8.14). Their judgment of Jesus' identity is also false because they merely perceive him "according to the flesh." By contrast, Jesus' authentic claim about himself is validated by the Father who sent him (vv. 15-16, 18). Then comes the critical assertion in v. 23 about Jesus being extraterrestrial while his interlocutors are worldly. From this point on until the end of the section in v. 30 Jesus continues to focus upon his identity and the claim that he has been sent by the Father. Moreover, he states quite plainly that the Father has sent
him for the purpose of announcing what he (the Father) had taught him.

According to Jesus, his origin in heaven provides him with an epistemological advantage over the earthbound Pharisees. This advantage enables him to substantiate the veracity of his revelatory message and the authority of his revelatory mission. By the same token it calls into question the efficacy of these self-appointed earthly authorities. Two epistemological—and by implication, two revelatory—viewpoints are sharply distinguished: a this-worldly perspective which leads to false understanding and an otherworldly perspective which serves as the source of true knowledge. Only Jesus can lay claim to the latter./8/

Jesus’ heavenly preexistence also plays a significant role in the Bread of Life Discourse. Upon being challenged by a crowd of falsely committed followers to perform a sign on the order of the manna miracle which was performed during the Sinai wanderings (vv. 30–31), Jesus replies by pointing out that Moses (6.32)

did not give to you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives to you the true bread from heaven.

This true bread from heaven, Jesus goes on to explain, is “the one who descends from heaven and gives life to the world” (v. 33)—which in the next verse turns out to be Jesus himself: “I am the bread of life.” In three simple steps Jesus reveals that his fundamental place in the cosmos is heaven.

A deeper probe into this first section of the Bread of Life Discourse (6.25–40) illuminates for us the polemical relevance of
this claim. Just before they ask for a sign Jesus rebukes the crowd for expressing an interest only in physical sustenance, rather than seeking "the bread which remains unto eternal life" which the Son of Man provides (vv. 26-27). The following request for a sign like the manna miracle suggests that the crowd may now be beginning to think in spiritual terms. As justification for their request Jesus' interlocutors appear to cite (but not verbatim) Ex 16.4, Ps 78.24, and/or WisSol 16.20: ". . . just as it is written, 'bread from heaven He gave to them to eat.'" Jesus immediately picks up upon this scriptural reference and decisively locates the heart of the discussion within the spiritual and eternal dimension of life. He infers that they believe that the giver of this heavenly bread is Moses, and accordingly he contrasts their belief that Moses has given to them (τοιαύτης, i.e., the present crowd of Jews) salvific bread from heaven with the correct understanding that his Father gives this eternal life-giving bread. Moreover—and this is the crux of the argument—Jesus himself is this heavenly bread. As such he alone possesses the ability to resurrect the dead and bestow eternal life.

The fundamental question with which this text wrestles is, Who is the true mediator of that life which comes from the heavenly world? By the way in which v. 32 is constructed the reader is led to understand that Jesus' interlocutors believe that Moses is the giver (or mediator/9/) of such life. This understanding corresponds well to other Joh. statements about the Mosaic beliefs of the Jewish crowds who interact with Jesus. (1) Moses is the one who
gave the Law (so says Jesus in 7.19—note that in 1.17 the narrator more precisely identifies Moses as the mediator of the Law). (2) This Law, which is sometimes identified as the Scriptures, is generally thought to bring eternal life (5.39). And (3) because of Moses’ unique involvement in the giving of the Law the people are said to place their hope in him (5.45). In light of the soteriological significance of Moses for the Jewish people in JOHN it seems reasonable to conclude that the assertion of Jesus’ heavenly preexistence in 6.32-34 is meant to undergird Jesus’ own authority to give salvific life at the expense of the popular claims made on Moses’ behalf. Jesus’ mediatory prerogative to raise the dead and to bestow eternal life completely overshadows the role which Moses plays in the giving of the Law.

The third occasion for Jesus’ claim about his preexistence is the High Priestly Prayer which he utters at the conclusion of the Farewell Discourses. In 17.5 Jesus prays,

Now glorify me, Father, beside you with the glory which I had beside yourself before the world existed.

The dual reference to “beside you/yourself” (παρ’ σοι, παρ’ σεαυτόν) in this verse patently underscores the unique status which Jesus has and will enjoy in the presence of the Deity in heaven. To be sure, according to JOHN the disciples will also participate in the glory which Jesus expects to share with the Father. But their glory is quite plainly said to be mediated to them by Jesus (v. 22); it has not been an integral part of their lives since before the creation of the world.
As in the two previous passages we find here that Jesus' heavenly origin is associated with his authority to grant eternal life (v. 2) and his revelatory responsibility to disclose the name of the Father to the disciples of Jesus (vv. 4, 6ff). In fact, soteriology and revelation are juxtaposed and made almost identical by the statement in v. 3 that eternal life is the knowledge of the one true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent. For the third time a statement about Jesus belonging fundamentally to the heavenly world is placed in a context which highlights the authority of Jesus to represent the Deity in his relationship to humanity. On this basis we can tentatively hypothesize that a principal reason for emphasizing the cosmological dimension of Jesus' existence is to undergird Jesus' authority while he carries out his revelatory and soteriological mission upon the earth.

2. Titles Which Allude to Jesus' Heavenly Origin

In addition to statements in JOHN which explicitly designate heaven as Jesus' true abode, there exist in the gospel a host of titular expressions that are applied to Jesus and which normally in antiquity connote the idea of permanent divinity. Some of these are bestowed upon Jesus by the narrator or Jesus' true disciples; others are articulated by Jesus himself.

At the very outset of the gospel the protagonist is identified as the preexistent "Logos"/10/ and even as a "god."/11/ Hardly any more direct affirmation of Jesus' heavenly roots can be imagined than this. Whatever the precise nature of Jesus' apparent
incarnation (1.14), this facet of his identity is never allowed to eclipse Jesus' godlike character. To the contrary, by asserting Jesus' heavenly origin at the beginning of the gospel story the author effectively qualifies every subsequent witness to Jesus' humanity.

Jesus' divine Sonship is a pervasive theme in JOHN, and it is primarily indicated by these three appellations: "the (only begotten) Son of God,"/12/ "the Son,"/13/ and "the only-begotten of the Father."/14/ This filial relation which the protagonist enjoys with the Father is without question one of a (divine) kind, as indicated by a consistent use of the definite article in these expressions, by the fact that Jesus refers to God in a uniquely personal way as "my Father,"/15/ and by two statements which assert that Jesus and the Father are "one."/16/

Often Jesus speaks as if he were the Son of Man./17/ This mysterious heavenly figure first appears in Dan 7.13-14 and then later in the Similitudes of Enoch and 4 Ezra. The title is appropriated by the Synoptic Gospels and Acts for the earthly and the exalted Jesus. Many of the Joh. Son of Man sayings are explicitly associated with this figure's descent from heaven or ascent from the earth, thereby illuminating the title's otherworldly nuance.

The numerous "I am" terms which are sprinkled throughout the Fourth Gospel, particularly those which have no predicate,/18/ serve as yet another means for suggesting to the reader who is familiar with the Hebrew Bible that Jesus belongs fundamentally in heaven. Whether يهو يهو alludes to Yahweh's self-designation
in Exo 3.14 and/or to an oft-used signification for Yahweh in
Second Isaiah (esp. 41.4; 43.10, 25; 45.18; 46.4; 51.12), it
clearly indicates that Jesus enjoys a very intimate relationship
with the Deity. As the Son Jesus is one with the Father and yet at
the same time remains subordinate to him as the one sent to the
earth in his (the Father’s) stead./19/

More ambiguous in terms of its multiple connotations is the
title "Lord" (Kύριος), which appears over fifty times in JOHN and
is used of Jesus more than forty times. In the Farewell Discourses
and the resurrection appearance stories it is by far the preferred
term of Jesus’ disciples for their leader. If these and earlier
uses of "Lord" by the author and Jesus’ true followers are meant to
be understood retrospectively in light of Thomas’ confession of
Jesus in 20.28 ("My Lord and my God"), as is probably the case,
then we are justified in adding this title to our list of appella-
tions which point to the heavenly origin of JOHN’s protagonist./20/

With so many different titles for Jesus pointing the reader
to the protagonist’s heavenly background it is curious that nowhere
in JOHN is he designated as an angelic being. Of course, this is
right in step with the rest of the canonical books of the early
Church; a few biblical texts even take pains to argue that Jesus is
superior to angels (Heb 1), and that he alone and not angels should
be worshiped (Col 2.18; ApJn 19.10). In contradistinction to this
tendency some prominent II C.E. theologians and texts do not hesi-
tate to speak of Jesus as an angelic figure as well as the Son of
God, Son of Man, Logos, and so on./21/ Arguments for and against
conceiving of Jesus as an angel appear frequently enough during the first couple of Christian centuries to suggest that a significant segment of early Christianity embraced Jesus as an angelic figure. While the absence in JOHN of any mention of this belief does not in itself constitute an affirmation or polemic against it, the Joh. depiction of Jesus as a fundamentally divine being who comes from heaven and appears in human form, who claims to be in close relationship to the Deity and is sent by him to announce a divinely ordained message, who helps those in distress and then disappears, supposedly returning to heaven—all of which when taken together constitute the basic pattern by which angels are portrayed in Judaism and Christianity—at least gives us pause to wonder why Jesus is not identified as an angel. The fact that angels play an even smaller role in the Fourth Gospel than in the other (canonical) three may be related to JOHN's reluctance to speak of Jesus in this way, but we will have to wait until after our study of Jewish and Christian views concerning revelatory angels (in Chapter Three) before we can pursue this line of questioning further.

The divine titles which are employed for Jesus in JOHN confirm and amplify his own bold claim to have existed in heaven before Creation. Not unlike the explicit statements which locate Jesus' home in the heavenly world, these titles frequently appear in literary contexts where the superior mediatory prerogative of Jesus is the subject of discussion (e.g., 1.17-18, 49-51; 3.11-21; etc.). This provides additional support for our previously mentioned hypothesis that the Joh. depiction of Jesus as an
otherworldly figure has something to do with the matter of his authority as a mediator of the words and works of God.

B. THE COSMOLOGICAL DESCENT OF THE JOHANNINE JESUS

1. "To Descend from Heaven"

The heavenly preexistence and divine status of Jesus is considerably enhanced by explicit references throughout most of the gospel to his descent from heaven to the earth. To be sure, one might naturally infer from the Prologue that if the divine Logos becomes flesh and dwells "among us" he must of necessity descend to the earth. But as other biblical texts demonstrate, the appearance of heavenly creatures on the earth does not require a statement about how they got there. Concerning the figure Jesus, it is instructive to note that almost without exception, where the literature of the New Testament declares or suggests that he originates in heaven, they (excepting JOHN) do not also mention his journey down to the human world.22/ In contrast the Fourth Gospel states quite plainly in a number of different ways that its main character has made a cosmological trip from the heavenly realm of God down to the terrestrial domain of mortals.

Of the three verbs which are used in JOHN to convey the downward movement of Jesus through the cosmos,23/ certainly the most explicit is καταβαίνειν. This is a term which appears in each of the Synoptic gospels, where its predominant usage is this-worldly, having to do with geographical or meteorological
descent, e.g., descent of a person from a mountain or from Jerusalem, or descent of the rain to the earth. Of its eleven total appearances in Mt, thirteen in Lk, and six in Mk, only three times in Mt and Lk and only once in Mk is καταβάσις used to refer to cosmological descent. Interestingly, in none of these seven instances is Jesus the subject of this kind of downward movement. The ratio in John of this-worldly to cosmological descent is notably different. Eleven of the nineteen occurrences of καταβάσις in the Fourth Gospel have to do with the latter form of descent: two involve the reported descent of the Spirit before the commencement of his public ministry (1.32, 33), one is employed in Jesus’ allusion to Jacob’s dream at Bethel where the angels are said to ascend and descend upon the Son of Man (1.51), and all the rest speak of Jesus’ journey from heaven to the earth. Curiously, seven of the eight examples of this usage are clustered together in the Bread of Life Discourse (6.33, 38, 41, 42, 50, 51, 58). The other is found in Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus (3.13).

All seven of the phrases in ch. 6 which contain καταβάσις are quite similar in structure although no two are verbally identical. Each phrase can be seen as containing three parts:

(1) (2) (3)

"bread" καταβάσις "from heaven"
(= Jesus)

The second and third segments are virtually identical; it is in the first section that the significance of these phrases is manifest, for it is here that it becomes increasingly clear that Jesus
regards himself as the salvific Bread of Life. How and why is this so?

In his widely acclaimed monograph about the putative effect which JOHN's heavenly depiction of Jesus and its Descent-Ascent Schema have upon Joh. sectarianism, Meeks explains that the Joh. penchant for double entendre, deliberately contradictory statements, similar but not identical sayings, spiraling patterns of logic, and a multitude of apparent aporiae are all common marks of mythological consciousness. He avers furthermore that the author of mythical communication "must resort to 'redundance'" in order for the fundamental structure of his message to be able to penetrate the distracting "noise" produced by the complex social matrix and reach its intended receivers. Thus to communicate effectively, one "must repeat the signal as many times as possible in different ways."/27/

One of the primary signals emanating from the sevenfold repetition of Jesus' descent from heaven in Jn 6 is this: an (apparent) mortal by the name of Jesus is the source of salvific life for humanity, because as a heavenly being he has descended from heaven to bring it to the world. Thus cosmological descent and the ability to bestow salvation are inextricably joined. It is quite significant that what Jesus' interlocutors grumble about first after listening to his self-witness is not that the means of their salvation must descend from heaven (they acknowledge that this is so by their scriptural "quotation" in v. 31), but rather that Jesus himself is that means ("bread") by virtue of his having
descended from the celestial world (vv. 41-42a). Their complaint in v. 42b focuses precisely upon the matter of descent: "How then does he say, 'I have descended from heaven'?" In other words, they question whether Jesus is the authentic descending agent of salvation.

Jesus' response to their question about his descent contains four major elements. (i) His ability to offer salvation is directly contingent upon the Father's prior work of drawing people to him (i.e., to Jesus—v. 44). (ii) Jesus has been sent from God. (iii) While mortals may have heard from the Father and been taught by him, only Jesus has actually seen the Deity (v. 46). And (iv) the Fathers who were fed in the wilderness all died (v. 49). The first two elements identify why Jesus has the authority to descend: it stems from the Deity. The final two points explain why his descent is both significant and unique: only Jesus has had direct contact with the Deity; and, the ministry of the one who might be thought to have conveyed life-giving sustenance (Moses) ultimately resulted in failure. One must conclude therefore that Jesus is the sole mediator of salvation, that as v. 45 maintains he is the one to whom people come who are (truly) taught of God (v. 45). It is noteworthy that after alluding to Moses' alleged failure in v. 49 Jesus immediately states not once but twice in succession that he is the (eternal) life-giving bread which has descended from heaven (vv. 50, 51). Thus the argument spirals back to the claim which sparked the controversy, and the point is again driven home that Jesus is THE ONE who is divinely authorized to provide eternal
life, because he is the descended one.

While κατάβαίνω phrases in ch. 6 strengthen Jesus’ argument that he has uniquely been given the prerogative to grant salvation on behalf of the Deity, a single κατάβαίνω statement in the Nicodemus Discourse of ch. 3 serves as the basis for a complementary claim that he has the unique authority to speak on behalf of God. In v. 2 Nicodemus comes to Jesus and immediately identifies him as "a teacher who has come from God." Thus the issue of revelation is introduced at the very outset of this story. Jesus responds by revealing that an enigmatic birth and the Spirit are necessary prerequisites for one to be able to "see" and "enter into the Kingdom of God" (vv. 3-8). Seeing and entering God’s kingdom presumably connote some kind of revelatory experience. When Nicodemus balks at Jesus’ testimony, Jesus rebukes this "teacher of Israel" for not knowing what Jesus is talking about (vv. 9-10). Next comes a statement about speaking and bearing witness to what is known and seen, which is followed by a somewhat sarcastic remark to the effect that if Nicodemus (and those whom he represents) does not believe the earthly matters which Jesus reveals, how can he (and they) expect to believe the heavenly things which Jesus speaks (vv. 11-12)? Then comes the climatic verse containing κατάβαίνω (v. 13):

and no one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.

Later in the gospel it becomes obvious that Jesus is that Son of Man. What the assertion of Jesus’ cosmological descent
accomplishes at the conclusion of this dialogue story/28/ is to establish Jesus' superior revelatory credentials in contradistinction to the implied authority which Nicodemus (and his fellow ruling Pharisees) exercises as a teacher of Israel. In other words, descent from heaven validates Jesus' revelatory prerogative; and since no one else has been in heaven, only Jesus appears to have the right to claim such authority.

Interestingly, after v. 13 the theme of Jesus' speech moves directly to soteriological matters, meaning that what Jesus is authorized to reveal is that which (through faith in him) brings salvation. With respect to JOHN one should not attempt to distinguish too sharply between the revelatory and soteriological functions of Jesus; they are in fact complementary aspects of a single divinely authorized mission which Jesus executes after his descent to the earth. Revelatory discourse in JOHN, as in most of the religious literature of antiquity, is primarily oriented towards a soteriological objective. If, therefore, from this point on we speak of the function of Jesus' cosmological descent as being to authenticate his claim to possess unrivaled revelatory authority, we will understand that a salvific aim lies at the heart of this mediatory responsibility is a salvific aim.

2. "To Come into the World" and "To Come from Above"

The second verb which is frequently used by JOHN to speak of the downward movement of Jesus through the cosmos is ἐγέρθη. Of the more than one hundred fifty occurrences of this term in its
various forms it is used to refer to Jesus' cosmological descent about ten times. Most of these examples depict Jesus' coming from the point of view of its terminus, using the prepositional phrase "into the world" (ἐις τὸν κόσμον). In public discourse (9.39), in discussion with his disciples (16.28), and in his testimony before Pilate (18.37) Jesus announces that he "has come into the world." The same phrase is used to describe the presence of Jesus as "light" on the earth (1.9; 3.19; 12.46). On one occasion Jesus is acclaimed as "the prophet who has come into the world" (6.14). And finally, the phrase appears with "the Christ" and "the Son of God" as the third element of Martha's Christological confession (11.27).

But is our cosmological interpretation of the verbal expression "to come into the world" justified? At the heart of this question lies the meaning of "world" (κόσμος) in JOHN. As used in this particular phrase does "world" refer to the earth (i.e., the domain of humanity—as we might appear to be suggesting)? Does it instead designate the universe as a whole, as perhaps it does in 1.3, 10; 17.24; etc.? Or is it used metaphorically to denote fallen humanity, as 3.16 would suggest and Bultmann vigorously maintains?/29/

In terms of the phrase "to come into the world," the first and second definitions do not substantially differ from one another. Whether Jesus is said to come into the universe of which humanity is a part, or is said to come to the earth upon which humanity is situated, the point is that Jesus has come (down) to
the place where mortals are. There is never any suggestion in JOHN that Jesus goes to some uninhabited (by humans) part of the universe. Moreover, since it is only with sinful human beings in need of salvation that the Joh. Jesus has to do, it is possible to agree with Bultmann that "world" in this descent phrase probably has an harmatological and existential nuance. If "world" implies sinful humanity in 3.16, then, given the metaphorical nature of Joh. language and the deliberate use of irony by the author throughout the gospel, it probably carries that connotation everywhere else.

However, Bultmann's point is not that the hermeneutical effect of Joh. metaphoricity demands that we include "existence in bondage" or the "compound of darkness and falsehood" in our polyvalent definition of "world"; he argues rather that cosmological considerations have no place in an understanding of the term as it is used by the extant text of JOHN. To say that Jesus "has come into the world" is to make an existential and faith-oriented affirmation rather than a cosmological statement. For Bultmann the "cosmological dualism of Gnosticism has now become in John a faith-oriented dualism of decision." 130/ Because of his own hermeneutical bias Bultmann (particularly in his commentary) tends to relegate specific descent terms and phrases to footnotes. In our next chapter we will note that Bultmann's gnostic hypothesis with its accompanying existentialist hermeneutic no longer commands a large following of scholars—at least in North America—as it did a generation ago. This is due partly to his failure to justify his
assumptions about the nature of pre-Joh. Gnosticism (upon which his interpretation is largely based), and partly to the general recognition that the existential tendencies which he "finds" in the gospel seem to arise more from the text’s interaction with a reader who is steeped in a modern philosophical consciousness than from its interaction with a reader who allows the significance of explicit cosmological language in a profusion of ancient texts to determine his reading of the Joh. narrative. For these reasons we cannot endorse Bultmann’s view that apparent Joh. references to cosmological ideas are primarily metaphors for existential realities.

Even if it is granted that "world" refers primarily to a material reality, one may ask if the expression "to come into the world" does not simply mean that Jesus, like a typical prophetic messenger in the Hebrew Bible, merely moves from the terrestrial place where he is commissioned to another earthly location. /31/

This question can be particularly raised with regard to 6.14, which speaks of Jesus being "the prophet who has come into the world." However, the clear statements about Jesus’ preexistence and the unambiguous references to his descent elsewhere militate against this sort of figurative understanding of "to come into the world."

Moreover, we find that the verb ἐξέρχομαι appears twice in 3.31 with an emphasis upon the other end of the cosmological journey, the point of departure (vv. 31-32):

The one who comes from above [ουρανος ὄλευθεν] is above all things; the one who is from the earth is from the earth and speaks from the earth. The one who comes from heaven (is above all
things); he who has seen and heard this bears witness . . .

It seems reasonable to assume that when έρχομαι is used to
describe the fundamental fact of Jesus' appearance in the world, it
has a cosmological significance: it refers to his descent from
heaven to the earth.

Jn 3.31-32 exemplifies the explicit relationship in JOHN
between expressions of Jesus' descent and his revelatory authority
which we have come to expect. The paragraph continues through v.
36, stating that the one whom God sent and to whom he has given all
things--the Son--speaks the words of God and serves as the basis of
salvific life for those who believe in him. Many of the other
έρχομαι texts also have to do with Jesus' revelatory authority.
For example, Jesus informs Pilate that he has "come into the world
in order to bear witness to the truth" (18.37).

In addition to these έρχομαι statements which refer
explicitly to the descent of Jesus we should note that when this
term appears elsewhere in JOHN it often contains a double meaning
which includes the notion of cosmological movement. In the mind of
a sympathetic reader of the gospel the aforementioned unambiguous
statements about Jesus' descent tend to unite with JOHN's penchant
for double entendre and deeper meanings to evoke cosmological
meanings in ambiguous texts. Thus one who is disposed to accepting
the claim that Jesus has come from heaven will "see" further
confirmation for this assertion in such statements as: "Rabbi, we
know that [you are] a teacher come from God" (3.2), "I [Jesus] have
come in the name of my Father" (5.43), "he came into his own"
(1.9), and so forth.

Likewise the pervasive Joh. sending motif takes on cosmological significance as it hermeneutically combines unequivocal heavenly descent texts and an obvious narrative strategy involving deeper meanings. Although the noun ἐστίν τὸ δόξα can be found only once in the entire gospel, its verbal form (ἐστίν τὸ τέλλει) appears twenty-eight times. A synonymous term, ἔστησε, expresses the theme of divine sending another thirty-two times. Over sixty percent of the time one of these words is used to express the idea that God the Father sent Jesus the Son./32/ The reader who has been informed of Jesus’ heavenly preexistence and of his subsequent descent to the earth will probably find a cosmological inference in these sending statements. Providing hermeneutical assistance are three ἐστίν τὸ τέλλει texts which actually employ the familiar “into the world” phrase associated with ἐστίν: "God sent not the Son into the world" (3.17; also 10.36 and 17.18). Finally, as we have already noted, some of the cosmically-oriented καταβαινω and ἔστησε phrases in JOHN appear alongside references to the sending motif.

3. "To Come Out from God"

The third verb in JOHN to express the cosmological descent of Jesus is ἑστησεν. Six of its twenty-nine occurrences in the gospel patent refer to this event, and in each case the accompanying prepositional phrase directs the reader to the terminus of descent: Jesus is said to come out from God or the
Father./33/ Although in none of the texts is the coming out of Jesus specified as the basis for his revelatory authority, the two matters are often in juxtaposition to one another. Moreover, when Jesus summarizes the purposes of his earthly mission in ch. 17 we find that among the ideas which he has intended to communicate to his disciples is the fact of his descent from heaven./34/ As pointed out earlier, this "fact" becomes part of the confession of a true believer— at least one like Martha (11.27; cf. 16.30).

The cumulative effect of all of these direct and indirect references to the descent of Jesus is to place this alleged event in the forefront of the reader’s mind so that it becomes inseparable with his/her understanding of Jesus. Jesus is perceived to be otherworldly because he claims to have preexisted in heaven, because he is identified with titles which are normally associated with heavenly beings, and because JOHN contains a multitude of explicit and implicit references to his cosmological descent from his heavenly abode to the earth. Moreover, Jesus is an exceptional otherworldly figure. He is the only-begotten Son of God. He alone grants a baptism of the Spirit (1.33; 7.37-39), and that Spirit patently functions in subordination to him (16.12-15). At best angels play a marginal role in the Fourth Gospel. No other heavenly beings appear or are mentioned. Thus Jesus is the Deity’s quintessential mediator of salvific revelation. Given the undeniable Joh. emphasis upon Jesus’ unique revelatory priority, one cannot help but wonder whether this might be a primary reason why the gospel was written. But if so, what is the driving force
behind this aim to highlight Jesus’ authority?

As we endeavor to find the answer to this question through the course of this study we must not overlook two important facts. First, despite all that has been presented thus far about Jesus’ extraterrestrial identity, it is abundantly clear that the divine Logos does become incarnate (1.14). What "incarnation" means is, of course, debatable. But surely it involves a greater participation in human existence than Kaesemann is willing to grant ("the absolute minimum of the costume designed for the one who dwelt for a little while among men"/35/). After 1.14 the Logos always appears before the reader of the gospel in "flesh"; it is never described as some sort of temporary sheath or outer covering for the real being of the Logos. But what sort of meaning is attached to Jesus’ "incarnational" existence? From an implied birth/36/ to a certified physical death on a cross Jesus is perceived by many of his contemporaries in the gospel story to be only a mortal (e.g., 8.53; 10.33). It is Jesus’ apparent mortality that makes it impossible for many to believe that he comes from heaven; paradoxically, it may be a belief in his otherworldly origins that that makes it difficult for his true disciples to come to terms with his death. The question of the relationship of Jesus’ apparent humanity to his alleged divinity bears directly upon the twin issues of his otherworldly portrayal and the assertion of his unique revelatory authority. In due time we must attempt to explain why a narrative so bent on asserting its protagonist’s heavenly qualities runs the risk of causing misunderstanding by
investing that figure with so much human likeness.

The second fact not to be overlooked is that Jesus' descent is often mentioned in JOHN but never narrated or reported by an eyewitness. No one, not even the omniscient reader of the gospel, is granted a glimpse of Jesus' downward journey through the cosmos. Even the moment of his arrival upon the earth is enshrouded in mystery. Given the significance of Jesus' descent for establishing his revelatory authority, one would think that a description of his descent or report of his arrival would enhance his stature as an otherworldly messenger. After all, John ("the Baptist"/37/) confesses that in seeing the descent of the Spirit (presumably from heaven) upon Jesus he is able to identify the latter as "the one coming after me who is before me (in rank)"—that is, as "the Son of God" (1.30-34). Why, given the epistemological significance of cosmological descent, does JOHN not include a description of Jesus' descent into the world—such as can be found in AscIsa 10.17-11.16?

Part of the answer to this question is, of course, that Jesus appears to have been on the earth since his birth. But then why does JOHN not begin with a miraculous birth story, as do Mt and Lk, which would dramatically establish Jesus' heavenly credentials? Why is there but a single enigmatic statement in the Prologue about "the Word becoming flesh" and then a commencement of the narrative of Jesus' earthly mission after he is full grown (1.19ff)? To respond by pointing out that Mk also begins its narrative with an adult Jesus does not satisfactorily answer these questions, for Mk is not nearly so concerned as JOHN to emphasize the heavenly
origins and cosmological descent of its primary character. Some important factor must have precluded JOHN's employment of what would seem to be an excellent means of substantiating the claim that Jesus's revelatory mission has the highest authorization possible.

C. THE COSMOLOGICAL ASCENT OF THE JOHANNINE JESUS

Since the Joh. Jesus is originally a heavenly being who descends to the earth in order to execute a divinely authorized revelatory mission, his terrestrial sojourn is temporary and at some point he must return to the place whence he came. But is this cosmological ascent experience significant enough to be described—or even mentioned? While one might be inclined to answer in the affirmative, at least with regard to the second possibility, it is instructive to note that in the case of angelic beings who appear on the earth in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures ascent into heaven at the conclusion of the revelatory episode is hardly ever explicitly indicated. More often than not when his revelatory mission is accomplished the angel simply fades out of the narrative picture. Thus the articulation of a heavenly revelatory being's ascent from the earth cannot be taken for granted. But having noted this tendency with respect to those heavenly messengers which have so much in common with the Joh. Jesus, it must be acknowledged nevertheless that the instinctive response to our question about Joh. ascent is the correct one, for this biblical
text plainly speaks of the ascent of Jesus after his mission has been accomplished.

In quite notable contrast to the normative depiction of angels in the biblical world JOHN not only mentions but emphasizes the fact of Jesus' return to heaven. Sometimes ascent is conjoined with descent (e.g., 13.3); more often it is not. Explicit statements dealing with Jesus' ascent appear only about two-thirds as often as explicit references to his descent./39/ This ratio might lead one to assume that JOHN regards descent to be more important than ascent, but this supposition lacks a firm basis, since numerous implicit references to both vectors are not taken into account. And just how many of these allusions there actually are is impossible to determine with certainty, since the subjectivity of each individual reader plays such a major role in their identification. In the absence of a definite, firm ratio of descent to ascent references we can only say at this point that both vectors are quite important to the overall meaning of the Fourth Gospel.

But what about the distribution of descent and ascent terms along the unfolding plot of the gospel? In his thorough study of Joh. descent and ascent language Godfrey Nicholson observes that,

[b]roadly speaking, it is true to say that in the first half of the Gospel, Jesus speaks of his having come from the Father and of the relationship with the Father that persists throughout this movement. From chapter 13 on, he speaks of his imminent departure, his return to the Father and the events consequent upon this departure that are to involve the believers./40/
As a general statement this observation cannot be disputed. However, it is equally important to note that the matter of Jesus’ descent surfaces occasionally in the Farewell Discourses and the High Priestly Prayer (16.30; 17.8). It has by this point clearly become an item of confessional significance. Cosmological ascent, on the other hand, is broached by Jesus in 3.13, specifically mentioned again at 6.62 and 7.33, and alluded to more than a half dozen times in chapters seven, eight, and twelve. Given that the claims about Jesus’ descent and ascent appear quite often both in confessional and polemical contexts, it is obvious that they serve a critical function in the gospel. But what function do they serve, and is it the same function?

1. "To Ascend into Heaven," "To Ascend to the Place Before," and "To Ascend to the Father"

Just as καταβαινω (καβ) unambiguously points to Jesus’ cosmological descent, so ανάβας (αβ) is the most explicit signifier of his return to heaven. This verb appears numerous times in the Synoptics, but never with a cosmological meaning.41/ Likewise it is used ten times in JOHN to refer to ascent within the terrestrial domain. But on five other occasions it denotes an ascent from the earth to heaven.

In the first instance the subject of ascent is the angelic host which is "ascending and descending upon the Son of Man" (1.51). Since in JOHN Jesus is that Son of Man, it would appear that this verse is quite relevant to our study of the Joh.
depiction of Jesus. Five matters in particular call attention to themselves.

First, 1.51 alludes to Jacob's dream-vision at Bethel in Gen 28.12. The two texts are quite similar but not identical, the major difference being that Son of Man in 1.51 seems to take the place of the ladder in the Hebrew text. Second, ascent and descent are juxtaposed in what can be said to be a round-trip trajectory or a complete cosmological journey. Here in a nutshell is what one might term an "Ascent-Descent Schema." One may question whether in fact this is the case in JOHN, since the Son of Man figure may be situated in heaven. But this interpretation falters if the intended allusion to Gen 28.12 is taken seriously, where it is clear that the angels ascend and descend along a ladder which stretches from the earth up to heaven. Third, this schema is the inverse of normative angelic movement. Since angels are heavenly beings one would expect these creatures to descend first and then ascend afterwards. To be sure, the Joh. pattern is the same as that of Gen 28.12. But then one wonders why this pattern is also contrary to expectations. Fourth, in both texts the ascending-descending angels are completely silent. After seeing the open heaven and the ascending-descending angels Jacob is addressed directly by the Deity (Gen 28.13ff). Not so in JOHN: Jesus does not promise that Nathaniel (and his friends) will enjoy such an encounter, and never in JOHN does the Deity directly address these mortals. And fifth, even what Jesus does predict that Nathaniel and his friends will see is never literally fulfilled in JOHN.
There is nothing in the rest of the gospel which even remotely resembles an ecstatic vision of this sort. Furthermore angels play a miniscule revelatory role in the gospel as a whole (see 20.12-13; cf. 12.29).

This mysterious allusion to an ecstatic vision involving the reciprocal cosmological movement of heavenly beings, an open heaven, and the Son of Man figure has a direct bearing upon our understanding of why and how Jesus is depicted in the way that he is in JOHN. What function does this unfulfilled prediction have in the unfolding narrative of a heavenly revealer who appears on the earth in human form? We must postpone consideration of this question until after we have had the opportunity to consider angelic revelation in Judaism and Christianity in greater detail (the subject of Chapter Three). It is only necessary to note at this point that JOHN contains an unrealized promise about a vision of angels moving in an unexpected trajectory up from the Son of Man—JOHN’s protagonist—and then down again.

The other four cosmological uses of ἀναβίω in JOHN refer to movement by Jesus himself, and like 1.51 they all manifest significant interpretive difficulties. The first of these appears in the Nicodemus Discourse at 3.13 ("no one has ascended into heaven except he who has descended, the Son of Man"), a text which we examined earlier in our study of ἀναβίω statements. A plain reading of the verse might suggest that Jesus has already ascended (note the perfect active tense), but this cannot be correct since Jesus (the Son of Man) is still on the earth when he
utters this statement. Some have attempted to make sense out this
enigmatic text by claiming that it represents an intrusion by an
old Joh. source which mentions an ascent by the human Jesus prior
to his assumption of the Son of Man title and subsequent descent to
earth as the Logos figure./43/ Others maintain that the intrusion
is from the other end of the temporal spectrum, the Joh. community:
"the speaker's perspective is thus that of the Christian, post-
Easter community."/44/ Or it could be that the emphasis of the
verse is not upon Jesus' descent and ascent, but rather upon Jesus'
descent and others' non-ascent: e.g., "no one has ascended, but
(Jesus) has descended."/45/ These are but some of the more notable
attempts to understand this difficult text. We will postpone our
own effort to resolve the matter until Chapter Four; for now it is
only necessary to point out that in this verse are situated
cosmologically oriented references both to Jesus' descent and
ascent, and that (as noted earlier) the text lies in the context of
a discussion about revelatory matters.

The second layınב text for Jesus is another problem-
atic Son of Man saying, located near the end of the Bread of Life
Discourse. Upon realizing that "many of his disciples" are
scandalized by "this word" (ὃ Ἰησοῦς ἀνασκέψατο), Jesus exclaims in
6.61b-62:

This scandalizes you? What if you behold the Son of Man
ascending to where he was before?

Jesus continues in v. 63 by contrasting the Spirit- and life-giving
nature of his own words with the worthlessness of the flesh.
Precisely what "flesh" denotes is not transparent, and as a result this statement has been the focal point for generations of heated debate about the nature and efficacy of the eucharist (note that "flesh" has a positive meaning in vv. 51b-58: it apparently refers to Jesus' sacrificial and soteriological death).

Yet even v. 62 is not without difficulty. It is not a prediction but a hypothetical question, posed as a protasis for some such statement as "then will you be scandalized or believe?" The protasis is never literally fulfilled within the story frame of the gospel; no one ever espies Jesus, the Son of Man and Bread from heaven, ascending to his former abode. In fact, given the conditional nature of Jesus' question, it is not even clear that Jesus will ascend or that if he does and is seen by these "disciples" that such a visionary experience would produce faith. What is more obvious is that because of his interlocutors' intransigence Jesus must defend the spiritual and life-giving efficacy of his words (v. 63). Once again cosmological movement and the issue of Jesus' revelatory authority are conjoined.

Jesus' announcement in 20.17 containing two \( \text{παραβαίνω} \) verbs is the last statement about his ascent in the entire gospel. To an astonished and clutching Mary Magdalene, who is the first person to encounter him after his resurrection, Jesus says,

Do not hold me, \( \text{να} \) not yet have I ascended to the Father; go and tell my disciples and say to them, "I ascend to my Father and your Father and to my God and your God."/46/
Clearly Jesus is speaking of his cosmological ascent to heaven. But what is not so easy to grasp is why Jesus would tell Mary not to cling to him (after all, he is intermittently seen on the earth for another chapter and a half), and why this ascent experience is not observed by any of his closest followers. There is no explicit confirmation in JOHN that Jesus ever actually ascends. Does this statement function in lieu of a narrative of Jesus' ascent? Might it convey the idea that Jesus' resurrection appearances are pre-ascent in nature, so that the words of the risen Jesus are made to stand in continuity with the previous words of his earthly ministry (as opposed to the Risen Lord type of discourses in Gnostic literature, in which the teachings of an earthly Jesus play little or no role)? We must await answers to these questions until later. We simply note again the complex nature of the matter of Jesus' cosmological ascent in the Fourth Gospel.

2. "To Leave the World," "To Come to the Father," "To Go Away to the Sender," and "To Pass Over from this World to the Father"

JOHN contains seven other verbs which refer to Jesus' ascent. The most unambiguous texts are:

16.28: Jesus: "I am leaving the world" (ἀφίημι).
17.11: Jesus, to his Father: "And no longer am I in the world ... and I come to you" (ἐπροσώπω).</p>
7.33: Jesus: "I am going away to the one who sent me" (ἐν αὐτῷ).
16.5: Same as 7.33.

16.10: Jesus: "I am going away to the Father" (ἐν αὐτῷ).
16.17: Same as 16.10.

13.1: Narrator, speaking of Jesus: "his hour had come that he pass over from this world to the Father" (ἐν αὐτῷ).

13.3: Narrator, speaking of Jesus: "From God he came out and to God he is going away" (ἐν αὐτῷ./47/

With one exception (7.33), all appear after the shift from the public to the private phase of his discourses, which confirms Nicholson’s observation that, "broadly speaking," chs. 1-12 are primarily concerned with Jesus' descent while chapters 13ff focus upon his ascent. It is notable that here at the juncture between these two phases of ministry appears the most direct juxtaposition of descent and ascent in JOHN (13.3). This is the "Descent-Ascent Schema" for Jesus in a nutshell.

3. Confusion over Ascent

As pointed out in the introduction to this section there are quite a few other allusions to Jesus' cosmological journey back to heaven, but these are not nearly so explicit because the heavenly destination of the movement is not specified. In the Temple (ch. 7) and the Bread of Life Discourses we find a discussion between Jesus and unfriendly interlocutors which involves double meaning, unbelief, and misunderstanding. He informs them that he is "going away to the one who sent (him)," but they will not be able to find him or come with him (7.33; cf. 8.14, 21-22). Since
they do not believe that he has been sent by God or from heaven, they assume that he is going to the Diaspora or is about to commit suicide (7.35; 8.22). But for the reader, who believes what Jesus and the author have already declared on numerous occasions, the terminus of Jesus' departure is correctly understood to be heaven.

In the First Farewell Discourse Jesus repeats that he is going away (13.33), and once again there is confusion over just what he means. When his disciples ask him to clarify the matter, he reiterates that he is going back to God in heaven (14.12, 28b). It is interesting, however, that both here and in the Second Farewell Discourse mention of a temporary departure from the disciples in order to go to the cross intrudes into the discussion (14.18-21; 28a; 16.16-22). In fact, the intrusion calls into question some of the apparent references to Jesus' cosmological ascent, and it certainly leaves the disciples completely befuddled (16.17-18).

The tendency for Jesus' announcement of his departure to take on the double meaning of cosmological ascent and crucifixion is patently manifested in three well-known Son of Man sayings involving the verb "to lift up" (יָשָׁב). Immediately after referring specifically to his heavenly ascent in 3.13 Jesus announces that "it is necessary for the Son of Man to be lifted up" (v. 14). Likewise Jesus alludes to his ascent to heaven in 8.14 and 21, and this is followed by the promise that "When you [the crowd] lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am, . . ." (v. 28). Despite the implication that the Son of Man will be passive while a
fairly hostile crowd will effect the lifting up experience, it is easy to see how one might understand Jesus to be referring to his heavenly ascent. Yet in an explanatory aside the narrator (v.33) interprets the final lifting up saying (12.32, 34) to refer primarily to Jesus’ death (i.e., it is a lifting up of Jesus upon the cross). What is the purpose of this pun? Why are both Jesus’ interlocutors and JOHN’s readers “deceived” until ch. 12?

The precise relationship between Jesus’ heavenly ascent and his crucifixion is a riddle which we must attempt to solve in Chapter Four. Our concern at this point involves the recognition that Jesus’ identity as a fundamentally heavenly being is shaped in part by his depiction as a figure who will ascend to heaven at the end of his earthly sojourn. He both descends and ascends, and accordingly it is appropriate to designate this feature of his portrayal as a Descent-Ascent Schema. What function this schema has in portraying the protagonist as an otherworldly being is by now quite plain to see. We have already noted how descent language is intimately associated with the issue of Jesus’ authority to speak and act on behalf of the Deity, and we could add a number of similar examples from the ascent side of Jesus’ cosmological trajectory.

Descent and ascent bear directly upon the question of Jesus’ acceptance as the quintessential intermediary for the Deity. Jesus’ claim to have descended from heaven is never accepted by his opponents; but in a confessional statement at the end of the Second Farewell Discourse it becomes clear that his true disciples have
embraced this asseveration (16.27-30). Yet in this confessional statement there is no mention of ascent—even though Jesus has just spoken about it along with the matter of descent (v. 28). It would appear that ascent continues to be problematic for the disciples at least until after Jesus' death. What significance may be attributed to the apparent distinction between descent and acknowledged authority and ascent and acknowledged authority remains to be seen.

D. THE COSMOLOGICAL ASCENT OF HUMAN BEINGS?

In the course of our study of Joh. texts which emphasize the cosmological movement of Jesus from heaven to the earth and then back to heaven we have occasionally come across statements which seem to deny the possibility that human beings can ascend to heaven or behold the Deity. Since these prohibitory statements appear to be set in opposition to affirmations of the descent and ascent of JOHN's protagonist, since the affirmative claims are inextricably wed to the assertion that Jesus possesses an unsurpassed degree of revelatory authority, and since JOHN patently contains far more revelatory discourse material than any of the Synoptic gospels, /50/ it behooves us to examine these interdictory statements more closely.

1. No Ascent into Heaven

The key verse in all of JOHN regarding the question of a proscription of heavenly ascent by mortals is undoubtedly 3.13:
And no one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended, the Son of Man.

Here we find in juxtaposition three types of cosmological movement: the descent and ascent of the Son of Man—which are affirmed; and the ascent of everyone else—which is patently denied. The revelatory context in which this verse appears is also quite clear (see above, pp. 17-18). Here in the Nicodemus Discourse the revelatory authority of a leader of the Jewish people is pitted against the revelatory prerogative claimed by Jesus as the (heavenly) Son of Man. From the point of view of the gospel Jesus' authority far surpasses that attributed to mortal revealers. He is able to declare what he has seen and heard in heaven, while they (as represented by Nicodemus) can fathom neither the heavenly nor even the earthly matters which he discloses (vv. 11-12). And, by implication, how can they as the leaders of the Jews disclose what they do not comprehend?

The basis for distinguishing between intermediary status of Jesus and that claimed by Nicodemus and his peers is, quite simply, that Jesus comes from heaven while they stem from the earth. This epistemological distinction is absolutely critical to the Joh. argument for Jesus' revelatory supremacy. Since authentic revelatory knowledge has a heavenly origin, it cannot become a human treasure unless either mortals ascend to get it or someone from heaven brings it down to the earth. Therefore, at issue here (and, it would appear, throughout JOHN) is the question of who has been granted the opportunity to obtain revelation in heaven and pass it
on to mortals on the earth. We have already noted this epistemo-
logical distinction in another context (8.23), where again at issue
is Jesus' claim to be "the Light of the World" who is authorized to
speak in the world the things which he previously heard from the
Father who sent him.

If we move to the end of ch. 3 we find another variation of
this same theme. A sharp contrast is drawn between an unidentified
earthbound revealer and a heavenly one. Apparently the former is
John,51/ while the latter most certainly is Jesus. Note how em-
phatically the earthly origin of the lesser figure is distinguished
from the heavenly origin of the greater figure by the technique of
redundancy and by sandwiching a descriptive comment about the
lesser between descriptive statements about the greater (v. 31):

The one from above
is above all.

The one from the earth
is from the earth and
speaks from the earth.

The one coming from heaven
[is above all].52/

In the next verse we learn that the celestial figure bears
witness to "what he has seen and heard," which presumably is in
heaven. The revelatory responsibility and authority which pertain
to this superior being is highlighted in the subsequent statements
that "the one whom God sent speaks the words of God" (v. 34) and
"The Father loves the Son and has given all (things) into his hand"
(v. 35). Finally, and as we should expect, revelatory mission and
salvific mission are seen to be one and the same: "The one who believes in the Son has eternal life, . . . " (v. 36). From this we can conclude that 3.31-36 reiterates the basic themes of the 3.1-21, thereby reinforcing the principal message that no one other than the divine Son has been in heaven to receive the salvific revelation which mortals so desperately need and which is bestowed upon them only because this heavenly being has brought it down to them.

2. No *Visio Dei*

A second way in which JOHN appears to interdict human ascent into heaven for revelatory purposes involves the question of whether mortals have ever directly beheld the Deity. The possibility of a human *visio Dei* is categorically denied on three separate occasions.

After contrasting the Law-giving (hence, revelatory) activity of Moses with the grace- and truth-giving ministry of Jesus Christ (1.17) comes this blunt epistemological statement at the very end of the Prologue:

> God no one has seen at any time. The only-begotten god/54/ who is in the bosom of the Father—he has declared him.

Throughout almost all of the gospel story the Deity remains far removed from the action taking place on the earth. No one ever espies him or is said to have seen him (except Jesus, of course), and even his voice is imperceptible to all persons except his Son
(as 12.28-29 implies). Given this utterly transcendent view of God in the Fourth Gospel, it stands to reason that the only way for a mortal to hope to come into direct contact with the Deity is if he is able to ascend to heaven or at least have a vision of the heavenly world (cf. the seer's experiences in ApJn).

Stories of heavenly ascents and heavenly visions (which is a kind of "ascent of the inner eye") are quite common in Late Antiquity. Many of these stories pertain to the ancient heroes of Israelite faith, including Moses, who was believed by many Jews to have ascended above Sinai into heaven to receive the Law. While in heaven and in the presence of the Deity he was allegedly enthroned as King and Prophet of Israel./54/ Jn 1.17-18 seems to presuppose some sort of belief in the ascent of Moses to heaven. At minimum it assumes the biblical claim that Moses saw the Deity "face to face." In either case, v. 18 firmly rejects the claim that Moses had direct contact with God. On the other hand, it maintains that Jesus has been in heaven and that he has been in the most intimate contact with the Deity conceivable. No one other than Jesus has seen God—not even Moses—and therefore no one other than this "only-begotten god" can speak about him and for him. While JOHN does not dispense with the Law, it is relegated here and elsewhere to an patently inferior position vis a vis the revelation of Jesus.

Twice Jesus appears to deny claims that his interlocutors have experienced a direct visual encounter with the Deity. During the Bethesda Discourse (ch. 5), while defending his unique revelatory status as a Son sent by the Father, Jesus asserts that
his testimony is greater than John’s (v. 36). Then comes the proscriptive statement (vv. 37-38):

Neither his [God’s] voice have you [plural] heard at any time, nor his form have you seen, and his word you do not have abiding in you, because the one [Jesus] whom he sent you do not believe.

A similar assertion is found in the Bread of Life Discourse (6.46):

Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father.

Neither text explicitly refers to an ascent experience, but given the Deity’s transcendence in the Fourth Gospel it is difficult to imagine how else one might behold him. Yet even if only heavenly visions are in view, the point remains the same that no one under any circumstance has seen or heard God except Jesus. This Jesus is the sole mediator of the words of the Deity to humanity. Both of these texts allude to the experience of Israel at Sinai;55/ and some have argued that it is to this watershed revelatory event in Israel’s history that Jesus is referring. While this is certainly plausible, both interdictory statements evince a powerful contemporary thrust (note the implied 2nd. pers. pl. form of the verbs of 5.37-38) which suggests that the primary emphasis of Jesus’ remarks lies with present ecstatic experiences.

In both 5.37-38 and 6.46 the question of a visio Dei is directly related to the matter of revelatory authority. Jesus claims in each case to possess unrivaled authority to act as God’s intermediary, because he has seen God (in heaven) while everyone
else has not. Just as the descent and ascent of the heavenly Jesus 
undergirds his mediatory claims, so the inability of mortals ascend 
to heaven to behold the Deity undermines theirs.

3. A Visio Christi Instead

If no one has ever beheld the Deity, then what about the 
various texts in the Scriptures which depict distinguished Israel-
ites encountering God directly through theophanic visions? JOHN 
seems to be aware of this question, for he offers an answer to it 
by arguing that it was Christ, and not God himself, whom these 
Israelites saw. The visionary experiences of Abraham, Isaiah, 
Moses, and Jacob are all presented in this light.

The Jews argue with Jesus over the authority of his "word" 
in the third section of the Light of the World Discourse (vv. 31-
59). Almost at the end of this heated discussion Jesus boldly 
exclaims (8.56):

  Abraham your father rejoiced to see my day; he saw and 
rejoiced.

The Jews take sharp exception to this claim, and rightly so, 
because it is difficult to believe that a man "not even fifty years 
old" could have once seen (note the reversal of subject and 
predicate) the venerable patriarch. There are, however, both 
biblical and post-biblical traditions which maintain that Abraham 
saw God on the earth or at least experienced an Ezekiel-like 
theophany in the heavens./56/ Could it be that Jesus is directly 
confronting such beliefs, which may involve a human ascent, by
claiming to the contrary that Abraham saw "my day"?/57/

A similar point is made with regard to the prophet Isaiah at the conclusion of Jesus' public ministry. After citing a couple of texts from the book of Isaiah (including one text from the Isaiah's call vision in ch. 6!) about the refusal of the Israelites to believe the words of God's prophets, the narrator makes the following remarkable assertion (12.41):

This Isaiah said because he saw his glory and spoke concerning him.

To whom does this statement refer? In Isa 6 it is clearly the glory of the Deity sitting upon his heavenly throne whom the prophet beholds. But prior to Jn 12.41 the subject is Jesus (not God), and how the failure of the Jews to believe in him (Jesus) is the fulfillment of the "word" of the prophet Isaiah (vv. 37-38). Immediately after v. 41 comes the narrator's comment that "many of the rulers believed in him," but were afraid to publicize their belief lest they be "thrown out of the synagogue."/58/ The antecedent of "him" can only be Jesus. Thus it would appear from the context of v. 41 that the one whose glory Isaiah espied was Jesus. Whether the situation alluded to is the heavenly vision of Isaiah as narrated in Isa 6 or an ascent experience such as the one found in AscIsa 6-11 (in which the prophet's vision of the Deity is even more graphically described [9.37-42]) cannot be determined. But perhaps it is not necessary to make a distinction anyway, as we will endeavor to prove in Chapter Three.
We have already looked at a likely negative appraisal of an ascent belief involving Moses (1.18), and it is only necessary to glance briefly at a curious utterance by Jesus at the end of the Bethesda Discourse in which the claim is made that Moses "wrote concerning me" (5.46). Of course, Jesus does not aver that Moses saw him, as Abraham and Isaiah did. The phrase may only refer to a text like Deu 18.18, which prophesies the coming of a prophet like Moses and which was an important text for first century Jews who entertained earnest expectations of a coming messianic figure. Yet if our understanding of 1.18 is correct, that lying in the background of the gospel is some sort of belief in the ascent of Moses to heaven where he beholds the Deity directly, then 5.46 might be taken as a statement which parallels 8.56 and 12.41. While the Moses ascent tradition would have Moses writing about the Deity and the heavenly world (analogous to AscIsa and TAbr), the Joh. Jesus would be claiming that Moses (who never ascended) saw (in the Sinai experiences recorded in Ex through Deut) Jesus and wrote about him. If we recall that Philo in his scriptural exegesis often substitutes a vision of the Logos for a putative vision of the Deity, then our interpretation of 5.46 does not seem beyond the realm of distinct possibility.

Earlier we discussed the allusion in 1.51 to Jacob's ecstatic dream-vision at Bethel. Whereas Jacob seems to have beheld the Lord (Gen 28.13—whether he literally espied the Deity is admittedly ambiguous), Jesus in 1.51 claims that Nathaniel will see the Son of Man. There is no express indication from Jesus or
the author that the patriarch saw the Son of Man rather than the Deity, but it is remarkable that in store for Nathaniel is a visionary experience which parallels that enjoyed by Jacob. Given that the prediction of 1.51 is never literally fulfilled in JOHN, one wonders if there is not here a denial or revision of implied claims made by JOHN's contemporaries to be able to do just what Jacob is supposed to have done. Might Jesus be saying in effect that one who has Jacob-like visions—whatever may be their phenomenal character—will behold himself as the Son of Man?

4. No Ascent with Jesus Back to Heaven

Finally, we turn to a few texts which might be taken to mean that no one can accompany Jesus when he returns to the Father. Jn 7.33-34 and 8.21-22 seem to suggest that that Jesus' opponents will not be able to find him after he disappears because "where I am you are not able to come" (7.34). This is not what Jesus' interlocutors understand by Jesus' statement, but for the reader who is informed of and accepts Jesus' return to heaven this might very well be how these texts are understood.

A similar interpretation can be made of Thomas' request of Jesus in 14.8 to be shown the Father. Prior to this request the subject of the dialogue between Jesus and his disciples involved Jesus' enigmatic announcement about his imminent departure to prepare a place for the disciples in his Father's house (vv. 1-2). He then seems to comfort them with the statement that he will return and take them to be with him (in heaven?). A brief
discussion ensues about the "way" to the place, and then comes Thomas' request. Thomas appears to desire to go now with Jesus to the Father's house in heaven. In other words, he seems to be asking Jesus to serve as a hierophant for his own heavenly ascent.\[61\] To this supplication Jesus responds negatively: if one wishes to see the Father one must look to Jesus and hear his words (vv. 9-11).

CONCLUSION

We began this chapter by asking two questions about the Joh. depiction of its protagonist: (i) How is it that most readers of the gospel come to perceive this character primarily as an otherworldly being; and, (ii) For what purpose is this extraterrestrial characterization intended? We have discovered that JOHN's pervasive portrayal of Jesus as a heavenly being is the combined product of numerous statements and titles which point to his preexistence with God in heaven, of claims that he has descended from heaven to earth, and of further claims that he will ascend back to heaven after his earthly mission is fulfilled. The dominant function of these manifold assertions is to undergird the quintessential revelatory (and salvific) authority of the one about whom they are made. In the Fourth Gospel Jesus is primarily conceived as a heavenly intermediary who executes on the earth the divinely ordained words and works of the God who has sent him. In order to carry out his task successfully he must not only receive
authority from on high, but his authority must be accepted by those below. Assertions about his heavenly origins and his cosmological descent and ascent, as well as the divine titles which are attributed to and claimed by him, all endeavor to convince true believers of his unrivaled intermediary prerogative.

The audacious asseveration that Jesus is the sole revealer of supernatural knowledge appears to come into conflict with an alternative revelatory perspective which gives pride of place to heavenly ascents and heavenly visions practiced by mortals. Traces of this revelatory paradigm which are scattered throughout the gospel suggest that such ecstatic experiences are enjoyed by contemporaries of JOHN, who may justify their behavior by appealing to the traditions of similar ascents and/or visions practiced by the famed patriarchs and prophets of ancient Israel. It is difficult to discern what, if any role Jesus plays in the alternative schema, although we must not exclude the possibility that he performs a not insignificant function in their ecstatic perception of celestial realities. Certainly if the advocates of this alternative revelatory paradigm can be shown to embrace some kind of understanding of and faith in Jesus as the Christ, then the place which this schema assigns to Jesus would be our particular interest to us.

Whatever the precise configurations of this visionary/ascent paradigm, it seems fairly obvious that one of the primary functions of JOHN is to deconstruct this ecstatic revelatory perspective by asserting the primacy and indeed the exclusivity of
the revelatory mission of Jesus, the heavenly Son of God. Human ascent is ruled out, and ancient scriptural visio Dei experiences are transmuted into visions of the preexistent Jesus. Only Jesus Christ—the Logos, Son of God, and Son of Man—has crossed the cosmological gulf which separates the Deity from humankind and brought the salvific mysteries of heaven down to earth. There is no other comparable intermediary of the light (revelation) and life (salvation) of God.

Needless to say, this reconstruction of the revelatory matrix of the Fourth Gospel is quite speculative at this point. We know that the cosmological orientation of the Joh. depiction of Jesus buttresses the gospel’s central claim that he is the quintessential revealer of heavenly knowledge; but as to why this assertion plays a much more dominant role in JOHN than in the Synoptic stories of Jesus we can make only an informed guess. In order to test our hypothetical reconstruction it is necessary for us to become more familiar with the nature of ecstatic revelatory experiences in antiquity, and in particular, with the function of heavenly beings in these experiences. We would like to know whether there is a mythical pattern involving a preexistent, descending-ascending revelatory figure which JOHN may have used as a blueprint for its portrayal of Jesus. If this pattern can be identified, does its manifestation elsewhere provide us with insight into why JOHN so strongly emphasizes Jesus’ authority and also why the gospel appears to take such a dim view of heavenly visions and ascents?
Of course, the question of the mythical background of JOHN is not new to Joh. scholarship. Scholars have wrestled intensely with the matter since the early decades of this century, and it is with a great deal of appreciation for their efforts and contributions that we turn now to a consideration of their responses to these questions about JOHN's otherworldly depiction of Jesus.
CHAPTER TWO

MODERN HYPOTHESES
ABOUT THE COSMOLOGICAL DEPICTION OF THE JOHANNINE JESUS

INTRODUCTION

The pervasive presence in JOHN of statements referring to Jesus' heavenly origin, his descent to the earth, and his ascent back into the celestial world demand a coherent explanation in terms of the history of religious ideas. Whence comes the notion of a supremely authoritative, descending-ascending, otherworldly revealer who appears on the earth in human form to offer himself as the means of salvation to those who are chosen for it by God? And why does JOHN depict Jesus in this relatively uncommon (from a New Testament perspective) fashion? The Fourth Gospel appears to presuppose some sort of serious threat to the revelatory authority of its protagonist. What is the nature of this rival perspective and whence does it come?

We can save ourselves much time and effort by recognizing that it is futile to look to the Synoptic gospels or their putative immediate sources for the answers to these perplexing questions. It is clear that JOHN's transcendent understanding of Jesus is not derived from the Synoptic tradition, although, as C.H. Dodd persuasively argues, significant portions of JOHN are probably dependent upon a tradition common to all four gospels.1/ Depending upon how one interprets the apocalyptic reference to the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, the Synoptics have little or
nothing to say directly about Jesus' cosmological descent. There are only two explicit references to his post-resurrection ascent, one of which is found in Mk’s longer ending./2/ Identification of Jesus as the apocalyptic Son of Man, Wisdom, and the Son of God, and perhaps also the birth narratives all hint at some kind of preexistence, but these intermittent features of the Synoptic tradition simply cannot be compared to the pervasive Joh. affirmations of Jesus' heavenly origin and preincarnate intimacy with the Deity.

As indicated at the outset of the previous chapter, recognition that JOHN is remarkably different from the Synoptic gospels extends well back into II C.E., as evidenced by the testimony of Clement of Alexandria, to whom belongs the credit for articulating antiquity’s most persuasive and enduring explanation for JOHN’s distinctiveness. Although occasionally modified and reformulated, the essential thrust of the tradition which he reports has won innumerable supporters from the age of the Church Fathers up to the present day./3/ Clement alleges that the Apostle John,

upon seeing that the external things (ἐξ ὡς ἄλλος) had been set forth in the [Synoptic] gospels, and being urged by the notables [disciples], was S/spiritually inspired to make a spiritual (πνευματικός) gospel./4/

In terms of contemporary hermeneutics, the Synoptics provide an "historical" view of Jesus' ministry while JOHN enables us to see the events which comprise this ministry from a divine perspective. The attractiveness of this venerable report lies with the intuitive assumption that Jesus and his message are more
earth-oriented in the Synoptics and more heaven-oriented in JOHN. Yet if we pause to reflect upon the matter more carefully we recognize that the difference between the Synoptic and the Joh. depictions of Jesus is much more complex than Clement's citation might suggest. On the one hand, the gospel with the patently cosmological portrait of its protagonist hardly says anything about the heavenly world and does not even narrate his descent and ascent. On the other hand, it is in the Synoptics and not in JOHN that we find stories involving the descent of divine creatures (angels and Satan) from heaven, as well as a narrative about the heavenly transfiguration of Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. Not even the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus at his baptism is narrated in the Fourth Gospel, although John appears to allude to this event in 1.31-34. Moreover, no one is said to espy Jesus' descent or ascent in JOHN, but many of the true disciples witness his spectacular ascent into heaven in the Lk-Acts corpus. Clearly the Clementine distinction between "external" and "spiritual" is problematic at best.

And even if this dubious distinction is accepted, the question of the pervasive cosmological accent in the Fourth Gospel remains unresolved. For Clement fails to mention precisely why the "spiritual" account was necessary, and why the "external" approach of Mt, Mk, and Lk is inadequate. Some advocates of the veracity of the tradition which Clement reports have argued that the Church felt that it had to set forth the deeper meaning of the message and ministry of Jesus. But this explanation does not eo ipso explain
the Joh. emphasis upon Jesus’ descent, ascent, or even upon his
preexistence—since, after all, the message and ministry of Jesus
in every canonical gospel deals almost exclusively with terrestrial
matters. If we add to these criticisms of Clement’s report the
fundamental question of its historical reliability,/5/ then we are
compelled to look elsewhere/6/ for the key which unlocks the
cosmological mysteries of JOHN.

The overwhelming tendency in modern Joh. scholarship has
been to search among the various religious traditions and movements
spacially and temporally contiguous to New Testament Christianity
for the wellspring of Joh. preexistence, descent, and ascent. This
religionsgeschichtliche approach to the problem has unearthed a
treasure trove of myths and motifs about descent-ascent figures,
visionary practices, human ascent experiences, heavenly revealers
from practically every segment of Judaism and early Christianity,
as well as from Greco-Roman culture, Egypt, Persia, and on and on.
Despite this wealth of knowledge no consensus has yet emerged
concerning which myth, which tradition, which sect, or which text
deserves pride of place as the forerunner of the Joh. cosmological
orientation. Nevertheless, some early contenders for the prize
have now been all but eliminated, while other claimants continue to
enjoy widespread support. The intent of this chapter is to sift
through the research of the past three-quarters of a century and to
determine if possible the best course to follow in our effort to
expose the basis for JOHN’s persistence in depicting Jesus as an
otherworldly figure whose revelatory authority is incontestable./7/
A. LITTLE RELIGIONSGESCHICHTLICHE INFLUENCE
UPON THE JOHANNINE JESUS

Two categories of scholarship are treated briefly in this section of the study. First, we will mention three authors of recent commentaries on JOHN who express little or no interest in the portrayal of Jesus' heavenly origin as such. They virtually ignore the significance of descent and ascent language in the gospel, and consequently they evince only a modicum of interest in the intellectual and sociological background to these motifs. Second, we will discuss three scholars who recognize to some degree the significance of cosmological language in the Fourth Gospel, but who attribute this phenomenon primarily to theological developments within canonical Christianity rather than to religionsgeschichtlichen factors.

1. F. F. Bruce

The unofficial Dean of evangelical scholarship both in Great Britain and North America mentions only in passing the possibility that the Joh. depiction of Jesus is "reminiscent" of the Jewish Wisdom myth. As far as human ascent is concerned, Bruce refers to the experiences of Paul (2 Cor 12.3-5) and John of Patmos in an endnote which is attached to his discussion of Jn 3.13 without attempting to derive any significance from these citations.*/8/*
2. Leon Morris

This Australian scholar who is popular in theologically conservative circles makes a tentative commitment to the hypothesis of Hugo Odeberg (see Section E below) that 3.13 intends to polemicize against Jewish Merkabah mysticism. Moreover, contends Morris, for the person who has experienced the "new birth" by the Spirit (3.3ff) "ascent into heaven is in fact possible." But Morris does not indicate whether he is referring to a form of mystical ascent, to eschatological ascent after death, or simply to spiritual regeneration--although his interpretation of Jn 3 as a whole points in the regenerative direction./9/ Elsewhere in his commentary Morris mentions Odeberg's hypothesis of a "mystical polemic" in JOHN, but the scant attention which he pays to the theory demonstrates the lack of importance which he attributes to it./10/

3. Ernst Haenchen

In his Hermeneia commentary Haenchen argues that at certain points in the gospel (notably the Prologue) there is evidence of a Christian reworking of "an old profound and melancholy myth regarding Wisdom" which Judaism had embraced and applied to the Torah. Some early Christian hymnist "substitute[d] the masculine Logos for the feminine Wisdom" and was thereby able to show that God's agent in creation was also the one who had earlier been rejected by men, and more recently come to the world and founded
his community. Traces of this old myth appear occasionally in other parts of the gospel text./11/

We now turn our attention to scholars who make some effort to come to terms with the cosmological thrust of the Fourth Gospel, but who claim that the key to the gospel’s otherworldliness can be found within the theological and traditional borders represented by the New Testament.

4. C. K. Barrett

Barrett is aware of the possibility of certain influences upon the Fourth Gospel stemming primarily from religious currents which are ordinarily associated with ascent beliefs. He identifies several apocalyptic terms and motifs in JOHN, to wit: the Son of Man, kingdom language, an emphasis upon future resurrection and judgment, and upon eternal life and life in the age to come, and references to germinating seeds and ripening harvests. However, according to Barrett these expressions have reached the author through Christian channels, meaning that they were already transformed by Christian theology before they entered the extant gospel. Barrett admits that the motif of the indwelling of the Father, Son, and Spirit, as well as the motif of the abiding of these three with true believers and vice versa, are all "mystical elements in his [the author’s] thought." But the English commentator is also quick to point out that JOHN cannot be classified "with the mystics of his age, or of any age." For, "[i]f John has borrowed from contemporary mystical thought he has done so not in his description of
Christians but in his portrait of Christ” (in terms of his relationship to the Father)./12/

Barrett’s reluctance to imagine that heavenly ascent (or descent) beliefs might have had some sort of immediate and profound impact upon JOHN is illustrated by the tentative way in which he explicates the apparent interdiction of ascent in 3.13. He notes that one can find “a similar polemic against mysticism in Judaism” and cites a few Rabbinic, Wisdom, and Pseudepigraphical texts as support for this claim. But that is all that he has to say about the matter. When he turns to a discussion of whether the next part of this verse states that Jesus has already ascended prior to his conversation with Nicodemus, Barrett makes the following comment:

It is legitimate to here compare I Enoch 70.2; 72.2 . . . , but very doubtful whether the comparison really illuminates John’s thought which has no room for such an ascent./13/

Indeed, it may well be the case that JOHN “has no room for such an ascent,” so that that is why we find the statement: “No one has ascended into heaven.” Presumably the reason why Barrett does not seize upon these positive claims about heavenly ascent in apocalyptic literature and build a stronger case for a Joh. polemic against such practices is that he is firmly convinced that all ascent-oriented ideas have already passed through the transforming prism of Christian thought before they reach the author of JOHN. Thus there is no need for the gospel to be understood as confronting apocalyptic ascent beliefs as such.
5. Rudolf Schnackenburg

One of the primary objectives of Schnackenburg’s voluminous work on the Fourth Gospel, at least with regard to alleged religionsgeschichtlichen influences on its Christology, is to invalidate the thesis of Bultmann and his successors that the gospel’s point of departure is a pre-Christian Gnostic redeemer myth (see below, Section C). After evaluating the evidence and arguments tendered by the religionsgeschichtlichen Schule Schnackenburg concludes that it is "difficult to maintain that Gnosis presented Christianity with a ready-made and consistent myth of a redeemer." He allows that, in order to make the gospel more palatable to Hellenistic tastes, "[t]here may be assimilation to the Gnostic redeemer myth, but the root or source is not there."/14/ Rather, the root extends from JOHN downward through the theologically fertile soil of early Christianity to the bedrock of Jewish Wisdom mythology.

Schnackenburg astutely takes note of "the Johannine way of looking at things ‘vertically,’"/15/ and within this historical trajectory extending from Wisdom to JOHN he endeavors to determine as precisely as possible the unfolding development of ideas about cosmological descent and ascent as well as preexistence and certain titles such as Son of Man. Descent, preexistence, and Son of Man all ultimately go back to the ancient Wisdom myth and are significantly modified by early Christian thought, but the notion of redemptive ascent cannot be derived from Wisdom and therefore must have originated from within the Church. Phil 2.6-11 and Mk 14.62; 16.6 reveal an early kerygma in which the resurrected Christ is
enthroned in heaven, and this notion of Christ’s exaltation is developed in a realistic direction by Lk-Acts and more theologically by JOHN into "a vertical process in space"--the ascension./16/

Despite having argued for the influence of Wisdom and early Christian thought upon JOHN, Schnackenburg maintains that the primary ground for Joh. preexistence and the cosmological "way" of Jesus is the soteriological desire of the fourth evangelist "to establish clearly the Christian revealer’s power to save." Since the giver of salvific life dwells (preexistent) in the celestial world, he must descend "to impart the Spirit and life of God" and then ascend back to heaven in order to make these gifts fully effective. Thus, the cosmological depiction of Jesus "was dictated . . . by authentic and primordial Christian interests" which remain "in continuity with its Jewish [esp. Wisdom] pre-suppositions."/17/

Moreover, it is within the tributary of primitive Christianity which flows directly into JOHN that the Logos title is inserted for Wisdom (although independently of this Philo also identifies Wisdom as the Logos). The primary reason for the Joh. shift to speaking of the Logos where reminiscences of the Wisdom myth can be found has to do with the allegedly more personal character of the former, which in turn allows for notions of "real personal pre-existence and above all his incarnation."/18/

Schnackenburg recognizes a polemical thrust within JOHN, but he claims that it is not directed towards Jewish heavenly ascent beliefs, since such beliefs lie only on the fringes of Judaism and hence beyond the Joh. community:
But the Judaism of the day was fully convinced that no man could see God with his bodily eyes while on earth... Heavenly raptures and mystical visions were viewed with distrust by official Judaism./19/

JOHN's polemical remarks (such as there are) are directed towards non-Jewish ideas, most notably those belonging to Gnosticism. In 1.14 and similar incarnational expressions in the epistles of John are meant to oppose docetic Christology within Christianity as well as to serve as a "declaration of war on the Gnostic myth of the Redeemer." The categorical denials that humans can see God are best explained by assuming a latent anti-Gnostic and anti-Hellenistic mystical purpose for the gospel./20/

6. W. H. Cadman

Schnackenburg's contention that the cosmological orientation of JOHN's depiction of Jesus is derived primarily from early Christianity and only secondarily from Jewish Wisdom means that he must attribute a considerable degree of creative theological activity to the early Church. But since the early apostolic tradition does not evince an explicit descent-ascent pattern for the Christ figure, the notion of redemptive ascent, a descending-ascending Son of Man, and a preexistent Logos, the author of the Fourth Gospel must be seen as a significant theologian in his own right. This emphasis upon the unique contribution of the author to the Joh. portrait of Jesus is pushed about as far as is possible in a posthumously published collection of notes and writings belonging to W. H. Cadman. Cadman ignores virtually all of the purported
external influences upon the gospel, preferring to interpret it instead within its own narrative world. /21/

Cadman observes quite correctly that the putatively pre-existent Logos who is identified as Jesus reveals nothing about the heavenly world; the protagonist speaks only of "the eschatological significance of the human divine person of Jesus, of His passion, and of His resurrection." Furthermore, Jesus speaks often of his present relationship with the Father as the occasion for his being able to see and hear divine things (e.g., 5.19-20, 30; 14.10-11). Observations such as these inspire Cadman to hypothesize a distinction between the underived (in relation to God) preexistent Logos of 1.1-3 and the derived incarnate Logos of the rest of the gospel. The latter figure is of course Jesus, the human Son of God, who by the Spirit has had his "manhood . . . taken into union with the Logos, in order that that union might subsequently be extended to all humanity." Jesus reveals throughout the gospel only what he has learned from the Father since his baptism. /22/

Cadman's hypothesis turns all putative cosmological statements about Jesus into metaphorical expressions for the way in which Jesus has experienced and is experiencing earthly revelatory contact with the Deity. Statements which seem to suggest that Jesus has seen God prior to his appearance on the earth (e.g., 1.18) refer actually to a self-awareness of his union with the Logos. Jesus must be a human and not a heavenly Son of God, since it is inconceivable that the preexistent Logos (who is identified as God) would need to be sanctified (10.34ff). Likewise, "Son of
Man" signifies "the union of Jesus' manhood with the Father." The reference to an open heaven in 1.51 actually means "God revealed . . ." The absence of a narration of Jesus' descent and ascent suggests to Cadman that "descent" really refers to the protagonist's origin as the incarnated Logos (= Son of Man = Son of God), while "ascent" actually means coming into the presence of God (i.e., "coming under the guidance of the Spirit")./23/

Cadman's concentration upon the internal world of the Joh. narrative is at once the greatest strength and the most serious weakness of his interpretive enterprise. By focusing so directly upon the narrative connections within the gospel story Cadman makes several observations which are sometimes ignored or undervalued by scholars who approach the text from a singularly historical-critical perspective. He notes, for example, that the absence of a narrative of Jesus' descent and ascent is hermeneutically significant. He argues that Jesus' death is "the complete fulfillment of the promise to Nathanael" in 1.51, and that the term "hour" signifies both Jesus' death and his glorification. Cadman believes also that the statements about birth and the kingdom in 3.3ff pertain not only to the followers of Jesus, but even to Jesus himself./24/

On the negative side, Cadman treats the Fourth Gospel as if it is hermeneutically sealed from its cultural and religious environment. (And he himself appears to be sealed from much of contemporary scholarship!) His approach to the text is reminiscent of the New Criticism, which eschews all external referentiality and performs the interpretive task solely within the boundaries of the extant
text. Cadman's consistent rejection of historical-critical and
religionsgeschichtlichen findings as he moves through JOHN leaves
him with a rather idiosyncratic interpretation which may have some
appeal to modern literary sensibilities, but which cannot be
considered a legitimate reading of the gospel through the eyes of a
first century member of the Joh. community. /25/ And this, we
believe, is where the quest for contemporary relevance must begin.

Despite the fact that the preceding scholars as a group do
not find that the cosmological features of the Fourth Gospel are
best illuminated by referring to some myth, motif, or text outside
of early Christianity, what they do suggest by way of faint
religionsgeschichtlichen comparisons is more or less what the rest
of Joh. scholarship identifies as major factors affecting the
otherworldly depiction of Jesus. That is to say, the most popular
candidates for the mythical source upon which the Joh. Jesus is
allegedly constructed are Wisdom, the Logos, and Gnostic revealer,
while some form of apocalyptic or mystical ascent ideology is
widely held to be the object of the Joh. polemical remarks. Each
of the remaining sections of this chapter will explicitly deal with
the way in which contemporary scholars attempt to explicate the
intellectual background of one or both of these important aspects
of the Fourth Gospel.
B. JOHN BORROWS FROM MYTHS DOMINATED BY A DESCENDING-ASCENDING FIGURE

1. C. H. Dodd

Like the other members of this section Dodd is aware of and takes quite seriously the cosmological orientation of JOHN. He explains that the gospel’s cosmological dualism (e.g., ἡ ἄρχου versus ἡ καταλείπω) is a Weltanschauung which corresponds positively to the common religious view of the author’s period. Dodd pursues this line of thought further by claiming that Jesus "is a stranger to this world" because he as the Son of God "belongs aboriginally" to the heavenly world. Due to his divine origin, Jesus' "appearance in the world is a ἱερόθησις, and it culminates in an ἱεράβαςις."/26/

Dodd surveys a wide field of religious traditions which he believes to be contemporaneous with the Fourth Gospel in an effort to discover the intellectual milieu in which JOHN came into being. He settles upon two streams of thought in particular, both of which can be generally categorized as "mystical." He claims that the gospel is "sympathetically in touch with Hellenistic Judaism as represented by Philo" and also with "the higher pagan thought of the time as represented to us by the Hermetic literature."/27/ It must be pointed out that Dodd does not believe that JOHN’s cosmological depiction of Jesus is taken directly from Philo or the Hermetica, but rather that all three religious traditions borrow many of the same ideas from a common source and then within the
same Hellenistic intellectual milieu develop them independently of one another./28/ From this productive well flows the Nous and \textit{\textup{\textalpha}l\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron} \textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}} \textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron} \textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron} \textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}} \textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron} of Hermetic thought, the Logos, \textit{\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}} \textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron} \textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron}\textup{\textomicron} of Philo, and the Logos and Son of Man of JOHN./29/

The wellspring of all of these heavenly beings is Wisdom mythology. Dodd argues that the Joh. Prologue is written by someone whose thinking proceeds along a path analogous to the "Jewish writers of the 'Wisdom' school." In an attempt to resist the encroachments of Hellenistic Wisdom speculation, these rabbinic thinkers replaced the "Word of the Lord" concept of the Hebrew scriptures with Wisdom, "the hypostatized thought of God" and the "medium of creation and revelation." In a similar manner JOHN started with the Word of God, then interpreted it in light of hypostatized Wisdom, and finally within the context of Hellenistic Jewish thought applied it to the Logos figure (Dodd notes that Philo also without difficulty equates Wisdom with Logos). This opened up the way to discuss the heavenly role of the Joh. protagonist as creator, as both transcendent and immanent, "as the thought of God . . . projected into objectivity"--hence as God himself revealed. In an indirect way the notion that Wisdom is immanent in humanity might have helped to spawn the Joh. incarnation of the Logos, as well as the corresponding idea from the Hellenistic world that the immanent Logos is "the divine, essential humanity."/30/ JOHN of course radicalizes the coming of the Wisdom-Logos figure into the human world in a way that Wisdom
speculation and Philo never do: [t]he Logos became the ἄνθρωπος or human nature which He bore."/31/

Despite many similarities in their respective depictions of the principal heavenly mediator between the Deity and humanity, there is one notable dissimilarity between JOHN on the one hand and Philo and the Hermetic tractates on the other. The latter both advocate a mystical approach to God; Philo sometimes speaks of the visio Dei as "an intense mystical awareness of absolute being," and the Hermetica employ metaphysical speculations as a "propaedeutic to the vision of God."/32/ JOHN may speak "the common language of Hellenistic mysticism," acknowledges Dodd, but its visio Dei is uniquely historicized, involving a vision of the historical Logos who is "fully personal" and who has "a place in history." On rare occasions Dodd will point out that a Joh. verse (e.g. 1.18) indicates that the author opposes a claim of Hellenistic mysticism, but for the most part Dodd is preoccupied with the task of simply noting the similarities and differences between JOHN and other Jewish Hellenistic works./33/ Dodd's reluctance to find in JOHN a direct and systematic critique of the mystical thought with which the gospel otherwise shares so much in common may be due to his belief that JOHN was written as an evangelistic appeal to a "non-Christian public."/34/ Given this overriding purpose a polemical thrust might be counterproductive.
2. E. M. Sidebottom

According to Sidebottom the descent of the Son of Man is a "conception which is given great prominence in the Fourth Gospel" in general and in 3.13 in particular. Sidebottom surveys the literature of antiquity in order to locate the model for this idea of a descending (and ascending) Son of Man, and in the course of his research he rejects Jewish apocalypticism (because its Son of Man figure is never said to descend), Hermeticism and similar Hellenistic cults (because JOHN lacks the constant trafficking between earth and heaven which these traditions promote), and Mandaeanism (because this religious tradition evinces direct literary dependence upon the Fourth Gospel rather than vice versa)./35/ "Orthodox Judaism" provides a closer parallel to the descent of the Son of Man first of all in its notion of the descending Shekinah. As in Jn 1.14 Rabbinic Judaism speaks of a tabernacling of the divine Glory; 1.18 appears to allude to "the descent of the Shekinah in the Word who is the Son of Man."/36/ Jewish Wisdom provides the other primary model for Joh. descent. Furthermore, Wisdom is sometimes associated with the Jewish idea of "Man"—i.e., Adam, who according to the rabbis is the Blood of the World (cf. the Joh. Son of Man as the descending Bread from heaven) and the Light of the World./37/ The confluence of the Shekina, Wisdom, and "Adam" myths all seem to provide the author of JOHN with the essential components for his depiction of Jesus as the descending Son of Man.
But why is it necessary for the author of JOHN to speak of
descent at all? Sidebottom answers that it is due to "the thought-
forms of his day," meaning not only Wisdom and Shekina mythology,
but also the "typically Jewish" cosmology of two worlds (above and
below) which these myths presuppose. In order for "a transaction
between the sphere of the divine and the non-divine" to take place,
the heavenly Son of Man must descend. In so doing he brings about
a unification of the two worlds./38/ This recognition of the
influence which cosmological presuppositions have upon the nature
of revelatory experience in JOHN is a perceptive observation, and
we will have occasion to speak of it again in greater depth in
Chapter Three.

Sidebottom explicitly rejects the hypothesis (of Odeberg in
particular) that 3.13 polemicizes against the apocalyptic idea of
the heavenly ascent of saints past and present, although he does
allow that the Prologue and the manna discourse (ch. 6) may include
a polemic against a belief in Moses' ascent. In 3.13 JOHN cannot
be criticizing human ascent ideas since the gospel elsewhere
"speaks freely" of Abraham and Isaiah having visionary experiences
of Jesus--"which presumably implies some vision of the kind
mentioned by Odeberg."/39/ Sidebottom does not seem to grasp,
however, the deconstructive effect of the Fourth Gospel transfor-
mimg the visio Dei of each of these Israelites into a visio
Christi. For him the emphasis of 3.13 as well as of the rest of
the gospel is upon the descent of the Son of Man. Human ascent to
heaven plays only a minimal role in the overall thrust of JOHN.
Brown agrees with Sidebottom that "Wisdom Literature offers better parallels for the Johannine picture of Jesus than do the later Gnostic, Mandeian, or Hermetic passages sometimes suggested." By "Wisdom" Brown means "OT Wisdom," which he defines broadly to include both canonical and non-canonical Jewish sapiential literature. Brown considers this literature to be quite "cosmopolitan" and ecumenical. It presumably had contact with Egyptian, Sumerian and Babylonian Wisdom traditions in its earlier development, while osmosing Oriental mythology/mysticism and Greek philosophy in its later Hellenistic phase. Brown avers that Wisdom theology influenced the Fourth Gospel particularly in terms of its Logos, Spirit-Paraclete, and Son of Man figures. Wisdom's impact upon the Johannine Son of Man becomes quite apparent when one compares their respective descents to earth, ascents back to heaven, revelatory missions, relationships to metaphors of eating and drinking, calling and instruction of disciples, and rejections by human beings./40/

Along with Dodd and Sidebottom Brown claims that the gospel introduces "a much sharper historical perspective" into its sapiential depiction of Jesus than is to be found in Wisdom literature, although a similar historicizing thrust appears in the Hellenistic period in texts which identify Wisdom with the Torah and the experiences of the patriarchs. In this sense JOHN not only employs the Wisdom myth as its pattern for Jesus, but in addition the gospel modifies this pattern to suit its own theological
agenda. Beyond this putative Joh. strategy of a mildly reconstruc-
structive appropriation of Wisdom materials Brown is hesitant to
proceed, although he does not entirely overlook the possibility that
texts such as "no one has seen God" and "no one has ascended"
contain an argument against apocalyptic ascents and visions. Even
so, Brown is much more disposed to argue for their similarity to
statements in the Torah and Wisdom literature than to entertain
hypotheses about a Johannine polemical agenda./41/


On the basis of our survey of Joh. scholarship up to this
point it would appear that the Jewish Wisdom figure is generally
considered to be the principal model for the Joh. depiction of
Jesus as a descending-ascending, preexistent heavenly revealer, and
such in fact is the case. Almost invariably Wisdom appears as an
influential figure in scholarly arguments about the genesis of Joh.
Christology. Even Bultmann, the foremost advocate of the well-
known hypothesis that behind the Joh. Jesus stands a Gnostic
redeemer myth, assumes that Wisdom mythology is responsible for
some of the claims made about the Logos in the Prologue (see the
next section). We have noted several points in favor of this
hypothesis--particularly in the observed parallels between the Joh.
Prologue and Jewish wisdom literature/42/---but what can be said
against it? Two counterarguments are offered by Jan Buehner which
call into question the perception that Wisdom plays the leading
role in JOHN's portrayal of its extraterrestrial protagonist.
First of all, with but one exception Wisdom in Hebrew (Old Testament) and Jewish literature is never explicitly said to descend or ascend. One would think that for this heavenly figure to appear in the presence of human beings she must descend through the cosmos, but it is quite significant (particularly in light of the Joh. emphasis upon Jesus’ descent and ascent) that such movement is only a rare feature of Wisdom’s depiction. Interestingly enough, the one explicit reference to a descending-ascending Wisdom figure is found not in the wisdom corpus, but in an apocalyptic work instead: the Similitudes (1 En 42.1-3). As already mentioned in our review of Schnackenburg,/43/ the ascent of Wisdom is quite problematic for Joh. interpretation. While the Logos of JOHN descends, is rejected by some, but then is accepted by others and is able to return as a successful savior (17.4), Wisdom in Sim 42.2 ascends without having accomplished her salvific mission. Her ascent is an escape of sorts; his return (at least from the Father’s perspective—17.1-5) is a “glorious” homecoming.

Furthermore, opines Buehner, given the lack of descent-ascent terminology elsewhere in Jewish wisdom literature, the association of Wisdom with the angels in heaven (Sim 42.2-3) implies that Wisdom’s way (i.e., her descent and ascent) has been formed in analogy with biblical angelic beliefs./44/ As we will observe later Buehner contends that the Joh. descent-ascent schema is derived primarily from Jewish angel conceptions. To Buehner’s and Schnackenburg’s remarks about Sim 42.1-3 we might add that if this text is read in light of its larger literary context, we
discover that divine revelation is successfully transmitted from heaven to earth—but not by the descent of Wisdom. Rather, an exemplary mortal (Enoch) ascends to heaven and brings the coveted mysteries of heaven back down to the earth. In concert these observations demonstrate that Wisdom cannot be responsible for the cosmological descent and ascent of Jesus, and they raise the legitimate question as to whether the revelatory facet of Wisdom's depiction has a direct bearing upon the depiction of Jesus as a quintessential revelatory figure.

Buehner's second major criticism of the Wisdom hypothesis has to do with the sending motif, which in JOHN functions alongside the descent-ascent pattern and which serves as one of the primary grounds for Jesus' claim to be able to exercise unrivaled revelatory authority. This pervasive motif in the Fourth Gospel is often said to stem from Wisdom mythology, and WisSol 9.10, 17 is frequently cited as justification for this claim. In these verses the author ("Solomon") prays for God to send Wisdom out from heaven in order to teach him what is pleasing to the Deity. Buehner astutely observes, however, that this is a prayer for W/wisdom and not a statement that W/wisdom has actually been sent. Moreover, it is a request for a personal charismatic gift ("wisdom") rather than for the coming of Wisdom in a theological-historical sense. For these reasons Buehner doubts whether it is really justifiable to speak of a sending motif in Jewish wisdom literature.45/

Buehner acknowledges that Wisdom does influence the Joh. Prologue to some degree, but he believes that this is the extent to
which Wisdom serves as a model for Joh. Christology. In terms of any hypothesis claiming some sort of direct "borrowing" by JOHN of Wisdom mythologoumena Buehner's conclusion seems quite valid. But then neither Dodd, Sidebottom, nor Brown attempt to argue that the Joh. Jesus is a xerox of the Wisdom figure. Each of them points out how the author has modified Wisdom mythology in significant ways in order to present a unique portrait of the Joh. protagonist. They are aware that, unlike Jesus, Wisdom is never mistaken for a human being, that she never lives an historical life, and that she never dies. On the other hand, they do not regard such differences to be as important as they actually are. Why is it that Wisdom's shadow can be detected in the Prologue but hardly elsewhere in JOHN? Does the Prologue effectively summarize the Joh. depiction of Jesus, or are notable elements of this overall portrait absent from the first eighteen verses of the gospel?

In this connection it might be instructive to mention an interesting hypothesis formulated by Burton Mack concerning the relationship of Wisdom to the literature which bears her name. Mack maintains that there is no unified Wisdom myth per se in ancient Hebraic and Jewish thought; rather, the Jewish wisdom mythologumena are all parts of a theological construct which was developed in order to undergird Yahweh as the Lord of creation and redemption during a period in Israel's history when God's gracious presence among his people was being questioned in light of the destructive impact of Hellenism. To be sure, in the sapiential writings of Israel Wisdom is "objectified, personified, and
distanced from man," but these statements are elements of a reflective process among theologians and are not taken from a "living mythos" functioning within Israel./46/ If Mack's hypothesis is valid, then the argument that a mythical figure by the name of Wisdom serves as the principal pattern for the otherworldly depiction of Jesus is even harder to sustain. It helps to explain why cosmological descent and ascent are not normally associated with her, and it suggests that other heavenly figures lie in the background of the Joh. Jesus. This does not mean that the author of JOHN (or the Joh. tradition) might not have read wisdom literature through the spectacles of contemporary descending-ascending revealers, which would have enabled him to "see" a Wisdom figure myth. But it does strongly suggest that the cosmological blueprint for the Joh. protagonist is not largely derived from a myth of a Jewish Wisdom figure.

C. JOHN BORROWS FROM, BUT THEN TRANSFORMS MYTHS DOMINATED BY A DESCENDING-ASCENDING FIGURE

1. Rudolf Bultmann

Bultmann's name is normally associated with putative Gnostic influences upon the Fourth Gospel, and yet his first published attempt to come to terms with the historical background of the Joh. depiction of Jesus is devoted primarily to the figure of Jewish Wisdom. In a 1923 article on the Prologue Bultmann argues that it appears to be dependent upon Alexandrian Jewish (but not Philonic)
He understands this "speculation" essentially to be a myth about preexistent Wisdom, the companion of God in the Creation, who comes to earth, is rejected by humanity, returns to heaven and hides there. While mortals seek after Wisdom, only God knows the way to her. In a (probably) later development of the myth Wisdom is said reveal herself to selected mortals, and perhaps still later, the Logos figure replaces Wisdom. According to Bultmann, the author of JOHN's Prologue gains access to a textualized version (literarische Vorlage) of this newer myth and "Christianizes" it./48/

But Bultmann is not content to let the historical question be resolved simply by referring to a Jewish myth about Wisdom. He notices that in the various Jewish texts Wisdom is said to inspire (human) prophecy, and in some instances she is even thought to be embodied in the prophets. While this idea is absent from the Joh. Prologue, it is firmly embedded in Manichaean and other Gnostic writings, where preexistent Wisdom is embodied in a Primordial Man (Urmensch) who is sent as a life-giving revelatory figure from heaven to the earth. Since the Primordial Man is sometimes identified as the "Word," and because of the other above-mentioned parallels, Bultmann is convinced that historical connections exist among Gnostic thought, Jewish Wisdom mythology, and the Joh. Prologue. To explain why the descending-ascending revealer is sometimes feminine and at other times masculine Bultmann opines that a myth about a Creator/Wisdom divinity may have been combined with a myth about a revelatory divinity in a number of different
ways. Whatever the credibility of various individual parts of his hypothetical reconstruction of the history of the Joh. Prologue, Bultmann is convinced that with its Christological parallels to Wisdom mythology on the one hand and to Gnosticism on the other, this introductory hymn provides good evidence for the existence of an "oriental gnostic speculation" in primitive Christianity (Urchristentum). /49/

In his next major study of the religionsgeschichtlichen background of JOHN just two years later Bultmann elaborates upon the impact of Gnostic thought upon the genesis of the entire gospel. Again myth appears to be the way to solve the riddle. From Mandaean, Manichaean, and Jewish Wisdom texts, as well as from the Odes of Solomon, other Gnostic texts, and the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, Bultmann culls evidence for what he identifies as a single redemption myth (Erloesungsmythos), which is itself a synthesis of two older myths. In the soteriological myth, a descending-ascending envoy (Gesandte) appears on the earth in human raiment in order to reveal to the imprisoned soul knowledge of its origin, prior descent, and future return home. The cosmological myth explains how this soul—viz., the heavenly Primordial Man, who in fact turns out to be a composite of all human souls—descended to the earth and was imprisoned in matter. Now in the synthesized myth the envoy and the Primordial Man are assimilated, so that the envoy himself is perceived to be imprisoned and therefore in need of redemption. He has become the "redeemed redeemer," who, in rescuing himself, also saves and reunites the scattered parts
Bultmann hypothesizes that this Gnostic myth became operative in a proto-Mandaean baptizing community which revered John the Baptist as the incarnate Son of God and Revealer. Later, in his Joh. commentary and his Theology of the New Testament, Bultmann elaborates upon this theory, claiming that the future author of JOHN had been a member of the Baptist's community, but at some point he became convinced that Jesus, and not John, was the true (Gnostic) descending-ascending redeemer. As a result he left the Baptist's community and brought along with him certain revelatory discourse materials (die Offenbarungsgreden) which presupposed the myth. He helped to found a new community in which Jesus and not John was the center of the cult, and naturally the discourse materials were modified to reflect this change in allegiance. In time these writings were synthesized with several other source materials to form a gospel, the central claim of which is that "Jesus is the envoy sent from God (e.g., 17.3, 23, 25) who brings revelation through words and deeds." By asserting that the divine envoy and the Primordial Man are depicted as one character in the synthesized Gnostic myth which immediately preceded the Fourth Gospel, Bultmann is able to provide a compelling reason for the union of the Joh. sending motif with the descending-ascending Son of Man concept, both of which are integral features of the Joh. narrative landscape.

The creative labors of the author of JOHN are not limited to a clever melding of sources and transposition of names. In the
course of his revision the author "demythologizes" the mystical, cosmological, and noetic features of the Gnostic myth into an historicized, existentialist, and faith-oriented gospel. This part of Bultmann's theory constitutes (from our perspective) the most interesting facet of his interpretation of the Fourth Gospel, and it bears directly upon the question of the presence of cosmological language in the gospel. How he deals with Jn 3.13 provides an excellent illustration of the way in which he believes that JOHN has demythologized its Gnostic revelatory discourse materials.

Actually, the revelatory source which lies behind 3.13 is itself most likely an "attack" upon "the various types of (visionary) heavenly journeys, which were commonly expounded in Jewish apocalyptic and the speculation of Merkaba." This Gnostic source claims that only those who originate from heaven can ascend to heaven---i.e., those who are \textit{\v{e}v 
\textit{\v{e}vgn \textit{\v{e}is}}}. The author of JOHN in turn modifies his source in a dramatic way. The human Jesus is now regarded as the Primordial Man/Son of God, and it is his descent and ascent (3.13) which makes the rebirth of 3.3-5 possible. Not only is the heavenly revealer transformed into a human figure in whom the glory of God is hidden except to faith, but the Gnostic concepts of "descent" and "ascent" are stripped of their cosmological meaning and reinterpreted respectively as epiphany ("[T]he Revealer appears . . . as a \textit{definite human being in history}; Jesus of Nazareth") and exaltation (referring both to Jesus' life in the flesh and to his death). In other words,
the literal cosmological structure of the Gnostic redeemer myth has been reinterpreted almost exclusively in terms of the earthly revelatory mission of Jesus. According to Bultmann the Fourth Gospel is concerned with revelation that is historical and not with knowledge that is heavenly, preexistent, or otherworldly.

Bultmann recognizes that mystical experiences are not limited to apocalyptic and Merkabah traditions; Gnosticism also practices a form of mystical ecstasy. For this reason Bultmann will occasionally suggest that JOHN appears to be opposing such experiences as practiced within a Gnostic context. For example, Jn 1.18 seems to deny the possibility that a Gnostic through ecstasy can be transformed into divine nature and thereby know God "outside the revelation given in the incarnate Son of God." The dominical promise of 1.51 is "not conceived as the vision of heavenly beings, but as the vision in faith of his [Jesus'] . . . (1.14)." And Philip's request (14.6) possibly alludes to the theophanies . . . epoptia of the mysteries . . . mystical experiences . . . experiences of philosophical meditation . . . [and] the eschatological vision of God, such as Gnosticism promises. . . ."/57/

It should be pointed out that Bultmann places the preceding comment in a footnote, which indicates the relative lack of importance which he ascribes to the matter of the gospel's tension with mystical practice. It is a characteristic of JOHN worth mentioning, but for Bultmann it is not one of the primary reasons why the gospel was written.
2. Critique: Can the Gnostic Redeemer Myth Be THE Pattern for the Joh. Jesus?

We have devoted considerable space to Bultmann's hypothesis about the origins of the Fourth Gospel because of the profound impact which his work has had and continues to have upon Joh. scholarship. Yet his reconstruction of the historical and literary matrix out of which JOHN emerged has been subjected to a withering barrage of criticism on several points, the result of which has been to call into serious question the validity of his most basic assertions. It goes without saying that Bultmann's earlier arguments about the relationship of Jewish Wisdom to the Joh. Prologue share the same fundamental strengths and weaknesses as the hypotheses of the other scholars whom we have presented and critiqued. There is no need for us to discuss this aspect of Bultmann's work further, especially since he becomes convinced early in his career that the Gnostic redeemer myth rather than the Wisdom myth sheds the most light on the gospel's Christology. Therefore it is with the Gnostic hypothesis that our following comments are exclusively concerned.

Bultmann's interpretation relies heavily upon the assumption that the Gnostic texts which he uses reflect a religious point of view that antedates early Christianity. This hypothesis of a pre-Christian Gnostic redeemer myth has been sharply undermined by the work of Carsten Colpe and others, who have convincingly shown that these texts must all be dated after JOHN, and in some cases, quite some time after the gospel./58/ Against Bultmann's rebuttal
that these post-Joh. texts nevertheless incorporate much older religious ideas (perhaps from a Persian or Mesopotamian environment), his critics argue that it has not been satisfactorily demonstrated that those religious beliefs which do indeed predate Christianity include an emphasis upon the redemptive function of its protagonist as is found in JOHN and later Gnostic literature. More importantly, Bultmann’s hypothetical construction of the Gnostic redeemer figure is a composite portrait drawn from many disparate sources; there is no good evidence that a single myth of such a figure existed prior to the early Christian period. Even the assumption that the Gnostic envoy figure and the Primordial Man figure were united prior to the Common Era lacks sufficient justification./59/ Along these lines Schnackenburg points out that while a Primordial Man figure may predate JOHN, this figure is characterized in a variety of ways all of which are quite different from the Joh. Son of Man; moreover, the Gnostic Son of Man figure appears only in Gnostic Christian texts, suggesting that they are dependent upon the New Testament for the Son of Man title rather than vice versa./60/

Bultmann’s existentialist hermeneutic leads him to interpret JOHN from a predominantly anthropological point of view. For example, Schnackenburg claims that Bultmann’s hermeneutic can be "pushed so far that all personal relationship with God is eliminated in favour of the relationship between man and man," whereas JOHN and the rest of the biblical corpus emphasize the fact that human beings are "bound to a personal God."/61/ Schnackenburg’s
point is well taken, for, even though JOHN places considerable emphasis upon the reciprocal indwelling ("unity") of Father and Son with believers, it patently avoids making an ontological identification of the redeemer with the redeemed which is so prevalent in Gnostic literature. There is a decisive distinction between mortal and divine beings in the Fourth Gospel, and the former group is directly accountable to and dependent upon the latter in terms of judgment and salvation. According to JOHN the believer can enjoy a real albeit indirect relationship to the transcendent Deity through a real and not-so-indirect relationship to Jesus via the Spirit-Paraclete. While deferral in the divine-human encounter is a significant and necessary feature of the gospel's message, JOHN nevertheless assumes the reality of some kind of deeply personal involvement of believers with God through his Son.

Finally, Buehner feels that Bultmann expends too much effort attempting to compress centuries of ancient religious history involving religions which have little or no clear historical connections, all the while ignoring the contributions of traditionsgeschichtlichen studies which much more persuasively demonstrate an historical relationship between JOHN and Hebrew/Jewish culture./62/ Buehner seeks to demonstrate that JOHN’s portrait of Jesus is heavily dependent upon Jewish beliefs about angels as well as transcultural ideas about human and divine envoys, and we will need to consider his hypothesis later in this chapter. If a strong case can be made for Hebrew-Jewish influence upon the gospel, it would seem more appropriate to concentrate one’s efforts in this milieu
rather than in religious contexts which appear to be further removed from the Fourth Gospel in time, space, and ideology.

Perhaps in time the Nag Hammadi corpus will be understood in such a way as to make it possible for Bultmann's thesis to be revived in some kind of persuasive form—if of course the dating and historical connection riddles can be resolved. While a host of Nag Hammadi experts such as Helmut Koester, George MacRae, James Robinson claim to have discovered elements of gnostic thought which are thematically and stylistically parallel to alleged Joh. sources, much more needs to be done before a compelling hypothesis about the influence of some type of gnostic ideology upon the Joh. depiction of Jesus can be formulated./63/

3. Charles Talbert

Talbert revives one important aspect of Bultmann's hypothesis, that JOHN modifies the myth of a descending-ascending redemptive figure from which it derives its fundamental conception of Jesus./64/ He observes that (so-called) Gnosticism is not alone in speaking of such a being, for in a wide spectrum of literature from Hellenistic Judaism to Christianity to Greco-Roman paganism several titles which connote divinity—particularly "angel," "archangel," "Wisdom," "the Spirit," "the Logos," "Man," and "the (Firstborn) Son of God"—are often used of a single mythical figure who engages in cosmological descent and ascent, and who in the process of his/her journey carries out a redemptive mission while on the earth. Philo is perhaps the best known example of one who
thinks in this manner, but he is by no means alone in doing it nor is he responsible for starting it. Talbert argues quite persuasively that those who interchange divine titles for the same heavenly redeemer are indebted to an underlying mythical pattern which cuts across sectarian and cultural boundaries and extends even into late second century Christianity.

At the end of his monograph Talbert turns his attention to JOHN and claims that the above-mentioned Jewish-Hellenistic myth is responsible for the Joh. depiction of Jesus as a preexistent, descending-ascending redeemer. He bases his argument not only upon the descent-ascent language of JOHN, but also on the fact that Jesus in this gospel is given many of the same titles that are found in other texts which employ this mythical pattern. Yet despite JOHN's apparent appropriation of the basic myth, the gospel never speaks of Jesus as an angelic figure. Talbert suggests that it is "possible that John reflects an anti-angel tendency," since the angel component of the "Wisdom-Logos-Son-Man synthesis" is absent. Talbert admits that the evidence in JOHN is too meager to sustain a firm assertion that the gospel intentionally opposes the idea of Jesus being designated as an angel. But at least it can be said "that the Evangelist chose not to employ the total synthesis but only a part of it."/65/

Unfortunately Talbert does not develop his hypothesis about the intellectual background for the Joh. depiction of Jesus further. Buechner rightly criticizes Talbert for assuming too readily that the Wisdom component of this putative cross-cultural myth is
explicitly associated with cosmological descent and ascent./66/
Later we will even call into question the claim (shared by Talbert and Buehner) that descent-ascent is characteristic of Hebrew and Jewish angelic beings. Despite these weaknesses in Talbert's presentation, his argument that a mythical pattern rather than a specific mythical figure serves as THE basis for the Joh. Jesus is persuasive, for it helps to explain why JOHN's protagonist so closely resembles Wisdom at certain points and gnostic revelatory beings at other points—while all the time being identified as the Logos, Son of Man, Son of God, etc. Left unexplained are several important matters, such as the reason why the angel component is omitted, whence comes the Joh. emphasis upon Jesus' descent and ascent, why these heavenly titles are placed upon a divine being who appears to be subject to death, and why JOHN speaks quite negatively of the possibility of mortals seeing the Deity and of their experiencing an ascent into heaven. Despite these unanswered questions Talbert's insistence upon a ubiquitous mythical pattern being the principal basis for JOHN's Christology has enough merit to be pursued further. This we intend to do after we have discussed two other types of hypotheses about the cosmological depiction of the Joh. Jesus.
D. ONE OF JOHN'S AIMS IS TO POLEMICIZE AGAINST NON-CHRISTOCENTRIC VISIONARY AND ASCENT EXPERIENCES

1. Nils Dahl

We now turn to a couple of Joh. scholars who are much less concerned with attempting to identify some mythical pattern lying behind the Joh. Jesus than to come to terms with both positive and critical statements which the gospel makes concerning certain types of visionary and ascent experiences. Dahl understands the Fourth Gospel to be primarily devoted to presenting a "cosmic lawsuit" between God and the world, in which the Joh. Christ serves as God's representative while the "unbelieving Jews" stand for the world. In the Christ figure who dominates the gospel scene the evangelist wants the people of his generation to see that God has already spoken his verdict, but that this verdict (which is 'guilty' "for those who do not fulfill the conditions for acquittal") has yet to be applied to individual cases during the period in which the gospel is written. The primary function of the gospel is to bear witness to this forensic situation and especially to Christ. In so doing JOHN fulfills polemical as well as more important "missionary, apologetic, and devotional" aims. /67/

Our interest lies with what Dahl characterizes as the gospel's "antiheretic purpose." He maintains that JOHN has an "affinity" to certain "pre-gnostic trends within Judaism and early Christianity," but he does not express much interest in the possibility that the Fourth Gospel is directed against this point.
of view—unless we are to understand a brief, ambiguous comment in a footnote about the docetic "heretics combated by John" to be referring to a group which is gnostic in orientation./68/

More important to Dahl is the "polemical note" which seems to be "directed against a type of piety which made the patriarchs and prophets heroes of mystical visions of the heavenly world." Dahl argues that in opposition to this perspective JOHN asserts a "Christological interpretation of Old Testament visions and theophanies." He notes that several ancient Israelites (Isaiah, Moses, Abraham, Jacob-Israel, and perhaps even those with Moses at Sinai) who are associated with ecstatic visions in Scripture and Jewish tradition appear in JOHN as witnesses to Christ because it was not the Deity but the incarnate and crucified Christ whom they beheld during their visionary experiences./69/

Dahl has very little to say about heavenly ascent experiences, although he does occasionally refer to Jewish Merkabah mysticism. He appears to hold that JOHN's evaluation of alleged human ascents into heaven is the same as its judgment regarding purported visions: those which are Christocentric are fundamentally in agreement with the thrust of the gospel—to wit: while admitted-ly the mythical descent-ascent imagery in the Ascension of Isaiah (AscIsa) is not present in JOHN, the claim in the apocalypse that the prophet while in heaven saw an incarnate and crucified Christ is also the "basic idea" found in Jn 12.41. From Dahl's perspective the intent of JOHN is not to issue a blanket criticism of visionary and ascent experiences, but rather to criticize mystical
beliefs in which Christ is not the central figure. For this reason Dahl opines that the seer's theophany in ApJn 4-5 "may help us to understand how the Old Testament witnesses' visions of Christ were visualized by the author of the Fourth Gospel."/70/ Regrettably Dahl does not discuss either the interdiction of ascent in 3.13 or the thrice-mentioned assertion to the effect that no one has seen the Father except the Son (1.18; 5.37; 6.46). The former text appears to rule out all ascents both past and present, while the latter three may be meant to be understood as denying the validity of contemporary visionary experiences.

2. David Aune

One of the most significant contributions of this generation to the quest for the cultic background of the Fourth Gospel is Aune's revised doctoral dissertation on realized eschatology in "heterodox" Judaism as reflected by Qumran, Ignatius, Marcion of Sinope, the Odes of Solomon (OdeSol), and JOHN./71/. Aune's thesis is that

the Sitz im Leben of the realized eschatology of the Fourth Gospel is the pneumatic worship, preaching and teaching of the Johannine community in which the vision of the living and exalted Jesus seen in his eschatological and Parousia glory was perceived by the believing congregation through the medium of illumination by the Spirit of God./72/

Aune contends that the distinctive emphasis upon realized eschatology in JOHN should not be credited to authorial "creative genius" or theological brilliance, but rather to "the piety of
spirituality of the Johannine community itself. It is not a reflective answer to communal problems, but a testimony to the cultic experience of the coming of the risen Lord to the charismatic community to dispense prophetically End-time judgment and salvation. In the Joh. Jesus, avers Aune, we discover "the religious needs, values and ideals of the Johannine community."/73/

Actually, Aune is somewhat ambivalent about the precise nature of the Joh. community's ecstatic, prophet Parousia experience of the Lord Jesus: it may involve "being eschatologically transported to the heavenly realm" to see Jesus (analogous to cultic experiences in OdeSol and the worship of God in Qumran texts), or it may be that the community sees Jesus "coming" to them during their experience of worship on the earth./74/ In favor of the former possibility are: (i) the visio Christi experiences of Isaiah and Abraham as interpreted by JOHN (which may have been understood along the lines of a heavenly ascent, as AscIsa suggests); (ii) the implicit reference to Moses' Sinaitic theophany in 3.13 (cf. 1.18—in I C.E. this theophany was likewise believed by many to have involved a heavenly ascent); (iii) the prophetic visions of the Old Testament, in which "the seer finds himself transported to the heavenly world"; and, (iv) similar visions and ascents reported elsewhere in the New Testament (e.g., ApJn 4.1ff, 2 Cor 12.3-5). Arguments in favor of a cultic coming of the Risen Lord to the worshiping community include: (i) the emphasis upon the Parousia in the cultic experience of the eucharist; (ii) the resurrection appearance stories, which "show telltale signs of
having originated both formally and materially within a cultic setting"; (iii) parts of the Farewell Discourse section of JOHN, which speak of seeing the future glory of Jesus (e.g., 14.3, 18, 23, 28; 17.24); (iv) the prediction of a Parousia vision of the coming Son of Man to be experienced by the High Priest presumably within his own lifetime (Mk 14.62); and, (v) similar "comings" of the exalted Jesus to a Christian believer or community in worship reported elsewhere in the New Testament (e.g., Acts 7.55-56; 9.1-9 & par.; ApJn 1-3)./75/

This purported corporate cultic vision of the Risen Jesus experienced by the Joh. community is graphically represented by 1.51, in which "the heterodox Jewish salvific goal of the visio Dei . . . has been transformed by the Johannine community into a visio Christi (ad dextram Dei)." Aune surmises that in the social setting the Jewish desire for a proleptic vision of the Deity along the lines of Moses’ Sinaitic theophany has come into direct conflict with the Joh. Christian desire for an anticipatory direct experience of Christ, and that the gospel deliberately engages in a "polemic" against the former by asserting the unique validity of the latter. The plural subject of 3.11 ("we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen; but you do not receive our testimony") confirms Aune’s suspicion that the visio Christi "experience of the Johannine community has been retrojected into the mouth of the Johannine Jesus" in order to polemicize against Moses-inspired ascent practices in Hellenistic Judaism (the social context out of which Joh. Christianity sprang). Likewise the
reference in 3.3ff to a "birth from above" resonates with the
teaching of Philo and other mystics about the need for "some kind
of bodily transformation or assimilation to a heavenly mode of
existence" in order for visionary ascent to be possible./76/

The strengths of both Aune and Dahl's interpretation of
JOHN are (i) that they regard various references and inferences to
visionary experiences as significant to the overall meaning of the
gospel; and, (ii) they correctly perceive that JOHN reorients
ancient visio Dei beliefs in the direction of some kind of visio
Christi. Whether this vision of the ever-living Christ focuses
primarily upon his incarnation and death (as Dahl sometimes
suggests) or instead upon his Parousia glory (so Aune) is not yet
clear.

But does JOHN's patent acceptance of scriptural visionary
experiences (albeit interpreted Christocentrically) imply a similar
acceptance of present Christian visionary (and ascent) practices?
It is indeed curious that a gospel which is purportedly so indebted
to cultic visions of the exalted Christ and whose Jesus reflects
the "needs, values, and ideals" of the Joh. community never nar-
rates a single such ecstatic experience during the earthly sojourn
of Jesus except for three resurrection appearance stories—even
though the Synoptics narrate several (to wit: the Transfiguration,
the baptism of Jesus, the ascent of Jesus into heaven, and the
visits of the angel Gabriel in the birth narratives). Aune may
very well be correct in supposing that the promise in 1.51 may have
been used to justify ecstatic visions in the Joh. community, but
there is no unambiguous evidence in the rest of the gospel to indicate that JOHN itself endorses this interpretation of Jesus’ saying. In Chapter Four we will endeavor to show that the purported proleptic Parousia "coming" statements in chs. 13-17, which Aune believes are meant to undergird the cultic visions of Christ by the Joh. community, are better understood as referring in some cases to Jesus’ resurrection appearance stories and in other instances to his "coming" with the Father to the Christian community via the Spirit-Paraclete.

Moreover, Aune’s interpretation of 3.13, in which an exception to the categorical prescriptive statement is presumed for Christocentric visionary ascents, simply is not justified by the context. While we can agree with Aune that the plural subjects of 3.11 are best understood as the intrusion of the Joh. community’s beliefs into the depiction of the earthly life of Jesus, there is no explicit indication of an ecstatic basis for the community’s "knowing" and "seeing." It might be more naturally explained as a "knowing" and "seeing" by witnesses of the earthly Jesus, as 1 Jn 1.1-4. And while the insistence upon the need for a spiritual birth (3.3ff) probably alludes to some kind of ecstatic experience, it is not obvious that the gospel endorses such a transformation in anticipation of a present visionary experience of Jesus. Aune correctly translates the phrase ἐκ νηστεία ἐκ τοιούτου as "birth from above." He does not note, however, that in 3.31 ἐκ τοιούτου is employed in a similar expression for the Son ("the one coming from above"), and that this paragraph continues by asserting that the
Father has given the Spirit without measure (presumably) to his Son. Perhaps therefore, as Meeks avers (see below), 3.3ff has more to say about who Jesus is than about what Jesus' followers should expect to experience. At any rate, if 3.13's "no one has ascended into heaven except . . . the Son of Man" is taken at face value, it is not difficult to read both 3.3ff and 3.11 as statements which support the idea that no ascent is possible—-or even necessary—-for anyone, because the Joh. (earthly) Jesus, whose Spiritual "birth" uniquely qualifies him to speak the words of God, has been seen and heard by witnesses who in the time of the Joh. community continue to testify to the validity of these things (21.24)./77/

Finally, neither Aune nor Dahl satisfactorily explain the pervasive presence of descent and ascent language in the Fourth Gospel. Aune's claim that the Joh. Jesus is a reflection of the cultically perceived "coming" of Jesus in his Parousia glory might explain why Jesus' heavenly preexistence and his divine titles are regular features of the gospel story, but it does not adequately address the question as to why the "first" coming of Jesus and his post-resurrection return to heaven so dominate the narrative landscape (albeit without narration). While Aune and Dahl have presented a convincing reconstruction of the positive beliefs of some Joh. Christians towards visionary and ascent revelatory experiences, it is doubtful whether they have correctly grasped JOHN's view of these matters.
E. JOHN UTILIZES MYTHS OF A DESCENDING-ASCENDING FIGURE IN PART TO OPPOSE BELIEFS ABOUT ECSTATIC VISIONS AND HEAVENLY ASCENTS

In this section we will consider five scholars who argue that the Joh. depiction of Jesus is rooted in a set of mythical ideas about a descending-ascending heavenly figure, and that one of the important functions of this depiction is to oppose beliefs in ecstatic visions and heavenly ascent experiences. Generally speaking, this mode of interpretation is a synthesis of Section B (JOHN borrows from myths dominated by a descent-ascent figure) and Section D (JOHN polemicizes against non-Christocentric visions and ascents). But not all of the hypotheses discussed below assume that JOH N has deliberately patterned its Jesus after a particular descent-ascent being, nor do most agree with the point of view expressed by Aune and Dahl that the Fourth Gospel excepts Christophanies from its categorical prohibition of heavenly visions and ascents. Finally, there is a notable disagreement among these scholars as to whether JOHN's model for Jesus is derived from the same religious context as the ecstatic beliefs against which it seems to oppose.

1. Hugo Odeberg

Odeberg represents a conceptual transition from the point of view represented by Dahl and Aune to the hypotheses of those who follow. 78/ Like Dahl and Aune Odeberg argues that JOHN is indebted to religious beliefs in which heavenly visions and celestial
ascents play a major role. Consequently, much of Odeberg’s effort is directed towards a demonstration of the "mystical" background of the Fourth Gospel. In this enterprise he is primarily informed by the religious traditions stemming from (Gnostic) Mandaeanism, Hermeticism, Amoraic Rabbinism, Philo, and late second-century Christianity. Odeberg’s work resembles that of Dahl and Aune in a second respect as well, in that it states that the Joh. opposition to visions and ascents pertains only to those ecstatic experiences which are not generated by means of a faith commitment of the seer to the Joh. Son of Man. Odeberg repeatedly underlines the possibility and importance of human spiritual ascent through the agency of the Son of Man, and in so doing he links the putative Joh. affirmation of ecstatic ascent with similar Christian affirmations in 2 Cor 12.2-4 and Eph 4.7ff./79/ 

Along lines similar to Gnostic mythology Odeberg claims that there is a "latent something" in a human being which constitutes "the true nature of man." In doing the (religious) truth a person is able to activate that "latent something," and this process of activation is what is meant by the term "faith." As faith arises it is directed towards the Son of Man who has come into the world. The promise in Jn 1.51 about Jesus' disciples being able to behold angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man actually means that they as seers will be able to "see the connexion being brought about between the celestial appearance, the Glory ... of Christ, and his appearance in the flesh."/80/
Odeberg's mystical interpretation of JOHN has an interesting effect upon his understanding of the Son of Man's descent and ascent. On the one hand, they seem "to be taken quite realistically": "the καταβασία is a real 'descent,' the descent of a transcendent and preexistent being: the Son." /81/ But on the other hand, both vectors are primarily explained in terms of their direct impact upon the one who believes in the Son. In its deeper sense καταβασία refers to the revelation of the Father in the Son of Man, while ἐπιβαίνεις signifies the believer's perception of the Son of Man's divine glory and this celestial being's unification with the Father. /82/ Odeberg does not hesitate to point out that in mystical faith both the Son of Man and the believer experience "a real ascent" to heaven--the mortal ascending in his own spirit (which is his true nature, as indicated above).

"This ascent is not an ascent in ecstatic vision but a real ascent, the ultimate goal of which is the final glorification of the Son of Man, and in him, of the believer." /83/

Furthermore, this mystical relationship of the believer and the Son of Man is what the Lifting Up Sayings (e.g., 3.14) in JOHN are primarily about: the lifting up of Jesus signifies the mystical "elevation of the Son of Man to the spiritual vision of the believer," and only in a secondary sense does it refer to Jesus' crucifixion and glorification. /84/ Again, Odeberg does not deny the cosmological nature of Jesus' ascent (being lifted up), he simply focuses upon the efficacy of this event for the authentic spiritual ascent of the believer.
It might seem that Odeberg believes that JOHN consciously sketches its Christology and soteriology based upon a pattern provided by Hellenistic Jewish mystical lore. And certainly on several occasions he opines that the Joh. understanding of the Son of Man and salvation has parallels in the Hermetica, Merkabah texts, and Mandaean literature. In fact, he takes pains to explain that if the Joh. Son of Man were substituted for the "messenger-saviour" in the Gnostic Mandaean mythology, the Joh. figure would "fall in naturally with the ideas referred to." However, Odeberg never appears to speak of the gospel's kinship with its religious environment in terms of some kind of intentional "borrowing" of a mythical model from the Hellenistic Jewish mystical milieu, even though JOHN's "salvation mysticism" is quite similar to that found in Gnosticism, certain Rabbinic circles, the Hermetica, etc./85/

While the Fourth Gospel has much in common with certain strains of several mystical religions, Odeberg believes that there are other forms of the same general traditions with which JOHN must not be identified. Without a lengthy explanation he distinguishes between sophisticated versions of these mystical religions and their "more popular, rude form[s]." The more mature expressions of these religious traditions present a "salvation mystery," involving the descent of a "Saviour-Messenger" or ascent of the Spirit into heaven. The "coarsened theories," on the other hand, speak of the (unaided) ascent of "certain especially gifted or saintly men" to heaven. Needless to say, Jewish apocalyptic literature falls into this latter category along with the popular versions of Merkabah
mysticism, Gnosticism, and Hermeticism./86/

According to Odeberg JOHN engages in a "polemic" against this more popular understanding of mystical ascent. The gospel clearly makes the point that ascent is not possible apart from the Son of Man. And since the Son of Man is "essential" to the success of human ascent, it would appear that 3.13 involves the rejection of the traditions of ascensions into heaven made by the great saints, patriarchs and prophets of old . . . , such as Enoch, Abraham Moces, Elijah, Isaiah, and also of the views of those who at the time maintained that they could ascend to heaven and obtain knowledge of Divine Things and therefore had no need of the Son of Man./87/

Odeberg hastens to point out that JOHN does not reject "altogether" the ecstatic experiences recorded in the Hebrew Bible, for what they did--even if it involved a heavenly ascent--was done "in union and communion" with the Son of Man./88/

Odeberg's assertion that JOHN exempts Christ-mediated ascents from the general prohibition of heavenly ascent is similar to the hypotheses of Aune and Dahl and it for this reason it is subject to the same criticisms as theirs. On the other hand, by demonstrating that the Joh. depiction of the Son of Man as a descending-ascending revelatory savior has much in common with Gnostic, Hermetic and similar salvation mysteries, Odeberg goes beyond their work in that he attempts to identify the mythical roots of the heavenly Joh. protagonist. Unfortunately, Odeberg's hypothesis--like Bultmann's--is too heavily based upon second, third, and fourth century religious traditions to be considered viable today. This fault is understandable, given the fact that
Odeberg did his research in the late twenties when the Mandaean and Hermetic dating questions had not yet been resolved. But while it is true that Odeberg's hypothesis cannot withstand the scrutiny of subsequent scholarship, this does not mean that his intuition about the adversarial relationship in John between myths involving descent-ascent figures and beliefs about heavenly visions and ascents should be abandoned altogether.

2. James D. G. Dunn

Following the path blazed by Odeberg, Dunn argues that the Fourth Gospel formulates a high Christology based upon religious beliefs dominated by a heavenly descent-ascent figure in order to engage in a polemical or apologetic dialogue with religious traditions that challenge the central role played by Christ in revelation and salvation. Dunn avers that John contends primarily with two Jewish groups: apocalypticists and Merkabah mystics on the one hand, and Jamnean rabbis on the other. At stake in both conversations are the Christological questions of Jesus' origin, his relationship to the Father, and his revelatory authority. Our interest lies primarily with Dunn's view of the relationship of John to Jewish apocalypticism and mysticism.

Dunn finds substantial evidence for direct contact between John and heavenly ascent-oriented beliefs which claim to possess "direct knowledge of heavenly mysteries." Given the similarity between certain Joh. prohibitory statements and the "strong reactions against . . . apocalyptic and merkabah speculation" in
Sir 3.18-25, 4 Ezra 8.20f, m.Hag 2.1, m.Meg 4.10, and against angel
worship in Col 2.18 and Heb 1-2, it can be reasonably assumed that
the relationship between the Fourth Gospel and human ascent tradi-
tions is antipodal. Dunn does not break new ground here, but he
makes full use of a plethora of studies which convincingly identify
thematic parallels between certain statements in the gospel (e.g.,
1.18; 3.13; 6.46) and mystical traditions about Moses and other
visionary Patriarchs./90/

Dunn argues that the Fourth Gospel's negative response to
ascent-oriented beliefs is formulated in terms of emphasis upon the
assertion that Jesus is from above, meaning that "he brings and
embodies the truth, the true knowledge of God and of heavenly
things."/91/ The claim that Jesus is from above is especially
manifested in the ways in which he is designated, for he is iden-
tified as the descended Son of Man, as the living Bread which has
come down from heaven, as the Son who is in continuity with the
Father, as one who transcends the categories of prophet, king, and
Messiah, and most importantly, as the Logos emanating from God.
Here Dunn agrees with those scholars who argue that JOHN’s
Christology is heavily indebted to Wisdom/Logos traditions. Dunn
points out that the advantage of depicting Jesus in this way is
that the Wisdom/Logos figure is not a subordinate intermediary,
like angels, who are (ontologically?) "over against God." Rather,
the Joh. Wisdom/Logos is the unique preexistent emanation of God:
"God himself, God in his self-manifestation." All other Christo-
logical titles (e.g., Son of God, Messiah, and Son of Man) are "an
elaboration" of this concept./92/

Dunn maintains that the Joh. Wisdom/Logos portrayal of Jesus would have a decisively negative effect upon contemporary heavenly ascent assertions. In "modern terms,"

the Fourth Evangelist insists that a christology >from below< is inadequate (a christology of inspiration or mystical ascent or apotheosis). The meaning of Christ cannot be expressed except as a christology >from above<./93/

Of course, by identifying the human Jesus as a Wisdom/Logos figure JOHN runs the risk of undermining its monotheistic presuppositions, and this is precisely what Dunn believes to be at the root of JOHN’s conflict with the Jabnean rabbis. The rabbis misunderstand JOHN’s Logos Christology to be a "blasphemy against the unity of God."/94/

Clearly the strength of Dunn’s presentation lies in his insistence that one can understand the Joh. polemic only by taking into account both the mythical background for Jesus and the mystical and apocalyptic beliefs of contemporary Judaism. In other words, he recognizes the significance of both the preexistent, descent-ascent language associated with the Joh. Jesus and the apparent Joh. polemic against heavenly ascents. Dunn’s thirty-one page monograph provides a comprehensive summary and compelling synthesis of recent investigations into both major facets of JOHN’s cosmological interests. But if Dunn is correct in positing that the Fourth Gospel depicts Jesus primarily in Wisdom/Logos categories, then it cannot be taken for granted (as Dunn does) that a significant portion of the gospel deals with the death of that
descending/ascending emanation of God (as JOHN does). The death of Jesus marks a critical break with Wisdom/Logos traditions. Even the Logos' incarnation and depiction in a biographical narrative is more problematic than Dunn assumes.

There is even a more fundamental question to be raised with respect to Dunn's hypothesis. If the Wisdom/Logos concept is central to Joh. Christology, so that all other divine titles are subordinated to it (as Dunn avers/95/), then why is the Wisdom figure never mentioned in the gospel, and why also is the Logos title seemingly abandoned after 1.14? Just because the Logos idea dominates the Prologue, which in turn establishes the context for the rest of the gospel, does not necessarily mean that this concept has priority over other Christological terms. JOHN's explicit statement of purpose shortly after Thomas' confession ("... that you believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, ...") (20.31)) cannot be as easily dismissed as Dunn would like. Further study of this matter is certainly necessary.

3. Wayne Meeks

While searching for the mythical model for the Joh. Jesus, Dunn mentions that one of the important insights obtained from Meeks's monumental study of the relationship between Jewish traditions about Moses and Joh. Christology is that "the Johannine pattern of descent/ascent of a heavenly messenger has no direct parallel in the Moses traditions."/96/ Meeks does not suggest where the Joh. descent-ascent pattern might have come from, but
Dunn uses this comment as support for his Wisdom/Logos hypothesis. Against the charge that in Jewish literature the Wisdom figure is seldom said to descend or ascend, Dunn responds in a footnote that the descent-ascent motif is primarily the product of the Fourth Evangelist's creativity:

"It is wiser to conclude that the descent/ascent motif in its Johannine form is a creation of the Johannine school itself, formed precisely by the conviction that the full significance of Jesus could be grasped only in terms of the identification of Christ as Wisdom."/97/

Unfortunately, Dunn fails to pursue the matter of this motif further, but Meeks himself does so in a subsequent essay on the structure of JOHN and its relationship to communal sectarianism. Meeks sets out to solve the "puzzle" which so fascinated Bultmann: Why does the gospel depict Jesus according to the typical descent-ascent pattern of a heavenly revealer, who reveals nothing except that he is the revealer?/98/ Meeks's approach to the question combines insights from the fields of linguistics and sociology. He contends first of all that the Fourth Gospel evinces a dominant mythical pattern of descent followed by ascent. Secondly, Meeks avers that the repetition of this pattern through the gospel narrative has an effect upon the reader similar to the effect which an ancient myth would have: by repeating the same basic ideas in many different ways the receiver will tune in to the "signals" generated by the descent-ascent pattern (rather than upon surface level ideas) and thereby get the basic point of the entire story. Meeks believes that as the modern interpreter concentrates upon the
descent-ascent signals (s) he will be able to grasp how the gospel functioned in the social setting out of which it emerged. In a word, the Fourth Gospel is designed to be an etiology, theodicy, and apology for the socially alienated Joh. community./99/

Our interest in Meeks's article lies not with its sociological theses, but rather with a number of salient points which he makes about the religionsgeschichtlichen background of the gospel. Like Dunn and Odeberg several decades before him, Meeks seeks to develop a comprehensive and persuasive hypothesis (i) which takes into account both the Joh. depiction of Jesus as a preexistent, authoritative, descending-ascending revealer AND the apparent Joh. uneasiness with theophanic and heavenly ascent claims, and (ii) which demonstrates that a major reason for the former is the latter.

Meeks identifies roughly a half dozen ideas associated with the descent-ascent motif in JOHN, almost all of which have to do with the overlapping themes of Jesus' identity, the authority of his revelation, or the failure of the "Jews" to understand Jesus and accept him./100/ The primary function of these oft-repeated themes associated with descent-ascent language is to deal with the dilemma brought about by the Joh. community's expulsion from synagogal life. In developing a profile of the type of Judaism out of which the Joh. sect has come, Meeks avers that apocalyptic or mystical factors enter into the picture. Meeks does not elaborate much upon this point; nor does he need to do so for anyone familiar with his overall understanding of the Fourth Gospel, since he has
already discussed the matter at some length in a previous monograph/101/ and article/102/. It behooves us to take a brief look at these previous works in order to grasp the full significance of Meeks's hypothesis regarding the relationship of a descending-ascending Joh. Jesus to ascent-oriented beliefs in the Jewish background of the gospel.

Meeks contends that the Fourth Gospel's traditions were shaped, at least in part, by interaction between a Christian community and a hostile Jewish community whose piety accorded very great importance to Moses and the Sinai theophany, probably understood as Moses' ascent to heaven and his enthronement there./103/

Within Philo, rabbinic midrash, and Samaritan literature Meeks finds "the remnants of an elaborate cluster of traditions of Moses' heavenly enthronement at the time of the Sinai theophany." This celestial enthronement includes the granting by God to Moses of (i) his divine name (יְהֹוָה), (ii) his divine image, (iii) a divine status, and (iv) "a unique function among men." "Moses henceforth was to serve on earth as God's representative, both as revealer (prophet) and as vice-regent (king)." Meeks goes on to argue that at least one function which Moses' ascent up Sinai and into heaven serves for those who embrace this idea is that it "guarantee[s] . . . the esoteric tradition" which is associated with it. And he notes that Philo even sees Moses' ascent as something to be imitated by others./104/

Turning to JOHN, Meeks discovers considerable evidence for a dispute between the Joh. community and Jews who believe in Moses
as the quintessential ascending-descending prophet-king. Meeks maintains that JOHN takes the essential features of the Mosaic ideology—prophet and revealer, miracle worker, Israel’s shepherd, enthronement as king, "paraclete", messianic figure, defense attorney and accuser, teacher, intermediary, apostle ("sent-one"), association with the Torah, etc.—and applies them to Jesus. Yet Jesus is not merely the fulfillment of Mosaic expectations, and he is no second Moses; rather, he supercedes Moses to such an extent "that Moses is now stripped of those functions and made merely a ‘witness’ to Jesus (like John the Baptist)."/105/

In order to counter the claim that Moses through his ascent into heaven became first a king and second God’s unique messenger of divine secrets on the earth (which provides the basis for this piety involving "hope" and "belief" in Moses [Jn 5.45-56] and Mosaic discipleship [9.28]), JOHN asserts that Jesus is enthroned in his ascension into heaven (although paradoxically through death) and that only he has seen and bears witness to the mysterious Kingdom of God. Meeks maintains that 3.1-13; 1.18; 5.37; and 6.46 are all expressions of a Joh. polemic against beliefs associated with Moses’ putative ascent, the point being that only Jesus is authorized to reveal heavenly mysteries because only he has been in heaven to obtain them. Meeks notes that "the ascent of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel cannot be separated from his prior descent," and he claims furthermore that a descent-ascent pattern for a heavenly messenger has much more in common with gnostic thought than with Moses traditions, but he does not pursue the significance of Jesus’
descent beyond these passing comments. /106/

Meeks compensates for this deficiency in his aforementioned article on "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism." Now he devotes considerable attention to descent as well as to ascent in demonstrating that the Joh. descent-ascent pattern for Jesus is meant to oppose heavenly ascent claims:

Within this small collection [of Amen-sayings in 3.3, 5 and the three interlocking statements in 3.11-14] the descent/ ascent of Jesus seems to serve as the warrant for the esoteric revelation which he brings... As Odeberg showed, the exclusivity of the revelation by the Son of Man must be construed as a polemic, not against claims of other gnostic revealers (since they, too, would claim to have "descended"), but against the claim of prophets or seers to have received revelations by means of "heavenly journeys," as for example in apocalyptic or in the Merkabah speculation, or in the traditions of the theophanies to Moses and the Patriarchs. /107/

Meeks rejects the Bultmannian hypothesis that some form of gnostic thought lies in the background of the Joh. depiction of Jesus, /108/ and opts instead for a Jewish explanation. Not only is the alleged polemic of 3.13 probably directed against apocalyptic and/or Merkabah ascents, but, argues Meeks, the depiction of Jesus as an exclusively descending-ascending Son of Man may itself be derived from "familiar patterns" of apostolic prophet, heavenly Wisdom, Yahweh angel, and Son of Man which "had been prepared for by Merkabah exegesis in mystical Jewish sources." /109/ Concerning the first-mentioned pattern, Meeks maintains that the Joh. emphasis upon the fact that Jesus speaks only what his Father commissioned him to reveal "could be underlined by the mythical picture of the apostle's assumption to heaven to receive the secret
message," which in turn serves as a "point of contact for the
development of the Johannine picture of Jesus' descent and ascent,
in connection with the Wisdom myths."/110/

In other words, the pattern adopted by JOHN for Jesus stems
from the same general ascent-oriented milieu as the beliefs against
which the gospel appears to polemicize. This perspective is quite
similar to Odeberg's and rather different from Dunn's, who seems to
suggest that the Jewish background of the Joh. Wisdom/Logos is
different from the religious background of the ascent beliefs
against which the gospel contends./111/ But if Meeks and Odeberg
are correct, then a most important question must be resolved: How
might a conceptual environment in which heavenly ascents and
theophanies flourish spawn a viewpoint which sharply opposes
participation in such experiences in favor of a mode of revelatory
acquisition in which a descending-ascending figure from out of
heaven is entirely responsible for this task?

To be more specific, would a Wisdom motif embedded in an
apocalyptic tradition (i.e., in Sim [1 En] 42--the only place where
a descent-ascent pattern can be found) really have served as the
impetus for an alternative schematic orientation that undermines
the (human) ascension thrust of the tradition? Would the writings
and/or mystical experiences of Philo serve as the material basis
for a revelatory belief which eschewed all mystical experiences?
Why is Jesus in JOHN not depicted as an ascending prophet who, like
Enoch in Sim, is led on a tour of heaven by the angel of Yahweh and
permitted to see the abode of Wisdom and/or the Son of Man? Is not
Dunn's implicit "mutually exclusive traditions" hypothesis more reasonable? On the other hand, given the pervasive presence of the Son of Man, the Logos, the Messiah/Christ figure, the Son of God, and to a lesser extent the Wisdom figure in both ascent- and theophanic-oriented texts, might it not be rather difficult for Dunn to argue that the Joh. titles for and description of Jesus stem from a conceptual part of Judaism which denies or ignores the possibility of ecstatic human perception of the celestial world?

These questions demonstrate just how exceedingly complex the religionsgeschichtliche question about cosmological language in JOHN really is. The same descending-ascending heavenly figures appear in literary contexts which advocate heavenly ascents and theophanies as well as in contexts which do not. This observation certainly complicates the task of discerning whence comes the model for the Joh. Jesus. But on the other hand, the recognition that heavenly beings appear in both types of revelatory situations may give us an important clue as to the way to resolve the riddle of the origin and purpose of the otherworldly depiction of Jesus.

4. Peder Borgen

Borgen's study of the conceptual relationship of JOHN to Philonic thought is yet another example of the hypothesis that the Fourth Gospel's view of Jesus as a descending-ascending heavenly being stems from a religious environment which supports heavenly ascent beliefs. In his earlier work Borgen argues that both the Joh. Bread of Life Discourse and Philo represent parallel (but
unconnected) "side-branches of early Merkabah mysticism" (i) which utilize "midrashic methods, patterns, and terminology," (ii) which appropriate "haggadic traditions about the manna," and (iii) which "follow a common Jewish homiletic pattern."/112/

JOHN and Philo differ, however, in the soteriological significance which each attaches to the historical and material world. While "Philo undercuts the Jewish idea that God acts in history," JOHN—despite its indebtedness to the docetic tendencies of its intellectual milieu—polemicizes against this "gnosticizing tendency to draw a distinction between the spiritual sphere and the external sphere."/113/ Borgen suggests that in the Joh. community are "docetic spiritualists" whose thinking is paralleled by Philo, and who, like the "Jewish externalists" in 6.41, "reject the Incarnate One as the only mediator between God and man." These gnostic Christians deny that the Christ figure is to be identified with the human Jesus, and consequently they reject Jesus' claim to have the exclusive right to behold the Deity. Instead, they give "the vision of the spiritual realities a more general character."

Of course, 6.46 contradicts all of these assertions, as does also 1.18, 3.13, and 5.37: "the Son of God, being identical with Jesus in the flesh, is the only one on [sic.] who has seen God and the only one who can mediate this vision." Borgen argues that all four texts interpret the theophany at Sinai from the perspective of Ex 33.20, which claims that even Moses was not permitted to see the face of God. In agreement with Dahl (whom he mentions) Borgen opines that JOHN's position is that neither the Israelites at
Sinai, nor Moses, nor Abraham, nor Isaiah saw the Deity directly; the "form" (6.46) which they all saw belongs to Jesus Christ, Son of God. Moreover, both the Bread of Life Discourse and the gospel as a whole emphasize the exclusive vision by the Son of his Father, as well as his descent into incarnation and his ascent through the scandalon (from the gnostic point of view) of death./114/ Thus, maintains Borgen, JOHN polemicizes against gnostic ascent beliefs grounded in a form of Merkabah mysticism by emphasizing the historical and material aspect of Christ's coming into the world.

Concerning Jn 6's Christology, Borgen argues first of all that JOHN--like Philo--identifies the bread/manna from heaven (which of course is the Joh. Jesus) with (i) the Torah which was given during the Sinai theophany, (ii) heavenly W/Wisdom (which itself can be identified with the Torah), and (iii) the rabbinic halakhic principle of agency./115/ Now in showing how JOHN identifies the heavenly Bread with the Wisdom figure, Borgen refers to several familiar Wisdom texts (e.g., Prov, Sir, Bar) to sustain his argument. Interestingly enough, these texts do not endorse ecstatic ascent practices, which suggests that JOHN derives its portrait for its protagonist from a non-ascent-oriented milieu. Yet when Borgen turns to Philo and explains how the Alexandrian philosopher identifies the same two concepts, the passages from Philo which he cites (e.g., Mos II 215; Mut. 259-60) convey the distinct impression that wisdom--in these instances--is not thought of by Philo as being an hypostatized figure./116/ In other words, this "wisdom" is not the same entity as the putative Wisdom lying
in the background of Joh. Christology. Borgen himself notes that
JOHN "has utilized the personal features of the [sic.] wisdom . . .
, while Philo has developed the impersonal aspects more fitting to
the meaning of σόφια within Greek educational philosophy."/117/
Perhaps, or it may be that the source of Philo’s wisdom (and
sometimes for Philo she is an hypostatized figure) is the same as
the alleged Wisdom source for JOHN.

Three years later Borgen again addresses the question of
the Joh. depiction of Jesus, and this time he finds a remarkable
set of parallels between the Joh. idea of Jesus as an envoy (or
agent) sent from the Father and Jewish halakhic rules for agen-
cy./118/ Again with the help of Philo Borgen contends that such
rules could also be applied to heavenly agents; and in fact this is
what Philo does with respect to the angel Israel, who is known as
"God’s First-born, the Word, who holds the eldership among the
angels, . . . ‘the Beginning,’ . . . and the Man after His Image."
Since Jn 1.51 connects the idea of Israel "with the idea of vision
in the interpretation of Jacob’s vision," and since JOHN also gives
many (of the same) names to Jesus that Philo bestows upon the
Logos-angel Israel, Borgen believes that he has provided further
substantiation for his hypothesis that JOHN’s Christology stems
from an early Merkabah mystical background which employs halakhic
rules for agency.

Borgen notes that Philo does not employ such rules in his
portrayal of the angel Israel (who mediates the vision of God), and
for Buehner (although not for Borgen) this omission is quite
significant: if the Philonic Logos is not depicted as an envoy, as the Joh. Jesus so often is, then how can one maintain that Philo’s conceptual roots are the same as JOHN’s?/119/ Moreover, Borgen acknowledges that Jn 3.3-13 seems “to be a polemic against the very idea expressed by Philo” that Moses at Sinai underwent a second birth (earthly to spiritual nature) and ascended to heaven. Once more we pose the religionsgeschichtliche question, Is it really likely that the Joh. idea of Jesus as a preexistent, descending-ascending revealer who alone has been in heaven is derived from the same intellectual environment which inspired Philo to conceive of his Logos-angel as one who not only mediates the vision of the unseen Deity but also assists the seer in his/her climb into the heavenly world?

5. Jan Buehner

Hailed by Klaus Berger in 1983 “als den zur Zeit gewichtigsten und qualifiziertesten Beitrag . . . der zur Christologie des Johannesevangeliums vorliegt,”/120/ Buehner’s 430+ page Doktorarbeit presents a comprehensive hypothesis about the background and the development of the Joh. depiction of Jesus which takes into account the matters of preexistence, the descent-ascent pattern, glorification, designation as the Son of Man, the Father-Son sending motif, prophetic imagery, and the putatively polemical texts with which we are so familiar. As the title of his work suggests, the conceptual hub from which all of these themes extend is comprehended in the idea: Der Gesandte und sein Weg” (“The Envoy
and His Way").

After a lengthy critique of twentieth century (particularly but by no means exclusively German) Joh. scholarship on the question of the religionsgeschichtlichen basis for JOHN's Christology, Buehner seeks to demonstrate first of all that the Joh. Son-sending motif does not merely arise in Jewish halakhic circles (so Borgen) or in gnostic communities (so Bultmann), but is instead a kulturgeschichtliches phenomenon. 121/ Buehner observes that this transcultural messenger motif is quite old, and that it has helped to shape the way in which Old Testament prophets and angels are portrayed.

Next, Buehner argues that this ancient oriental sending motif is mediated to the Fourth Gospel particularly through the conceptual world of Jewish Shaliach Halacha. Rabbinic Judaism embraces the transcultural motif and gives it a distinctive form which can be seen in the way that biblical ideas about prophetic sending are united with concepts of what Buehner identifies as juridical representation (juristischer Vertretungslehre). One of the more important features of the rabbinic expression of the transcultural messenger motif is the notion that the envoy is a representative of his sender. According to Buehner the Fourth Gospel uses this idea to describe the Son's relationship to his Father, except that JOHN intensifies it in such a way as to suggest a very close, personal identification of messenger and sender. This idea of a personal unity between Father and Son combines with the prophetic-apocalyptic concept of a manifested glory and with
the belief that the Son of Man is a commissioned gatherer of the multitude of the righteous, and this synthesis in turn is joined to the juridical ideas of representation and full authority—all of which provides the basis for Joh. assertions that Jesus is "in" the Father and vice versa (14.10), that the Father makes sure that the Son is able to accomplish his mission (10.29–30), that the Son shares the Father's estate (17.7, 10), and most significantly, that whoever has seen the Son has seen the Father (12.45; 14.9). Buehner avers that this fourth assertion is probably (vermutlich) meant to limit (abgrenzen) the claims of pneumatics who claim to have visions of the Deity apart from Christ, in whom only is God able to be seen./122/

Then Buehner turns to the religionsgeschichtlichen presuppositions of the Joh. portrait of Jesus as an envoy, and here he focuses upon the matter of descending and ascending messengers in Judaism.

First, he argues that in the Hellenistic era the two basic types of biblical messengers (ῥήτορες)—(human) prophets and (divine) angels—are understood as Shaliach figures, and that sometimes these two types are united.

Second, in rabbinic, Samaritan, and apocalyptic circles, as well as according to Josephus, Moses is understood to be a Shaliach figure who (at least according to some of these traditions) ascended up Mount Sinai to heaven, received the Spirit, revelation, and a commission to proclaim that revelation, then descended back to the earth and discharged his duties, after which he again climbed
up the mountain back into heaven to report to God his accomplish-
ments. According to Buehner, what originally was conceived as a
pattern of ascent-descent for Moses became—because of the emphasis
upon Moses’ heavenly commission and final report—over time a
descent-ascent pattern./123/

Third, Buehner avers that Jesus’ depiction as a descending-
ascending envoy is also based upon Jewish conceptions of angels.
Like human prophets, angelic beings in both apocalyptic and rabbin-
ic circles are conceived as Shaliach figures. They visit the earth
briefly, often appearing in human form in the carrying out of their
revelatory missions./124/ A descent-ascent pattern is associated
with angels, although Buehner must admit that more often than not
this pattern is presupposed rather than expressly stated. Even the
two rabbinic texts which he cites as the best evidence for the
imposition of an explicit descent-ascent pattern upon angelic mes-
sengers do not provide unambiguous evidence for his assertion./125/

Fourth, Buehner points out that several notable mortals
from Israel’s past are depicted in rabbinic, Philonic, and
apocalyptic literature as having ascended into heaven and taken on
temporary or permanent angelic/heavenly form—to wit: Elijah,
Isaiah, Moses, Aaron, Enoch, and Jacob-Israel. Buehner notes that
Enoch is even said to have become the Son of Man, who like angels
can function as an envoy of the Deity. Moreover, some of these and
still other traditions evince an interesting pattern: ascent (of
the principal mortal), transformation, vision of God and heavenly
service, descent as an angel and disguise in human form (Dan 7.14
Finally, Buehner assimilates all of these ideas into a single grand hypothesis about the historical process by which Jesus came to be depicted as the descending-ascending revelatory Son of Man in JOHN. He claims that Jn 3.13 ("no one has ascended except he who descended") reflects a very primitive Joh. perspective in which an apocalyptic-prophetic figure (Jesus) was understood to have ascended to heaven, had a vision of the Deity, received a revelatory commission, and then was sent back to the earth. Later (but still quite early) this ascent-descent conception became united with apocalyptic Son of Man traditions (the Son of Man himself being conceived as a heavenly messenger of God) and with early Christian ideas about the sending of God’s Son. Now the Son of Man was distinguished from other ascending apocalyptic seers as one who is "from above" is set apart from those who are "from below." In his descent to the earth the Son of Man became visible in the earthly Jesus, who carried out his revelatory and soteriological mission before being exalted and glorified in his return to his heavenly abode. Lastly, this descent-ascent revelatory pattern combined with halakhic sending ideas which generated the notion that the Son is sent into the world.

Buehner deserves much credit for demonstrating that the pervasive Joh. sending motif is indebted not to a particular religious tradition but to ancient Mediterranean culture as a whole. This insight causes us to wonder whether even more of Joh. Christology is perhaps grounded in transcultural ideas (rather than
in a particular religious tradition) than Buehner himself has recognized.

Buehner is also to be commended for using apocalyptic and especially Mosaic traditions to explain why JOHN has such as keen interest in descent and ascent, in the Son of Man figure, in visio Dei experiences, and in prophetic and revelatory imagery. When his work is combined with Meeks's studies an even stronger case can be made for the hypothesis that some kind of ascent-oriented piety directed towards Moses as the quintessential revelatory figure in Judaism stands in the background of the Fourth Gospel. Whether Jesus was originally conceived as an apocalyptic ascent figure like Moses—perhaps as "the prophet like Moses" (Deu 18.15)—before being transformed into a descending-ascending Son of Man does not need to be decided here.128/ Even if 3.13 hints at such a possibility, now within the entire gospel context it can and should be interpreted as affirming a single descent-ascent revelatory journey made by a preexistent heavenly messenger by the name of Jesus—in contradistinction to competing revelatory claims made for Moses and perhaps other apocalyptic seers.

Buehner's use of Jewish ideas about angels to explain certain notable features of the heavenly depiction of Jesus represents a third excellent insight into the Joh. Christological enigma. Many of Wisdom's characteristics which cause scholars to claim that she serves as a model for the Joh. Jesus (co-creator, intimacy with the Deity, revealer, savior, present in human life) can also be found to be associated with angelic beings. What makes angels
better "candidates" for comparison with Jesus than Wisdom is that they are closely associated with a multifaceted sending motif, with "incarnation" and historical activity on the earth, and with visionary and ascension practices (much more so than Wisdom). They are also much more often said to descend and ascend than Wisdom. For these reasons any attempt to come to terms with the Joh. depiction of Jesus must take seriously how angels function in Jewish and Christian piety.

CRITIQUE OF BUEHNER, AND CONCLUDING REMARKS AND QUESTIONS

Before proceeding further it must be noted that Buehner’s evidence from the two rabbinic sources which he cites in support of his claim that Jesus’ descent and ascent is constructed along the lines of angelic descent and ascent is not persuasive (see n. 125). Moreover, given the widely acknowledged dating problem associated with rabbinic materials, Buehner’s extensive use of such sources is itself subject to question. It would be better for him to work exclusively with earlier texts, not only in order to avoid the charge of anachronistic argumentation, but because they provide a stronger basis for his claim. He himself points out that references to angelic descent and ascent can be found in the Hebrew Bible, in Tobit, in Joseph and Aseneth, and in the Testament of Abraham. Of course, just how numerous such references actually are remains to be seen.
Secondly, the Joh. Jesus is never invested with the title "(Arch-)angel" as he is "Son of Man," "Logos," "Son of God," and so on. Admittedly, this constitutes a problem for any hypothesis about an angelic pattern for Jesus. But then he is never identified as Wisdom either—and this notable omission has not prevented a large body of scholars from claiming that Jesus is patterned after her via the Logos concept. On the other hand, perhaps it would be more appropriate to think of the Joh. protagonist as performing many of the functions of angelic creatures without claiming that he is meant to be identified as an angel himself. This possibility calls to mind Talbert’s hypothesis (pp. 86–88) that it is better to speak of a transcultural pattern which embraces all mythical descent-ascent figures lying in the background of Joh. Christology than to attempt to identify a specific mythical figure upon which Jesus is based. Thus JOHN might be seen as attributing to Jesus certain angelic functions without having to claim that he is an angelic being.

Alan Segal argues in a similar vein that all cosmological travel by heavenly and human mediators in antiquity is conceived according to a single "mythical structure" which can be described either as a katabasis pattern (involving divine figures) or an anabasis pattern (involving human figures). These two patterns are reciprocals of one another and therefore structurally equivalent. Moreover, claims Segal, "in pre-Christian times it is more normal to find only one pattern—a man may ascend and return, a divine mediator may descend and return."/129/ However, this is not the
case in the Fourth Gospel. Here according to Segal we find "an extremely full articulation of the structure of the *anabasis*- 
*katabasis* pattern." The Fourth Gospel integrates Jesus' ascent, 
his preexistence, his identification as the Logos, and a presumed 
polemic against other ascent beliefs by means of "a unitary 
narrative of a single descending and ascending figure"--"the whole 
cycle of descent-ascent is the fundamental premise." Thus, "the 
Gospel of John has unified the mediator of mythical contradictions 
into a single figure."/130/

One weakness of Segal's structuralist hypothesis is that he 
fails to explain why the Joh. Jesus is represented as a descending- 
ascending heavenly being rather than as an ascending-descending 
seer. Buehner's hypothesis is somewhat more helpful at this point. 
Nevertheless, Talbert, Segal, and to some extent even Buehner (in 
terms of the sending motif) argue persuasively that the *religions-
geschichtliche* search for a particular mythical figure must be 
replaced by a *religionsgeschichtlichen* quest for a mythical pattern 
which helps to determine the Joh. depiction of Jesus./131/ The 
conscious appropriation of an underlying mythical pattern rather 
than a deliberate "borrowing" of characteristics from a particular 
heavenly being might explain why Jesus is identified with the 
titles of several different divine figures. It also would account 
for the remarkable similarity between Jesus and angelic creatures 
despite the fact that he is never identified as a member of their 
company. Perhaps there is a deliberate reason for this.
Even if we think in terms of a general pattern instead of specific mythical figures, we are left with the question of whether there is but one basic descent-ascent pattern in antiquity (so Segal and Talbert) to which all heavenly revelatory beings conform. Does it matter whether the descent-ascent motif upon which the Joh. Jesus is based stems from a milieu which fosters heavenly visions and ascents by mortals, or whether this motif is derived from a non-ascent religious environment? If from the former milieu, then how does JOHN come into possession of the idea that this descent-ascent motif should be used to shut down all human ascents, to deny claims that Moses and perhaps other past luminaries ascended into heaven, and to turn scriptural theophanies into Christophanies? But if on the other hand we are to imagine that there are not one but two basic revelatory patterns—one pattern which contains a descent-ascent motif only, and an alternative pattern in which both divine descent-ascent and human ascent-descent are present—can we identify more precisely the contrasting features of these distinctive patterns in order to determine which one JOHN employs for its depiction of Jesus? Might the typical descending-ascending revelatory figure in one pattern be phenomenologically and functionally different from the descending-ascending figure in the alternative mythical structure?
CHAPTER THREE
THE REVELATORY ROLE OF ANGELIC BEINGS IN JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY PRIOR TO THE COMPOSITION OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

INTRODUCTION

While the modern quest for the particular mythical figure which serves as the blueprint for Joh. Christology has succeeded in identifying a number of notable parallels between the gospel's main character and several other ancient descending-ascending revealers, ironically its greatest contribution may lie in its ultimate failure to find this alleged "parent" figure. For if the Joh. Jesus is a heavenly messenger who is said to descend to earth and to "become flesh," who announces the will of God to friend and foe with unrivaled revelatory authority, whose revelatory mission includes a soteriological death, and who is then seen by his followers to be corporally alive before his announced return ascent to heaven, then clearly this Jesus is no clone of some other divine intermediary from Levantine antiquity, whether it be Wisdom, the Son of Man, the Son of God, the Word of the Hebrew Bible, the Hellenistic-Jewish Logos, the Holy Spirit, the Shekinah, the Gnostic Redeemer, an/the angel of the Lord, or an archangel. In this sense the Joh. Jesus is sui generis, and much more credit for the portrayal of the Joh. Jesus should be given to the author/1/ of the gospel.

But this being so, the question remains as to why the Joh. Jesus bears a striking resemblance, at least in certain notable respects, to contemporaneous depictions of descending-ascending
messengers. Because the Fourth Gospel so strongly emphasizes Jesus' preexistence, heavenly identity, and descent and ascent, as well as making repeated interdictory comments about all other ascent and visio Dei claims, we cannot hope to grasp its central message until we have been able to identify its place in the larger intellectual environment of Judaism and Christianity. We are compelled to take these cosmological features of JOHN quite seriously since we know that they are of considerable importance to many of the religious movements of Late Antiquity. Therefore we must persist in our religionsgeschichtlichen quest for the key which unlocks the riddle of JOHN's otherworldly, descending-ascending Jesus.

We have already determined that we cannot expect to find our answer by looking for THE heavenly revealer myth from which JOHN "borrows" (in the old religionsgeschichtlichen sense) its pattern for Jesus. Talbert and Segal have now adjusted the focus of our search by directing our attention to the hypothesis that the key to a proper understanding of the generative impulse which produced the descending-ascending Joh. revealer is to be found in a mythological pattern (or better: schema or paradigm) which lies behind all such figures in antiquity. In principle we heartily concur with this methodological reorientation. The evidence which they cite from Philo, various apocalyptic, wisdom, and gnostic texts, as well as from first and second century Christianity (including JOHN), clearly demonstrates that the identities and functions of various divine beings are in fact frequently
attributed to a single figure in a given religious text, meaningthat this figure's depiction is determined by a plurality "models"rather than by a single archetype./2/ But if this is granted, isit therefore justifiable to maintain that these Hellenistic eradescending-ascending figures are similar enough to one another thatonly one basic transcultural paradigm underlies all of them? If
notable differences are observed in the way in which specificheavenly beings who appear on the earth are depicted (and we willsee shortly that there are), should such variations be construed aspermutations of a single schema?

When a study of descending-ascending figures concentratesespecially upon matters relating to revelatory function andauthority, the answer to these questions is negative. In thischapter we will demonstrate that in the intersecting worlds offirst century Judaism and Christianity there were not one but tworadically distinct ways of depicting descending-ascending revela-
tory beings. These two types of representation are not merely"variations upon a common theme"; rather, they belong to twofundamentally different modes of thinking about divine-humanrevelatory transmission and therefore represent two separate
revelatory paradigms. And if this is so, then we must reformulate
the tantalizing hypothesis suggested by Odeberg, Meeks, Buehner,
et. al., that the Fourth Gospel appropriates a descent-ascent
schema for its portrayal of Jesus in order to oppose some kind of
"alternative" revelatory ideology. For they all tacitly assume
that the descent-ascent pattern largely stems from the same basic
human ascent-oriented milieu as the ecstatic beliefs against which the gospel contends.

For the sake of conceptual clarity concerning these two separate revelatory schemas we must emphasize that the primary feature which distinguishes them is not that one evinces a descent-ascent pattern while the other does not. Both schemas contain otherworldly revelatory beings who travel to and from the earth in a descent-ascent trajectory. If we were so inclined we might suggest the opposite, that the primary difference between the two paradigms is that one evinces an ascent-descent pattern while the other does not. This ascent-descent pattern describes the movement not of a heavenly figure but of a mortal instead, who journeys to heaven to obtain heretofore unknown knowledge which he is able to disclose to his family and community when he returns to his earthly abode. Of course this revelatory schema is the one which many scholars contend that the Fourth Gospel is attempting to confute, and with this judgment we are in full agreement. Yet we must not overlook the fact that even in this ascent-descent paradigm one finds descending-ascending figures that are integrally involved in the mortal’s revelatory experience. And so we arrive back at our earlier question: Are these descending-ascending figures substantially different from the descending-ascending figures found in the revelatory paradigm which underlies non-human-ascent stories?

In order to avoid conceptual confusion brought about by the fact that even the so-called ascent-descent schema contains a descent-ascent pattern, we prefer to characterize the essential
difference between these two revelatory paradigms in another way, by concentrating upon the place or locus where revelation is transmitted. Generally speaking, in that schema which contains both ascending-descending human seers and descending-ascending heavenly beings the locus of revelatory discourse is heaven. In this instance, most if not all of the heavenly mysteries are communicated to the mortal from a celestial vantage point. In sharp contrast, that other schema which is patently void of human ascent-descent evinces a terrestrial locus for its revelatory transmission. Here, the descent-ascent revealer comes down to the earth, delivers his/her message within the human life-world, and then departs back to heaven. In the course of our study we will discover why the simple matter of where mortals come into contact with the words of the divine--whether in heaven or on earth--is significant enough to serve as the fundamental criterion by which the two revelatory paradigms can be distinguished. And of course by differentiating between the two paradigms in this way we can avoid the possibility of misunderstanding due to the fact that both schemas contain descending-ascending, otherworldly revelatory figures.

Before we commence our religionsgeschichtliche study we should reiterate that the primary objective of this chapter is to determine as precisely as possible the source and nature of the conceptual framework which lies behind the Joh. depiction of its protagonist as a supremely authoritative, descending-ascending revelatory being. Until further proof can be offered in Chapter
Four, we will tacitly assume on the basis of our analysis in the previous chapter that the primary belief system against which JOHN contends asserts the revelatory priority of some ascent-descent figure or figures (perhaps it is Jesus of Nazareth, as Buehner's work might suggest!). We will assume further that Jesus is depicted as a descending-ascending heavenly being in JOHN in order to oppose this ecstatic idea that a mere mortal can serve as the authoritative seer and mystagogue of heavenly realities. Given these two assumptions, we desire in the chapter now before us to demonstrate that the paradigmatic basis for the Joh. argument against human ascent beliefs lies outside of the conceptual milieu which supports theophanies and heavenly ascents. In other words, JOHN does not base its otherworldly portrayal of Jesus upon the normative depiction of the heavenly beings which appear in apocalyptic and mystical traditions. The Fourth Gospel derives its view of Jesus from the depiction of such figures in a radically different revelatory context.

Ideally we should take into consideration every descending-ascending heavenly being in antiquity in order to illuminate the identity and function of divine intermediaries in the two allegedly antipodal, transcultural revelatory schemas. But in terms of the practical limitations of this project such a procedure simply is not possible. We have elected to concentrate upon one hypostatized heavenly figure in particular—the heavenly angel/3/—because this figure appears quite often in ancient Judaism and Christianity and because it performs significant (although different) revelatory
functions/4/ in both schemas. In pursuing our investigation we do not wish to give the impression that the Joh. Jesus is patterned exclusively after angelic mythology, as if the author of JOHN "borrowed" the angelic model and imposed this particular model upon his protagonist. As indicated earlier we maintain that JOHN appropriates a mythical pattern rather than a specific mythical figure for its portrayal of Jesus. Thus the angel beliefs which we will discuss in the succeeding pages serve as an illustration rather than as the comprehensive expression of the two transcultural revelatory patterns which lie in the background of the Fourth Gospel, and which are responsible either positively and negatively for the bold other-worldly depiction of its main character.

Procedural Excursus

While the main thrust of this chapter is directed towards a religionsgeschichtlichen investigation of dozens of texts containing stories of angelic revelation, it must be pointed out that our reading of these texts is more narratological than historicist. That is to say, rather than attempting to peer "behind" the texts in order to discern the historical and communicative factors which gave rise to them, we will concentrate upon the narratives as they presently exist. Of course, a general sketch of the unfolding history of beliefs about angelic revelation cannot be avoided. But in reconstructing this history we will as a rule work only with the narratives in their extant form, and refrain from hypothesizing about written and oral sources which may lie behind these texts. This procedure does not prevent us from extrapolating general patterns of thought from individual texts, nor does it require us to postulate an intertextual dependency. During Late Antiquity orality and textuality intersect with one another in a myriad of ways which we are only now beginning to fathom; nevertheless, we feel justified in assuming that all forms of religious communication participate in the same basic structures of mythical thought—even if each communicative medium has its own particular rules about the way in which these fundamental schemas are depicted.
A. REVELATION ACCORDING TO THE EARTHBOUND REVELATORY SCHEMA

We will designate the revelatory paradigm from which the Joh. depiction of Jesus is drawn as the EARTHBOUND REVELATORY SCHEMA (or simply, EARTHBOUND SCHEMA). From this title it can be clearly seen that the most important feature of this particular view of human-divine communication is that the entire revelatory process takes place upon the earth. An angelic being appears on the earth before a human audience (of one or more persons), alone or in conjunction with the Deity he executes his revelatory assignment, and then he suddenly departs from the terrestrial place of meeting. Textual evidence for the EARTHBOUND SCHEMA can be clearly observed from the time in which JOHN was written all of the way back to the earliest known written traditions about Israel’s patriarchs. One can detect relatively minor changes in this schema as it appears in Jewish (and eventually Christian) literature over the course of many centuries, and even during the same general time frame the schema manifests limited variability, but by and large for nearly a millenium the fundamental conceptual integrity of the revelatory paradigm remains intact—meaning that in terms of this conception revelation in its entirety is dispensed from heavenly to human beings solely upon terra firma.

1. The Presence and Function of a Descent-Ascent Pattern

One might infer that since we hold that the Joh. Jesus is depicted according to this revelatory paradigm, the vast majority
of stories which manifest the paradigm should contain an explicit descent-ascent pattern. But such is simply not the case. Of fourteen archaic Hebrew Bible texts which evince the EARTHBOUND SCHEMA form of angelic revelation, we can locate only one explicit reference to cosmological ascent (Judg 13.19-20), and only one expressed indication of cosmological descent (Ex 3.7-8). Moreover, concerning the latter text, it is not even clear whether the Angel of the Lord (hereafter: A.L.) or the Deity himself is the subject of this downward journey. Turning our attention to the other twelve passages, we find that many fail to mention the angel’s arrival or departure at all; and those which actually speak of his coming and leaving do so in patently non-cosmological terms. To summarize: virtually no Hebrew Bible text having to do with revelatory angels specifically mentions the angel’s descent from or ascent back to heaven. The angel simply appears on the earth, delivers his message, and is gone. We must acknowledge that in the literature of the archaic period (which extends roughly until the Hellenization of the Orient) there is no explicit descent-ascent pattern associated with angelic revelation according to the EARTHBOUND SCHEMA. even though this revelatory scenario involves a heavenly being delivering a divine message exclusively upon the earth.

This void begins to be quickly filled when late biblical and post-biblical angel texts evincing the EARTHBOUND REVELATORY SCHEMA are brought into the picture. In our survey of six representative Hellenistic Jewish texts, only two (TJob 3-5 and Jub
32) make no explicit mention of the revelatory angel’s descent or ascent./11/ Two stories refer to the angel’s descent only: Dan 4 twice (vv. 13, 23) and PrJos A.4 once./12/ In Dan 4 an exalted mortal (King Nebuchadnezzar) reports to Daniel about a previous dream in which he espied a "watcher" descend from heaven and begin to address him. In this story the "watcher" himself has nothing to say about his descent, and it should also be noted that no details whatsoever of the observed descent are mentioned by Nebuchadnezzar. It is apparently seen but not described. Somewhat at variance with Dan 4 the descended angel in PrJos A.4 himself announces his descent (to Joseph?). What is most curious about PrJos A is that this angel—identified as the patriarch Jacob-Israel—appears to claim that he actually did not know of his descent until informed of it after the fact (while on the earth in human form) by another angel (Uriel)./13/ Obviously neither of these two texts bears a close affinity to JOHN, in which the descent of Jesus is seen by no one and is presumably known only to him before he reveals it to his audiences on the earth. What Dan 4 and PrJos A.4 do share in common with JOHN is an absence of any description of the heavenly messenger’s cosmological journey. That all three texts do mention their respective divine envoy’s descent albeit without elaboration suggests that the downward journey serves some purpose other than to satisfy human curiosity about intercosmic travel. In each instance its primary function seems to be to establish the heavenly emissary’s otherworldly identity and thereby render the authority of his message superior to the authority exercised by a Babylonian
suzerain (Nebuchadnezzar), a Hebrew patriarch (Jacob) who is thought of as being merely human, or mortal religious leaders (e.g., Moses, Nicodemus).

Two of our six Hellenistic Jewish stories dealing with angelic communication on the earth—Tob and JosAsen—patently refer to the envoy’s descent and ascent. And quite interestingly, these two are by far the most extensively narrated examples of angelic revelation out of the six.

In Tob 12.14, 20 the heavenly intermediary announces to Tobit and his son Tobias:

And now God has sent (ἐστηκέρης) me to heal you and Sarah your daughter-in-law. I am Raphael, one of the seven holy angels . . . who go in before the glory of the Holy One . . . And now give thanks to God, for I ascend (εὐφαίνων) to the one who sent (ἐστηκέρης) me . . . 14/

Since it is quite clear from Tob 5.16 that the Holy One dwells in heaven, for the angel to be sent by God to a mortal and then for him to ascend back to the Deity means in effect that he engages in a round-trip cosmological journey. Even if the word "descent" is not used, the idea of an earthward journey is easily grasped by the reader and the descent-ascent pattern is firmly established in his/her mind.

Parallel to the way in which JOHN portrays its own protagonist, Tob has its heavenly messenger announce his otherwise unknown (to the mortals in the story) descent and ascent, and he does this while on the earth after his descent but before his ascent. Once again we encounter no narration or description of
cosmological travel. But what we do find is that, as in JOHN, the statements of descent and ascent are intertwined with the issue of the intermediary's heavenly identity, his redemptive mission, and most importantly, his awesome revelatory authority. Descent: Note how Tobit and his son are "troubled" and "fearful," and that they "fall upon [their] face[s]" immediately after Raphael announces who he really is and that he has been sent to them by God (19.16-17). Ascent: The angel declares, "I ascend to the one who sent me, and you write all of these happenings in a book" (12.20). And that is precisely what Tobit does shortly after Raphael's departure, in obedience to the angel's command (13.1ff).

Unlike all of the preceding Jewish angel stories, JosAsen actually does provide a limited narration of the cosmological movement of its revelatory angel, albeit only from the point of view of the human audience (Aseneth) on the earth. The heavens are rent open, an inexpressible light appears, and a "man" comes to the penitent woman from heaven (14.2-3)./15/ At one point during her conversation with the heavenly messenger Aseneth speaks of the Lord God "who sent you out to rescue me . . ." (15.13); and on two separate occasions after the departure of the divine envoy, Aseneth acknowledges that this man came to her from out of heaven (17.9; 19.5)./16/ The angel's departure is no less spectacular than his arrival. Aseneth is said to espy him standing upon a fiery chariot-like object pulled by four lightning-like horses which are speeding away into heaven (17.8), which understandably causes her to exclaim: "And behold, now he is traveling (back) into heaven to
Thus JosAsen evinces not only an explicit
descent-ascent pattern but even a brief earthbound narration of the
angel's arrival and departure.

In contradistinction to Tob, both the mortal Aseneth and
the author—but not the angel—inform the reader of the heavenly
intermediary's descent and ascent. Of course, it is not necessary
for the angel to announce his coming and going, since (like Dan 4)
these events are visually witnessed by his human audience. Not
surprisingly, the angel's credibility as a messenger for the Deity
is greatly enhanced by his impressive entrance and exit: Aseneth's
response to both events is one of abject humility before the divine
figure and his Sender (14.10-11; 19.9-10). Once again we find that
the primary function of descent and ascent is to accentuate the
authority of the heavenly messenger and to set him above all of the
mortals of the story—including Levi, who himself is some sort of
prophetic intermediary (22.13).

Fully three-quarters of sixteen early Christian texts employing an EARTHBOUND SCHEMA with revelatory angels do not
explicitly refer to their respective angel's cosmological movement
either out of or back to heaven. None of the four which do mention
the angel's descent (Mt 28.2-4; Lk 1.26; GPet 44) or ascent (Lk
2.15) unambiguously indicate that the cosmological movement itself
is observed by mortals on the earth, although it is reasonable to
assume that this is in fact the case. The author simply
informs the reader of the decent/ascent of the angel in the human
audience's presence without any embellishment. It would appear
that the effect of descending/ascending activity upon those who presumably witness it, as well as upon the reader of each story, is to highlight the heavenly envoy's divine authority.

To summarize what we have discovered about the presence and function of a descent-ascent pattern in the EARTHBOUND REVELATORY SCHEMA we can say:

First, it is legitimate to speak of a distinct tendency towards an explicit rendering of a descent-ascent pattern within this revelatory paradigm by the Common Era. Since this is so, it is possible to argue that even where cosmological movement is not expressly indicated either in Hellenistic Jewish/Christian or archaic Hebrew texts, a typical first century believer would probably infer that descent and ascent had taken place—in other words, this person would be likely to "read" cosmological descent and ascent "into" the less explicit stories which belong to this revelatory paradigm. If the author of JOHN wished to base his depiction of a descending-ascending Jesus upon the type of angel stories which we have just considered, the fact that many of them do not contain an explicit descent-ascent pattern would not be problematic for him. As far as he would be concerned the pattern would be "there" in his remembrance or reading of these stories whether it was explicitly manifested or not.

Second, even where there is an explicit reference to angelic descent and/or ascent, such movement is never extensively narrated. It is either expressed as a simple fact or it is briefly detected and portrayed from a patently earthbound point of view.
In terms of this feature of the EARTHBOUND SCHEMA the Fourth Gospel fits squarely within its conceptual borders, alongside those texts which simply state the fact of descent and/or ascent. Both Jesus' descent and ascent are mentioned and even mentioned often in JOHN, but there is not even a hint that these alleged events can be observed by anyone—and there certainly is no kind of narration of movement in either direction.

Third, the fact that even many Hellenistic angel stories do not speak directly of the heavenly figure's descent or ascent, much less evince an explicit descent-ascent pattern, means that we must acknowledge that this revelatory paradigm contains no irresistible impulse which compels the author or transmitter of a revelatory angel experience to make even the mention of cosmological descent or ascent an explicit feature of that narrative. Perhaps in the minds of first century believers heavenly revealers descend and ascend in every communicated EARTHBOUND SCHEMA experience, but it cannot be taken for granted that such movement will be explicitly stated in the oral or written transmission of the heavenly messenger's story. That JOHN so repeatedly refers directly to Jesus' descent and ascent can not be adequately explained without attributing much of the responsibility for the pattern's manifestation to its author, who deliberately brings to the surface of his narrative what often seems to be more implicit than explicit within the revelatory paradigm itself. In other words, by explicitly referring to the descent and ascent of Jesus the author of JOHN appears to be making a conscious effort to say something very important
about his protagonist.

And finally, what he seems to be attempting to do is to
direct the attention of his readership to the heavenly identity of
Jesus and thereby magnify Jesus’ revelatory authority. As we noted
earlier, the rhetorical significance of descent and ascent within
the EARTHBOUND REVELATORY SCHEMA is not to satisfy human curiosity
about that part of the cosmos which is invisible to the mortal eye,
but rather to establish the singular revelatory authority of its
principal divine intermediary. In several instances the authority
of the heavenly envoy is asserted against a potential mortal rival:
Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 4), the "mortal" Jacob-Israel (PrJos), the
prophet Levi (JosAsen), and the soldiers at Jesus’ tomb (Mt 28;
GPet). This feature obviously corresponds closely to the Joh.
strategy of claiming that Jesus’ authority vastly exceeds that of
all human messengers for God, including Moses.

But in light of this rhetorical aim of the Fourth Gospel we
might wonder: If when the divine messenger’s journey is actually
detected by earthbound mortals it conveys the awesome authority and
superiority of the angel in a particularly dramatic way (as in
JosAsen and the resurrection stories, for example), then why does
JOHN not provide a similar account of the descent and ascent of
Jesus? In fact, why does the gospel not go ahead and narrate
Jesus’ cosmological journey to and from the earth?

A clue that points to an important reason for the absence
of the narration of Jesus’ descent and ascent can be found in a
comparison of the content of the messages delivered by Raphael to
Tobit and the heavenly messenger to Aseneth. The message which Raphael delivers to Tobit's family has little to do with heaven and much to do with affairs on the earth. It may not be an accident that this particular Hellenistic angel text, which contains no narrative or description of this figure's descent or ascent, is one which has a revelatory discourse that is almost exclusively concerned with earthly matters. In JosAsen on the other hand, where the descent and ascent of the heavenly envoy is both seen by his human audience (Aseneth) and briefly described for the reader, we find that this angel speaks at some length about life in the heavenly world. /20/ In other words, the narrative (JosAsen) which expresses a greater interest in describing the actual descent and ascent of its angelic intermediary is also the one whose revelatory message is more heavenly-minded. Both narratives evince an EARTH-BOUND REVELATORY SCHEMA, but clearly the one (Tob) which more closely resembles JOHN in having its heavenly messenger merely announce his descent and ascent is also the one which is reminiscent of JOHN in terms of its earth-centered revelation.

As a partial answer to the question, Why doesn't JOHN narrate Jesus' descent and ascent?, we can hypothesize that to do so would potentially affect the content of what is revealed. To dramatize Jesus' actual arrival and departure from the earth would lead the reader away from Jesus' earth-centered message, causing him/her to speculate needlessly---and perhaps improperly?---about matters with which the gospel has no interest. The EARTHBOUND SCHEMA allows an author to accentuate the revelatory prerogative of
its heavenly messenger by mentioning without describing his cos-
mological journeys. In this way the attention of the reader can be
kept upon the earth by an authority which unmistakably transcends
the earth.

2. The Depiction and Function of a Revelatory Angel’s Human Form

Ludwig Blau’s seemingly contradictory evaluation of the
Hebrew conception of angels, claiming in part that they
appear to man in the shape of human beings of extraordinary
beauty, and are not at once recognized as angels . . . they
are formed of fire and are encompassed by light . . . [t]hough
superhuman, they assume human form,

places in bold relief the dualistic way in which these mysterious
creatures are depicted in the Hebrew Bible./21/ Taken by itself
Blau’s statement is reductionistic and does not adequately account
for the disparate depictions of angelic figures which are scattered
throughout canonical literature. Nevertheless, he does correctly
perceive a quasi-ontological dualism that is characteristic of many
archaic angel stories. What Blau does not point out is that the
simultaneous attribution of divine and human characteristics to
revelatory angels serves an important function in several notable
biblical narratives: it focuses the reader’s attention upon the
significance of the messenger and his message.

An excellent example of this narrative strategy can be seen
in the story of Gideon’s call. In the first verse of Judg 6.11–24
the reader is informed of what Gideon comes to realize only at the
end of the revelatory episode, that the stranger who comes and "sits" (as might any human being) under a nearby tree and then begins to speak to him is actually an A.L. From the rather casual if not brusque way in which Gideon responds to the mysterious guest (see esp. v. 13) the reader realizes that Gideon wrongly believes the unknown visitor to be yet another prophet such as the one who confronts Israel back in v. 8. The reader suspects that Gideon would not treat the holy messenger with such disrespect if he knew of his true identity, and this suspicion is confirmed when Gideon cries out in utter dismay upon discovering that the now-departed messenger is an A.L. (v. 22). With the postponement of Gideon’s moment of recognition until the end of the episode, the entire story is cast in an ironic light which functions hermeneutically to make the informed reader particularly conscious of the identity and authority of the revelatory angel throughout the narrative. Gideon’s dramatic exclamation of fear and remorse after the A.L. disappears brings to a climax the mounting tension that is fostered by the reader’s perceived discontinuity between human appearance and divine reality. The result is an enhanced respect within Gideon and the reader for the revelatory authority of the divine messenger.

Thus what may sometimes be thought of from an historical-critical point of view as an inadvertent editorial blurring of the identity of a revelatory angel appears upon closer inspection to be a seemingly artistic strategy designed to accentuate the role of the angel in the revelatory episode. With the help of the author
the reader is made cognizant, often from the outset of the story, of the fact that the messenger who appears in the guise of human flesh is a heavenly being. The reader observes further that this mortal guise functions rather like a disguise as far as the human audience in the narrative is concerned, for these mortals inevitably behave as though the incognito angel were only a human messenger. The perceived incongruity between the human audience's impiously casual regard for the divine emissary on the one hand, and the reverent way in which the omniscient reader suspects that a properly informed audience would behave on the other, establishes an ironic situation which creates tension within the reader as the plot unfolds. The tension reaches its apex at the critical moment of recognition when the human recipients of revelation in the story realize with whom they are actually dealing. It is released shortly thereafter as the reader observes how contritely and submissively the chastened human characters now act as a result of having encountered the angel. This quite sudden change of heart convinces the reader that the divine messenger and his message ought to have been received with the utmost reverence all along.

Judg 13.1-25 achieves a similar narratological effect. Manoah and his wife are met twice by one whom the narrator repeatedly identifies as an A.L. [A.G.], but whom they designate in v. 6 only as a "man of God"/22/ whose "form [is] as the form of a 
\[\text{7 8 5 3 [\text{D} \text{Y} \text{E} \text{L} \text{O} \text{U}]}\] of God, very dreadful." Despite their initial awareness of the visitor's remarkable form, the couple mistakenly regard him as a prophetic figure rather than as a divine
being until his spectacular departure from them near the end of the story (vv. 21-23; cf. v. 16). In contrast to the human pair, the reader is cognizant of the messenger’s true identity throughout the episode, and this superior insight along with a remembrance of what took place in the Gideon story causes the reader to reflect upon the uncomfortable incongruity between the couple’s reported behavior and how (s)he imagines that they would act if they knew the truth about their guest. The reader’s expectations are fulfilled when the angel departs in a spectacular fiery ascent Manoah and his wife fall on their faces with Manoah exclaiming in horror, "We shall surely die--because we have seen [in effect] God" (v. 22).

In the Hebrew Bible we find about a half dozen stories of this type in which a heavenly being (known to be such by the reader) appears before mortals on the earth in human vizard and reveals to them the will of the Deity before suddenly departing from their midst. At first the incognito angel is treated like any other prophetic figure. But then comes the moment of recognition when his human audience recognizes the otherworldly stranger’s true identity. From that point on he and his message receive the kind of respect normally shown only to God himself, and in the process the reader is subtly led to embrace the notion that the divine messenger speaks and acts with superhuman prerogative.

In terms of the Christian texts which we have consulted, only the resurrection accounts of Mk and GPet even remotely suggest that the mysterious messenger at Jesus’ tomb might be misunderstood
to be a mere mortal, and these two stories clearly do not evince
the sort of mistaken identity ploy mentioned above. Virtually
every Hellenistic angel text which evinces the EARTHBOUND SCHEMA
has the human audience immediately perceive that the messenger is a
divine being. The only exceptions are the truncated FrJos, in
which the angel figure himself appears to be initially ignorant of
his true nature, and Tob. But interestingly enough, as a lengthy
narrative of a revelatory being's mission on the earth, Tob more
closely resembles JOHN than any of the other archaic and Hellenis-
tic angel stories.

From the moment when Raphael makes his entrance into this
Hellenistic Jewish narrative (5.4), the reader is made aware of his
divine origins. Yet no mortal in the story comes to share this
understanding until Raphael himself (alias Azarias) declares his
true identity and God-sent mission near the end of the story
(12.6ff). As a result, several pious statements uttered by the
unsuspecting Tobit about hope for angelic protection for Tobias—
one once spoken even in Raphael's presence—appear as humorously ironic
to the omniscient reader (5.16, 21; 11.14). This incongruity also
causes the reader to be somewhat amazed at the spiritual dullness
of Tobit's son Tobias, who fails to see in Raphael's extensive
knowledge of exorcism rites a person who is more than a mere
kinsman (6.2-8, 16-17; 8.2-3). As in the archaic stories of Gideon
and Samson's parents, so the mortals here in Tob react first in
fear and humility and then in praise and complete submission when
they discover who Azarias truly is.
The similarity between these revelatory angel stories (Judg 6, 13, and esp. Tob) and the Fourth Gospel in terms of the depiction and function of the heavenly envoy's human form is nothing less than striking. JOHN too makes the reader aware from the beginning of his narrative that the humanlike revealer named Jesus actually comes from heaven rather than from the earth. This insight gives the reader an advantage over many of the mortal characters in the gospel story, which is exploited hermeneutically through the ironic technique of mistaken identity: the reader becomes an insider to the true nature of Jesus in contrast to those within the gospel narrative who presume that he is merely the son of Joseph and a resident of Nazareth, even though Jesus (unlike the typical revelatory angel) identifies himself rather unambiguously by Jn 5. To be sure, a few of the characters (e.g., John the Baptist, Nathaniel, Martha, and perhaps Simon Peter and the Samaritan woman) seem to grasp before the Farewell Discourses that Jesus is more than a mere mortal, but one can reasonably question whether even they—until after Jesus' resurrection—understand as fully as the reader Jesus' unique identity and unsurpassed authority. Moreover, Tobit's and Tobias' contrite and submissive response to the revelatory angel after the moment of recognition but prior to the envoy's ascent back to heaven is analogous to the way in which a startled Thomas (Jn 20.28) and the other disciples respond in worship and willing submission to Jesus during his pre-ascent resurrection appearances.
Needless to say, this narrative ploy comes to expression in EARTHBOUND SCHEMA narratives because in them revelatory discourse takes place entirely within the human life-world. We can therefore aver that, in addition to highlighting the heavenly identity and revelatory authority of its divine envoy without fostering speculative thought about the heavenly world (see pp. 146-48 above), the expressed or implied statement --but not narrative--of the descent of that heavenly intermediary creates the condition whereby a seemingly authentic incarnation is virtually inevitable. When a revelatory angel makes a visible, perhaps even spectacular descent to the earth (as in JosAsen), he tends to be immediately recognized as belonging to the celestial world, even though he may look somewhat like and even be designated as a "man." But when an angel arrives on the earth in a subtly expressed descent like Raphael in Tob, he not only tends to be clothed in "flesh" but he may very well be thought by his human audience to be only a mortal being. Perhaps the statement in Jn 1.14 that "the Logos became flesh" and the subsequent effort to depict Jesus as a human being is not due so much to historical remembrance or even to the author's creative ability, as to the fact that by his decision to depict Jesus according to the EARTHBOUND SCHEMA and claim that he has descended (without narrating that event), he (the author) must have his protagonist appear as and be mistaken for a human being. At any rate, the structural demands of the schema dovetail nicely with the fundamental Christian belief that the central figure of its faith was a mortal being: Jesus of Nazareth. JOHN does not explicitly
deny this tradition of the humanity of Jesus, although it is cer-
tainly overshadowed and rendered problematic by the emphasis upon
his otherworldly identity (Bultmann's protestations notwithstanding). To summarize, it is clear that the descent and subsequent
"incarnation" of heavenly messengers in the EARTHBOUND SCHEMA
foster a situation in which the anthropomorphic envoy can be
mistaken for a mere human being. And this misunderstanding in turn
can be used by the skillful author to accentuate the otherworldly
status and enhance the divine authority of that heavenly emissary—
whether it be an angel or the Joh. Jesus.

3. The Identity of the Revelatory Angel's Audience and How
   It Determines His Revelatory Function and Authority

At the outset of Part A we pointed out that the EARTHBOUND
REVELATORY SCHEMA is not rigidly uniform in all of its particulars,
but that even among the revelatory stories which patently evince
this paradigm and which are to be dated at roughly the same period
of time, a degree of variation in terms of certain specific fea-
tures can be observed. We now wish to discuss one such type of
variation, the effect of which upon the authority of the revelatory
angel in EARTHBOUND SCHEMA stories should not be underestimated.
This variation involves the identity of the human audience which
the heavenly messenger encounters upon the earth. There are two
types of audiences in stories evincing this paradigm: non-prophetic
and prophetic. Eventually we will come to see that a revelatory
experience involving the latter kind of audience has the inherent
potential to effect a decisive shift in basic revelatory perceptions, thereby undermining the conceptual integrity of the EARTHBOUND SCHEMA itself.

In about half of the Hebrew Bible texts and roughly one-third of the later Jewish and Christian texts which embrace the EARTHBOUND REVELATORY SCHEMA the angel’s mortal audience consists of one or a small number of people who for all practical purposes are designated as the exclusive recipients of the divine message./25/ For example, what the A.L. says to Hagar (Gen 16.7-14) is meant particularly for her and for no one else. Moreover, she is not explicitly entrusted with the responsibility of conveying what she has learned to other members of the human community. The A.L. is the only intermediary between the Deity and the audience (in this case Hagar alone) for which the heavenly message is intended, and thus we say that this kind of revelatory story has a non-prophetic audience.

But in a number of other EARTHBOUND SCHEMA texts we find a significantly different type of audience which encounters the revelatory angel./26/ It consists of a mortal (or sometimes two) to whom is delegated the responsibility of passing on what he hears during the revelatory encounter to another group of human beings. For example, in 2 Kgs 1.3-4, presumably after the Deity "offstage" has commissioned an A.L. to deliver a message to Elijah, we read of this A.L. carrying out his assignment, which consists of instructing the human messenger to retransmit God’s word of judgment to its ultimate recipient, King Ahaziah. In this episode Elijah
functions as a prophetic figure or a "man of God", and in fact he, along with Moses, Balaam, and the disobedient messenger in 1 Kgs 13.1ff, are expressly identified as such. Therefore we designate these penultimate audiences as "prophetic," and distinguish them from the type of audience which encounters the angel but is not expected to retransmit what they have learned during the revelatory experience. When we compare stories which contain these two types of angelic audiences with one another, the following two significant dissimilarities are to be observed: (i) the divine source of the revelatory message is not exactly the same in each case; and (ii) the function and authority of the revelatory angel are notably different.

EARTHBOUND SCHEMA texts which involve a non-prophetic audience contain only one divine source of revelation, the angel, whose impact upon the mortal(s) with whom he speaks is so dramatically felt that it is as if God himself were speaking. In Gen 32.24-32 Jacob wrestles and converses with a mysterious adversary who at first glance appears to be a man but who upon further reflection would surely be understood by a first century reader to be an angel of God in human form. What is especially noteworthy about the identity of this creature is that both he (v. 28) and Jacob (v. 30) claim that the patriarch has actually striven with ἰδρύς [θεὸς]. Does this term refer to the Deity ("God") or to the anthropomorphic angelic figure (as the singular form in the LXX might suggest)? Or is it perhaps a double entendre and therefore designates both heavenly beings? While Jacob truely
wrestles with an angel in human form upon the earth, it is actually with the God whom the angel represents that Jacob must do business. Whichever way these two verses are read, the reader is led from a perception that Jacob strives with an angelic being to an awareness that this being exactly represents (or is inextricably identified with) the One who has sent him. Despite this shift in emphasis from the angelic being to the Deity, the revelatory authority of the former is not detrimentally affected. To the contrary, the heavenly messenger's status would appear to be enhanced by the fact that he is so closely identified with his Sender.

Or to express it differently: for Jacob and the other non-prophetic audiences, to encounter the angel is in effect to encounter God "face to face." Since there is no other intermediary figure in the story who might be seen as a rival to the angel's authority, and since God himself is present only through his divine envoy, the attention of the human audience as well as the attention of the reader is focused directly upon this angelic figure. As the perceptible expression of the invisible God the angel is thought to speak with absolute authority. One can readily see how this perception of a heavenly intermediary's unrivaled revelatory authority parallels the Joh. depiction of Jesus, for he too is the only direct, divine source of revelatory knowledge; and consequently, he represents the Father to such a degree that he is able to make such claims as, "he who has seen me has seen the Father," and "the Father and I are one."
We find a profoundly different dynamic at work in an EARTH-BOUND SCHEMA text containing a prophetic audience. In the burning bush episode of Ex 3.1-4.17, both the A.L. and the Deity directly confront Moses, and here God plays an active, independent (from the angel), and even dominant role in announcing the heavenly message. The angel actually says nothing; he appears suddenly at the outset of the experience, and then just as quickly and silently he fades out of the scene. It is the Deity himself who addresses Moses. Similarly, Elijah in 1 Kgs 19 is helped by an A.L. to get to the holy place where God himself can hand over to the mortal his new prophetic responsibilities. If we consider Elijah’s commissioning service (vv. 9-18) to be the second half of a single revelatory episode of which the first half (vv. 4-8) is the prophet’s brief encounter with the angel—whose message consists solely of the twice repeated command to arise and eat!—then as with the call of Moses we observe here an angel appearing briefly in order to prepare the way for the coming and speaking of the Deity directly to the human figure. God appears in the center of the revelatory stage while his angel stands to the side playing an important but subsidiary role.

To summarize: In the non-prophetic scenario the human audience is addressed exclusively by a revelatory angel whose authority is tantamount to God’s. But when a prophetic figure is the one whom the revelatory angel encounters, then that angel’s function and corresponding authority is significantly reduced because God himself delivers the most important portion of the otherworldly
message to the human audience.

The effect which a direct encounter with the Deity has upon the human intermediary is of particular interest to us. His revelatory status rises dramatically vis-à-vis the angel’s to the point that often it actually exceeds the status of his heavenly counterpart. As pointed out above, in Ex 3.1-4.17 not the angel but the Deity himself explicitly addresses Moses from the beginning to the end of the episode./31/ Note that it is apprehension that he might possibly behold the Deity and not anxiety over having espied an angel (v. 2) that causes Moses to recoil in fear in v. 6. Somewhat surprisingly Moses’ confidence rebounds quickly, and in stark contrast to Gideon or Samson’s parents Moses actually attempts to haggle with the Deity. This confrontation with the Deity and his emissary serves in part as Moses’ prophetic commissioning service, and as such it establishes his preeminent revelatory credentials: he is designated by the Deity as “God” to his brother Aaron (4.16)./32/

While Aaron essentially functions as a prophet to the Israelites (4.15), Moses acts with far greater authority as the single intermediary between God and Aaron. Moses’ unrivaled prophetic authority can be traced in large measure to repeated assertions that he communicates “face to face” with the Deity. The man who is permitted to behold a portion of the form of the Deity does not need to be portrayed as submitting to the authority of an angelic intermediary, who plays but a relatively insignificant role in the calling experience of Israel’s most highly revered human prophet.
In this kind of revelatory setting the status of the prophet increases at the expense of the status of the angel—quite the opposite of the way in which the otherworldly Jesus is compared with Moses in the Fourth Gospel.

Interestingly enough, the observed shift in revelatory priority from angel to prophet can take place in an EARTHBOUND SCHEMA revelatory story even if the prophet’s direct encounter with the Deity is not actually narrated. In Num 22.21-35 an imposing A.L. arrests Balaam and tells the wayward prophet to speak “only the word which I speak to you. . .” (v. 35). Yet when Balaam actually prophesies in the next two chapters he designates the Deity (or his Spirit) as the source of his inspiration (22.38; 23.3; and a dozen more times)—although there is no narrative to that effect. As a consequence the arresting angel gives way to the reformed prophet as the chief mediator of God’s word to the human world. The plot of 2 Kgs 1 unfolds similarly: an A.L. tells Elijah what to speak first to King Ahaziah’s messengers and then later to the king himself, but each time when the message is conveyed to the monarch the role of the A.L. is omitted. This glaring lacuna leaves both the king and the perceptive reader with the distinct impression that for all practical purposes Elijah gets his “word of the Lord” directly from that Lord. Finally, in 1 Kgs 13 a Judean “man of God” is punished by the Lord for giving priority to the word of a Bethelite prophet who falsely claims to have received his message from an angel over the direct “word of the Lord” which he himself had previously received. /33/ In all of these examples the human
prophet, not the angelic messenger, serves as the more visible and thus more authoritative messenger for the Deity—especially from the reader’s point of view.

On the other hand, when a revelatory angel encounters a non-prophetic audience, it is clear that the authority exercised by this divine being is without rival—including even potential prophetic rivals. Consider the two revelatory stories involving Gideon (Judg 6) and the parents of Samson (Judg 13). At first both human parties act as if the stranger who suddenly confronts them is merely a prophetic figure. In Gideon’s case this is somewhat understandable, since a prophet has been sent by the Lord to Israel in the immediately preceding paragraph (vv. 7-10). Thinking that his unexpected guest is another such messenger, Gideon speaks rather curtly to him, questions the veracity of his message, and demands a certifying sign. Manoah and his wife refer to their divine visitor as a "man," they endeavor to feed him, and they try to get him to divulge his name. While these mortals are not particularly impolite to their respective guests, they certainly do not treat them with the kind of special courtesy that one would expect to offer to an envoy from the heavenly world. In each story, the angel completes his mission and spectacularly departs, thereby causing the startled hosts to realize the true identity of their respective guests. Note the abrupt change in their demeanor. They now act as if the Deity himself had literally visited them:

Manoah exclaims, "We shall surely die, because we have seen [Greek]"; similarly Gideon needs to be assured by God
that he will not die because he has seen the A.L. "face to face."

These texts plainly demonstrate that in "non-prophetic" circum-
stances a revelatory angel is much more highly regarded by his
human audience than revelatory mortals.

Before discussing this matter in the context of Hellenistic
EARTHBOUND SCHEMA stories we should mention a couple of observa-
tions regarding the relationship of biblical prophecy to archaic
Hebrew beliefs about angels. B. J. Bamberger points out that it
"cannot be dismissed as pure accident" that "angels appear so often
in the narrative portions of the Pentateuch, in the historical
books, and in the prophetic writings of Ezekiel and Zechariah" but
are almost entirely absent from the prophetic works of the pre-
exilic (only Hos 12.5-6 and Isa 6.1ff) and exilic periods and to
some extent from texts of the post-exilic era. He notes further-
more that some prophetic texts which mention angels seem to do so
in order to polemicize against them explicitly (e.g., Hos 12; Isa
63.9 [LXX]) or implicitly (e.g., Hag 1.13; Mal 1.1; 2.7; 3.23-
24)./34/ On the basis of similar observations Alexander Rofé
argues that most prophetic texts in one fashion or another
deliberately suppress or even discard angels "in favor of the
prophets."/35/ While it is not possible for us to investigate this
matter more fully here, it should be pointed out that our own study
tends to corroborate these findings. The revelatory authority of
angelic messengers in the archaic portion of Scripture seems to be
diminished in those stories in which prophetic figures appear,
relative to the status and significance which these heavenly beings
enjoy when such human intermediaries are absent. Simply put, angels and prophets do not normally share the revelatory limelight.

The sort of bifurcation within the EARTHBOUND REVELATORY SCHEMA between non-prophetic and prophetic audiences and therefore between the priority of the heavenly messenger over the human messenger or vice versa is manifested not only in archaic Hebrew Bible texts but also in later Jewish and Christian revelatory angel stories. Tob, which we have already shown to have a great deal in common with JOHN in terms of its revelatory perspective, belongs in the non-prophetic category. The message which Tobit and his son receive from the angel Raphael is intended primarily for them. They are not told to speak to others what they have heard, but only to write about it (12.20; 13.1). Not only does writing have the effect of deferring the authoritative presence which an oral prophet would manifest before his audience, but the fact that Tob does not go on to mention who the recipients of Tobit’s and Tobias’ testimony are makes it clear that here we are dealing with a non-prophetic mode of revelation.

Note that, as we observed in the archaic biblical examples of non-prophetic angelic discourse, when Tobit and his son are informed of Raphael’s heavenly identity (12.6ff) they treat him with the utmost respect. Of course, Raphael is the principal revealer in this story; the Deity never makes an entrance (12.22). Yet quite predictably, God and not his angel serves as the focal point of the mortals’ praise when the revelatory episode is finished. In fact, Raphael himself enjoins the human pair to
praise his Sender (12.17, 20). In Tob the Deity is "heard" through his angel, not apart from him; but the angel speaks with such unquestioned authority that for all practical purposes it is as if God himself were addressing the human audience. The parallels between this exalted view of the function and authority of the heavenly messenger and the Joh. view of Jesus as the quintessential representative of the Father are obvious.

Dan 4 and JosAsen 14-20 provide an interesting new development to the way in which archaic Hebrew EARTHBOUND SCHEMA texts containing a prophetic audience relate heavenly to human intermediaries. In these two Hellenistic Jewish texts human figures other than the ones who actually entertain the revelatory angels encroach upon the heavenly messenger’s revelatory territory. Neither Daniel nor Levi is expressly said to speak directly with the Deity, but the fact that they are both prophetic figures suggests that they have access to God apart from angelic mediation. In the larger context of Dan we discover that this interpreter of dreams and angelic messages can experience a theophanic vision (ch. 7), while in the section of JosAsen following Aseneth’s lengthy encounter with the Deity’s divine emissary the reader is informed that the heroine’s brother-in-law, Levi, is a prophet who reveals to her the “unspeakable mysteries of the Most High” (22.12-13). This is precisely what was said of the angel back in 16.14; furthermore, it is important to note that Levi does not receive his esoteric knowledge from this or another angel, but rather by being able to see up into the heavenly world himself./36/ To be sure, little is
made of Levi's revelatory responsibilities in JosAsen other than an occasional reference to his ability to read other people's minds (e.g., 23.8), which isn't exactly the same as being able to speak the mind of God. Nevertheless, by the way in which he is described in these two verses the prophet Levi clearly has the potential to compete with the angel's revelatory authority, and in some measure he does.

With Dan 4, JosAsen 14-20, and even Jub 1/37/ we draw near to the edge of the shadowy boundary which separates the EARTHBOUND REVELATORY SCHEMA from an alternative way of thinking about revelatory experiences. As we noted earlier, as long as the angelic intermediary serves as the principle divine revealer in a given revelatory experience, it is easy to discern an EARTHBOUND SCHEMA lying in the background: the locus of revelation is the earth, and the revelatory angel exercises unrivaled revelatory authority. But in the case of Dan 4 and JosAsen 14-20, textual configurations outside of each narrated revelatory experience begin to qualify the divine emissary's authority by attributing comparable revelatory powers to a mortal. The normative lines of authority established by the EARTHBOUND SCHEMA have begun to shift decisively away from angelic and towards human intermediation, the shift in these two instances being the result of interpretive pressures stemming from the larger literary context. In other words, the pattern of thought represented by these two angelic revelatory stories is in the process of being co-opted and transformed by a different revelatory perspective that belongs to their larger narratives.
We conclude Part A first by restating that the Fourth Gospel's depiction of Jesus appears to be rooted in the type of revelatory structure which we have come to designate as the EARTHBOUND REVELATORY SCHEMA, and more specifically, in the non-prophetic scenario of this paradigm. Like the angel in this type of revelatory experience, Jesus is the exclusive revelatory figure. Yet Jesus' authority and message are derived directly from the Deity, and he is so closely identified with his Sender that he serves as the visible manifestation of the invisible God. While according to the gospel the Joh. community is expected to preserve and pass on what it has heard from Jesus, it does not (or should not) really consist of prophetic figures in whole or in part. In fact, as in Tob the primary mode of retransmission appears to involve a textualization of the message (i.e., the gospel narrative). The Joh. community is clearly subordinated by the gospel to the otherworldly Jesus via the Spirit-Paraclete, and all other potential revelatory rivals are denied access to heavenly knowledge except by the mediatory work of the preexistent Jesus.

The other point to be made has to do with the prophetic type of EARTHBOUND SCHEMA story. The fact that here mortals serve as supplementary revealers and steal the limelight from heavenly intermediaries shows that the center of revelatory authority within the EARTHBOUND SCHEMA itself is rather unstable. The co-option of the angel's revelatory prerogative by mortals in the larger literary context of Dan 4 and JosAsen 14-20 further demonstrates just how fragile the angel's function and status in the prophetic
type of EARTHBOUND revelatory drama can be. While there is sufficient literary evidence to demonstrate that even by the end of I C.E., EARTHBOUND SCHEMA stories with prophetic audiences are a popular way of conceiving how God communicates with the human life-world, it would appear that this particular mode of revelatory conceptualization with its emphasis upon a direct encounter with the Deity has the potential to bring about a major paradigm shift—if God is perceived to be so transcendent that the only way to enjoy unmediated contact with him is by ascending to heaven. And this, as we wish to demonstrate in Part B, is what in fact took place.

B. REVELATION ACCORDING TO THE HEAVENWARD REVELATORY SCHEMA

We now turn to a second and younger revelatory paradigm involving heavenly creatures who are sometimes associated with a descent-ascent pattern. But in marked distinction to the EARTHBOUND REVELATORY SCHEMA, the locus of discourse between divine beings and mortals in this revelatory schema has shifted heavenwards. Terra firma no longer serves as the exclusive spatial setting for revelatory transmission. Otherworldly knowledge—or at least a significant part of it—is transmitted directly from heaven to selected mortals who now enjoy the opportunity to make sensory contact with this heretofore silent and invisible celestial world.

Once again we will concentrate upon Jewish and Christian texts/38/ in which the otherworldly creatures who function as
revelatory intermediaries are either explicitly or implicitly identified as angelic beings. As a result of our upcoming analysis, we will be able to demonstrate that the identity and function of the Joh. Jesus do not stem from this alternative mode of revelatory conceptualization, the HEAVENWARD REVELATORY SCHEMA. Instead, we will be able to show that the HEAVENWARD SCHEMA underlies the set of revelatory beliefs against which the Fourth Gospel contends. Moreover, by comparing the way in which the two paradigms respectively view revelatory dynamics and especially the way in which heavenly and human intermediaries are depicted, it will be possible for us to return to the gospel narrative in Chapter Four and explain how JOHN utilizes the EARTHBOUND SCHEMA in order to deconstruct a Christology based upon the HEAVENWARD SCHEMA.

The earliest evidence for a gradual shift in revelatory perceptions in Israel from the EARTHBOUND SCHEMA to the HEAVENWARD SCHEMA can be detected as far back as the patriarch traditions. In Gen 21.17-19 and 22.11-18 (terminus ad quem: IX/VIII B.C.E.), Hagar and Abraham respectively hear the voice of an angel speaking to them from heaven. Except for the angel’s invisibility and celestial vantage point, these two stories read much like any typical EARTHBOUND SCHEMA (and non-prophetic!) text./39/ In Jacob’s visionary glimpse of angels ascending and descending between the earth and heaven (Gen 28.10-22) a more profound move away from the EARTHBOUND SCHEMA can be discerned. The "gate of heaven" is identified and is now beginning to open, thereby making it possible
for a heavenly visage to supplement the voice of God.

From this point on it is within prophetic contexts that the HEAVENWARD SCHEMA really begins to emerge. Within the classical prophetic community first Micaiah (1 Kgs 22.19-23, par. 2 Chr 18.18-22) and then Isaiah (Isa 6.1-13) are granted the privilege of observing and overhearing the Deity and his heavenly entourage as they conduct their sacred business in the heavenly throne room./40/

We noted at the conclusion of Part A that during the pre-exilic prophetic period revelatory angels are seldom depicted as appearing on the earth. Instead, prophets are said to be the principal revealers of the Word of God. The heavenly beings which are mentioned during this period either remain in heaven (as the seraphim in Isa 6), or the make brief trips to the earth to deceive wayward prophets (as the spirits in 1 Kgs 22). The reliable human intermediary receives his message directly from the Deity or from a vision of the Deity in heaven, where divine beings play a minor role in the actual transmission experience. From this evidence we hypothesize that a decisive break with the EARTHBOUND SCHEMA begins to occur prior to the Exile in a prophetic milieu, that is, in that EARTHBOUND setting which is he most unstable—given the prophet’s desire for direct contact with the Deity in order to legitimate his own revelatory authority.

Yet there appears to be a second major factor involved in the full emergence of the HEAVENWARD SCHEMA out of its predecessor: a perceived gradual recession of the Deity from the affairs of the earth during the latter part of the archaic period./41/ The
significance of this shift in God’s involvement in terrestrial matters can be observed in texts stemming from the Babylonian captivity and afterwards down to the Maccabean era. Now an interest in revelatory angels reasserts itself, but two new wrinkles in the way in which they and the mortal audiences are depicted can be discerned. First of all, divine intermediaries in the texts/42/ which represent this phase function primarily as interpreters for the human visionary, helping him to understand more fully the significance of what he himself with his own eyes and ears is perceiving of the unseen world. And second, in a couple of the texts (Ezek and the Animal Apocalypse of 1 En) the human visionary is raised above the surface of the earth by a transcendent power and then transported to another terrestrial location. This tentative movement towards heaven becomes the penultimate step in the evolution of a revelatory schema whose telos is human ascent into the celestial world.

With Enoch’s impressive journey into the inner sanctum of the Great Glory (1 En 14.8ff—circa 200 B.C.E.) the HEAVENWARD SCHEMA reaches conceptual maturity. To be sure, ancient Hebrew literature is not without a brief reference or two to human ascents into heaven at the end of a mortal’s life: Elijah (2 Kgs 2.11-12) and perhaps Enoch (Gen 5.24). But a narrative about a mortal’s temporary foray into the divine domain for the express purpose of being handed revelatory secrets that he (the mortal) must retransmit to his earthbound community upon his return does not appear upon the literary scene until the early Hellenistic era. From
about this point on claims involving prophetic ascents into heaven
begin to multiply not only in Israel but throughout the Hellenistic
world. By the Common Era ascent traditions involving heroic
mortals past and present are so popular everywhere that J. Z. Smith
avers with justification that that the myth of a descending
redeemer and subsequently ascending mortal is "the fundamental
pattern of hellenistic Mediterranean religions."/43/

We must point out that while the HEAVENWARD SCHEMA evolves
to conceptual maturity nearly three centuries prior to JOHN, this
does not mean that its more primitive expressions lose their
vitality by the Common Era or that a study of these earlier forms
is irrelevant for Joh. interpretation. To the contrary, both in
Judaism and in Christianity the more primitive forms thrive in the
same historical and literary contexts as the heavenly ascent
stories. For example, ApJn contains examples of heavenly ascent
(4.1-2), heavenly vision (15.1ff), and heavenly audition (19.1ff).
Only when we understand that the Joh. references to heavenly ascent
(2.13), heavenly vision (12.38-41), heavenly audition (12.28-31),
and open heaven (1.51) are all part and parcel of the same heaven-
earth communication matrix can we hope to be able to come to terms
with the deconstructive way in which the Fourth Gospel handles each
of these purported revelatory experiences.

Excursus: Twentieth Century Heavenly Ascent Studies

Since the early days of the religionsgeschichtlichen
Schule many significant studies have been published both in
Europe and in North America which endeavor to sort out and to
come to terms with the vertiginous array of ascension be-
liefs/44/ which emerge from the biblical world and its
environment. /45/ One of the most impressive results of this scholarship is the demonstration that heavenly journey ideas in general, as well as the type of temporary revelatory ascent beliefs in which we are interested, do not merely flourish within sectarian groups lying at the fringe of "normative" Judaism or Christianity. /46/ Such experiences form an integral part of the spiritual life of some of Judaism's and Christianity's most revered theologians and leaders. /47/

Thus to the informed student of Late Antiquity it does not come as a shock to discover that JOHN mentions heavenly ascent in a revelatory context (3.13). What does call for an explanation in light of the widespread popularity of such experiences is this gospel's unexpected denial of the validity of human journeys into the heavens and its apparently calculated effort to alter radically the revelatory paradigm of which heavenly ascent is its most developed expression.

Unfortunately, the aforementioned studies of ascension beliefs and behavior shed relatively little light upon JOHN's categorical denial of human ascent beliefs—particularly as they involve heavenly beings who participate in the revelatory process. These studies tend to focus upon the content of what is seen in the heavens and revealed upon the earth, upon the historical causes and the sociological and literary impact of apocalyptic texts, or upon the attitudes and behavior of the ascending mortal as he explores the celestial world. What they fail to investigate directly is the issue of revelatory authority, that is, what sort of effect do heavenly journeys have upon the revelatory status of heavenly and human messengers vis a vis one another and in relationship to the receiving community on the earth. The following remarks constitute a preliminary attempt to redress this oversight.

1. The Presence and Function of Both Ascent-Descent and Descent-Ascent Patterns

Judging from our earlier analysis of the EARTHBOUND SCHEMA, we should not expect to find much interest in cosmological movement in texts belonging to the HEAVENWARD SCHEMA until the Hellenistic era. And for the most part both with regard to angels and to mortals this is in fact the case. The only archaic Hebrew passage which explicitly mentions angelic travel is the story of Jacob's dream-vision at Bethel (Gen 28.12). Most auspicious here is the unexpected pattern of angelic movement, ascent-descent rather than
vice-versa, which serves as a harbinger for the more conspicuous circuit traveled by angels in the later heavenly ascent stories. Until the Hellenistic period human visionaries likewise are not said to make cosmological journeys, although Ezekiel is reported to be lifted up (דָּשַׁךְ לְגַaven עַל בָּזֶן) above the earth by the Spirit and a manlike figure (Yahweh?) and transported from Babylon to Jerusalem./48/

Turning to the eleven Hellenistic era HEAVENWARD SCHEMA texts containing heavenly ascent experiences and which serve as the primary basis for our study here in Part B, we find that where there is a strong preference for the visionary mode of revelation so characteristic of the archaic/early Hellenistic period (e.g., Isa 6; Ezek 1), the (human) ascent-descent structure will probably lie beneath the narrative surface—as in ApJn and some portions of 1 En. But this literary scenario seems to be quite rare, at least for revelatory angel texts which are relevant for the study of JOHN./49/ Only slightly more popular are those literary works in which the mortal’s ascent plays a prominent role in the narrative while his return lies hidden from (the reader’s) view./50/ In seven of our eleven texts, however, it is rather clearly stated that the human intermediary ascends into the heavens and subsequently descends or returns back to the earth.

All of the texts which mention the return of the mortal to his terrestrial abode do so either by speaking explicitly of his "descent" or by stating that he returns to the earth, to his home, or to the place from which he was earlier taken. Thus the idea of
descent is clearly conveyed whether a verb of downward motion is used or not. It is interesting, however, that the human’s return is never narrated to any significant degree. Frequently one or more angels are said to escort the cosmic traveler back to his home (e.g., 1 En 81.5); occasionally the man’s descent is indicated by an express command of the Deity (e.g., 2 En 38.1); and in one story an archangel rather forcibly ejects a human visitor (the repentant sinner Adam) from the heavenly paradise (Vita 29.1). Expression of the fact of human descent is a regular and almost necessary feature of the mature form of the HEAVENWARD SCHEMA; yet apparently there is no compelling reason to narrate this vector of the cosmological trajectory.

These patent albeit terse references to the return of the mortal to terra firma highlight the temporary and revelatory nature of his sojourn in the celestial realm, and distinguish this type of ascent experience from a permanent ascent at the conclusion of the subject’s mortal life. By expressly indicating that the ascended one returns to the earth, the author subtly reminds the reader that (s)he is dealing with a round trip adventure of celestial discovery for earthly benefit rather than with a one way trip into the recondite world of the divine—although, as Bousset recognized long ago, there does seem to be a direct ideological connection between the two types of journeys. /51/

But this "reminder" is not merely given for the purpose of helping the reader to distinguish between two forms of heavenly ascent experience. More importantly, without a descent there can
be no revelation. Or to say it another way, the cosmic traveler must descend because he is to be sent to reveal to his religious community what he has been privileged to see and hear of their immortal destiny. This idea is clearly expressed in the Slavonic recension of 3 Bar, which ends with a command to Baruch's angelus interpres:

"Bring Baruch down to the face of all the earth so that he will tell the sons of men that which he has seen and heard, and all the mysteries you have shown him. And glory be to our God forever." AMEN.

Most heavenly ascent stories do not so explicitly juxtapose descent and revelatory commission,52/ but it seems likely that the reader would automatically assume the latter when the former is expressed. Thus a statement of the human messenger's descent is important in that it at least implicitly points to the intermediary function of the celestial voyager, which in turn accentuates his revelatory authority as well as that of the narrative which records his witness to the divine world. (Note that to satisfy this need for revelatory authorization a narration of the descent is unnecessary.)

Turning to the ascent vector of the mortal's cosmological journey, we find in almost every text at least one and more often a multitude of statements about the main human character's movement from his place upon the earth into a heavenly domain.53/ Quite frequently terms denoting upward movement are used to describe this cosmic journey. Sometimes mortals enter and climb through the
heavens actively (i.e., they ascend or go up), while on other occasions they do so passively (i.e., they are lifted, raised, carried, or taken up). We note in passing that here, as in Ezek, the idea of passive transport is quite popular: it appears at least a dozen times in four different texts—three of which belong to the Enochic corpus./54/

Perhaps even more significantly, nine of the texts narrate the upward journey, and in seven of these the dramatic portrayal of ascent—typically including an audience with the Deity at the apogee of the upward trek, and sometimes followed by further exploration of the heavenly world—clearly dominates the entire plot of the narrative./55/ What precedes and what follows the ascent portion of the heavenly journey is often directly related to it: biographical episodes prior to the fateful voyage often provide justification and specify preparations for the ecstatic event (e.g., TAb A 1-9); whatever takes place after the mortal’s return to the earth almost invariably has to do with the communication of what he has seen and heard on his upward journey.

One major rhetorical advantage of such a lengthy description of the mortal’s climb into the heavens is that it fosters an acceptance of his revelatory message. As the captivating plot unfolds the reader is subtly induced to participate mentally in the ascent experience of the human "seer" (a term which unfortunately fails to connote the auditory aspect of these ecstatic experiences). This is especially true if the ascension narrative is autobiographical, as most are./56/ Together the seer and the
reader journey upwards into the cosmos and discover along the way
the precious secrets of meteorological and astronomical phenomena,
the mysteries of angelic beings and their functions, and the truths
about past and future events. Simultaneously, both figures come
into the holy presence of the Deity and are addressed by him. This
is no ex post facto catalogue of divine secrets, but instead a
narrative of gradual discovery which is so constructed that for the
reader it can become a personal revelatory experience./57/ The
covert participatory character of a heavenly ascent narrative
becomes an even greater impetus in bringing about a communal
acceptance of the seer's (and text's) revelatory message if, as
Aune maintains, these stories have a cultic function within the
believing communities which treasure them./58/ As the reader
through worship participates in and begins to "own" the narrated
ecstatic experience of the "I" in the story, (s)he is irresistibly
drawn to an endorsement and acceptance of what is disclosed by this
"autobiographical" revelation of the mysteries of the heavenly
world.

And acceptance of the message means acceptance of the
messenger. In our consideration of the EARTHBOUND SCHEMA text of
Judg 13 we noted that the sudden ascent of the A.L. from Gideon
reveals to him the mysterious messenger's true identity and thereby
establishes his revelatory authority, and a similar phenomenon was
detected in the Hellenistic texts of Tob and JosAsen./59/ Likewise
it can be argued that the ascent of the human messenger legitimates
his own revelatory claims vis a vis the communities (both within
and beyond the text) to which he addresses his otherworldly message. The seer who ascends into the celestial world is granted the opportunity to see what no other mortal has seen or will see (1 En 19.3). Thus he can lay claim to the fact that he is a unique eyewitness to the mysterious heavenly world (2 En 11a.1-6; 3 Bar S17.1) and even to the Deity himself (TLevi 2.10-11). His knowledge of the heavenly mysteries is unmediated; he has obtained the content of his proclamation directly from its source. When combined with the rhetorical impact of an autobiographical point of view and of a (putative) cultic function within the believing community, the transcendent authorization provided by the seer's cosmological journey up through the heavens can be such as to set this exceptional mortal apart from his peers as a unique and perhaps foundational revelatory figure.

None of our Hellenistic examples of the HEAVENWARD SCHEMA contains a more dominant cosmological journey scenario than that which pertains to the ascending-descending seer. Yet there is another significant cosmological journey schema embedded in many of these heavenly ascent texts: the descent-ascent-descent(-ascent) of the angelic being(s) who accompanies the mortal during his otherworldly travels. To be sure, some stories do not have the angelus interpres meet and begin to guide the seer through the cosmos until after the latter figure has entered the heavenly world. But somewhat more frequently an angel (or two) is portrayed as coming to the mortal cosmic traveler on the earth and then escorting him upwards into the heavens. Moreover, on a couple of occasions the
ascent of the accompanying angel back to heaven after he has
completed his revelatory responsibilities is also mentioned. Thus
one can speak of a descent-ascent-descent(-ascent) revelatory
schema here with respect to angelic revelatory figures, although in
several instances the first vector and in most instances the last
one is implied rather than expressly stated or narrated. /62/ It
should also be noted that the reader’s attention is directed
primarily to the middle two vectors of the entire pattern because
this ascent-descent is parallel to the seer’s circuit.

In conclusion, we observe that what differentiates an
EARTHBOUND SCHEMA revelatory angel from a HEAVENWARD SCHEMA angel
is not that the former is associated with a descent-ascent pattern
or a “sending” motif while the latter is not—both are, or at least
can be. What distinguishes the two types of divine intermediaries
is whether there is present in the same revelatory experience with
the angel a second intermediary to whom also belongs a cosmological
journey motif and a commissioned status—but who originates from
the earth. When the rival mortal revealer is present, then the
ascent-descent of the seer dominates the descent-ascent-descent
(-ascent) of the angel both in terms of length of narration and of
significance to the revelatory message which is disclosed. That
is, the principal message from the heavenly world is revealed to
the seer (and the reader) during and at the conclusion of the
mortal’s narrated upward journey, rather than after the angel’s
briefly mentioned descent(s).
These observations enable us to understand why JOHN, with its pronounced emphasis upon the revelatory supremacy of an other-worldly Jesus, must be opposed to human ascents and theophanies and to the HEAVENWARD REVELATORY SCHEMA from which these beliefs are derived. If in the background of the Fourth Gospel Jesus is alleged to be a mortal ascent figure like Moses, then he (Jesus) will be no more authoritative (and most likely less so!) than the most important "Prophet-King" in Israel's history. In order to counter this type of Christology JOHN must assert the divine identity of Jesus. And in so doing the gospel has to turn to the EARTHBOUND SCHEMA for the appropriate model upon which to base its depiction of its protagonist, since divine intermediaries in the HEAVENWARD SCHEMA are actually inferior to visionary and ascending seers. It simply cannot be the case that the Joh. Jesus is based upon the depiction of heavenly revelatory figures who appear in stories about human visions and ascents.

2. The Insignificance of a Revelatory Angel's Human Form

In our analysis of the EARTHBOUND SCHEMA we discovered that, somewhat paradoxically, the divine identity and absolute revelatory authority of a heavenly intermediary is conveyed in part by the technique of having him appear before his human audience disguised as a mortal being until the dramatic moment of recognition. While this audience mistakes the otherworldly envoy for a human messenger, no such misunderstanding about revelatory angels occurs in HEAVENWARD SCHEMA situations. Here, to be sure, the
reader will occasionally meet a heavenly messenger who is described as a "man" (Zech, Ezek), as being "like a man" (Dan, Ezek), as having "the form of a man" (Dan) or "the form of a snow-white person" (1 En 87), or as appearing in "the likeness of a son of man" (Dan). While these figures are meant to be understood as bearing some resemblance to human beings, it is nevertheless true, as Zimmerli avers with respect to Ezekiel's angelus interpres, that their supernatural identity is not hidden from human eyes. The very fact that they immediately command the attention and awe of their human audiences suggests that no human wizard is in view.

In the majority of the Hellenistic ascent stories the form of the angelus interpres is not mentioned at all. These creatures may appear like humans if they desire (1 En 17.2), but only in 2 En, ApAb, and TAb are they referred to as "men" or said to appear in human likeness. There is no question in the mind of the human intermediaries in 2 En and ApAb, however, that their respective human-like visitors are angels, since they are described as having faces "like the shining sun," as having fire coming from their mouths, as having glistening wings, a sapphire appearance, and so forth. Only in TAb is the appearance of the revelatory angel Michael sufficiently mortal enough to beguile Abraham (no doubt due to the influence of Gen 18.1ff). Yet curiously, Isaac and Sarah are not fooled, and Sarah corrects her husband's misunderstanding long before he ascends into the heavenly world.

Herein lies further evidence for our claim that the Joh. Jesus is rooted in the EARTHBOUND SCHEMA rather than in the
alternative paradigm. The enigmatic incarnation of Jesus can only be patterned after the heavenly revealers which belong to the former schema. The HEAVENWARD SCHEMA evinces virtually no interest in an anthropomorphic depiction of its divine intermediaries—much less in a beguiling strategy of "becoming flesh."

3. The Priority of the Prophetic "Audience" over the Revelatory Angel

The HEAVENWARD SCHEMA revelatory angel is typically portrayed as the prophet’s divinely appointed attendant. As such the angel (or comparable heavenly being) seeks to meet the intellectual, spiritual, and emotional needs of the mortal during his heaven-oriented revelatory experience. In the earlier HEAVENWARD SCHEMA stories these divine assistants may do as little as the seraph in Isa 6, who prepares the prophet for direct verbal intercourse with the Lord; or they serve as *angeli interpretæ* and thus be responsible for much that human intermediaries are able to learn concerning the divine world, as in Dan 7-12 and Zech 1-6. Yet the important fact remains that it is the prophet rather than his heavenly helper who delivers the secrets of heaven to the believing community on the earth, and who is therefore esteemed as the community’s principal link with God.66/ And it is the prophet rather than his divine helper who is perceived by later generations to be the central figure in subsequent revelatory dramas: Isaiah (AscenIs); Enoch (2 En, 3 En); Ezekiel (ApocEzek); Daniel (ApDan [IX C.E.]).67/
To contend that the *angelus interpres* has a relatively inferior ranking is not to suggest that his revelatory relationship to the seer/68/ is inconsequential; to the contrary, the assistance provided by this divine being appears to be absolutely necessary in order for the mortal to obtain and comprehend the message with which he is entrusted. Furthermore, the accompanying angel's relatively diminutive status does not mean that he is always regarded by the seer to be inferior. As a rule the ascending mortal often shows considerable deference to his angelic guide, whose countenance and authority may appear so awesome and threatening that it strikes terror in the man's heart (e.g., 2 En J/A 1.7-10; but cf. TAb 8.8; 15.10!). Typically, the mortal explicitly obeys the angel's commands, and he may even attempt to worship the divine guide (e.g., ApJn 19.10; 22.8-9; AscenIs 7.21-22; ApZeph 6.14-15). But as we shall soon see, the respect which a seer shows for his heavenly helper does not ultimately undermine his (the mortal's) preeminent status as revealer of the divine mysteries.

All of the human intermediaries in the more primitive HEA-VENDWARD SCHEMA stories are said to view God's form and to hear his voice at least once, and more often than not the Deity speaks directly to these human visionaries./69/ Even if the archaic prophet's beatific vision seemingly occurs only once and it constitutes but one of several of his revelatory experiences, those who are responsible for preserving the prophetic text/70/ as well as later generations of believers who treasure it will regard the ecstatic vision as the primary event which confirms and establishes
the prophet’s singular revelatory claims. It has long been the understanding of biblical scholarship that the theophanic experiences which are embedded in Israel’s prophetic call traditions serve the important purpose of establishing the revelatory credentials of prophets in the eyes of their peers and the literary communities which embrace their words. Such an experience not only authenticates a given prophet’s message but links him with Israel’s most outstanding human messenger, Moses—the man who beheld the very form of God without angelic assistance. Thus, to be able to claim a visio Dei experience enables a prophet to stand within a very small and select company of mortals who communicate directly with the Deity and who are not particularly dependent upon angelic beings for what they know about the heavenly world.

While in the later ascent stories there are a few exceptions to the rule that the mortal experiences direct verbal and visual contact with the Deity, where the visio et audio Dei is said to take place the mortal now actually stands before God’s heavenly throne. Closer proximity to the Deity has a profound impact upon the authority of the mortal within his community, which as we saw in the primitive texts already supercedes that of all other intermediaries—both human and divine. Not only does the seer surpass all mortal authority figures because he has stood near the Lord and been able to behold what no other human has seen, but in several instances his rank supercedes that attributed to the angelic hosts in general and even his own magnificent escort in particular.
The Enochic tradition provides numerous illustrations of this persistent tendency to promote the seer above the status of angels. For example, during the initial ascension event itself the venerable seer is permitted to draw nearer to the Great Glory than most angels and be counted as equal in rank to the "most holy ones" (14.21-15.1). Yet even this honor pales in comparison to what is said to happen to Enoch in 2 En, which reflects beliefs that are most likely contemporaneous with the Joh. community. After being left by his two accompanying angels in the seventh heaven and then having been brought up before the face of the Lord by the (archangel) Gabriel (J/A 21.1-6)—who is probably second in authority only to Michael, the archistrag/75/—Enoch is invited by the Lord to "sit to the left of me with Gabriel" (J 24.1). The A recension of this verse spells out what J implies: Enoch's seat is actually closer to the Deity than is Gabriel's! From this superlative position Enoch is then able to receive directly from the Deity's mouth instructions in secrets of which even the angels are ignorant (J/A 24.3; J/A 40.3).

Enoch's superior status in the heavens (and hence on the earth) is indicated in other ways. He mediates the Deity's words of judgment to evil angels (the "Watchers"—1 En 12.4ff), and he is asked by them to intercede before the Lord on their behalf (2 En J/A 7.4). Their request for pardon is not granted, and so Enoch in effect takes their place as one who can be shown the mysteries of heaven (1 En 16.1ff). Enoch is characterized as a revealer of W/wisdom on the earth in Sim (37.1-5), which is especially
significant in light of the fact that Wisdom herself—an angelic being no doubt—had previously descended to earth to reveal her ways but found it necessary to return to heaven (42.1-3). One can even find the bold assertion by members of his terrestrial community that he "carried away the sin of mankind" (2 En J/A 64.5; but cf. 55.1-2). The failure of Enoch to mention the role of his *angeli interpretati* when he returns to the earth and reports what he has seen and heard provides still further confirmation for our claim that he is regarded as the quintessential revealer to and by those who preserve the Enochic traditions. He tells of having seen and heard the Lord directly and of having seen other heavenly phenomena, but not once does he give any credit to his angelic attendants (2 En J/A 39.1-40.1; 47.1).

Not even Enoch's reverent designation of Gabriel as "my Lord" (2 En J/A 21.4) detracts from the impression conveyed by the narrative as a whole that the mortal's status exceeds that of his angelic assistant. Any significance which might be attributed to this expression, uttered in a moment of fear and uncertainty, is effectively canceled by the Deity's own subsequent invitation to Enoch to sit between him and Gabriel. Similarly, the impulsive desire expressed by some seers to worship angels (including their *angeli interpretati*) should not be understood to be the final word on the matter of the relative status of human and heavenly intermediaries. Upon seeing the glorious angel seated upon a throne in the second heaven Isaiah is tempted to worship this creature, but he is prohibited by his angelic guide who commands
him not to worship the angels on the thrones in any of the heavens because "above all the heavens and their angels is placed your throne, . . ." (AscenIs 7.21-22). A short time later Isaiah refers to his guide as "my lord," but immediately the angel replies, "I am not your lord, but your companion" (8.5-6). This pattern of mistaken address or attempted worship followed by a categorical correction is found also in ApJn 19.10; 22.8-9 and ApZeph 6.13-15. In other words, the thrust of these narratives is against angelic worship, and in affirmation of the seer's unrivaled authoritative status in their respective earthly communities./76/

The final point to be noted in this discussion of the relationship of prophetic to angelic revelatory authority involves a persistent tendency to blur the line between mortality and immortality. We observe this first in Dan 7-12, where it is rather difficult to distinguish the identities of the most significant characters: Daniel, Israel, the angel Gabriel, and the mysterious "son of man" figure of 7.13. There are four basic ways in which a fusion of identities seems to take place. First of all, several synonyms for "man" are used interchangeably with respect to Daniel and divine beings./77/ Secondly, in slightly different ways Daniel, Gabriel, and the mysterious ruler-designate of 7.13 are each designated as a "son of man.="/78/ Thirdly, it is difficult, if not impossible to determine with certainty whether the "holy ones" (i.e., "saints") in Dan 7-12 are human or angelic beings—or both!/79/ And finally, a comparison of what the individual "son of man" receives from the Deity in 7.13-14 with what the "saints"
receive in 7.18, 22, 27 strongly suggests that the former figure at
least occasionally serves as the corporate personality of the
nation of Israel.80/ In contradistinction to a typical revelatory
angel of the EARTHBOUND SCHEMA, who all but becomes incarnate, in
this primitive HEAVENWARD SCHEMA story the human intermediary all
but becomes divine. As the locus of revelation moves heavenward,
the identity of the mortal messenger changes accordingly.

What seems to be budding in Dan 7-12 appears in full bloom
in several of the heavenly ascent narratives, which is not sur-
prising given both the widespread tendency in Late Antiquity to
depict various members of Israel’s "Hall of Fame" as angelic
beings/81/ and the divinizing effect which ascent into heaven has
upon mortals especially in gnostic, magical, and apocalyptic
circles. Transmogrification is expressed in a variety of ways: by
being anointed and then putting on angelic garments (ApAb 13.14;
ApZeph B 8.3; 2 En J/A 22.8-10; AscenIs 8.15, 26; 9.2, 9); by
joining in the angelic praise of the Deity (ApZeph B 8.3; AscenIs
8.17); by the assumption of an incandescent face (2 En J/A 37.2;
Sim 39.14); by an absence of hunger, thirst, and fatigue (ApAb
12.2; 2 En J/A 23.3; 56.2); by a statement that the seer’s lot/
portion is now in heaven (ApAb 13.8); by being able to speak the
language of angels (ApZeph B 8.3); and so on./82/

In the case of AscenIs, Isaiah finds himself elevated above
the status of angels and just below that of the righteous Israel-
ites in heaven (which will be his own status when he returns to
heaven at the conclusion of his mortal life). Isaiah praises the
Lord (Christ) along with the exalted righteous company rather than with the inferior angelic host (9.28-29)./83/ But even more significantly, Isaiah is informed that, because of him, power has been given to the angel with him (9.39). Whatever this means, it is clear that with Isaiah’s exaltation in the seventh heaven the angelus interpres has become dependent upon the mortal rather than vice versa.

In light of Buehner’s hypothesis that within the Joh. community the ecstatic, ascending-descending Jesus was transformed into the descending-ascending Son of Man, we must briefly mention the enigmatic situation in Sim 70-71 where the mortal Enoch appears to be equated with the heavenly Son of Man figure./84/ While it is true, as Ephraim Isaac points out, that the Ethiopic "son of man" expression as applied to Enoch is different from the two which are used unambiguously elsewhere in Sim of the eschatological heavenly being,/85/ and while 70.1 seems to distinguish between Enoch and the heavenly Son of Man,/86/ it is quite significant nevertheless that the two figures are given such similar names in these two concluding chapters to Sim (we noted a similar phenomenon in Dan 7-12). Moreover, it would seem that Enoch’s heavenly status is rather similar to that enjoyed by the Son of Man since: (i) Enoch performs the same function as the Son of Man in revealing the wisdom of the Lord of Spirits (37.1ff; cf. 48.7); (ii) the righteous, presumably including Enoch, can expect to ascend with the Son of Man in order to wear garments of glory forever (62.14-15); and, (iii) their dwelling places will be with Enoch and "that
Son of Man" (71.16-17). Even if it is not the precise intent of the final editor of Sim to equate Enoch and the heavenly Son of Man, there is but one small step necessary to attain this end.

CONCLUSION

The ascent of a human seer into heaven, his unparalleled opportunity to behold and converse directly with God, the heavenly identity and superior status which is bestowed upon him while standing before the Deity, his subsequent descent back to earth, the revelatory supremacy which he enjoys within the community which embraces his revelatory messages, and his final ascent back to heaven and to the full attainment of celestial immortality—these are all recurring features of the HEAVENWARD REVELATORY SCHEMA which sharply distinguish it from the conceptual structure of the EARTHBOUND REVELATORY SCHEMA. Perhaps, as Buehner avers, Joh. Christology itself evolved along these lines. The possibility is certainly tantalizing.

Whether it did or did not, and whether the alternative revelatory paradigm in the background of JOHN asserts Jesus (as we suppose), Moses, or some other mortal to be its principal revelatory figure, it is now abundantly clear why the Fourth Gospel turns to the EARTHBOUND SCHEMA to oppose such claims categorically. As long as Jesus remains an essentially human, albeit exalted and perhaps quasi-divine revealer, his revelatory priority is subject to displacement by the "next" human ascent figure—whether it be a
revival of a past prophet (e.g., Moses, Enoch) or claims involving a late I C.E. seer. The only way to insure Jesus’ revelatory priority is to depict him as an essentially divine revelatory being who enjoys an unrivaled intimacy with God, who descends to the earth and acquires human form in order to reveal what is necessary for salvation, and who then returns to heaven after completing his revelatory mission. By asserting without narrating Jesus’ descent and ascent the Fourth Gospel is able to point to its protagonist’s heavenly status, by having this figure appear to embrace human flesh JOHN is able to convince the reader of Jesus’ unity with the Father and his divinely authorized commission, and by having the earthly Jesus categorically shut down the possibility of human ascent and reorient ancient scriptural visions towards himself the gospel is able to emphasize the exclusive nature of Jesus’ mediatory role.

How JOHN methodically deconstructs the HEAVENWARD SCHEMA which lies in its background is the subject of our final chapter of this study. The basic outline of the gospel’s plan of attack is already fairly obvious. What is not clear, however, is how JOHN deals with the undeniable historical record that its protagonist once died on a cross. This fact of history cannot be dismissed, nor is there any parallel feature of the EARTHBOUND REVELATORY SCHEMA to which the author might appeal for help in explaining this embarrassing event. Death threatens the integrity of JOHN’s fundamental claims about Jesus. Thus it is the death of Jesus which stands as the greatest obstacle for JOHN to overcome.
Before we return to JOHN we must reiterate that our hypothesis of the existence of two alternative revelatory paradigms in antiquity involving heavenly intermediaries does not merely pertain to stories dealing with angelic beings, nor do we wish to imply that JOHN "borrows" its model for Jesus from angelic beliefs. We have assumed all along that angelic stories illustrate the presence of these two patterns of thought quite well, but that in actuality these patterns underlie all myths of heavenly revealers which antedate or are contemporaneous with JOHN.

For example, it would appear that Wisdom as depicted in WisSol, Prov, Sir, Bar and even Sim 42 belongs to a mindset which is shaped by the non-prophetic form of the EARTHBOUND SCHEMA: she has enjoyed an intimate relationship with the Deity since before the creation of the world, she can be said to descend and ascend, she can become "incarnated" in the Torah, and her authority as a revelatory figure is without mortal (or heavenly) peer (i.e., where Wisdom functions as a successful intermediary, heavenly ascent as such does not come into the picture).

Philo's understanding of the Logos, on the other hand, seems to belong to a conceptual world influenced by the HEAVENWARD SCHEMA. According to one train of thought within Philo, the Logos functions as an intermediary for weaker visionaries (e.g., Abraham) in the pilgrimage of their souls towards the Existent One, while those who have achieved "perfection" (e.g., Moses) may expect to have the Deity himself as their guide (Mig.-Abr. 169-74). In fact, the "perfect" Moses is sometimes depicted as a god and is also
identified as the Logos, and frequently he himself is said to serve as a hierophant for the ascent of other souls (Sac. 9; Conf. Ling. 95-98; Cong. 170). Here in Philo the Logos gives way in authority and significance to exalted mortals who themselves have entered into the holy presence of the Deity, much like the angelus interpres defers to Isaiah in AscanIs or to Enoch in 2 En.

And this is the essential difference between the two schemas: in the most stable form of the EARTHBOUND SCHEMA the sole locus of revelation is the earth and the heavenly intermediary speaks without rival; but in the HEAVENWARD SCHEMA the locus of revelation moves upward into heaven, and the mortal who is privileged to see or enter into God’s domain surpasses his angelic guide in becoming the principal revelatory figure.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE FOURTH GOSPEL'S DECONSTRUCTION
OF THE HEAVENWARD REVELATORY SCHEMA

INTRODUCTION

We end this study at the place where we began: with the
text of the Fourth Gospel. Having demonstrated in Chapter One that
a dominant feature of the gospel's narrative landscape is the
employment of cosmological language (preexistence, divine titles,
and a descent-ascent pattern) to assert the superior revelatory
authority of its protagonist in contradistinction to rival claims
which seem to be grounded in visio Dei and heavenly ascent experi-
ences, and having concluded in Chapter Two that this conflict over
revelatory authority can be best understood by analyzing the
mythical paradigm or paradigms which underlie religious thought
about heavenly revealers in Late Antiquity, we then determined
through such an analysis involving revelatory angel stories in
Chapter Three that JOHN employs one paradigm (the EARTHBOUND
REVELATORY SCHEMA) in the depiction of its protagonist in order to
oppose beliefs grounded in an alternative paradigm (the HEAVENWARD
REVELATORY SCHEMA). It now remains for us to show how and to what
extent JOHN employs salient features of the former schema in a
concerted effort to criticize and ultimately to deconstruct beliefs
grounded in the alternative schema.

We maintain that the conflict between these two competing
views of revelatory discourse constitutes an overriding theme of
the Fourth Gospel, and to justify our claim we intend to show how
the whole gospel and not simply isolated portions of it evince this
struggle. We recognize, however, that it is not possible within
the limits imposed upon this project to write a commentary on JOHN.
What we intend to do instead is to examine briefly a considerable
variety of Joh. passages which bear the marks of this paradigmatic
conflict and in so doing show how JOHN's EARTHBOUND point of view
is made to prevail over the competing HEAVENWARD ideology./1/

A. MULTIPLE BEGINNINGS AND JESUS' PREEMINENT AUTHORITY

It is widely held that JOHN's Prologue (1.1-18) sets the
agenda for what follows in the gospel narrative, both in terms of
form/2/ and content./3/ Whatever its compositional history, the
Prologue functions within the gospel as a proleptic statement about
many of JOHN's major concerns, pulling the reader "into the very
bosom of the implied author"/4/ so that the reader can begin the
story from a vantage point which is analogous but by no means equal
to that enjoyed by the ἀρχιερέας in his intimate relationship to
the Father (1.18). The prologue is about beginnings--three in fact
according to Werner Kelber: the beginning of the transcendental
Logos, the beginning of the historical inauguration of Jesus by
John, and the beginning of Jesus' incarnational commencement./5/

But v. 18 does not mark the end of this threefold begin-
ing, for it is also possible to argue that the introductory phase
of the Fourth Gospel extends further to include both the narrative
about John (the baptizer—vv. 19-34)/6/ as well as the rest of the first chapter./7/ Interestingly, the three segments of Jn 1 are thematically parallel to the three beginnings identified by Kelber in the Prologue alone: Logos (1-18), John (19-34), and the earthly Jesus (35-51). That we are able to identify micro-structures of beginning within a macro-structure of commencement (meaning that beginnings beget more beginnings) should not surprise us, since we have already noted that narrative strata in JOHN tend to unfold in spiraling patterns of logic./8/

The introductory portion of JOHN does more than serve as a preview of coming attractions; it establishes the superior authority of the gospel’s protagonist both positively by revealing his identity and function as well as negatively by contrasting him with three significant authority figures: John, Moses, and (by implication) Jacob-Israel./9/ Whatever the various characters may say about Jesus from Jn 2 to 21, the reader is already persuaded that Jesus possesses unmatched revelatory authority because he is a preexistent being who has enjoyed a unique intimacy with the Deity and who has been sent into the world and into human form in order to convey to mortals the authority to become the children of God.

1.1-18

All but one of the major elements used repeatedly by JOHN to portray Jesus as a supremely authoritative otherworldly figure are found in the Prologue. The protagonist’s preexistence extends all the way back to the priordial beginning. No creature is or can
be older; and within a thought-world in which superior status is a function of antiquity (cf. vv. 15, 30), this claim about the protagonist is most significant. Upon the protagonist are bestowed the most authoritative titles conceivable for someone other than the Deity: "Logos" (vv. 1, 14) and "god" (vv. 1, 18). Cosmological descent is clearly implied by comments about "the true light ... coming into the world" (v. 9) and being in the world and coming to his own (vv. 10-11), and of course by the statement that he "became flesh and tented among us, ..." (v. 14). A special element which is lacking is some direct or indirect reference to the Logos’ cosmological ascent.

Despite the highly exalted status which the protagonist enjoys both in heaven and on the earth, not everyone and everything acquiesces in his sovereignty. Conflict is an integral part of the total message which the Prologue brings to the reader: the Logos as light successfully penetrates the darkness, which is not even able to grasp him (v. 5). His own reject him, while others receive him. And upon the latter he confers the authority to join him in some capacity in his intimate relationship with the Deity (vv. 10-13).

Is there a specific being who constitutes a threat to the Logos’ authority? At this point the reader cannot be sure. It may be John, who is pointedly said not to be the Logos-light and who compares himself unfavorably to JOHN’s protagonist (vv. 8, 15). More likely the rival authority is Moses, who (only) gives the revered Law while the Logos—now "incarnate" and identified as
Jesus Christ--gives grace and truth (v. 17). Then comes v. 18:

God no one has seen at any time. The only-begotten god who is
in the bosom of the Father---he has declared him.

We must not underestimate the significance of this first visio Dei
interdiction. We have already pointed out on several occasions/12/
that when a typical first century reader---who would be familiar
with at least one of several traditions about Moses' ascent up
Mount Sinai and into heaven in order to see God "face to face" and
to receive the Law from him---notices the proximity of the narra-
tor's comment about Moses and the Law to the following categorical
denial that anyone has seen God except the Joh. protagonist, the
reader would probably suspect that the Joh. denial was directed
primarily at the aforementioned beliefs about Moses. In contrast
the reader would observe that JOHN pointedly asserts that its
preexistent protagonist has experienced a visio Dei and is
therefore authorized to "reveal"/13/ the Father in a way which
Moses could never be said to have done. In other words, v. 18
claims that it takes god to reveal God; no mortal is fit for this
task.

Significantly, the Prologue "culminates in the Christ-Moses
antithesis"/14/ and concludes with this almost militant affirmation
of the Joh. protagonist's exclusive revelatory authority. As a
result the reader is prepared for a possible conflict between the
"incarnate" Logos and a certain segment of humanity,/15/ and (s)he
may wonder whether the Logos will wage this battle on earth for the
duration of eternity while manifesting the indestructible aura
which belongs to his heavenly existence. After all, up through v. 18 there is no indication that the glorious Logos will appear in human disguise (cf. v. 14b!), there is as yet no mention of a cosmological ascent after his earthly mission is accomplished,\(16\) and finally there is no foreboding of the protagonist’s death.

1.19-34

This portion of a chapter devoted to beginnings elaborates upon the self-effacing testimony of the human witness who was introduced in the Prologue. John (the baptizer) appears or is mentioned several times after Jn 1, and it is remarkable that there as here his primary function is not to baptize or to preach, but to direct the characters in the story (as well as the reader!) to the Joh. protagonist. An important effect of John’s proleptic revelatory ministry is that in disclosing who Jesus truly is John must subordinate himself to the one whom he reveals.\(17\) In vv. 19-21, 25 John explicitly rejects two of the honored titles which will be attributed to the protagonist ("Christ" [1.41] and "the prophet" [6.14]), and identifies himself instead as a humble forerunner of one whose sandals he is unworthy to untie (vv. 23, 26-27).

John experiences two types of "seeing." The first is ecstatic: he beholds "the Spirit descending as a dove from heaven" and resting upon the human figure Jesus. The reader who is already aware of the Fourth Gospel’s aversion to human ascent and of its preference for divine descent cannot help but discern a subtle
reinforcement of this viewpoint in the statement that John espies a divine being descending rather than ascending. Coordinate with this "descent" vision is a mysterious audition which interprets for John the significance of what he has seen. This supernatural experience leads John to confess that Jesus is both the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (v. 29—a soteriological reference [implying death already?]) and "the Son of God" (v. 34—an expression of superior identity and authority). Interestingly, the ecstatic "seeing" which constitutes nothing more than a visual perception of the descending Spirit prepares John to experience a second kind of seeing, which has both physical and conceptual facets. He sees Χριστός a presumably humanlike Jesus coming to him (v. 29) and is able to see θεόν that this Jesus is an exemplary divine being (v. 34). The importance of literally seeing the earthly Jesus and at the same time recognizing something of his unique eminence is a motif which is further developed in the last portion of Jn 1 (vv. 36, 38, 39, 42, 46, 47, 48, 50).

John's ecstatic vision and audition are not actually narrated. These events have taken place some time in the past and are now being reported after the fact. Thus the reader is compelled to rely upon John's testimony to learn about his vision. Staley points out that the significance of this "retrospective focalization" is that the reader is led to a belief which is "not based upon 'sight' but upon secondary reporting"/18/—a type of intermedation. Moreover, we observe that John's vision involves a perception not of God but of Jesus as an incarnate being. Here a
pattern is established which will be evoked again with respect to
the purported visions of Jacob, Abraham, and Isaiah (1.51; 8.56;
12.41). The Fourth Gospel does not categorically deny all
visionary experiences, but in various ways it does maintain that
when one truly occurs it is only this otherworldly Jesus appearing
in human form on the earth who is seen and heard. Already in Jn 1
the lines of authority emanating from the HEAVENWARD SCHEMA are
beginning to be redrawn.

1.35-51

The EARTHBOUND SCHEMA's rhetorical strategy of paradoxical-
ly emphasizing the authority of a heavenly revealer by having him
appear before naive mortals in human vizard can be detected early
in the Fourth Gospel. John (the baptizer) informs the reader of
the soteriological significance of his identification of Jesus as
the Lamb of God: he "takes away sin." But the characters in the
gospel story hear only the title (v. 29, cf. v. 36)./19/ Does this
suggest that the reader understands more about Jesus than his first
followers? The reader is already aware that the Joh. protagonist
is no one less than the preexistent Logos and the only-begotten god
who enjoys unparalleled intimacy with the Deity, but it is not at
all clear despite the honorific titles ("Messiah," "Son of God," "King of Israel") which are given to Jesus by his first followers
whether their view of this man is as exalted as the reader's.
Nothing remarkable is mentioned about Jesus' physical appearance
which might lead the reader to think that these followers can see
that the protagonist is much more than the mortal "Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth" (v. 45). Their subsequent behavior will prove that that a significant gap between their and the reader's perception of Jesus does indeed exist, and this difference will accordingly enhance Jesus' prestige vis a vis the reader./20/

From our perspective the most important feature of the EARTHBOUND SCHEMA is its strong tendency to depict the divine revealer as the only intermediary between heaven and earth, so that for human beings revelatory knowledge is usually mediated knowledge. In this regard it is interesting to note that beginning with Jn 1 the reader is subtly led to accept the principle that religious knowledge is mediated knowledge. We have already referred to the matter of retrospective focalization. Here in vv. 35-51 we discover a second rhetorical strategy which produces similar results: every follower of Jesus comes to him because of another's "'secondhand' reporting."/21/ This phenomenon continues into Jn 2, where the reader learns of the miracle of turning water into wine only through the testimony of the chief steward (2.9), and then on into Jn 4, where in a similar fashion the reader is informed of the miraculous healing by the official's servants (4.51). Staley notes a further connection between this pattern of intermediation and Jesus' comment to Thomas in 20.29 about the blessedness of those who believe without actually seeing./22/

Finally we come to the very enigmatic promise that is embedded in v. 51. Jesus announces:
Truly, truly I say to you [pl.], you [pl.] will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.

This chapter of programmatic "beginnings" ends just like the Prologue, with a reference to visionary experience,23 except that this time the tone appears to be more positive. Scholars generally agree that v. 51 alludes to the dream-vision of Jacob-Israel in Gen 28.12ff, on the basis of the parallel statement about "the angels of God ascending and descending upon" something or someone. Thus the ostensive meaning of 1.51 is that Nathaniel and the other followers of Jesus (including the gospel's readership!) should expect to have a visionary experience similar to that previously enjoyed by the venerable patriarch. There are, however, three very notable and vexing differences between the narrative of Jacob-Israel's dream-vision and its retextualized expression in JOHN: (i) JOHN inserts the Son of Man figure and apparently substitutes it for the ladder upon which the archaic angels go up and come down;24 (ii) while Jacob-Israel hears the voice of the Deity and perhaps also espies his form ("the Lord stood above/on/beside it," i.e., the ladder), the Joh. "visionaries" are promised neither a direct audition nor vision of God—they will see only angels and the Son of Man; and most importantly, (iii) there is no clear indication that Jesus' prediction is actualized in the narrative, or in fact ever will be in the time which follows.25

Exegetes have proposed a wide variety of interpretations of 1.51 as it now stands in the Fourth Gospel,26 the majority of which fail to appreciate how radically JOHN transforms this
Jacob-Israel tradition and the HEAVENWARD SCHEMA which lies behind it. Heaven is presumably opened, but the focal point of this vision lies not in heaven but down towards the earth. The Deity is not present, angels do not speak or escort mortals to and from heaven,/27/ and the Son of Man is made analogous to an inanimate object. As if this is not confusing enough, the expectant reader is never informed when and how Jesus’ promise was or is to be fulfilled. Few commentators consider the possibility that 1.51 contains a sharply critical edge, and that the stated promise is deliberately intended to lead the reader astray and thereby provoke reflection. Staley persuasively argues that on at least five separate occasions JOHN does indeed “victimize” the reader in order to prevent him/her from assuming that (s)he knows everything that there is to know about Jesus and the journey of faith./28/ Just as the misunderstanding evinced by various characters within the gospel story (e.g., the Samaritan woman, Nicodemus) brings the reader to greater enlightenment about the purposes of Jesus, so the reader’s own occasional and temporary befuddlement enables her/him to achieve a deeper grasp of the mysterious nature of the Joh. protagonist and what it means to be his faithful follower. But Staley is unaware of the significance of references to heavenly ascent and visio Dei experiences in his interpretation of JOHN, and probably for this reason he overlooks the possibility that 1.51 might constitute a sixth example of readerly victimization. How might this rhetorical strategy work in 1.51?
On the basis of the phrase, "you will see heaven opened," a person who is familiar with ecstatic beliefs stemming from the HEAVENWARD SCHEMA would naturally assume that some kind of visionary event is being promised. The reader might initially imagine that the ascending-descending angels serve as *angeli interpretes* for this experience and might further suppose that the reference to the Son of Man is consonant with the idea that visionaries and ascending seers (E.g., Daniel, Enoch) are sometimes said to behold the Son of Man in the heights of heaven.\textsuperscript{29} Upon closer inspection the reader would notice that the angels are silent and alone, and that the Son of Man cannot be in heaven where he is supposed to be, since the angels ascend and descend εἰπήμονέ μοι. Is he then a real ladder *upon* whom they ascend and descend? But this is absurd. Is he upon the earth, so that the angels move away from and back towards him? This is more likely, but from a HEAVENWARD perspective it still seems quite strange. And who is this Son of Man? He himself is not said to ascend and descend—only the angels do this. Having been alerted by JOHN's peculiar juxtaposition of a vision and the Son of Man to a matter which appears to be of considerable significance to the gospel as a whole, the reader would pay careful attention to what is said subsequently about these subjects. (S)he would eventually discover that the Son of Man is the earthly Jesus, that the Joh. depiction of the Son of Man is in this and in other notable respects quite different from the normative apocalyptic conception, that the reason why the Son of Man in 1.51 does not ascend-descend is that he descends-ascends, and that no visionary
experience of the sort supposedly promised by Jesus in 1.51 ever takes place within the narrative time frame.

The lack of a literal, mystical, or even metaphorical fulfillment of this promise should stimulate the reader at the conclusion of the gospel, who by now is fully aware of JOHN’s penchant for metaphor, irony, symbolism, and victimization ploys, to look back and recognize that 1.51 can only be grasped as paradox and never as an unambiguous propositional truth. The verse deconstructs HEAVENWARD expectations while pointing enigmatically towards a new perspective on the Son of Man, his authority, and his relationship to cosmological movement. This informed reader would be able to grasp that the prohibitory remark in 1.18 is true, and that, according to JOHN, Jesus deliberately deconstructed visionary expectations during his earthly ministry by directing the attention of potential visionaries towards some kind of earthbound “vision” of himself as the exclusive mediatory (“ladder”) upon which heavenly knowledge can descend in his own person down to the earth./30/

B. THE PRIORITY OF DESCENT OVER ASCENT

Having informed the reader in Jn 1 of the heavenly identity and superior authority of the Joh. protagonist, while concomitantly appearing to express serious reservations about theophanic experiences in general and Moses’ visio Dei in particular, the author proceeds in Jn 2 to show how Jesus, by his exercise of divine authority in terms of miraculous and confrontational ωμησιω.
elicits a kind of faith from his disciples and from others which is paradoxically both commendable (2.11) and inadequate (2.22, 23-25). JOHN's seemingly ambivalent attitude towards miraculous signs and visionary experiences becomes more transparent in Jn 3 when a particularly dramatic supernatural "sign/miracle" is brought to the attention of the reader: ascent to heaven.

In Chapter One we noted that the primary thrust of 3.1ff is to demonstrate the revelatory priority of the otherworldly Jesus/31/ vis a vis potential earthly rivals (represented by the Pharisee ruler Nicodemus). We observed further that the enigmatic references to spiritual birth in vv. 3-8 probably connote some kind of revelatory experience./32/ Given these observations a recently published hypothesis of William Grese is especially noteworthy. He avers that 3.1-21 "follow[s] the pattern of a manual for a heavenly journey," with vv. 1-12 dealing with the mortal's "requirement" for this journey: spiritual birth./33/ Grese goes on to claim that "birth from above," "birth out of water and spirit," "seeing" and "entering the kingdom of God," and a recognizable revelatory discourse style involving a befuddled disciple and his sagacious teacher are all typical features of heavenly ascent stories in Late Antiquity. Grese concludes that "John 3:3, 5 is a response to Nicodemus's implicit request for a divine revelation."/34/

Unfortunately, the religious texts which Grese cites as providing the best parallels to the heavenly ascent terminology which he identifies in vv. 3-8 must all be dated later than JOHN./35/ Specific references to God's kingdom are extremely
difficult to find in first century Judaism and Christianity outside of the gospels/36/ and while in some apocalyptic texts mortal seers are transformed into immortal beings when they arrive before the Deity's throne, the idea that this transmogrification constitutes a "spiritual birth" is not present. On the other hand, the apocalyptic literature which we examined in Chapter Three is replete with references to the Deity as a sovereign who sits upon his heavenly throne and who administers the affairs of the cosmos as if it were a kingdom. When a seer is allowed to "enter" and "see" the glorious Deity seated upon this throne in the heavenly sanctuary it is as if he perceives the "kingdom of God." Moreover, in the Odes of Solomon/37/ the seer announces that the Spirit raised him up to heaven before the Lord, at which time this Spirit transformed him from the Son of Man into the Son of God and along with the Lord made him like the Lord (OdeSol 36)./38/ Thus, while the specific Joh. phrases "birth from above/out of water and Spirit" and "seeing/entering the kingdom of God" are not present in HEAVENWARD texts which are contemporaneous with the Fourth Gospel, the symbolic world to which these phrases point are. And when read in light of the emphatic prohibition of ascent in 3.13, it is not unreasonable to assume that these phrases represent HEAVENWARD ideas which JOHN deconstructs.

How this transformation takes place is as follows: human ascent is categorically denied, the erstwhile "ascent" expressions are made to refer to the Joh. protagonist, and some of these are formulated in such a way that they can be secondarily applied to
believers—but from a non-ascent-oriented perspective. As Meeks points out, the statement in 3.31 which rather clearly designates Jesus as the one who is ἴνα Ἰσχύει ꞈ gives us good reason to suppose that the one "born ἴνα Ἰσχύει" in 3.3 is that same figure./39/

Therefore Jesus is the only one who can claim to have been able to "see the Kingdom of God."

Since the informed reader is aware (i) that only Jesus possesses the Spirit (which is symbolized by water) until the time of his death (1.33; 4.14; 7.37-39; 19.30), (ii) that Jesus (like the Spirit in 3.8) is a figure about whom it can be said that mortals do not know "whence he comes or whither he goes" (cf. 8.14), and (iii) that Jesus is Ἰὸς ὁ Ἰσχύει ὁ Ἰονᾶ Ἰερουσαλήμ (3.16) and is therefore "born" from God in a figurative sense,/40/ it can be argued that the characteristics of spiritual birth and of being present in the kingdom mentioned in 3.5-8 pertain to the Joh. protagonist just as in v. 3. Nevertheless, even the first time reader knows that believers are "born out of God" (1.13) and are to be "baptized" by Jesus in the Spirit (1.33) at some point in time, and that v. 7 uses a plural in the statement "it is necessary for you to be born ἴνα Ἰσχύει." So the traditional view that these verses speak of the spiritual experiences of believers must be held in tension with the fact that they also allude to Jesus./41/ But with reference to believers note that vv. 5ff do not legitimate human ascent experiences. As v. 5 indicates, one cannot "enter into the kingdom of God" without a birth through the Spirit. Yet such a birth is impossible for creatures of "flesh," since they do
not know whence the Spirit comes or whither it goes (v. 8). Thus human ascent is impossible and v. 13a confirms it: "no one has ascended." Moreover, human possession of revelatory knowledge is made dependent upon the one who has been in heaven and "has descended, the Son of Man" (v. 13b).

The primary point of vv. 3-13 is not to say something positive about spiritual birth (as many commentators have assumed), but rather to say something negative about human ascent: seeing and entering the kingdom of God for mortals in any literal sense is excluded, because birth in the Spirit upon which ascent depends is, generally speaking, impossible. Of course as the gospel unfolds the reader discovers that in a metaphorical sense believers can be "born of the Spirit" (v. 8c) and "enter into the kingdom of God" (v.5), because it is Jesus' kingdom (18.36) and because Jesus bestows upon them the same Spirit which he himself possesses (19.30; 20.22). But along the narrative way the reader also is reminded that mortals remain upon the earth and that their involvement in the heavenly world is contingent upon the mediatory work of the Joh. protagonist. Even a retrospective reading of vv. 3-8 cannot authentically foster heavenly ascent aspirations.

Jn 3.1-13's denial of the possibility of human ascent and its assertion of the revelatory priority of the heavenly one who has descended to the earth constitute "the earthly things" about which Jesus speaks (v. 12), and after the climactic v. 13, the emphasis turns to "the heavenly things" which Jesus reveals.42/ As Grese astutely points out, the emphasis in vv. 14-21 upon
eternal life and divine judgment, presented as they are in terms of a realized eschatological framework, is a strong indication that an apocalyptic notion of revelation has been deliberately replaced both here and in the gospel as a whole by the idea that all such knowledge is transmitted to mortals only upon the earth./43/ Yet even with a decisive shift in revelatory locus from heaven to the earth, it is curious that in 3.14-15 the actualization of the salvific message in the life of the believing community seems to be made contingent upon Jesus’ (the Son of Man’s) ascent.

Jesus is connected with ascent for the first time in the previous verse (v. 13), and here it is his cosmological ascent which appears to be in view./44/ Then comes vv. 14-15, with its parallel between Moses’ lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness so that those who look to it can be saved from deadly snakebites (Num 21.8-9), and the lifting up of the Son of Man so that those who believe in him can have eternal life./45/ A person seeing Moses’ name and reading these verses from a HEAVENWARD point of view might suppose that vv. 14-15 simply augment v. 13’s implicit reference to Jesus’ cosmological ascent./46/ After all, as we have already noted, Moses is frequently associated with ideas of salvific ascent. And use of some expression with the same basic meaning as ἐβατω ("to lift up") in v. 14 is a common HEAVENWARD way of describing the passive transport of seers by God, angels, wind chariots, or the Spirit into heaven. References to a lifting up type of ascent experience by mortals are found in 1 En, 2 En, Sim, TAB, AscenIs, ApAb, and ApZeph./47/
But like the enigmatic allusion to the Jacob-Israel theophany in 1.51, there is something unsettling about the way in which 3.14's apparent reference to cosmological ascent is portrayed. Moses is not lifted up anywhere; rather, as JOHN tersely states, Moses himself lifts up a serpent! Num 21.8-9 provides an even more shocking contrast to normative ascension beliefs: Moses lifts up on a **serpent** (!) a brass representation of the very creature which is causing death among the Israelites. This lifeless figure "ascends" no higher than the top of the pole, and it is by looking to it rather than to Moses (whose feet are firmly planted upon the earth) that salvation from death can be experienced. Does the bronze serpent in some way prefigure Jesus? Probably so, the reader might think, since it is apparent that the Son of Man is Jesus. Does this mean that the lifting up of Jesus is prefigured by the lifting up of the lifeless, yet strangely magical serpent? Judgment must be held in abeyance.

But what would already be obvious even to the first-time reader of the Fourth Gospel is that from the Joh. point of view cosmological ascent is quite problematic: Moses and other humans are not able to ascend, and even the gospel's preexistent, descending protagonist is "lifted up" in a most peculiar fashion. Thus Kelber is correct in arguing that "the Nicodemus narration undertakes both a repudiation (John 3:13) and a revision (John 3:14) of the traditional Mosaic ascent mysticism."/48/ All normative patterns of ascension into heaven come under scrutiny. According to the so-called "heavenly revelation" of vv. 14-21,
salvation is accomplished by the descent of the only-begotten Son into the world and by his enigmatic lifting up within the terrestrial domain. But what this peculiar lifting up involves and whether Jesus is ever expected to return to his heavenly home are matters which still require narrative explication.

C. NO SINAITIC VISIO DEI

The Fourth Gospel’s opposition to the HEAVENWARD SCHEMA is not limited to ascent ideas; it also takes a stand against visio Dei claims. Having already discussed JOHN’s first anti-theopanic passage (1.17-18),/49/ we now turn to three other texts which evince the author’s deconstructive agenda with regard to this type of HEAVENWARD belief.

5.1-47

Jesus’ healing of a lame man by the Sheep’s Gate sparks a lengthy round of disputation with the "Jews" over his authority to heal on the Sabbath and to call God his own Father ("making himself equal to God"—v. 19). Jesus responds to his adversaries by boldly proclaiming that he does indeed have divine prerogative—to give eternal life and to render judgment—because such authority has been granted to him as the Son of Man by the Father (vv. 20-29). Obviously, this claim to be God’s envoy presupposes Jesus’ pre-existence with the Deity, but what is especially interesting is that Jesus’ divine authority is said to be grounded in an implicit
**visio Dei:** "the Son is not able to do anything by himself except what he sees the Father doing." Read in isolation the emphasis of v. 19 might be thought to be upon Jesus' vision of what God is doing. But with 1.1-3, 18 and 3.13 all preceding this verse the reader must assume that Jesus not only sees what the Deity is doing but also the Deity himself./50/

Jesus' claim of unmediated visual (and aural) contact with the Deity contrasts noticeably with the fact that his interlocutors must rely upon mediated knowledge in order to determine whether his testimony is valid. John, Jesus' works, Scripture, and Moses' writings are all paraded forth as witnesses to Jesus' claim that he has received his commission from God in heaven (vv. 31-36, 39-47). Jesus even speaks of the Father serving as a witness, but immediately after this statement comes the critical qualification that "you [pl.] have neither heard his voice nor seen his form at any time" (v. 37). Both Israel's paradigmatic experience at Sinai and similar present-day ecstasies seem to be in view here./51/ How then are the "Jews" expected to be able to hear God's testimony? Only by receiving the envoy whom he has sent (v. 38)--i.e. Jesus. In other words, we believe that this denial of Israel's visio Dei serves an explanatory function between the statement that "[t]he Father who sent me bears witness of me" and the assertion that "his word [uttered by Jesus] does not abide in you, . . ."/52/ Consequently, vv. 37-38 assert that Jesus' interlocutors have no hope of obtaining access to God except through his divine emissary, Jesus, whom they have rejected./53/
We have already noted that the Bread of Life Discourse contains the most sustained emphasis upon the cosmological descent of Jesus in JOHN, and that the primary reason for referring again and again to Jesus' descent is to undergird his unique and divinely-ordained salvific authority against those who cannot accept that Jesus originates in heaven or that his mediatory office is superior to Moses'. Kelber has shown that the "bread" metaphor in this chapter undergoes several successive deferrals of meaning: from the perishable food which nourished a crowd of five thousand (vv. 7-13, 26), to a ἀρτοποιόν which that crowd misunderstands (vv. 14-15, 26, cf. 30), to the imperishable bread which Jesus gives (v. 27), to the heavenly manna for which Jesus' audience asks—but which God, not Moses gives (vv. 31-32), to the true bread of life, i.e., Jesus (vv. 33, 35), to the flesh of Jesus which is meant for a kind of cannibalistic consumption (v. 51-58), and finally to a "spiritualized" view of Jesus' flesh (v. 63). Kelber argues that this series of deferrals antagonizes and marginalizes most of the characters in the story, and to a considerable extent even the reader him/herself. What is of particular interest to us is how the ironic and spiraling logic of the Bread of Life Discourse undermines and reorients the visio Dei perspective of those who are marginalized, and at the same time raises questions for the reader about Jesus' own ascent back to heaven.

In order to pursue this line of thought we must first take note of the various ways in which Jesus is depicted according to
the EARTHBOUND SCHEMA. Not only is Jesus repeatedly associated with the verb *kataβαίνω*, he also speaks once of ascending (*ἀναβαίνω*) back to his point of origin (v. 62). The sending motif is a pervasive feature of this discourse, as well as is an explicit emphasis upon his superior authority. In fact, Jesus' authority extends even beyond that enjoyed by EARTHBOUND angels: he is able to resurrect the dead and he is identified as the life-giving Son of Man and the Son (of God). Furthermore, like many EARTHBOUND angels Jesus is mistaken for a mere mortal: "Is this not Jesus, Joseph's son, whose father and mother we know?" (v. 42). And finally, he is designated as the sole intermediary between the Deity and the human audience.

With the reader now informed that the Joh. protagonist as a typical EARTHBOUND heavenly figure with inestimable authority, (s)he now arrives at the critical anti-visionary statement in v. 46:

> Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father.

In contrast to this denial of the possibility of a human vision of the Deity JOHN subtly reminds the reader in the literary context that mortals can and should have a vision of Jesus: (i) Jesus' hearers "have seen [me] and not believed" (v. 36); (ii) "Everyone who beholds the Son and believes in him should have eternal life" (v. 40). Note the decisive emphasis upon having a vision (and not just an audition!) of Jesus, in direct contrast to the prohibition of HEAVENWARD visions of God in v. 46. The reason why mortals
should look to Jesus for revelation and salvation is because he himself has experienced a *visio Dei.* /56/ Just as in EARTHBOUND revelatory angel stories, to behold the heavenly intermediary (Jesus) upon the earth is as close as mortals (Jesus' interlocutors) can hope to come to beholding the Deity who has sent him.

The denial of the possibility of experiencing theophanies is placed in a literary context in which Jesus' opponents are identified as "the Jews" (vv. 41, 52). However, from v. 60ff those who take exception to Jesus' claims are said to be "his disciples" (vv. 60, 61, 66). These "disciples" become deeply offended by Jesus' announcement that they should eat his flesh and drink his blood for eternal life (vv. 51-61). Then comes v. 62:

"[What] if therefore you should behold the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?"

This is a hypothetical question, not a statement. Does it mean that they would believe if they truly saw Jesus ascend back to heaven? Or does it mean that even if they did witness this incredible event they would not believe? It is impossible to decide. If we jump ahead to the end of JOHN, we discover that neither these "disciples" nor anyone else observes Jesus' return to his celestial abode. Thus the reader never receives a direct answer to Jesus' question. (S)he is reminded instead in v. 63 of the principle enunciated in 3.3-8 that the Spirit and not flesh gives life, and that (the descended) Jesus is the authoritative dispenser of this Spirit-given life.
Moreover, we note that in v. 60 the author informs the reader that ò λόγος οὗτος scandalizes them. Could this be a pun of sorts, meaning that it is the type of Logos which Jesus claims to be that offends these disciples rather than his claim to be a divine being (which is what angers "the Jews")? Borgen’s argument that the Bread of Life Discourse is primarily directed against docetic Christians who deny that Jesus is the only mediator between God and humanity is merits some consideration at least for vv. 60ff. But again the reader cannot be sure. Whatever else Jesus’ reference to his own ascent might mean, it certainly draws attention to this event and entices the reader to seek further clarification.

10.1-42

An indirect deconstruction of the Sinaitic theophany can be discerned in the Good Shepherd Discourse. Despite its bucolic imagery this address generates confusion (v. 6), then division (vv. 19-20), and finally intense antagonism against Jesus, the latter response being a direct result of his claim to enjoy unparalleled intimacy with his Father (vv. 29-31). At the climax of the discourse the protagonist announces: "I and the Father are one" (v. 30). This statement leads his enraged interlocutors to accuse him of blasphemy, claiming: "you being (a) man make yourself (a) god" (v. 33). Jesus retorts by quoting a phrase from Psa 82.6 where the Deity proclaims: "I said, ‘You are gods,’" and then proceeds a fortiori to argue that if this is so, then it is not blasphemous
for him to identify himself as the Son of God (vv. 35-36). Jesus concludes by reasserting his proximity to the Deity: "the Father is in me and I am in the Father" (v. 38).

Precisely what Jesus is getting at and what Psa 82.6 has to do with his argument has been the subject of considerable debate. What is generally agreed upon, based upon several rabbinic midrashim, is that by citing a portion of this psalm Jesus is alluding to the giving of the Torah at Sinai./59/ Combining Psa 82 with scriptural accounts of the Sinai revelation the rabbis concluded that when the people of Israel received the Torah they became temporarily deathless, and hence godlike./60/ If Jesus is evoking the paradigmatic revelatory event at Sinai, as we think he is, then it is worthwhile to recall that, according to Deu 5.24, the whole nation of Israel was shown the glory of God and (for awhile) even heard his voice. Proximity to the Deity is life-threatening, and therefore the Israelites requested Moses to serve as an intermediary between the Deity and themselves (Deu 5.25-27)./61/ Moreover, we find in Ex 24.10-11 that the elders of Israel had an even more direct encounter with the Deity: the MT plainly identifies this experience as a theophany, but the LXX describes what the elders saw more circumspectly./62/ Small wonder then that some rabbis maintained that at Sinai Israel "saw what Isaiah and Ezekiel never saw."/63/

Given the solid evidence which Jn 1.18, 5.37, and 6.46 provide for the argument that JOHN directly contests HEAVENWARD SCHEMA beliefs which include some kind of reference to the theophany at
Sinai, it stands to reason that JOHN's citation of Ps 82.6 participates in the same critical discussion. What is of keen interest to us is that immediately after the citation of this text Jesus announces: "If he called them gods to whom the Logos of God came, ..." (v. 35). Could it be that "Logos" here refers not only to the word of God (i.e., the Torah, as many scholars take it to mean), but also to that heavenly being who was introduced in the Prologue and there identified as Jesus?/64/ If so, then albeit somewhat ambiguously the Joh. Jesus is claiming that he as the Logos was the one who actually appeared and spoke to the Israelites at Sinai—not the Deity. Of course, the idea that Israel encountered God's angelic intermediary rather than God himself is not uncommon in first century Judaism and Christianity./65/ More importantly, on several occasions Philo avers that it was the Logos rather than the Deity who revealed the Law to Israel./66/ Therefore, from a religionsgeschichtlichen perspective, it would not be surprising if JOHN were to interpret the appearing of the Deity in the Sinai revelatory tradition as an appearing of his divine intermediary instead, thereby emphasizing the revelatory authority of that figure as over against the authority of the human intermediary Moses. What compels us to give this otherwise rather speculative hypothesis a second look is the fact that JOHN actually does reorient two ancient visionary experiences in just this manner, as the next section will demonstrate.
D. ANCIENT VISIONS WERE EARTHBOUND CHRISTOPHANIES

The Hebrew scriptures record numerous instances of visionary experiences, some of which appear to involve some kind of direct encounter with the Deity either in heaven or on the earth. The author of JOHN does not attempt to deny this sacred testimony in principle, but he does interpret such events according to his EARTHBOUND point of view. From the beginning of the gospel he artfully prepares the reader for the idea that some figure other than the Deity was the one who appeared to ancient visionaries, and that these revelatory encounters took place exclusively upon the earth. If the patriarchs and prophets of old did not behold God, as one might wrongly understand many scriptural texts (as well as more contemporaneous apocalyptic traditions) to assert, then whom did they espy?

8.31-59

In understanding the latter half of the Light of the World Discourse as a deliberate revision of a traditional heavenly vision belief and an assertion of Jesus’ preeminence we must first recognize that Abraham is identified with several heavenly visionary (Gen 15, 17; 4 Ezra 3.14; 2 Bar 4.4; TLevi 18.14; Gen R 44.25) and ascent (ApAb, TAbr) traditions in I and II C.E. Judaism. It is also helpful to note that in several early rabbinic texts which speak of the celestial ascensions of Johanan b. Zakkai the practitioners of such experiences are considered to be descendants of
Abraham. The importance of the latter point is seen in the fact that Jesus' interlocutors themselves claim to be in a filial relationship to Abraham (8.33, 39--and note that Jesus at first appears to agree with them: v. 37), while the significance of the first point becomes apparent when the reader finally arrives at v. 56:

Abraham your father rejoiced to see my day; he saw and rejoiced.

As to which of the above-mentioned ecstatic experiences in Abraham's life this statement points there will probably never be any concensus. But as we will see it is likely that one of these HEAVENWARD SCHEMA beliefs (or perhaps an unknown one) about Abraham lies in the background of v. 56 and this half of the discourse as a whole. But how does the gospel assert the superiority of Jesus to Abraham and in so doing deconstruct a traditional belief about Abraham's visio Dei?

When "the Jews" assert that they are descendents of Abraham, Jesus inquires as to the reason why they are trying to kill him--one who is speaking to them the truth which he heard from the Father--for "this Abraham did not do" (v. 40). Roy Ward suggests that in this last phrase Jesus is referring to Abraham's (and Sarah's) reception of the three mysterious visitors in Gen 18./70/ If this is so, then already prior to v. 56 we find the author alluding to an EARTHBOUND revelatory experience in the patriarch's life, one in which the entire revelatory drama is played out on terra firma. /71/ By having Jesus refer to this EARTHBOUND SCHEMA
story the author subtly introduces his preferred revelatory pattern to the reader before (s)he encounters the critical verse, a rhetorical technique already observed in Jn 6.

A few verses later death comes up again, but this time it is the death of Jesus' interlocutors which is as much the focal point of the discussion as Jesus' own demise. In 8.51 Jesus claims that anyone who keeps his word will not behold death unto eternity. Jesus' audience immediately responds to his bold assertion by pointing out that Abraham and the prophets all died, and they conclude by raising the question, "You are not greater than our father Abraham, who died, are you?" (vv. 51-53). At this point it would be helpful to remember that one of the most notable features of TABr, an apocalyptic text in which the patriarch makes a temporary journey into heaven just prior to his death and final ascent to immortality, is that Abraham repeatedly attempts to avoid the inevitability of his death. It is this tradition which is probably in view in vv. 51ff. In other words, Jesus claims that he has the authority to enable others to ward off death. But his interlocutors retort that if their "father" and authority figure could not do this, despite his strenuous efforts and even his ability to ascend into heaven, then it is simply not conceivable that the "mortal" Jesus could succeed where the venerable Abraham failed.72/

Jesus answers his critics by reiterating that the basis for his authoritative claims lies in his unique, intimate, otherworldly knowledge of the Father (vv. 54-55; cf. vv. 38, 40, 42, 47). Then
comes v. 56 and the ultimate deconstructive act. Jesus announces that the vision which Abraham had and which makes him an authority figure among those with whom Jesus is speaking was actually a vision of himself! Since the beholder in a visionary experience is normally considered to be inferior to the one who is beheld, this statement expressly subordinates the patriarch to Jesus. We cannot be certain whether the reference to Jesus' "day" has to do with the moment of his incarnation, his earthly life, his death/resurrection, or his final coming in glory, although the preponderance of the non-literal uses of this term in JOHN point to death or resurrection./73/ Whichever it is, it is a future vision of Jesus upon the earth, not a vision of Jesus in heaven and certainly not of the Deity.

Jesus' interlocutors obviously understand "day" to be referring to Jesus' earthly life, and not unexpectedly they reverse the subject and object of Jesus' claim so as to make Jesus inferior to Abraham: "You aren't even fifty years old and you have seen Abraham?"/74/ Schnackenburg notes that the question posed by Jesus' interlocutors "is clearly absurd," and presents but then rejects the idea that there is an allusion here to the type of visionary experience in which a person just prior to death is granted a vision of his just reward and of the heavenly world./75/ (Thus the opponents would be claiming that Jesus is too young to have had this experience.) Yet given the significant number of references to HEAVENWARD SCHEMA beliefs in JOHN, it is not at all unlikely that a typical first century reader would assume that
Jesus' opponents are thinking in terms of this possibility. At any rate, Jesus responds to their question by making a statement ("before Abraham was, I am") which not only asserts his superior age (cf. 1.15, 30) but also his superior state of being (ἐγώ vs. ὕψωσε; cf. 1.1-2 with 1.3)./76/ This places Abraham in an inferior position to the otherwordly Jesus, thereby undergirding the bold claims which Jesus makes prior to v. 56 about his unri-valed revelatory authority.

12.37-50

The other relatively unambiguous transformation of an anc-ient visio Dei into a visio Christi is found at the end of Jesus' final public discourse. We have already shown that the narrator’s comment in 12.41, after JOHN’s non-verbatim "citation" of Isa 6.10,

This Isaiah said because he saw his glory and spoke concerning him,

can refer only to Jesus./77/ According to JOHN the venerable prophet during his ecstatic call vision beheld not the Deity (as both the MT and the LXX plainly state) but his envoy Jesus. Commentators note that there is a tendency in I C.E. Judaism to claim that Isaiah saw God’s shekinah rather than God himself, and thereby claim that perhaps JOHN has adopted this perspective in 12.41--cf. 1.14: Jesus is the shekinah of God. This leads scholars to assume that what Isaiah espied was Christ in his preexistent glory./78/
However, this interpretation fails to take seriously v. 41's immediate literary context or the overall thrust of the Fourth Gospel. As we will discuss more fully in the next section, the primary theme of the passage immediately preceding this one is the imminent demise of Jesus, and attached to this death is the idea of Jesus' (and the Father's) glorification (v. 23—cf. vv. 24-25; v. 28—cf. vv. 27, 33). As far back as 11.4 the glorification of Father and Son is associated with death—Lazarus's death. Now in the middle of Jn 12 we find, as Schnackenburg says, that "[t]he real, full glorification ... takes place in Jesus' 'hour' (12:23; cf. 7:39; 12:16)."/79/ Moreover, the first Isaianic text which the author cites (verbatim from the LXX) is from the Suffering Servant hymn of Isa 53 (v. 1). Brown notes the appropriateness of this selection, since both the hymn as well as Jn 12.20ff deal primarily with the rejection of the Suffering Servant./80/ We would only add that both also speak of the death of that emissary from God.

Abraham saw Jesus during his sojourn upon the earth, Jacob—Israel's dream-vision serves as a pattern for a vision of the earthly Son of Man, Moses did not see the Deity but did write about this Jesus, Israel at Sinai did not see or hear God but apparently heard the Logos (who in 1.14 is identified as the earthly Jesus), and now it is said that Isaiah saw the glory of that same Jesus—presumably the glory of his death. HEAVENWARD SCHEMA theophanies from Israel's past are consistently transformed into Christophanies by the Fourth Gospel, which in so doing imposes an EARTHBOUND interpretation upon the heavenly intermediary's appearing; in most
instances it is Jesus upon the earth rather than in heaven who is said to have been perceived by the ancient heroes of Israel. With the deconstruction of a HEAVENWARD SCHEMA belief about Isaiah's visio Dei (perhaps including an ascent, as in AscenIs?) into a vision of the death of Jesus the reader comes to the realization that probably JOHN intends for all of the preceding visionary experiences to be interpreted in like manner. If this is so, then it is but one of several instances in which JOHN repeatedly uses a motif, term, or some other literary device to direct the reader's attention towards what increasingly seems to be the climax of the gospel drama: Jesus' passion. This rhetorical strategy is quite apparent in the passages which contain the second and third lifting up sayings.

E. LIFTED UP UNTO DEATH

We noted earlier in this chapter that JOHN does not begin to speak of the cosmological ascent of Jesus until 3.13, and then only in an indirect way in the process of denying the possibility of human ascent. Following directly upon the heels of this verse is JOHN's first lifting up saying, the meaning of which is rendered problematic by the analogy which is established between the lifting up of the Son of Man and of the serpent by Moses. The reader, who on the basis of v. 13 is expecting v. 14 to deal rather directly with cosmological ascent, is left wondering how Jesus can provide salvation if he like the serpent is lifted up upon a pole only a
short distance above the earth. When the reader comes to the next lifting up of the Son of Man saying in Jn 8.28, (s)he finds once again that the narrative simultaneously offers illumination and postpones ultimate resolution of what it means for Jesus to be lifted up.

8.12-30

Before turning our attention to the immediate literary context in which the second lifting up saying is found, we should point out that a familiar narrative feature of many EARTHBOUND SCHEMA texts—the audience’s failure to grasp that the one addressing it is a heavenly rather than a human messenger—is present here in the first part of the Light of the World Discourse. Yet again the familiar Joh. pattern of subtly introducing the EARTHBOUND perspective before dealing directly with a problematic point of view is to be observed. In response to the charge that he testifies to himself, Jesus states in v. 14 that if he does this he is justified in so doing,

because I know whence I came and whither I go; but you do not know whence I come or whither I go.

After claiming that the Father who sent him also bears witness to him, Jesus is asked by his interlocutors, "Where is your Father?" Jesus does not inform them where his Father is, but announces instead: "You know neither me nor my Father; ..." (vv. 16-19). Questions involving these three issues—whence (Ποθεν) Jesus
came, whither (ποῦ) and ὅπου he goes, and who his true father (and mother) is—are raised again and again in JOHN, and they lie at the heart of what the gospel intends to say about the other-worldly identity of the Joh. Jesus./83/ More specifically, the question of Jesus' paternity focuses the reader's attention upon his preexistence,/84/ the "whence" question leads her/him to reflect upon this and his cosmological descent,/85/ and the "whither" question deals with the matter of his cosmological ascent (or so it would seem)./86/ Thus the author of JOHN picks up the misunderstanding motif from the EARTHBOUND SCHEMA and develops its rhetorical potential further in order to accentuate his protagonist's revelatory authority.

Beginning in 8.21 Jesus correlates his announced departure with his interlocutors' unsuccessful search for him and their subsequent death. They however think that Jesus is speaking of his own demise—by suicide (v. 22). Jesus responds to their misunderstanding by reasserting his heavenly origin (and authority) and by explaining why they are so obtuse: "You are from below, I am from above; you are from this world, I am not from this world" (v. 23). Then he repeats that they will die in their sins, if they do not believe that "I am" (ἐγώ εἰμι—v. 24). Here we have a most curious and somewhat confusing situation from the reader's point of view. Jesus' interlocutors clearly do not believe that he is the Father's quintessential envoy, even though he has repeatedly directed their attention to this claim since the Light of the World Discourse commenced (vv. 12, 16, 18, 23, 26-27, 28-29)./87/ Yet
they will seek after him when he goes away: presumably they are looking for Jesus upon the earth somewhere, but the reader realizes that Jesus is returning to heaven. They will wrongly conclude that he has taken his own life, when in actuality this vain search of theirs is somehow related to their own demise.

The rather odd association of death—both Jesus' and those who would desire to follow him—with ascent is a literary feature which will increase in significance as the gospel narrative unfolds. Yet already in v. 28's lifting up saying its rhetorical effect can be discerned.

While a reading of 3.14 in light of 3.13 and from a HEAVENWARD SCHEMA point of view might initially suggest that the lifting up of the Son of Man (note the passive voice, no explicit subject) is his cosmological ascent, such an understanding of 8.28 is much more problematic. Now "the Jews" (Ἰουδαῖοι) are the ones who are said to lift up Jesus. This makes no sense to one who interprets the text from a HEAVENWARD perspective, since it is almost always God, the Spirit, an angel, or some other divine being who raises the mortal above the earth in heavenly ascent stories.

Just as the association of the lifting up of the Son of Man in 3.14 with Moses' lifting up of a serpent (upon a pole) makes the reader wonder whether Jesus' cosmological ascent is really the point of that text, so direct human involvement in the raising of the Son of Man here in 8.28 poses an additional problem for one who expects this lifting up saying to say something about Jesus' journey into the celestial world. The reader begins to recognize that this
is no ordinary cosmological lifting up. The overt association of Jesus' departure with death immediately preceding v. 28 causes the reader to wonder if this lifting up saying also has something to do with death. Her/His suspicion that the two are directly related will be confirmed by the third lifting up saying, as well as by the later discovery that (i) the crucifixion of Jesus is seen by the narrator himself (see 19.34-37) as a critical revelatory event which is meant to evoke the kind of faith in the later Joh. community which is implied in v. 28 ("then you will know that I am"), and that (ii) Jesus' statement right after v. 28 that the Father has not left him alone is parallel to a comment made just prior to Jesus' arrest and execution (16.32).

12.20-36

The threat of death has loomed ominously over the Joh. protagonist since Jn 2.18-22, when the narrator interpreted Jesus' cryptic saying about destroying "this temple" and having it raised up three days later as an allusion to Jesus' bodily resurrection from the dead. From that point up to Jn 11 the reader is informed of mounting hostility directed against Jesus both by "the Jews" and by the religious establishment which represents them (5.18; 7.1, 25, 44-52; 8.20, 59; 10.31, 39; 11.8, 16). Concomitantly the reader is made aware that Jesus recognizes, willingly accepts, and even helps to bring about his own demise (6.64, 70-71; 7.19-20; 8.40; 10.11, 15, 17-18, 32). Lazarus' death and his resurrection by Jesus dominates Jn 11, and this miraculous "sign" (11.47; 12.18)
is said to result in a renewed determination by Jesus' opponents to have him put to death (vv. 46-57). Jesus' anointing (12.1-11) is explicitly connected to his burial,\(^{91}\) and the raising of Lazarus from the dead is said to be the reason why a crowd gathers around Jesus as he auspiciously enters Jerusalem (12.12-19).

Attuned as the reader is by now to descent-ascent language, the statement in 12.20 that "there were some Greeks among those who were ascending \(\alphaυγϕ\) in order to worship in the feast" would surely catch his/her eye. Is there a double meaning to this reference to ascent? What makes this question particularly intriguing is that what these ascending Greeks "wish to see Jesus" (v. 21). Here then for the more alert reader is the subtle suggestion that cultic ascent should be directed towards a vision of the earthly Jesus.

Apparently as a result of their desire to see him Jesus suddenly announces: "The hour has come in order that the Son of Man should be glorified." What this signifies is indicated by what Jesus says next: he speaks of a seed of grain falling into the earth, dying, and bearing much fruit (v. 24), of loving and losing one's soul versus hating it in this world and gaining eternal life (v. 25), and finally of serving Jesus by following after him (v. 26). Nicholson interprets v. 24 in light of v. 26, arguing that all of vv. 24-26 refer to discipleship rather than to Jesus' death. After all, it is the disciples and not Jesus who are the fruit-bearers in JOHN.\(^{92}\) Yet Nicholson fails to appreciate the Joh. penchant for establishing parallels between Jesus and his true
followers: their experience is patterned after his; if he suffers
and dies, so may they (15.18-21; 16.1-4). Thus the dying of the
seed of grain represents primarily the death of Jesus, which
results in the bearing of fruit by those who may secondarily die by
hating their souls in this world as Jesus does and by following him
along the path of suffering. This means that the "hour" in which
Jesus is to be glorified must be the hour of Jesus’ death./93/

"This hour" is again mentioned in v. 27 in the context of
Jesus’ passion:

Now is my soul troubled, and what should I say, "Father, save
me from this hour?" But for this [reason] I came to this
hour.

Jesus prays for the Father to make "this hour" a time when his name
is glorified, and a voice from heaven responds, "And I have glo-
riified it and again I will glorify it" (vv. 28). As pointed out
previously, only Jesus (and the reader) understands this voice to
belong to the Father; everyone else thinks it to be either thunder
or an angel’s voice. This incident suggests that Jesus alone has
the ability to communicate directly with his transcendent Father
even while upon the earth./94/ Mortals, however, are not allowed
to comprehend even this simplest form of HEAVENWARD communication.

Then comes the last lifting up saying in v. 32, which
appears to be a HEAVENWARD saying that JOHN takes and radically
transforms:

And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all
[persons] to myself.
Immediately after this verse the narrator informs the reader (alone) that the meaning of this lifting up statement (and by inference, the other two as well) involves an ascent by Jesus up unto death: "This he said signing (oμοθύων) what sort of death he was about to die."/95/ Now the reader understands that the sign and hour motifs in JOHN both point primarily to the ultimate sign, the death of Jesus which brings glory to him and to the Father. The HEAVENWARD idea of lifting up a mortal into heaven in order to obtain celestial secrets for human salvation has been dramatically transmuted into a raising up of a heavenly revealer upon a Roman gibbet. This ironic "lifting up" accomplishes what heavenly ascents are meant to achieve: salvation. But while an ascending seer desires to be lifted up not only for the sake of others but especially for his own sake, this "ascent" of Jesus unto death is carried out exclusively for the salvation of others./96/ Most significantly, the whole experience occurs in EARTHBOUND fashion upon the earth!

Jn 12.32-33 serve as a retrospective clarification of the two previous lifting up sayings. Now the reader can see that as early as 3.14--if not even in 3.13!--JOHN begins to undermine a traditional view of cosmological ascent by turning the reader's expectation of Jesus' cosmological ascent into an ironic lifting up unto death. Whether or not Jesus truly ascends back to heaven is left up in the air. Through Jn 12 the reader is only sure that ascent for Jesus means primarily death, and both salvation and revelation are earthbound.
F. JESUS DEPARTS WITHOUT HIS FOLLOWERS

As the plot of the Fourth Gospel unfolds into the so-called "private" ministry of Jesus and on to his passion and resurrection it becomes increasingly clear that questions having to do with the departure of the Joh. protagonist move from the periphery of the gospel drama to center stage. By the end of Jn 12 the reader has been able to obtain a firm grasp of the significance and meaning of Jesus' preexistence and descent from heaven as they pertain to his revelatory and salvific activities upon the earth. (S)he is also cognizant of JOHN's categorical objection to heavenly ascent and visio Dei beliefs. What is not yet perceptible, however, is whether the gospel's opposition to a HEAVENWARD SCHEMA perspective is to be applied universally or if certain Christian--particularly Joh. Christian--ecstatic practices are excepted. All of the interdictive statements up to this point could be understood as being directed against such experiences in the distant past and/or outside of the community of true believers (although we have attempted to argue otherwise). In fact, the only explicit anti-ascent text (3.13) easily lends itself to this interpretation: it employs the perfect tense ("No one has ascended except . . .") and Jesus' interlocutor is ostensibly an "outsider" (as a ruler of the Jews). Jn 1-12 makes sufficiently clear that the opponents of Jesus will not be able to seek after and find Jesus in heaven when he departs from the terrestrial world (7.33-34; 8.21-24), but what about those who are committed followers of Jesus? Does JOHN allow
them to take part in an ascent to heaven followed by a theophany?

No less problematic than the issue of the believer's ecstatic experiences is the matter of Jesus' own ascent. The reorientation of the HEAVENWARD SCHEMA lifting up expression in the direction of death raises more questions than it resolves: Does not an ascent to death implicitly undermine Jesus' claim to possess an otherworldly identity, a heavenly 

visio Dei commission, a descent-ascent mission, and thus revelatory superiority? We need only recall that angels and other heavenly figures which function as revealers in both revelatory paradigms simply do not die. Death, particularly death on a cross, suggests mortality, failure, shame, and inferiority. Unless the author can show that Jesus' death is an integral part of his revelatory mission upon the earth and should be seen as a display of divine will, power, and even life, his assertion about the preeminence of his protagonist will appear vacuous and unconvincing. In a tentative way the lifting up sayings and the rest of Jn 1-12 already begin to address this issue: first, by indicating that Jesus' demise achieves profound revelatory (8.28) and soteriological (3.14; 12.32) results; second, by pointing to some kind of resurrection from death (e.g., 2.19-22; 11.25-27, 40-44); and third, by claiming that far in advance Jesus knows and chooses his fate because it has been ordained of him by his Sender (e.g., 6.51; 10.17-18; 12.23-33). What has been rather sporadically presented in the first half of JOHN must now be organized into a systematic presentation if the very real threat to Jesus' quintessential rank and authority is to be overcome.
Beginning in 13.1 the Fourth Gospel addresses both this and the former issue with increasing clarity—in fact, the question of the ecstatic experiences of Jesus' followers and his own ascent through death are deliberately intertwined. In the remaining portion of this chapter we wish to show how JOHN's break with the EARTHBOUND view of ascent ultimately reaffirms an EARTHBOUND understanding of Jesus' quintessential revelatory authority while simultaneously deconstructing HEAVENWARD SCHEMA beliefs within the Christian context which potentially vitiate that authority.

13.1-30

That the departure of Jesus and the accompanying problem of his death are now to become the center of attention is explicitly indicated by the introductory statement of vv. 1-3:

Before the feast of the Passover, Jesus, knowing that his hour had come for him to cross over [meta] from this world to the Father, [and] loving his own in the world, he loved them to the end [ φιλος]. And with the devil having already entered into the heart of Judas Simon Iscariot in order that he should betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands and that he came from God and was going to God, arose from the dinner and ... 

We have noted on several occasions how the author of JOHN prepares the reader for a deconstructive segment of the gospel by first of all (and often somewhat subtly) presenting his own EARTHBOUND point of view. A similar strategy is observed in v. 3, where the narrator succinctly reminds the reader of both the descent-ascent pattern and the considerable authority which Jesus is permitted by
the Father to exercise upon the earth.

Verses 1-2 are likewise preparatory, but here in a disturbingly ambiguous way the narrator anticipates a significant departure from the normative descent-ascent pattern. Already Jn 12 has clarified for the reader that Jesus must die; now this theme is alluded to again. The reader may be surprised to discover that instead of using the more familiar term for Jesus' ascent (ἀνω - ἀνωτάτων) in v. 1, the narrator speaks instead of Jesus "crossing over" from the world to the Father. Perhaps (s)he will recall that the term was used metaphorically back in 5.24 to refer to a "crossing over from death to life."/98/ If so, then employment of this verb for Jesus' departure from his followers is most unsettling. Verse 2 increases the reader's concern, for here in this introductory section the narrator mentions Satanic possession and betrayal (see 6.70-71). How does this deadly opposition to Jesus affect one's reading of the phrase, "he loved them to the end"? What is the end? The reader cannot be sure if "end" refers to termination of mission and ascent to heaven (the standard EARTHBOUND pattern) or to termination of ministry and being lifted up unto death. Only later will (s)he become aware that for JOHN the "end" occurs as Jesus utters his final words, "It is finished" (τελεθησανια - 19.30).

So as not to allow the reader to ignore Jesus' impending demise and its profound implications for his earthly mission and for the subsequent community which it fosters, the author inserts the theme of betrayal into the following footwashing scene (esp.
vv. 11, 18-30). Given that the principal lesson of the footwashing experience is that the disciples ought to imitate their Lord, what does the betrayal of Jesus mean for their own lives? Will they too be betrayed and encounter death? Later the reader will discover that 15.18-16.4 demands an affirmative response to this question.

Since the betrayal of Jesus constitutes a serious threat to his self-proclaimed revelatory authority and salvific mission, the author must continue to argue that his departure from the normative EARTHBOUND SCHEMA enhances Jesus' status as God's exclusive emissary. For this reason the reader encounters a second instance in which the gospel asserts that the demise of Jesus enables mortals to recognize his otherworldly identity ("that I am" --13.19; cf. 8.28). The EARTHBOUND authority of Jesus is not vitiated by his betrayal or death; rather, the "cold fact of Christian tradition ... that Jesus was put to death on a cross"/100/ constitutes a--or perhaps even THE--critical revelatory event in the Fourth Gospel, at least for the reader.

13.31-16.33

As the narrative continues to slow down to consider "the awesome 'hour' of Jesus' glorification,"/101/ the reader discovers through the anxious questions posed by the disciples in response to Jesus' teaching that their perception of what Jesus' departure means is not shared by Jesus himself. Moreover, it soon becomes obvious that Jesus' going away has decisive implications for the
disciples themselves, in that their eager expectation of being able to accompany Jesus on his return to heaven is transformed into a foreboding that they must remain where they are after he departs and even suffer persecution and death.

Jesus commences the First Farewell Discourse by announcing that now (νῦν) is the time for God to be glorified in the glorification of the Son of Man, which will be carried out by the Deity immediately (εὐδοκεῖν). The emphasis in vv. 31-38 upon the imminence of what is to transpire must not be overlooked, for it compels us to understand much of what follows as referring to the Jesus' death and resurrection rather than to some vague period afterwards when Jesus is supposed to ascend. "Now" for JOHN and its protagonist means the passion, but for Jesus' disciples it means something else. For this reason Jesus tells them the same thing which he earlier/102/ had announced to the "outsiders":

Children, yet a little while I am with you; you will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews that where I am going you are not able to come, so now [διότι] I say to you.

In other words, they cannot come with him. But where is Jesus going, to heaven or to the cross?/103/ When Peter asks Jesus to be more forthright, Jesus again states that Peter (and presumably the others) cannot follow him now (νῦν); but he will be able to follow later (ὑποτεθεῖναι—v. 36). But whither? Peter apparently believes that Jesus is returning to heaven and he wants to go with him, otherwise his enthusiastic plea in the next verse to be allowed to follow Jesus immediately (κατα) makes little sense. Peter so
earnestly desires to ascend into the celestial world that he claims he is willing to give up his life for Jesus (subsequent events will prove that this is not what Peter literally means), whereupon Jesus responds that the ultimate sacrifice will indeed be necessary, only not at this time (vv. 37-38). Not until the end of the gospel will the reader discover that Peter unknowingly and Jesus omnisciently have spoken in truth about the tragic manner in which Peter is to follow his Lord.

At the beginning of Jn 14 the desire expressed by Peter (no doubt on behalf of the other disciples) to follow their Lord into heaven "now" is further suppressed by Jesus as he announces that he is departing to his Father’s "house" without them and that they must remain where they are until he returns to "receive" them unto himself. "You know the way where I am going," says Jesus (vv. 1-3). But instead of providing comfort (as scholars often understand the function of these verses to be), Jesus’ comments increase the disciples’ anxiety, as Thomas indicates when he informs Jesus that they do not understand where he is going or the way there (vv. 4-5). Jesus recognizes that Thomas’ query about "the way" is of particular concern to the disciples because they still want to follow him. Thus he responds by declaring that he is "the way . . . to the Father" (v. 6). But to guard against the disciples inferring that Jesus intends to help them to ascend to the Father, he adds, "from now (ἀπὸ) you know him and have seen him" (v. 7).

Philip misses the point of this caveat entirely, for he asks to be shown the Father (vv. 6-8). Since both for JOHN and for
first century Judaism and Christianity in general God is thought to be quite transcendent and therefore not to be found anywhere upon the earth, we must imagine that Philip’s question implies a request that Jesus function as some kind of hierophant/104/ for Philip so that he can ascend into heaven and experience a *visio Dei*. Jesus’ response is immediate and unequivocal: he rebukes Philip for making this request and he reiterates that Philip has already seen and heard the Father by having seen and heard the Father’s envoy, Jesus (vv. 9-11). Again Jesus announces definitively that he is going away, and that they must remain in order that they might do "greater things" than he has done (v. 12). That Jesus is absent and that they will do "greater things" does not mean that their status somehow exceeds Jesus’, for Jesus adds that he will enable them to accomplish these works and they will be done to the glory of the Father in the Son (vv. 13-14).

Up to this point in the First Farewell Discourse JOHN seeks to deconstruct HEAVENWARD SCHEMA beliefs within the believing community (represented by the disciple’s questions) by directing the reader’s attention to a modified EARTHBOUND revelatory interpretation of its protagonist’s ministry and of the nature of revelatory authority with the community. We say "modified" because Jesus’ imminent death patently alters normative EARTHBOUND expectations about a direct and possibly glorious ascent back to heaven. This death retrospectively calls into question the nature and extent of Jesus’ authority during his earthly sojourn and it poses a problem for his continuing exercise of sovereign authority
over the Joh. believers after he has departed. Of course, the
death of Jesus many be more problematic for the reader than for the
disciples in the story, for they have yet to indicate that they
truly grasp the fact that their Lord is to be lifted up unto death.
Even until the end of the Second Farewell Discourse they do not
seem to comprehend how Jesus' supposed ascent has been delayed--
perhaps indefinitely--by his death.

Beginning in Jn 14.15 the author attempts to resolve these
questions about Jesus' authority in light of his death and his
unaccompanied departure by having Jesus begin to explain what he
alluded to earlier (vv. 2-3) about his eventual return to the
community. Through the Spirit-Paraclete both Jesus and the Father
will come to the community and dwell in it (v. 23). With Jesus'
continued (albeit non-visible) presence by the Spirit the
preeminence of Jesus' past and future authority is maintained.
Believers are expected to continue to keep Jesus' word (vv. 23-24),
and what they are to be taught by the Spirit are the words which
Jesus uttered during his earthly ministry (v. 26). Most important
ly, this "other Paraclete" is sent to them in Jesus' name and is
therefore directly subordinated to the Joh. protagonist (v. 26).
Thus according to the latter half of the First Farewell Discourse
Jesus' superior "EARTHBOUND" revelatory authority is not diminished
in any way by the prospect of his death or of his visible departure
from his followers.
Excursus: A Joh. Endorsement of Christophanies?

The matter of Jesus' return to the community via the Spirit-Paraclete is more complex than we have implied in the brief discussion above. In both Farewell Discourses one finds a sizable number of texts/105/ which suggest to some commentators that the Fourth Gospel endorses visio Christi experiences in the Joh. community analogous to the type of visions which JOHN claims that Abraham and Isaiah enjoyed. David Aune presents a strong argument on behalf of this point of view, claiming that these texts, which speak of the "coming," "manifesting," and " beholding" (i.e., "seeing") of Jesus, refer "primarily to the recurring cultic 'coming' of Jesus in the form of a pneumatic or prophetic visio Christi within the setting of worship 'in the Spirit' as celebrated by the Johannine community./106/ Aune bases his hypothesis partly upon analogous statements about a pre-Parousia cultic coming and appearing of Jesus in judgment in ApJn 2.5 and 16./107/ which are located in a section of this apocalypse that precedes what we have identified as a HEAVENWARD SCHEMA text./108/ But we must look at the gospel's statements themselves more closely before we can determine whether Aune is justified in interpreting them as promising visio Christi experiences for the later Joh. community./109/

Aune interprets 14.3 ("... again I am coming and will take you unto myself, that where I am you also will be") as referring to "a final eschatological return of Jesus for his followers in order that they may ascend to the heavenly realm with him where they will eternally contemplate his protological glory (cf. 12:26; 17:24)."/110/ But as Aune himself notes "this apocalyptic return of Jesus" is found only elsewhere in the gospel in 21.22-23./111/ so that all of the subsequent "coming," "manifesting," and "beholding" texts in the two Farewell Discourses must refer to something which takes place prior to the Parousia coming and yet which is patterned after that experience--i.e. (according to Aune) cultic Christophanies. Aune is so intent on arguing that these other texts cannot possibly refer to the Parousia/112/ or to an invisible, "spiritual" coming of Jesus to the Joh. community that he inexplicably ignores the possibility that many of them might point instead to Jesus' resurrection appearances.

We would like to demonstrate that all of the positive (i.e., excluding 16.10) "beholding" statements in the two discourses are better understood to refer exclusively to Jesus' resurrection appearances, and that all of the "coming" and "manifesting" statements should be thought to point primarily in the same direction, although secondarily some must also refer to the later community's experience of an invisible Jesus via the Spirit. Since a persistent narrative technique in JOHN is that later developments in the plot illuminate earlier ones, we will first direct our attention to
the relevant sayings in the Second Farewell Discourse and peer briefly at what follows, before returning to consider those which are found in the First Farewell Discourse.

In 16.10 Jesus announces that the Paraclete will be sent to the disciples "because . . . you no longer behold me." This verse must not mean that the Paraclete is sent after Jesus is no longer on the earth (as vv. 7 and 10 are sometimes interpreted), for the Paraclete is given to the disciples during one of Jesus' resurrection appearances (20.22)./113/ Therefore, we take 16.10 to mean simply that the Paraclete is necessary for the later community because at that time Jesus is no longer visibly present.

The meaning of the " beholding in a little while" promises in 16.16ff is determined by what immediately follows.

(Note that through the technique of having the disciples question among themselves what Jesus means—vv. 17-19—the narrator once again informs the reader that they are unable to comprehend or accept what Jesus says about his departure.) The grief turned to joy and the pregnant woman in labor who becomes joyful after the birth of her child (vv. 20-22) are strongly suggestive of the disciples' response first to Jesus' apparent departure and death (see 16.22; 20.11, 13, 15) and then to the reality of his resurrection (20.20). The statement that "in that day you will not ask me anything" (16.23a) is implicitly fulfilled in the two resurrection appearances before the disciples in Jn 20 and explicitly points to a comment made by the narrator in 21.12 (but see 21.21). Admittedly, the twin matters of the disciples being able to ask the Father in Jesus' name and of Jesus speaking openly of the Father (vv. 23b-26; note: v. 29 is not a true fulfillment of v. 25 /114/) are not taken up again before the conclusion of the gospel, but the identified correspondences seem sufficient to support the hypothesis that the " beholding in a little while" promises in the Second Farewell Discourse refer primarily to Jesus' resurrection appearances and not to some later Christophany.

With this reading of Jn 16 it is not difficult to show how the "coming," " beholding," and "manifesting" statements in the First Farewell Discourse can be interpreted in a similar non-Christophanic fashion. Jn 14.19 is almost identical to the 16.16-19 statements. The matter of the disciples knowing that Jesus is in the Father and vice versa (14.20) is reminiscent of Thomas' confession (20.28). Jesus' promise to manifest himself only to his followers (14.21-22) has both conceptual and verbal parallels in 20.20 and 21.1 (2x), 14, and it is implied in 20.26-27. Immediately following this promise comes the statement about the Father and Son coming and making a dwelling with the believer (14.23). To the extent that this text is fulfilled in the later Joh. community it must refer to a "spiritualized" coming, for the Father is never to be seen by any human being—and especially upon the earth./115/ Nevertheless, it is not unlikely that the
"coming" of Father and Son via the Spirit-Paraclete commences with the bestowal of the Spirit upon the disciples in 20.22. Last but by no means least, confirmation for our interpretation is found in the numerous references to "beholding" (20.14, 18, 20, 25, 27, 29) and "coming" (20.19, 24, 26; 21.13) in the resurrection appearance stories. Thus the Fourth Gospel opposes Christian visions and temporary ascents to heaven of all kinds./116/ Jesus' "coming" to believers is an invisible coming; nevertheless he continues to exercise quintessential authority over the affairs of the Joh. community.

Before concluding this section we ought to note that our claim that in the Farewell Discourses the author is seeking to defend his assertion of the revelatory singularity and superiority of the earthly Jesus as over against HEAVENWARD revelatory ideas dovetails nicely with D. Bruce Woll's interpretation of the First Discourse. Woll argues that this discourse like "so much of the Gospel is cast in a form which underscores the separation of Jesus from the disciples," the purpose of which is to counter the erosion of Jesus' authority within the Joh. community brought about by charismatic revelatory figures who claim to control the revelatory and salvific channels to the heavenly world because they have "direct access to the Spirit" and "präsentia Christi" experiences. According to Woll the author accomplishes his polemical task by denying to all but Jesus immediate access to heaven (13.31-14.11) and by demonstrating that even during the period of Jesus' visible absence from the Joh. community that community is directly dependent upon the return of Jesus through the Spirit-Paraclete for access to heavenly knowledge. Even believers' hope for an ultimate ascent to heaven is contingent upon the prior departure and subsequent return of Jesus./117/
Both in general terms as well as in many particulars Woll's arguments are quite persuasive. His only major weakness is his failure to recognize that the death of Jesus functions as a major component in the gospel's rhetorical strategy. The inability of the disciples to "confess" Jesus' ascent when they testify to his descent at the end of Jesus' lengthy instruction on these matters and just after Jesus has referred to both vectors (16.28-30) is difficult to explain, but it may be the author's way of dealing with the fact that death has rendered Jesus' ascent and revelatory claims problematic for some in the gospel's audience. Only after Jesus' resurrection will the disciples in the gospel story as well as first time readers truly grasp that Jesus' death does not undermine but rather accentuates his authority. Moreover, the Joh. strategy to use the death of Jesus to stifle ascent aspirations is becoming increasingly clear. If, as JOHN maintains, the life of the believing community is patterned after Jesus' life, then just as Jesus ascends to heaven only after death, so his followers can hope to ascend only after their respective deaths (whether immediately [5.24-29?]) or at the Eschaton [14.3?]) is difficult to determine). That death ineluctably precedes all heavenly ascent and yet does not vitiate the revelatory superiority of Jesus is a major theme of the last two major sections of the Fourth Gospel.
G. THE CONFIRMED DEATH OF THE QUINTESSENTIAL HEAVENLY REVEALER

Jn 18-19 constitutes the climax of the gospel story and is not, as Kaeasemann suggests, "a mere postscript which had to be included because John could not ignore this tradition nor yet could he fit it organically into his work."/120/ We have attempted to demonstrate that as early as Jn 2 the author begins to inform his readers of the demise of his otherworldly protagonist, and beginning with Jn 12 when the nature of Jesus' lifting up is revealed the author seeks to prove that death does not undermine Jesus' singular and superior authority in matters of revelation and salvation. In doing this the author departs temporarily from normative EARTHBOUND expectations about the immediate cosmological ascent of the heavenly intermediary and endeavors to convince his readers that this death of this messenger functions as an integral part of his revelatory commission.

Kaeasemann and Nicholson correctly perceive that the Jesus of this passion story is "in absolute control of his own fate" and that his death must "be understood within the context of the movement of Jesus back to the Father."/121/ But whereas these observations lead Nicholson to aver that the failure of the disciples to confess Jesus' ascent prior to his arrest and execution (16.30) is due to their lack of belief that Jesus will ascend, we believe that they hold reservations about Jesus' ascent because of their disappointment and confusion over the fact that their heavenly leader will return to heaven without them. Having finally
been brought to the position where they can confess that Jesus is an otherworldly revelatory figure sent to them from God in heaven, and realizing that he is about to return, they cannot understand why he is not willing to take them back with him to the celestial world. As if this is not bewildering enough to their HEAVENWARD way of thinking, Jesus confuses them even more by hinting that his departure will involve his and ultimately their own suffering and death./122/ When Jesus' passion actually takes place, the disciples' short-lived faith in his otherworldly identity and authority seems to be shattered, so that until his resurrection appearances they (except for the Beloved Disciple) themselves are absent from the center stage of the drama.

JOHN's depiction of Jesus as being "in absolute control of his own fate" up to and including his crucifixion is intended to counter this loss of confidence which is illustrated by Peter and most of the other disciples. In order to undergird the gospel's claim that the earthly Jesus must be seen as the quintessential revealer and savior from heaven despite his undeniable death the author utilizes a number of rhetorical techniques which are already familiar to the reader. Soldiers and other authorities who seek to arrest "Jesus of Nazareth" find themselves cowering in terror before one who identifies himself as (the divine) "I am" (18.5-8). Jesus' prediction that none of his true followers would be harmed is expressly fulfilled (18.8-9)./123/ Jesus' allows himself to be arrested because he must drink the cup which the Father has given to him (18.11). Both before the Jewish authorities as well as
before Pilate Jesus seems to be as much in control as those who interrogate him. The narrator underlines the fact that Jesus has already correctly predicted how he would die (18.32). Jesus asserts that his is a heavenly kingdom and the reader cannot overlook the irony that against the will of the "Jews" Pilate identifies the crucified Jesus as their sovereign (18.36, 39; 19.14, 19-22). Pilate’s presumption of unchecked power is challenged by Jesus, who announces that Pilate’s authority is from above (19.11: ἐκ οὐρανοῦ)—whence the reader knows that Jesus comes (3.31). The reader finds considerable irony in Jesus’ opponents’ charge that “he makes himself to be a son of God” (19.7). Events surrounding the execution fulfill Scripture (19.24, 28, 36, 37).

Finally comes Jesus’ death. The reader is of course aware (from 19.14) that Jesus expires at about the time when the Passover lambs are being slain, which authenticates the gospel’s claim that the otherworldly Jesus’ mission involves in significant measure service as the “Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (1.29). Twice the reader encounters the expression "it is finished" (19.28, 30: Καλότετα), which not only informs her/him that Jesus has successfully completed his revelatory mission, but also reminds the reader that this death is the ultimate expression of Jesus’ and God’s love for true believers (3.16 and 13.2). Suddenly there appears one of the greatest Johannine ironies of all: the otherworldly, solitary bearer of the inexhaustible “water” of eternal life—i.e., the Spirit (4.14; 7.37-39)—becomes thirsty and then voluntarily surrenders that Spirit in death.
Whatever the full significance of the departing of the Spirit from Jesus hanging upon the cross, it does clearly establish that the heavenly revealer truly dies. The narrator takes pains to prove this point further by stating that the soldiers "see" that Jesus is dead (19.33), by indicating that he is buried in a tomb (19.38-42), and by highlighting the fact that when Jesus' side is pierced both water (Spirit?) and blood flow out (19.34-37).

Because of the narrator's patent emphasis upon this last incident, we must regard the death of Jesus as well as the peculiar way in which he dies as constituting a confessional claim no less significant than the subsequent one that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (20.31).

Rather than deny the "contradictory" demise of its exalted protagonist, JOHN makes this apparent tragedy the focal point of Jesus' mission, and attaches to this event profound revelatory and soteriological meaning. For the author the death of Jesus is no accident or proof of failure, but is rather the God-ordained fate to which the confident revealer himself has willingly consented.

No less significant is the impact which this death has upon mortal aspirations of ascent with Jesus into heaven. Clearly Jesus is not able to serve as a hierophant for the disciples: first, because all of them but one are not present when this aborted ascent takes place, but second--and more importantly--because Jesus does not ascend. He expires, is bound for burial, and then is laid in a marked tomb. Any remaining hope which the disciples might have harbored that their Lord would suddenly ascend and take them
way with him into the Father’s heavenly kingdom is buried in that
tomb with Jesus. The impact which Jesus’ death should have upon
later HEAVENWARD-oriented believers in the Joh. community is no
less dramatic. If Jesus’ earthly life in obedience to the Father
ends in death, then how can anyone who truly identifies him/herself
as a follower of this man expect to avoid what he had to face?
Through his dramatic portrayal of the authentic death of his
protagonist the author of JOHN utters a resounding “No!” to those
in his Christian community who seek to ascend into heaven prior to
the end of their own mortal lives.

In establishing the unrivaled authority of Jesus over the
community which acknowledges him as their founder the author of
JOHN emphasizes the fact of Jesus’ preexistence, divine titles, and
descent from God in heaven to the earth; but to prevent his readers
from speculating about the heavenly world he does not narrate Je-
sus’ life in heaven or his cosmological journey to the terrestrial
world. In like manner, with this graphic lifting up unto death
rather than into heaven the author keeps the focus of his readers
“EARTHBOUND.” There is no opportunity for them to look, must less
hope to ascend “HEAVENWARD.” Of course, despite the revelation of
Jesus’ soteriological triumph at the cross the specter of death
continues to call into question the author’s assertion of the
fundamental heavenly and preeminent status of Jesus. As magnifi-
cent as he is, is he no greater an authority figure than Abraham or
the prophets, who all died (8.53)? For this reason the gospel
cannot end with the death and burial of Jesus.
H. JESUS TO ASCEND, BUT WITHOUT THE DISCIPLES

John's final defense of its earthbound-grounded claim that the earthly Jesus is the quintessential revealer and leader of the Joh. community at the time when the Fourth Gospel is composed is predicated upon four resurrection appearance stories. These stories undergird the Joh. argument about the ongoing unrivaled authority of Jesus in two ways. First, by demonstrating that Jesus has the power and authority to transform even his own death into life, these stories validate all of John's audacious claims about the protagonist and his earthly mission. And second, by showing that the disciples are expected to follow Jesus' pattern of divinely-commissioned service followed by death before they can hope to ascend upwards, Jn 20-21 effectively denies the possibility of prophetic mortal ascents to heaven for revelatory purposes.

The validation of the Fourth Gospel's depiction of Jesus dominates Jn 20.1-21.14. Even before the first resurrection appearance the gospel subtly suggests to the reader that Jesus is not permanently subject to death. Mary (v. 1), the Beloved Disciple (vv. 5, 8), and Simon Peter (v. 6) all have non-ecstatic "visions" which enable them to determine that Jesus' dead body is absent from its place of burial (the seemingly ironic repetition of these "seeing" verbs in light of the gospel's rejection of ecstatic experiences cannot be accidental). Here we come upon the first stage in a reconstituted faith in the heavenly identity and authority of the Joh. protagonist: belief that the tomb which bore his
body is empty./128/

The motif of seeing continues to play a significant role in the first appearance story (vv. 11-18). Mary sees and hears Jesus, but does not comprehend who he is until he calls her by name. Her immediate recognition of Jesus confirms the gospel’s earlier claims about his unique shepherding authority over believers (10.3-5, 8, 16), and by calling him "Rabboni" she implicitly identifies the man with whom she is now speaking as the erstwhile Joh. protagonist (cf. 1.28, 49; 3.2; etc.). Then follows a command uttered by Jesus which gives commentators considerable difficulty. Our translation of 20.17 understands Jesus to be telling Mary that she must let go of him because she herself is commissioned to carry out a revelatory mission:

[Jesus:] Do not grasp me. Since I have not yet ascended to the Father, then go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."/129/

This verse communicates three things. First, death has not canceled Jesus’ plan to ascend back to God in heaven. Second, Jesus has not already gone to heaven and come back; he is the same person—never having departed from terra firma—that Mary has always known. Third, by inference Jesus will return to heaven alone; he does not indicate that anyone will accompany him back to heaven. With this profound message Mary leaves to announce to the disciples that she "has seen the Lord" (v. 18). She now functions as a human messenger who bears the words of the earthly, albeit resurrected, otherworldly Jesus—surely a prototype of the true
follower of Jesus (cf. v. 25).

This much of 20.17 seems quite clear. What is not so easy to grasp is whether the reader is to understand that Jesus ascends prior to the next three appearance stories,/130/ or whether he ascends at some indefinite period after Jn 21 is completed. Our preference is for the latter interpretation, but we candidly admit that the former perspective cannot be easily dismissed. In fact, because of the temporal ambiguity surrounding Jesus' ascent it might be possible to argue that the three appearances of Jesus before the disciples in 20.19ff constitute Christophanies of the kind which Aune argues that the gospel itself endorses. But even if one accepts this interpretation, our basic hypothesis is not threatened: from JOHN's viewpoint revelation comes to mortals only through the EARTHBOUND mediatory work of the otherworldly being who is identified by "body" and name as the earthly Jesus. Moreover, the resurrected Jesus actually reveals little that is not already anticipated in Jn 1-19; so that if these resurrection appearances are meant to be a pattern for future Christophanies, what they show is that what Jesus announces prior to his death serves as the criterion by which all subsequent revelatory discourse is appraised. Thus the Fourth Gospel itself remains the principal source of heavenly knowledge for the Joh. community.

Jn 20.19-23 and 24-29 simply provide additional support for the gospel's claim that the imposing and authoritative figure who appears to the disciples after the crucifixion scene is in fact the Jesus of Jn 1-19./131/ And Thomas' ejaculatory "My Lord and my
God" (v. 28) seals the argument. The man standing before Thomas who bears the tell-tale marks of crucifixion is Jesus of Nazareth; but if this is so then indeed he is much more than a mere mortal: he is every bit the supremely authoritative figure whom the gospel claims him to be. Having driven his lesson home the author has Jesus implicitly affirm those (the readers) whose belief in the Joh. Jesus is necessarily based upon the testimony of eyewitness accounts (v. 29), and of course at the core of this faith is the confession that the earthly Jesus is not simply a Christ figure, but the unique and preeminent Son of God (v. 31)./132/

As promised in his private discourse with and prayer for the disciples Jesus gives to them the Holy Spirit and formally commissions them to continue his soteriological and forensic revelatory mission upon the earth (vv. 21-23). It is his Spirit which he breathes upon them, it is his commission which he gives to them. What this implies is that it is Jesus' will that they not ascend with him at this time. They must remain and continue to draw into Jesus' "sheepfold" those who will believe in him through the disciples' word (17.20). Jesus' earthly mission has ended, while theirs has just begun.

And just as Jesus' ministry comes to an end in death prior to his ascent back to heaven, so the last meeting between Jesus and the disciples along the Sea of Tiberias makes quite clear that following Jesus means following him first into service (21.15-17) and then into death (vv. 18-23). The reader cannot help but notice the parallel between Jesus' repeated command to Peter, "follow me"
(v. 19, 22), and the incident narrated in 13.36-38. Now with the metaphorical reference to Peter's execution in 21.18-19 it is clear that when Jesus before his death says to Peter, "you will follow me later," he means primarily that the disciple's fate will be parallel to his teacher's./133/ Peter's rash claim that he is willing to die for Jesus (14.37) becomes all the more ironic. Even the Beloved Disciple does not appear to escape Peter's and every Christian's fate, although whether 21.23 implies that the Beloved Disciple is dead by the time when the gospel is written can be debated./134/ By ending his gospel with this poignant conversation between Jesus and Peter, the author of JOHN, who from the opening lines has sought to establish the revelatory singularity and superiority of the otherworldly-earthly Jesus, places what he hopes to be an unmovable stone before the entrance of the tomb where he has laid to rest the heavenly vision and ascension hopes of some of his fellow Christians.
CONCLUSION

Through the course of this study we have sought to demonstrate that one of the primary concerns of the Fourth Gospel is to deal with critical questions about the revelatory prerogative of its central character, and that it does so in a way which accentuates and solidifies his preeminent authority over the believing community in which the gospel was composed. We are now able to see that JOHN's rather unique and striking portrayal of the earthly Jesus as a supremely authoritative, otherworldly, descending-ascending revealer-redeemer reflects the author's desire to suppress a view of revelation in which visio Dei and heavenly ascent experiences play a central role.

The gospel's deconstructive objective is achieved first by asserting that divine knowledge is acquired only through the descent of God's preexistent and unrivaled envoy, who suddenly appears on the earth in the form of a mortal by the name of Jesus. In effect "descent" is elevated to a conceptual position that is indisputably superior to "ascent."

JOHN's second strategy is to deconstruct somewhat even its own revelatory paradigm. By an explicit reading of the gospel the expected cosmological ascent of the divine envoy does not take place. It is postponed indefinitely, so that the reader is never able to identify a precise time in which or manner by which the expected event occurs. The reader's attention is drawn instead to another type of ascent, and here in the lifting up of the Joh.
protagonist upon the cross one of the most profound messages of the Fourth Gospel is to be found. For in the ascent of the founder and leader of the Joh. community upon the cross the anticipated ascent and visio Dei experiences of ecstatic Christians are effectively aborted. The Joh. imitatio pattern, which is based upon the Joh. Jesus, applies to all believers without exception: service for the Deity upon the earth does not end (or is not temporarily interrupted) by a cosmological journey into the celestial world. It inevitably ends in death. Whether ascent follows death is left indeterminate.

This means that the Joh. community is utterly dependent upon the gospel’s protagonist for salvific knowledge from God. His earthly teachings and works as preserved by the gospel and his further communication through the illumination of Spirit-Paraclete are from JOHN’s point of view the revelatory riches which the community has to treasure. Revelatory knowledge mediated through alternative figures, particularly through those who claim to have acquired their celestial secrets through direct contact with the Deity in the heavenly world, is expressly rejected.

The written medium which the author of the Fourth Gospel employs in order to state his case simultaneously serves as a powerful persuasive tool and as a perilous rhetorical ploy. By presenting Jesus’ mission upon the earth in narrative form rather than in, say, theological propositions (as in the epistolary genre), the reader is inclined to identify more easily with the Joh. Jesus and therefore with the author’s point of view. The
history-likeness of the gospel narrative and the placement of all
of the gospel's critical theological ideas in the mouth of the
revered John, protagonist create an aura of reality and veracity
which make the author's deconstructive claims more palatable.

On the other hand, there is peril for the author of JOHN in
the fact that narrative interpretation is generally much more fluid
than the interpretation of straightforward propositional texts.
Multiform readings of written narratives are inevitable, and
certainly the rich and varied history of the interpretation of the
Fourth Gospel bears this out. To make matters worse (or perhaps
"better," depending upon whether one feels a need for closure!),
JOHN employs a complex strategy of metaphors, double entendres,
ironies, symbols, feedbacks, and other dislocating features which
force the reader to struggle through the entire narrative and then
to do so again and again in order to obtain a grasp of both the
whole and its parts.

For this reason it is not surprising that commentaries
began to be written within a generation or so after the gospel came
into being and that these commentaries reflect radically different
interpretations of the same text. The First Epistle of John tends
to correspond more to our own understanding of the Fourth Gospel,
while the writings of Gnostic Christians--e.g., Heracleon's com-
mentary and the Apocryphon of James--present much different readings.
In each instance the revelatory preeminence of the divine Logos who
appears as Jesus Christ is upheld, as is also the singular signifi-
cance of his involvement with the cross. Of course, the manner in
which the Joh. protagonist identifies with human nature and human need, as well as the meaning of the cross both for Jesus and his followers, are matters upon which the "ecclesiastical" and Gnostic interpretations vary considerably. Moreover, the early commentaries on JOHN disagree sharply on the degree to which the Fourth Gospel opposes ecstatic visionary experiences. What we have read as a thorough criticism of ascent and visionary hopes cherished by believers, the Apocryphon of James apparently sees as some kind of endorsement. And if the Apocalypse of John belongs within the Joh. literary circle and is a later production than JOHN, then our point about the possibility of many different readings of the gospel narrative is even more strongly established.

For this reason we present our interpretation of the Fourth Gospel with a certain degree of tentativeness. We are confident that our reading of the gospel is an historically viable reading of this complex narrative. Furthermore, we are convinced that no attempt at a comprehensive interpretation of JOHN can fail to take cognizance of the matters which we have discussed in the preceding pages. Nevertheless, we recognize that no reading of JOHN captures its meaning in entirety and that therefore one must return again and again to the text in order for the Logos of God to be heard afresh and anew. This project then does not bring us to the end of our quest for the Joh. Jesus, but rather it constitutes yet another step in an intellectual--and ultimately religious--journey.
ENOTE TO THE INTRODUCTION

(Full citations are given alphabetically in the Bibliography)


4. Eusebius Pamphili: Bk. 6, ch. 14 (p. 27).

5. Where text critical judgments are necessary we will make them, but fortunately these decisions will have a minimal effect upon our reading of JOHN.

6. By "author" we mean what narrative and reader response critics refer to as the "implied author" and not the actual person(s) who penned the gospel text. Culpepper (1983: 7-8, 16, 43) points out (and Staley [1988: 37-41] demurs only slightly) that in JOHN the implied author and the narrator are virtually the same. We are in essential agreement with this position, but nevertheless we will use the term "narrator" to refer to the implied author's explicit "voice" in the text (e.g., Jn 20.30-31), while "author" will refer to the "singular consciousness which the reader constructs from the words of a text: a consciousness which knows the story backward and forward . . . developed from multiple readings" (Staley 1988: 29).

Although we do not know the identity of JOHN's actual author(s), there is no good reason to object to the conventional assumption that one person was primarily responsible for the extant narrative and that this person was male. Thus we employ masculine singular pronouns to refer both to this person and to the "implied author" which he through the text has created.

7. Obviously by the expression "reader" we do not mean the same thing as that which reader response and narrative critics often designate as the "implied reader" (who according to Staley [1988: 33-35] "only has knowledge of what has been read up to the given moment"). Our "reader" is one who is always less informed than the "author" (who along with the Joh. protagonist enjoys an omniscient viewpoint on the drama), but who nevertheless has some understanding of the entire plot prior to any specific reading of the text. This reader uses her/his understanding to reinterpret the text upon each new reading, and yet during the reading process (s)he is willing to allow the author to guide her/him along in a progressive unveiling (and occasional concealing) of the meaning of the entire narrative.
8. We recognize that the first generation’s exposure to JOHN was probably as much aural as visual, since in antiquity an author typically composed a text by speaking aloud to him/herself or to an amanuensis, and since receivers of such a text usually read it aloud or had it read to them (Aune 1986: 77-78). Thus when we speak of the "reader" we must not forget the oral/aural dimension of textual appropriation. On the other hand, we must admit that we cannot hope to reduplicate the ancient oral/aural reading of JOHN, since each performance would have been "original" and to some degree different from the others.

ENDNOTES TO CHAPTER ONE


5. Kae semann (1966) 1968: 10. Accordingly, Kae semann holds that JOHN embraces a "naive docetism" which leads directly into "Christian gnosticism" (pp. 26, 75).


7. Even Bultmann (1955: 42), whose questionable existen
tialist hermeneutic causes him to find a largely human Jesus in the extant gospel narrative, admits that "on first thought it might seem . . . [that] many passages of the evangelist represent Jesus as the 'divine man' . . ." (Italics his.)

8. It would therefore appear that Godfrey Nicholson (1983: 21) underestimates the significance of 8:23 when he claims that the dualism inherent in "above" and "below" (8:23) does not appear to be of any importance to the author, for the [des
cent-ascent] schema is not concerned with issues of ontology, but rather speaks about a movement and a relationship that persists throughout that movement. (Italics his.)

This dualism is quite significant to the author precisely because it establishes the basis for Jesus' prerogative to speak the words of God, since in heaven he enjoys communicative intimacy with the Father. Furthermore, Jesus' heavenly origin serves as a necessary presupposition for claims about his cosmological movement.

9. It is not clear that the two ought to be distinguished. To assume that Jesus' primary concern in these verses is to correct the mistaken idea that Moses rather than God provides life-giving sustenance (i.e., that Moses is not the mediator but the ultimate source of the divine gift) is to place too much emphasis upon v. 32 and not enough upon the rest of the section. The thrust of Jesus' argument after v. 32 is on his ability to mediate or provide salvation and not on God's giving of Jesus for that purpose. While the faceless crowd may think of Moses as the giver of the Law--note that Jesus does not contradict this belief (7.19)--and the one in whom they place their hope, unquestionably they understand Moses to be an agent for God and not his replacement.

10. By the narrator (1.1-3, 14).
11. By the narrator (1.1, 18). Concerning the latter verse, the earliest manuscripts read ἄδεια instead of ἀδεία. More difficult to resolve is the question of whether or not ἄδεια is originally anarthrous. See Metzger (1971: 198).

12. By John the Baptist (1.34), by Nathaniel (1.49), by Martha (10.36), by the narrator (20.31), and by Jesus himself (3.18; 5.25; 10.36; 11.4). The chief priests and rulers of the Jews inform Pilate that Jesus "ought to die because made himself a son of God" (19.7); although the expression is anarthrous, the fact that it is considered blasphemous indicates that it is taken to be a reference to some kind of divine status.

13. By Jesus and or the narrator (3.17, 35, 36 [2x]; 5.19, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23 [2x], 26; 6.40; 8.35, 36; 14.13, 17.1 [2x]).

14. By the narrator (1.14).

15. In 5.17 and at least twenty more times. To be sure the disciples can claim God as their Father also, but as 20.17 indicates (Jesus: "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God") there is a clear distinction between Jesus' Sonship and their status as children of God. When speaking of the disciples' relationship to the Deity Jesus never speaks of "our Father."

16. Understood by the opponents of Jesus and not refuted by Jesus or the narrator (5.18), and spoken by Jesus to his opponents (10.30-39).

17. Jesus never explicitly identifies himself as the Son of Man, but the reader can hardly infer otherwise (1.51; 3.13, 14; 5.27; 6.27, 53, 62; 8.28; 9.35; 12.23, 34 [2x]; 13.31).

18. Without an explicit predicate: 4.26; 6.20; 8.24, 28, 58, 13.19; 18.5, 6, 8; with some form of predication: 6.35, 41, 48, 51; 8.12, 18; 10.7, 9, 11; 11.25; 14.6; 15.1, 5.

19. See esp. Philip Harner's monograph (1970) for a detailed argument that the Joh. "I am" sayings stem primarily from the "I (am) He" expression for Yahweh in Second Isaiah and are intended to convey the unity of Jesus with his Father while at the same time acknowledging the Son's subordination and obedience (e.g., Jn 8.28-29). Harner points out "that the ani hu [phrase of the MT] is regularly translated in the LXX as ego eimi" (p. 6). While there may be some sort of prophetic basis for the "I am" sayings as well, as Eugene Boring (1982: 128-30) maintains, any first century Jewish or Christian reader would surely make a hermeneutical connection between the "I am" statements of JOHN and the Deity's self-predication in the Hebrew Bible.
20. One other appellation for Jesus must be mentioned. Sim (1 En) 48.10 and 52.4 bear witness to the fact that the "Christ"/"Messiah" title (employed about a dozen and a half times in JOHN) could also connote divinity in antiquity. It is impossible to determine if this is meant to be the case here in JOHN, apart from the obvious point that in its association with other titles in confessional statements (e.g., 20.31) it "becomes" a divine expression.

21. Justin Martyr, the Shepherd, SibOr 8, and the Epistle of the Apostles. Tertullian's strenuous efforts in opposition to an angelic understanding of Jesus provide a further indication of the popularity at least in some quarters of this idea. See Talbert (1976: 430-34).

22. By designating him as Wisdom, the Son of God, and the Son of Man, the Synoptic Gospels and Acts convey the impression that the earthly Jesus enjoys some sort of divine status and even a type of preexistence. In speaking of Christ's humiliation in Phil 2.5-11 Paul is even more explicit about the matter. But not even this ancient Christian hymn specifically mentions the descent of Christ Jesus to the earth.

23. In his study of the Joh. descent-ascent schema Nicholson (1983: 52) argues that these three verbs are used over fifty times to refer to cosmological descent. It will soon become obvious that our list is shorter--by about forty percent. This is due in part to the fact that Nicholson includes texts which speak of the descent of the Spirit and of angels, and also because he admits into his list those examples which involve a double meaning and only in retrospect can be said to speak of cosmological movement. We will mention some of these examples, but only to demonstrate the hermeneutical phenomenon and not to suggest that these texts directly convey the impression of Jesus' downward journey through the cosmos. For some inexplicable reason Nicholson omits the ἐξ ἀποστολάς phrase in 6.14, which we judge to be explicit enough to include in our own study.

24. Employing the terminology developed by John Crossan (1983: 37-40), we would say that these seven phrases are characterized by ἰπσίσσηκα structure (a typical feature of oral communication), but not by ἰπσίσσηκα verba (which is indicative of scribal activity).

25. Slot #2 contains:
-either a participial form...καταβολή or καταβήσις
-or the verb..........................καταβήσις

Slot #3 contains:
-five times.............................................ἐκ τοῦ αὐτοῦ
-once....................................................ἐκ γὰρ ἀποστολάς
-once....................................................ἐκ τοῦ αὐτοῦ
26. Slot #1 contains:

- once..."The Bread of God" ........... ἄρτος θεοῦ
- once..."I am the Bread" ........... ἐστιν ὄρας θεοῦ
- once..."I am the Bread of Life" .......... ἐστιν ὁ ζωήν ἄρτος
- twice..."This is the Bread" .......... ἐστιν ἄρτος ζωῆς
- twice...Implied "I" with the verb .......... ἐστιν ἄρτος

27. Meeks 1972: 48. (Italics his.) According to the modern Anglo-American tradition of scholarship on oral communication in the ancient world, formulaic (i.e., non-verbatim) repetition of brief ideas plays a vital role not only in the oral life-world but is also carried over into texts which are created where primary oral communication remains a dominant feature of the intellectual landscape. See Ong (1982: 39-41) and Kelber (1983: 44, 66-68).

28. It is impossible to determine exactly where the dialogue ends and Jesus' (or the narrator's) monologue begins. Suffice it to say that there is no further reference to Nicodemus after v. 12.


31. See also Rom. 5.12; 1 Jn. 4.1; and 2 Jn. 7.

32. Twenty-eight occurrences in all: ἀναστειλ. -> 14 times; τείματος -> 24 times. Others sent in the same manner are the Spirit-Paraclete and John (the baptizer who witnesses to Jesus in ch. 1).

33. With three different prepositions: ἐκ in 8.42 and 16.28; ἐν in 13.3 and 16.30; and ἐπί in 16.27 and 17.8.

34. Jesus prays in 17.8: "because the words which you gave to me I gave to them; and they received [them] and understood truly that I came out from you, and they believed that you sent me."

36. As is well known the only "John" in the Fourth Gospel is the baptizing witness to Jesus who in the Synoptics is commonly designated as "John the Baptist." Since this figure's principal role in the Fourth Gospel is to bear witness to Jesus rather than to baptize or preach apocalyptically, it would be more fitting to give him the appellation "John the Witness" instead of "John the Baptist/ baptizer." But it is even more felicitous simply to call him by his only Joh. name "John," and to differentiate him from the gospel by identifying the latter as "JOHN."

37. Since Jesus is said to have a natural family consisting of a mother, a father, and several siblings (1.45; 6.42; 7.3, 41; 19.25).
38. The angel’s departure may or may not be stated. But even in the former case his ascent must be assumed by the reader. In Chapter Three we will discuss this surprising feature of biblical as well as extra-biblical angelic narratives in some detail.

39. Our tally is twenty-four verbs expressing Jesus’ descent to sixteen mentioning his ascent. But this accounting omits all “I am going away,” “I am leaving you,” and “lifting up” passages--of which there is a large number in JOHN--which do not specifically identify heaven, God, or something similar as the terminus of the expected movement.


41. Mt, Mk, and Lk: each nine times. Concerning Jesus’ heavenly ascent after his resurrection appearances Mt has nothing to say. The longer ending of Mk and Lk–Acts expresses this event as follows:

Mk 16.19: ανεβασεν εἰς τὸν ἀνέβων
Lk 24.51: ἀνεβασεν εἰς τὸν ἀνέβων *
Ac 1.2: ἀνεβασεν
Ac 1.9: ἐν οὗτω
Ac 1.9: ἐν οὗτω ὑπέστησεν αὐτὸν ἀπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀνέβων
Ac 1.10: εἰς τὸν ἀνέβων παραχωσάμενος αὐτὸν
Ac 1.11: ἂν αὐτοῦ ὑπέστησεις εἰς τὸν ἀνέβων
Ac 1.11: παραχωσάμενος εἰς τὸν ἀνέβων
Ac 2.33: ἐν οὗτῳ ὑπέστησες εἰς τὸν ἀνέβων
Ac 2.34: εἰς τοὺς ἀνέβων (implied)

(* Note that the ABS committee admits that this reading has a mere "D" probability--see Metzger [1971: 189-90].)

It should be noted that the vast majority of the expressions for Jesus’ ascent have a passive connotation, i.e., Jesus is taken or born up into heaven rather than going up himself.

42. See above pp. 13-14.

43. Jan Buehner (1977: 374-99) forcefully argues that in 3.13 ascent precedes descent, claiming that this text preserves an older tradition in which the human Jesus is said to have ascended to heaven, been transformed into the Son of Man, and then descended back to the earth (analogous to Enoch in Sim [1 En] 70-71). This interpretation is of the text’s tradition history merits consideration, but it is not helpful in determining how the author of JOHN intends for it to be understood within its present literary context, for in JOHN Jesus is unquestionably a descent-ascent and not an ascent-descent figure.

45. Sidebottom 1961: 120.

46. We do not translate ἀπελθεῖν at this time, since its precise function in this statement is subject to scholarly disputation, and since it holds the key to the problematic relationship between "don't hold me" and Jesus' imminent ascent.

47. A complete list of the verbs which are used to refer to Jesus' cosmological ascent is below. The numbers in parentheses indicate how many times the word appears in JOHN, while the verse numbers to the right show where the verb is used explicitly or implicitly in a cosmological sense.

1. ἀναβαίνω (16) 1.51; 3.13; 6.62; 20.17, 17
2. οὐράνιον (12) 16.7
3. οὐράνιος (14) 14.18; 16.28
4. οὐρανοῦ (150) 17.11, 13
5. ἐνθάδε (3) 13.1
6. ἐνθαδεύω (14) 7.35; 14.2, 3, 12, 28; 16.7, 28
7. ἑλπιστεύω (32) 7.33; 8.14, 14, 21, 21, 22; 13.3, 33, 36, 36; 14.4, 5, 28; 16.5, 5, 10, 17
8. ὄνομα (5) 3.14; 8.28; 12.32, 34

This list differs from Nicholson's (1983: 58) in the following way: (1) he inexplicably omits ἀναβαίνω; (2) he also omits ἑλπιστεύω from his list, but he clearly identifies it is an ascent term in the following chapter; and, (3) he occasionally lists a text which more properly refers to the non-ascent of Jesus' followers (e.g., 7.34, 36).

48. Nicholson (1983: 75) avers that "the Fourth Evangelist uses ὄνομα, predominantly but not exclusively, to speak of the exaltation of Jesus rather than his execution. (Italics his.)

49. We have already noted the proximity of revelation to ascent in 1.51, 3.13, and 6.62-63. The Son of Man saying of 8.28 correlates the lifting up of Jesus with the recognition of who Jesus is ("then you will know that I am") and under whose authority he speaks ("and that of myself I do nothing, but just as the Father has taught me these things I speak"). Jesus' ascent also serves as a primary condition for the Spirit-Paraclete to be sent to the disciples. In being subordinate to the Father and the Son, this "other helper" reveals to the ongoing community only what they tell him to speak (16.7, 14-15).

50. Werner Kelber (Birth: 8) points out that together, the two Farewell Discourses and the High Priestly Prayer comprise
approximately one-fifth of the gospel. If we discount chapter 21 as a later redactional addition, three-fourths of chapters 1-20 consist of sayings, dialogues, and monologues. And if one disregards the narratologically more densely composed passion-resurrection story, approximately four-fifths of the preceding chapters 1-17 appear to consist of sayings (Sneller).

51. The deliberate and repetitive way in which John defers to Jesus' authority both in 1.8, 15, 19-34, 5.31-36, and here in ch. 3 just prior to the passage under consideration (vv. 22-30) strongly suggests that a criticism of some kind of belief in the revelatory priority of John is in view in JOHN, and that the "one who is from the earth" in 3.31 is that same John.

52. Whether or not the bracketed phrase belongs to the original text is impossible to determine with certainty, for even the oldest and most reliable witnesses do not agree. See Metzger (1971: 205).

53. See above, n. 11.

54. See Meeks (1967). Meeks finds a belief in Moses' heavenly ascent in the following authors and texts: Philo (pp. 110-111, 117, 122-25); Josephus (p. 141); EzkTrag, Jub, 4 Ezra, Ps-Philo, & 2 Bar (pp. 147-49, 156-59); Rabbinic haggada (205-209); and, Samaritan texts (pp. 232-36, 241-44). See also pp. 295-96.

55. Ex 24.10-11 claims that while on the holy mountain the leaders of Israel beheld the Lord along with Moses, and there were even some first century Jews who believed that God had descended to the earth at this propitious revelatory moment and revealed his form to all the people. See Dahl (1962: 133). If these texts allude to these beliefs, then there is no human ascent in view, but rather a heavenly vision.


57. We must wait until Chapter Four to determine that to which "my day" actually refers. Suffice it to say that it must have something directly to do with Jesus.

58. סֵבָא הָעִיִּיתֹּים יֶהוּנֶּתַּלָּא.

59. That Moses saw the Logos rather than the Deity, see Philo: Ques Ex 67-68.

60. See above, pp. 21, 36-38.

61. One is reminded of the conclusion of ApocJas in the Nag Hammadi corpus, in which Peter and James temporarily ascend with Jesus as he returns to heaven.

2. See p. 270, n. 41.

3. See for example the popular layperson's commentary on JOHN by Barclay (1956: xxv-xxvi).

4. Eusebius Pamphili: Bk. 6, ch. 14 (pp. 48-49).


6. Completely without substantiation is the notion that JOHN reflects one rhetorical style employed by the historical Jesus while the Synoptics reflect another. This hypothesis seems to be what lies behind Leon Morris' (1973: 532) assertion "that the Synoptists reflect the public teaching of Jesus; whereas JOHN reflects Jesus' informal teaching of his disciples and his disputes with his enemies." By this interpretation the Joh. Jesus never teaches in public, and the Synoptic Jesus never instructs his disciples informally or argues with his adversaries. To the contrary, all three modes of communication characterize both JOHN and the Synoptics, but the rhetorical style employed by Jesus in each gospel tradition is consistent within itself and different from the other.

7. The best and most thorough summation of the religionsgeschichtlichen studies (especially in Germany) that purport to elucidate the cosmological dimensions of the Fourth Gospel is by Jan Buehner (1977: 8-115).


10. Morris 1971: 60-61, 371-73. Morris categorically rejects the hypothesis that JOHN polemicizes against Gnosticism, although he allows that "one of John's aims was to combat false teaching of a docetic type" (p. 36).


18. Schnackenburg (1965) 1987: 481, 486, 505-506. Citing Phil 2.6; Col 1.15; and Heb 1.3 as proof-texts, Schnackenburg argues that the personal preexistence of the Logos is a pre-Joh. Christian idea (p. 232). But the Logos term does not appear in any of these verses or even in their immediate contexts.

19. Schnackenburg (1965) 1987: 278). The rigid distinction between "official Judaism" and its sectarian fringes seems almost anachronistic in light of the modern consensus (generated by the efforts of Erwin Goodenough, Gershon Scholem, Jacob Neusner, Wayne Meeks, and a host of others) that every part of early Judaism is notably diverse in theology and practice.


21. Writes G.B. Caird, one of Cadman's former students and who is responsible for weaving the disparate pieces into a somewhat intelligible whole (Cadman [1969: viii; see also pp. 9 & 15-17]):

Against all the current trends of New Testament scholarship Cadman maintained that, whatever might be learnt about the words and symbols of the Gospel from their history in Jewish or pagan thought, their meaning in the Gospel was what St. John intended them to mean, and that what he intended them to mean could be discerned only by reading and rereading the Gospel.


24. Cadman 1969: 62-5. In Chapter Four we will attempt to show how each one of these observations is justified in light of the unfolding plot of the narrative.

25. In his review of recent Joh. scholarship Robert Kysar (1975: 192-95) argues that Cadman's work is "pre-Bultmannian" and perhaps more "a meditation for faith . . . than a scholarly study." This judgment is too harsh, being prejudiced by Kysar's bias towards an historical-critical approach to JOHN. Those who
advocate a narratological or reader-response hermeneutic might be inclined to designate Cadman's effort as "post-Bultmannian" instead.

26. Dodd 1953: 258. Jesus' descent and ascent make possible human ascent "to the sphere of ἀνάστασις"—by which Dodd means "rebirth" (pp. 305, 307).

27. Dodd 1953: 133.

28. Dodd 1953: 53, 73, 133. Dodd states that their relationship is contemporaneous "without any substantial borrowing on the one part or the other."


31. Dodd 1953: 284. (Italics his.)

32. Dodd 1953: 16-17, 62.

33. Dodd 1953: 167, 194, 197-99, 201; see also 73 & 305.

34. Dodd 1953: 8-9.


39. Sidebottom 1961: 119-20, 123. Sidebottom believes that the correct interpretation of 5.13 involves seeing it as the author's triumphant answer to Wisdom's question, Who has ascended into heaven and come down? (Prov 30.4)—answer: No one. To justify this interpretation Sidebottom translates the אַל conjunction in 5.13 as "but only" (thus: "No one has ascended into heaven but one has descended"). Although unusual, this suggestion is intriguing and will be mentioned again in Chapter Four.


42. Dodd (1970: 274-75) presents of list of a dozen "obvious and striking similarities between certain of the propositions of the Prologue and passages in the Wisdom literature." Some are more similar than others, but certainly Dodd is justified in arguing "that in composing the Prologue the author's mind was
moving along lines similar to those followed by Jewish writers of the 'Wisdom' school. A summary of his list is reproduced below:

1. "in the beginning was the Logos".................Prov 8.22
2. "the Logos was toward God"..............WisSol 9.4; Prov 8.30
3. "all things came into being through him".WisSol 9.2; 7.22
   Prov 8.30; 3.19
4. "in him was life".................................Prov 8.35
5. "the life was the light of men"...............WisSol 7.26
6. "the light shines in the darkness,
   and the darkness has not dominated it"....WisSol 7.29-30
7. "it/he was in the world".......................WisSol 8.1; Sir 24.6
8. "the world did not known him/it"...............Prov 1.29
9. "he came into his own and
   his own did not receive him"...............Sim (1 En) 42.2
10. "whosoever received him he gave to
    them authority to be children of God".......WisSol 7.27
11. "he tented among us".............................Sir 24.8
12. "glory as of the only-begotten
    from the Father"..............................WisSol 7.22, 25

43. See above, p. 67.


45. Buehner 1977: 93-95. Against Buehner we should point out that WisSol 9.18 does seem to imply that Wisdom was given to people on the earth in earlier times. But Buehner's point remains valid that there is no explicit mention of Wisdom being sent by God into the world.

46. Mack 1973: 46-60. Among his reasons for this hypothesis are: (i) the alleged Egyptian models (which Mack claims do exist) for the Hebrew/Jewish Wisdom figure are not themselves spoken of in the Egyptian wisdom corpus, meaning that Hebrew/Jewish thinkers must have developed a new genre by uniting sapiential literature and Wisdom; (ii) significant aspects of the content of Hebrew/Jewish wisdom texts—as well as certain stylistic features—cannot be found in the older Egyptian sources; and, (iii) the prophetic style of Wisdom in the Hebrew/Jewish writings has more in common with post-exilic biblical prophecy than with the purported Egyptian sources.


49. Bultmann (1923) 1967: 23-35. Towards the conclusion of this article Bultmann anticipates the theme of his next major monograph when he speculates that the Joh. Prologue is based upon a Gnostic baptismal Vorlage.
50. Bultmann (1925) 1967: 59. And the Joh. Son of Man form stems not from Jewish apocalypticism, as in the case of the Synoptic Son of Man, but rather from this Primordial Man conception (p. 97).


53. Bultmann (1925) 1967: 57. And the totality of what Jesus reveals is "dass er als Offenbarer gesandt sei." (See also p. 103.)


57. Bultmann (1964) 1971: 79-81, 106, 608 n. 4. See also his comments about 5.24 (p. 258 n. 3), 10.14 (p. 382), and 12.20ff (pp. 426-27).


63. See, for example, Robinson (1971: 232-68), MacRae (1986), Koester (1986), and Schenke (1986). The term "gnostic" as used here is intended to signify a much larger and more diverse body of literature and ideas than Bultmann and the old religionsgeschichtliche Schule imagined.

64. Talbert 1976. See his summary on p. 430.

70. Dahl 1962: 131-32, 288 n. 27.
73. Aune 1971: 45-46, 63-64, 76, 81, 88.

77. We will pursue this line of reasoning further in our own reading of JOHN in Chapter Four.

We cannot fail to comment upon Aune’s perplexing remark (p. 92) that "[F]requently in the prophetic visions narrated in the Old Testament, the seer finds himself transported to the heavenly world . . ." To the contrary, Elijah (and then only at the end of his earthly life) is the only mortal in the Hebrew Bible of whom it is explicitly said that he ascended to heaven (2 Kgs 2.11-12). We will observe in the next chapter that all ecstatic experiences narrated in the Hebrew Bible involve the seer being essentially on or in proximity to the earth, although he may be able to look up into heaven. The reason for noting this distinction is that JOHN itself appears to distinguish between ancient visions (which are valid providing they are understood as visio Christi experiences) and heavenly ascent practices.

78. Of course it must not be forgotten that Odeberg published his principal work on JOHN more than three decades before Dahl and four decades before Aune published theirs.

80. Odeberg 1929: 36-37, 40, 113-114, 146.
81. Odeberg 1929: 114, 264. (Italics his.)
82. Odeberg 1929: 36.
83. Odeberg 1929: pp. 111-113. (Italics his.)
86. Odeberg 1929: 73, 88-89, 94-95, 98.
89. Dunn 1983: 322, 328-29, 333. In addition to JOHN’s dialogue with a couple of different Jewish perspectives, Dunn believes that it is possible that the gospel may also be directed against certain (unspecified) alternative Christian ideas.
92. Dunn 1983: 326-31. (Italics his.) For his study Dunn assumes that “Wisdom and Logos are virtually synonymous” (p. 330 n. 77).
96. Dunn 1983: 329. (Italics his.) Meek’s point is that this descent-ascent pattern “has no direct parallel in the Moses traditions (except for an isolated statement by Philo),” meaning that it is more likely “that the Johannine Christology is connected with gnostic mythology” (1967: 297).
97. Dunn 1983: 330 n. 80. It will become clear in Chapter Three that Dunn’s intuition about the Joh. author’s creativity is well grounded, and that the Joh. descent-ascent schema does indeed undergird the status of JOHN’s protagonist.
98. Meeks 1972: 47. Meeks modifies Bultmann’s statement somewhat, claiming that what Jesus really reveals is that “he is an enigma.” Meeks goes on to suggest that there is positive content to Jesus’ revelation, which primarily has to do with issues about Jesus himself. With this general assessment of the content of Jesus’ revelation we agree.
99. Meeks 1972: 47-50, 68-72. According to Meeks the gospel functioned within the Joh. milieu just as Jesus functions within the narrative. It produced alienation and rejection outside of the Joh. community, while it created and strengthened faith within the isolated Christian sect. JOHN served as an etiology of the group by explaining how its members came to be expelled from the wider Jewish community.

100. Meeks (1972) claims that the following messages are associated with Joh. descent-ascent schema:

1. It is used to identify Jesus "as the Stranger par excellence" (p. 50).

2. It "seems to serve as the warrant for the esoteric revelation which he [Jesus] brings" (p. 52).

3. It "serves here as the warrant for the truth of those secrets" which Jesus proclaims (p. 53).

4. It always occurs "in a context where the primary point of the story is the inability of the men of 'this world,' pre-eminently 'the Jews,' to understand and accept Jesus" (p. 58). Thus it points to division and judgment (p. 67).

5. It "becomes the cipher for Jesus' unique self-knowledge as well as for his foreignness to the men of this world" (p. 60).

6. It is "not only the key to his identity and identification, but the primary content of his esoteric knowledge, which distinguishes him from the men who belong to "this world" (p. 61). (Italics his.)

7. It has the nuance that "the future ascent of the disciples is promised" (p. 65). (Italics his.)


104. Meeks 1968: 367-71. See also Meeks (1967: 100-285). Meeks's findings must be qualified with the admission that his Samaritan (IV C.E.) and rabbinic sources post-date JOHN by a considerable length of time.


106. Meeks 1967: 295-301. (Italics his.)
107. Meeks 1972: 52. (Italics his.) On another occasion Meeks opines that the combination of motifs—apostolic prophet, heavenly Wisdom, and Son of Man—which he finds in JOHN are probably due to "Merkabah exegesis in mystical Jewish sources" (p. 59 n. 54). See also Meeks's comments on the apocalyptic/gnostic genre of discourse in Jn 3 (p. 53).


111. Dunn never explicitly states that JOHN employs one strain of thought about revelatory experience (involving the descending-ascending Wisdom/Logos figure) to criticize another (heavenly ascent traditions). But this is a natural inference of his work. He does not seem to grasp the significance of the fact that an important Wisdom tradition (Sim [1 En] 42.1-3) lies squarely in the middle of an apocalyptic text, while Philo's Logos often serves as a hierophant for mortal ascents of the soul (presumably including Philo's!).


121. Buehner 1977: 118-80. He focuses here upon (i) the claim that ideas governing human agency (e.g., a king sending his messenger to speak or act on his behalf) serve as the conceptual basis for beliefs about divine messengers who are sent out by the Deity; (ii) the perceived "way" of a messenger, which is divided into three states: sending out, execution of mission, and return; and, (iii) the self-understanding of the messenger, which is expressed by various types of "I am" statements. In each case Buehner shows rather convincingly how the Fourth Gospel employs these same notions in its depiction of Jesus.

Die christologische Exklusivitätsaussage einen Sitz im Leben in der Abwehr pneumatisch-visueller Geistlehre hat, welche die Bindung an das Himmlische und den himmlischen Christus, nicht jedoch an seine irdische Sendung betont.

Buehner’s discussion of rabbinic Shaliach teachings is found on pp. 181-267. The other concepts which he discusses are: the full authority (Vollmacht) which the Shaliach receives when he is commissioned so that he can execute his mission, the strict obedience of the one who is sent to his sender, the honor which the Shaliach must seek for his sender, the agent’s self-justification, the representation of future things, the Shaliach’s proof of his status, the substitution of a second for the first envoy, and the duty to return and report that the mission has been accomplished. Again Buehner correlates these concepts with many expressions about Jesus from JOHN.


125. Buehner 1977: 335-341. The first text (Ber. 97.3 to 46.16) speaks first of an angel’s unsuccessful attempt to ascend, and then of his likewise unsuccessful attempt to descend. Buehner claims that this text contains the principle that a heavenly messenger must descend to execute his mission and then ascend back to heaven. Maybe so, but in this story the angel does neither! Moreover, the angel’s Vollmacht is clearly superceded by Moses’ authority, for he is the one who (through prayer) is responsible the angel’s inability to ascend or descend. Finally, the angel’s mission has nothing to do with dispensing revelation.

The second text (Mechila to Ex. 12.1) claims that for angels a return ascent is not necessary for them to report back to God, since the Deity fills the earth; furthermore, in this text there is no explicit descent-ascent pattern.


128. In addition to 3.13 Buehner mentions another possible witness to an ancient apocalyptic notion of Jesus: the "sanctification" of Jesus in 10.36. It is "not impossible" to see here a prior reference to a prophetic call vision which was later transformed into the idea that Jesus as a divine being was chosen from among other divine creatures near the throne of God and "sanctified" for an earthly mission (1977: 393-95).
Concerning the idea that JOHN is responding to an attempt to conceive of Jesus as a fulfillment of Mosaic expectations we should also mention the studies of J. L. Martyn (1979: 102-151) and Burton Mack (1988: 224-230). Martyn argues that JOHN wishes to bring the members of the Joh. community from a Moses-like "Prophet-Messiah" Christology to a more adequate Son of Man Christology. Mack suggests that JOHN's seven miracle stories ("signs"—and note that all but the first and last are reminiscent of activities during the Exodus experience) are meant to show that the Mosaic order has come to an end and has been replaced by the work of Christ. (Mack points out that the water in the purification jars is changed into wine [2.1-11] in the first miracle story and Lazarus is raised from the dead in the last, thereby symbolizing the shift from Moses to "new wine and life" in Christ.)

129. Segal 1980: 1336, 1340.

130. Segal 1980: 1374-75. While Segal sometimes wishes to distinguish between an ascent pattern and a descent pattern, he seems to regard both as having the same basic meaning and as reciprocal parts of a single "pattern."

131. Segal's concluding remark to his extensive article is worth quoting at this point, even though it evinces a bias towards ascent (1980: 1388):

To see this [ascension] pattern as the inevitable result of the structure of the mind is perhaps too grandiose, but it is possible to see the heavenly journey of the soul, its consequent promise of immortality and the corollary [sic] necessity of periodic ecstatic journeys to heaven as the dominant mythical constellation of late classical antiquity.
ENDNOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

1. See n. 6 on p. 264 for our use of "author" and "narrator" in this study.

2. See Talbert (1976: 426-40) for the literature citations which justify this assertion.

3. We recognize that the term "angel" (πνευσματικος) is sometimes used in both parts of the Christian Bible to designate human as well as divine messengers sent out by God, and that sometimes it is not abundantly clear from the literary context which type of envoy was in view when the text was written and first read. However, we believe that Joh. Christians would have been culturally disposed to regard all ambiguous references to such messengers in the Hebrew scriptures and elsewhere as pointing to divine rather than mortal beings, in line with a widespread and longstanding practice in the Levant during the Hellenistic era:

   Hirth (1975: 55, 93, 114) argues that the perception that angelic figures are normally heavenly beings actually begins to take hold by the Elohistic period, when the πνευσματικος figure is granted heavenly status by virtue of being associated with the divine court of Δυσιμοί.

   For Qumran and Jewish Apocalyptic literature, which evince well-developed (heavenly) angeologies, see Buehner (1977: 324-26). For Philo, who equates these figures with θεος and θεος respectively, see Blau and Kohler (n.d.: 595-96) and Grundmann, von Rad, and Kittel (1964: 76). For the Rabbinic tradition, which according to W. Baumgartner understood the πνευσματικος to be the archangel Michael, see Baumgartner (1959: 240-44) and Buehner (1977: 332-35). For Josephus, whose rationalistic hermeneutic leads him on the other hand to substitute visions for many πνευσαι appearances in Scripture, see Grundmann, von Rad, and Kittel (1964: 76, 80-81).

   Turning to the New Testament, we find that the general term πνευσαι is used unambiguously to refer to a human being only in Mt 11,10 & par.; Lk 7.24; 9.52; and Jas 2.25. Far more often a NT πνευσαι is characterized in some way as a heavenly figure: either directly (e.g., Mt 18.10; 24.36; Lk 16.22; Gal 1.8) or indirectly (e.g., coming with Son of Man in glory at the Judgment [Mt 16.27 and par.] or bringing dead Lazarus to Abraham [Lk 16.22]), and appearing in dazzling apparel [Lk 24.23]). The specific πνευσαι figure in the NT is even more consistently depicted as a heavenly being, as the following examples show: it appears in several dreams (Mt 1.20 & 24; 2.13; 2.19; Acts 10.3); it is said to descend out of heaven (Mt 28.2); it is identified as the archangel Gabriel (Lk 1.11 [cf. v.19]); it is associated with other πνευσαι who go away to heaven (Lk 2.9); and, it appears w/ light and performs miracles (Acts 8.26; 12.7; 12.23). All other NT references to this figure (mostly in the plural) are probably of the same ilk. See Grundmann, von Rad, and Kittel (1964: 83).
4. Since the focus of our investigation is directed towards revelatory activities, only those cosmological journey stories will be treated in which the communication of the divine Will, and not simply the execution thereof, plays a central role. This principle allows us to exclude from consideration a sizable number of narratives which do not primarily involve the dispensation of heavenly knowledge that is ultimately intended to be received by people on earth, such as (1) final heavenly ascents of mortals after death; (2) stories about descending-ascending figures in which their activities have nothing to do with the affairs of earth (e.g., angels praising God); (3) descents of angels to earth for the sole purpose of helping, rescuing, leading, opposing or punishing human beings, or for effecting climatic changes; (4) descents of disobedient heavenly beings to test humans and to execute other evil purposes; (5) presence of the kaba'od in the priestly cult; and so on.

Most scholars are of the opinion that, intellectually speaking, JOHN and its tradition are deeply indebted to beliefs stemming from latter first century Hellenized Judaism, even though the gospel may have been written to deal with an intra-Christian matter or for the Hellenistic world in general. With this in mind, and in order to avoid the justifiable criticism leveled at early religionsgeschichtlichen hypotheses concerning the late terminus ad quem of their alleged Joh. sources, our study will be largely restricted to those Jewish and Christian traditions which can reasonably be imagined to have been extant within the Joh. cultural periphery prior to the composition of the gospel.

5. We will use the term "pattern" from this point on to refer exclusively to descent-ascent and ascent-descent journeys, while "schema," "paradigm," and "structure" will designate the two modes of revelatory thought (e.g., EARTHBOUND SCHEMA) in which these patterns appear.

6. These fourteen Hebrew Bible texts are:

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<th>16.7-14</th>
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<tr>
<td>31.1-16</td>
<td>32.1-2.24-32</td>
<td>3.1-4.17</td>
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<td>22.21-24.25</td>
<td>5.13-6.21</td>
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7. To understand these verses to be speaking of angelic descent instead of the descent of the Deity the reader must assume that the A.L. who appears before Moses in the burning bush in v. 2 (and only here in the whole episode of Ex 3.1-4.17!) is the ongoing ontological manifestation of the Deity throughout the revelatory experience. The reader must discount the fact that the Deity is said to speak from the same bush in v. 4, and that he serves as the explicit subject of all divine utterance thereafter.

Against this reading it should be noted that the Hebrew Bible emphasizes that of all the prophets only Moses is permitted
to speak with God "mouth to mouth" and to behold something of his form directly (Num 12.6-8; Ex 33.17-34.8). For this reason no angelic mediator is ever said to speak to Moses on behalf of the Deity. Moreover, during the great revelatory drama which follows Moses’ call in Ex 19ff it is the Deity himself who is depicted as descending to the top of Mount Sinai. Although one cannot completely discount Stephen’s possible reference to angelic intermediaries at Sinai in Acts 7.30-53, the widely-held belief among first century Jews that Moses and the Israelites experienced a direct visible encounter with God (see Kaufmann n.d.: 396) strongly influences us to regard Ex 3.7-8 as speaking of the descent of the Deity rather than that of the evanescent A.L.

8. Coming: the angel finds, meets, appears to, stands before, or stands against the receiving mortal; he comes to a town; he speaks in a dream; he ascends from Gilgal to Bochim (Judg 2.1). Leaving: the angel turns away from the place of contact with mortals; he departs from their eyesight.

9. Not only do archaic passages containing revelatory angels avoid mentioning cosmological descent and ascent, practically all Hebrew texts of this era in which angelic figures are found are devoid of such references. Gen 28.12 is a rare exception to the rule, and here quite remarkably the normal trajectory of a heavenly being (descent followed by ascent) is reversed—as it is in Jn 1.51.

The only being who is represented in archaic Hebrew literature as descending and ascending to any significant degree is the Deity himself. He descends as far down as the mountain slopes to execute the non-revelatory tasks of rescuing the psalmist (Ps 18.9 [17.9]; par. 2 Sam 22.10; Ps 144.5 [143.5]), of fighting for and redeeming Israel (Isa 31.4; Ex 3.8), and of judging evildoers (Gen 11.5,7; Micah 1.3). On two occasions the Deity is said to ascend after speaking with a mortal (Gen 17.21; 35.13), and on a couple of other passages he is depicted as descending to earth in a cloud for the same purpose (Num 11.17 & 25; 12.5). All other explicit references to cosmological travel by the Deity in a revelatory context are found in the Sinai narratives and they involve descent only as far as the top of the sacred mountain (Ex 19.11, 18, 20; 24.16 [LXX]; 33.9; 34.5; Deut 31.15 [LXX]; cf. Neh 9.13).

10. These are:

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<tr>
<th>TEXTS</th>
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<td>Daniel 4</td>
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<td>Tobit 1-14</td>
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<td>Joseph and Aseneth 14-20</td>
<td>JosAsen</td>
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<td>Testament of Job 3-5</td>
<td>TJob</td>
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<td>Prayer of Joseph</td>
<td>PrJos</td>
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<td>Jubilees</td>
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Dating. The evidence is introvertible that Dan 4 (in the LXX) and Tob (fragments found among the Dead Sea Scrolls—Nickelsburg 1981: 35) were written before the turn of the millennium. Nickelsburg (1981: 263) believes that JosAsen was composed at about the same time, while Burchard (1985: 187) sets its terminus ad quem at 135 C.E. and Philonenko (1968: 109) at just after 100 C.E. Both Spittler (1983: 833) and Nickelsburg (1981: 247) opine that TJob was written before the end of I C.E., while Collins (in Stone 1984: 353) suggests that it may have been written as late as 150 C.E. There is widespread agreement that Jub should be dated in the middle of II C.E. (J. J. Collins 1979b: 32). While PrJos theoretically could have been composed just before Origen’s Commentary to John in 231 C.E., J. Z. Smith (1968: 255 n. 1) prefers a "possible first century dating" and mentions that M. Smith suggests something similar, although P. Winter dates this text after Valentinus.

11. But even in TJob, as Talbert contends, it is reasonable to infer that both the coming (3.5: ἑλθόν ὁ ναζοῦ) and going away (5.2: ἢττελαθώ) of the angel involve cosmological movement, since elsewhere a form of the same verb (16.2: ἔλθαν ὁ αγαθόν) is used to refer to the downward movement of another angel—Satan—to the earth (Talbert 1976: 424 n. 2). Note that Jub 32.20—21 mentions the descent of an angel, although this is not the principal revelatory angel.

12. For "descent" both texts use some form of the verb καταβαίνειν. Note that much like Jn 1.14 PrJos states that Jacob-Israel "descended upon the earth and tabernacled (καταβαίνεις) among humanity." Of course we do not know whether the PrJos also mentions angelic ascent, since only a tiny portion of this lengthy work is known to us. (According to the Stichometry of Nicephorus the entire PrJos contains 1100 stichoi [J. Z. Smith 1968: 254].)

13. In PrJos C it states that Uriel "reminded" Jacob-Israel of his true identity. These two texts suggest a gnostic type of revelatory myth, in which a heavenly being descends into flesh, is ignorant of his/her origins, and must be reminded of this in order to ascend back into heaven. See J. Z. Smith (1968: 281-87), for arguments pro and con regarding this hypothesis. This ignorance—remembrance motif, which is at least implied by the sparse text before us, is quite different from the ever-present omniscience of Jesus in JOHN.

14. Other expressions of movement: 3.17 ("sent"), 12.8 ("came"), 12.22 ("appeared"), and 12.21 ("and they saw him no more").

15. 14.4b: καὶ ἐλήκη πρὸς αὐτὸν καταβάς πᾶσας πᾶσι τοῖς ἐγκαταβάσεσι. Throughout the story the revelatory angel is identified as a man (ἀνθρώπος) in the more reliable texts. Burchard avers: "Doubtless the ‘man’ was promoted to ‘angel,’ rather than vice versa, as 19:5, 9 confirm, where ‘man’ is attested by virtually all
witnesses" (1985: 224 n. "h").

16. The participle translated as "who sent [you] out" is ἐξεστηκέναι.

17. Burchard's OTP translation.

18. These are:

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<td>Mt 28.1-10</td>
<td>Mk 16.1-8</td>
<td>Lk 1.5-25</td>
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<td>Lk 1.26-38</td>
<td>Lk 2.8-20</td>
<td>Lk 24.1-24</td>
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Gospel of Peter (GPet) 35-58

Dating. It is impossible to ascribe a firm date to GPet prior to the middle of II C.E., but a growing number of scholars, including Cartlidge and Dungan (1980: 83) and Koester ([1980] 1982: 163), argue that much of it reflects first century traditions which are independent of the canonical gospels. Therefore we include it along with the other texts that are undoubtedly contemporaneous with JOHN.

19. GPet 44 comes the closest to claiming that the first human audience actually beholds the descent of the angel, for it indicates that the soldiers are able to see heaven become opened (the second human audience consists of the women at the tomb—vv. 55-56). There is one other graphic example of angelic descent in v. 36, but these two "men" are never said to speak.

20. E.g., the book of the living in heaven (15.4), angel Repentance's work in heaven (15.7-8), the eternal wedding robe (15.10), the heavenly honeycomb, which comprise (in part) the ineffable mysteries of the Most High (16.1-17.4), etc.

21. Blau and Kohler n.d.: 583). Blau's statement applies both to angels in general and to the A.L. figure in particular. The summation offered by Talbert is less reductionistic and therefore more helpful: the A.L. "is sometimes indistinguishable from God himself," and he "appears sometimes as a man or men" (Talbert 1976: 422). Unfortunately Talbert does not go on to point out that both of his statements sometimes pertain to the same biblical story (e.g., Judg 6.11-24); nor does he adequately address the significance of the tension in many texts between the human appearance of the angel and his true divine nature.

22. Ἁγίου Πνεύματος Θεοῦ. This title appears again in v. 8. It is a common biblical term for a prophet (Deut 33.1; 1 Sam 9.6-7; 1 Kgs 12.22; etc.). Note also the use of "man" in Judg 13.10, 11.
23. That they think him to be a normal human being is suggested by the fact that they offer him food to eat. Typically the angel refuses. But note Gen 18.5-8!

24. The other archaic Hebrew revelatory texts which follow this narrative strategy of having the human audience within the story initially mistake an angel for a mere mortal are:

- Gen 18.1-33 (cf. Gen 19.1)
- Gen 32.24-32 (cf. Gen 32.1-2 and Hosea 12.3-5)
- Gen 19.1-29
- Num 22.21-24.25
- Josh 5.13-6.21

25. The best examples of texts with this type of audience are:

- Gen 16.7-14, TJob 3-5, Mt 1.18-25
- Gen 19.1-29, PrJos, Mt 2.13
- Gen 31.1-16, Tob, Mt 2.19-20
- Gen 32.1-2, 24-32, Lk 1.11-22
- Judg 2.1-5, Lk 1.26-38
- Judg 6.7-24
- Judg 13.1-25

Concerning PrJos, J. Z. Smith argues that this "'objective' narrative has a 'subjective' correlative," meaning that the descent/ascent of Jacob-Israel serves as the mystical basis for "the Himmelreise der Seele of the believer through the astral-angelic spheres and magical-theurgic practices" (1968: 288-89). While this supposition is attractive, and if true would suggest that "Jacob-Israel" has descended in order to assist mortals in a revelatory ascent to heaven (so that they themselves might become revelatory figures when they return to their terrestrial abode), our miniscule extant text contains no compelling evidence in support of Smith's proposal. In light of what we do have before us we must assume that PrJos deals only with the descent of the angel "Jacob-Israel," who speaks directly to those mortals for whom the divine message is specifically intended.

26. The best examples of texts with this type of audience are:

- Gen 18.1-33, Dan 4
- Ex 3.1-4.17, JosAsen 14-20
- Num 22.21-24.25, Jub 1
- Josh 5.13-6.21
- 1 Kgs 13.1-32
- 2 Kgs 1.1-18

27. The terms "prophetic" and "prophet" are used in a very general sense to refer to all figures who function like genuine
prophets after they have encountered a divine revelatory being.
This is why we include with the more obvious prophetic texts Josh
5.13-6.5 (cf. Josh 6.6-21 and note several other references to
Joshua's prophet-like activities in Josh 3.7-13; 4.15-18; 7.6-15;
and 24.1-13) and Gen 18.1-33 (note the patriarch's prophetic
intercession on behalf of Sodom in v. 22ff and see also Gen 20.7,
where he is expressly identified as a prophet).

28. In one of these non-prophetic texts (Judg 6) the Lord
God apparently speaks to the mortal after the angel has departed
(vv. 22-25), but the reader has the distinct impression that this
communicative scheme represents the "mythological-anthropomorphic"
style which is so common in biblical literature (i.e., God speaks
to the mortal without any expressed manifestation of his pres-
ence—perhaps it should be understood as God speaking "internally"
to Gideon rather than "externally"). Also, in vv. 14 and 16 the
Deity is expressly identified as the speaker; but again, given the
absence of any mention of God's coming before Gideon or the sugges-
tion that the future warrior perceives himself to be addressed by
two divine beings rather than by one, we must assume that the
author of this text wants to convey the impression to his reader-
ship that what the angel announces is directly from the Deity.

29. The reasons why Jacob's opponent must be seen as an
angel and not as a human being are as follows: (1) Hosea 12.4 iden-
tifies him as an angel; (2) the nocturnal battle is fought in the
same area in which Jacob earlier that day had encountered heavenly
beings (Gen 32.1-2); (3) Jacob's request for his adversary's name
(v. 29) closely resembles Manoah's attempt to ascertain the appel-
lation of the A.L. standing before him (Judg 13.17-18); and, (4)
the etiological formula in v. 30, which refers to Jacob seeing the
face [LXX: form] of God, suggests that the mysterious creature is
more than a mere mortal.

30. Note that this expression is used both of the Deity
(Ex 33.11; Deut 5.4; 34.10; Ezek 20.35) and of angels (Judg 6.22)
in the Hebrew Bible. In the Moses traditions it is remarkable that
the prophet is permitted to see God "face to face," but not at all
noteworthy that he espies an angel in the burning bush at Mount
Horeb (Ex 3.2). The warrior-judge Gideon, on the other hand, who
never sees God, is overwhelmed by the fact that he has encountered
an A.L. "face to face."

31. See also above, n. 7. Both within the Hebrew Bible and
in later Jewish interpretation Moses is regarded as an exceptional
human being, as one who needs no intermediary between himself and
the Deity.

32. מִשְׁפָּרִים יִנָּפְדוּ-ךָ. Note that it is to
rather than to מְשַׁפְּרִים that Moses is likened in some
fashion. Given the polyvalent nature of מְשַׁפְּרִים one could
certainly read this phrase as "you will be like a god (= angel) to
him." See BDB (43 [2b]): "godlike one." Note however that the LXX describes Moses' revelatory relationship to Aaron more circumspectly: αὐτῷ δὲ κυρία πρὸς τὸν θεὸν.

33. Here of course a contrast is drawn between prophecy allegedly grounded in angelic revelation and prophecy based upon a direct encounter with the Deity. While it may be pressing the text too much to see here a criticism of angelic revelation per se, since angels do deliver brief but valid messages to Elijah in 1 Kgs 19.5, 7 and 2 Kgs 1.3-4, 15, it certainly seems that the Judean prophet is expected to regard angelic revelation as inferior to direct communication by the Deity--otherwise how could he be expected to know which "word of the Lord" to believe? That the moral question posed by this narrative does not have to do with whether or not to obey inveterate lying prophets can be seen in the fact that the erstwhile deceitful Bethelite does prophesy accurately the divine punishment which the Judean prophet will soon experience. Note that this message of judgment appears to come directly from the Deity (vv. 20-22).

35. Roë 1979: XIII-XXVI.

37. In Jub the revelatory angel is charged with providing Moses with the details of Israel's history in writing which Moses in turn will present to the people, but from the outset of the book it is obvious that the author regards Moses as having received both the commission and heart of the heavenly message directly from the Lord (1.1-28). Moses' direct contact with God elevates him above the angel, as a portion of the lengthy title of this work implies: "... Just as the Lord told it to Moses on Mount Sinai ..." (OTP 2: 52). Note that here in the incipit the angel's role is completely overlooked.

38. Texts evincing the HEAVENWARD REVELATORY SCHEMA to which we will refer in this portion of the study are:

"VISIONARY" TEXTS

| Gen 21.17-19 | Isa 6.1-13 |
| Gen 22.11-18 | Ezek 1.1-3.15; 8.1-11.25; 40.1-48.35 |
| Gen 28.10-22 |  |
| 1 Kgs 22.19-23 | par. | Zech 1.7-6.8 |
| 2 Chr 18.18-22 | Dan 7.1-12.13 |

"ASCENT" TEXTS

| 1 Enoch 1-36, 72-108 | "1 En" |
| 1 Enoch 37-71 = "Similitudes" | "Sim" |
| 2 Enoch | "2 En" |
| (Greek) Baruch | "3 Bar" |

ABBREVIATIONS

RECENSIONS
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Attribution</th>
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<tr>
<td>Apocalypse of Zephaniah</td>
<td>&quot;ApZeph&quot;</td>
<td>A/B/Akhmimic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apocalypse of Abraham</td>
<td>&quot;ApAb&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Testament of Abraham</td>
<td>&quot;Tab&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Testament of Levi</td>
<td>&quot;TLevi&quot;</td>
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<td>Vita Adae et Evae 25-29</td>
<td>&quot;Vita&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apocalypse of John</td>
<td>&quot;ApJn&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ascension of Isaiah (6-11)</td>
<td>&quot;AscenIs&quot;</td>
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Unless otherwise noted the quotations from (and versification of) all of these texts except ApJn are taken from OTP 1 and 2.

Sim is separated from the rest of 1 En on the basis of its well-known absence from the 1 En corpus at Qumran. The rest of 1 En appears to be a compilation of several originally separate texts. In this analysis all of 1 En excepting Sim will be treated as one text which describes several heavenly ascent and heavenly vision experiences.

Like Sim, AscenIs (or the Vision of Isaiah) is considered separately from its companion, the Martyrdom of Isaiah, because of significant differences in content between these two texts and the fact that some of the early manuscript evidence points to their independent circulation (see Knibb 1985: 143-54).

With the exception of 1 En there is no incontrovertible evidence that these texts were extant by the end of I C.E., but in the considered judgment of a large number of authorities this is most likely the case for all except 3 Bar, ApZeph, Tab, and AscenIs. These four "later" texts were probably written down by mid-II C.E., and it is quite likely that (for our purposes) they reflect views that were popular in I C.E. Nevertheless, as a precautionary measure no claim advanced by this study depends solely upon any of them. The question of the dating for each "late" text is discussed by the following scholars:

Tab.......see Sanders (1983: 875); and Nickelsburg (1976: 13, 19).
AscenIs...see Knibb (1985: 150), A. Y. Collins (1979: 85), and Himmelfarb (1983: 137) and (1986: 98).

39. For example, the angels in these two stories speak with considerable authority to mortals who themselves do not retransmit what they have heard to a larger human audience.

40. There is some discussion among scholars as to whether the throne which Isaiah sees is located within the heavenly or earthly (Jerusalem) temple—the latter place being the location of Isaiah before the vision commences. Rolf Knierim (1968: 50-52) demonstrates that a strong argument for the latter possibility can be made, but even if his point of view is accepted, it does not
undermine our claim about the heavenward locus of Isaiah’s revelatory experience. As Knierim himself points out, Isaiah’s "temple on Mount Zion ... still belongs to the heavenly space, and Yahwe can be regarded experienced as sitting upon his throne in heaven as well as in the temple." In other words, in Isa 6 Mount Zion serves as the axis mundi, or Center of the World, i.e., the sacred space where the plane of heaven irrupts through theophany into the plane of earth (see Eliade 1959: 20-65). Thus Isaiah truly sees the heavenly world—not because it has descended but rather because the divine and human planes of existence have for this brief theophanic moment intersected and become as one. 1 Kgs 22 and its much younger parallel in 2Ch 18 probably should be understood similarly.

41. Our understanding of this shift in transcultural perceptions about the relationship of the Deity to the human life-world has been considerably helped by James Tabor’s study of human ascent experiences in antiquity. Tabor, who takes his religionsgeschichtlichen cue from the well-known Hellenistic studies of Martin Nilsson and Jonathan Smith, argues that in the "archaic" (i.e., roughly pre-Alexandrian) era God and his divine retinue are thought to be "close at hand" to the earth. Thus virtually all revelatory discourse takes place upon the earth. But during the Hellenistic period God becomes noticeably more transcendent, so much so in fact that human access to him and to divine revelation is considered to be possible only if mortals ascend into the celestial world. Tabor speaks of this shift from an immanent to a transcendent Deity as a displacement of one cosmological paradigm ("archaic") by another ("Hellenistic"). While our study charts a different course from Tabor’s and is at variance with Tabor’s classification of certain texts as ascent-oriented rather than (earthbound) vision-oriented, both investigations are in agreement that within the overall human ascent perspective (our HEAVENWARD SCHEMA) there is a gradual development in the ancient world from visions of heaven to ascents into heaven.

42. To wit: Ezek, Zech 1-6, and Dan 7-12. See also the Animal Apocalypse of the book of Dream Visions in 1 En.

43. J. Z. Smith 1968: 288. Alan Segal is no less impressed by the transcultural breadth of ascension ideas in antiquity, claiming that they constitute "the dominant mythical constellation of late classical antiquity" (1980: 1388).

44. Permutations of the basic human ascent idea include: soul/mind ascent, body and soul/mind ascent; temporary ascent for revelation, permanent ascent for salvation; divinization of the ascending mortal, no ontological transformation; journey to hell, journey to the throne of the Deity; visual revelation, and auditory revelation. The possibilities are virtually endless. The plethora of variations upon a common myth have kept students of antiquity busy over the past hundred years and will no doubt provide grist for the scholarly mill for many generations to come.
45. Bousset's seminal work ([1901] 1960) at the turn of the last century, Die Himmelsreise der Seele, set the agenda for modern research into ancient ascension myths. It remains an oft-quoted classic. A list of those who in the last quarter century alone have published well-known studies on biblically related human ascent ideas must include Colpè (1967); Lentzen-Deis (1970); Lohfink (1971); Schaefer (1975); Talburt (1976); Segal (1980); Rowland (1982); Himmelfarb (1983); Dean- Otting (1985) and Tabor (1986). (See our bibliography for the complete citations.)

It would unnecessarily complicate matters to discuss whether or not the older visionary texts properly belong within what is often referred to as the apocalyptic genre, given the lack of consensus by modern scholarship as to what constitutes apocalypticism (compare Semeia 14 with the approach by Rowland [1982: 1-72]). The editor of Semeia 14, John J. Collins (1979: 27-30), argues that transcendent eschatology is an integral feature of apocalyptic literature, and therefore he identifies from our list in n. 38 only Dan 7-12 and the Animal Apocalypse (1 En 85-90) as true apocalypses ("with no otherworldly journey"; Zech 1-6 is relegated to an "antecedent" status). But from our perspective all of the passages in our "visionary" data base constitute a broad primitive stage in the human attempt to transcend the cosmic gulf, and therefore each of them ought to be included in any discussion of heavenly ascent stories (which by most definitions are designated as "apocalyptic"). This point of view agrees with but goes even beyond the statement of Armin Schnitt: "Zeitlich begrenzte Entrückungen [i.e., temporary human ascent experiences] muessen nicht notwendig ihren Zielpunkt ausserhalb dieser Welt haben, sondern koennen sich auch innerhalb dieser Erde ereignen. Derartige Entrückungsformen finden sich im AT" (Schnitt 1973: 2).

46. Since the sweeping studies of the Hellenistic biblical world carried out in the middle of this century by Walter Bauer, Erwin Goodenough, and Gershom Scholem, it has become axiomatic that one should not think in terms of an "orthodox-heterodox" dichotomy when dealing with religious beliefs and groups stemming from the first couple of centuries of Judaism and Christianity. For a more recent restatement of this important hermeneutical principle see Neusner (1975: 174-87).

47. Two of the most important figures in the establishment of rabbinic Judaism unquestionably engaged in heavenly ascent practices--Johanan ben Zakkai and Rabbi Akiba ("The Four Who Entered Paradise")--despite certain reservations expressed by other rabbis. Within what will later be designated as canonical Christianity we find the Apostle Paul (2 Cor 12.2-4) and John the seer (ApJn) taking part in such experiences. The preponderance of evidence for heavenly ascent beliefs are to be found in Jewish and Christian apocalypticism and gnosticism, in philosophical Judaism (Philo), in cultic Christian poetry (e.g., the Odes of Solomon), in "mystical" Judaism (i.e., the Merkabah tradition), and in "mystical" Christianity (e.g., the Gospel of Secret Mark).
48. The Ezek texts are: 3.12, 14; 8.3; 11.1, 24; 43.5. See also 1 En 87.3. Regarding this text, J. J. Collins (1979b: 24) rightly contends that "[t]his does not amount to a heavenly journey (there is no mention of travel through the heavens)."

Zimmerli (1969a: 236-8) correctly points out that it is impossible to distinguish between Yahweh (cf. 1.27), "man," and the Spirit in Ezek 8.1-3; for all practical purposes it is the same figure who lifts the prophet up between heaven and earth. See also Schmitt (1973: 320). This sort of blurring of the identity of the heavenly intermediary is not uncommon in ascent-oriented literature, as we shall see later in this chapter. Here in Ezek 8 one can perceive already that this obscuring tendency affects the identity of the heavenly being ("man") in such a way as to render the creature's independent ontological status somewhat problematic.

49. Of these eleven texts only in ApJn is it difficult to find an explicit ascent-descent pattern. There is but one probable reference to ascent in the entire work (4.1-2), and no mention of John's subsequent descent. Through the course of the entire work he appears to bounce back and forth between earth and heaven unpredictably and inexplicably. This state of affairs leads A. Y. Collins to aver that "the dominant literary form of the book is the vision account," although "the otherworldly journey motif is not entirely absent" (1979: 71). But since this single explicit mention of ascent is strategically placed at the conclusion of the Christ epiphanies and at the beginning of the vision accounts (which run almost to the end of the work), it is possible to interpret all of the "visions" as parts of a lengthy ascent experience in which past and future events on the earth appear to be taking place in heaven.

50. Texts in which no explicit reference to the mortal's return to the earth can be detected (besides ApJn—see above, n. 49) are:

Sim------but within the larger framework of 1 En a descent is mentioned (81.5);

ApZeph----but we probably have only about one-fourth of the original text (so Carl Schmidt, as reported in Wintemute [1983: 47]); and,

AscenIs--but 11.35ff contains an implied descent.

51. According to Bousser the temporary heavenly ascent is a foretaste of the glory divine: "Die Ekstase, vermege deren man sich durch den Himmel zum hochsten Gott erhebt, is ja nichts anderes als eine Anticipation der Himmelsreise der Seele nach dem Tode des Menschen" ([1901] 1960: 5).

52. See also 1 En 81.5; AscenIs 11.35-36 (implied); 2 En J 36-39; and TLevi 5.1-3 (the priestly mission to which Levi is called involves revelatory proclamation: 4.5).
53. ApJn may or may not be the single exception, depending on how one interprets the visionary experiences of the seer after 4.1-2. See above, n. 49.

Admittedly, in Vita 25.3 the mortal seems to move horizontally rather than vertically. In this connection it is also very difficult to make spatial sense of the statement which Adam makes just after being escorted to the chariot-like throne of the Deity: "I [Adam] worshiped in the presence of God on the face of the earth" (26.1). Whatever this means, from the context it is clear that he is in heaven and not on the earth.

54. Relying solely upon the OTP’s English translations of the various texts, an admittedly inexact survey reveals the following:

* Lifted or raised up by
  
  God........ 1 En 14.25; 15.1
  Angels.....1 En 17.1, 4; 87.3-4;
  Sim 71.3;
  2 En A 11.1; J/A 20.1; J/A 22.6;
  TAb 9.8; 10.1

  Wind chariot alone. Sim 70.1, 2

* Carried or taken up by
  
  Angel(s)....AscenIs 7.4 (& 9 more times);
  ApAb 15.3;
  2 En J/A 3.1 (& 4 more times)

  Spirit......ApZeph A

55. Only Vita 25-29 and ApJn are void of a narration of the ascent experience. Relative to the length of the whole work the ascent portions of Tlevi and TAb are rather short. Not so with regard to the other seven texts: the narration of human ascent (sometimes including an audience with the Deity and further celestial travel) comprises at least half of 2 En and ApAb and practically all of 1 En (containing a number of ascent experiences), Sim, 3 Bar, and AscenIs (if it is originally independent of the Martyrdom section). What we have of ApZeph is completely devoted to an ascent journey. Concerning ApJn, if one understands all that happens to the seer after an apparent reference to his ascent in 4.1-2 to be part of a continuous journey in heaven—as seems likely—then this text would be an eighth example of the dominance of the ascent vector within the whole of these HEAVENWARD SCHEMA texts. Cf. the several cosmic journeys of 1 En 1-36.

56. In Aune’s opinion the autobiographical nature of many apocalyptic texts is an integral feature of this genre of literature (1986: 86-91). A. Y. Collins demurs, citing a number of alleged apocalypses which are biographical instead (1986: 2-3.) Yet just one of the texts in her biographical list is directly relevant to our discussion: TAb 10-15. Most of the others to which
she refers are normally assigned a *terminus a quo* later than the period with which we are concerned.

57. Although he does not speak in narratological terms, J. Z. Smith (1968: 287-92) likewise argues that a principal feature of ascent mythology is the believer's "subjective" salvific appropriation of the mythical figure's "objective" experience.

58. Aune avers that "the skillful apocalyptic writer may portray the revelatory experience which he purportedly had with such literary skill (particularly enhanced through public performance) that the intended audience may indeed participate in the original experience to such an extent that the experience is 're-presented' or re-actualized for them" (Aune 1986: 87-91).

59. Schmitt (1973: 338) makes a similar point: "Wenn es sich um den Boten Jahwes handelt, dann legitimiert ihn die Auffahrt als Gottgesandten."

60. Most interesting in this regard is the verbal parallel between TLevi 2.11 ("Through you [i.e., Levi] and Judah the Lord will be seen by men") and Jn 14.8-11 (Jesus: "He who has seen me has seen the Father").


62. Descent is implied by the following terms:

"appeared".......2 En J/A 1.4; 3 Bar S/G 1.3  
"sent" by God......2 En J/A 1.8; 21.3; 3 Bar S/G 1.3;  
ApAb 10.3-13; AscenIs 6.13; 7.3ff  
"came".............Vita 25.2

Only in TAb (9.8; 10.1) is the descent of the angelic assistant explicitly mentioned. This text is most interesting because the revelatory angel descends and ascends at total of five times through the course of the entire narrative. No other extra-Joh. text considered by this study emphasizes the descent-ascent of a heavenly being as much as TAb. In some texts the accompanying angel descends a second time in order to bring the seer back to his terrestrial abode: 1 En 81.5; 2 En J 38.1; 3 Bar S 17.1; TLlevi 5.3; and Vita 29.3.


64. See: 2 En J/A 1 (cf. J/A 55.1); ApAb 10.4-11.6.

65. TAb 2-3 & 6.

66. At first glance the Daniel of Dan 7-12 might not seem to fit into the prophetic category, since he is charged with the
responsibility of writing down for future posterity what he has seen and heard (7.1, 28; 8.26; 9.24; 12.4—does 8.27 imply some sort of oral communication with other mortals?). Our reasons for maintaining that, at least from a 1 C.E. point of view, Daniel must be considered a prophetic figure like Ezekiel and Zechariah despite the fact that he does not orally transmit what his visionary experiences have taught him are: (1) the larger literary context (i.e., Dan 1-6) represent Daniel as a prophetic personality; (2) Mt 24.15 designates him as a prophet; and, (3) the book of Dan is included with the books of the Major Prophets in the LXX.

67. It goes without saying that the main human character in heavenly ascent narratives is expected to function as a revelatory or prophetic figure after his return from his celestial journey: 1 En 81.5-6; Sim 37.2; 2 En J/A 33.6-11; ApZeph 8.5; 3 Bar 17.1; TLevi 2.10; Vita 25.1; AscenIs 11.36-43; and ApJn 22.18-19. The possible two exceptions to this involve the figure Abraham, who of course is not normally regarded as prophetic figure in antiquity. The temporary ascents in TAB and ApAb are primarily intended for the personal benefit of the patriarch. Nevertheless, the fact that what Abraham sees while traveling above the earth is made public through written narration implies some kind of revelatory discourse from Abraham to his progeny.

68. Only in TAB do human beings other than the seer have an opportunity to encounter and converse with the revelatory angel during his sojourn on the earth. But even in this instance they learn nothing of significance from the angel about the heavenly world.

69. Micaiah espies and overhears the heavenly council. Isaiah is commissioned for prophetic service directly by the Lord. Ezekiel sees "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord" (1.26-28), who speaks to Ezekiel at that time and frequently during subsequent visionary experiences. On one occasion Zechariah appears to be present within the heavenly temple and thereby able to overhear the voice of the Deity (3.1-10). The MT is so worded as to make it possible to assume that it is with the A.L. rather than with the Lord himself that the prophet has to do. On the other hand, the LXX seems to suggest that not only does Zechariah hear the Lord speak, but the Lord actually serves as Zechariah's "angel-us interpres"! [see Hirth 1975: 99]). Daniel espies the mysterious Son of Man coming before the Ancient of Days, and he too is able to overhear what transpires (7.13-14).

70. Note the conspicuous textual location of the theophanies enjoyed by Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel—all at or near the outset of their respective prophetic or apocalyptic texts.

71. It is hardly necessary to be reminded that Isa 6, Ezek 1, and Dan 7 all serve as major revelatory benchmarks for later believers. It is these direct encounters with the Deity and n
the prophets' conversations with heavenly beings that generate so much discussion and speculation in later Judaism and Christianity.

72. One scholar who discusses the impact of theophanies upon prophetic authority at some length is Habel (1965: 316-323).

73. The exceptions to this rule are ApZeph, 3 Bar, and TAb. In light of the preponderance of heavenly ascent stories in which the seer experiences direct revelatory contact with the Deity it is mystifying to read J. J. Collins' assertion that God's transcendence necessitates "the mediation of an otherworldly being: i.e., it [revelation] is not given directly to the human recipient" (1979a: 10; italics mine). While it may be true that most of what the seer learns is taught to him by his angelus interpres, it is just as important to recognize that one of this angel's most important functions in most heavenly ascent narratives is to conduct the seer into the presence of the Deity so that he can receive direct instruction from the Source of all heavenly knowledge. Note that in ApAb 19.1ff the Lord actually replaces Iaoel as the seer's tour guide.

74. In TLevi 2.10 we find a direct correlation between Levi (the eponymous ancestor of the Israel's priestly class) being allowed to "stand near the Lord" and his commission to "tell forth his mysteries to men." Perceiving the significance of this statement in providing authorization for Levi's revelatory disclosures, Segal (1980: 1360-61) argues that TLevi was composed in order to legitimate the priestly claims of the Hasmonean Dynasty.


76. A similar point is made by Bauckham (1981: 329), who claims that the purpose of this angel-refusing-worship motif in ApJn is to accentuate the role of Jesus as the source of revelation in relation to the angel and John, who merely serve as instruments for the communication of that revelation. Bauckham's comment concerning the primacy of Jesus is correct, but he fails to note that in this apocalypse the seer is regarded as a fellow servant with his angelic attendant; and that for those to whom the seer directs his testimony he and not the revelatory angel is the visible and authoritative witness to the revelation of Jesus Christ (1.1-5).

77. Gabriel---8.15: [עוגב קדוש
9.21: [עוגב קדוש
10.18: [עוגב קדוש
Daniel---10.19: [עוגב
"son of--10.5: Ἰωάννης ὁ ἀβγαὶος
man"

12.6: τοῦ ἀρσενοῦ τῷ ἀρσενοῦ

12.7: τοῦ ἀρσενοῦ τῷ ἀρσενοῦ

One may argue that the "man clothed in linen" is not the "son of man" figure of 7.13, as Lacocque avers (1976: 206); but even if not, clearly he is a heavenly being of some sort. And he, like Gabriel and Daniel, are all designated as "men."

78. Gabriel—10.16: ὁ ἄρσενος ὁ ἀβγαῖος

Daniel—8.17: τοῦ ἀττικοῦ

"son of--7.13: ὁ ἄρσενος ὁ ἀβγαῖος
man"

Note that the similarity of expressions is particularly noticeable in the LXX. See also Lacocque (1976: 167-68, 212). In his understanding of Dan 8.15-17, Lacocque maintains that Daniel, Gabriel, and the second angel of v. 16 "are bound together by an 'Adamic' tie which would be totally incomprehensible if we did not have chapter 7 about the 'son of man' whose inclusive character we have shown."

79. Dan 7.18, 22, 25, 27; 8.13; cf. 12.3. J. J. Collins argues that they are angelic beings (1979: 31), while Lacocque (1976: 152) speaks of these characters as "the most Haughty Saints" and avers that "the Author is making an audacious allusion to the 'divinized' status of the Saints...[who] participate in him, the community exalted as high as heaven." John Goldingay (1988: 497) chooses a mediating position: "angels or glorified [i.e., celestial] Israelites." Again, the very fact that scholars cannot agree illustrates our point that a human community through visionary experience and/or tradition is elevated to superhuman status.

80. Assuming, of course, that the "saints" here designate the people of Israel—see Lacocque (1976: 124-47).


82. See Himmelfarb (1987: 212-13), who relates some of these changes to preparation for and participation in the heavenly temple service.


85. See OTP 1: 50 n. "s": E. Isaac points out that "Son of Man" is literally "son of people" or "son of the mother of the living," while the son of man expression employed for Enoch means "man" or "a masculine person." See also p. 43 n. "j."

86. "And it happened after this that his [Enoch's] living name was raised up before that Son of Man . . ."
ENDNOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

1. In terms of this chapter's hermeneutical posture the reader is referred to the Introduction to this dissertation (pp. 4-7).

2. For example, Jeffrey L. Staley (1988: 50) characterizes JOHN's Prologue as a "concentrated preliminary exposition" which "endows the implied reader with an Olympian perspective of the basic plot structure of the Fourth Gospel." See also p. 74.

3. For example, Bultmann ([1964] 1971: 13) understands the Prologue to be "an introduction— in the sense of being an overture, leading the reader out of the commonplace into a new and strange world of sounds and figures, and singling out particular motifs from the action that is now to be unfolded." (Italics his.) Bultmann perceptively notes that the Prologue grants "a certain prior understanding" without permitting an authentic understanding to be grasped until the reader "knows the whole Gospel." Contrast this with Culpepper (1983: 19), who avers that "the narrator shares his omniscient vantage point with the reader, so the reader is immediately given all that is needed to understand the story." Schnackenburg ([1965] 1987: 224), moving in a theological direction, sees in the Prologue "a theological 'opening narrative'" which is designed to show the "divine origin of the revealer" and thereby "throw proper light on his unique significance for salvation."

4. Staley (1988: 48). Staley is more optimistic about the depth of the reader's comprehension after reading the Prologue than seems to be justified, but certainly the reader is granted a "qualified omniscience" by the Prologue which sets her/him above all of the characters of the story other than Jesus.


8. Noted by Meeks (1973: 48) as one of the typical features of mythical thought. See our comments on this matter back on p. 22. Staley astutely points out that "the repetitious style of the prologue also helps to produce . . . an implied reader who will continue to be nurtured by the circular structures within the subsequent narrative" (pp. 50, 52).

9. Kelber (Birth: 13-14, 28) discerns several ways in which the authority of the protagonist is manifested in the Prologue: through a subjection of plural logoi (i.e. Jesus sayings—perhaps uttered by prophetic figures within the Joh. community) to a single
dominant Logos, by apotheosizing the Logos, by having a potentially rival authority (John) bear witness to his anteriority, by asserting his salvific role on behalf of the true children of God, and by opposing Mosaic ascent mysticism.

10. On 1.18's reading of "god" rather than "son" see above pp. 16 and 267 n. 11.

11. The reader is no doubt expected to interpret word "grasp" (KATÈ) simultaneously as "to seize, take hold of" and "to comprehend." See Brown (1966: 8). In JOHN religious understanding has agonistic implications.


14. Kelber Birth: 26-27). Kelber remarks that "the antithesis of the two visionaries, Christ and Moses, ... enunciates a purpose which typifies the johannine gospel in its entirety."

15. Against Culpepper's (1983: 232) sweeping remark that "[t]he plot of the gospel is so crafted, however, that the narrator's view of Jesus is conclusively established before the reader is exposed to any challenge to it."

16. Against Schnackenburg ([1965] 1987: 224), who claims that the return to heaven "is presupposed (cf. v. 16)."

17. See Kelber (Birth: 17).


20. Staley (1988: 80, 93) is essentially correct in pointing out that the reader "has had little evidence to make him suspect that the disciples' confessions might reflect anything less than deep, genuine faith." Only "much later in the story" will (s)he "realize that the disciples' early confessions ... were not much more than words."

21. Staley (1988: 79-80) alerts us to the rhetorical significance of this chain of intermediation. Actually, he excepts Philip from this chain, probably because he understands Jesus rather than one of his followers to be the antecedent of the phrase "and he finds Philip" (v. 43b). While this is plausible, given the likelihood that it is Jesus rather than one of his followers who wishes to go into Galilee (v. 43a), both Bultmann ([1964] 1971: 97-98) and Brown (1966: 81, 85-6) opine that a source behind the present text understood Andrew or one of the other disciples as the
person who finds Philip. We think that this is even the correct reading of the present text: Andrew first finds Simon, leads him to Jesus, whereupon Jesus addresses him (vv. 40-42); and then, after Jesus determines to go into Galilee, Andrew finds Philip, implicitly brings him to Jesus, whereupon Jesus addresses him as well (v. 43). Thus the chain of intermediation is unbroken from John (v. 35) to Nathaniel (v. 46).

22. Staley 1988: 82-86. Cf. 17.20: "those who believe through their [the disciples'] word." Staley also directs our attention to JOHN's warning against an unmediated signs-oriented faith (2.23-35 and 4.48).


24. Jerome Neyrey (1982: 589-90) avers that the Son of Man is not substituted for the ladder in Gen 28.12. He believes that the Son of Man is a replacement for the appearing Deity instead (Gen 28.13)―meaning that the point of Jn 1.51 is not that Jesus (the Son of Man) on terra firma brings about some kind of connection between heaven and earth (as is often argued), but rather that he "will appear to his disciples in a [heavenly] theophany, just as the Lord appeared to Jacob." Against Neyrey's interpretation we note a striking verbal similarity between the two relevant phrases, which is difficult to ignore:

Gen 28.12 (LXX): 

Jn 1.51:

Gen 28.12:  

Jn 1.51:

Neyrey (1982: 597 n. 43) contends further that in Jn 1.51 the preposition ἐπὶ means "toward" rather than "upon," presumably justifying his claim that the exalted Son of Man is located in heaven during the visionary experience. But even if ἐπὶ means "toward," the place toward which the angels move remains ambiguous.

25. There is also no explicit mention of an open heaven in Gen 28, but the statement that the top of the ladder reaches "into heaven" (ἐπὶ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ) connotes a similar idea.

26. Here is a representative sampling of scholarly attempts to come to terms with 1.51:

(1) Literal fulfillment—at the resurrection or parousia. The former alternative is an example of what Culpepper (1983: 63-64) designates as a "completing internal prolepsis": an event is predicted to take place in the future but before the end of the story—yet its fulfillment is not actually reported. But according to Culpepper, this narrative ploy is "rarely" used by JOHN and the gospel "surely would not do so for a significant event." The
parousia solution is attractive because of similarities to certain Synoptic texts (e.g. Mt 16.27-28), but one searches in vain for a text approximating JOHN’s open heaven conjoined with angels who are “ascending and descending” upon a stationary Son of Man.

(ii) Mystical fulfillment. A promise that believers on earth, who together comprise the Son of Man figure, will be united with their heavenly archetypes (Odeberg 1929: 33-42, and somewhat similarly Dodd 1970: 241-46). Or a promise that they will have a vision in faith of the glorious union of the earthly Son of Man (= Jesus) with his heavenly archetype (Bultmann 1964: 1971: 105-106). Most of the extra-Joh. texts which are employed in support of these interpretations are much too late or too far removed from the Joh. milieu to be appropriate for comparison. Our interpretation of JOHN as being essentially anti-mystical further militates against these views.

(iii) Metaphorical fulfillment. It refers “to the revelation which occurred during Jesus’ ministry” (Culpepper 1983: 63-64), or to a perception that “all Jesus’ work [involves] the union with God which is his and his alone” (Schnackenburg 1965: 1987: 321), or to the idea “that Jesus as Son of Man has become the locus of divine glory, the point of contact between heaven and earth” (Brown 1966: 91). Some non-literal fulfillment seems most likely, but these explanations all fail to indicate why JOHN makes this metaphorical point by alluding to Gen 28.12ff. What has Jacob-Israel’s dream vision to do with what JOHN wishes to say about th. revelatory work of the earthly Jesus?

It is difficult to decide how to categorize Neyrey’s position. He claims that 1.51 promises that the disciples “will see a heavenly vision just as Jacob did,” meaning that they “will look directly into heaven” and there see “a vision of the divine Jesus” who “is seated on a heavenly throne” (1982: 589-90, 594, 599-600). But then Neyrey qualifies his interpretation by recognizing correctly that “a typical member of John’s community is expected to believe that Jesus is a divine figure through the preaching of the group and not by means of a direct revelation”—meaning that “[t]he promise of 1.51, although not literally fulfilled, is realized in the vision of faith of the Johannine community...” (pp. 601 n. 56, 605). Yet if this is so, then there can be no promise that the disciples will be able to peer into heaven and see what Neyrey claims that they will see. A “vision of faith” is no ecstatic vision.

27. In this respect Gen 28.12ff, one of the most primitive forms of the HEAVENWARD SCHEMA, is in “agreement” with the Joh. point of view. Not until centuries after the Jacob-Israel text comes into being do angeli interpretes speak and transport seers up into the heavenly world.

28. Staley 1988: 98, 104-116. These five instances of victimization are found in:
4.1-2. .......cf. 3.22, 26: So Jesus did not baptize!
7.10. .......cf. v. 8: So Jesus did go down to Jerusalem!
10.40-11.18. cf. 1.28: So there were two Bethany!
So Lazarus died after all!
13.1-30. .......Where did this "beloved disciple" come from?
20.30-21.25. Didn't the gospel come to an end at 20.31?

29. It is possible that Gen 28 or a tradition based upon it
and involving the heavenly Son of Man figure (as he appears in Dan
7.13-14 and the Synoptic texts which are based upon Dan 7)) serves
a legitimating function for HEAVENWARD SCHEMA beliefs in the
religious milieu in which JOHN is situated, in which case what
Neyrey claims JOHN is promising would actually be what JOHN is
opposing.

30. That Jesus might serve both as the ladder upon which
heavenly knowledge descends and as the descending bearer of that
knowledge is no more surprising than the idea that Jesus is both
the bread-giver and the bread (6.27, 35) or that he is both the
shepherd who brings the sheep through the door and the door itself
(10.2, 7).

31. Although Jesus is not explicitly identified as the Son
of Man (3.13-14), the immediately preceding and succeeding contexts
make this identification possible.

32. See above, pp. 24-25.


35. Grese's strongest evidence is derived from Apocryphal Jas, 3
En, the Mithras Liturgy, and tractates I and XIII of the Hermogenes.
He points out more distant analogies in Philo, Ovid, and Asclepius.


37. That OdesSol is contemporaneous with JOHN is persuasive-
ly argued by Charlesworth and Culpepper (1973) and by Aune (1982).

38. The OTP 2 translation by James Charlesworth assumes
that the one transformed is "Christ" rather than the seer, but
there is no literary evidence that a change of subject between vv.
2 and 3 is intended.


40. Admittedly no such statement is found in JOHN, but it
does appear in 1 Jn 5.18: "We know that everyone who is born [perf.
pass.] out of God does not sin, but the one [Jesus Christ] born
[aor. pass.] out of God keeps him ...." Moreover, Nicholson

According to Brown (1966: 13) the term *movyevwv* "is distantly related to *genew乃是, 'to beget'; yet its primary meaning is 'only.'" See also Buechsl (1967: 737-41), who claims that in JOHN it refers to Jesus' uniqueness, incomparability, and sonship to God—and "probably" "denotes also the birth or begetting from God."

41. Nicholson (1983: 81-85) maintains that 3.3 refers to Jesus but vv. 5-8 refer to believers.

42. Brown (1966: 132) and Bultmann ([1964] 1971:147-49) argue that vv. 3-11 involves the "earthly things" while vv. 13ff deal with the "heavenly things." Schnackenburg ([1965] 1987:377-80) accepts this with the qualification that Nicodemus is no longer "present" to hear what the evangelist reveals. Nicholson (1983: 90) agrees with Wilhelm Thuesing "that the contrast is between Jesus speaking in his earthly revelatory work and the ascended Jesus speaking through the Paraclete in the midst of the johannine community."


44. We noted earlier (p. 39) that Sidebottom translates *εἰκ. μὴ* as "but": "No one has ascended into heaven; but one has descended, the Son of Man." Yet the mention of the Son of Man being "lifted up" in the next verse strongly suggests that Jesus' own ascent in v. 13 is in view—thus *εἰκ. μὴ* as "except" is preferable. See also Nicholson (1983: 93-97), who on the basis of a study of eighty-five occurrences of *εἰκ. μὴ* in the NT, concludes similarly. All other uses of *movyevwv* in JOHN (1.15; 6.61b-62; 20.17 [2x]) do refer primarily to cosmological movement.

45. Nicholson (1983: 99-103) provides a convenient summary of the various ways in which the Moses-Jesus typology has been interpreted, as well as what the "lifting up" of the Son of Man refers to (cosmological ascent, crucifixion). Concerning the former matter, Nicholson argues that the *tertium comparationis* is not Moses, the serpent, or the pole, or looking at it for healing, but only Moses' action of lifting it up on the pole: "Moses did not ascend--he lifted something else up--but the Son of Man did ascend--he was himself lifted up." But believing that vv. 13-14 constitute a polemic against Mosaic ascension beliefs, we cannot agree that the only *tertium comparationis* is a single item of a Mosaic story which is pregnant with meaning for JOHN's Christology and soteriology. Nicholson himself admits that only "a few decades later in the Epistle of Barnabas and the writings of Justin Martyr" we find interpretations of 3.14 which detect many points of comparison between it and Num 21.8-9.
46. We assume that as a result of 1.51 the reader has accepted the idea that Jesus as the Son of Man dwells upon the earth for a period of time prior to the Eschaton, in contradistinction to the way in which the Son of Man is normally depicted in apocalyptic literature (Sim 62.14; 4 Ezra 13).

47. See above, pp. 175, 177-78, 296 n. 54.

48. Kelber Birth: 27. We would add "and all other forms of ascent mysticism."

49. See above, pp. 199-201.

50. Brown (1966: 214) interprets 5.19 similarly, and mentions that 6.46 and 8.38 also refer to a direct vision of God by Jesus.


54. See above, pp. 22-24. See also our review of the way in which Borgen deals with the Bread of Life Discourse, pp. 118-122.


56. The statement in v. 45 that those who come to Jesus do so because they "hear" the Father should not be taken literally (remember 5.37!). This type of "hearing" signifies a present acceptance of the ancient God-ordained prophecy (Isa 54.13: "they will be taught by God"). Acceptance of this prophecy causes one to come to Jesus.

57. See above, p. 119. Against the hypothesis that the disciples of Jesus accept his divine status (and concomitantly his descent) but reject his incarnation (so Borgen), we note Gerd Theissen's (1988: 250) observation that Simon Peter's "schlichtes" confession in v. 69 ("you are the holy one of God") is ambivalent about Jesus' identity and mentions nothing about descent. One gets the impression even Jesus' closest followers are not yet ready to confess him as a descent figure.

58. Neyrey (1989: 651) points out that Jesus "underscore[s] the boldness of [his] claims" by first stating that his Father is greater than all (v. 29) and then by equating himself with the Father.
59. Neyrey (1989: 647-55) provides a convenient summary of the various ways in which Psa 82 was understood in Jewish exegesis.

60. Neyrey (1989: 655-59). See also A. T. Hanson (1965: 160). Israel's status as gods was short-lived because she soon resorted to sin again—which necessitates death.

61. According to Deu 4.12 Israel did not see the form of God but only heard his voice. See also Deu 4.33; 18.16; Ex 19.16-20.

62. The visual aspect of the Sinai theophany is described as:

24.10: "בכש תושב תמש תועש תולדה [kal ἐπὶ ἐξελήφθη τὸ εἶναί τι "I saw，在τὸ τὸ καὶ ἑλκών τὸ γὰρ ἐξ ἐν τῷ θεῷ ἐν θεοὶ"

24.11: "ינ [&κ] [kal ἦλθεν ἐν ὑμῖν ἐν τῷ ἔλθων [ἐν τῷ θεῷ θεῷ"


64. Neyrey (1989: 655) rejects this interpretation, but not A. T. Hanson (1965: 161). Brown (1966: 411) is intrigued with Hanson's viewpoint but not quite willing to be fully committed to it.

65. Jos Ant xv 5.3; Jub 2.1ff; Acts 7.38; 53; Gal 3.19; Heb 2.2.

66. Philo: M Abr 47; Q Ex II.37, 39; Som I 62, 71.

67. First the narrator categorically denies that a mortal can behold God (1.18—reaffirmed in 5.37 and 6.46). Then the author has John testify that in his own ecstatic experience he saw the Spirit descend upon the earthly Jesus (1.32-33). Finally, he has Jesus announce to his followers that they will have a vision reminiscent of Jacob-Israel's experience at Bethel with "angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man" (1.51).

68. See Bovler (1971: 158, 162).

69. Scholars have suggested that Jn 8.56 may allude to the "joyful" announcement in Gen 17.17 of the birth of Isaac, through whose seed Jesus would eventually come. (The incredulous laughter of Abraham and Sarah in the Gen text was understood by the rabbis, Philo [Mut 154-69], and Jub 15.17; 16.17-20 as a joyful response to the announcement.) See Barrett (1978: 351-52), Dodd (1970: 261), Bultmann ([1964] 1971: 326-28), Brown (1966: 359-60), and Schnackenberg ([1971] 1987: 221-24).
Apparently overlooked in this religionsgeschichtlichen survey is TAb 9–15 and ApAb 9–32. The latter text is an apocalyptic expansion of Gen 15 in which Abraham claims to have been led by the angel Isra to the Deity, who personally reveals to him past and future events upon the earth. Abraham does not actually behold the Deity (ApAb 16.3 reads somewhat ambiguously):

He whom you [Abraham] will see coming directly toward us in a great sound of sanctification is the Eternal One who has loved you. You will not look at him himself."

(Quoted from R. Rubinkiewicz’s translation in OTP 1)

Nevertheless, Abraham does abide in God’s presence and converse with him for quite some time. Moreover, Abraham is told to “be very joyful” during this ascent experience (ApAb 10.15), and in the course of it he espies God’s “chosen one” who “In the last days” will appear and liberate Abraham’s descendants from the condemned heathen (ch. 29–32). We do not wish to suggest that this text itself lies directly in the background of Jn 8.56. It is sufficient for our purposes to show that Abraham is associated with a variety of visionary and ascent experiences in I C.E. and that therefore it is quite probable that in Jn 8.56 the author is deconstructing some sort of HEAVENWARD SCHEMA belief.


71. A first century readership would undoubtedly understand Abraham’s and Sarah’s guests to have been heavenly rather than human messengers (cf. Gen 19.1 and see above, p. 284 n. 3).


73. How “day” (ἡμέρα) is used in JOHN to signify some moment or period of time in Jesus’ existence:

Death or burial..........12.7; 19.31
Resurrection...............2.19, 20; 14.20(?); 16.23, 26
Earthly life (implied)...9.4; 11.9
"Last day" (eschaton).....6.39, 40, 44, 54; 11.24; 12.48

74. While some ancient manuscripts read “... and Abraham has seen you?”, the more difficult and therefore the preferred reading is the one chosen by the UBS—see Metzger (1971: 226–27), Barrett (1978: 352), Bultmann ([1964] 1971: 327 n. 3), and Brown (1966: 360).

75. Schnackenburg ([1971] 1987: 223, 494 n. 142) maintains instead that the "absurd" question sets up Jesus’ reply in v. 58. But his comment about old-age visions may not be as "irrelevant here" as he assumes. Enoch (2 Enoch 70–71 [?]; 1 En 81.6; 2 En J/A 1), Abraham (TAb 9.6ff), Isaac (TIsaac 2.1; 7.1—II C.E.), Jacob (TJacob 5.10–15—II to III C.E.?), Stephen (Acts 7.55–60), and
possibly Ezra (4 Ezra 14) are associated with such beliefs.

76. See Brown (1966: 360).

77. See above, p. 52.


79. Schnackenburg (1971) 1987: 402. Schnackenburg avers that glorification of Father and Son "continues in the action of the heavenly Christ (cf. 13:32; 14:13; 17.1,5)," but even if this is so (and we will dispute his interpretation of 13.32), it does not mean that the glory which Isaiah is said to behold in 12.41 is that of the preexistent or heavenly Christ. The immediate context must be given priority in determining the meaning of v. 41.


82. See above, pp. 149-54.

83. Nicholson (1983: 106) rightly avers that the issue of Jesus' whence and whither "is the question of johannine christology." (Italics his.)

84. We must be content merely to point out here that the Fourth Gospel first establishes the heavenly priority of Jesus' existence and that he enjoys an especially intimate relationship to the Father (1.1-18), who is his Father (1.34); and then it proceeds to show the informed reader how mortals in the story are confused by his claims of divine origin, thinking him to be, as Philip puts it, "Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" (1.45). See especially the controversy over Jesus' parentage in 5.18; 6.41-42; and 8.19, 25-27. Confession that Jesus is the (only-begotten) Son of God lies at the heart of Joh. faith.

85. After emphasizing at the beginning of the gospel that Jesus came into the world from God the Father, the author proceeds to show the informed reader that mortals in the story are confused about where Jesus has come from. The "whence" issue is introduced indirectly by Jesus' first followers, who ask him, "Where are you abiding?" (1.38) and who assume that he is from Nazareth (1.45-46). The author does not explicitly confirm or deny that Jesus is from Nazareth or that he is even from Galilee as opposed to Bethlehem in Judea (7.41-43). Rather than postulating that the text's seeming befuddlement over the matter is the product of competing sources, rearranged texts, or poor redaction, we must accept the more likely explanation that the narrator simply refuses to specify where Jesus' homeland is (4.44: "ἐκ τῆς Ἰατραίας." One can make a strong case for both northern and southern Israel here!). Combined
with multiple "whence" questions (note that of the twenty-nine occurrences of this word in the NT it appears thirteen times in John and not more than five times in any other book), which are often asked in the midst of sharp controversy over Jesus' identity (7.27, 28; 8.14; 9.29, 30; 19.9; also 3.8?—referring to Jesus rather than to the Spirit), the reticence of the author to specify where Jesus' earthly home is accentuates his heavenly origins and undergirds his far more significant claim to have descended from the celestial world.

86. The Fourth Gospel contains nearly two-fifths of the occurrences of ἐξωθότως in the NT, while for ἐξωθοῦ the fraction is slightly greater than one-third. Seven of the eighteen uses of ἐξωθότως in John allude either to Jesus' cosmological ascent or to some misunderstanding about it; the ratio of ἐξωθοῦ uses is ten to thirty. Without doubt the question of Jesus' cosmological "whither" (it sometimes is better translated as "where") figures prominently in the Joh. narrative, both during Jesus' public ministry (7.34, 35, 36; 8.14, 14, 21, 22) and in the Farewell Discourse section (13.33, 36, 36; 14.3, 4, 5; 16.5; 17.24).

87. Back in Chapter One (pp. 17-18) we argued that the "I am" sayings which have no predicate probably stem from the self-designation of Yahweh in the LXX. Nicholson (1983: 112-14, 121) cannot accept this interpretation, particularly here in 8.24 and 28, and he cites Barrett in defense of his position:

It is intolerable that Jesus should be made to say "I am God, the supreme God of the Old Testament, and being God I do as I am told."

(Quoted from C. K. Barrett, "Christocentric or Theocentric? Observations on the Theological Method of the Fourth Gospel," in J. Coppens, ed., La Notion publique de Dieu, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicae Lovaniensis, no. 41 [Leuven: Leuven Univ. Press, 1976], pp. 361-76.) Nicholson correctly argues that the context provides the predicate for the two "I am" sayings: I am not from this world but from above, and am sent by the Father.

But it is not necessary to assume that an absolute "I am" statement would identify Jesus as ontologically one with the Father. From the context here and elsewhere in John it is clear that the author wants to claim that Jesus is subordinate to the Father, and yet at the same time enjoys an unmatched degree of intimacy (cf. 10.29-30 and 36-38). Buechner (1977: 138-80) shows that "I am" statements with a predicate, identifying a human or divine envoy, are common to a wide variety of religious traditions in the ancient Mediterranean world, and he claims with justification that the Joh. "I am" statements—including the ones which have no predicate—are theological adaptations of this common phenomenon. Therefore, Nicholson is correct in maintaining that the "I am" sayings in Jn 8.24, 28, and 59 do not purport to identify Jesus as ontologically equal to God the Father, but the allusion to the
Hebrew scriptures cannot be accidental. These self-designations must be understood as a peculiarly John way of representing Jesus as being a messenger from God who enjoys complete intimacy with his Sender. It is a way of affirming his absolute revelatory superiority.

88. Although the first time reader cannot know this, it might be noted by one who has already read the gospel through that "If from now on, when the 'Jews' seek Jesus it will be in order to kill him (8:37,40; 10:39; 11:8,56)" (Nicholson 1977: 110). Those who seek after Jesus without believing in him threaten to undo his life. This is in notable contrast to the kind of following which true believers exercise, a following which is eventually shown to be earthbound and not heavenward.

89. Jn 6.62 and 7.33 have already informed the reader that Jesus' destination is heaven, so that here in 8.21 (s)he has no difficulty in understanding Jesus to be referring to his cosmological ascent.

90. Nicholson (1977: 119-123) strains mightily to overcome this difficulty and to remain committed to his thesis that here, as in the gospel as a whole, "the act of crucifixion itself is not of primary importance." Besides having to make a conscious effort (p. 119) to ignore the way in which the narrator later highlights Jesus' crucifixion in 19.31-37, Nicholson argues that 8.28's combination of ἐθνικὸς plus the aorist subjunctive "often refers to an event 'B' that takes place after an event 'A' has been completed." He cites two texts which presumably prove his point (10.4; 16.21), and then he avers that according to John the knowledge that "I am"

comes when the process of "lifting up" is completed, when Jesus is once more exalted with the Father. . . . The disciples at 20:1 are no further advanced in their nascent belief than they were at 16:33, . . .

What Nicholson fails to mention is that Mary Magdalene grasps fully who Jesus is after he calls her name—and this takes place before Jesus' ascent (20:17). His contention (p. 165) that now "the message of the necessity of the ascension of Jesus (20:17)" has been established is unconvincing, since during the Farewell Discourses Jesus speaks just as earnestly of the necessity of his ascension. It is not the final announcement of ascent which brings illumination, but Jesus' death and resurrection appearances (with speaking).

91. Brown (1966: 449) argues that since there is no subsequent reference to an anointing of Jesus by Mary, the statement "Leave her alone, in order that she should keep it unto the day of my burial" (v. 7) must be a purpose clause: "The purpose was that she might keep it for the day of my embalming"—i.e., today.
92. Nicholson 1977: 152-53. Nicholson undermines his argument however when he admits that "It is true that Jesus must depart and that this departure will necessitate his death, so in this sense Jesus is like the grain of wheat which must die to bring life."

93. It becomes increasingly obvious to the reader that the term "hour" (ὥρα) refers especially to a specific time in Jesus’ earthly existence: his death. Several occurrences of the word in the early chapters of JOHN refer to some time in Jesus’ existence other than his passion (2.4; 4.21, 23; 5.25, 28), but from then on with one possible exception (16.25) "hour" is consistently associated with suffering and death:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jesus’ Passion</th>
<th>Joh. Community’s Passion</th>
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<tr>
<td>7.30</td>
<td>16.2, 4</td>
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<td>8.20</td>
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<td>12.23, 27, 27</td>
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<td>19.27</td>
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Nicholson (1977: 147-48) interprets all of the “hour” texts in light of 13.1 (which explicitly refers to Jesus’ ascent back to the Father and not to his death), and claims that this term does not refer primarily to Jesus’ passion, but to his “reunification” with the Father which extends “backwards into the passion.” But does this not mean that reunification between Father and Son takes place at the passion, meaning that the passion is the key element in the drama of Jesus’ departure? And doesn’t this idea substantially alter, if not radically deconstruct, ancient perceptions of ascension to heaven?

94. Jesus’ statement in v. 30 that the voice was "on account of you" implies a forensic function—in i.e., proving that the crowd is spiritually obtuse—as the next verse about the ruler of this world being cast out and the subsequent citations from Isa (vv. 38-40) confirm.

95. Nicholson’s (1977: 137-38) argument that v. 33 is meant only to indicate that Jesus is to be executed by crucifixion rather than by stoning (cf. 18.32), and that therefore the real point of the lifting up statement is Jesus’ ascent back to heaven, ignores the problematic way in which all three lifting up sayings are presented, ignores the heavy emphasis upon death in this chapter, and ignores the fact that cosmological ascent is nowhere explicitly mentioned in this section. It is analogous to the interpretation which the unbelieving crowd seems to have in v. 34, who think that Jesus is claiming that the Christ/Son of Man is leaving them to return to heaven.
96. Note Brown’s (1966: 478) comment “that the Johannine usage of ‘being lifted up’ was probably suggested by the description of the Suffering Servant in Isa lii 13”:

\[\text{Knowledge of the Suffering Servant.}\]

More specifically, we believe that the lifting up idea comes originally from HEAVENWARD SCHEMA stories, but it is quite likely that the Joh. deconstruction of this notion was influenced by the Suffering Servant passage in Isa.


98. The only other Joh. usage of \textit{metabolw} is in 7.3, where it refers to a literal crossing from Galilee to Judea. Interestingly, 1 Jn 3.14 also employs \textit{metabolw} to speak of crossing over from death to life (in terms of believers). The significance of this term was first suggested to me by an unknown (to me) participant in a discussion of my thesis at the Neutestamentliche Sozietaet der theologischen Fakultaet at the University of Heidelberg.

99. Note that while the disciples are instructed to pattern their lives after Jesus, he is nevertheless hierarchically distinguished from them in v. 16 as a master is set apart from a servant and an apostle from the one who sends him forth. The EARTHBOUND superiority of the heavenly revealer is never compromised by the oft-mentioned Joh. principle that the disciples are in many respects to imitate their Lord.


102. Jn 7.33-34 and 8.21.

103. Woll (1981: 96) believes that 13.33 should be read similarly to 3.13’s more unambiguous prohibition of heavenly ascents by mortals, meaning that what Jesus is declaring here is that even his own disciples cannot ascend with him. We agree that this is one of two meanings which the gospel holds in tension.

104. Evidence for such beliefs about the Christ figure can be found in the gnostic ApocryJas 13-15 and in OdeSol 20, 21, 37, 42.

105. All of which are uttered by the protagonist except for 14.22 and 16.17-18:

14.3: And if I should go and should prepare a place for you, again I am coming and will receive you unto myself, in order that where I am you also may be.

14.18: I will not leave you as orphans, I am coming to you.
14.19: Still a little while and the world does not behold me, but you [will] behold me; because I live you also will live.

14.21: And I will love him and manifest myself to him.

14.22: [Thomas:] Lord, why is it that you are about to manifest yourself to us and not to the world?

14.23: ... and we [Jesus and the Father] will come to him and make a dwelling in/with him.

14.28: ... I go away and I come to you.

16.10: ... because I go away to the Father and you no longer behold me.

16.16: A little while and no longer do you behold me, and again a little while and you will see me.

16.17: [Disciples:] What is this which he speaks to us, "A little while and you do not behold me, and again a little while and you will see me," and "Because I go away to the Father?"

16.18: ... What is this little while...?

16.19: A little while and you do not behold me, and again a little while and you will see me.

16.22: But again I will see you, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.


108. ApJn 4-22 certainly appears to evince the HEAVENWARD SCHEMA, but admittedly the visionary experience recorded in ApJn 1-3 may very well involve a perception of the exalted Jesus in the vicinity of the earth (note that 4.1 implies that up to that point the seer is still upon the earth), in which case these chapters could be characterized as EARTHBOUND in revelatory orientation in contradistinction to the rest of the book.

109. Aune opines that these Christophanies may involve heavenly ascensions rather than visions of the exalted Christ upon the earth, but we have already determined that 13.33 and 14.9-11 seem to rule out this option (unless 13.36's "but you will follow me later" is interpreted as a promise of a future proleptic ascent; but in our discussion of 21.15-25 we will demonstrate that this is not the correct way to read 13.36). Thus in response to Aune we will concentrate upon whether JOHN allows for cultic visions of the
exalted Christ who has temporarily returned to the earth.


111. And also in 1 Jn 2.28; 3.2. See Aune (1971: 129).

112. Aune (1971: 132) points out that the Parousia is "primarily conceived of as a public event" (cf. 14.22 and ApJn 1.7), while the Joh. texts seem to refer to a communal or personal vision of Jesus.

113. The coming of the Spirit to the Joh. disciples obviously takes place earlier than the Pentecost experience in Acts 2.

114. Culpepper (1983: 119) points out that the disciples "can only parrot proudly what Jesus has just said. . . . Their answer is scarcely more than Nicodemus' opening statement (3:2): 'You are a teacher come from God.'"

115. The "coming" described in Jn 14.23 is certainly patterned after the Parousia event mentioned in 14.2-3 (note the common references to μετοίκησαν, μεταφέρομαι), but as the latter does not speak of a visible appearing of Jesus or of the Deity before believers it is difficult to argue that this event serves as a pattern for cultic visio Christi experiences.

116. Most likely some of the "coming," "beholding," and "manifesting" promises stem from the community's sayings tradition, and are used to support HEAVENWARD SCHEMA beliefs.


118. The death of Jesus does not figure as greatly in the First Farewell Discourse as it does in the Second Discourse and what follows thereafter, which is probably why Woll perceives this death to be "above all . . . a change of place" (1981: 39).

119. E.g., 13.14-16, 34; 14.12; 15.9-10; 18-16.4; etc.


122. E.g., 12.7, 24-25; 13.21-26; 15.18-16.4.

123. Note that Jesus' word is "fulfilled" (cf. 18.32) in the same way that Scripture (13.18; 15.25; 17.12; 19.24, 36) and Isaiah's word (12.38) are said to be fulfilled.

124. Cf. use of the similar verb τελεσθηκας in 17.4: "I glorified you upon the earth completing the work which you gave me
125. Brown (1970: 910) and Schnackenburg ([1975] 1987: 285) point out the voluntary nature of this act. It is interesting that the term is ἀποκλίνειν, which is also used to describe Judas' betrayal of Jesus!

126. Of course ἀποκλίνειν could refer simply to Jesus' human spirit, but we agree with Brown (1970: 931) that the creative author of innumerable ironies, metaphors, and double entendres has more in mind than this. Perhaps, as Brown suggests, Jesus is portrayed as handing the Spirit over to the Beloved Disciple during this supreme moment of glorification (cf. 7.39). If so, then this act would effectively set this disciple (who is directly responsible for the Fourth Gospel) apart from the others, who themselves do not receive the Spirit until after the resurrection (20.22).

127. Note that the narrator speaks of "having seen" this, of "bearing witness" to it, of this witness being "true," and of this being done "in order that you should believe," and compare these expressions with similar ones in 20.31 and 21.24.

128. Jn 20.9 ("For they did not yet understand the Scripture that it was necessary for him to be raised from the dead") should be taken to mean that the Beloved Disciple's faith does not have to do with Jesus' resurrection from the dead, but simply with the fact that his body is no longer in the tomb.

129. This translation is suggested by Michael McGeehe (1986: 299-302), who convincingly argues against Brown and a host of others that ἀποκλίνειν is anticipatory rather than causal. He points out that several grammars (Smyth's, Denniston's, Kuehner's, Messenger's, and Zerwick's) allow for this translation, and then he shows how it overcomes several problems arising from the conventional translation—to wit: the apparent contradiction between Mary's not being able to touch Jesus and Thomas' permission to do so (20.27), and what touching or not touching Jesus has to do with his ascent anyway.

130. Many commentators argue that for JOHN resurrection and ascension are one and the same, meaning that in effect all of Jesus' resurrection appearances occur after he has initially gone back to heaven. See Lohfink (1971: 115-118) and Brown (1970: 1011-17). Lohfink's attempt to argue that what is important to JOHN is the "Das der Himmelfahrt" (italics his) and not a specific reporting of the chronology ("Zeitangabe") of what happens after Jesus is resurrected—and Brown argues similarly—sacrifices a close, realistic reading of 20.17 ("not yet"—καθώς) at the altar of a patent theological bias in which the "basic NT understanding" (so Brown) of Jesus' resurrection/ascension (e.g., Acts 2.32-33; 5.30-31; Rom 8.34; Eph 1.20; Phil 2.8-9; etc.) dominates. We believe that extra-Joh. texts may be used to clarify the Fourth
Gospel but not at the expense of ignoring or denying what the narrative plainly states.

131. As pointed out earlier, the mention of Jesus' "coming" (vv. 19, 24, 26), of his utterance of "Peace" (vv. 19, 21, 26; cf. 14.27; 16.33), of his showing (i.e., manifesting) himself to the disciples (vv. 20, 27), and of the disciples' beholding (vv. 20, 25, 27, 29) and rejoicing (vv. 20) together provided compelling evidence that JOHN wishes for the reader to understand that the resurrected Jesus is the earthly Jesus.

132. Against the interpretation of D. A. Carson (1987: 639-51) that this confession answers the question, "Who then is the Messiah?"

133. If Jesus' comment in 14.38 is initially meant to be a question ("So you will give your life for me?") now in retrospect it is seen as a promise: "You will give you life for me!"

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