

Observations on the significance of the Old Testament in the Fourth Gospel*

Maarten J J Menken

ABSTRACT

What significance did John attach to God's revelation in the history of Israel as recorded in the Scriptures? To answer this question, a distinction has to be made between the *text* of Scripture and the *history* narrated in this text. In John's view, the text of the Old Testament contains testimonies on behalf of Jesus, awaiting to be filled with the reality of the Jesus event. As regards the events of Old Testament history, John considers some theophanies as communications with the pre-existent Jesus in heaven, but he does not consider the pre-existent Jesus as the real actor in Old Testament theophanies on earth. For the rest, Old Testament history is meaningful to the evangelist in so far as it provides 'types' of Jesus. To him, the Scriptures legitimate Jesus, but real revelation of God is to be found exclusively in Jesus.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the assessment which the Old Testament receives in John's gospel, there is a certain ambivalence. On the one hand, the Scriptures have a positive function: they bear witness on behalf of Jesus and furnish models for John's picture of Jesus. The Johannine Jesus even says that 'Scripture cannot be nullified' (10:35), and there are no reasons to doubt that this is meant to be a serious truth. On the other hand, the evangelist concentrates God's revelation exclusively in Jesus to such an extent that there seems to be no room for any other revelation of God. To John, Jesus is the only revelation of God, not the climax of God's revelation in the Old Testament. It is this aspect of John's christology that easily becomes a major problem in the present dialogue between Jews and Christians.

Both aspects of the Johannine view of the Old Testament have been amply discussed in the last decades.¹ The discussion has shown, at least to my mind, that the

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¹ Limiting myself to works that deal with the use of OT materials in the whole of John's gospel, I mention: Barrett 1947; Dahl 1976 (the article dates from 1962); Glasson 1963; Braun 1964; Freed 1965; Meeks 1967; Reim 1974; Pancaro 1975; G. ...

two aspects are equally present in John's gospel, and that it is useless to play off one against the other. The ambivalence is present throughout the gospel, and it cannot be explained by assigning its two sides to different sources or literary levels (see Dietzfelbinger 1996, especially :204). Besides, even if it were possible to explain the ambivalence in that way, the mere fact that the evangelist has chosen to preserve both sides in his final redaction would still require an explanation.

In this paper, I intend to focus on the question about the significance John (and his community, I presume) attached to God's revelation in the history of Israel as recorded in the Scriptures. If God reveals himself exclusively in Jesus, what value does the Old Testament retain as revelation? To answer this question, we have to distinguish between the *text* of Scripture and the *history* narrated in this text. I use the term 'history' here not in the modern sense of critically reconstructed history, but to indicate the events as they appear in the Old Testament, that which we usually call 'the Old Testament history of salvation'. John evidently ascribes to the *text* of Scripture, to the words that have been written down, a positive witnessing function; but if God reveals himself in Jesus only, in how far then can God be said to be the authority behind the text of Scripture? On the other hand, it seems that hardly any revelatory value is left for Old Testament *history*. What is the value of, for example, events such as the theophany on Mount Sinai or the gift of the manna? Did these events for John in any sense constitute revelation of God (cf 5:37–38; 6:49)? In other words: is there, in the Fourth Gospel, any idea of a history of salvation, or is it completely absent?

I shall start with a very brief survey of the unique revelatory function the evangelist ascribes to Jesus. I shall then try to determine John's view of the status of the *text* of Scripture by examining the witnessing function of the Old Testament, and by comparing it with the role the evangelist ascribes to John the Baptist. To answer our second question, concerning the revelatory value of Old Testament *history*, we first have to examine John's ideas about theophanies in the time before Jesus' appearance in the flesh. John does not deal explicitly with this topic, for the simple reason that what he presents is not a treatise on this theme, but a story about Jesus; however, some parts of his gospel betray that he does have certain ideas about this, and we can try to reconstruct them. We then have to see what bearing these ideas may have had on John's view of the value of Old Testament history, and we shall look for other evidence of John's view of the value of Old Testament history. In all this, we have to bear in mind that John's Old Testament is the Old Testament as read and interpreted by Jews and Christians of the first century, and that John knew it primarily (though not exclusively) in the textual form of the LXX (see Menken

1996, especially :205–209; 1997b; cf Hübner 1990:57–70; Müller 1996, especially :19–45, 124–141).

2 JESUS AS THE ONLY REVEALER OF GOD

The Fourth Gospel contains a series of statements, both by the evangelist himself and by Jesus, to the effect that Jesus is the only one to reveal God. To John, seeing and hearing God is possible through Jesus, and through Jesus alone. Real communication with God can take place only in communicating with Jesus. 'No one has ever seen God; the only-begotten one, God, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known' (1:18). 'No one has ascended into heaven, except the one who came down from heaven, the Son of Man' (3:13). 'He whom God sent speaks the words of God' (3:34). 'You have never heard his [God's] voice and you have not seen his form, and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one he sent' (Jesus to 'the Jews', 5:37–38). 'Not that any one has seen the Father, except he who is from God; he has seen the Father' (6:46). 'My teaching is not mine but his who sent me' (7:16). 'As the Father taught me, those things I speak' (8:28). 'He who sees me sees him who sent me' (12:45). 'The Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak' (12:49). 'No one comes to the Father except through me' (14:6). 'He who has seen me has seen the Father' (14:9). 'The word which you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me' (14:24).²

Jesus' pre-existence with God constitutes, in John's thought, the explanation for the fact that he is the only one to reveal God: because God, the Father of Jesus, sent his Son from heaven, Jesus is a trustworthy witness to what he saw and heard with the Father. The Prologue (1:1–18) shows that because he was with God from the beginning, he is able to reveal God. He comes from heaven, and 'bears witness to what he has seen and heard' (3:31–32, cf 3:11). He speaks what he has heard from God and what he has seen with the Father, he speaks to 'the Jews' the truth he has heard from God (8:26, 38, 40). He says to his disciples: 'All that I have heard from my Father, I have made known to you' (15:15). Jesus' complete and immediate heavenly communication with God is continued during his earthly ministry (see, e.g., 5:19–20, 30; 8:29).³

Several of the statements just quoted on Jesus' revealing function have a clear polemical ring: one can reasonably suppose that assertions such as that no one except Jesus has ever seen God or ascended into heaven, were directed against people who believed that there were one or more others who had done so. We know

² Concerning the theme of 'seeing God', cf also, with an ethical focus, 1 John 3:6; 4:12; 3 John 11.

³ For the centrality of the notions of pre-existence and revelation in John's christology, see Loader 1989:29–34, 76–78.

that in first century Judaism it was believed that Moses' ascent of Mount Sinai (Exod 20:21; 24:18; 32:31) had been an ascent into heaven, where he had beheld God and received revelations (see especially Philo, *Mos* 1.158; see further Menken 1996:56–57). Chapters 15–30 of the *Apocalypse of Abraham*⁴ show that there was a similar tradition about Abraham, based on Genesis 15: Abraham ascended to heaven on the right wing of the pigeon he did not slaughter (see Gen 15:9–10), and there he saw, as far as humanly possible, God (*Apoc Abr* 16:3–4), and received many revelations from God himself. Similar traditions were circulating about other figures, and they could function as a stimulus for people to go the same way in mystical experiences (see Borgen 1993; Himmelfarb 1993, especially 9–71). So the Johannine assertion that no one but Jesus has been in direct communication with God in heaven, has a polemical meaning. To John, Jesus is not just one out of a series of revealers, maybe even the best among them, but he is the only revealer, because he was with God and comes from God. There was no need for him first to ascend to heaven and then to return to earth, as he came from heaven and has returned there.

3 THE TEXT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT AS A WITNESS ON BEHALF OF JESUS

That the scriptural text witnesses on behalf of Jesus, is evident from many statements made by various characters in the course of the gospel narrative. At the beginning of the story it is Philip who, just after having been called by Jesus, says: 'We have found him of whom Moses has written in the Law, and also the prophets, Jesus, the son of Joseph, from Nazareth' (1:45). Later, Jesus says to 'the Jews' about the Scriptures: 'It is they that testify on my behalf' (5:39); in the same context, Jesus says about Moses: 'He has written about me' (5:46). It may be that similar general statements are made by the evangelist in 2:22 (after Jesus' resurrection, his disciples 'believe Scripture') and 20:9 (at the empty tomb, Peter and the beloved disciple 'did not yet know the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead'). In these cases, however, γραφή can also refer to a single passage from Scripture. In any event, it appears that John employs a hermeneutical principle to the effect that the Scriptures are actually about Jesus. That they are about Jesus, can be fully understood only after his resurrection (see 2:22; 12:16); this, however, matters more to the *dramatis personae* in the gospel than to the reader of the gospel, who anyway approaches its text from a post-Easter position.

In the course of John's gospel, his hermeneutical principle is concretised in explicit and implicit quotations from the Old Testament.⁵ Jesus is the righteous suf-

ferer described in several psalms (2:17=Ps 69:10; 12:27=Ps 6:4–5; 13:18=Ps 41:10; 15:25=Ps 69:5; 19:24=Ps 22:19; 19:36=Ps 34:21). This may well be tantamount to calling him the Davidic Messiah: all psalms in question are ascribed to David, so that when Jesus is identified with the 'I' of these psalms, he is implicitly identified as the Davidic Messiah (see Daly-Denton 1996:336–337 and *passim*, cf Menken 1996:44, 132). According to other quotations, he is the Christ (12:34=Ps 89:37; 7:42=2 Sam 7:12 etc⁶), the one coming in the name of the Lord (12:13=Ps 118:26), the king announced in Zechariah 9:9 (12:15), the pierced one of Zechariah 12:10 (19:37). He is the place of God's revelation (1:51=Gen 28:12). Isaiah already spoke about and gave the explanation of the disbelief in relation to Jesus' signs (12:38=Isa 53:1; 12:40=Isa 6:10). The promise of God's eschatological teaching is realised in belief in Jesus (6:45=Isa 54:13). John the Baptist, who testifies to Jesus, is the nameless voice of Isaiah 40:3 (1:23). In some quotations, a typological interpretation⁷ of Old Testament passages is presupposed: Jesus is the true manna (6:31=Ps 78:24, cf John 6:32–33), the true water-giving rock (7:38=Ps 78:16, 20), the true paschal lamb (19:36=Exod 12:46; Num 9:12; also Exod 12:10 LXX). Two quotations (8:17=Deut 19:15; 10:34=Ps 82:6) are used by Jesus against his adversaries to defend his words about his unity with the Father in an argument *a minori ad maius*; these quotations may be said to testify indirectly on behalf of Jesus.

In addition, there is a multitude of allusions to Old Testament passages or themes. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish between implicit quotations and allusions, and allusions may be hard to identify; nevertheless, there are many instances in John where, by means of allusions, the evangelist clearly shows his conviction that the Old Testament witnesses on behalf of Jesus. I give a few examples. In 5:35, John the Baptist is described as 'the burning and shining lamp (λύχνος)', in whose light 'the Jews' 'were willing to rejoice (ἀγαλλιαθῆναι) for a time'. We meet here an allusion to Psalm 132:16–17: 'her [Zion's] pious ones will rejoice with joy (LXX: ἀγαλλιάσει ἀγαλλιάσονται)... I [God] shall prepare a lamp (LXX: λύχνον) for my anointed one'. By alluding to the psalm passage, the evangelist shows that he considers it as another scriptural text witnessing on behalf of Jesus as the Christ. In the shepherd discourse (10:1–18), the evangelist applies the Old Testament image of God and his anointed one as shepherds of Israel to Jesus. The image is present in, for instance, Genesis 49:24; Psalm 23; Psalm 78:70–72; Ezekiel 34; these and similar Old Testament passages may be said to testify to Jesus. The absolute 'I am' (ἐγώ εἰμι) in Jesus' mouth (6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; maybe also 18:5, 8) constitutes an

⁴ This writing was probably composed sometime between 70 CE and the middle of the second century, see Rubinkiewicz 1983:683.

⁵ In what follows, I presuppose the identification of the OT sources of John's explicit OT quotations I gave in Menken 1996. The materials collected below clearly show, in my view,

that John is not, as Beutler (1996) thinks, 'more interested in the fact of the witness of scripture to Jesus than in the details of it' (quotation from 1996:158).

⁶ In 7:42, it is not quite clear what value the evangelist attaches to the Davidic descent of the Messiah and his birth in Bethlehem.

⁷ The topic of typology will be discussed in detail in section 4 below.

unmistakable allusion to the absolute 'I am', said by God according to Second Isaiah (MT: אני ה' ; LXX: $\epsilon\gamma\omega\ \epsilon\iota\mu\iota$; see Isa 41:4; 43:10; 46:4; 48:12; 52:6). In John's view, the divine presence proclaimed in Second Isaiah is realised in Jesus.

In some of the general statements about the Scriptures and some of the quotations presented earlier, John considers 'the Law' ($\delta\ \nu\omicron\mu\omicron\varsigma$), in either its usual or an enlarged sense, as witnessing on behalf of Jesus (1:45; 8:17; 10:34; 12:34; 15:25).⁸ Elsewhere in John as well, 'the Law' has that function (see Pancaro 1975:130–168, 307–363, 534–546). In 7:19–24, Jesus argues on the basis of the precedence of circumcision over the Sabbath, that he rightly made a human being well on the Sabbath. In 7:45–52, Nicodemus asks his fellow Pharisees, who curse the crowd that do not know the Law, whether the Law judges somebody without first interrogating him about what he is doing; the suggestion is that the Law would pass a positive judgment on Jesus. When 'the Jews' finally use the Law to accuse Jesus of blasphemy and to have him crucified (18:31; 19:7; cf 5:18; 8:58–59; 10:33), they apparently go against the Law as understood by John. At the end of the Prologue, we find the statement: 'For the Law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ' (1:17). There is certainly some antithesis here between the Law on the one hand, and grace and truth on the other. At the same time, the words 'grace and truth' constitute a clear allusion to a passage from the Law, God's revelation to Moses in Exodus 34:6 (see Hanson 1980:97–109; 1991:21–24), so that the Law may be said to bear testimony on behalf of Jesus as the personification of grace and truth. A positive legal or halachic function of the Law cannot be discerned in John. Of course, 'the Jews' observe the Law (see, e.g. 5:10; 7:22; 19:31), but the Johannine Christians have to keep Jesus' new commandment of mutual love (13:34; 15:12–13, 17).

The witnessing function which Scripture has in the Fourth Gospel is related to the evangelist's speaking of Scripture 'being fulfilled' ($\pi\lambda\eta\rho\omicron\upsilon\sigma\theta\alpha\iota$) in what happens to Jesus. From 12:38 onward, scriptural quotations are introduced by a fulfilment formula: certain events are said to have taken place 'that the Scripture may be fulfilled', and then a quotation follows (13:18; 19:24, 36). Sometimes, other expressions are used instead of 'the Scripture' (12:38; 15:25), and once the formula is used without an actual quotation (17:12). John wishes to demonstrate that words from Scripture are 'fulfilled' in the rejection and death of Jesus. On one occasion, he uses $\tau\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\iota\omicron\upsilon\sigma\theta\iota$ instead of $\pi\lambda\eta\rho\omicron\upsilon\sigma\theta\iota$ (19:28). In the given context, the former verb is best considered as an intensification of the latter: in Jesus' final act before he dies, Scripture is completely fulfilled (most probably, Ps 69:22 is aimed at). The verb $\tau\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\iota\omicron\upsilon\sigma\theta\iota$ here also implies the aspect of reaching an end or a goal: in this act of Jesus, Scrip-

⁸ That John has Jesus speak of 'your Law' (8:17; 10:34) or 'their Law' (15:25), serves on the one hand to accuse 'the Jews', on the other to show that to Christians the Law is valid only not as Law, but as Scripture; see Pancaro 1975:514–534.

ture arrives at its end and its goal is realised.⁹ That John reserves the explicit fulfilment of Scripture for the rejection and death of Jesus from 12:38 onward, does not mean that the idea of fulfilment is completely absent from the preceding part of the gospel, for it is clear that there as well John intends to tell that Scripture is finally realised in Jesus' ministry (see, e.g. 1:23; 12:15). Obermann (1996:348–350) rightly distinguishes between the 'implicit' and 'explicit' fulfilment of Scripture: Scripture is explicitly fulfilled in Jesus' passion, and implicitly in his preceding ministry.

The idea at the basis of this metaphor is that before the coming of Jesus, Scripture remains, so to speak, 'empty'; Jesus is the reality that fills the words of Scripture (see Schlatter 1957:21; Soares Prabhu 1976:46; Müller 1996:133–135; cf also Obermann 1996:81–83; Kraus 1997:9–10). Before his coming, the words of Scripture constitute a promise of a reality that is not yet present on earth; they refer to someone who is not yet there. The rationale behind John's speaking of fulfilment is expressed in Old Testament passages such as Numbers 23:19 or Isaiah 55:11: God will certainly accomplish that which he says. Later on, we find it expressed by, for example, Philo, according to whom God's words do not differ from oaths (*Sac* 93), and God says nothing that will not certainly be performed (*Mos* 1.283). John's speaking of the fulfilment of Scripture has Old Testament roots (see 1 Kgs 2:27; 2 Chr 36:21–22), and finds a few parallels in contemporary Judaism (in Ps-Philo's *Bib Ant*, e.g. 12:3; 21:9; 56:1; see Reinmuth 1993:221–229).¹⁰ For the idea of eschatological fulfilment, the evangelist builds on a Christian usage already existing in his time (see Mark 14:49; Matt 1:22; 2:15, etc; Luke 4:21; 24:44; Acts 1:16; 3:18; 13:27). The best parallel to the basic idea behind this usage is, as far as I can see, the *pesher* exegesis practised by the Qumran sect (see, e.g. 1QpHab or 4QpNah). According to this type of exegesis, the scriptural text concerns in a veiled way the events of the last days, which the interpreter and his community are convinced are now occurring. The prophet Habakkuk as viewed by the Qumran sect did not even know the real, eschatological meaning of his own words, which had to be brought to light by the Teacher of Righteousness (see 1QpHab vii 1–5). To John, Scripture has a hidden eschatological meaning that is disclosed only by its fulfilment in Jesus and so perceptible only for who believes in Jesus. If Jesus is the one about whom Moses and the prophets have written (cf 1:45), then Scripture is essentially a collection of 'oracles' whose real purport remains obscure before Jesus' appearance, even for the human authors of Scripture. In this respect, the prophecy of Caiaphas (11:51–52) constitutes an illuminating parallel. As a high priest, Caiaphas is, in spite of his own lack of

⁹ See Bauer 1988 s.v. $\tau\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\iota\omicron\omega$ 2c, where parallels are adduced, among them Josephus, *Ant* 15.4; 1 *Clem* 23:5; *Mart Pol* 16:2. See also Obermann 1996:87–89, who refers to Philo, *Mos* 1.283 (1996:88 n 146). Kraus (1997:14–16) wrongly tries to exclude the idea of fulfilment in 19:28.

¹⁰ See also Jas 2:23.

morality, under divine inspiration, and he makes a statement whose true purport he does not understand himself.¹¹

In the view of the fourth evangelist, then, the text of the Old Testament contains authoritative prophetic utterances, testimonies on behalf of Jesus, awaiting to be filled with the reality of the Jesus event. These utterances were spoken and written down by humans (Moses: 1:45; 5:46–47; Isaiah: 1:23; 12:38, 39, 41; the prophets: 1:45), but their ultimate source is God himself (5:37;¹² 10:35). But in what sense precisely is God their origin? If there is no real revelation of God apart from Jesus, as we have seen in the second section, there cannot be real revelation of God in the Old Testament. What then is the revelatory value of the testimony of the Old Testament text? In order to find John's answer to this question, we can fruitfully compare the functions which the evangelist ascribes to the scriptural text and to John the Baptist. There is a striking similarity between these two functions; at the same time, the evangelist's view of the Baptist is more elaborate at the textual level of his gospel than his view of the Scriptures, so that the former view can assist in fleshing out the latter.

In the Fourth Gospel, the role of John the Baptist is almost completely reduced to that of a witness on behalf of Jesus (see Ottlinger 1991). When the Baptist is introduced in the Prologue, his task is set out as witnessing to the light (1:7–8; cf 1:15). In the gospel narrative, he consistently carries out the program of witnessing to Jesus (1:19–37; 3:23–30). Jesus refers to John bearing witness to the truth (5:33–35). At the end of Jesus' public ministry, people observe that 'everything that John said about this man [Jesus], was true', and many believe in Jesus (10:41–42). Throughout these passages, John the Baptist is said 'to witness' (μαρτυρεῖν: 1:7, 8, 15, 32, 34; 3:26; 5:33; μαρτυρία: 1:7, 19; 5:34, 36). His other activities as we know them from the synoptic gospels, such as preaching repentance and baptising (Mark 1:4–6 par; Matt 3:7–10 par; Luke 3:10–14), are hardly found in John's gospel. John's baptising is only mentioned in passing (1:25, 26, 28, 31, 33; 3:23, 26), and its objective is to make Jesus known to Israel (1:31). The baptism of Jesus by John (Mark 1:9–11 par) is not directly depicted in the Fourth Gospel, but only hinted at in a monologue of the Baptist (1:32–34). In the Fourth Gospel, John the Baptist is important as a witness on behalf of Jesus.

In this respect, his role agrees with that of the Old Testament: the positive, theological meaning of both John the Baptist and the Old Testament within the Fourth Gospel is that they testify to Jesus. Everything that John the Baptist has said about Jesus, turns out to be true (10:41); Scripture cannot be nullified (10:35). John

witnesses in order that people might believe through him (1:7) and be saved (5:34); the Scriptures witness with the aim that people might come to Jesus and have eternal life (5:39–40). Both John and the Scriptures are misunderstood by 'the Jews' (5:35, 39–40). There are, of course, also differences. John the Baptist is a contemporary of Jesus, he appears together with Jesus, and his words about Jesus apply immediately and overtly to the latter; they are not said to be 'fulfilled' later. The words of Scripture, on the other hand, date back to long before Jesus appeared, they have a veiled meaning that has to be disclosed, and they can be said to be 'fulfilled'.¹³ As witnesses, John the Baptist and the Scriptures do not have quite the same status: Jesus does not really need John's human testimony (5:34), while the testimony of the Scriptures together with that of Jesus' works is presented under the heading of 'the testimony greater than John's' (5:36).

What is the source of John's testimony? Whence does it derive its authority? When John the Baptist is introduced in the Prologue, he is said to have been 'sent from God' (ἀπεσταλμένος παρὰ θεοῦ, 1:6). He himself calls God 'the one who sent me to baptise in water' (1:33; see also 3:28). He is, within the Fourth Gospel, the only person apart from Jesus (and the Paraclete, 14:26) about whom such statements are made. Jesus' mission occurs from his pre-existence with God; it coincides with his coming from God, as is evident from the parallel expressions in 7:29; 8:42; 17:8. John the Baptist is not pre-existent with God; his mission is the mission of an ordinary human being. In contrast to the eternal being of the Logos (ἦν, 1:1, 2, 4), John the Baptist 'appeared' (ἐγένετο, 1:6; see Brown 1966:8). God gave him a special commission: to bear witness to the light (1:7–8), to make Jesus known to Israel (1:31). God spoke to him, and told him by what sign he would recognise Jesus (1:32–33). Although the Baptist is never called a prophet in John's gospel,¹⁴ his mission most closely resembles the mission of Moses and the prophets as described in various Old Testament passages: they are also sent by God to perform a special task, and God speaks to them (see, e.g., Exod 3:10–15; Isa 6:8; Jer 1:4–10). Such divine missions and speaking take place on earth, not in heaven. There is communication between God and John the Baptist, but it is an earthly, mediated communication, distinct from and inferior to the heavenly, immediate communication between God and Jesus, between the Father and his Son, who are one (10:30) and have everything in common (16:15; 17:10).

Because in the Fourth Gospel both John the Baptist and the Scriptures are pre-eminently witnesses on behalf of Jesus, it seems plausible to understand the revelatory value of the text of Scripture in close analogy to that of John's testimony. The

¹¹ Cf Philo's description of the prophet Bileam in *Mig* 113–115; *Mos* 1.274, 277, 281, 283, 286.

¹² I take the perfect μεμαρτύρηκεν to refer to God's testimony as recorded in the Scriptures, see Menken 1985:120–123.

¹³ Some sayings of Jesus also find a 'fulfilment' later in the gospel, see 18:9, 32.

¹⁴ As it explicitly happens in Matt 11:9 par; Luke 1:76. According to Mark 11:32 par; Matt 14:5, it was a popular opinion that John the Baptist was a prophet. In John 1:21, the Baptist denies to be 'the prophet', i.e., the prophet like Moses in Deut 18:15, 18.

words of Scripture were written down by people whom God had sent and to whom God had spoken in the same earthly, mediated way as he sent John the Baptist and spoke to him. Both John the Baptist and Scripture derive their authority from God, but it is an authority that is conferred by God speaking to ordinary human beings on earth. It is distinct from and inferior to the authority of the Son. One could also compare the 'voice from heaven' mentioned in John 12:28–29: it comes from God, but not unequivocally or immediately, for it is interpreted by the audience as either a thunderbolt or the speech of an angel.

4 REVELATION IN ISRAEL'S HISTORY?

We now turn to John's view of the revelatory value of the Old Testament *history*: to what extent can God be said to have revealed himself in the events of the Old Testament history of salvation? From John's view of Jesus as the only revealer of God it is evident that to this evangelist there cannot be revelation of God in the full sense of the word apart from Jesus: no one but he has come from God to proclaim what he has seen and heard with God, not even one of the heroes from Israel's past. They have not, in the view of the evangelist, directly communicated with God in the way Jesus does. Now there are various Old Testament stories about theophanies, and as we have seen (in section 2 above), some of these have been interpreted in Jewish tradition in such a way that the human beneficiary of the theophany entered into heaven, or was given a look into heaven, so that such a person had immediate communication with God. How does John interpret such theophanies?

A clue towards an answer to this question is found in John 12:41 (see Menken 1996:118–120). The evangelist gives, in 12:39–40, a quotation from Isaiah 6:10, in order to explain the unbelief as regards Jesus. The verse is part of Isaiah's call vision (Isa 6:1–13); it is one of those Old Testament passages in which humans, in this case Isaiah, are said to behold God (vv 1, 5). Both the Hebrew text and the LXX are unambiguous in this respect (see also *Mart Isa* 3:9). According to John 12:41, Isaiah spoke the words of Isaiah 6:10 'because he saw his glory, and he spoke about him' (ὅτι¹⁵ εἶδεν τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐλάλησεν περὶ αὐτοῦ). Within its context, the personal pronoun αὐτοῦ can only refer to Jesus: that is clear from what follows in 12:42, where the evangelist says that 'many of the authorities believed in him'. John apparently considers Jesus as the one whom Isaiah saw in his call vision, and who speaks in the quotation. Isaiah did not see God himself, but the pre-existent Jesus. One could try to interpret 'his glory' as indicating Jesus' earthly glory, still belonging to the future from Isaiah's point of view, but such an interpretation underestimates the importance of Jesus' pre-existence in John. The fourth evangelist has, as we have seen, a clear idea of Jesus being with God before his appearance on earth, even

before creation, and in his view the pre-existent Jesus participates in God's heavenly glory (17:5, 24: δόξα). In addition, the interpretation that Isaiah saw Jesus' earthly glory obscures the obvious links between John's text and Isaiah 6. According to the Hebrew text of Isaiah 6, the prophet sees God's glory (v 3: כבוד). The LXX reinforces this theme by translating in v 1 the Hebrew word שָׁרָיָה, 'train', with δόξα, 'glory', so that now not the train of God's garment but God's glory fills the temple. In the Targum, God's glory, and no longer God himself, is the object of the vision of Isaiah ('I saw the glory of the Lord', v 1; 'my eyes have seen the glory of the *Shekhinah* of the eternal king, the Lord of hosts', v 5; translated by B D Chilton). So the assumption that John in 12:41 aims at the pre-existent glory of Jesus, goes well with both John's christology and the text of Isaiah 6 together with its early interpretation. We should also keep in mind the notion, current in apocalyptic eschatology, that things to be revealed at the end of time are now already with God in heaven (see, e.g., 1 *Enoch* 48:6–7; 1 Pt 1:4–5; Rv 21:2, 10; *Mart Isa* 8:25–26). So Isaiah sees Jesus' glory to be revealed on earth (in his ministry, death, and resurrection) when he sees the glory of the pre-existent one (cf 1:14; 2:11, etc).

In John 12:41, then, the evangelist has replaced God, as the object of Isaiah's vision, with the pre-existent Jesus. Something similar seems to be the case at the end of John 8. Jesus says there to 'the Jews' that Abraham 'rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad' (v 56). 'The Jews' misunderstand this statement and think that Jesus, who is not yet fifty years old, has seen Abraham (v 57), and Jesus replies with an unmistakable reference to his pre-existence: 'Before Abraham came into existence, I am' (v 58). We are faced here with a problem which is similar to that of 12:41: does Abraham's vision of Jesus' day, mentioned in v 56, concern the pre-existent or the earthly Jesus? The expression 'my day' could suggest the latter, the reference to Jesus' pre-existence in v 58 the former. In any case, Abraham's vision directs us to Genesis 15 and its early *Wirkungsgeschichte*. The connection between the vision of Genesis 15 and Abraham's joy is explicitly made in *Jubilees* 14:21, where the retelling of the chapter from Genesis is concluded with the words: 'And Abraham rejoiced' (translated by O S Wintermute). As we have seen, the vision was interpreted in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* 15–30 as a tour of heaven; during it, Abraham saw various things hidden with God in heaven and to be revealed at the end of times, in agreement with God's promise before his ascent: 'And there I will show you the things which were made by the ages and by my word, and affirmed, created, and renewed' (9:9; translated by R Rubinkiewicz). We meet the same idea in Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 18:5; 23:6: in his vision, Abraham was lifted above the firmament and shown the arrangement of the stars, he saw the fire of hell and the flaming torches (cf Gen 15:17) which will enlighten the righteous (see Jacobson 1996:582, 716–717; see further 2 *Apoc Bar* 4:4; 4 *Ezra* 3:14, and the rabbinic materials collected in Strack & Billerbeck 1924:525–526). I have already drawn attention to the notion of apocalyptic eschatology that things to be revealed at the end are already with God.

¹⁵ The reading ὅτι is to be preferred, as the *lectio difficilior*, to ὅτε; so also Metzger 1994:203.

So Abraham's vision of 'my day' in John 8:56 presupposes the presence of the pre-existent Jesus in heaven, a presence that was seen by Abraham and that was revealed on earth in Jesus' appearance there (for similar interpretations, see Odeberg 1929: 306–310; Urban & Henry 1979–1980:184–186). Such an explanation suits the sequel in 8:57–58.

To John, the object of the glimpses into heaven that were granted to Isaiah and Abraham was not God himself, but Jesus in his pre-existence; and what John thought to be valid for Isaiah and Abraham, he probably also thought to be valid for Moses, and maybe also for others who saw God in heaven according to the Old Testament as interpreted in John's time.¹⁶ Was then in John's view the pre-existent Jesus also the real actor in the Old Testament theophanies that took place not in heaven but on earth? That is a view that we clearly meet a few decades after John in Justin Martyr (*Apol* 1.62–63; *Dial* 126–129),¹⁷ and notably Hanson has tried to explain several passages from John's gospel in terms of the pre-existent Logos or Jesus being active in Old Testament history.¹⁸ Is this indeed what John intends to say?

In answering this question, we have to distinguish between the Prologue and the rest of the gospel. Apart from the Prologue, the pre-existence of Jesus is a recurrent theme in the Fourth Gospel, but the evangelist never dwells on activities on earth of the pre-existent Jesus before the incarnation. In the Prologue, the divine Logos has a role in creation and incarnation, but not in what happens between these events; just as in some Wisdom hymns that probably influenced the Prologue (especially Prov 8:22–36; Sir 24:1–22), there is no interest in the activities of Wisdom between creation and her taking up residence with Israel. The present tense φαίνει ('the light shines', 1:5) shows together with the following passage about John the Baptist (1:6–8) that at least from 1:5 on, the incarnate Logos is the theme of the Prologue (see, e.g., Bultmann 1941:4; Kümmel 1976:248–249; Ridderbos 1987:53–55; Theobald 1988:211–229). Although the Prologue in itself could suggest some distinction between the Logos and Jesus, a reading of the Prologue in combination with the ensuing gospel narrative makes it clear that to John, from the very beginning, Jesus and the Logos are identical. The suggestion just mentioned is easily explained by the use of traditional materials in 1:1–18. In the rest of the gospel, Jesus is never called ὁ λόγος, and John emphasises the identity of the pre-existent and the earthly Jesus: when the Johannine Jesus speaks about his 'existence' before the incarnation, he uses the first person (see, e.g., 3:11; 8:26, 38).

¹⁶ Moses, Abraham, and Isaiah are the only OT figures to play a significant role in John's gospel.

¹⁷ See already Philo, *Som* 1.229–241; 1 Cor 10:4.

¹⁸ Hanson 1991, esp. 21–32, 36–41, 73–83, 125–131, 144–149, 166–170, 240–242. References to his earlier publications are easily found in the footnotes to these pages. See also Reim 1983:4–8; Hengel 1989:266, 288. For criticism of Hanson, see Obermann 1996:29.

It follows that John does not speak of the pre-existent Jesus being active on earth between creation and incarnation. In his pre-existence, Jesus is in heaven, and a few chosen Old Testament figures such as Isaiah, Abraham, or Moses, see him in his heavenly glory. I presume that their vision of Jesus in his glory implies for John that they see God in Jesus. If Jesus' followers, united with him in heaven, will see the glory he already had before creation (17:24, cf 17:5), and if they see the Father when they see Jesus (12:45; 14:9), then John probably thought that Isaiah and the other Old Testament figures who saw Jesus' glory, also saw God in Jesus. Even before the incarnation, there is no real access to God other than through Jesus. The incarnation makes it possible for all believers to see God in Jesus (cf 1:14, 18), but before that moment a few chosen Old Testament figures already saw God in the heavenly, pre-existent Jesus.

But what about the rest of the Old Testament history of salvation? In how far does it have a positive significance for the evangelist? It seems to me that to John, Old Testament history is meaningful in so far as it provides τύποι, 'types' of Jesus. By 'types' I understand: persons, acts, events, institutions from the Old Testament that prefigure—in the eyes of the evangelist—Jesus as God's eschatological envoy, in such a way that Jesus corresponds to them and at the same time (as 'antitype') surpasses them. John does not use the terminology of τύπος and the like, as some other New Testament authors do,¹⁹ but the idea behind that terminology is present in his gospel.

A few times, Jesus and an Old Testament type are explicitly compared. We read in 3:14–15: 'And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, in order that everyone who believes, may in him have eternal life'. Moses' act of lifting up the serpent (Num 21:8–9) is a type of the crucifixion of Jesus (cf John 12:32–33). There is a physical similarity between the two acts, and both acts are meant to convey life. In this respect, however, the latter surpasses the former: whoever saw the serpent, obtained natural life, while whoever believes, has eternal life. The comparison of the effects is not spelt out here in John, but is evident in the other example of explicit typology, to which we now turn.

In the discourse on the bread of life (6:22–59), Jesus compares himself as the bread of life, come down from heaven, with the manna. In 6:48–50, 58, the different effects of the two kinds of bread are emphasised: the fathers, who ate the manna, died, but whoever eats of the bread of life, has eternal life. There are more differences between Jesus and the manna: Jesus is bread in a metaphorical sense, the manna in a real sense; Jesus has to be eaten in a metaphorical sense,²⁰ the manna in a real sense; for Jesus, 'coming down from heaven' means that he comes from God, for

¹⁹ See Rm 5:14; 1 Cor 10:6, 11; Hb 9:24; 1 Pt 3:21.

²⁰ The metaphorical sense of 'eating Jesus' is also present in 6:51c–58, see Menken 1997a.

the manna that it descends from the sky. Nevertheless, there is the basic similarity of food given by God, as becomes clear from 6:32. This saying of Jesus follows and interprets the quotation from Psalm 78:24 which the crowd adduce in their request for a sign: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat' (6:31). Jesus corrects the statement of the crowd on three points. The crowd consider Moses as the giver of the manna in the psalm quotation (see Menken 1996:54–63), but in reality it is God. The crowd consider God's gift of bread from heaven as something of the past with present effect (cf the perfect *ἔδωκεν*), but God's real gift takes place in the present. The crowd consider the manna as bread from heaven, but Jesus is the true bread from heaven. The saying in 6:32 is fairly complex, because three oppositions are woven into one antithetical parallelism. In any case, it shows that the manna was, in a sense, bread from heaven, given by God; if it was not, the addition of *τὸν ἀληθινόν* at the end of the second member of the parallelism would be pointless.²¹ The contrast between Jesus and the manna becomes clear against a background of similarity, slight though it may be.

Although in 1:17 there is no explicit comparison, the statement can also be classified as an instance of typology: as God gave the Law through Moses,²² so grace and truth became reality through Jesus Christ. Without going into the question as to what kind of parallelism precisely is at stake here, we can say that God's gift of the Law is both paralleled and surpassed by the grace and truth taking place now in Jesus.

There are other instances of typology in John, but they remain implicit. I mention a few instances; some of these have already been touched on in the discussion of John's quotations and allusions. The evangelist considers Jesus not only as the true manna, but also as the true water-giving rock (7:38). This typology is very probably behind the flowing of water from Jesus' pierced side (19:34), and is also represented by the 'living water' offered by Jesus to the Samaritan woman (4:10–14). According to some prophetic texts (Ezek 47:1–12; Joel 4:18; Zech 13:1; 14:8), Jerusalem and the temple will also be sources of (living) water. A typology related to that of the rock is therefore that of Jesus as the true temple, the true place of God's presence (especially 1:14, 51; 2:19–21; 4:21–24).²³ We remain within the sphere of temple and liturgy with the typology of Jesus as the true paschal lamb, which appears in the quotation of 19:36. It is implicitly present in John's chronology of the passion, according to which Jesus is hanging on the cross at the same time that in the Jerusalem temple the paschal lambs are slaughtered (13:1; 18:28; 19:14; cf Josephus, *JW* 6.423; *m Pesah* 5:1). The hyssop mentioned in John 19:29 also belongs with it (see

²¹ This is overlooked by Dietzfelbinger 1996:205; Theobald 1997:350–357. For a more adequate interpretation, see, e.g., Barrett 1978:289–290; Sängner 1995:125–126.

²² The passive *ἔδοθη* is best considered as a 'theological passive', see Jeremias 1942:877; Kotila 1988:141, 204; Hengel 1989:266; cf Zerwick 1963:nr 236.

²³ See on this topic and its various ramifications now Busse 1997.

Exod 12:22).²⁴ One could add the images of the shepherd (10:1–18), of the vine (15:1–8), of the breath of life (20:22), and still more. The modelling of some of Jesus' miracles in John's gospel after miracles of Elijah and Elisha can also be considered a kind of implicit typology (see, e.g., John 4:46–54, especially v 50, beside 1 Kings 17:17–24, especially v 23; John 6:1–15, especially v 9, beside 2 Kings 4:42–44, especially v 42). A still clearer case of modelling is found in the 'Mosaic' traits in John's portrait of Jesus: features such as divine mission, legitimation by means of signs in view of faith, revelation of God's name and speaking of God's word (see, e.g., John 2:11; 17:6, 8), all find parallels in the Old Testament portrait of Moses (see, e.g., Exod 3:1–4:17; see Glasson 1963; Meeks 1967: 286–319; Reim 1974:130–153; Boismard 1988:1–71). One could perhaps also add the discussion between Jesus and 'the Jews' about Abraham in 8:31–41; Jesus considers Abraham as a type not of himself, but of the true believer (vv 39–40).

John's typological interpretation of persons, acts, events, and institutions from the Old Testament presupposes that the Old Testament text gives evidence of a history that has similarities with the history of Jesus. That he depicts Jesus as the one whom all these types prefigure, shows that the types have a positive value for him; less value than Jesus, who represents for him the absolute value, but some value nevertheless.²⁵ For the types to be used in this way, they must be, in John's view, part of a history of salvation in which God is active (this divine activity is enunciated in 1:17; 6:32). Presumably we have to think here of the same mediated divine activity to which John ascribes the ministry of John the Baptist, and which we also postulate to be behind the text of Scripture. Nobody in the history of salvation has had direct communication with God in the way Jesus had; on the other hand, the Old Testament history is not 'christianised' by ascribing it to the activity of the pre-existent Jesus.

5 CONCLUSION

My initial question was what the significance of God's revelation in the history of Israel as recorded in the Scriptures was to John. It has become clear in the course of the argument that the *text* of Scripture witnesses to Jesus in the sense that he is the reality that fulfils the scriptural words. Until his coming, these words were 'empty', that is, they were a promise of a reality not yet present on earth. The words of Scripture came from God, not in the direct way in which God spoke to the pre-existent Jesus, but in an indirect way, comparable to the way John the Baptist was sent by God. In so far as the *history* recorded in Scripture is concerned, John does not ascribe

²⁴ Possibly also the identification of Jesus as 'the lamb of God' in 1:29, 36.

²⁵ By overlooking part of the evidence, Theobald (1997:362, cf 365) wrongly ascribes to John a view of OT history as 'in einen Raum theologischer Irrelevanz entlassen'.

activity on earth to the pre-existent Jesus, who was seen in his heavenly glory by some chosen Old Testament heroes; it is God who has been working, also in an indirect way, in the Old Testament history of salvation. God's work in this history has similarities with his revelation in Jesus, and this circumstance makes it possible for the evangelist to search in the Old Testament for types of Jesus; at the same time, Jesus as the antitype, by far exceeds the types.

In the use of typology, there is an obvious relationship between the textual and the historical aspects of Scripture. In many instances, the Old Testament history constitutes an initial but very incomplete fulfilment of the Old Testament text; to put it otherwise, the type is an initial and the antitype a complete fulfilment of the Old Testament text. The gift of the manna, for instance, was a realisation of the words from Psalm 78:24, quoted in John 6:31: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat', but Jesus, who came down from heaven as the bread of life, surpasses the manna by far and constitutes the complete and true fulfilment of the psalm verse. In 1:17, the Law is on the one hand a witness on behalf of Jesus, to be fulfilled by the grace and truth that came with him, on the other hand it is a type of what will become full reality in Jesus.

To John, Jesus is legitimated as God's envoy by the Scriptures. Such legitimation is necessary, not only because the Johannine Christians have to defend their belief in Jesus against Jewish opponents who read the same Scriptures in a different way (see, e.g. 9:28–29), but also and primarily because to the evangelist Jesus is essentially, and not just accidentally, the climax of God's involvement with Israel. That Jesus is the King of Israel (1:49; 12:13), is not just an unessential detail. John does not doubt that the God of Israel and the Father who sent Jesus are the same. In 4:22, he has Jesus say to the Samaritan woman that in contrast to the Samaritans, the Jews worship what they know, 'for salvation is from the Jews'. This statement does of course not mean that 'the Jews' (with the negative connotation of 'unbelievers') know God, for that would be in flagrant contradiction to 8:19, 55; 15:21; 16:3. It means that the Jewish people are closer to the God of Israel than the Samaritans,²⁶ and that is because God's definite saving act takes place in the Jew Jesus, to whom the Jewish Scriptures witness and for whose work Jewish history contains types. To John, the Scriptures, both their text and the history recorded in them, legitimate Jesus, not *vice versa*.

However, in the Johannine view real revelation of God is to be found not in the Scriptures, but exclusively in Jesus. John's theological outlook is christocentric to the extent that there is no room for anyone or anything else as bearer of real divine revelation. On this point, John seems to represent an extreme position within early

²⁶ The antithesis in this verse is expressed in typically strong Semitic fashion with no mean between ignorance and knowledge', so Brown 1966:172. There are no cogent reasons to consider 4:22, either in its entirety or its final clause only, as a gloss.

Christianity. We should actually be astonished that John still has some positive things to say about the Old Testament. True, it does not contain revelation of God in the strict sense of the term, but the same God who has revealed himself in Jesus, spoke through mediation in the Old Testament text and was active in the history recorded in it. John's gospel may be something of a stumbling block in Jewish-Christian dialogue, but it does not leave us with the infelicitous alternative of either leaving this dialogue or discarding the Fourth Gospel.

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Prof Dr M J J Menken, Department of Biblical Studies, Catholic Theological University, P O Box 80101, 3508 TC Utrecht, The Netherlands; guest lecturer, Department of New Testament (B), University of Pretoria, Pretoria, 0001 South Africa.
E mail: mmenken@ktu.nl