

date in the late 80s or even 90s would be more plausible.

Publication after c. 85 CE is often postulated because of John's references to people being made *apōsynagōgōi*, 'separated from the Synagogue' (9.22; 12.42; 16.2). These are widely held to relate to the introduction of a new clause to the Synagogue prayers, reputedly by the Jamnian authorities, around this date (e.g. Brown, 1979; Martyn, 1979). This is known as the Twelfth Benediction or *birkat ha-minim*, 'blessing of the heretics'. The relevant section begins by calling on God to destroy speedily the apostates and insolent government, continuing: 'and let the Christians [*nošērim*] and the heretics [*minim*] perish in a moment, let them be blotted out of the book of life, and let them not be written with the righteous. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who humblest the insolent'.¹⁶ Thus, although technically a blessing (*birkat*), this was effectively a curse. Often this text is believed to refer to the same event as the 'cursing' of Christians in synagogues mentioned by Justin Martyr in the second century (*Dial.* 16; 96).

There are, however, serious problems with using the *birkat* to date John. First, in its earliest form it did not include the word *nošērim* (interpreted as 'Nazoraeans', i.e. Christians); the *nošērim* could, conceivably, be included with the *minim* ('heretics') – which does occur in early versions – but *minim* normally refers to unorthodox Jews rather than Christians. Secondly, the dating of the *birkat* to c. 85 CE has been strongly challenged: the rabbinic sources (*b. Ber.* 28b–29a; *y. Ber.* IV, 3.8a) linking it with Samuel the Small (85–100 CE) and/or the Jamnian academy are late and possibly unreliable (Lincoln, 2000, p. 270). Nor is it evident that Justin's accusation that Jews cursed Christians in the synagogues necessarily refers to this clause.¹⁷ It is also questionable whether the Palestinian rabbis had authority to impose such prayers throughout the Jewish world, including Ephesus, where most scholars locate John's 'community'. For all these reasons the evidence of this *birkat* must be rejected for dating purposes.¹⁸

Nor can any help be derived from John's relationship to Revelation or 1–3 John. It is not clear whether Revelation was written before or after the Gospel, and in any case it cannot be securely dated – it is generally assigned to the reign of Domitian (81–96 CE), though some support a date in Nero's reign (54–68 CE). The letters of 1–3 John are generally placed after the Gospel (Edwards, 1996a, pp. 53–5) and usually dated before c. 100 CE (Grayston, 1984, is exceptional in placing 1–3 John before John); but this only slightly reduces the *ante quem* provided by *papyri*. To conclude: a date before 70 CE seems unlikely on various grounds; publication after c. 100 CE is improbable. Therefore c. 75–c. 95 CE seems the most plausible time for John's publication in something close to its present form.

Conclusion

There can be no certainty about either the place or date of publication of John. Its association with Ephesus rests on the strength of patristic testimony (and possible links with Revelation) rather than on internal evidence. John must have worked in the context of a Christian environment, but attempts to use social-scientific analysis to delineate the character of his 'community' have proved unsuccessful. He probably wrote for a broad audience, including Jews and Jewish Christians, to whom he was eager to demonstrate Jesus' messiahship. But his aim extended beyond this: he also wanted to set out his own understanding of Jesus' actions and person, offering to readers salvation and new life through him.

6

Jesus' Miracles as Narrative Theology

The heart of John's Gospel is its christology or presentation of Christ. Jesus dominates its narrative from start to finish, hardly ever being 'off-stage'. All the rest of John's theology – ethics, eschatology, ecclesiology, doctrine of God, the Spirit, and the Church – is so intimately bound up with his christology that any attempt to cover these aspects separately is likely to distort his thought (cf. Barrett, 1978, p. 67; Carson, 1991, p. 95). Yet John's understanding is far from straightforward. Parts of his narrative presuppose a 'higher' christology than others, and there are tensions in his portrayal of Jesus as fully human and yet divine.

One reason for these tensions may be John's reuse of traditional materials, not always fully integrated with his own more sophisticated ideas. Another is the nature of biblical theology, which is not propositional, but rather experiential and often 'narrative'. Instead of presenting systematic, logical propositions, with a firm philosophical base, the Gospel authors write narratives embodying their experience of God in Jesus. John communicates his theology in different ways: through the shape of his Gospel as a whole; through significant actions of Jesus; through dialogues (including 'confessions of faith'); and through Jesus' statements about himself. He also presents it through interpretative asides and longer reflections like the Prologue.

Chapters 6–9 examine these varied ways in which John conveys his christology, beginning with Jesus' miracles. The possibility that all of these came from a special 'Signs Source' has already been discussed (and rejected); we concentrate here on their theological content. John calls the miracles either *erga*, 'works',¹ usually on the lips of Jesus, or *semeia*, 'signs', mostly in comments by other characters or by the narrator. John stresses that Jesus' fine deeds are performed in accordance with God's will (5.36; 10.32); they are God's 'works' as well as Jesus' (9.3; 10.37f.); they bear witness to him (10.25). *Semeion*, probably derived from the Septuagint (though occurring in secular Greek), suggests that the miracles point to something beyond themselves. Just as God revealed his character through 'signs and wonders', so Jesus, through his signs, reveals God's glory (11.40) and his own (2.11; cf. 11.4). Apart from the incarnation and resurrection, eight miracles are recounted; but John knows of many more (20.30). Sometimes John makes his understanding plain through specific comments; sometimes it is brought out by interpretative dialogues; sometimes it has to be deduced from context, or from pointers in language and imagery. As well as revealing Jesus' character, the miracles serve as a catalyst to faith (or unbelief). Each miracle needs to be studied separately.

(1) The 'Sign' at Cana (2.1–11)

This story, unique to John, is told with vividness but restraint. The wine runs out at a wedding, and Jesus' mother tells him, 'They have no wine'; Jesus apparently rebukes her. Nevertheless she tells the servants, 'Do whatever he bids you'. Jesus bids the servants fill six large stone jars with water, draw off some, and take it to the banquet master (Greek *architriklinos*). They do so, and when he has tasted the water, now become wine, he congratulates the bridegroom on its excellent quality (2.10).

Sometimes this episode is criticized as a 'luxury' miracle. Although honour was involved for the village family who faced humiliation in running out of wine, it can hardly be said to meet an extreme need. Jesus apparently produces over 100 gallons of wine (the six jars each contain 'two or three measures', i.e. 18–24 gallons: Barrett, 1978, p. 192). Why should Jesus create so much wine, especially when the guests have already drunk freely (2.10)? Is he encouraging alcoholic indulgence? To ask such questions is to misunderstand the nature of John's narrative. This is no ordinary miracle, but a 'sign', revealing Jesus' glory (2.11). 'Glory' (Greek *doxa*) can mean reputation or ordinary human honour (cf. 12.43), but here it denotes divine splendour, majesty, and transcendence. The disciples have glimpsed this through Jesus' action.

The miraculous production of top-quality wine in large quantity would suggest varying symbolism to different readers. Those with a Jewish background would recall how wine in the Hebrew Bible symbolizes joy: it gladdens the human heart (Ps. 104.15) and cheers both God and mortals (Jdg. 9.13). Created to make people rejoice, when drunk in moderation it is 'equal to life for humans' (Ecclus 31.27). Abundance of wine portends the end-time, when God was expected to intervene dramatically in history. Isaiah promised that 'on that day' the Lord would prepare on the mountain a rich feast with mature wines; he would wipe away tears, and bring salvation to his people (25.6–9). Amos (9.13) and Joel (3.18) similarly speak of the mountains dripping sweet wine on 'the day of the Lord'. 2 *Baruch* 292 foretells that when the 'Anointed One' (messiah) begins to be revealed vines will produce supernaturally large quantities of grapes. Targums and rabbinic sources associate abundance of fine wine with the messianic age (Aus, 1988, pp. 8f.). The *Pirke Aboth*, probably the earliest text of the Mishnah (c. 2nd cent. CE), uses 'the banquet' to describe enjoyment of life with God (cf. the Synoptic banquet or wedding feast symbolizing the Kingdom³). Some Hellenized Jews might recall Philo's interpretation of the priest-king Melchizedek (Gen. 14.18) as the *logos* who offered wine instead of water, so that souls might be 'possessed by divine intoxication, more sober than sobriety itself' (*Leg. All.*, III.79–82); note his image of the *logos* as God's 'wine-pourer', himself the drink which he pours, filling sacred goblets with pure joy (*Somn.*, II.249). For Philo, the wine produced by the *logos* stands for grace, joy, virtue, and wisdom.

Christian readers would probably see the quantity and quality of the Cana wine as illustrating God's generosity, and Jesus as God's promised agent of salvation, bringing eschatological joy. John's placing of this miracle at the start of Jesus' ministry would be taken as a sign of the dawn of a new age, and as a pointer to what is to follow. For these readers, 'the third day' (2.1) might suggest Jesus' resurrection (cf., e.g., Mt. 16.21; 17.23; Lk. 9.22; 24.7; Acts 10.40; 1 Cor. 15.4).⁴ Jesus' mention of his hour (2.4) could be seen as pointing forward to John's characteristic use of 'hour' to refer to Jesus' Passion (e.g. 12.23, 27; 13.1; cf. Brown, 1966, pp. 517f.). Those for whom the Eucharist formed an important element in their lives would undoubtedly also interpret the wine as foreshadowing this sacrament, as did many of the Church Fathers (Cullmann, 1953, p. 69; Brown, 1966, p. 110).

How would pagan readers (or Christians converted from Hellenism) understand this story? Many would be reminded of the miracles of Dionysos, the Greek god of wine and irrepressible new life. A well-known legend tells how Dionysos once caused his ship's mast to turn into a grape-

laden wine and the ship to flow with fragrant sweet wine (*b. Hom.*, VII.34-40), a scene depicted in Greek art. According to Pausanias (VI.26.1f.), on the eve of Dionysos' feast empty jars placed in his temple at Elis were miraculously filled overnight with wine. At his festival on Andros and Teos, the temple springs miraculously flowed with wine instead of water (Pliny, *NH*, II.231, XXXI.16; Diod. Sic., III.66.2). Hellenized readers, familiar with such stories, might suppose John's message to be that Jesus is greater than Dionysos. But it is doubtful how far John deliberately draws on Dionysiac imagery (Dodd, 1963, pp. 22-4; Morris, 1972, pp. 175f.). Although the miracle has some 'Hellenistic' colouring (including the presence of a banquet master), Jewish symbolism seems to be paramount; compare the miraculous production of water, oil, and barley-meal in the Moses, Elijah, and Elisha stories.

The possibility of another symbolic meaning must also be discussed. The stone water-jars are described as being there 'according to the *katharismos* [literally, purification] of the Jews' (2.6). Some commentators have suggested that a deliberate contrast is intended between the insipidness, or imperfection, of Judaism (symbolized by the water) and the exhilarating 'wine' of Christianity (e.g. Barclay, 1956, vol. 1, pp. 89f.; Hunter, 1965, p. 31). Thus the miracle has been seen as symbolizing the supersession of Judaism in the glory of Jesus (Barrett, 1978, p. 189). But it is far from obvious that this is John's intention. The reference to Jewish *katharismos* may be simply to explain the presence of so many large water-jars; it also points forward to the debate over purificatory rites in 3.25.

The 'sign' at Cana illustrates both the joys and the problems of studying John. A simple narrative is packed with potential symbolism with seemingly endless interpretative possibilities. There is no sure way of determining how many of these were intended by the Evangelist. All we can say is that he deliberately chose this 'sign' to open his account of Jesus' active ministry. Its most important message is probably that Jesus is God's eschatological agent in dispensing good gifts in the form of wine, a symbol of joy and of the 'messianic' age.

(2) The Official's Son (4.46-54)

This story forms a pair with the wine miracle. The narrative is quite straightforward: an official begs Jesus to heal his son who is dying of a fever. At first Jesus demurs (4.48; cf. 2.4), but the man persists; so Jesus tells him, 'Go; your son lives' (4.50). He trusts Jesus' word and returns home to find that the fever left his son at the exact time that Jesus spoke. The official 'believes' with all his household (cf. Acts 10.2; 11.14; 16.15). This healing at a distance is paralleled in the Synoptic (Q)

healing of the centurion's servant (Mt. 8.5-13; Lk. 7.1-10), with many details in common with John, and the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter (Mk 7.24-30). But John's episode appears to be independent of both, though possibly deriving from a common oral source with the Q story (Dodd, 1963, pp. 188-95; Davies and Allison, 1991, pp. 17f.).

Non-Jewish readers, including Gentile Christians, might be reminded of Greek and Roman tales of divine healers, including many seers and heroes. Some scholars see John as presenting Jesus as a *theios anēr* (cf. above, p. 34), like Apollonius of Tyana, an itinerant Neo-Pythagorean philosopher, whose supposed miracles are described by Philostratus (3rd cent. CE). But there is no need to look as late as this for parallels. From Homer onwards, miraculous cures were attributed to Asclepios and his sons, whose cults continued into the Graeco-Roman period when Asclepios is said to have cured fevers, paralysis, leprosy, and many other diseases (Blackburn, 1991, pp. 24-8, 188-91). Jewish readers (and Christians converted from Judaism) might be more inclined to interpret Jesus' actions in the light of Jewish charismatic healers. Many scholars quote an anecdote from the Babylonian Talmud (*b. Ber. Bar.* 43b): Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa, after praying for a colleague's sick son, told those who came to him for aid, 'Go, for the fever has left him'; they found that the boy had been healed at the exact same hour. The parallel with John 4.42 is striking, but the text is very late and so might have been influenced by John.⁵

More importantly, readers familiar with the Hebrew Bible would recall miracles attributed to Elijah and Elisha. 2 Kings 5 describes how Elisha cured Naaman of leprosy by an authoritative command to wash in the Jordan. Both Elijah and Elisha reputedly raised the dead (1 Kgs 17.17-24; 2 Kgs 4.18-37). The parallel with Elijah's restoration of the widow of Zarephath's son is particularly remarkable. Elijah says to the mother, 'See, your son *lives*', almost exactly the same words in the Septuagint (3 Kgs 17.23) as Jesus uses to the official, 'Go; your son *lives*' (Jn 4.50). The choice of the Hebrew-sounding term '*lives*' (Greek *zōō*, cognate with *zōē*, 'life') rather than the idiomatic Greek 'is better' or 'has recovered' is striking. The miracle follows immediately after Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman, to whom Jesus has offered *living* water (4.10), 'welling up to eternal *life*' (4.14). This can hardly be coincidence. In restoring life to the dying boy Jesus acts out his life-giving powers, of which he has spoken to the Samaritan woman under the image of 'living water'. The gift of life to the boy echoes the Prologue's theme of life (1.4), and points forward to other passages featuring Jesus as life-giver (e.g. 5.26; 6.33), a prerogative shared with God. This second 'sign', then, shows Jesus as much more than a Hellenistic miracle worker (or *theios anēr*). It reveals him as closely

associated with God, and as following in the steps of the Hebrew prophets.

(3) The Lame Man (5.1-47)

The healing of the lame man (5.1-9) follows a pattern of Hellenistic miracle story of a type often found in the Synoptics. A realistic setting is given – a pool in Jerusalem where disabled people gather in the hope of healing (5.2f.). The man's illness is described, including its length (38 years); Jesus' authoritative command is recorded, 'Rise, take up your bed, and walk' (5.8; cf. Mk 2.11). The man demonstrates the reality of his cure by doing precisely this. Similar features occur in the healings of Peter's mother-in-law (Mk 1.29-31 par.), of the woman bent double (Lk 13.11-13), and in the raising of Jairus' daughter (Mk 5.22-4, 35-43). There are also parallels in Acts (3.1-10; 14.8-11). The most similar Synoptic miracle is the healing of the paralysed man at Capernaum (Mk 2.1-12 par.), to which John may be indebted.

In both John and Mark the lame man's healing is more than a simple miracle: it is also a controversy story. In Mark, the issue is Jesus' authority to forgive sins; in John, it is working on the Sabbath – an issue raised in other Synoptic miracle stories (e.g. Mk 3.1-6; Mt. 12.9-14; Lk. 13.10-17; 14.1-6), as well as in the grain controversy (Mk 2.23-8 par.). It is illuminating to compare Jesus' defence in the different Gospels. In the Synoptics, Jesus meets criticisms with rabbinical-style arguments, especially that known as *qal uahomer* (literally 'light and heavy'), an argument from the lesser to the greater (e.g. Lk. 13.15f.; 14.5f.); if you would untie an animal so that it can drink, or rescue one from a pit on the sabbath, how much more should you free a suffering human being? In John, Jesus counters accusations of Sabbath-breaking by claiming that his Father is still working, and he is too (5.17). It was a matter of debate among learned Jews whether God could rest on the Sabbath without ceasing his creative activity. Jesus' response presupposes that God never ceases to be creative on the Sabbath; Jesus, as his Son, must be the same. This is a more radical defence than the Synoptic *qal uahomer* arguments, or the clever repartee that the Sabbath was made for humankind, not humankind for the Sabbath' (Mk 2.27 par.).⁶

'The Jews' accuse Jesus of making himself 'equal with God', but he does not claim this. He rather stresses his subordination as a dutiful son: he does only what he 'sees' the Father doing (5.19); he can do nothing independently, and seeks the Father's will, not his own (5.30). But he acts with the full authority of the Father, who has granted him to have life 'within himself' and to execute judgement (5.22, 26f.). The Father himself bears witness to him (5.37), as do John the Baptist and his own

deeds (*erga*). He reproaches his accusers for not believing in him, the one whom God has sent, and for not believing in Moses, who wrote of him (5.38, 45-7). In the face of these claims, the original healing which sparked off the criticisms is almost forgotten. While further symbolism has sometimes been read into this miracle,⁷ its main purpose (besides depicting Jesus as a healer) is to serve as a peg on which to hang this christological discourse.

(4) The Feeding of the Multitude and (5) the Walking on the Water (6.1-71)

These two miracles are closely associated (cf. Mk 6.32-52) and may be discussed together. The scene is set in Galilee near Passover time.⁸ First, the feeding miracle is related with its immediate consequences (6.1-15). Then, when it was dark and a strong wind blowing, Jesus walks on the water (6.16-21); he reassures the frightened disciples, who take him into the boat; it immediately arrives at the shore (cf. Ps. 107.30). Finally (6.22-71), the feeding is interpreted through a lengthy dialogue between Jesus, the crowd, 'the Jews', and the disciples, ending with some of them withdrawing. The feeding miracle is specifically called a 'sign' (6.14).

John's account is christologically rich and resonant with symbolism. Jews and Jewish Christian readers would, once again, be aware of precedents in the Elijah and Elisha stories, both prophets miraculously producing food at a time of need (1 Kgs 17.8-16; 2 Kgs 4.1-7, 42-4). Even closer is the parallel between Jesus' production of food in the desert at Passover-time and Moses' giving of manna to the Israelites, to which John specifically draws attention (6.31f., 49). The walking on the water suggests other familiar Scripture stories, including Elijah's and Elisha's crossing of the Jordan dry-shod (2 Kgs 2.8, 14), and, especially, Israel's crossing of the Red Sea under Moses after the first Passover (Ex. 14.19-25). All this leads readily to the crowd's identification of Jesus as 'the prophet who is to come into the world' (6.14). Their words allude to a specific text – Moses' promise that God will raise up a prophet like him (Dt. 18.15-18). Immediately after this the crowd attempt to make Jesus king (discussed below, Ch. 7). One gets a strong impression that for John the feeding miracle, like the wine miracle of Cana, symbolizes the advent of the end-time or 'messianic' age.⁹

John offers no interpretation of the walking on the water. Educated Greek readers, and Christians converted from Hellenism, might well recall tales of heroes like Euphemos, the companion of Jason, who walked on water without even wetting his feet (Apol. Rhod., 1.179-84), and of ships which miraculously sped their way under divine guidance (*h. Hom.*, III.418-21). Readers from a Jewish background would be more

likely to see parallels with God's actions in the Hebrew Bible, where YHWH controls the unruly waters and makes his path in the sea (cf. Isa. 51.10; Ps. 77.19f.). This impression would be enhanced by Jesus' use of the phrase *egō emi* (6.20). While this might be simply a formula of recognition, 'I am', it could also be understood absolutely in the sense of 'I am', recalling YHWH's self-revelation to Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3.14) and various Isaianic texts (discussed below, Ch. 12).

However, the ensuing dialogue does not focus on Jesus' divinity, but on his giving food that endures to eternal life (6.27). The people refer to the bread which their fathers ate in the desert (6.31; cf. Ex. 16.15). Jesus corrects them: it was not Moses who *gave* the bread, but his Father who *gives* the true bread from heaven (note the tenses, and John's characteristic use of 'true' in the sense of 'real'). The people ask for this bread, and Jesus identifies himself with the 'bread of life'. He has come down from heaven to do the will of him who sent him. It is his Father's will that everyone who sees the Son and puts faith in him may have eternal life, and be raised on the last day (6.25–40). Thus Jesus is revealed as 'the prophet like Moses', as fulfilling typologically¹⁰ Moses' actions, and as superior to Moses.

'The Jews' complain, 'Isn't this the son of Joseph whose father and mother we know?' (ironical words for readers familiar with the story of the Virgin Birth). Jesus speaks of his mission from the Father (6.44f.), citing 'and they shall all be taught by God' (Isa. 54.13). The inference seems plain: Jesus' 'bread' is his life-bringing teaching. Yet somehow Jesus also is the bread itself (6.35, 48). Those who ate manna in the wilderness died, but those who eat the living bread will not die. Many scholars assume that Jesus is now identified with personified Wisdom, who summons people to her banquet (Prov. 9.5; Eccles 24.19), feeding those who keep Torah with 'the bread of understanding' and 'the water of wisdom' (Eccles 1.5.3). There are even more striking parallels in Philo, who speaks of the divine *logos* distributing wisdom, the heavenly food (*ourania trophē*) of the soul, which Moses calls 'manna' (*Qus Rer.*, 191); the phrase 'true bread from heaven' (6.32) also recalls a fragment of a possibly pre-Christian Sibylline oracle (preserved in Theophilus of Antioch) which says that those who worship the true and eternal God will receive life, and dwell in the Garden of Paradise, eating 'the sweet bread from the starry heaven' (Fr. 3, 46–9; Charlesworth, 1983, p. 471). It is striking that Jesus both *provides* food (6.27) and *is* the food (6.33, 35).

Jesus goes on to say that the bread which he will give for the life of the world is his 'flesh' (6.51c). 'The Jews' not unnaturally question how this can be. He replies, 'Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you' (6.53); after repeating that he is the bread come down from heaven, he says, 'Those who eat this bread

will live for ever' (6.58). The original miracle has faded into the background, as the thought has moved through themes of Jesus and Moses, Jesus and Wisdom, to Jesus' giving his 'flesh'. The section 6.51c–58 is most plausibly understood as alluding to the Eucharist, whose 'institution' is omitted from John's account of the Last Supper.¹¹ It is remarkable for interpreting this sacrament not primarily as a memorial (or bringing to remembrance) of Jesus' death (cf. 1 Cor. 11.24f.; Lk. 22.19), but rather as spiritual food, enabling the mutual indwelling of believers and Jesus and leading to everlasting life (6.56–8); compare Ignatius' description of the one eucharistic bread as 'the medicine of immortality, an antidote that we should not die, but live for ever with Jesus Christ' (*Eph.*, 20.2). However, it is unlikely that John intended 6.51c–58 to be understood exclusively of the Eucharist (Edwards, 2000). For him, the 'bread from heaven' is simultaneously Jesus' life-bringing teaching (cf. 6.63), the eucharistic bread, and Jesus' giving of his life for the world. The 'Bread of Life discourse' (6.26–59) has many resonances with the dialogue about the 'living water' (4.4–16); both may ultimately draw on Jewish traditions which interpreted the manna and the 'well' (i.e. the rock from which Moses struck water) as Torah.¹²

(6) The Blind Man, (9.1–41)

This story forms a pair with (3), the lame man's healing (5.1–47). Both stories are set in Jerusalem, where Jesus comes into conflict with the Jewish authorities. But whereas the cured lame man apparently does not come to faith, the newly sighted man becomes a model disciple. There are Synoptic parallels, but these are general rather than specific (Mk 8.22–6; Mt. 9.27–31; Mk 10.46–52 par.). In John the magnitude of the miracle is enhanced by the fact that the man was born blind. The miracle is depicted as one of Jesus' 'works', the man's blindness happening 'so that God's works may be disclosed in him' (9.3f.). The manner of healing is striking. Jesus makes 'clay' (a creative act) with his spitte, anoints the man, and bids him wash in the pool of Siloam (interpreted as 'Sent'); the injunction recalls Elisha's command to Naaman to wash in the Jordan (2 Kgs 5.10); for the use of spittle compare Mark 8.23.¹³

As with the lame man, the miracle leads to a dialogue, in this case quite dramatic. First his neighbours question the man, wondering whether he is indeed the person they knew. He is well aware that it is Jesus who healed him (9.8–12; contrast the lame man, 5.13). Then the Pharisees interrogate him, and readers discover that it was a Sabbath when his sight was restored (9.13–17). Next 'the Jews' establish the man's identity from his parents (9.18–23). The man is interrogated a second time, and 'cast out' (9.24–34). Jesus finds him and asks, 'Do you

believe in the Son of Man? He replies with faith (9.35–8). Finally Jesus confronts the Pharisees, describing them as 'blind', which they resent; their sin remains because they claim to be able to see (9.39–41).

Recurrent motifs are light and darkness, and blindness and sight. At the start Jesus proclaims, 'I am the light of the world' (9.5), picking up the Prologue's image of the *logos* as 'the true light' (1.9; cf. 3.19–21; 8.12, etc.). By calling Jesus 'light', John brings out his role as life-giver, revealer of God's true nature, and as judge (for the light shows up the darkness of evil). The miracle is a practical demonstration of Jesus' role in bringing 'light' – not just physical sight, but also spiritual insight. It further illustrates his call to decide between good and evil, knowledge of God or its opposite. There are repeated ironical contrasts between the man born blind, who moves from darkness to light, acknowledging Jesus first as 'a prophet' (9.17), then as sent from God (9.33), and finally as 'Son of Man' (9.35–8),¹⁴ and the Jewish leaders, who move from apparent enlightenment to darkness or spiritual blindness. This use of 'blindness' to symbolize unbelief and sin can have been written only by a sighted person, as pointed out by John Hull (himself blind), who draws attention to the problems raised by such imagery for blind people (2001, pp. 49f., 87).

The drama of John 9 forms the main plank of the hypothesis that John should be read at two levels, that of the historical Jesus and that of the Johannine community (Martyr, 1979, esp. pp. 24–62; cf. Brown, 1979, esp. pp. 17–20). Martyr sees the newly sighted man as standing for Jewish Christians who, following the introduction of the *birkat hamminin*, came out openly with their new faith despite risk of expulsion from the Synagogue (see above, pp. 48f.). It must be said that this is by no means the only context in which John 9 can be understood. Historically Jesus did come into conflict with the Jewish authorities, and some of his followers may have suffered already during his lifetime for their loyalty to him. As Christianity emerged as a distinct movement within Judaism, and then as a separate religious grouping, conflict intensified. Paul's letters often mention his sufferings as a Christian (e.g. 1 Thess. 2.14–16; 2 Cor. 11.24f.), a picture supported by Acts.¹⁵ Josephus describes how the High Priest Ananus (the son of the Annas mentioned in John) had Jesus' brother James killed after condemnation by the Sanhedrin (*Ant.*, 20.200). In the Synoptics Jesus predicts that his followers will be persecuted (Mk 13.9; cf. Mt. 5.11f.; Lk. 6.22), including being flogged in synagogues – prophecies often seen as *post eventum*. John's references to synagogue expulsion (9.22; 12.42), and Jesus' warning that the disciples will be cast out of synagogues or killed (16.2), can readily be understood as foreshadowing the suffering that would come to some Christians. The newly sighted man functions as a shining example of faith, courage, and pertinacity.

(7) The Raising of Lazarus and its Consequences (11.1–53)

Lazarus' raising forms the climax of Jesus' miraculous signs. The story is elaborately constructed, with some detailed characterization, and is unique to John. Some scholars believe that it was freely created from Luke's story of Martha and Mary (10.38–42) and his tale of the rich man and Lazarus (16.19–31), which mentions the possibility of someone returning from the dead. Others see this suggestion as far-fetched. The episode is sometimes seen as a later element in John (see above, p. 47), but it plays a significant role in his story-line since it (rather than the Temple cleansing, as in the Synoptics) precipitates the Jewish leaders' plot to kill Jesus.

The Synoptics relate two stories of restoration from death – those of Jesus' daughter (Mk 5.22–43 par.) and the widow of Nain's son (Lk. 7.11–17) – an action seen as a messianic sign (cf. Mt. 11.5; Lk. 7.22). There are also parallels in Acts (9.36–42; 20.7–12), the Elijah–Elisha cycle, and other Jewish and Hellenistic sources. In the Synoptic stories (and those of Acts) the person restored to life has only just died, so that the possibility of resuscitation cannot be ruled out, whereas in John's story, Lazarus has been dead for four days, and his corpse is decaying. No convincing rationalization is possible: most commentators concentrate on possible symbolism.

As far as christology is concerned, Lazarus' raising forcefully demonstrates Jesus' power to give life. After healing the lame man, Jesus foretold that the dead would hear the voice of God's Son and live, and that those in the tombs would hear it and come forth (5.25, 28). Now a dead man is portrayed as physically coming out of a tomb at Jesus' command (11.43f.). Lazarus' resurrection brings glory to God, so that his Son may also be glorified (11.4). It provides a perfect setting for teaching on resurrection, including Jesus' famous saying, 'I am the resurrection and the life' (11.25). He is depicted both as the one who brings resurrection and the one who is the resurrection (just as he both gives and is the 'bread of life').

This episode also foreshadows Jesus' own resurrection. In both cases the dead man has been for some days in a cave-like tomb, sealed with a stone. In both he is swathed in bandages, with a separate head-cloth. But Lazarus comes out bound, whereas the risen Jesus emerges free, the graveclothes left behind. Lazarus comes back to life temporarily, for he will die again; Jesus rises to live eternally. Like his earlier miracles, this one causes division: some see and believe (11.45; cf. 12.11), while others report on Jesus to the Pharisees.

(8) The Miraculous Catch of Fish (21.1-14)

This last miracle occurs in John's Appendix. The risen Jesus reveals himself to seven disciples who have been fishing. He bids them lower their net on the right side, and it catches so many fish that they cannot haul it in. The miracle is paralleled in Luke 5.1-11. In both stories the men have been fishing all night without success. In both, Peter plays a prominent role: in Luke he falls down and 'worships' Jesus (in recognition of his uncanny powers, maybe even his divinity); in John he leaps out of the boat to go to him, but it is the 'beloved disciple' who first recognizes Jesus as 'the Lord'. In Luke, the catch is so heavy that the net breaks; in John, it remains intact. In Luke the miracle leads to the call of Peter to 'catch' people; in John it leads to Peter's pastoral commissioning, and the command 'Follow me' (21.15-19). The two stories must be related. Some suggest that Luke has used a miracle associated with Jesus' resurrection to enhance a call story - in the Marcan parallel (1.16-20) there is no miraculous catch. Others suppose that John has moved a miracle originally located at the start of Jesus' ministry to a post-resurrection context. Possibly the two stories draw on a common tradition, which the Evangelists use differently.

Like the feeding miracle of John 6, the miraculous draught of fish illustrates Jesus' care for his people in providing food (he has already cooked fish on a charcoal fire before they haul their catch in). John's description of its distribution, 'Jesus ... took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish' (21.13), recalls both his earlier feeding miracle (6.11) and the breaking of bread in Luke's Emmaus meal (Lk. 24.30). For Christian readers all three meals would prefigure the Eucharist (cf. Mk 14.22), though it is uncertain whether this was John's intention. Many scholars interpret the miraculous catch as primarily a symbol for mission (cf. Mk 1.17 par.; also Matthew's parable of the drag-net, 13.47f.).¹⁶ The significance of the 153 fish (21.11) is obscure: some interpret them as representing the nations of the world, but this is unlikely (Lindars, 1972, pp. 629f.). More probably the exceptionally large catch symbolizes God's generosity in response to obedience and faith (21.6f.); compare the abundant wine at Cana. The unbroken net may stand for the unity of the Church (Schnackenburg, 1982, p. 358). Certainly, for its author, this final appearance adds further proof of the reality of Jesus' resurrection, and illustrates his continuing concern for the disciples and by implication for the future Church.

Conclusions

Jesus' miracles most obviously depict him as a healer and wonder-worker: but it is clear that John intends more than this. Jesus is

presented as a prophet, sent from God (cf. 3.2; 4.19). His actions recall those of Moses, Elijah, and Elisha; they could be seen as fulfilling Jewish expectations of the Deuteronomic 'prophet like Moses', or even of Elijah's return to prepare for 'the day of the Lord' (cf. Mal. 4.5; Mk 8.28; 9.11f.). The wine miracle and the feeding of the crowd would almost certainly be understood as symbolizing the inauguration of the new eschatological era. Jesus' restoration of mobility to the lame, sight to the blind, and life to the dead might also be seen as showing that God's salvation had drawn near (cf. Isa. 35.1-6; Mt. 11.5; Lk. 7.22). Thus the 'signs' point to Jesus as the expected 'messianic' deliverer, bringing vibrant new life, both physical and spiritual. They are the setting for three of his great 'I am' sayings: 'I am the bread of life' (6.35; cf. 6.48-51, 57f.), 'I am the light of the world' (9.5), and 'I am the resurrection and the life' (11.25).

The miracles reveal Jesus' special relationship with God. They are performed in the Father's name and show the Father's good works (*kala erga*, 10.32). They depict Jesus as God's emissary, who does what the Father does. They hint at Jesus' divinity, but do not make it explicit. They inspire faith (cf. 2.11; 4.53; 6.69; 9.37f.; 12.11); but some fail to believe (6.66-71; 9.39-41). They are indeed 'narrative christology'. Our next chapter will consider how 'confessions of faith' fill out this picture.

7

Christological Confessions
and Titles for Jesus

The christology implied by Jesus' miracles is developed and made explicit by confessions of faith from those who encountered him. These acts of witness, often involving christological 'titles', begin already in the Prologue; they feature prominently in John's dramatic dialogues, and culminate in the acclamations of Mary Magdalene and Thomas in the Resurrection Narrative. They are complemented by what Jesus says about himself, by indirect statements about him, and by controversies, questions, and comments from Jesus' opponents, often used with dramatic irony (e.g. 7.41, 52; 9.29; 11.50; 19.3). The 'titles' would convey different ideas to different readers. Most of them have a complex and controversial background in Judaism which can here be treated only