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"BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HAVE NOT SEEN"
(JN 20:29): JOHANNINE DRAMATIZATION OF AN
EARLY CHRISTIAN DISCOURSE

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The relationship of the Gospel of John to early Jewish mysticism has been the focus of several previous studies beginning with W. Baldensperger who recognized the polemical nature of 3:3 and 3:13 and suggested that this polemic was aimed at Jewish mystics.¹ H. Odeberg has followed suit, also arguing that the polemic contained within these verses was directed against Jewish visionaries who sought salvation through an ascent to heaven and visual encounter with God.² P.

¹ W. Baldensperger, *Der Prolog des vierten Evangeliums* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1898). On the connections between John and early Jewish mysticism, see H. Odeberg, *The Fourth Gospel Interpreted in its Relationship to Contemporaneous Religious Currents in Palestine and the Hellenistic-Oriental World* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1929; Amsterdam: Bruner, 1929, repr. 1968, 1974); G. Quispel, "Nathanael und der Menschensohn (Joh 1:51)," *ZNW* 47 (1956) 281-283; idem, "Het Johannesevangelie en de Gnosis," *NedTTs* 11 (1956/57) 173ff.; idem, "L'Évangile de Jean et la Gnose," *L'Évangile de Jean*, ed. M. E. Boismard (RechBib 3; Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1958) 197-208; N. A. Dahl, "The Johannine Church and History," *Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Otto A. Piper*, ed. W. Klassen and G. Synder (New York, Evanston, and London: Harper & Row, 1962) 124-142; P. Borgen, *John and the Writings of Philo* (NovTSup 10; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965); idem, *Philo, John and Paul: New Perspectives on Judaism and Early Christianity* (BJS 131; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987) 103-120, 171-184; W. A. Meeks, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology* (NovTSup 14; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967); A. F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports About Christianity and Gnosticism* (SJLA 25; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978) 213-214; C. Rowland, "John 1.51, Jewish Apocalyptic and Targumic Tradition," *NTS* 30 (1984) 498-507. J. Dunn, "Let John be John: A Gospel for Its Time," *Das Evangelium und die Evangelium, Vorträge vom Tübinger Symposium 1982*, ed. P. Stuhlmacher (WUNT 28; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1983) 322-325, provides a brief summary of some of these ideas.

² Odeberg, *The Fourth Gospel*, 72-98; of R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, ed. R. W. N. Hoare and J. K. Riches, trans. by G.R. Beasley-Murray (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 150 n. 1; Borgen, *Philo, John and Paul*, 103-120, 171-184; W. A. Meeks, "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism," *JBL* 91 (1972) 52; F. Moloney, *The Johannine Son of Man* (Rome: Las, 1976) 54. On ascent, see: W. Bousset, "Die Himmelsreise der Seele," *ARW* 4 (1901) 136-169, 229-273; G. Widengren, *The Ascension of the Apostle and the Heavenly Book* (UUA 7; Uppsala: Lundequistka Bokhandeln, 1950); C. Colpe, "Die 'Himmelsreise der Seele' ausserhalb und innerhalb der Gnosis," *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo, Colloquio di Messina 13-18*

Borgen believes that the polemic serves a more specific purpose: to discourage adepts in the Johannine community who maintained that they were visionaries like Moses.³

Discussions of 1:18 have served to advance this investigation. C. Rowland argues that the claim in this verse that only Jesus can make God known must be recontextualized alongside the claims made by Jewish mystics that they revealed the divine secrets. So the Fourth Gospel contains several rebuttals against those mystics who claimed that they knew God apart from the revelation of God in Jesus (1:18; 3:13; 5:37; 6:46).⁴ Rowland's discussion seems to have been influenced by earlier works such as those by G. Quispel and A. Segal who previously argued that 6:46 is a polemic against ascension and theophany themes.⁵

The work of these scholars has made it clear that the Johannine author was in dispute with mystical pre-mortem ascent theology, especially in verses 1:18, 3:3, 3:13, 5:37, and 6:46. To these passages, I would add the series of verses in John where Jesus proclaims that he will not be able to be followed into heaven (at least not before the Eschaton). No less than four times, Jesus repeats to different audiences that "you will seek me...(but) where I am going, you cannot come" (7:33-34; 8:21; 13:33; 13:36).

Aprile 1966, ed. U. Bianchi (SHR 12; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967) 429-447; A. Segal, "Heavenly Ascent in Hellenistic Judaism, Early Christianity, and their Environment," *ANRW* 2.23.2 (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1980) 1333-1394; U. Mann, "Geisthöhe und Seelentiefe: Die vertikale Achse der numinosen Bereiche," *Eranos* 50 (1981) 1-50; M. Smith, "Ascent to the Heavens and the Beginning of Christianity," *Eranos* 50 (1981) 403-429; I. P. Culiuanu, "L'Ascension de l'âme dans les mystères et hors des mystères," *La Soteriologia dei culti orientali nell'Impero romano*, ed. U. Bianchi and M. J. Vermaseren (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1982) 276-302; idem, *Psychanodia I: A Survey of the Evidence Concerning the Ascension of the Soul and Its Relevance* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1983); idem, *Expériences de l'Extase* (Paris: Payot, 1984); M. Dean-Otting, *Heavenly Journeys: A Study of the Motif in Hellenistic Jewish Literature* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1984); J. D. Tabor, *Things Unutterable: Paul's Ascent to Paradise in its Greco-Roman, Judaic, and Early Christian Contexts* (Studies in Judaism; Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986); M. Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven In Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

³ Borgen, *Philo, John and Paul*, 103. There certainly were those who maintained that Moses was divinized. See Quispel's comments on Ezekiel the Tragedian in "Judaism, Judaic Christianity, and Gnosis," *The New Testament and Gnosis: Essays in Honour of Robert McLachlan Wilson*, ed. A.H.B. Logan and A.J.M. Wedderburn (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983) 48-52.

⁴ Rowland, "John 1:51," 499-500.

⁵ G. Quispel, "Gnosticism and the New Testament," *Gnostic Studies*, vol. 1 (Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul 34; Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut in het Nabije Oosten, 1974) 211. Segal, *Two Powers*, 213-214.

Indisputably, the Johannine author was discoursing against the notion of ecstatic pre-eschatological ascent and visionary experience. As to this idea that John is reacting when he makes the statements that no one has ascended into heaven except Jesus nor has anyone ever seen the Father except the Son. But is it possible to further identify the factions of this discourse from this textualized Johannine environment?

Developing upon the methodological model of R. Wuthnow who has advanced our understanding of the process of articulation of actual discourse as textual ideology,⁶ I suggest that in addition to covering the ideology of the general religious environment to which John may be responding, we can also determine what I call the "religio-social horizon," the specific religious community with which John is in dispute, and the "discursive field," the particular point of dispute between the two communities.

It must be recognized, however, that the religio-social horizon presented in the Johannine text may only resemble partially the actual community which is in dialogue with John. The actual discourse will be masked due to the theoretical representation of the conflict. The articulation of the discursive field will be done on a symbolic level so that the actual features of the religio-social horizon are incorporated at the textual level as symbolic acts and events. The actual opposition between the factions is dramatized. Such dramatizations provide a contrast to the religio-social horizon and evoke a space for creative reflection on the part of the author. The result of the discourse between the two communities is the textualization of critical ideology which will have thematized particular features of the horizontal horizon.

In order to assist in recovering the discourse from its textual environment, three major passages will be analyzed: 14:3-7, 14:20-23, and 20:24-29. This analysis will identify more precisely the discursive field as understood by the Johannine author and reveal the nature of the religio-social horizon. It must be remembered, however, that this horizon will only be reflective of Johannine space and thus will only bear a relative relationship to the actual discourse itself. Common to these passages is the portrayal of (Judas) Thomas as the Fool who does not have the correct understanding of the way to heaven or of the manner of encountering God since he insists on visions.

⁶ R. Wuthnow, *Communities of Discourse* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989) esp. 1-22.

The dialogue in the first of these passages, John 14:3-7, centers around the crucial term "the way (ἡ ὁδός):"

"And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way (τὴν ὁδόν) where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way (τὴν ὁδόν)?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way (ἡ ὁδός), and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also; henceforth you know him and have seen him."

According to R. Bultmann, "the way" is a reference to the mythology that, when the soul separates from the body, it journeys to the sacred realm often guided by a superior being.⁷ In other words, it is the route to heaven and divinity.

A vivid instance of this in Christian literature is seen in the Syrian *Odes of Solomon* 39.9-13, where the Lord's footsteps to heaven create a path for his own to follow and, in this manner, "the Way has been appointed for those who cross over after him, and for those who adhere to the path of his faith; and who adore his name" (39.13). In *Ode* 11, the hymnist tells us that "I ran in the Way in his peace, in the Way of truth" (11.3). This verse functions as the beginning of a song about the hymnist's ascent to Paradise (11.16), his vision of the Lord (11.13), and his transformation into a light-being (11.11). The Lord caused the mystic odist to "ascend from the regions below" (22.1) and this is the Lord's "Way" which is "incorruptible" (22.11).

This use of the concept "the way" as the heavenly route is already present in Judaism as evidenced in Philo. In *De Migratione Abrahami* 168-175, Philo explains that Exodus 24:1, "Come up to thy Lord, thou and Aaron and Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the Senate of Israel," means that the soul must "come up" to "behold the Existent

⁷ R. Bultmann, *John*, 603ff. where he refers to Hippolytus, *Ref.* 5.10.2, 5.16.1, 5.26.23; *Exc. Theod.* 38, 74; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.13.6; 1.21.5; Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 36.3.2-5; Origen, *c. Celsus* 6.31; *Acts Thom.* 148, 167; *Odes Sol.* 39.9ff. [cp. 7.3, 13f., 11.3; 22.7, 11; 24.13; 33.7ff; 41.11]; *Mand. Lit.* 38, 77, 97f., 101, 132f., 134f.; *Joh.-B.* 198.20f., 199.3f., 239.14; *Ginza* 95.15, 247.16ff., 271.26f., 395.3ff., 429.17ff., 439.14ff., 487.8ff., 523.23ff., 550.1ff; *C.H.* 1.26, 1.29, 4.11, 7.2, 9.10, 10.21. He states that the parabolic usage of the way in the Old Testament (e.g. Ps 143:10; Isa 63:14) is of little relevance here, 604 n. 5. Furthermore, he notes that "the way" belongs together with "the door" in 10:7 which mythologically represents the entrance into life or the world of light, 377-378 n. 7, 604 n. 5. Cf. idem, "Die Bedeutung der neuerschlossenen mandäischen und manichäischen Quellen für das Verständnis des Johannesevangeliums," *ZNW* 24 (1925) 100-146, esp. 135. Odeberg, *Fourth Gospel*, 319-327, convincingly argues that the expression "door" in John 10:9 refers to the door or gate of heaven being opened and is the same spiritual reality as described in John 1:51.

ne" (169). Furthermore, Aaron (= combining understanding and speech), Nadab (= voluntarily honoring the Deity), and Abihu (= having need of God), are "the powers that form the bodyguard of the mind" (170). These "bodyguards" are necessary because "the soul has no reason to fear ascending in its own strength to the sight of Him who is at IS, ignorant as it is of *the way* (δι' ἐαυτὴν ἀγνοοῦσα τὴν ὁδόν)" (170).⁸ So Moses, Philo's paradigm mystic, in Exodus 33:15 "prays that he may have God Himself, to guide him to the way that leads to Him" (πρὸς τὴν πρὸς αὐτὸν ἄγουσαν ὁδόν)" (171).⁹ Philo warns unprepared mystics, however, that it is better to forego mystic ascent and roam through mortal life, then to ascend without "Divine direction" and become shipwrecked along the way (171).

The study of J. Pascher indicates that Philo interprets the "royal way (βασιλικὴ ὁδός)" of Numbers 20:17 as the way to the knowledge and vision of God.¹⁰ Philo describes the "royal way" as the road to "wisdom" by which the "souls can make their escape to the hereafter." For we may well believe that he who walks unimpeded along the King's way (ὁδοῦ τῆς βασιλικῆς) will never flag or faint, for when he comes into the presence of the King" (*Quod deus* 159-161). Philo explains that the "royal way" is the eternal and indestructible way described in Genesis 6:12 which leads to the recognition and knowledge of God; those who are endowed with "vision," that is clairvoyance, are able to journey along this road although they will be tempted to swerve off course by the earthly senses (*ibid.*, 142-144; cf. *Gen.* 2; *Gig.* 64; *Mig.* 146).

Philo's employment of ὁδός in the technical sense as the road to heavenly ascent and vision is similar to the manner in which Hermeticism uses ὁδός. In *Corpus Hermeticum* 4.11, Hermes tells Tat that "if your vision of it [god's image] is sharp and you understand it with the eyes of your heart, believe me, child, you shall discover *the way* (τὴν ὁδόν) that leads above or, rather, the image itself will show you the way (ὀδηγήσει)." He continues by informing Tat that vision is a special drawing power, taking hold of the mystic and drawing him up to God like a "magnet stone draws iron" (cf. *C.H.* 1.26-27). In *Excerpts* of Stobaeus 6.18, Hermes explains that the one who has

⁸ Philo, *Migr.* 170 (trans. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker), emphasis mine.

⁹ Philo, *Migr.* 171.

¹⁰ J. Pascher, *H ΒΑΣΙΛΙΚΗ ΟΔΟΣ Der Königsweg zu Wiedergeburt und Vergöttung bei Philon von Alexandria, Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des Altertums* 17, 3-4 (Leipzig: F. Schöningh, 1931). Cf. E. Goodenough, *By Light, Light* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935), who understands the "Way" to be the Mystic Road to God: 14, 16, 145, 214, 219, 244, 280, 316, 355-356.

seen God is blessed but this visionary experience is not possible while one is in the body. One "must train his soul in this life, in order that, when it has entered the other world, where it is permitted to see God, it may not miss the way (ὁδὸν) <which leads to Him>."

Since the goal of the ascent and vision is to become divinized like Hermes, the way of Hermes is "the way of immortality (εἰς ἄβιτον ἄθνητον τὸν οὐρανόν)," the ascent to the ninth heavenly sphere (*Disc.* 8-9 63.10-14; cf. *C.H.* 10.7; 13.3).¹¹ So the Hermetics speak of the experience of becoming God (*C.H.* 13.3,10,14) by casting off materiality, ascending to heaven, and being absorbed into God (*C.H.* 1.24-26; 10.13; *Disc.* 8-9 57.28-58.22; cf. *C.H.* 11.20; 12.1; *Ascl.* 6.22). Thus, they explain: "If you ask about god, you ask also about the beautiful. Only one way (ὁδός) travels from here to the beautiful - reverence combined with knowledge" (*C.H.* 6.5; cf. 11.22).¹²

A passage from the *Excerpts* of Stobaeus 2B.3-8 contains a synthesis of this theology. Tat is taught about "the only way that leads to Reality (ἡ πρὸς ἀλήθειαν ὁδός)" (2B.5).¹³ This way is a "holy and divine way (ὁδός)" which is difficult to travel while the soul "is in the body" (2B.5).¹⁴ The soul must feud against the vices and strive toward the Good (2B.6-7). Once the soul has won this contest, it is able to "mount upward" and begin the "journey to the world above" (2B.8). The soul yearns for the Good and must learn to know the Father so that the soul is freed and will not fail "to know whither it must wing its upward flight" (2B.3-4).

Connected to this is the discussion in *Corpus Hermeticum* 13 where Tat inquires about the way to be "born again" (13.3). Hermes explains that he is incapable of relating anything about this except to share a specific visionary experience when he left his human body and assumed "an immortal body (ἀθάνατον σῶμα)" (13.3).¹⁵ He goes on to describe a vision of his spiritual Self. He tells Tat that the Self must be cleansed of the twelve vices under the influence of the ten powers of God. Hermes, of course, is referring to the way of ascent

¹¹ For an excellent summary of the Hermetic immortalization process, see J.-P. Mahé, "La voie d'immortalité à la lumière des Hermetica de Nag Hammadi et de découvertes plus récentes," *VC* 45 (1991) 347-375.

¹² A. D. Nock and A.-J. Festugière, *Corpus Hermeticum, Tome I, Traités I-XII* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1945) 75.

¹³ A.-J. Festugière, *Corpus Hermeticum, Tome III, Fragments extraits de Stobée I-XXII* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1954) 14.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁵ A. D. Nock and A.-J. Festugière, *Corpus Hermeticum, Tome II, Traités XIII-XVIII. Asclepius* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1945) 201.

ough the planetary spheres, the removal of particular vices at each here, and the final absorption into the divine (cf. *C.H.* 1.24-26). Once this has happened, the new spiritual birth is possible and with it, unity (13.10). Thus the road of ascent and vision is the way of birth.¹⁶

It is significant that all these texts, whether describing pre- or post-mortem ascent, agree that ὁδός means the path that the soul will take when it goes to heaven. It is quite certain that the Johannine author employs the terminology "the way" in this technical sense. As Thomas' reply makes sense: "Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" (14:5). It appears that Thomas' answer reflects the popular association of ὁδός with proleptic heavenly ascents.

At the same time, the disciple Thomas is portrayed by the Johannine author as the fool in this discourse because of this ignorant statement.¹⁷ Clearly, in this passage, the Johannine author attributes to Thomas the confession that he and others with him are ignorant of the true way or route to heaven.

It is probable that here we see evidence of the textualization of the discourse from the point of view of the Johannine community. The author, by deliberately characterizing Thomas as a fool in this passage, condemns the hero of Thomasine Christianity. Moreover, his identification of the discourse points to a particular feature of the dispute: the journey or ascent to heaven. John tells us that such ascent is not necessary, that Jesus himself is the only "way" into heaven. This is stated in contradistinction to the Thomasine belief which, from Thomas' answer in 14.5, appears to have encouraged proleptic heavenly ascents.

The next pericope which requires attention is John 14:20-23 where certain Judas who is distinguished from Judas Iscariot (Ἰούδας οὐχ Ἰσχαριώτης)¹⁸ is given the dunce cap:

¹⁶ C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953) 44-53, discusses *C.H.* 13 and notes "expressions which recall the language of the Fourth Gospel and the First Epistle of John" including the notion of birth. He argues that there lie "real similarities in thought" behind these verbal parallels. He provides a useful chart which compares passages from *C.H.* 13 and John 14:5-11.

¹⁷ Contra J. Charlesworth, *The Beloved Disciple: Whose Witness Validates the Gospel of John?* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995) 261-264.

¹⁸ The gloss, "not Iscariot," was probably added to this passage by the Johannine author since Judas Iscariot had left the scene earlier.

"In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest (ἐμφανίσω) myself to him." Judas (not Iscariot) (Ἰούδας οὐχ ὁ Ἰσχαριώτης) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest (ἐμφανίσειν) yourself to us, and not to the world?" Jesus answered him, "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."

Judas is concerned about the method by which the followers of Jesus will be able to have a vision of Jesus when he is not in the "world" anymore. Judas has interpreted the phrase "manifest myself to him (ἐμφανίσω αὐτῷ ἐμαυτόν)" to refer to a theophany since he demands to know how the followers of Jesus will be able to behold the manifestation while others in the world will not see it.

The word ἐμφανίζειν is used only in the New Testament in John 14:21-22 in this sense, but it is a word which is associated with the theophany in Exodus 33:13,18 which is quoted by Philo in *Legum Allegoriae* 3.101. He states that Moses represents the "mind more perfect and more thoroughly cleansed, which has undergone initiation into the great mysteries" and which lifts its eyes "above and beyond creation" and "obtains a clear vision (ἐμφασιν) of the uncreated One" (*Leg. Al.* 3.100). Thus Moses says in Exodus 33:13: "Manifest Thyself to me (Ἐμφάνισόν μοι σαυτόν), let me see Thee that I may know Thee (γνωστός ἴδω σε)" (*Leg. Al.* 3.101). Philo exegetes this passage, stating that Moses meant that he did not want God to "be manifested (ἐμφανισθεῖς) to him "by means of heaven or earth or water or air or any created thing at all" (*Leg. Al.* 3.101). He believed that one can only receive "the clear vision (ἐμφασιν) of God directly from the First Cause Himself" (*Leg. Al.* 3.102). Thus Philo employs the term ἐμφανίζειν to describe the vision of God himself.

According to the Johannine author, it is actually a misunderstanding that Judas expects Jesus' manifestation to be a theophany. When Jesus speaks of manifesting himself in the future to his followers, according to John, he intends to do this through a manifestation of divine love, not through a mystical visionary encounter such as that which Judas is anticipating.

The identity of this "Judas" is arguably linked with the Syrian Thomas tradition where the apostle Thomas has the unique appellation "Judas Thomas."¹⁹ Careful analysis of the use of this name in

¹⁹ H.-Ch. Puech, "The Gospel of Thomas," *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2 vols., ed. E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher, Eng. trans. R. McL. Wilson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963) 1.278-307; followed by H. Koester, "GNOMAI DIAPHOROI: The Origin and

ous Syrian texts suggests that, in addition to Judas Iscariot, there is a disciple of Jesus whose actual name was "Judas." In order to differentiate him from Judas Iscariot, the nickname "Thomas" or "Twin"²⁰ was appended to Judas probably at an early date. Thus, "Judas Thomas" is preserved in the Syrian traditions. Eventually the name "Judas" fell out of favor because it was so closely linked to the man who betrayed Jesus (how often do we hear of anyone naming their child "Judas" even today?). As the name "Judas" became unfavorable, "Judas" was dropped in some traditions and the disciple was addressed by his nickname "Thomas" or "Twin."²¹

That John was aware of the fact that "Thomas" was only a title and not the actual name is evidenced in John's use of "ὁ λεγόμενος Δίδυμος" which is added to the name Thomas in 1:16, 20:24, and 21:2 (cf. 14:5D).²² Moreover, the presence of the name "Judas" in 14:22 probably suggests that the Johannine author or redactor was familiar with the very early tradition that there was an apostle named Judas. It is plausible that John

of Diversification in the History of Early Christianity," in J. M. Robinson and H. Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971) 127-128. For further discussions, see A. F. J. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas: Introduction - Text - Commentary* (NovTSup 5; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1962) 158; A. F. J. Klijn, "John XIV 22 and the Name Judas Thomas," *Studies in John Presented to Professor Dr. J. N. Sevenster on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* (NovTSup 24; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970) 92; J. D. Barr, *The Book of Thomas the Contender from Codex II of the Cairo Gnostic Library Nag Hammadi (CG II.7): The Coptic Text with Translation, Introduction, and Commentary* (SBLDS 23; Missoula: Scholars, 1975) 8-9.

Δίδυμος (twin) is a Greek rendition of the Aramaic ܕܝܕܘܡܝܢ (twin) which has been transliterated into Greek letters as θωμάς. See Klijn, "Judas Thomas," 89-91; and Turner, *Book of Thomas*, 114. H. Koester suggests that this Judas is to be identified with the brother of James in Jude 1 and was probably a brother of Jesus according to five traditions, "GNOMAI DIAPHOROI," 134-135. Cf. Judas is a brother of Jesus in Mark 6:3, Matthew 13:55; Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13 know of a Ἰούδαν Ἰακώβου. This tradition is likely a later confusion.

Cf. Klijn, "Judas Thomas," 88-96. The author of Luke 6:15-16 and Acts 1:13b is now confusing the traditions surrounding the name "Judas Thomas" were by the first century. He has recorded both a "Thomas" and a "Judas son of James" in his list of disciples, thereby seemingly representing this singular disciple twice in his lists. The gospels of Matthew and Mark, however, only record this disciple once under the name "Thomas" and present the twelfth disciple as "Thaddaeus" (Mt 10:3; Mk 3:18). The tradition that Judas was the son of James rather than the brother of James and Jesus is likely to also be a later confusion. On the tendency to soften the stress on the sibling relationship between Judas Thomas and Jesus, see Koester, "GNOMAI DIAPHOROI," 135. Refer as well to J. Dart's treatment of the name Judas in his article, "Jesus and his Brothers," *Jesus in History and Myth*, ed. R. Joseph Hoffman and G. A. Larue (New York: Prometheus Books, 1986) 181-190.

Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas*, 158; idem, "Judas Thomas," 89; cf. C. K. Barrett, *The Acts according to St. John* (London: SPCK, 1978 [1955]) 327.

14:22 represents a very early layer of tradition belonging to the Johannine community about the disciple "Judas Thomas." It is highly significant that the Johannine author has assigned the same role to Judas in 14:22 as he does to Thomas in 14:5 and, as we will see, in 20:25: that of a fool who misunderstands salvation as ascent and vision mysticism.²³

Thus it would seem that, in the Gospel of John, there are preserved two of the stages in the development of the name "Thomas:" the earliest stage where this disciple was known by his actual name "Judas," and the later stage where the disciple was beginning to be known by his epithet "Twin" or "Thomas." This signals that the Johannine author was familiar with early Syrian Thomasine traditions and had some type of contact with the Thomasine community.²⁴

In this story we see remnants of the discourse between these two communities. The discursive field, as articulated by the Johannine author, focuses on the question of visionary experience. Fragments of this discourse recovered from its textual environment tell us that the Thomasine tradition expected theophany experiences whereas the Johannine Christians did not. In textualizing the discursive field, the Johannine author has painted the hero of Thomasine Christianity as an ignoramus, a fool who repeatedly misunderstands salvation.²⁵

The third passage which merits analysis is John 20:24-29 which reads:

Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe." Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing." Thomas answered, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

²³ Of interest as well is the foolish statement made by Thomas in 11:16. Thomas does not seem to understand that life is imparted through belief in Jesus as God's Glory on earth and that Jesus' journey to Lazarus' tomb was intended to witness to this (11:15).

²⁴ R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 3 vols. (New York: Crossroad, 1968) 1.152, concludes that "the Johannine tradition, originating in Palestine, was subjected to Syrian influences before it reached Asia Minor (Ephesus), where it was fixed and edited."

²⁵ Contra: Charlesworth, *Beloved Disciple*, esp. 267.

ory must be read as the third and climactic story about Jesus' appearances after his death and is best understood within this larger context. The main issue in all three of these episodes is one of vision, not Jesus' corporeality as some have suggested.²⁶

The sequence of stories begins in 20:14-18, where Mary Magdalene encounters Jesus outside his tomb. The text is very clear that the point of the story is one of Jesus' identity: "She turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus (καὶ οὐκ ᾔδει ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστίν)" (20:14). Jesus even talks to her and she still does not recognize him. In fact, the reader can only be humored by the subsequent narrative when it says that Mary even confided in him, asking him to be the gardener who had stolen Jesus' body. She then asks him to take her to the missing body. It is not until he addresses her by name that she finally recognizes the man as Jesus. The point of recognition is driven home at the end of this pericope when Mary meets with the other disciples and announces: "I have seen the Lord" (20:18).

This resurrection story, as presented by John, bears the hallmark of traditional folktale. According to the Russian Formalist, Propp, any individual folktale is a combination of a concrete set of functions or "functions" which are gathered into spheres of action. According to Propp, the characters or actors are defined by the spheres of action in which they participate. These are classified as actants and include such figures as the hero and the false hero. If the spheres of action consists of clusters of functions which are attributed to the actors. Thus a tale is characterized by an array of thirty-one functions and their sequential order.²⁷

This model was later revised and condensed by A. Greimas.²⁸ He actually reduces the number of Propp's functions to twenty-four elements by coupling several of them because of their binary character. Moreover, he emphasizes the transformational nature of the tale, particularly in regard to the sequential order. Thus he defines the tale as "a discursive manifestation, unfolding, by means of the articulation of its functions, an implicit transformational model."²⁹

Most recently, G. Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered: Thomas and John in Control* (Lincoln: Fortress, 1995).

Propp, *Morphologie du Conte* (Paris: Seuil, 1928, reprint 1965 and 1970). I am indebted to Ellen Johns for this and the following reference.

Greimas, *Sémantique Structurale: Recherche de Méthode* (Paris: Larousse, 1965), now, *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method*, trans. D. McDowell, R. Barthes, and A. Velie (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1983).

ibid., 225.

In both of these models, we find at the finale of the sequences of functions, and thus at the conclusion of the narrative, a cluster of elements which are particularly significant for the present analysis of John 20. Greimas articulates them in the following manner:

16. unrecognized arrival of the hero
17. difficult trial versus success
18. recognition of the hero
19. exposure of the false hero versus revelation of the hero³⁰

In the episode where Mary encounters Jesus, we discover the actant, the hero, playing out his proper function at this point in the narrative: his incognito arrival. Function 17, the victory, has been ingeniously hinged by the author on element 18, the recognition of the hero. Jesus, by overcoming his death, is successful in his trial. This victory is revealed through Mary's exclamations, "Rabboni!" (20:16) and "I have seen the Lord!" (20:18). Thus, Mary, by recognizing Jesus, acknowledges his victory over death.

This cluster of functions is duplicated, and therefore emphasized and reinforced in the second episode when Jesus appears to the disciples who are in hiding. He shows them his hands and his side. Through this visionary experience, the disciples are able to recognize Jesus. The text reiterates the theme of vision: "The disciples were glad when they *saw* the Lord" (19:20). Here again the emphasis is on identification, through vision, of the hero Jesus who has arrived incognito. This identification is a celebration of Jesus' victory.

A common *topos* in ancient Greek literature is the identification of a character through the exposure of his wounds and the touching of his body. Nowhere is this more evident than in the *Odyssey* when the disguised hero, Odysseus, arrives at his home.³¹ Eurykleia is asked to wash Odysseus' feet after his long journey (19.357-360). Odysseus withdraws into the shadows in order to keep his identity secret (19.388-389). But alas, as she takes his feet into her hands, she notices a scar which a boar had inflicted on him years ago (19.392-394). Thus lines 467-475 read:

The old woman, holding him in the palms of her hands, recognized this scar as she handled it. She let his foot go, so that his leg, which was in the basin,

³⁰ Ibid., 225.

³¹ My thanks to Dennis MacDonald who reminded me of this story in his response to my presentation of this paper at the 1995 SBL Annual Meeting in Philadelphia.

ll free, and the bronze echoed...Pain and joy seized her at once, and both eyes filled with tears, and the springing voice was held within her. She took the beard of Odysseus in her hands and spoke to him: "Then, dear child, you are really Odysseus. I did not know you before; not until I had touched my hand all over."³²

special connection between identifying the hero and touching him right out here and goes a long way to explain John 20:17 where Mary touches Jesus and exclaims, "Rabboni," as she recognizes him. This generic *topos* spilled over into literature about the dead so often the dead are found displaying their wounds to the living.³³ For instance, when the murdered Clytemnestra appears in the same scene in *Eumenides*, she cries out, "Do you see these wounds (πληγὰς τάσδε)?" (103) as a way to identify herself and her death, and to elicit pity for her dreadful fate.³⁴ There are similar scenes in Virgil's *Aeneid* which speak to this end, scenes in which Aeneas is able to identify several of the dead by their death scenes. For example, the Trojan hero stops by the side of the woman he sees "her wound still fresh," "recognizing her dim form in the darkness." In that instant he wept and spoke softly to her, "So the story they brought me was true, unhappy Dido? They told me you were dead and had ended your life with the sword" (6.450-458).³⁵ Following this, he sees Deiphobus standing there, "his whole body mangled and his face cruelly torn. The face and both hands were in pieces. The ears had been ripped from the head. He was noseless and speechless" (6.450-458).³⁶ Perhaps the most vivid example is Aeneas' discovery of the dead Hector found in 2.272-273, 277-279:

...a dream, behold, before my eyes most sorrowful Hector seemed to be present and be weeping copiously, as of old dragged by [Achilles'] chariot,

g. trans. by R. Lattimore, *The Odyssey of Homer* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967) 294.

the warriors in Homer, *Iliad* 11.41; Clytemnestra in Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 103; Sychaeus in Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.355; in *Aeneid* 6.445-446; Dido in *Aeneid* 6.450; Deiphobus in *Aeneid* 6.494-497; *orgias* 524-525; Tibullus 1.10.37; 2.6.38-40; Propertius 4.7.7; Statius, *Silvae* 1.56; Silius Italicus 12.547-550; Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 8.8. For a discussion of these texts, see J. N. Bremmer, *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) 70-84; Riley, *Resurrection*, 50-51. The dead are often shown on vases with their wounds. Refer to J. Chamay, "Des défunts portants," *Bulletin Antieke Beschaving* 52-53 (1977-1978) 247-251.

J. Podlecki, *Aeschylus. Eumenides* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1989) 68-69. West, *Virgil. The Aeneid* (New York: Penguin, 1990) 146.

l., 148.

black with gory dust, and pierced in his swollen feet with thongs...wearing a squalid beard and hair clotted with blood, and those many wounds he received around the walls of his fatherland.³⁷

Thus the ancient readers of the Gospel of John would have understood the display of the death marks in the second pericope to be his badge of identification. So the story emphasizes that Jesus showed them his hands and side. This display revealed his true identity and celebrated his victory over death. Thus the story builds on the premise that the disciples identified Jesus by seeing him.

Finally, in the crucial third episode, the climax of the narrative, we find Thomas "the Twin," the one who is reported to have missed the resurrection appearance of Jesus to his disciples (20:24), singled out. The reader expects Thomas to receive the third vision in a row and identify Jesus on this basis, following the pattern set up in the two previous encounters. The reader may even be waiting for Thomas to finally be absolved from his past misunderstandings since he has been chosen for his own special vision of Jesus.

Thus the narrative functions of the first two episodes are triplicated here. They are amplified to the extreme. Thomas does not believe the reports of the others that they have seen the Lord (20:25). He must see for himself Jesus and the death wounds.

Therefore, Thomas' statement in 20:25, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe," is a rhetorical intensification of the storyline begun in 20:20 when Jesus showed his death wounds to the other disciples in order to reveal his identity to them. Like Eurykleia in the *Odyssey* who did not recognize Odysseus until she had touched his scar, Thomas must handle the death wounds before he recognizes Jesus and is able to proclaim his identity.

So the story may surprise the reader when Jesus appears to Thomas and rebukes him, "Do not be faithless, but believing" (20:27), because Thomas confesses his belief that Jesus is God on the basis of his vision of Jesus (20:28). The effect of this rebuke has a dyadic function in the narrative. First, the Johannine author has written Thomas into the role of the actant, the false hero, and has forwarded the movement of the narrative so that we find function 19 being articulated: the false hero is exposed through the revelation of the hero's identity. By identifying the specific actor, Thomas, with the

³⁷ Ibid., 148.

at, the false hero, the Johannine author is driving home his point: the hero of the Thomasine Christians is really no hero at all.³⁸

Second, the Johannine author has created space for his own message for his critique of the visionary experience and his praise of the visionary experience. The exposure of the false hero erupts in the climactic scene in verse 29 where Thomas is admonished by Jesus that visions and signs are not necessary for belief: "Have you believed because you have seen me? (Ὅτι εἶδράκας με πεπίστευκας) Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe (μακάριοι οἱ μὴ ἰδόντες καὶ πιστεύσαντες)" (20:29). Clearly, a conflict is set up here between the false hero, Thomas, who insists that a *visio Dei* is necessary, and the true hero, Jesus, who rebuts this in favor of faith.

The Johannine story, therefore, should not be confused with the other post-resurrection narratives. It was not meant to be understood like Luke 24:37-43: as a demonstration of the corporeality of Jesus' resurrection. It should be noted that ancient readers were familiar with the notion that the dead soul could interact with the living. It could be touched, and even made love to.³⁹ So for the dead Jesus to appear and be touched was not *necessarily* a demonstration of his corporeality. Luke has to *inform* his readers that Jesus' appearance was not the appearance of his spirit *as they supposed*, but of "flesh and bones": "See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have" (Luke 24:39). How different from John's statement in 20:25, where Luke's restrictive qualification, "for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have," does not appear!

The Johannine scholar, J. Ashton, in his balanced monograph on the Gospel of John, warns us about plunging into a morass when interpreting this story, of reading beyond the intent of the author as expressed in the statement of B. Lindars: "According to the Jewish idea of resurrection presupposed by John, Jesus is touchable, and is actually able to invite Thomas to handle him."⁴⁰ Ashton reminds us to keep the *author's* point of the story foremost in mind: "If John intended this story, as there is every reason to believe, it was not,

Contra: Charlesworth, *Beloved Disciple*, 226-233, 274-285.

For a summary of the ancient texts, see Riley, *Resurrection*, 51-58. In this discussion he makes obvious the dispute among the ancient Greeks over the palpability of the

B. Lindars, *Behind the Fourth Gospel* (London: S.P.C.K., 1971) 607.

surely, to stimulate his readers to reflect upon the tangibility of risen bodies, but to impress upon them the need for faith."⁴¹

Based on this reading of the gospel, I therefore disagree with G. Riley's suggestion that John 20:24-29 represents a dispute between the Johannine community and the Thomasine Christians over the issue of bodily resurrection.⁴² Aside from the fact that the intent of John 20:24-29 is not to confirm a fleshly resurrection but to criticize visionary experience in favor of faith, it must be noted that nowhere does the *Gospel of Thomas* mention resurrection as a *spiritual* raising.

In Logion 51, it is said that the "rest of the dead" has already happened, but the nature of this resurrection is not discussed. It is clear that many early Christians including Paul held that the resurrection had already started with Jesus' own resurrection. Some of these Christians, especially those who espoused an encratite lifestyle like the Thomasites, interpreted Luke 20:34-36 as evidence for the fact that their life *on earth now* was part of this new era, the age of the resurrection. They believed that they had to imitate the angels in the way that they conducted their lives (Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 3.12.87).⁴³ But nothing is delineated regarding the nature of this resurrection.

Thus I maintain that this story is not about bodily resurrection and must be distinguished from Luke 24:36. Rather the impetus of this story for the Johannine writer is encapsulated in the climatic saying attributed to Jesus which blesses those who have faith in Jesus even though they have not had a visionary encounter (20:29). Behind this articulation we can reconstruct the discursive field. For Johannine Christians faith in Jesus was the basis of their salvation, whereas for the Thomasine Christians, the mystical visionary encounter was paramount. The discourse between these communities on this subject is preserved here from the perspective of the Johannine community which presents its "correct" version of soteriology that developed as a result of the discourse.

Clearly, in each of these three scenarios, Thomas is the actant, the false hero, a fool who misunderstands the path of salvation. In the

words of C. Barrett: "Thomas...appears in John as a loyal but dull disciple, whose misapprehensions serve to bring out the truth."⁴⁴ According to John, Thomas' misunderstanding is that he believes that in order to achieve life, one must seek the "way" to Jesus, the route of ascent into heaven, and a *visio Dei*.

The methodology of articulation when applied to the Gospel of John has borne results. It has revealed a discourse between the Thomasine and Johannine Christians.⁴⁵ The discursive field has emerged as a dispute over soteriology, specifically over the validity of proleptic visionary flights to heaven. The assumption of this methodology is that the Johannine author is not painting an arbitrary picture of the apostle Thomas, the hero of Syrian Christianity, when he portrays him as a false hero whose mystical soteriology is corrected by Jesus. Thus he created his discursive field by dramatizing actual features of the religio-social horizon and incorporating them at the textual level. The articulation certainly mirrors Johannine space and perspective, reflecting only partially the historical discourse itself.

These conclusions become more than provocative because they can be substantiated by the *Gospel of Thomas* itself, which promotes a visionary scheme of salvation. There is evidence that the Thomasine Christians were mystics seeking visions of God for the purpose of immortalization.⁴⁶ Such a scheme defines Jesus' role as the esteemed model mystic and mystagogue. Each individual becomes responsible for saving himself. It may be against this consequence of the *Gospel of Thomas*' soteriology that John reacts so harshly.

In any event, John disparages this system and, in response, articulates his own system which centers around the transforming essence of the faith experience. This experience is more than cognitive belief. It is experiential. In Jesus' absence, the Paraclete or Spirit has descended to earth. Now the divinity of Jesus is encountered through the Spirit, particularly in the two sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's

⁴⁴ Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 382.

⁴⁵ The implications for dating the Thomas tradition and perhaps even the Gospel of Thomas are paramount. Since the Johannine tradition is connected with Palestine and Asia Minor (see n. 29), it is quite possible that the author was familiar with the Syrian Gospel of Thomas. If John is writing in response to the Gospel of Thomas itself rather than traditions associated with it, this would suggest a first century date for the composition of the Gospel of Thomas probably around 70-80 CE. This lends support to S. Patterson's recent and convincing arguments for a 70-80 CE date for Thomas; refer to his discussion in *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus* (Sonoma: Polebridge, 1993) 113-120.

⁴⁶ On this see A. D. De Conick, *Seek to See Him: Ascent and Vision Mysticism in the Gospel of Thomas* (VCSup 33; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996).

⁴¹ J. Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991) 514.

⁴² Riley, *Resurrection*, 107-126.

⁴³ On this, see U. Bianchi, "The Religio-Historical Relevance of Lk 20:34-36," *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions. Presented to Gilles Quispel on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, ed. R. van den Broek and M. J. Vermaseren (EPRO 91; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981) 31-37.

Supper. But how John develops this ideology is a subject for another essay.⁴⁷

I leave this essay, however, with a few comments on a passage from the *Acts of John* 90:

He took us three [John, James, and Peter] likewise up the mountain, saying "Come with me." And again we went; and we saw him at a distance praying. Then I, since he loved me, went quietly up to him, as if he could not see me, and stood looking at his hinder parts; and I saw him not dressed in clothes at all but stripped of those <that> we (usually) saw (upon him), and not like a man at all. (And I saw that) his feet were whiter than snow, so that the ground there was lit up by his feet; and that his head stretched up to heaven, so that I was afraid and cried out; and he, turning about, appeared as a small man and caught hold of my beard and pulled it and said to me, "John, do not be faithless, but believing, and not inquisitive."

This was written in Syria shortly after the Gospel of John⁴⁸ and preserves a story in which John, *not* Thomas, is rebuked by Jesus: "John, do not be faithless, but believing." And what provoked this rebuke? That John went up a mountain (which is a metaphor for ascent), and was afraid of the vision he had of Jesus as the Glory!⁴⁹

It is plausible that this represents the theoretical construction of continued discourse between the mystic Christians of Syria who applauded Thomas and those who continued to follow John. Here they remind the Johannine Christians that visions of God are essential to the Christian faith experience. So they remember and portray not a Doubting Thomas, but a Doubting John.

⁴⁷ I will take up this subject in a paper to be delivered at the 1996 Annual SBL Convention in the Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism Consultation: "He who sees me sees him who sent me' (Jn 12:45): The Johannine Theologian and Early Christian Mysticism." See also my forthcoming *Faith Mysticism in the Gospel of John: The Johannine Community as a Community of Discourse*, to be published by Sheffield in the Supplements to *JSNT*.

⁴⁸ R. Cameron, *The Other Gospels* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982) 88-89; cf. H. Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament, Vol. 2: History and Literature of Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982) 196-198.

⁴⁹ See J. Fossum, "Partes posteriores dei: The 'Transfiguration' of Jesus in the Acts of John," in his forthcoming book, *The Image of the Invisible God: Essays on the Influence of Jewish Mysticism on Early Christianity* (NTOA 20; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995) 95-108.