


**"A Hard Saying"**  
The Gospel and Culture

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## WHEN IS JOHN TALKING ABOUT SACRAMENTS?<sup>1</sup>

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The Melbourne Scripture Seminar of 1981 was devoted to the theme: "The Sacraments: Celebrating and Creating Life." I had been invited to contribute in the area of Johannine scholarship, and the brochures advertising the Seminar stated: "Johannine literature is perhaps regarded as the most explicitly sacramental of the New Testament collection." This is true. If one were to accept the suggestions of all the scholars who have written on this issue in a positive sense one would finish with the following explicit sacramental teaching in the Fourth Gospel:<sup>2</sup>

*Matrimony:*

The marriage feast at Cana (2:1-11)

*Anointing of the Sick:*

The anointing at Bethany (12:1-8)

<sup>1</sup> I have retained this title, despite its difficulties, from the original setting of this paper, given at the Melbourne Scripture Seminar, Newman College, University of Melbourne, 24-31 August 1981. It enabled me to raise the issues of the Johannine community and its experience. See below.

<sup>2</sup> For the following list of possibilities see Raymond E. Brown, "The Johannine Sacramentary," in idem, *New Testament Essays* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1967) 75-76. Another good survey of scholarship can be found in Herbert Kloss, *Die Sakramente im Johannesevangelium. Vorkommen und Bedeutung von laufe, Eucharistie und Busse im 4. Evangelium*. SBS 46 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1970).

*Reconciliation:*

Lazarus (11:1-44)

"Whose sins you shall forgive shall be forgiven, etc." (20:23)

"He who has bathed does not need to wash, *except for his feet*." (13:10)<sup>3</sup>*Baptism:*

The baptism of Jesus (1:32-33; 3:26)

The marriage feast at Cana (2:1-11)

The "cleansing" of the Temple (2:13-25)

The conversation with Nicodemus (3:1-21)

The conversation with the Samaritan woman (4:1-30)

The healing at Bethsaida (5:1-17)

The walking on the water (6:16-21)

The source of living waters (7:38)

The healing of the man born blind (9:1-38)

The Good Shepherd (10:1-18)

The raising of Lazarus (11:1-44)

The foot washing (13:1-20)

The miraculous draught of fishes (21:1-8)

*Eucharist:*

The marriage feast at Cana (2:1-11)

The "cleansing" of the Temple (2:13-25)

"My food is to do the will of my Father" (4:31-34)

Chapter 6, especially 6:1-15 and 6:51-58.

The foot washing (13:1-20)

The vine and the branches (15:1-11)

The meal of bread and fish (21:9-14)

*Baptism and Eucharist:*

Blood and water from the pierced side of Jesus (19:34)

Water and blood as witnesses (1 John 5:8).

This list is clearly "maximal." It gathers indiscriminately from the suggestions of scholars, some of them reflecting upon the text from a more systematic perspective or reading it in the light of subsequent patristic and Church thought and practice. For the contemporary biblical critic it probably comes as something of a surprise that certain events have been read as containing explicit teaching on the Christian sacra-

ments. One might ask, for example, how the anointing of the feet of Jesus might be linked with the Catholic sacrament of anointing, or how the cleansing of the Temple, where there is no reference to any baptismal symbols or rituals (especially water), however subtle, could refer to the fundamental Christian sacrament of baptism?

These questions could go farther, as contacts between most of the texts cited and the sacraments of the Christian tradition are tenuous at best. A further point should be raised as we begin this study. Scholars who have produced these various claims do not fall into clearly defined confessional groups. It is interesting to note that the defense of many explicit contacts between the Johannine gospel and the Christian sacramental system is not the sole preserve of conservative Catholics. Similarly, we must note that the rejection of sacramental teaching in the Fourth Gospel is not only found in schools of radical Protestant scholarship. I have no intention of discussing the details of this long and unresolved debate, of which Raymond E. Brown remarked: "Perhaps on no other point of Johannine thought is there such division among scholars."<sup>4</sup> Anyone interested in a fuller discussion should consult the surveys done by Brown in his *New Testament Essays*<sup>5</sup> and in his commentary on the Fourth Gospel,<sup>6</sup> and the useful survey contained in Herbert Klos's book.<sup>7</sup> Thinkers from all schools take up a variety of positions on the issue. A careful reading of this scholarship shows that, as always in approaching New Testament texts, what ultimately determines the answer to the question "when is John talking about sacraments?" is the set of criteria and methods adopted by each scholar in approaching the text. I will limit myself to a few contrasting positions in this debate before setting out on my own discussion. However, there are still some introductory remarks that have to be made. Indeed, the following brief discussion is partly indicative of the "criteria and methods" I adopt in my subsequent reading of the Johannine text.

### 1. "WHEN IS JOHN TALKING?"

It is not accurate to ask about a single character called "John," nor are we justified in referring to "John talking." The apparently never-ending debate over the author of the gospel we call "of John" is well

<sup>4</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 2 vols. AB 29, 29A (New York: Doubleday, 1966-70) 1:cxii.

<sup>5</sup> Brown, "The Johannine Sacramentary," 51-56.

<sup>6</sup> Brown, *John* 1:cx-cxiv.

<sup>7</sup> Klos, *Die Sakramente im Johannesevangelium*. See n. 2 above.

<sup>3</sup> The words ἐν τῇ τὸν πῶδας are textually doubtful, and may have been added by a copyist to solve the problem of sinfulness after baptism. For a discussion of this issue, with bibliographical details, see Francis J. Moloney, *The Johannine Son of Man*. BibSacRel 14 (2nd ed. Rome: LAS, 1978) 192-93.

and widely covered in the many fine introductions to this gospel, including those of the great contemporary commentators now all available in English: Charles Kingsley Barrett, Barnabas Lindars, Rudolf Schnackenburg, and Raymond E. Brown.<sup>8</sup> I have also discussed this question in my own recent commentary in the *Sacra Pagina* series.<sup>9</sup> The evidence of the gospel itself, assuming that the link made between the author of the gospel and the Beloved Disciple in the secondary 21:20-24 is correct, points to an original tradition about Jesus with its source in a disciple of Jesus. This tradition deepened and developed in a Christian community that eventually established itself somewhere in Asia Minor (probably Ephesus). The development took place over a long period of time, through many trials and tribulations caused by both external and internal difficulties.

I remain convinced that the community was gathered around an all-important figure who had close contact with the historical Jesus and was most probably an ex-disciple of the Baptist (see 1:35). If this was the case we cannot ask about "John talking." We must look deeper into the life and experience of faith of a particular Christian community. The Gospel of John, like all the other gospels, is not a single person "talking" to us, but a living community of first-century Christians communicating, through their own particular Spirit-filled journey, their dynamic experience of faith that is, especially in the Fourth Gospel, a christological and an ecclesiological journey.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John* (2nd ed. London: S.P.C.K., 1978) 100-34; Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John*. NCB (London: Oliphants, 1972) 28-34; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*. 3 vols. HTCNT IV/1-3 (New York: Crossroad, 1968-82) 1:75-104; Brown, *John* 1:1xxxvii-xcviii. It should be noted that Schnackenburg, who hesitatingly opts for John, the son of Zebedee, in the first German volume of his commentary, reproduced in English, has since shifted to a position akin to the one adopted in this paper. See Rudolf Schnackenburg, "On the Origin of the Fourth Gospel," in Pittsburgh Festival on the Gospels 1970, *Jesus and Man's Hope* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, 1970) 233-46. Like Schnackenburg, Brown moved away from the identification of the Beloved Disciple with the son of Zebedee to a position closer to the one espoused here. See Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple. The Life, Loves and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times* (New York: Paulist, 1979) 31-34.

<sup>9</sup> Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*. SP 4 (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998) 6-9.

<sup>10</sup> See on this the contributions of Raymond E. Brown: "'And the Lord Said?' Biblical Reflections on Scripture as the Word of God," *TS* 42 (1981) 3-19; idem, "The Meaning of the Bible," *TD* 28 (1980) 305-20.

## 2. "ABOUT SACRAMENTS"

This is the point of greatest difficulty in all discussions of sacraments and sacramentality in the Fourth Gospel. Yet despite the fact that our various ecclesial and theological traditions have wide-reaching differences in their understanding of "sacrament," we could all gather around a general definition positing that sacraments are intimately associated with "life" and the communication of the divine life, a participation already "in the triumphant eschatological salvation promised by God through Christ as his Word, and wrought by God through Christ as the incarnate Son and mediator."<sup>11</sup> Obviously this notion is never explicitly spelled out in the New Testament, as a sacramental theology took centuries to evolve and is, of course, still unfolding in our pilgrim Church. The word "sacrament" comes to us from the Pauline word *μυστήριον*, picked up by the second-century Fathers in their attempts to forge a theology of the sacraments<sup>12</sup> and translated into the Latin version of the New Testament as *sacramentum*.<sup>13</sup>

It is difficult for us to see the New Testament, and especially the highly symbolic language of the Fourth Gospel, unburdened of our rich tradition of sign and symbol, so closely associated with our sacramental life in the Church. Yet we must be aware from the outset that for the Fourth Gospel all Jesus' activity and preaching, especially the notion of glory and glorification, so important to this gospel (see, for example, 7:39; 8:54; 11:4; 12:23, 28; 13:31-32; 14:13; 15:8; 16:14; 17:1, 4, 5, 10), is the communication of a life-giving power. Sandra Schneiders has written eloquently on this crucial feature of the Fourth Gospel.<sup>14</sup> Tracing "sacrament" in the

<sup>11</sup> Burkhard Neunheuser, "Sacraments," *Sacramentum Mundi. An Encyclopedia of Theology*. 6 vols. (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970) 5:378.

<sup>12</sup> For full details see G. W. H. Lampe, ed., *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961) 891-93, especially section F, where reference is made to Cyril, Theodotus, Clement of Alexandria, Dionysius, and Serapion from the early centuries, who used the expression *μυστήριον* in the sense of *sacramentum*: "revelation of divine activity."

<sup>13</sup> The word *sacramentum* originally meant an oath, especially a soldier's oath of allegiance. This can still be traced in early Christian literature. See, for example, Tertullian, *Ad Martyres* 3. On this see "Sacrament," in Frank L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974) 1218-19.

<sup>14</sup> See Sandra M. Schneiders, "History and Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel," in Martinus de Jonge, ed., *L'Evangile de Jean. Sources, redaction, théologie*. BFTI 44 (Gembloux: Duculot, 1977) 371-76; eadem, "Symbolism and the Sacramental Principle in the Fourth Gospel," in Pius-Ramon Tragan, ed., *Signi e Sacramenti nel Vangelo di Giovanni*. Studia Anselmiana 66; Sacramentum 3 (Romae:

Fourth Gospel in this wider sense does not call for a search for criteria: "Ultimately, the sacramental principle in the Fourth Gospel is Jesus, manifesting himself in the Church, who experiences and bears witness in and by her own history to her divine filiation in the Spirit."<sup>15</sup> I hope to return briefly to this issue at the end of my paper, but, as Sandra Schneiders fully appreciates,<sup>16</sup> this argument in no way annuls the validity of our quest: Are there descriptions of events from the story of the life of Jesus, as it is told by the Fourth Evangelist, that clearly indicate the practice and theology of a sacramental life, apart from the evangelist's seeming conviction that the very existence of the Johannine community as the continuing presence of Jesus' sonship in history made the community as such in some way sacramental?<sup>17</sup>

As I have already indicated, there are many scholars who would reply positively to that question. The departure point for a widespread understanding of sacramental references in the Fourth Gospel is found in the evidence that the early Church had practices that later tradition identified as sacramental. The synoptic tradition and Paul carry words of institution, and even though they can be reduced to two basic traditions they show that these words of Jesus, supposedly uttered on the night before he died, have had a considerable history in the life of various Christian communities before they were eventually inserted into their present contexts in the New Testament literature. The Pauline tradition (1 Cor 11:24; see also Luke 22:19) carries a command that may have come from liturgical practices: "Do this in remembrance of me," yet in other ways this tradition preserves the original setting of a meal.<sup>18</sup> While there is no command to repeat the action, the setting

Editrice Anselmiana, 1977) 221-35; eadem, "The Foot Washing (John 13:1-20): An Experiment in Hermeneutics," *CBQ* 43 (1981) 76-92.

<sup>15</sup> Schneiders, "Symbolism and the Sacramental Principle," 235.

<sup>16</sup> See especially Schneiders, "The Foot Washing (John 13:1-20)," 81-82.

<sup>17</sup> Xavier Léon-Dufour has argued for a deeper appreciation of two levels of understanding for a proper evaluation of the Fourth Gospel. He interprets the cleansing and the sign of the Temple, the dialogue with Nicodemus and John 6 *at the level of Jesus in a non-sacramental way*, and then argues that *the risen Lord present in the Spirit in his community makes the same texts sacramental*. See Xavier Léon-Dufour, "Towards a Symbolic Reading of the Fourth Gospel," *NTS* 27 (1980-81) 439-56. See especially p. 455: "The historical events call forth the mystery which sheds light upon it, but the mystery itself would peter out in pure imagination if it did not ceaselessly find its nourishment in the rich soil of time past."

<sup>18</sup> See further Francis J. Moloney, *A Body Broken for a Broken People: Eucharist in the New Testament*. (Revised ed. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997) 165-77.

within a meal has not been lost in the eucharistic practice behind the Markan tradition, repeated by Matthew (Mark 14:22-25; Matt 26:26-29).<sup>19</sup> The practice of baptism in the pre-Johannine churches is clearly indicated in the solemn closing words of the Matthean Jesus:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19).<sup>20</sup>

If there is sufficient evidence to show that pre-Johannine Christianity celebrated *at least* Eucharist and baptism in its various forms of early Christian worship, it seems logical that the author of the Fourth Gospel might also show that these sacraments had their basis in the words and works of Jesus.<sup>21</sup> To affirm this much, it appears to me, is correct. Here I am in general agreement with those scholars who see regular references to the sacraments in John, including the celebrated but contentious claims of Oscar Cullmann. But from this starting point Cullmann's tracing hidden references to the sacramental revelation of the  $\mu\omega\tau\tau\rho\rho\rho\rho$  of God at every turn as the *key* to an understanding of the gospel as a whole is, in my opinion, carrying a basic truth too far.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> For a lucid presentation of this case see Joachim Jeremias, "The Words of Institution," in Patrick McGoldrick, ed., *Understanding the Eucharist: Papers of the Maynooth Union Summer School 1968* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1969) 18-28. Still a classic in all these discussions is the same author's *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1966).

<sup>20</sup> There is universal agreement among contemporary scholars that Matt 28:16-20 is central to an understanding of the Matthean vision of his church and its mission. See, for example, Wolfgang Trilling, *Das Wahre Israel. Studien zur Theologie des Matthäus-Evangeliums*. SANTS 10 (3rd ed. Munich: Kösel, 1964) 21-51; John P. Meier, *Law and History in Matthew's Gospel. A Redactional Study of Mt. 5.17-48*. AnBib 71 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1976) 25-40; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*. 3 vols. ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988-97) 3:676-91. See p. 687: "The grand denouement, so consonant with the spirit of the whole Gospel because so full of resonances with earlier passages, is, despite its terseness, almost a compendium of Matthean theology."

<sup>21</sup> On this see Léon-Dufour, "Towards a Symbolic Reading of the Fourth Gospel" (n. 17 above).

<sup>22</sup> Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship*. SBT 10 (London: SCM, 1953). From his theological and exegetical argument for the second element of his position, which does make some very valid points to which we shall eventually return, see pp. 38-59 (especially 47-50). His argument swivels around the important conclusion on p. 56: "The implicit assumption of this Gospel is that the historical events, as here presented, contain in themselves, besides what is immediately

To cite Brown's comment on Cullmann's position: "In fact, he often seems to fall back on the principle that since a passage could have been understood sacramentally, it was intended sacramentally."<sup>23</sup>

This position, and the various scholars who follow it (Alf Corell, Bruce Vawter, Paul Niewalda, Louis Bouyer, David M. Stanley),<sup>24</sup> has, as I have mentioned, a solidly-based point of departure: the positive indications of pre-Johannine literature that a variety of forms of sacramental life were part of early Christian worship.<sup>25</sup> We should notice, however, that the only *firmly established evidence* we have for this sacramental life relates to baptism and Eucharist.

Of course the pro-sacramentalists have not had it all their own way. The most serious opposition has come from one of the outstanding New Testament scholars of the twentieth century, Rudolf Bultmann. Bultmann's central argument is that the Fourth Gospel was originally written as an anti-sacramental document, and he can immediately point to the complete absence of words of institution and of any command to baptize in this gospel. He has a wide following among fellow German scholars (for example, Eduard Schweizer, Helmut Koester, and Eduard Lohse) and also, in subsequent years, among North American scholars. Only a minority would claim that the Fourth Gospel is "anti"-sacramental, but some would suggest that it was non-sacramental. There is an important difference between polemics and absence. For Bultmann it would be foreign to John's theological vision to present a human "cultic place" where one could have some sort of union with Christ. The Fourth Evangelist was only interested in a personal union with Jesus through a commitment based purely on a loss of self (and thus the gaining of authenticity) that comes about in a radical commitment of faith to the fact that God is made known in the scandal of the Word (the *das* of the proclamation, and not the *was*).<sup>26</sup> Even Bultmann,

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perceptible, references to further facts of salvation with which these once-for-all key events are bound up."

<sup>23</sup> Brown, "The Johannine Sacramentary," 55.

<sup>24</sup> See the references in nn. 4 and 5 above for further discussion and details.

<sup>25</sup> See Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship* 7-36 for his analysis of what he calls the "basic characteristics" of that worship. He is over-optimistic, and many scholars would argue against some of his firm historical conclusions because they seem to be based on fragile evidence. For a better assessment see Ferdinand Hahn, *The Worship of the Early Church*. Translated by David E. Green (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973).

<sup>26</sup> See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*. 2 vols. (London: SCM, 1955) 2:70-92.

however, would admit that there are three places in the gospel where the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist are explicitly mentioned:

John 3:5: "no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit."

John 6:51c-58: There are apparent eucharistic possibilities in almost every verse. The main ones are:

v. 51c: "the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

v. 53: "unless you eat (φάγετε is used) the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."

v. 54: "Those who eat (τρώγετε is used)<sup>27</sup> my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life."

v. 56: "Those who eat (τρώγετε is used) my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them."

John 19:34: The blood and water flowing from the pierced side of the crucified Christ, especially in light of 1 John 5:7-8: "There are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree."

But for Bultmann not one of these passages belongs to the original gospel as the evangelist originally compiled it. They have all been added by what Bultmann calls an "ecclesiastical redactor."<sup>28</sup> In simple terms, he argues that these clearly sacramental passages have been added to an anti-sacramental gospel at a later stage in order to make it conform to the life and practice of the "greater Church."

We must be careful not to ridicule these suggestions. There are internal difficulties and tensions within the Fourth Gospel that need explanation. In John 6 there appears to be a contradiction in the positive use of the word "flesh" in vv. 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, and 56 and the negative use of the word in v. 63: "It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless." Bultmann's source theory and his allocation of all sacramental material to the conservative hand of an ecclesiastical redactor may not, in the

<sup>27</sup> There is a commonly used verb available to speak of the human process of eating: ἐσθίειν and its aorist form φάγετε. The verb τρώγετε is normally used in contexts where stress is given to the physical "munching" or "crunching" of food. It is more commonly used of animal feeding than of human. On this see Ceslas Spicq, "ΤΡΩΓΕΙΝ est-il synonyme de ΦΑΓΕΙΝ et de ΕΣΘΙΕΙΝ dans le Nouveau Testament?" *NTS* 26 (1979-80) 414-19.

<sup>28</sup> See Bultmann, *Theology* 2:3-14; idem, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, translated by G. R. Beasley-Murray (Oxford: Blackwells, 1971) 138-40; 300; 324-25; 325-28; 677-78. For an explanation of Bultmann's source theory see Moloney, *The Gospel of John* 85-86.

end, provide a satisfactory solution to the literary and theological tensions that abound in this gospel,<sup>29</sup> but they do take us back to a point made earlier: this gospel was not written overnight. It had a long history within the life and faith experience of a concrete Christian community. I am prepared to accept that the sacramental passages in 3:5, 6:51c-58, and 19:34 came into the Johannine tradition late rather than early, but I see no need to omit them from an authentic interpretation of the Johannine gospel as we now have it. Raymond E. Brown again summarized my position well when he wrote:

The recognition that some of the explicit Sacramental references belong to the final redaction does not mean any acceptance of the theory that the original Gospel was non-Sacramental or anti-Sacramental. It is a question of seeing different degrees of sacramentality in the work of the evangelist and that of the final redactor.<sup>30</sup>

The two opposing positions I have just outlined show different methods of approach and different criteria. From Cullmann we must learn that the gospel as a whole is the life story of Jesus, and that there is often a subtle use of that life story *from the past* to root community practice *of the present* in his life. From Bultmann, however, we must also learn that the gospel may reflect a long and perhaps troubled se-

<sup>29</sup> Two important recent books on the Fourth Gospel have their starting point in an appreciation of Bultmann's approach to literary and theological tensions in the gospel. In the end each of these scholars parts ways with Bultmann, but his contemporary recognition of his asking the right questions tells of his ongoing significance to New Testament scholarship. See John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), and Paul N. Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6*. WUNT 2nd ser. 78 (Tübingen: Mohr; Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1996).

<sup>30</sup> And, I would add, the Spirit-filled journey of a community behind all the stages of development! For the citation see Brown, *John* 1:cxii. It is here that I would differ from the suggestions of Léon-Dufour: "Towards a Symbolic Reading." Ignoring all the recent work done on the Johannine community and its journey of faith, he insists, for example, that 3:5 and 6:53-58 would make perfect sense to a Jewish audience as they stand, and that there are no indications in the text itself (e.g., introduction of "water" into 3:5) to show a growing sacramental awareness within the Johannine community. See pp. 449-54. In the light of a more contemporary understanding of the developing theological awareness of the Johannine community I would argue for a growing awareness, reflected in a growing text. In the more than thirty years since Brown wrote his commentary and the almost twenty years since I first wrote this study both of us became less certain that we could distinguish between the evangelist and the redactor!

ries of internal and external conflicts, producing a gospel of extraordinary christological and ecclesiological complexity. I would like, now, to steer a middle course, offering four criteria for the discovery of sacramental teaching in the Fourth Gospel. The first two of these criteria are well-established and widely used. They are somewhat "external" to the material. They attempt to provide some reliable "rule of thumb" by which the exegete may work. In many ways these are rather "negative" criteria, and I suppose there is a danger that some important material will escape them. However I believe that this is a sounder way to start an investigation, since it is possible that, once we establish a firmly based "minimum," more material might come to light because of its close contacts with that minimum.

The first criterion must be a rigorous search for elements in the text itself indicating that the author is referring to some form of sacramental ritual and symbol. For example, in John 3:5 there is the explicit reference to a "rebirth," the use of the word "water," and the idea of "entering the kingdom of God," expanding on the earlier statement in 3:3 about "seeing the kingdom of God." The same cannot be said, for example, of the curing of the paralytic in John 5:1-8. In fact, the restoration of the man (a positive element in itself) is not effected through water, but independently of it, simply at the word of Jesus: "Stand up, take your mat and walk" (v. 8). The tradition at the pool was that the water would heal (see v. 7). Jesus transcends that tradition and heals by the power of his word. The sequel to the miracle shows no further understanding or life of faith in the cured man; in fact, he appears to be extraordinarily obtuse. This lack of elements within the text itself makes a baptismal understanding of John 5 most unlikely.<sup>31</sup> This becomes particularly clear when one looks to the curing of the man born blind in John 9, a story in many ways parallel to the cure in 5:1-8. Here the miracle is effected by contact with water at the pool of Siloam, which the evangelist then further explains as meaning "Sent" (v. 7). The cure is followed by a gradual movement to theological sight and light as the series of interrogations of the man leads him through a journey of confessions of faith.<sup>32</sup>

- To his friends he says: "The man called Jesus" worked a miracle (9:11).
- To the Pharisees he says: "He is a prophet" (v. 17).

<sup>31</sup> For a study of John 5, with detailed bibliography, see Moloney, *Son of Man* 68-86.

<sup>32</sup> For further detail see *ibid.* 142-59.

