John 2:1-11: The sign of greater things to come

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ABSTRACT
It is here argued that a possible context for the fourth gospel is the liturgical celebration of the church. If so, the evangelist could be expected to assume knowledge of the liturgy by his fellow believers. By allusion therefore rather than by direct reference he could more vividly teach them the meaning of their liturgical actions. John 2:1-11 is here examined in order to see whether such an assumption gives a richer meaning to the text.

INTRODUCTION
The way in which the fourth gospel is interpreted depends largely on the interpreter's understanding of the context from which it arose. This paper takes as its starting-point the view that John's gospel "has behind it the common Christianity of the early period, and that readers who shared the life and thought of the Church would find here much that was familiar, from which they could advance to its new and unfamiliar teaching" (Dodd 1954:6). Although it is doubtful whether John knew the synoptic gospels, he certainly knew the traditions behind them. So, for example, he does not mention Jesus' choice of the Twelve, but assumes that his readers will know of this (6:67 etc.). There is every indication (pace Robinson 1976:9) that John's gospel was written late in the first century, after Christians had been excluded from the synagogue in terms of the Twelfth Benediction (the Birkath haminim). The term loudatoi, for example, frequently refers to unbelievers (e.g. 5:16; 8:48; 20:19), a use reflected elsewhere in the New Testament only in Acts. In John this term seems to have an even more precise meaning: Brown (1966:LXXI) rightly concludes that, "the term is almost the technical title for the religious authorities, particularly those in Jerusalem, who are hostile to Jesus". Already therefore there was a marked difference between Jews who believed in Jesus and those who did not.

If, however, the followers of Jesus were distinguished from
other Jews, one of the important marks of their distinctiveness would be their liturgical practices in which they would especially celebrate the foundation of their faith and its significance for them. As this is primarily to be found not so much in the teaching of Jesus as in his death and resurrection, the suggestion of Trocmé (1983) that the passion narratives in the gospels are all derived from an archetypal account originally composed for use in the Christian liturgy, is very attractive. John would not have to spell out the details of the liturgical practices, since he could rely on a common background against which his allusions could be recognized and understood without too much difficulty. Goodenough (1965:129) further points out that, "from the rabbis themselves we know that the blessing and eating of bread and the blessing and drinking of wine had by Philo's time become highly important Jewish observances", and he goes on to say, "Philo says that only one purified may be told about the sacred mystic rites, since what in them is manifest to the sight would mean nothing unless one could see beyond the perceptible to the immaterial and conceptual existence behind what is seen". This would seem to be very much in keeping with John's approach: The meaning of the ritual acts could so easily be misunderstood. It is not surprising that the disciplina arcani of the early centuries meant that only the baptized were permitted to know of what went on in Christian liturgical assemblies, a practice enjoined even by the Didache (9:5). John with his understanding that signs were of value only to those who had eyes to see, is therefore likely to have referred to the liturgical rites in ways by which their meaning is ever being made more vivid to the participants, while those who have not come to faith must remain in ignorance.

If this is the way John went to work it is not surprising that commentators have felt either that John had no interest in the sacraments or that his gospel is entirely sacramental. Smalley (1978:204-210), for example, tends to play down the importance of the sacraments in John. MacGregor (1963:119) on the other hand maintains, "John is rightly regarded as the supreme teacher on the sacraments". Similarly Correll (1958:47) believes that the Gospel of John, "reflects the seething life of the early Christian Church, a life which found its main expression in liturgy and teaching". It is really anachronistic to talk of sacraments in John, since this was a later name given especially to the liturgical acts of
baptism and eucharist. It is preferable therefore to speak of liturgy or worship. Now, the liturgy of the church reflects its theology, and real theology is not a construct of men, but a reflection on the human condition before God (cf. Jung 1978:291), and the liturgical actions describe the way in which God's revelation has been understood and accepted. As John therefore presents the gospel of Christ it is natural that he should take for granted the liturgical rites of the early church, and seek to draw out their meaning for the benefit of his hearers and readers. Barrett (1950:7) is surely right in concluding that, "John is neither a sacramentarian nor an anti-sacramentarian; he is concerned that sacraments should always be rooted in the historical Jesus ...". If John was writing from this background he wrote primarily for those who were already Christians, who will have recognized his allusions to the liturgy in which they shared.

It was the purpose of all the evangelists to link their account of the life and doings of Jesus with the life of the church of their own day. This is the basic presupposition of form and redaction criticism. The methods and language used to describe the words and works of Jesus have much to say not only about Jesus himself, but also about the life and practices of the early church. Though the literary genre of the gospels may be closest to a biography (Talbert 1978), they were written primarily to proclaim the saving work of God in Christ, and their interest is more in the presence of Christ with his people than in his history as an event in the past. What is true of all the gospels is especially true of John who wishes to underline the unity which exists between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith, the Son of God, who is present in the church, continuing his work of revelation and of sanctifying men (cf. Feuillet 1960:8).

If this is John's way of proceeding it leads on to another preliminary point. It would seem that the fourth gospel was written primarily to Jewish Christians. Though we need not go as far as Robinson (1962:c.8) and claim that John was directed only to Jewish Christians, and that even 10:16 refers not to gentiles but to Jews of the Diaspora, the constant references and allusions to the Old Testament would be intelligible only to those who were not only familiar with its words, but also conversant with the worship and practices of the Jews. The repeated allusions to Jesus as the fulfilment of the Torah, or as the true Wisdom, show the very
Jewish nature of John’s gospel. What we seem to find in John therefore is a work addressed primarily (but not necessarily exclusively) to Jewish Christians, who were conscious both of their heritage and of the unique position of Jesus the Messiah and who celebrated in their liturgy their indebtedness to him. Though many of their forms of worship and behaviour were based on Jewish models, the new features were derived from their understanding of the meaning of the person and work of Jesus Christ. It was this meaning which John was concerned to expound.

He effected this not by writing a biography of Jesus, but by selecting those incidents which in truth or in tradition were associated with him and which depicted in dramatic form the meaning of his words and deeds for those for whom John wrote. This dramatic quality of John’s gospel may never be neglected (cf. Connick 1948). In this way, as with all good drama, the reader becomes a participant and not only an observer. The fourth gospel presents a drama of the revelation of God. Though it has a beginning and an end the intervening scenes are composed in such a way that they portray a developing picture of the revelation of God in Christ. Each of them contains within itself the message of the whole (Dodd 1954:383), but each successive pericope adds a further feature to the total picture, so that the wealth of John’s gospel is all the more clearly disclosed by the subtle differences of emphasis employed. So in our examination of John 2:1-11 this pericope is seen in relation to the whole, as arising from the context of the Old Testament now reinterpreted in the light of Christ, and as speaking to Christians of John’s day - and therefore to Christians of every day.

This paper does not attempt to distinguish the sources which John used, nor to distinguish his own changes and additions. Fortna (1970) has attempted this in great detail. We are concerned here rather with the meaning which John assigns to the story as it now appears, and, though our knowledge of this would be greatly enhanced if we could be certain of the form in which John received the story, even the careful analysis of Fortna must be seen as yielding only tentative results. In fact, Fortna (1970:102-109) believes that John so drastically changed the order of the signs that it is his contribution which is the really significant factor. A reasonable historical background for the story is suggested by Derrett (1963) who describes the obligations incurred by guests at
Jewish weddings and argues that Jesus at the right time unexpectedly contributed the abundance of wine on behalf of himself and his disciples which custom would have demanded of him. Though this may indeed furnish the historical setting, anxiety to recover this may well lead to a failure to comprehend the real meaning of the narrative.

1 THE CONTEXT

This first sēmenōn in the gospel might be described as marking the end of the introduction. Just as the Prologue proper (1:1-18) introduces the whole gospel, as it indicates themes which are to be developed throughout the gospel, so this sign foreshadows the future glory to be revealed in Jesus. Jesus is the beginning not only of the gospel (as Mark would have it: 1:1), but of all creation (Jn. 1:1). This claim is to be substantiated by his works (5:36) which are seen as signs of his true work on the cross and in the resurrection. Boismard (1956:14f.) believes that the period from the baptism of Jesus (1:19) up to 2:11 is a carefully structured programme of seven days, and that the sign of Cana takes place on the seventh day. In view of the importance which Philo assigns to the seventh day (as will be indicated later), if Boismard's programme is correct, then the climax of the week is reached in 2:1-11.

The first sign therefore is of great importance; it is itself the archē (2:11). As the word is here used predicatively it does not need the article. Though most manuscripts (including A1,6,13) insert it, the best witnesses (p66,,75,v1,7,0,f,1,a,) favour its omission. Fortna (1970:35f.) believes that the reading of p66 tautēn proṭēn archēn is original, and that the "all but intolerable Greek" which this reading gives is due to John's addition of archēn to his source. More likely proṭēn was a gloss, later incorporated into the text either before archēn or (with a) after Galilaias. In any case this sign is not just the first of a series: It is the archetype of all the signs, which declare the glory of the Word incarnate and are intended to lead men to faith in him (cf. Barrett 1955:161). If it should be thought that this contradicts what has been said above, in so far as John seems to have been writing for Christians, it should be remembered that faith is not simply a once for all event - the expression of faith is an ongoing process. Past, present and future are inextricable linked in the life of every human being.
"Just as a man still is what he always was, so he already is what he will become" (Jung 1978:323). John is concerned to help Christians become what by God’s grace they already are. The faith which they expressed in their baptism needs continually to be fostered and enriched. The aorists ἐπανέρισεν and ἐπιστεύσαν in 2:11 indicate the actual results of the sign. So the greatest sign of all, the cross and resurrection, is followed by the statement of the purpose of John’s gospel in 20:31: "... that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name".

The pericope has been preceded by the story of the coming of Nathanael to Jesus, to which it is linked especially by the use of the phrase τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ ἐριτῇ (2:1), the significance of which will be further discussed below. This phrase follows three references to τῇ ἐπαινήτῃ (1:29,35,43) and would seem to indicate the end of a series of incidents, especially when its further meaning is taken into account. A further indication of the link between 2:1-11 and the story of Nathanael is given in 21:2 by the reference to "Nathanael of Cana in Galilee": Nathanael and Cana belong together. The account of Nathanael shows, inter alia, that the true Jew, the true Israelite ἐν τῷ δόλῳ οὐκ ἐστίν (unlike Jacob, the original Israel) is the one who comes to Jesus. Boismard (1956:21) draws attention to the repetition in the opening chapters of John of the words come, find and especially see. Seeing and believing is a theme which runs right through John’s gospel and is exploited in various ways. The theme adds a further element to the importance of Nathanael. He comes to Jesus by God’s grace (Nathanael = gift of God); for Jesus knew him even before he was summoned by Philip, while, like an assiduous rabbi, he was under the fig-tree - the right place to study Torah. Here at the start of the Gospel of John we are given an example of God’s gracious call to men in Christ (cf. 15:16). In coming to Jesus Nathanael fulfils the destiny of Israel. Israel, as Boismard (1956:99f.) convincingly demonstrates, was regularly (though wrongly) thought to mean "man seeing God”. Philip’s injunction to Nathanael, "Come and see" (1:46) is the occasion for the fulfilment of Israel’s destiny.

But the fourth gospel can never be analysed in such a way as to pin upon any text a single interpretation. In the story of Nathanael we have a pattern which reappears in 2:1-11, with an apparent change of referent in the narrative. On the one hand Nathanael is
the true Israelite, but his address to Jesus shows his recognition of Jesus as the true Rabbi and the true King of Israel, which prepares the way for the disclosure of Jesus as the true Israel. The vision of God granted to Jacob (Gn. 28:12) finds its fulfilment in Jesus (1:18), for, as 1:18 puts it, the only one who has truly seen God is the Son, who alone can reveal the vision to others. The Hebrew text of Genesis 28:12 could mean that angels were ascending and descending either on the ladder or on Jacob, though the LXX takes it to refer to the ladder. The rabbis recognized this double meaning, and one interpretation connected it with Isaiah 49:3, "Thou art my servant, Israel, in whom I shall be glorified", a theme repeated in verse 5. Odeberg (1974:33-40) quotes Genesis Rabbah 68:18, where Jacob's dream is interpreted as showing the link between the ideal Israel in heaven and Israel on earth. The glory of the heavenly Israel, and therefore the glory of God, is reflected in earthly Israel. The glory is now revealed in Jesus (cf. 1:14), so that in place of Jacob John writes ὁ γεννήτορας ἰδικοὶ ἀνθρώπων, the usual self-designation of Jesus. As the rabbis connected Genesis 28:12 with the glorification of Israel, God's servant, so now Jesus takes the place of Israel. He becomes the true image, the real man. It is in the history of this man, this connecting link between heaven and earth, that the glory of God is to be manifested, and it is this glory that the fourth gospel expounds.

The nature of the glory is hinted at in John 1:50: μείζων τούτων ὄψε, where the singular person is to be noted, followed almost immediately by the plural ὀψεσθε. The greater things are to be seen not only by Nathanael, but by all who recognize Jesus as the King of Israel whose glory will be shown in the cross and resurrection, anticipated now in the sign which follows. The readers and hearers are in this way invited to become those who truly see God and so show themselves to be the true Israel (cf. Boismard 1956:164f.).

2 EXEGESIS
The account begins with the words ἡμέρα ἤ τρίτη. It would be pedantic (in spite of Schnackenburg 1968:325) to think that this refers to a definite temporal period and nothing more. Following Old Testament usage (cf. Daly 1978:184) the phrase indicates an event of importance: It is used in the Old Testament to refer to the binding of Isaac, marking the decisive time for the offering
(Gn. 22:4), where the LXX has it in the same form as here - τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ. In Hosea 6:2 the phrase is used of the day of resurrection for Israel, to which perhaps Luke 24:46 refers. John could scarcely be unaware of its regular use to refer to the resurrection of Jesus (Mt. 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; 27:64; Lk. 9:22; 18:32; 24:7,46; Ac. 10:40; 1 Cor. 15:4). 1 Corinthians 15:4 is singularly instructive (cf. Boismard 1956:106f.), since this is part of a creedal statement incorporating the phrase in the same form as in John 2:1 (where it should however be noted that B,Θ,ε, pc have the more usual τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ).

The phrase immediately draws attention to Sunday as the day not only on which Jesus rose from the dead, but also on which the church celebrates the resurrection in its worship (Ac. 20:7), as would seem to be shown particularly in John 20:19 (Suggit 1976). The story of Nathanael has prepared the way for the manifestation of the glory of Christ, and the opening words of chapter 2 are rich in symbolic meanings. So the next word γάμος evokes festal and eucharistic images. It is frequently used in the LXX to translate the Hebrew miṣîh : "feast", and which is used in Isaiah 25:6 to refer to the messianic banquet of the Lord. (The LXX is here more of a paraphrase and miṣîh is not represented.) In the New Testament γάμος is regularly used with an eschatological reference (Mt. 22:2-12; 25:10; Lk. 12:36). The Lucan parallel to Matthew 22 (Lk. 14:16) speaks of δείπνον μεγά: Apparently the banquet is more important than the marriage. Both ideas are brought together in Revelation 19:7-9 where the marriage-supper of the Lamb is the symbolic representation of the messianic banquet, centering upon the crucified and risen Lamb of God, and where the use of δείπνον can scarcely fail to recall the Lord's Supper with its eschatological reference (1 Cor. 11:20,26). The first few words of the chapter are therefore already rich in eucharistic allusions. The importance of the whole account is shown by the backward reference to it at 4:46, at the beginning of the account of the second sign. Only the first two signs are numbered (4:54), and the connection of the second sign to the first enables the reader to see the importance of the complete series of signs which Cana initiates and which leads up to the cross and resurrection.

We are told that the mother of Jesus was there. She is mentioned before Jesus himself, and in the fourth gospel she appears only in this chapter (vv.1,3,5,12) and in 19:25-27. In both in-
stances she is addressed as γυναῖ, an unusual address by a son to his mother. Brown (1966:107-109; cf. Brown et al. 1978:188) suggests that the allusion may be to Mary as the new Eve, a view earlier proposed by Vawter (1956:160) who sees an inevitable allusion to Genesis 3:20 - εκαλέσαν Ἀδὰμ τὸ ὄνομα τῆς γυναίκος σὸς, ἵνα λατεῖ μὴ ἔστω ὄνομα τῶν γυναικῶν. Certainly John 19:25-27 shows, as Origen recognized (Comm. in ev. Johann. 1.4; Preuschen 1903:8f.), that the disciple now occupies the place of Jesus - those who share in the life that he gives can call Mary their mother too. Guilding (1960:183) interestingly notes that John 1:1-11 reflects the vocabulary of the Genesis lections for Kislev (gemizein: Gn.45:17 only; methuein: Gn.43:33; archioinochoos and similar compounds in Gn.41:9f.; and the command of v.5 in Gn. 41:55). Though it may seem unlikely that a parallelism is intended between John 2 and the Joseph story, it is to be noted that Genesis 41:55 is a command given in response to a shortage of food. More significant, however, is the appearance of Jesus' mother only here and at the cross. In this way John establishes the connection between this sign and the crucifixion as the true place of the revelation of the glory of Christ. Such a view is greatly strengthened by verse 4 - οἶπο ἥκει ἡ ἡμάρ. Jesus too had been invited to the marriage, and his disciples. The grammatical structure is interesting: The subject of eklēthē is Jesus, while the disciples are added almost as an afterthought, as though Jesus is the one who matters but as though he cannot be understood without them - a view reflected throughout John's gospel, and especially noticeable in 15:1-10 and 17:20-26. In the same way in the eucharist the Lord is present always with his disciples, without whom there can be no supper. When the wine had run out Jesus' mother appealed to him. Certain inconsistencies in the narrative suggest, according to Lindars (1970), that a miraculous story of changing water into wine has been combined with a parable (vv. 9f.) indicating the superiority of the new wine over the old (cf. Mk. 2:22). Lindars suggests that the miracle story may have originated from among those told of Jesus in his earlier years, though Derrett (1963:94f.) prefers the view already mentioned. In many ways the story plays a part similar to that of Luke 2:41-51, where Jesus' independence of his parents is asserted (Lk. 2:49), even though he remains subject to them.
Wine is frequently mentioned in the Old Testament, especially in connection with festive and significant occasions. It played an important part in the weekly kiddush ceremony, as well as in the annual Passover. The rabbis thought of it particularly as the symbol of the Torah (Dodd 1954:84). By its very nature, writes Boismard (1956:139), wine can symbolize the joy of the messianic renewal. The eschatological reference of Isaiah 25:6 mentions wine, where the LXX reads *piontai euthrosinon, piontai oinon* with reference to the messianic banquet. Goodenough (1965:127) notes that rabbinc exegesis often assigned messianic connotations to wine. Whether John was influenced by the Greek rites of Dionysus (Bultmann 1963:238) or by Philo's allegorical treatment (Hoskyns 1947:192) must remain uncertain, but he would certainly have been aware of the rich imagery associated with wine in the Old Testament.

_Husterēsaiōt oinou_ shows that the wine had already run out. A few manuscripts (*κ*, *α*, *ι*, * syr* *h* *m*) have the longer reading *oinon ouk eichon hōt i sunetēsthē ho oinos toī gāmou_. Though Bultmann (1971:116) believes this to be original, it is more likely that it is a somewhat clumsy attempt to spell out the meaning of the genitive absolute. The lack of wine is the occasion for the exchange between Jesus and his mother. _Ti emoi kai soi_ has provoked much discussion (see, e.g. Derrett 1963:89-92; Boismard 1956:144-147). Derrett believes that the phrase can mean, "Between us there can be no quarrel", and that it denotes "a protestation of a deep unity of ideas and motives". In support of this he adduces a corresponding phrase from modern Kurdistan with exactly the same form and meaning. It is however clear that often the phrase denotes some difference between speakers and is an implied rebuke. Does John make deliberate use of this ambivalent phrase? On the one hand Jesus is asserting that his ministry is to be carried on independently of Mary his mother, and on the other he is telling his mother that her concern will be attended to by himself. Here is a new era in the history of salvation. The wine of the Jews, the Torah, the covenant, had run its course and was to be superseded by the wine which Jesus would provide.

The reply of Jesus is not simply the assertion of his independence: _oupor hēkei hē hōra mou_ looks forward to the hour of glory on the cross (12:27-33; 13:1; 17:1). Culmann (1953:66) compares the similar theme in 7:2-6, where Jesus' _kairōs_, still in the future,
is contrasted with that of his brothers. It is on the cross that the glory of the Lord will be seen in its true and proper light, and the archetypal sign of Cana introduces the first reference to a motif which is sustained throughout John’s gospel. The allusions of 2:1 are thus more sharply depicted by the reference to the hour of Jesus. But even now the Lord is at work, and his mother’s injunction to the servants indicates her support for the work which her Son now begins independently of her. The words used are the same as those spoken by Pharaoh to the Egyptians during their time of famine. Diakōnos is a very general term, but it was also used by Christians (1 Tm. 3:8ff.) and pagans alike (Moulton & Milligan 1929:149) to refer to cultic ministers, and its use here is presumable coloured by its liturgical associations. Perhaps even the architriklinos as the chief butler in charge of the servants (Schnackenburg 1968:333) or the master of ceremonies (Derrett 1963:88) connotes the president of the eucharist. Certainly the next sentence quite explicitly refers to cultic features. The six jars are described as kaτà τόν καθαρισμόν τόν ουδαίνον κειμέναι.

Philop (Leg. All. 1.1–18) has much to say about the number six, which he calls the perfect number (par. 3). The mortal things (ta thnēta) which God creates correspond to the number six, but the things of blessedness and happiness (ta makāria kai eudaimōna) correspond to the number seven (par. 4). The importance of this for human life and behaviour is described as follows (par. 16): hōtan epigēnetai tē psuchē ho kath hēbdomada hāgios lógos. epēchetai hē hêkias kai hōsa thnēta tautē potēn dōkei ("When the holy Logos in accordance with the number seven comes upon the soul, then the number six, together with all the mortal things the soul seems to make with it, comes to a halt"). Something of this understanding may be present here, especially in view of a similar theme in 5:17ff., where the continuing creative work of God is declared to be carried on by Jesus (ho patēr mou hēs dēri ergazetai kagō ergazōmai). If this allusion can be seen in 2:6, then the six jars symbolize not the total ineffectiveness of the Jewish ritual and cult, but rather its failure to attain to the full perfection which is to be found only with Jesus the Messiah, the true Logos.

According to John purification (katharismos) results from the action of Jesus (13:10) or his word (15:3) or his blood, that is, his death on the cross (1 Jn. 1:7). The references in John’s gospel are all found in liturgical contexts. In 2:6 the reference is to Jewish
rites of purification, good enough in their limited way, but now to be transcended by the action of Christ, as surely as the water with which the jars are to be filled will be found to be inferior to the wine which will be drawn from them. It is possible that katharismós alludes to the practice of Jewish proselyte baptism, as Jewish sources suggest according to Beckwith (1978:44) who refers to Pesahim 8:8: "The School of Shammai say: If a man become a proselyte on the day before Passover he may immerse himself and consume his Passover-offering in the evening. And the School of Hillel say: He that separates himself from his uncircumcision is as one that separates himself from the grave" (Danby 1933:148). The importance of the distinction between clean and unclean is everywhere shown in the Mishna. This is reflected too in the scriptures, so that Ezekiel (36:25) looks forward to the time of real purification - ranō eph' humás hidōr katharón, kai katharisthēseishe apò pasōn tôn akatharion humōn. This seems to have been regarded as a type of baptism by Hebrews 10:22, if not by John 3:5, and it may be that the reference in John 2:6 is to Christian baptism as drawing its meaning from the death of Christ (cf. Cullmann 1953:70). Since both baptism and eucharist express the significance of the cross and resurrection, it would be unwise to limit the allusion here to the eucharist. John 13:1-20 similarly alludes both to baptism and eucharist, and is intimately connected with the passion narrative.

The size of the jars (containing between 80 and 120 litres each) and their being filled to the brim indicate the abundance of the wine provided at the marriage-feast, comparable to the abundance of food provided by the Lord at the feeding of the 5000 (6:13). The benefits of the Lord's passion are incalculable. It is only when the wine has been drawn from the jars and tasted that the architríklinos makes his comment, which is the punchline of the narrative - sū tetērēkas tôn kalōn oλon hēs ariL This sentence, like 2:4b, contains the clue to the meaning of the narrative: However valuable has been all that God has done in the past in and to his people, the real provision of his grace is now to be found in Jesus and his action.

The architríklinos calls the bridegroom, who has not been mentioned previously. In Mark 2:19f. nunphios clearly contains a reference to the Messiah, and it is to be noted that this saying occurs near to that about the new wine (Mk. 2:22). Narratives in
the gospels, and especially in John, cannot always be precisely and definitively pinned down and analysed. Images which are apparently mutually inconsistent tend to be used. So on this occasion, at the start of the narrative Jesus is clearly not the bridegroom; but he is the provider of wine, and in 2:10 the bridegroom is seen as the provider of the new wine. This tantalizing shift of referent gives a vitality to the account which renders it capable of different interpretations. This apparent inconsistency may be seen as evidence that John has brought together different traditions, but it is the finished product with which we are here concerned.

The use of numphios with a messianic connotation is found not only elsewhere in the New Testament (Mk. 2:19f. par; Mt. 25:1-13; cf. Rv. 21:2,9; 22:17) but also in John 3:29, so that it would seem to be an inevitable conclusion that the reference here is to Jesus, both as the provider of the new and better wine, wine which is not only better but is described in absolute terms as good (ion kalion omon), and also as the promised Messiah. The wine has inevitable connections with the death of Christ and the eucharist. Although the eucharistic cup is not referred to in the New Testament as ho oinos, but always as to poterion, correspondence of the wine with the blood of Christ is demanded by such passages as John 6:53-56, and the connection of wine with the passion of Christ is shown by 15:1-13 (especially v. 13) and 18:11. Since the messiahship of Jesus is declared especially in the cross and resurrection, the connection of the bridegroom with the wine is doubly significant. So the contrast in 2:10 between pas anthrados and su is extremely marked: The actions of the true bridegroom are unlike those of any other man, for the true bridegroom has declared his love to the uttermost on the cross. In this way the reader is shown the glory of God, anticipated in this sign but to be shown in Jesus throughout John’s gospel and reaching its culmination in the cross and resurrection.

So this sign, unlike most, is not followed by a discourse. Rather, the meaning of this first sign is indicated - and reinforced - by a succession of events. These events might themselves deserve the name of signs. Certainly 3:2 refers to tēmeia, even though John specifically numbers the second sign only at 4:54. The first sign occurs in Galilee, but the scene soon changes to Jerusalem (2:13). The first sign indicated the renewal which Jesus brought to the Jewish cult and worship. The account of the cleansing of the
temple has the same message. Jesus' visit to the temple is a messianic act of purification (cf. Mt. 3:1-3). His action is questioned with the words ἵνα σήμειον δείκνυεις ἡμίν ὁ θάνατος ποιεῖς. The reader knows that the sign has already been given at Cana. Jesus' reply to the question plays the same part in this narrative as the words of the architríklinos in 2:10. Λύσατε τὸν παῖν τούτον καὶ ἐν τρισὶν ημέραις έγέρει αὐτόν (2:19) is, as is made explicit in verse 21, a reference to his own person. The centre of the Jewish system of worship, faith and life is to be transferred from the temple to the person of Jesus, who is shown by the resurrection to be what he claims to be (v.22).

3 THE WIDER CONTEXT OF THE PERICOPE
The theme of the fulfilment of the Old Testament promises is supported throughout John's gospel. But it is not simply fulfilment: However perfect the Old Testament dispensation was - and John would not wish to deny its value - it is now superseded by the advent of the Logos incarnate who brings an altogether new dimension into the relationship between God and his people. The scriptures all pointed to Jesus and his word (5:39). This theme is presented in one form or another in most of the pericopai of the fourth gospel. It is clearly shown in 2:1-11, set as it is between the story of Nathanael and that of the cleansing of the temple. All three pericopai allude to the cross. Jesus will be shown to be truly King (1:49) only on the cross (19:19-22). What Nathanael saw was only the beginning. The miracle of Cana is the sign of greater things to come, which will be manifested only at the arrival of Jesus' hour. Similarly the meaning of the cleansing of the temple will be clear only in the light of the resurrection. The same theme runs throughout the gospel: Jesus is greater than Jacob (4:12), greater than Abraham (8:53); He is the true vine (15:1) and the bearer of the grace and truth which the Torah was meant to convey but which is to be found only in Jesus (1:17). It is as though the thrust of the fourth gospel is to convince its readers that those who have put their faith in Jesus the Messiah are the true people of God (cf. Brown 1966:xxxviii), and that those who have refused to acknowledge Jesus have forfeited the right to be considered Abraham's descendants (3:36). John 8:37-47 expresses the position clearly: If the Jews were truly Abraham's descendants they would accept the word of Jesus (τὸν λόγον τὸν ἐμὸν - v.43),
for the word which they had been given by God through Moses (i.e. the Torah) finds its real expression in Jesus, the Word incarnate. That they seek to kill Jesus (v.40) therefore clearly shows the disbelieving Jews to be no longer the descendants of Abraham. The argument is similar to that of Paul in Romans 4 or Galatians 3:6-29.

Though this is one consistent theme in John, there is another of equal importance running through the whole fourth gospel. This is the situation of the community for whom John wrote. At a time when there was no New Testament canon, the followers of Jesus would express their faith in him by their common life, both by meeting the ethical demands of the gospel which they had accepted, marked particularly by their display of unity and mutual love (13:34f.; 17:20-23), and in their liturgical practices which help to bind the members of the community together as they express the basis of their faith, not as a past event but as a present reality.

John therefore wrote with this twofold thrust - the fulfilment of the Old Testament and the present experience of Christ through the Spirit in their everyday life. The fourth gospel is not meant therefore to be a historical record (at least not in the modern sense of the term), and whatever John may have thought happened at Cana, he told the story in a way which best describes the meaning of the gospel proclaimed by Jesus. He bridged the gap between the Old Testament promises and the time of the church by constant allusions to its liturgy, so that the words and stories shed light on the meaning of the community's liturgical actions. Barrett (1950:15) with reference to the role of the Spirit in the fourth gospel, describes how John remained faithful to the gospel message even though he abandoned historicity, "because he firmly fixed the new dominical teaching on the Holy Spirit to the focal points of Christian worship: to baptism, in which the life of the kingdom of God is conveyed; to the eucharist, in which it is continually renewed; and to the preached word ...".

John 2:1-11 is all about the new life. As an introduction to the signs of Jesus it not only looks forward to their consummation on the cross, but by its allusions to baptism and eucharist it reminds believers that the worship in which they engage is itself a sure sign not only of what God has done in Christ but also of what He will do in their lives and in the life of the world.
The eucharistic allusions are clear for all those who have eyes to see – the third day, the marriage-feast, the deacons, the wine, the bridegroom as the supplier of the new wine. So too is the connection with the passion. The hour of Jesus can be only foreshadowed at Cana. But the hour of the marriage-feast, like the hour of a woman in labour, will bring to the disciples the true joy which cannot be taken away from them (16:21f.). So the sign of which 2:11 speaks is the sign of the death and resurrection of Jesus, the "greater things" which Nathanael has been promised. But with its eucharistic, if not baptismal, allusions it displays the Christian liturgy as the link in the present between the past historical act of God in Christ and the future hope, already assured yet still to be realized. The promise made to Nathanael - meiző iouïón úpsē (1:50) - is thus renewed to every participant in the eucharist as he acknowledges the Lordship of Christ, shares in his mission and even begins to experience his joy.

WORKS CONSULTED


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