THE TEXTUAL STRATEGY IN JOHN 3:12-14:
PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

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ABSTRACT
Firstly the views of some scholars on the flow of the argument in John 3:12-14 is examined. Then an own reading is presented in which it is argued that in verse 12 the Jesus of John raises the possibility of talking about the mysteries that heaven contains. This expectation is reinforced in verse 13 where it is claimed that Jesus is in the unique position to reveal these mysteries as He is the only person who had made the qualifying journey to the regions concerned. Jesus does not fulfil this expectation, though, but turns to talking about the cross of the Son of Man. In this way apprehension is initially caused in the group represented by Nicodemus, who could not even (grasp and) believe the earthly doctrine of birth from above, after which they are reassured by the fact that Jesus does not intend at all to talk about faraway and mysterious matters but only about the Gospel message itself.

1 INTRODUCTION

In v 12 Jesus uses a rhetorical question in which reference is made to the possibility of further revelation (or, as some would argue, revelation differently conveyed), while serious doubts are expressed, in the form of an a minori ad majus argument, that Nicodemus will believe (or be able to believe) the relevant revelation. Jesus says: εἰ τὰ ἐπίγεια εἶπον ὑμῖν καὶ οὐ πιστεύετε, πῶς ἔαν εἶπον ὑμῖν τὰ ἐπουράνια πιστεύετε; The implication is of course: ‘You will certainly not (be able to) believe it.’ By expressing his despair, and possibly annoyance, in this way, Jesus is of course reproaching and putting Nicodemus down. The intended perlocution is to cause the latter to cringe with shame, and ultimately to better himself. In this instance it would mean to react positively to Jesus’ urgent appeal in the first part of the dialogue to come to an open confession of faith by receiving baptism. For this is what the first part of the dialogue is all about: by confronting him with birth from above as the stringent condition for entering the Kingdom and offering him baptism as the way to this transformation, Jesus really urges Nicodemus, this well intentioned scholar and leader of Jerusalem, but also the man who can only utter his confession: Ραββί, οἶδας ὅτι ἀπὸ θεοῦ ἐληλυθάς διδάσκαλος under the cover of darkness, to take that bold and danger-

1 For a classification of the use of question sentences and their ability to communicate speech acts such as these, cf Van Jaarsveld 1987 and Snyman 1989.
ous step of openly confessing his faith. To his first incredulous questioning Jesus reacts with patience and explains the necessity, but also divine possibility and wondrous nature of this birth from on high. But Nicodemus persists in his incredulity, for, in spite of all Jesus’ explanations and his reference to the mysterious nature of this birth (vers 8), Nicodemus simply reiterates his objection: Πῶς δύναται ταύτα γενέσθαι;

V12, however, is not the first utterance of its kind. It comes as the third, and perhaps heaviest, punch directed at Nicodemus. Already in v10 Jesus reproaches Nicodemus by expressing his astonishment at the fact that Nicodemus, as the teacher of Israel does not know the things that Jesus talks about. This is followed in v11 by the lament, or accusation if you will, that, notwithstanding the unquestionable certainty of the message, no faith is forthcoming. So, this is where we find ourselves, with Nicodemus staggering on his feet after three well-directed blows.

The question that I address in this article concerns the way in which Jesus proceeds from v13 onwards. This question, however, is bound up with the exact meaning of v12, and especially with the τὰ ἐπουράνια that it refers to. Therefore the topic is called the textual strategy of John 3:12-14

I use the word strategy rather that something like coherence, simply to express the fact that there is a plan behind our utterances and that, in uttering them, we implement that plan in order to achieve our goals.

Firstly, I shall give a short overview of some opinions regarding the flow of the argument in these verses, and then I shall present my own reading.

2 OVERVIEW OF THE OPINIONS OF SOME SCHOLARS

We can distinguish at least three different views on the progress of thought from v12 onwards.

2 A colleague, Kobus Cronje, pointed out to me that we can possibly see vv10-12 as an instance of incrementum, one of three methods of amplificatio. Cf Cronje (1987:203-206) for clarification of these terms.

3 V10 thus is only ostensibly an expressive speech act (I can’t believe that you do not know). It really amounts to a reproof (You should have known) and can even be seen as a (mocking) denial (constative speech act, namely a disputative) of Nicodemus’s position (You pretend to be, but— with reference to οἶδαμεν in v2). Cf Van Tilborg (1988:10); Pancaro (1975 :87) on the latter (Pancaro says: ‘The polemical undertones can hardly be denied’). Cf Bach and Harnish (1979:39-55) for the taxonomy of communicative illocutionary acts presupposed here.

4 I could have used the word rhetorical instead of textual, thereby expressing the fact that I am interested in the impact and appeal of these verses, but I do not intend to label the strategy in terms of rhetorical or, for that matter, literary theory. If I have to choose a more descriptive word, I would rather talk about the persuasive strategy, for I am convinced that these verses form part of a bigger persuasive strategy, i.e. they are meant, like the rest of Jn 3:6-21 to persuade Nicodemus to heed the warning of Jesus in 3:2-5 and take the necessary action. But this is to go ahead of the story.
Firstly, we can refer to those scholars who take the position that Jesus turns away from Nicodemus after this verse. There are others as well of course, but it must suffice to mention the opinions of Schnackenburg, Nicolson and Grese in this regard. Both Schnackenburg (1968:261) and Nicolson (1983:77-78) judge that vv 13ff do not belong to the conversation, but are part of the Evangelist’s preaching or kerygmatic exposition. Schnackenburg (1968:361) says a continuation (of the theme of rebirth) becomes improbable after the doubts expressed in v 12. The conversation is thus ended on this negative note with Jesus’ question hanging in the air, as also happens in 5:47. The Evangelist also ends other conversations or disputes with a rather negative assessment, as can be seen in 7:24, 36; 9:41; 13:38; 18:11; 20:29.5

According to Schnackenburg, the ἐὰν εἰπω in Jesus’ question thus remains hypothetical, while both he and Nicolson take the epourania to refer to something else than the contents of the following verses. Schnackenburg (1968:379) assumes that the heavenly things are a continuation of the theme of ‘birth from the Spirit’ and thinks that the Evangelist probably had in mind ‘the mysteries involved in the fullness of salvation, the entry of man into the heavenly world. The mystery of Christ and redemption, the way of Christ and our way to the heavenly world, Christ’s action from heaven and his heavenly gifts....’ Nicolson (1983:75-104), following Thüsing,6 regards the epigeia and epourania as referring to the agents of revelation, that is to Jesus and the community respectively. Jesus is thus depicted as saying to Nicodemus, as representative of a wider group of Jews: ‘Since you didn’t believe me, you won’t believe those who speak in my name.’7

Grese (1988), on the other hand, is of opinion that vv 13ff are about the epourania, but in his interpretation the audience differs from this verse onwards. He interprets 3:1-21 within the frame of a manual for a heavenly journey (679), which he thinks is represented best by Corpus Hermeticum xiii, and furthermore stresses the fact that the dialogue functions on two different levels (691). According to him, vv 1-12 state the requirements for the heavenly journey, while vv 14-21 provide the revelation of the heavenly things (684,687). Nicodemus excludes himself from the heavenly revelation because he fails to grasp what the new birth, the requirement for understanding this revelation, involves. For the readers, however, who do understand, Jesus provides a description and interpre-

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5 I do not think that 20:23, which is included by Schnackenburg, belongs here.
6 Thüsing (1970:257) argues that the epigeia covers the whole earthly ministry of Jesus, while the epourania refers to the teaching of the glorified Christ through the Paraclete. Cf. however, the criticism of Schnackenburg (1968:377, n94).
7 According to Nicolson, v 12 is thus meant to place the negative experience of this community, which is recounted in v 11, in perspective. Conveying this perspective is also the purpose of the whole pericope, for it is meant to help the people inside the Johannine community, the readers of the Fourth Gospel, to come to terms with their rejection by those to whom they had testified.
tation of what the heavenly revelation offers (cf esp :689,691,692). It must be clear already that the *epourania* in this instance is taken to refer to such a heavenly journey, while it must also be noted that, like Nicolson, Grese approaches the *édv*-clause as an irrealis.

2 Secondly, there are those who are of opinion that Jesus press on with His revelation of the ‘heavenly things’ regardless of the fact that He Himself holds it impossible, or at least improbable, that Nicodemus will be able to follow Him. Here we are thinking of those authors, such as Bultmann (1968:108-9), Brown (1971:132), Schulz (1983:58), Rebell (1987:158-159) and many others, who claim, even if the exact wording cannot be explained, that the *epourania* refers to the content of the following verses and expresses the fact that there is a progress in the thought of these verses, which are concerned with Christology as compared with the preceding part of the dialogue, which is concerned with the birth from above and is labelled *epigeia* for some reason or another. Thus Rebell (1987: 158) says: ‘Was inhaltlich mit ta epigeia und ta epourania gemeint ist, lässt sich kaum mehr ausmachen und soll hier offenbleiben.’ He deems it certain though, that *ta epigeia* refers to the previous part of the discourse and *ta epourania* to the second part and that the contrast announces a *Steigerung* in the discourse. He says: ‘zu dem, was bisher gesagt ist, kommt ein “Mehr”, kommt

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8 According to him, the text therefore reinforces the isolation of the community from the world (691) and while his central tenet is to show that this discourse also reveals the way for those on the outside to attain the revelation that the Gospel contains (:679,692), it is not clear how it will encourage outsiders, who are in the position of Nicodemus, towards the faith or the community to convey the kerugma to people like him.

9 E.g Traub (1977:542), who says: ‘ta epourania .. are to be explained in terms of vv 13-16’. Schnackenburg (1968:379) talks about ‘the modern explanation, which sees the revelation of the “heavenly things” in the following verses (especially 13-15)’.

10 Bultmann (1968:106) explains the *epigeia* as follows: ‘Die Rede von der Wiedergeburt gehört insofern zu den Epigeia, als sie ein Urteil des Menschen über seine Situation in der Welt enthält...’ The thought of v 12 is then that if one cannot understand the necessity of rebirth, one can also not understand that it has become a possibility through Jesus. Schulz (1983:58) is close to Bultmann when he talks about ‘Die Wiedergeburt als der heilsnotwendige Existenzwandel, als Vorbedingung...’ as merely belonging to the *epigeia*. Brown (1971:132) considers the possibilities that the things spoken of in vv3-8 are designated as ‘earthy’ because they are illustrated by earthly analogies such as birth or wind or ‘because they take place on earth, while what is to follow concerns going up to heaven or being lifted up’. The first of these interpretations, which can also be found in Barrett (1978:212), was recently adopted by Petersen (1993:44) who argues that *ta epigeia* refers to the image of the wind, while *ta epourania* refers to the doctrine of birth from above. Bultmann (1968:105 n1) and Schnackenburg (1968:377) however question this type of explanation on the grounds that the *epigeia* are referred to as objects of faith in 3:12.

We can also mention the opinions of Berger (1970:108) who connects the two terms with baptism and Christology respectively and Richter (1977:339 note 56) who proposes that we should not ask about the *epigeia* at all. The whole expression is simply about ‘die den menschlichen Verstand überschreitende Größe und andersartigkeit des Gezeugtseins von oben.’
das Entscheidende hinzu.' An important assumption of this point of view, though not confined to it, is that the second part of the dialogue is meant to provide the ultimate answer to the question about the means of rebirth. In other words, the theme of rebirth is continued, albeit on a higher, or deeper, if you wish, level. Thus Rebell (158) talks about a 'thematishe Steigerung' in these verses, and when he answers the question about the 'Gedankenfortschritt', he quotes Bultmann (1968:102): 'Er liegt darin, daß der Blick des Menschen...jetzt auf das Ereignis gelenkt wird, in dem die Möglichkeit jenes Wunders begründet ist' (cf also Brown 1971:136-7,145; Schulz 1983:59). The latter is a very popular explanation of the coherence of the discourse to which we shall return in due course. It is also found with many authors that I did not mention as representatives of viewpoint two because they do not explicitly refer to the fact that the second part of the discourse is concerned with the epourania (cf e g Odeberg 1968: 71-72, Cullmann 1969:75-78; Dodd 1970:305-7; Söding 1990:198; Talbert 1992:100. Cf also Rebell 1987:160, note 5 concerning other authors who hold this view).

3 A combination of these two points of view is found in the interpretation that asserts that Jesus proceeds to answer Nicodemus' last question from v13 onwards, but that this does not mean that He continues with the ἑπουράνια. As is the case in the interpretations of Schnackenburg and Nicolson, the ἑν ἐπισκόπω thus remains hypothetical and epourania refers to something different from the content of the following discourse. Thus Burkett (1991: 79) interprets the ἑπουράνια as the future aspect of eternal life, in other words, life in heaven in the presence of God. As such it refers back to the idea of seeing or entering the ἑπιστήμη (vv3 and 5), which, in turn, is taken to mean to ascend to heaven. Nicodemus' incredulity regarding the epigeia, that is birth from above as the beginning of the earthly or present aspect of eternal life, makes it pointless for Jesus to speak about this ascent of the believer to heaven and his fellowship there with God (:80). With v13, which is interpreted in terms of salvation, and not of revelation, Jesus then commences to answer Nicodemus' question in v9 (cf Burkett 1991:76-7 for an outline of 3:1-21).

3 MY OWN READING

Firstly, I present in summary how my own reading relates to the interpretations already mentioned and what the intention with my reading is, and then I shall argue the case.

3.1 How my reading relates to those of others

In presenting my reading of the textual strategy, I shall argue that

11 Cf viewpoint number 3.
* the conversation continues after v12.
* Jesus does not talk at all about the ἐπουράνιον in the remaining part of the dialogue, at least not in the harsh sense that is assumed by viewpoint number two. Positively this means that Jesus merely creates the expectation that He is going to talk about things which He knows is without reach of Nicodemus' comprehension.
* the theme of birth from above is not continued in the second part of the dialogue, in other words, there is no thematic coherence in the dialogue as Burkett and those who hold position number two presupposes.

As the net result of my reading is that Jesus does not carry on in a harsh fashion that shows no regard for Nicodemus' inability to follow Him, it is naturally opposed to those readings, such as that of Meeks, (1972:57) who is of the opinion that the main purpose of the dialogue is to emphasise, in a kind of self-congratulatory fashion, that Jesus is incomprehensible to outsiders, even sympathetic outsiders such as Nicodemus, or that of Goulder (1991:168), who sees the conversation as reflecting ‘John's bitter dislike' for Nicodemus and ‘a pure hatred' for Jewish Christians. In my reading the way the dialogue is conducted, rather than being a parody on them, becomes an affirmation and illustration of the famous words that it contains, namely ὅταν γὰρ ἠγέρθησεν ὁ θεός τὸν κόσμον etc (3:16).12

3.2 Arguing the case

I shall argue my case in seven steps.

1 We can start by pointing out, in opposition to Nicolson and Grese, that v12 in itself does not constitute a termination of the conversation. In this respect we must agree with Bultmann (1968:107, note 1) who correctly observes that the ἐὰν-clause is no irrealis and that v12 therefore does not say that Jesus is not going to talk about the ἐπουράνιον. On the other hand, we must concur with Schnackenburg (1968:377) who, as we have seen, points out that ‘the ἐὰν-clause is hypothetical’. V12 thus merely states the possibility of talking about heavenly mysteries. It is not said that Jesus will talk about it, as Bultmann concludes.

2 Secondly, we must argue, against Schnackenburg and Nicolson, for the unity or coherence of the pericope in its present form. A first step would be to consider the formal indications that such an attempt should be made, that is that 3:1-21

12 Of course Burkett’s interpretation could be viewed in this light as well, but, as indicated already, it will emerge that the second part of the dialogue cannot be seen in connection with the theme of rebirth.
comprises a literary unity,\textsuperscript{13} and that there is no break in the flow of the argument at vv 11 or 12. As far as the first point is concerned, Mlakuzhyil (1987:191-95) at least shows that chs 2-4 must be divided into six pericopes which are separated or joined by transitions and bridge verses, 3:1-21 being one of these pericopes.\textsuperscript{14} It is separated from the pericope on the cleansing of the temple by a bridge passage, 2:23-25.\textsuperscript{15} The distinction between this episode (Jesus and Nicodemus) and the next (John the Baptist and his disciples) is clearly indicated by the literary-chronological device  \textit{Meta ta\uta} (3,22) which normally signals the beginning of a new section or subsection (cf 5,1; 6,1; 7,1).\textsuperscript{16} Mlakuzhyil (1987: 195-199) furthermore argues for the overall concentric structure of chs 2-4 on the grounds that the episodes exhibit parallels in the form of A1, B1, C1, C2, B2, A2. This would seem to support taking 3:1-21 as a unit.\textsuperscript{17}

As far as the internal structure of 3:1-21 is concerned, several inclusios are pointed out by different scholars. Stibbe (1993:54) lists the following parallels between vv 1-2 and 19-21, which, of course, also argue for the unity of the pericope:

\begin{align*}
\text{v1} & \text{ 'a man'} / \text{v19} \text{ 'men'} \\
\text{v2} & \text{ 'coming to Jesus'} / \text{v 21 'coming to the light'} \\
\text{v2} & \text{ 'by night'} / \text{v 19 'darkness'} \\
\text{v2} & \text{ 'doing'} / \text{v20 'doing'} \\
\text{v2} & \text{ 'God is with him'} / \text{v21 'wrought in God'}
\end{align*}

As far as the second point is concerned, the connectives at the beginning of vv 13

\textsuperscript{13} Nicolson (1983:78) takes 2:13-3:11 and 3:12-21 as two separate units.


\textsuperscript{15} These verses are called thus because they contain motives from both the preceding and the following pericopes and in this sense link them and form a bridge between them. As far as the beginning of the pericope is concerned, Topel (1971:216) criticises De la Potterie for taking 2.23-3.2 as a unit. The arguments he advances for starting the dialogue with Nicodemus in 3:1 include the fact that the δέ seems to start a new section, that hook words (διϊνομοι - διϊνομος) join separate elements, and that 'the solemn introduction of the new character and the new time seems to indicate a new event'. This would be true even if ἦν δέ διϊνομος meant 'for instance, there was one man, Nicodemus', which would clearly unite 3:1 and 2:23-25. What seems necessary to safeguard, in his opinion, is that a new form of discourse begins in 3:1, namely the dialogue in narrative form. Cf. also Lindars (1982:145) who points out that 'we have moved into a quite different literary genre'.

\textsuperscript{16} Some authors do not think that there is such a well-defined break between 3:1-21 and 3:22-36. Dodd (1970:311), e.g., regards 3:22-26 as an explanatory appendix to the dialogue with Nicodemus and the discourse which grew out of it, and De la Potterie (1969:132) labels the whole of 2:23-3:36 'Nicodemus Iudaeus in Jerusalem'.

\textsuperscript{17} Van Tilborg (1988:36) draws different connecting lines which result in a concentric structure for 1:19-3:36 in which the conversation of Jesus with Nicodemus (3:1-21) correlates with that of Jesus and his disciples (1:35-51).
and 14 are not very helpful in mapping out a clear train of thought, and thus to support the coherence of this part of the text. Schnackenburg (1958:92) says of the καὶ at the beginning of v13: ‘die Überleitung mit καὶ ist schwierig zu erklären’, and Schulz (1983:58) points out that vv13 and 14 are ‘unter sich nur lose mit “und” verknüpft’. Rebell (1987:144) however, shows that vv11-14 are connected to one another by means of a ‘hooking-up construction’. Οὗ λαμβάνετε in v11 is taken up by οὗ πιστεύετε in v12; ἑπούρανία in v12 by οὐρανόν in v13 and υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου is repeated in v14. He even judges that, as a result of this technique (and the use of parallelism in these verses), the train of thought is ‘eigentümlich zwingend’.  

3 Thirdly, I would argue against all those who hold opinion number one that the initial situation, as far as the identity of the interlocutors is concerned, remains the same after v12. There are those commentators who, like Rebel! (1987:147), judge that the presence of Nicodemus is presupposed after v12 and even right up to v21. In my own reading this is, however, not a crucial point. I would rather stress the fact that the situation remains the same. Many authors have pointed out that the plurals in the text indicate some kind of group discussion (e.g. Becker 1973:88; Ibuki 1978:12; De Jonge 1977:30; Martyn 1979:116f),18 and I shall also read the text on the level of an encounter between the Johannine Church and another group, which is represented by Nicodemus.19 I would only maintain that at least the conversation with this group is continued after v12.20 With this

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18 Schnackenburg (1968:366) merely states that it ‘gives the dialogue a more universal import...and the readers could feel themselves reminded of learned debates about the Scriptures between Jews and Christians in their own day...’

19 Martyn (1979:24) bases his famous two-level reading on the distinction between tradition and redaction. One should, however, bear in mind that even traditional material can serve the purpose of reflecting the story of the Johannine community. On the other hand, Onuki (1984:96), when asking about the ‘quantitativen Umfang der Horizontverschmelzung’, points out that in the first half of the Gospel the situation of the community is reflected less in the miracle stories than in the discourses of Jesus which are often meant to interpret these stories. In the discourses the latter situation is evident, especially where Jesus’ interaction with the Jews is mentioned and it is the case ‘vor allem in 3,1-12,13-21 und Kap. 9...’

In passing, it must be mentioned that Hengel (1993:293-4) rejects the whole method. He argues that the Evangelists were aware of the time gap between their own time and that of Jesus as well as of events in the earlier history of the church ‘und waren nicht völlig unfähig. Gegenwart und Vergangenheit zu unterscheiden’. John, however, is aware of blurring this distinction and therefore introduces the concept of the Paraclete (cf Jn 16:12-15).

20 This leaves room for the point of view that there is a clear transition from the dialogue with Nicodemus to a direct addressing of the group represented by him. Thus Tsuchido (1975:100) says: ‘Through the intentional transition from singular to plural, the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus changes into a dialogue between the Johannine Church (ἡμῖς) and its opponents (ὅμαι, probably those in the Synagogue). In the case of the teller, the plural is restored to the singular, while the plurals of the hearers are left intact in v12. In so doing, v12 is formed to proclaim the conclusive appeal...’
qualification, I think I can agree with De Jonge (1977:37) when he says: 'I do not think that it is useful or even possible to indicate where the dialogue with Nicodemus ends and Jesus' monologue begins.' If the appeal at the end of the pericope to really come to the light (3:19-21) is not directed to Nicodemus as (fictive and) representative character, it is at least directed to those represented by him.

4. In the fourth place it must be argued that the theme of birth from above does not continue after v12. This will undermine the point of view of those who judge that the *epourania* are unfolded in the second part of the discourse, as it removes the presupposition of their point of view. We have seen that this point of view is associated with the notion that the second, Christological part of the discourse provides the answer to the question of how this birth is possible and thus continues the theme of birth from above. If my argument is correct, it will not imply that the *epourania* cannot refer to the contents of vv13/14ff., but what it will deny is that Jesus is actually at a loss in the sense that He must talk about the Christological means of birth from above; that Nicodemus cannot grasp this, and that, despite this problem, He plunges on headlong and continues to bring his topic to conclusion.

Schnackenburg, for one, denies that the theme of 3:1-12 continues after v12 and Lattke (1975:67) equally justifies taking 3:11-21 on its own by appealing to the 'Themenwechsel', that is to the fact that the first 10 verses are about the ἰσοτρία τοῦ Θεοῦ, while the following verses are about the Johannine envoy, 21 As far as the fictive nature of 3:1-21 is concerned, we can refer to Hanson's (1991:50) judgement, based on the argument that the handling of the serpent motif in 3:14 presupposes knowledge of the Targumim, that, as we have it, the passage is all John's composition. He continues by saying: 'It is absurd to suggest that the historical Jesus could possibly have conducted this dialogue-monologue.' Cf also Lindars's (1981:83) verdict on the discourses of John: 'They are the free composition of the evangelist, building upon a careful selection of traditional sayings of Jesus.'

22 There are also other aspects of 3:1-21 that may be regarded as evidence that it was written from the perspective of the later church, e.g. 3:19 that assesses the reaction to Jesus' ministry in the manner of 1:11. This perspective of the later church is evident elsewhere in John as well. Schnackenburg (1958:91) himself had to concede this in the case of 4:38 (cf. ἀπεστειλα, but Martyn (1979:28) and Onuki (1984:83) can also point to 9:4 (cf. ἦν ζητεῖ δόξει ἐργαζέσθαι). In this verse, just as in 3:11, it is the later Church, that saw itself as a charismatic community that continued the mission of Jesus, that is speaking. As far as the latter verse is concerned, Onuki (1984:83) says that John forgets the textinternal situation of the dialogue with Nicodemus for the moment. We can say that in John ideology often simply overrides good story telling. (I am indebted to my colleague, Dr Francois Tolmie, for putting it this way.) This handling of the narrative is especially evident in the way in which the narrator was intent on idealising the Beloved Disciple. In 13:21-30 it is inexplicable how Jesus could so explicitly and elaborately point out the betrayer to the Beloved Disciple, while the rest of the disciples, including Peter, who initiated the question, remained oblivious. In the same manner the narrator's comment in 20:9 and the subsequent behaviour of the disciples militate against the resurrection faith of the Beloved Disciple of which 20:8 tells us.
his mission and its consequences for the world.\textsuperscript{23}

Let us take Maneschg as an example of how the case is argued for regarding the second part of the dialogue as the ultimate answer to the question about the means of rebirth. Maneschg (1981:403) concludes from the fact that in vv3 and 15 respectively $\gamma\nu\nu\nu\tau\eta\nu\mu\alpha\nu$ and $\pi\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\upsilon\epsilon\nu$ appear as conditions, while $\iota\delta\epsilon\iota\upsilon\nu\nu\tau\eta\nu\iota\alpha\iota\iota\nu\iota\nu$ and $\epsilon\chi\epsilon\iota\upsilon\zeta\omega\nu\iota\iota\nu\iota\nu$ appear as contents of what is promised, 'daß das "geboren werden von oben"...im Glauben besteht...', which I take to mean that faith (in the Son of Man) effects or conditions birth from above.

However, in vv5-8, where the necessity, possibility and therefore nature of rebirth are explained, clear logical connections are made. In v15 one would therefore also expect something like $\iota\nu\zeta\nu\tau\omega\zeta\iota\rho\tau\epsilon\upsilon\omega\nu\nu\tau\nu\nu\nu \gamma\nu\nu\nu\tau\eta\nu\mu\alpha\nu$ and $\epsilon\nu\upsilon\upsilon\nu\iota\alpha\iota\iota\nu\iota\nu$. The fact is that these are all closely related salvific terms and it is not clear that some are meant to explain others. It is, e.g., also possible to view the connections differently and see $\zeta\omega\nu\iota\iota\nu\iota\nu$ as equivalent to $\gamma\nu\nu\nu\tau\eta\nu\mu\alpha\nu$ (cf. Thüsing 1970:254), which is possible as far as soteriological logic is concerned, as both refer to the new existence in Christ. It is a question, however, whether this is \textit{probable} in a context where birth from above appears as the \textit{condition} for participation in salvation. It should also be remembered that Becker (1973:89-90) concludes from the parallel occurrence of the statements on salvation that the latter statements reinterpret or, if I understand him correctly, really supplant the initial ones. I would therefore agree with Schnackenburg (1958:95) when he states that 'Der Homilet hat nun die ganze Größe und Weite der christlichen Erlösungsbotschaft in den Blick bekommen', and with Van Tilborg (1988:39) who points out that the topics of the conversation have widened to such an extent that these utterances would almost fit all narrative contexts.\textsuperscript{24}

At this point we shall ask ourselves in what sense the conversation can continue if it displays a lack of thematic coherence. The answer simply is that we need not look for the coherence on a thematic level in this instance. In speech act terms, as a macro or global speech act, this conversation must be classified as a directive rather than a constative. In other words, Jesus is not primarily trying to teach Nicodemus something, but to get him to do something, and as Van Dijk (1978:63) points out, one can use various speech acts and strategies to achieve this goal. We have already referred to the fact that Jesus explains the nature of birth from above in vv6-8. This is done in the course of arguing for the necessity

\textsuperscript{23} Cf also Richter (1977:336) who says 3:14-21 'behandeln nicht mehr die thematik von 3,1-13', Makuzhyil (1987:199), who lists two themes for this pericope when he labels it: 'Dialogue with Nicodemus on birth from above and discourse on eternal life', and Grese (1988:677) who says: 'In its present form, the discussion in vv 1-21 presents us with two different topics...'

\textsuperscript{24} Cf also Dodd (1970:308) who concedes that 'the discourse, starting from the idea of rebirth...has become a kind of programme of the whole work of Christ...'
and possibility of this birth. We have also seen that Jesus then reverts to castigating Nicodemus (vv10-12). Now we have established that He turns to a new strategy. He unfolds the Johannine kerugma in order to urge Nicodemus (or more directly, the seekers within the Synagogue) to action. In a sense the present article is precisely about showing how the transition to the new topic that is introduced in this way is made.

The fact that the Jesus of John uses various strategies to attain his goal can also be illustrated in the conversation with the Samaritan woman. Here Jesus starts by drawing her into a conversation about living water, then He shows Himself to be a prophet and when the woman responds with a question about the legitimate shrine, He introduces the topic of the true worship that has become a possibility in Him. When she still fails to draw the correct conclusion about the Man in her presence, and reverts to talking about the Messiah, He informs her: ΄Εγώ εἰμι, ὁ λαλῶν σοι. As Windisch (1922:181) points out, three themes are touched on during this conversation, and it would be utter folly to try and relate them on a thematic level. Each of them simply has its place within the various conversational strategies. We can approach Jn 3:1-21 in the same way, the only difference being that whereas the Samaritan woman is initially totally unaware of Jesus' identity, Nicodemus starts off with a momentous confession and Jesus wants to persuade him to act (accordingly)25

5 In the fifth place, I argue that the epourania must be seen in the obvious literal sense of the word, namely as the mysteries that heaven contains.26

The elusive nature of the heavenly realities was a theme in Judaism and beyond

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25 In doing so, Jesus would obviously use the strategy of deepening Nicodemus's appreciation of who He really is, but this is something different from saying that the dialogue is about correcting Christology, which elevates v2 to the status of a so called topic-sentence as Rebell (1987:138) and Moloney (1993:108), amongst many others, do. In this regard Rensberger (1988:40) represents a both-and viewpoint. He is of the opinion that Nicodemus was a man with an inadequate Christology and with inadequate courage. The Christology takes priority in his interpretation and he argues (1988:60) that an intercommunal christological polemic provides the unifying theme for the whole of John 3.

26 If I must say why the doctrine of birth from above is called an epigeiton, I shall concur with Heitmüller (1907:742) who says it is called thus because it is experienced on earth (cf also Burkett 1991:78 and his note 4 on p78 for others who hold the same view). As far as Nicolson's interpretation in terms of the agents of revelation is concerned, it simply does not accord with the wording of the Greek. As Schnackenburg (1968:377, note 94) remarks, 'the two expressions are, after all, the things spoken about'. Burkett (1991:78) rightly criticises the type of view adopted by Barrett and Rensberger by pointing out that Jesus does not refer to two manners of speaking about the same subject, but to two...subjects of discourse...'. As far as Burkett's own interpretation of this contrasting pair in terms of the earthly and heavenly aspects of eternal life is concerned, Moloney (1993:260), referring to the fact that one needs to look at 12:25-26, 13:33-14:3 and 17:24 for confirmation, asks whether it would have been obvious to a reader of 3:12.
Wis 9:16 says: 'We can hardly guess what is on earth...but who has traced out what is in heaven?' In this regard 4 Ezra 4:1-21 is especially instructive. In 4:20-21, at the end of the parable of the conflict between the forest and the sea, we find the words: 'those who dwell upon earth can understand only what is on earth, and he who is above heavens can understand what is above the height of heavens' (tr Metzger 1983). As is more often the case, it is meant to mock a student who seeks to know something beyond his powers (Meeks 1972:53). In this instance Ezra was seeking an answer to the question as to why Israel had been given over to the gentiles (cf:23) and had even answered the angel Uriel's question: 'do you think you can comprehend the way of the Most High?' in the affirmative. On the other hand (Jewish and other) mystics claimed that they had experienced journeys to the heavenly world and could supply information about the mysteries that they had observed there (cf Odeberg 1968:72-75; Segal 1980; Grese 1988:679-684; Smith 1990).

But why does Jesus refer to these mysteries? I shall mention three possibilities and then give my own opinion:

* Interpreters such as Odeberg (1968:94), Meeks (1972:52) and Grese (1988:678,687-8) view it in connection with the idea of seeing (or entering) the Kingdom that is expressed in vv3 and 5, and which they think can only refer to a Himmelsreise tradition. But perhaps the formulation ‘to see the kingdom of God’ is not as unusual as Meeks (:52) thinks, because we find the parallel expression ὄπεσεν ζωήν in 3:36, while Grese still has to convince me that John 3:1-21 is modelled on the pattern of Corpus Hermeticum xiii.27 It is therefore not necessary to accept that the starting point for the conversation was a request for such a journey or revelation. It is rather Jesus that introduces the idea at this point.

* The reason for mentioning it could come from the social context, without this

27 If C11 xiii must serve as a formal pattern for In 3:1-21, it must be kept in mind that, while it is true that, according to C11 xiii, lack of rebirth excludes one from knowledge of spiritual matters and that conversely ecstatic knowledge of God is experienced in rebirth, it is also true that in C11 xiii:1 rebirth is not introduced as the prerequisite for a revelation, but that the student longs for instruction concerning such a birth itself (...πιθανένον τὸν τῆς παιδιγενεσίας λόγον μαθεῖν). It is in order to receive such a revelation that the requirement was previously stated that the student must purge himself of earthly matters (κόμων ἀπαλλοτριοουσθεί), and these preparations are completed when the dialogue starts (ἕτοιμος εγενόμην καὶ ἀπενεργεστά ὁ ἐν ἑαυτῷ φρόνημα ἀπὸ τῆς τοῦ κόμου αἵματος). Furthermore, Hermes' reaction in xiii:6 to Tat's confession of his lack of comprehension in which the former states that the nature of the reborn person cannot be understood by natural means (πῶς αἰσθητός αὐτῷ νοηματικός), is not really comparable to In 3.12ff as Grese (1988,683-4) thinks. Indeed, the dialogue is continued in xiii:7 by Tat's question: Αἵματός σὺν εἰμι ὁ πάτερ to which Hermes reacts with: Μὴ γένοιτο, ὁ τέκνον... θέλησον, καὶ γίνεται...
context being voiced in the dialogue. According to Schlatter (1975:92-3), John defends the ‘scheinbare Dürftigkeit’ of Jesus' message that reports nothing about heavenly things over against the Jerusalem situation where there was a keen interest in speculation about the heavenly realm. Jesus' word could also have another content, but that would not lead to faith.28

* Alternatively it could refer back to 1:51. There the idea of the ‘open heaven’ was introduced, as well as the idea of ascending and descending (to bring down heavenly revelation) and the content of this revelation had not yet been clarified.

But it is perhaps best to look to the immediate co-text. Jesus calls attention to the miraculous nature of birth from above by referring to the mysterious nature of the wind as a natural phenomenon. Nicodemus persists with his incredulous questioning. Now Jesus at once asserts that the implication of Nicodemus' questioning is that He must talk about the mysteries of heaven, as well as that Nicodemus will be unable to comprehend these mysteries. This way of drawing the implication of posing questions about the divine activity is also paralleled in 4 Ezra. In answer to Uriel's verdict that we quoted, Ezra protests: ‘...I did not wish to inquire about the ways above, but about those things which we daily experience: why Israel has been given over to the gentiles...’ (4 Ezra 4:23).

6 Sixthly, as far as v13 is concerned, the usual interpretation was that it asserts that Jesus is the only one qualified to reveal the realities referred to in v12 (cf. Bultmann 1968:107-8; Schnackenburg 1968:392).29 This view is still supported, at least by Grese (1988: 687), Maneschg (1981:394), Moloney (1978: 57;1993:117), Meeks (1972:52), Bühner (1977:380) and Black (1985:59-60).30 I also wish to argue that this is the case against scholars like Odeberg (1968:72), Bultmann (1968:108-9), Schulz (1983:59), Rebell (1987:159), Van Tilborg (1988:42) and Burkett (1991:80-87), who deny that revelation is at issue and say that this verse starts to reveal or is about the epourania of v12.31

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28 According to him, the whole content of Jesus' message is about ta epigeia, that is, He talks about what He is and gives, and about what man is and needs. The logic behind Jesus' strategy being: ‘Ja weiter sich...das Wort von dem entfert, was sein Hörer ist und weiß, um so weniger vermag es Glauben zu begründen.’

29 Heitmüller (1907: 742). for one, finds the rhetorical function of the verse thus interpreted therein that it provides a ‘Bürgschaft’ for the Christian preaching and the implication is that the unbelief of the Jews is completely laughable.

30 According to Richter (1977:336), v13 supplies the authority for the preceding modification in the doctrine of rebirth as he sees it.

31 Odeberg (1968:72) can be taken as an example. According to him, this verse is evidently intended to refer to the preceding, in other words, it continues the instruction on the birth from above and teaches that this birth is bound up with the Son of Man. ‘Aveßë-
The assertion that only Jesus can reveal the *epourania* comes in a polemical form. It is denied that anybody has ascended to heaven, which most probably refers to the ecstatic heavenly journeys mentioned previously.\(^{32}\) The implication is that these purported visionaries have no access to the heavenly mysteries mentioned in v12, while Jesus has.

Bultmann (1968:108 note 1), Schnackenburg (1968:392-393) and Burkett (1991: 83) are correct, of course when they protest that it is not explicitly stated in the text that the ability to reveal the *epourania* is at stake. Actually the καὶ is the only grammatical indication that there is a certain connection between vv12 and 13. But then it is a characteristic of verbal communication that many things are implied rather than said, a phenomenon that Grice (1975;1978) analyses in terms of conversational maxims and the inferences that we can make accordingly.\(^{33}\) In this instance the hearer or reader would assume, just like we do, that the maxim of relevance is adhered to at a deeper level, and would accordingly try to see the connection between v13 and the preceding text or co-text. In this text the possibility of revealing heavenly mysteries is voiced while the relevant background information prescribes that it is impossible to have first-hand knowledge of these realities unless one has made a journey to the regions concerned. Here

\begin{itemize}
  \item[Bπιεγευ] refers to the ascent of the Son of Man subsequent to his descent and, in view of the inclusive connotation that he accepts for the term Son of Man, he paraphrases as follows: 'the only possibility of being born from above, to ascend into or enter the Kingdom of God, is given in the Son of Man.'\(^{32}\) Odeberg (1968:89,94-98) argues that the polemic is not directed at Gnostic saviour-messengers (as they would equally claim to have *descended*) but against the claims of prophets or seers to have received revelations by means of the heavenly journeys referred to, as for example in apocalyptic or in the merkabah speculation, or in the traditions of the theophanies to Moses and the Patriarchs. He is followed by Bultmann (1968:107 note 5) and Meeks (1972:52). Odeberg (95), however, also mentions the so-called *Mithras-Liturgy* and Corp *Herm 1* in this regard. Borgen (1983:133-4) links this polemic specifically with the figure of Moses and is of the opinion that: 'In 3,13, ... probably serves as a polemic both against the idea of Moses' ascent and against any similar claims of or for other human beings. In 3,13 may thus imply a polemic against persons in the Johannine environment who maintained that they were visionaries like Moses.' Regarding the possible role of 3:13 as polemic against Elijah traditions, see Martyn (1978:20-1). Cf also Petersen (1993:44,100) concerning the superiority of Jesus over Moses as implied by this verse. Reference has already been made to Schlatter's (1975:94) views concerning the contemporary significance. Talbert (1992:101) thinks the concern is with the type of progressives in the Johannine community that are known from the epistles and who based their new position on direct revelation by the Spirit, severed from ongoing connections with Jesus. V13a then says that one is not born from above by the Spirit by one's own mystical ascent.

\(^{33}\) The gap in respect of that which must be supplied in order to preserve the relevance etc of an utterance can differ from slight to big, as the following examples demonstrate:

\begin{itemize}
  \item[i] My car ran out of gas.
  \item[ii] There is a garage around the corner.
  \item[iv] Did you hear what Mr J did?\(^{1}\)
  \item[iv] Lovely day today, isn't it! (Meaning: His wife is standing behind you!)
\end{itemize}
again 4 Ezra is instructive. In 4:7-8 Uriel says: "If I had asked you "...how many streams are above the firmament,...or which are the entrances of paradise?" perhaps you would have said to me, "I never...ascended into heaven." The reader would thus infer that the possibility of making heavenly journeys is mentioned in connection with the possibility of revealing heavenly mysteries.

But we should also look at the explanations for ἀναβήβηκεν in this verse to see whether we can defend our position.

* Usually this line of interpretation, that is that v13 comprises a claim to exclusive revelation, assumes that ἀναβήβηκεν does not pertain to Jesus, but only to others of whom it is denied that they have ascended to heaven. Thus the verse would be elliptically constructed and would say that whereas they did not ascend, Jesus descended (Moloney 1978:55; Maneschg 1981:396-7). This explanation cannot be accepted though, for even if εἰ μή could mean but in a context that contrasts two actions, it would require a different construction with a finite verb as Nicolson (1983:95) and Burkett (1991:83) point out. Ο ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καταβάς is a noun clause parallel to ὁ οὐίς τοῦ ἄνθρωπου and thus simply serves as the subject of the sentence.

We must thus conclude that ἀναβήβηκεν does indeed pertain to Jesus as well. In other words, it is not only said that nobody else has ascended to heaven; it is also said that Jesus did. Grammatically this makes good sense: V13 is a shortened exception clause. In such cases the parts which agree with the main clause are omitted in the conditional clause (cf Beyer 1968:102 and cf p 109 concerning In 3:13). In 17:12 it is clear that the omitted parts must be supplied:

καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐξ αὐτῶν ἀπώλετο
εἰ μή ὁ υἱός τῆς ἀπωλείας
{to be added: ἀπώλετο}

In 6:46 they are, in fact, supplied:

οἷς ὅτι τὸν πατέρα ἐώρακέν τις
εἰ μή ὁ ὁν πορὰ τοῦ θεοῦ
οὕτως ἐώρακέν τὸν πατέρα.

The completed formulation for 3:13 should thus read:

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34 Nicolson (1983:93-94) has however shown that if we compare 3:13 with those cases in the New Testament that have the same form (namely οὐδεὶς...εἰ μή...) we find that in no case does the verb change between the two halves. In Moloney's (1978:55) example (Rev 21:27), the verb is the same in both parts of the sentence, namely 'enter'.

35 Such as: ἀλλὰ εἰς καταβήβηκεν οὐ ἐστὶν δὲ ὁ καταβάς.
καὶ οὐδὲς ἀναβῇκεν εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν
εἰ μὴ ὁ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καταβάς, ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου
{όυτος ἀναβῇκεν εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν}

* This could refer to the Son of Man's ascent at the end of His life as seen from the perspective of the church, as Martyn (1979:142), Nicolson (1983:97), Pedersen (1993:45) and many others (cf Maneschg (1981:395-6, note 26 for some of these) think. In other words, it then reflects the post-resurrectional point of view.

I wish to argue that υψώθηκα δεῖ in v.14 need not concern the anabasis of Jesus at the end of his career, which makes it less likely that this topic is introduced in v.13. What is really damaging to this explanation, though, is that, as Moloney (1978:54) and Burkett (1991:82) point out, it requires the unlikely hypothesis that the Evangelist writes from Jesus' perspective in 3:1-12, abruptly shifts to his own perspective in 3:13, then reverts to Jesus' perspective in 3:14.

* Bühner (1977:392-3) interprets 3:13 in terms of an anabatic tradition whereby the person who ascends is changed into a heavenly angel, which enables him to receive a heavenly revelation. Bühner then links this with a presupposed call-vision of Jesus.

* Borgen (1983) argues that the ascent refers to an event before the descent,

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36 Bultmann (1968:108, note 3) argues that the perfect tense should rather be understood as a timeless perfect or the perfect in hypothetical examples, but Schnackenburg (1968:393) points out that the καταβάς makes the context historical.

37 Burkett (1991:82) finds this explanation unsatisfactory on account of the fact that the Evangelist does not speak anachronistically elsewhere. The fact is, however, that he probably does so in 4:38, so that this argument alone will not suffice.

Nicolson defends his interpretation by arguing that the 'story' of Jesus in John only begins after 5:1. In the present section the Evangelist is concerned with giving a series of typical events and encounters with Jesus, and hence the perfect tense is not used anachronistically. This however, takes the idea of the introductory nature of 2:1-4:54 too far.

38 Martyn (1979:142) however, draws the conclusion from 3:13 that the Son of Man is not consistently located on earth. According to him, the key to unravelling this confusion is, however, presented by the Fourth Gospel itself, for in this gospel the Paraclete is pictured as making Jesus present as the awesome Son of Man by continuing Jesus' 'suit with the world'. Martyn (1979:145) concludes: 'The Son of Man ascends to heaven on the cross, but in some sense he returns to earth in the person of the Paraclete and can therefore enter into conversation with "Nicodemus" as he who has ascended to heaven... The Paraclete makes Jesus present on earth as the Son of Man who binds together heaven and earth (1:51). Therefore the Son of Man cannot be located exclusively either in heaven or on earth.' Nowhere else in John can such confusion about the location of Jesus be found, however. Where the later situation does protrude on the surface of the text and causes difficulties in the logic of a passage, as in 4:38; 13:22-29; 20:8-9, it has to do with the history of the community. This is also the case in the present chapter (cf 3:11).
which also serves as its pre-condition. He (1983:139-40) finds support for this interpretation in the parallel statement in Jn 6:46. Here the corresponding idea that the Son has seen the Father prior to being sent by Him to mediate this vision to men can be found. Borgen thus concludes that the event referred to in 3:13 is a pre-existent installation in office. Reference to such a pre-existent installation can be found in Jn 17:2, which draws on ideas and terms from the passage on the Son of Man in Dn 7:13f.

Borgen excludes the connection with v12 in his whole discussion. When seen in connection with this verse though, this primordial anabasis the Son of Man can serve to claim that He has access to the heavenly secrets from which all mortals are excluded, that is He can reveal the ἐπουράνια.

There is therefore strong evidence that 3:13 claims an anabasis of one kind or another for Jesus whereby He gained access to the mysteries of heaven. This reinforces the expectation created in v12 that these secrets will, in fact, be revealed. We must therefore also read the καί at the start of v13 as: 'and indeed...'

39 Petersen (1993:97-98) also draws attention to the parallels between 3:13 and 6:46 (and1:18) as far as the idea of revelation is concerned, but he fails to see that this supports an interpretation of ἀναβήσεται in the sense of an anabasis before the incarnation and, as indicated already, thinks (1993:45) that it refers to the subsequent return of Jesus, seen from the perspective of the later congregation.

40 Nicolson (1983:97) calls Borgen's position on this point 'little short of bizarre', but Borgen (1983:141-2) has really already answered the objections that Nicolson raises, which concerns the fact that, according to John, the location of the pre-existent Jesus is τός τον θεόν, a position from which it is impossible to ascend. and that 3:13 refers to an ascent from earth to heaven. Firstly, Borgen points out that the point of departure for the ascent is not given, and since the word functions on two levels, that of human beings and that of a divine being, the ascent of human beings from earth to heaven is denied, while the ascent of the divine Son of Man is affirmed. Secondly, he refers to those passages in the OT and Jewish literature that mention the ascent of Jahwe in heaven.


41 Black (1985) supports this interpretation in still another way. He argues for the authenticity of the longer reading of 3:13 on external and internal grounds. According to him (57), the words ὁ ὁμ. ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ are not uttered from the post-resurrectional perspective, but from that of the earthly Jesus 'and express his omnipresence at the very time the historical revelation was being made.' V13 as a whole is then interpreted (59) in the light of 1:51 as 'giving expression, in a similar dramatic way, to the consciousness of Jesus, who himself "ascends" and "descends."

This means that 'Jesus insists that he is the only one who can speak of heavenly realities because his association with heaven is much more profound than that of any other man'.

42 Maneschg (1981:393) includes this καί amongst the adversative καί's which, as he correctly points out, play a significant role in vv11-21 (cf 3:11, 12, 19 and, in my view, also 14). The adversative force (und demnoch) would perhaps bring out still stronger the idea that Jesus creates the expectation that He is nonetheless going to talk about the epourania.
Lastly we must point out that Jesus does not fulfil the expectation that He created. Instead of relating the mysterious content of a heavenly vision, He turns to talking about the crucifixion of the Son of Man and the life that those who believe can have in Him.

In what Rebell (1987:159) calls a Christological Midrash, it is said that the Son of Man must be exalted like Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness (3:14). Despite dissenting opinions (cf in Maneschg 1981:409-410 n62), there seems to be some consensus that the correspondence is not between Jesus and the snake, in the sense of a snake typology, but concerns the lifting up as such (cf. Maneschg 1981:400, 409; Hanson 1991:46). This, however, does not mean that there is no typological relation between the two events, which would mean that the Old Testament allusion is reduced more or less to: 'Moses lifted something up', with the implication that the reference is not to the cross of Jesus but to his ascension or to the spiritual experience of believers, as Nicolson (1983:98-103) and Odeberg (1968:99-100,111) respectively insist. As Schlatter (1975:96) puts it, in the case of both the snake and Jesus, the reference is to the poles to which they were attached. If the reader, who is familiar with the Old Testament allusion (cf the definite article before ὁ ἄγνωστος), cannot make the connection with the cross at this stage, as Maneschg (1981:400) thinks he would, then it is explicitly stated later (12:32) that the lifting up indicates the way in which Jesus would die.43

There is, indeed, no indication that the reference is to the ascension of Jesus.44 If a double meaning is intended, it concerns the glorification on the cross. According to John (cf 19:37; Moloney 1978:62-3), the cross is the supreme moment of revelation, or as Schlatter (1975:96) puts it, the idea of 'lifting up' suggests the fact that Jesus becomes visible to all, which gives the ὄψωθήναι the positive meaning of revelatory glorification (cf also Maneschg 1981:424; Thüsing 1970:33; and Grese 1988:689 who says: 'The crucifixion is the moment of Jesus' exaltation and greatest glory, for it is there that he is closest to God and most clearly reveals him').45 In v15 the purpose of this crucifixion, in which

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43 Meeks (1972:63) argues that ὄψωθήναι has its parallel in ἀδεικνύει, and that the fact that the latter contains a reference to Gen 22 makes it clear that the former also has the cross in mind. The concentric pattern that Maneschg (1981:392) discovers for the whole of 3:11-19 would also support the parallelism of vv14 and 16. Cf Maneschg (1981:404-410) for an analysis of the typological interpretation of ἀδεικνύει in Jn 3:14,15.

44 Moloney (1978:62) argues that the typology that is employed here excludes the possibility of such a reference.

45 Thüsing (1970:33) points out that the ideas of enthronement and revelation are connected in the concept of lifting up and explains it as follows: 'Eben dadurch, daß der Erhöhte im Glauben angesehen wird, ist auch seine Herrschaft gegeben.' This idea of 'offenbarenden Verherrlichung' (Schlatter) can be found in Jn 8:28 and 12:32.

Cf Moloney (1978:63-4) for the Old Testament background of the connection exaltation, glorification and revelation. Also cf Moloney (1978:62 n103) for a summary of some views on ὄψωθήναι. Many authors argue in favour of a double meaning. We can mention...
heavenly glory is manifested, is then stated. Its purpose is that everyone that believes may have eternal life in Him.

Jesus thus disappoints any expectation that He would talk about heavenly visions, and v12 thus remains hypothetical. Jesus does not really intend to talk about faraway and mysterious things. He rather talks about the crucifixion of the Son of Man and the life that those who believe can have in Him. In this sense then Grese (1988:692) is correct when he says that; 'only in τὰ ἐπὶ γείωσα σαραντάντα revealed.'

In v14 Jesus thus actually reassures Nicodemus. After all the blows He dealt to him, and after the apprehension He caused about what would follow, He kindly stretches out a hand of support and begins to woo him with the Gospel message. The καί at the beginning of v14, must therefore be ascribed contrastive meaning, and gains the pragmatic function of reassurance, with the result that we can even translate it with something like ‘but don't despair...’ or ‘but listen here....’

4 CONCLUSION
I hope I have shown that the textual strategy in Jn 3:1-14 is that Jesus initially castigates Nicodemus and causes him great concern, but then again reassures him. Jesus is therefore eventually not being harsh, nor is He (or the narrator) turning away from Nicodemus or the group represented by him. He unfolds the kerugma that, in the words quoted by Paul ‘is near you’, in the hope of convincing Nicodemus. I think the strategy employed would bring relief for Nicodemus and make him favourably inclined towards Jesus. Perhaps this explains why, when Nicodemus reappears in the narrative of the Fourth Gospel, he shows a growing loyalty to Jesus.

WORKS CONSULTED

Cullmann (1948:365-6) and Petersen (1993:46) as examples of scholars who think that there is a secondary reference to the ascension. Petersen uses the distinction between everyday and special language in this regard. In the first language the expression would refer to the mode of his execution, but in the latter it refers to the return of the Word from its incarnation.

46 The similarity with Grese's exposition will be evident, the difference being that, according to him the expectation of experiencing a heavenly journey is created (in the whole preceding part of the dialogue), whereas in my exposition the expectation concerns a report on such a journey.

47 Cf Van Dijk (1978:94-96) concerning the pragmatic force of connective particles. Maneschg (1981:394) gives a different interpretation of this καί. He says it is not merely paratactic, but stresses the fact that He who comes from heaven, the Son of Man, is the same as He that must be lifted up and concludes as follows: 'Damit wird schon ersichtlich, daß der Abstieg in der Erhöhung des Menschensohnes zu seinem Zielpunkt gelangt.' Moloney (1978:59-60) sees it as a co-ordinating καί, meaning 'and so'. He says: 'It is because Jesus...is the unique revelation of God. that he must be lifted up.'


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