

## Dislocations in the Fourth Gospel with reference to a recent Theory

By the RT REV. MGR PROF. P. P. SAYDON,  
B.LITT., B.L.CAN., D.D., S.S.L.

**T**HE Fourth Gospel, unlike the Synoptic Gospels, is made up of long discourses and short narratives arranged chronologically and logically according to a definite plan. The Jewish festivals (2, 13, 23; 5, 1; 6, 4; 7, 2, 14; 10, 22; 11, 55; 12, 1; 13, 1) are the main chronological landmarks in Christ's public ministry, while his gradual self-manifestation first to the crowds and then to the Apostles, and the different attitude of the two classes of hearers culminating in the rejection of Christ's doctrine by the crowds and the Apostles' sincere attachment to him divide the theme of the Gospel at 12, 50 into two distinct parts.

But despite this general chronological and logical disposition there are here and there some incongruencies between questions and answers, allusions to recent events which had been mentioned only in a remote context, a certain looseness of thought and other blunt edges which have always been a source of difficulty for the full comprehension of Christ's discourses, their historical setting and the gradual development of Christ's doctrine. Chapters 5 and 6 are a well-known example. The beginning of chapter 6 does not fit in with the end of chapter 5. Christ's words: "Why seek you to kill me?" (7, 20) obviously referring to a recent attempt on his life are, according to 7, 23, an allusion to the events recorded in 5, 5-16 and which, in the present order of the Gospel, had taken place some 18 months before and could no longer be regarded as recent. Chapter 18 should follow immediately chapter 14, and the intervening chapters break the close connexion between those two chapters.

Interpreters have long ago pointed out that the sequence of thought would run smoother if certain sections or chapters were transposed. Thus chapter 6 is read before chapter 5 by Lagrange (1), Jouon (2), Tilmann (3), Durand (4), Braun (5), and

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- (1) *Evangelie selon Saint Jean*; 1927, cxx, 161.
  - (2) *L'Evangelie de Notre-Seigneur Jesus-Christ*; 1930, 483.
  - (3) *Das Johannesevangelium*; 1931, 9, 121.
  - (4) *Evangelie selon Saint Jean*; 1938, 137f.
  - (5) *Evangelie selon Saint Jean in La Sainte Bible*; 1935, 350.

others. Father E. Sutecliffe has tried to explain this inversion by suggesting that chapters 5 and 6 were originally written on separate sheets which were inadvertently misplaced when they were bound together (6).

But the latest and most complete treatment of this question is that by Mr F. R. Hoare who placed the whole problem on an arithmetical basis (7). A similar arithmetical treatment had already been given by J. H. Bernard (8) who, developing a suggestion made by F. Spitta in 1893, proposed the hypothesis that the fourth Gospel was written in codex form with approximately 750 letters to the page or 1500 letters to the leaf. Considering that the disturbing sections carry a number of letters that corresponds roughly to a multiple of 750 J. H. Bernard believes that the disagreement is caused by the displacement of single leaves or groups of leaves. Mr Hoare's theory is more complicated. He thinks that the leaves on which the original fair copy of the Gospel was written were accidentally disarranged before they have been pasted together to form a roll and before any copies had been made (p. vii). Though he admits that in the 1st century of our era books were issued both in roll form and in codex form, "the arithmetic, he says, points to a fair copy written out by the author's secretary on strips of papyrus used on one side only and intended to be pasted together to form a roll". It may be supposed that a pile of such strips, not yet numbered, but otherwise ready for making up into a roll, had fallen to the floor (for example) with the overturning of a table. The general order was preserved, but some strips got out of their place and were afterwards put together in the wrong order (p. 9).

Arithmetical calculations have disclosed that the number of letters in every disturbing section was always roughly a multiple of 397. Hence it has been inferred that the Gospel of St. John, which has a total of 71,579 letters (not counting the abbreviations and contractions), was written on 188 leaves with 397 letters to the leaf. The number of letters was occasionally less than 397

(6) *A Two Year Public Ministry*; London, 1938, pp. 96ff.

(7) *The Original Order and chapters of St. John's Gospel* with an introduction by the Very Rev. Mgr John M. T. Barton D.D.; Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1944, pp. vii, 160.

(8) *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John*; Edinburgh, 1928, pp. xvi-xxx.

by a more or less uniform quantity corresponding to the number of letters of four lines. This led to the conclusion that the original manuscript was divided into sections or chapters which, however, do not correspond to our chapter-division, separated from one another by a blank space of four lines. Another important, and at the same time curious, fact brought out by Mr Hoare's arithmetical computations is that not single leaves but groups of leaves fell out of their order in such a way that the order of the leaves in each group has been preserved.

The non-arithmetical reader will, perhaps, find it difficult and tedious to follow Mr Hoare's line of argument in all its details and will prefer to turn to the last chapter of the book where a reconstruction of the Gospel is given.

An accidental displacement of a leaf or a group of leaves is a possibility and a probability which all will admit. Moreover, the arithmetical method is the most objective way of ascertaining the existence of transpositions and providing the means for recovering the original arrangement of the text. But what is most amazing in Mr Hoare's theory is the fact that out of a total of 21 sections, or segments, as he prefers to call them, only two, the first and the last, are in their proper place while all the rest have been displaced in such a way as to leave hardly any visible trace of their displacement. While J. H. Bernard admits only six transpositions, Hoare extends their number to nineteen. There appears to be something artificial in the way Hoare's theory is worked out and I am afraid very few will accept it.

Let us examine a few cases of these supposed transpositions and see to what extent does the proposed rearrangement improve upon the traditional order.

#### **THE SAMARITAN WOMAN**

The episode 4, 3b-43 is placed before chapter 2. The transposition, it is said, renders the topographical and chronological sequence smoother. The words "and went again into Galilee" (4, 3b) are linked up with the last verse of chapter I to which they are the natural sequel. Christ had already inaugurated his public ministry near the Jordan (1, 29-34) and chosen five of his disciples (1, 37-51). He then went to Galilee (4, 3b) passing through Samaria where he remained two days (4, 4-43). On the third day (2, 1) he was in Cana of Galilee where he changed the water into

wine (2, 1-11). After a short stay in Capharnaum (2, 12) he went up to Jerusalem (2, 13), but after some time had to leave Judaea because of the hostility of the Pharisees (4, 1-3a).

The narrative as reconstructed proceeds so smoothly that the transposition seems to be entirely justified. It is doubtful, however, whether it represents the original order. There are no convincing reasons suggesting that the text of chapters 2-4 has been disarranged. Though Christ's return to Galilee from Judaea after his baptism is not explicitly recorded before 4, 3b, it is at least implied in 1, 43. The words "he would go forth into Galilee" do not mean that Christ simply made up his mind or manifested his intention to go to Galilee, but that he actually set out for Galilee. Consequently Philip and Nathanael were called after Christ's departure from Judaea. In other words the events related in 1, 43b-51 took place in Galilee. This being so, the words "and went again into Galilee" (4, 3b) cannot have originally stood immediately after the end of chapter 1.

Moreover the breaking up of 4, 3 into two parts, which is required by arithmetical reasons, and the shifting of each part into a different context creates more difficulties than it claims to solve. Where did Christ go when he quitted Judaea? (4, 3a). In 4, 45 which, according to the proposed order, follows, together with v. 44, 4, 3a, we are told that Christ "came to Galilee". But this topographical indication is by no means complementary to 4, 3a but, as the preceding particle "therefore" (Greek *oun* not reproduced in the Douay Version) clearly shows, a reference to a statement made in v. 43b. St. John is so accurate in describing Christ's movements (see for example 3, 22, 23; 4, 46; 10, 40; 11, 18, 54; 12, 1) that such a vague statement "he left Judaea" (4, 3a) is highly improbable. The two sentences "he left Judaea" and "he went into Galilee" form one indivisible unit belonging, in the present and the original order, to one and the same narrative, and any attempt to separate them and to place them in different contexts would result in the disarrangement of an originally well knit period. The same must be said of the two statements "he went into Galilee" (4, 43) and "when therefore he came to Galilee" (4, 46).

Another objection against the transposition of 4, 3b-43 is John's assertion that Christ went *again* to Galilee. Christ's journey to Galilee through Samaria is described as a return journey

to a place where he had previously been. This description suits well the present order according to which Christ had already been in Galilee (2, 1-11) before the return journey (4, 3b), but it hardly suits the proposed order in which no mention of a sojourn in Galilee occurs in chapter 1. Although the word *palin* "again" is omitted by a number of codices, the balance of manuscript evidence is in its favour, and the word is retained by all editors of the Greek New Testament.

The chronological argument in favour of the transposition of 4, 3b-45 is based upon the close connexion between the two data "after two days" (4, 43) and "the third day" (2, 1). Christ stayed two days in Samaria (4, 40) after which he left for Galilee (4, 43) where the day after, which was the third (2, 1) in relation to the other two, he was a guest at a marriage-feast at Cana.

The argument is more specious than convincing. After the chronological indication "two days" in v. 43 the most natural way of expressing the following day would have been "on the following day" or simply "then" as in 11, 6.7. The expression "on the third day" seems to suggest a two-day interval between the marriage-feast (2, 1) and the last event previously mentioned which, according to the present order, is the call of Philip and Nathanael, while, according to the re-arranged order, the two-day interval is made to start from the beginning of Christ's ministry in Samaria, not, more naturally, from its end. The chronological relation between Christ's *two-day* stay in Samaria and the marriage feast *on the third day* is rather apparent than real and does not, in my opinion, justify the transposition of the Samaritan woman's episode to the end of chapter 1.

#### **CHRIST'S ARGUMENT WITH THE JEWISH DOCTORS, 7, 15-24**

This short section is transferred to the end of chapter 5. The inappropriateness of this section in its actual context and its close relation to the episode related in 5, 2-16 is one of the reasons which have made modern interpreters invert the order of chapters 5 and 6 (9). Mr Hoare instead of inverting the two chapters is content with transposing only a small section of chapter 7 thus bringing the allusion to the healing of the paralytic (7, 23) into a closer contact with the account of the healing in 5, 5-16. This is

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(9) E. Sutcliffe: *A Two-Year Public Ministry*; pp. 87. See also J. H. Bernard, *The Gospel according to St. John*, p. xix.

unquestionably an obvious advantage over the inversion theory.

But while this transposition removes one difficulty it leaves others unsolved. The unnamed feast of 5, 1 remains unidentified. Christ crosses the lake of Tiberias (6, 1) without any indication of the direction of the crossing being given and without any mention of his departure from Judaea. It is not said whether Christ went up to Jerusalem for the Pasch mentioned in 6, 4. Apparently he did not (7, 1). But then the chronological indication in 6, 4 would be meaningless.

These difficulties are satisfactorily solved if chapter 6 is read before chapter 5. This transposition may be further improved upon by transferring 7, 15-24 or, at least, 7, 19-24 to the end of chapter 5 thus placing Christ's reference to the healing of the paralytic in its proper chronological context.

#### **THE CLOSE OF CHRIST'S PUBLIC MINISTRY**

The section 12, 34-50 is transposed to 8, 28a after the words "that I am he" on the grounds of a more logical sequence of ideas. The reference made by the crowd to the "Son of Man" (12, 34) has its proper context in our Lord's words in 8, 28a (Hoare, p. 53). The remark by the crowd "Who is this Son of Man?" (12, 34) comes in very natural after Christ's words "When you shall have lifted up the Son of Man" (8, 28a).

This apparently closer coherence of 12, 34 to 8, 28a is not a sufficient reason for transposing 12, 34-50 to 8, 28a. Throughout the whole section 12, 34-50 there rings a sad note of bitter disappointment. The end is impending. The time has come for Christ to depart this life. He had taught the crowds and wrought miracles, but "they believed not in him" (12, 37), and those that believed lacked the courage to confess their belief publicly (12, 42, 43). This is decidedly a most fitting close of Christ's public ministry. Vv. 44-50 are out of their historical context, but they are rather an afterthought logically connected with Christ's last words in v. 36 and with John's reflection in vv. 37-43 and added by John himself as the pronouncement of the different judgement which will certainly be passed on those who will have believed and on those who will have refused to believe in Christ.

The disruption of chapter 12 spoils the logical development of thought and deprives the narrative of Christ's public ministry of a fitting conclusion. Nor does the transference of 12, 23b-33 to

11, 33 improve in any way the sequence of ideas. The episode of the rising of Lazarus in 11, 33 is hardly an appropriate context for Christ's persistent prediction of his death (vv. 24, 25) and his victory over the unbelieving world and its ruler (v. 31).

#### **CHRIST'S DISCOURSES AFTER THE LAST SUPPER**

According to the traditional order of the Fourth Gospel Christ's last discourse is made up of three parts or discourses sharply marked off from one another and covering chapter 14, chapters 15 and 16, and chapter 17 respectively. There are difficulties both against this order and against the structure of the discourses. The end of the first discourse "Arise, let us go hence" (14, 31) has its natural sequel in 18, 1 "When Jesus had said these things, he went forth with his disciples". Chapters 15-17 seem to be interpolated. Moreover there are, especially in the second discourse, a disconnexion of ideas and some inconsistencies which seem at least to suggest that the text has been disarranged. Thus in 16, 5 Christ warns his disciples, seemingly for the first time, of coming persecutions, but he had already made the same warnings a few verses before (15, 18-20). Moreover in 16, 17-18 the Apostles are perplexed about the meaning of Christ's words "a little while and you shall see me no longer, and again a little while and you shall see me", but Christ had already given the explanation in the first discourse (14, 19-25).

Unfortunately Mr Hoare's theory provides no explanation to this disruption of the link between chapters 14-18. The traditional order 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 can hardly be considered original. Besides the exact correspondence of the beginning of chapter 18 to the end of chapter 14 there are other considerations suggesting that chapters 15-17 are out of their original context. Chapter 14 is a farewell speech. Christ was about to part with his disciples. In order to soothe their grief he promised to come back and take them with him. But they had to remain faithful to him by believing in him and keeping his commandments. He also promised to send them "another Paraclete", "the Spirit of truth" who would "abide with them for ever" during his absence (14, 16, 17). He then bids them farewell, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you" (v. 27), the words being the equivalent of the customary greeting form "Peace be with you". Christ is almost reluctant to leave his beloved disciples; he would like to stay

longer with them to keep up their spirits and to teach them other things about himself and his Father. But the time is up: the end has arrived; Satan, the prince of this world, personified in Judas and his gang, is already at work, and therefore Christ cannot stay any longer with his disciples. He must obey the commandment of his Father. Therefore he solemnly commands: "Arise, let us go hence" (14, 31). Thus Christ's ministry has ended, and the drama of the passion opens up. It is inconceivable that St John should have added other discourses or, in any way, prolonged Christ's ministry after the farewell speech. Chapters 15-17 must be considered as a later addition running through any number of pages of sheets made by John himself who, after the completion of the Gospel, not being satisfied with the short discourse in chapter 14, had added two more discourses of which the first (chapters 15 and 16) is but an expansion of chapter 14. This view is held by many modern writers as M. Lepin (10), Lagrange (11), Braun (12), Durand (13), Sutcliffe (14) and others. Mr Hoare rearranges chapters 13-17 in this order: 13, 1-9; 15, 17-16, 4a; 13, 20-14, 14; 16, 15b-23; 14, 15-24a; 16, 4b-15a; 14, 24b-15, 16; 16, 24 to the end of the Gospel.

In spite of its ingenuity and thorough elaborateness Mr Hoare's theory fails to convince. One can hardly bring oneself to believe that the original copy of the Fourth Gospel has been disarranged to such an extent and in that way which Mr Hoare thinks to have discovered. There is something artificial in this theory which cannot be accounted for as the accidental overturning of a table (p. 9) and the rearrangement of the displaced leaves by a more or less clever scribe. Moreover, a number of the proposed transpositions are not supported by internal evidence and some difficulties, as the insertion of chapters 15-17 between chapters 14 and 18, remain unexplained.

The best and simplest solution of the difficulties inherent in the traditional order of the Fourth Gospel is that connected with the circumstances of the composition of the Gospel itself. It is generally agreed that St John wrote the Gospel in his old age

(10) *La Valeur historique du Quatrième Evangile*; 1910, p. 101.

(11) *Evangile selon Saint Jean*; 1927, p. 397-9.

(12) *Evangile selon Saint Jean*; (Pirrot, *La Sainte Bible*), 1935, p. 433.

(13) *Evangile selon Saint Jean (Verbum Salutis)*; 1938, p. 409f.

(14) *A Two Year Public Ministry*; 1938, p. 104.



some fifty or sixty years after the events narrated. Though the recollection of Christ's discourses was, through prolonged meditation and preaching, still fresh in the Apostle's mind, we have not in the Fourth Gospel a verbatim report of Christ's discourses.

The doctrine is our Lord's, but the wording is, at least in many cases, St John's. Besides condensing our Lord's speeches St John has also, sometimes, added words and sentences which Christ had said on a different occasion. It is also possible that St John has, occasionally, expanded in his own way Christ's words, without however changing Christ's doctrine. It is also probable that St John, after completing his Gospel, has added some chapters inserting them in their chronological, though not in their logical, context. To quote Father J. Donovan S.J. : "That John the Preacher spent a considerable time in the composition of his Gospel, in touching, retouching, and perfecting it; that he added the last chapter as an afterthought—all this may be considered highly probable, if not certain. Again, while giving the finishing touches to the work, it is not improbable that he may have inserted whole chapters, and even altered the order of the original plan—other writers have also worked on these lines. What is, however, absolutely certain is the *identity of mind and hand* behind it all, from its first word to its last" (*The Authorship of St. John's Gospel*; London, 1936, p. 20f).

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