

Greeks Come to See Jesus (John 12,20f)

I. The problem

The story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem (John 12,12-19) is followed by a section, which as such has no direct synoptic parallel (12,20-36). We hear about a group of Greeks, who approach Philip with the request: "Sir, we wish to see Jesus". This request is forwarded to Andrew, and both Philip and Andrew forward it to Jesus. It leads to a short discourse of Jesus about the coming of the hour of the Son of Man to be glorified and about conditions of discipleship (12,23-28a). A prayer of Jesus to the Father to glorify his name is followed by a voice from heaven which is interpreted by the crowd and by Jesus himself successively. His announcement of his being "lifted up" leads to a discussion about the remaining or departure of the Messiah/Son of Man and a final exhortation directed towards the Jews to believe in the Light as long as it shines.

The sequence of ideas in this section is very much disputed. First of all the sudden appearance of the Greeks at this moment has not found an accepted solution so far. But also its relation to the following verses seems to be unclear: what does it have to do with Jesus' announcement of the coming of the hour, when the Son of Man will be glorified? And how does this announcement relate to the words about Jesus' death and the necessity to follow him wherever he goes? And finally: how are the different christological titles (Christ, Son of Man, Light) and verbs (to be troubled, to die, to be lifted up, to be glorified, to draw all to himself) related to each other?

II. Proposed solutions

The internal coherence of our section has been doubted by Bultmann: the verses 24-26 seem to interrupt the sequence of thought, introduced by v. 23. Also vv. 29f and 33 look like additions

to Jesus' revelatory discourse, added by the evangelist⁽¹⁾). Becker draws his own conclusion from the missing coherence of thought and ascribes vv. 24-26 to the postjohannine "ecclesiastical redaction"⁽²⁾.

Many authors miss a logical connection between the coming of the Greeks to Jesus and the remainder of the section. For Becker they are no longer scenically present from v. 23 onwards⁽³⁾. Bultmann suspects a theological reason for this approach, but rejects the request of the Greeks to see the historical Jesus as erroneous⁽⁴⁾. Brown recurs to historical tradition, which may stand behind the scene⁽⁵⁾ — but how probable is such a reminiscence without any synoptic parallel, decades after the event itself? W. E. Moore suspects that the scene might represent a temptation of Christ to go to the Greeks and preach to them salvation instead of remaining in Jerusalem and suffering death from the Jewish authorities⁽⁶⁾. This proposal does not seem to have convinced successive commentators; the question is not where Jesus goes, but who comes to see him at this moment. A solution which links the coming of the Greeks positively with Jesus' announcement of his imminent death seems to be preferable.

Finally the wording of the little introductory scene merits our attention: Greeks come "to see" Jesus. This wording may furnish us with the clue to our own proposal. Does the expression simply mean: "meet, make the acquaintance of Jesus", even with a connotation of readiness to believe in him?⁽⁷⁾ Or is it equivalent to the desire to see God and find eternal life in him?⁽⁸⁾ In other words:

⁽¹⁾ R. BULTMANN, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (KeK; Göttingen 1941, reprints) 321.

⁽²⁾ J. BECKER, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, II (ÖkTbKomm, NT; Gütersloh-Würzburg 1981) 382.

⁽³⁾ BECKER, *Johannes*, 384.

⁽⁴⁾ BULTMANN, *Johannes*, 324.

⁽⁵⁾ R. E. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John*, I (AB; Garden City, NY 1966) 470.

⁽⁶⁾ W. E. MOORE, "Sir, We Wish to See Jesus. Was This an Occasion of Temptation?", *SJT* 20 (1967) 75-93.

⁽⁷⁾ Cf. C. K. BARRETT, *The Gospel According to St John* (London 1978) 422, with Liddell-Scott.

⁽⁸⁾ C. H. DODD, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge 1953) 371, with reference to John 6,40.

does it have a similar meaning to Philip's request in 14,8 to see the Father?⁽⁹⁾

III. A fresh approach: influence of Isaiah 52,15 LXX

It seems that many of the problems which we have shown in John 12,20-36.37-43 (44-50) can be solved if we acknowledge the influence of the book of Isaiah in the whole section. Let us start with the paragraph in the wider context, where Isaiah is quoted twice explicitly (John 12,37-43), then go on to the nearer context (John 12,23-36), where the influence of Isaiah has been seen by many scholars, and then come to the unexpected "coming of the Greeks" in John 12,20-22.

1. *Isaiah in the larger context: John 12,37-43*

John 12,37-43, together with 12,44-50, brings to an end the public ministry of Christ according to the Gospel of John, whereas verses 12,37-43 state the unbelief of the "Jews" and give a theological reason for this fact, verses 12,44-50 contain a final invitation to believe in Christ. We disregard here the question whether the substance of 12,37-43 may come from a semeia source⁽¹⁰⁾ and whether vv. 44-50 may have been added secondarily to the gospel⁽¹¹⁾ and read the text in the extant form.

The two quotations from Isaiah in John 12,37-43 emphasize the fact that the "Jews" had not come to faith in Jesus although he had done so many signs. The second quotation takes up immediately the idea of "seeing", which corresponds to the witnessing of the signs, whereas the first quotation concentrates more on the idea of hearing. Let us start with the second text.

There has been a debate as to whether John used in 12,40 the Hebrew text of Isaiah, the Septuagint or some other version. The most probable solution seems to be that he used the Septuagint but modified it according to his own purposes, omitting part of it and

⁽⁹⁾ Cf. also the invitation to see Jesus in John 1,46. H. STRATHMANN, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (NTD; Göttingen 1962) 188, with other commentators points to this threefold intervention of Philip.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Cf. BULTMANN, *Johannes*, 346; BECKER, *Johannes*, 408.

⁽¹¹⁾ M.-É. BOISMARD, "Le caractère adventice de Jn 12,45[sic!]-50", *Sacra Pagina*, II (BETL 13; Louvain 1959) 189-192.

combining it with other texts taken from Isaiah⁽¹²⁾. The main difference from the LXX of Isa 6,10 is that God himself, not Israel, is responsible for blinding the people. This is in accordance with passages like Isa 56,10 or 42,19, where the passive of (ἐκ)τυφλώ is used in order to indicate or at least insinuate God's action in this event.

The strongest verse describing God's responsibility in blinding the eyes of his people is Isa 29,10: πεπότικεν ὑμᾶς κύριος πνεύματι κατανύξεως καὶ καμμύσει τούς δοφθαλμοὺς αὐτῶν. John may have taken recourse to such parallel statements in order to emphasize that the rejection of Jesus formed part of God's will. We find the same tendency in Mark 4,12, where Jesus' parables themselves lead to the deafness and blindness of the people and to God's decision not to lead them to conversion and forgiveness. We see a similar perspective in John 9,39-41, where Jesus says: "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind". Also here an influence of Isaiah can be recognized.

The pattern of Isaian quotations in John 12,39-41 is completed by a reference in v.41 to Isaiah's initial vision in Isa 6,1-7. It is after having seen God in his glory that Isaiah receives the task of going to God's people and proclaiming to it the good news, whether they want to hear it or not. According to John, Isaiah saw God's glory present in Christ (which might echo in a way the Targum of Isaiah 6,5⁽¹³⁾).

The other direct quotation from Isaiah in the section (John 12,37-43) stands directly at the beginning. It is taken from Isa 53,1, and in this case there is no doubt that it has been taken from the Septuagint: it is in complete concordance with the Septuagint text, including the introductory κύριε which is without parallel in the Masoretic text and alters the sense of the verse: an exclamation of the speaker without clear addressee becomes a prayer directed to the Lord.

What seems to be important for our argument is the fact that the quotation has been taken from the so-called fourth Song of the

⁽¹²⁾ See for this opinion, with a review of previous proposals: C. A. EVANS, "The Function of Isaiah 6:9-10 in Mark and John", *NT* 24 (1982) 124-138.

⁽¹³⁾ Cf. BROWN, *John*, I, 486f and the corresponding notes: in Jesus may appear the glory of the "shekinah of the Lord" which the prophet saw according to Isa 6,5 Tg.

Servant, Isa 52,13-53,12. It introduces the central part of the song, the description of the suffering, death and final salvation of the Servant. The structure of this unique text has been elaborated recently very carefully by P. Beauchamp⁽¹⁴⁾, so that I can refer to the details of this article. Authors do not agree whether the quotation contains a reference to the Suffering Servant as such⁽¹⁵⁾ or whether John has quoted the verse only on account of the subject of unbelief⁽¹⁶⁾. The former seems to be more probable, not only because of the preceding context, as we shall see, but also with regard to the introductory formula.

It is again Craig A. Evans, who has called our attention to the different kinds of quotation formulas used in the gospel of John for Old Testament quotations⁽¹⁷⁾. Whereas from John 1-12,14 usually expressions from γράφω/γραψή are used (1,23 ἔφη), from 12,38 onwards we have introductory formulas speaking of the “fulfillment” of Scripture (five times πληροῦσθαι, once — 19,28 — τελεῖσθαι, two other texts are combined with fulfillment texts: 12,39 with 38 and 19,37 with 36). The reason for this shift of expression seems to be of a theological nature: as the signs in the first half of the gospel point to the heavenly origin of Jesus, so the quotations from the Old Testament in the second half introduce the mystery of the suffering, death and glorification of Jesus. The first quotation, our text from Isa 53,1 in John 12,38, bears considerable weight. The very fact that it introduces the passion of Christ, makes it very probable, that its origin from the fourth Song of the Suffering Servant is not accidental.

2. *Isaiah in the immediate context: John 12,23-36*

After the introductory verses 20-22, with which we shall deal in the following paragraph, the verbs δοξασθῆναι and ὑψωθῆναι seem to form a semantic axis leading through the remainder of our

⁽¹⁴⁾ P. BEAUCHAMP, “Lecture et relectures du quatrième chant du Serviteur: d’Isaïe à Jean”, *The Book of Isaiah – Le Livre d’Isaïe* (ed. J. VERMEYLEN) (BETL 81; Leuven 1989) 325-355.

⁽¹⁵⁾ J. LUZÁRRAGA, “Presentación de Jesús a la luz del A. T. en el Evangelio de Juan”, *EstE* 51 (1976) 497-520: 504.

⁽¹⁶⁾ R. SCHNACKENBURG, *Das Johannesevangelium*, II (HTKNT; Freiburg-Basel-Wien 1971) 516, with the majority of the authors.

⁽¹⁷⁾ C.A. EVANS, “On the Quotation Formulas in the Fourth Gospel”, *BZ* 26 (1982) 79-83.

section (vv. 23-36). τιμᾶν in v. 26 can be added. We can distinguish three scenes in vv. 20-36: vv. 20-28a.28b-33 and 34-36. Each one is centred around a word or speech of Jesus and framed or introduced by a word or comment of the narrator. In the central scene (vv. 28b-33) the voice from heaven finds successive interpretations from the multitude, from "others" and from Jesus, followed by an interpretation of the interpretation of Jesus, given by the narrator. In every one of these scenes, the verbs δοξάζειν/δοξασθῆναι and/or ὑψωθῆναι appear, with a shift from δοξασθῆναι to ὑψωθῆναι:

- scene 1 (20-28a): δοξασθῆναι/δοξάζειν at the beginning (23) and at the end (28a); cf. τιμᾶν (26);
- scene 2 (28b-33): δοξάζειν at the beginning (28b, twice), ὑψωθῆναι at the end (32);
- scene 3 (34-36): ὑψωθῆναι (34).

So the two themes are carefully interwoven with a progression towards the "being lifted up/exalted" (vv. 32ff).

A problem lies in the fact that the ὑψωθῆναι, which Jesus refers to himself in v. 32, is referred by the multitude to the Christ in v. 34, and the latter identified with the Son of Man in the same verse. The answer to this problem seems to be that the text does not represent the minutes of a dialogue between Jesus and the "Jews" of his lifetime, but rather the result of about sixty years of early Christian christology, which led to the identification of Jesus of Nazareth with the Messiah of Israel and the (apocalyptic) Son of Man.

Now it seems to be justified to go still one step further and presume that this eschatological Messiah/Son of Man is also the Suffering Servant from the book of Isaiah. The main reason for this lies in the fact that Isa 52,13 LXX is the strongest text of the Old Testament which contains ὑψωθῆναι and δοξασθῆναι (in the future) and applies both to a central figure of salvation history. The text reads as follows: Ἰδοὺ συνήσει ὁ παῖς μου καὶ ὑψωθῆσεται καὶ δοξασθῆσεται σφόδρα.

Authors are again divided as to whether an influence of Isa 52,13–53,12 on John 12,(23)32.34 can be accepted⁽¹⁸⁾ or not. Some

⁽¹⁸⁾ In favour of such an influence are: A. VERGOTE, "L'exaltation du Christ en croix selon le quatrième Evangile", *ETL* 28 (1952) 5-23: 7; DODD, *Interpretation*, 247; D. R. GRIFFITHS, "Deutero-Isaiah and the Fourth Gospel: Some Points of Comparison", *ExpTim* 65 (1954) 355-360;

authors see behind the ὑψωθῆναι of John 12,32.34 an Aramaic expression which means at the same time "being lifted up" and "going away"⁽¹⁹⁾, but his proposal seems to suppose a theory about the origin of the Fourth Gospel which cannot be verified. Another argument comes from the school of the history of religions, particularly Bultmann and his followers, and points to gnostic parallels for the "glorification" of "Man"⁽²⁰⁾. Here the opposite seems to hold true: it is difficult to find texts prior to the Fourth Gospel which contain this idea. A third problem might arise from the fact that no explicit reference to the Suffering Servant is given in our text. Here we shall have to look a little more carefully.

First, the context of John 12,32.34 contains a clear reference to the passion of Christ. Johannine research has discovered behind John 12,27-29 the Gethsemani tradition of the Synoptic Gospels (Mark 14,32-42 parr.)⁽²¹⁾: Jesus' soul is sorrowful, the "hour" has come, he prays to the Father and calls him by name. A reference to Ps 42/43 seems to underlie both traditions, as I have tried to show elsewhere⁽²²⁾. The divine intervention is recorded in Luke (22,43 κ*.² D al.) and John (12,28c): in Luke it is an angel, in John it is taken as an angel by part of the crowd. The following verses make the reference to the passion even more explicit (cf. v. 32f).

Second, the wording of vv. 32 and 34 makes a reference to the beginning of the Fourth Song of the Servant even more probable.

W. THÜSING, *Erhöhung und Verherrlichung Jesu im Johannesevangelium* (Münster 1970) 36; G. REIM, *Studien zum alttestamentlichen Hintergrund des Johannes-Evangeliums* (SNTSMS 22; Cambridge 1974) 174f; B. CHILTON, "John XII 34 and Targum Isaiah LII 13", *NT* 22 (1980) 176-178; H. HEGERMANN, "δοξάζω", *Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* [= *EWNT*] (H. BALZ - G. SCHNEIDER, ed.) (Stuttgart 1980) I, 841-843: 842.

(¹⁹) Cf. C. C. TORREY, "'When I am lifted up from the earth', John 12,32", *JBL* 51 (1932) 320-322, who is followed by a number of authors.

(²⁰) Cf. BULTMANN, *Johannes*, 270; G. BERTRAM, "ὑψώω, ὑπερυψώω", *TWNT*, VIII (Stuttgart 1969; [G. Friedrich, ed.]) 604-611: 609. C. COLPE, "ὁ νίδις τοῦ ἀνθρώπου", *TWNT*, VIII, 403-481: 471, sees the Johannine conception on the way from apocalypticism to gnosis; G. LÜDEMANN, "ὑψώω", *EWNT*, III (1983) 981f: 982, speaks of a "doketisierende Herrlichkeitsehristologie".

(²¹) Cf. R. E. BROWN, "Incidents That Are Units in the Synoptic Gospels But Dispersed in St. John", *CBQ* 23 (1961) 143-160: 143-148.

(²²) J. BEUTLER, "Psalm 42/43 im Johannesevangelium", *NTS* 23 (1978-79) 33-57: 34-38.

Among all Old Testament texts which in one way or another contain δοξασθῆναι and ὑψωθῆναι, this text has the highest probability of standing behind John 12,32.34⁽²³⁾. A reference to the Targum of Isa 52,13 as proposed by B. Chilton⁽²⁴⁾ is less probable, even if we content ourselves with traditions which led to our existing Targums: it could only explain the idea of “being exalted” and the application of it to the Messiah (or Son of Man, v. 14), but not the glorification. Given the references to the Septuagint of Isaiah in the context, an influence of *Tg. Isa* in this passage would need further investigation.

The statement that Jesus will be lifted up “from the earth” may have been influenced by the tradition of the serpent in the desert (John 3,14f; Num 21,8f), as has been pointed out by W. Thüsing⁽²⁵⁾ and Hans-Theo Wrege⁽²⁶⁾. But we have to keep in mind that the verb ὑψοῦν does not occur here, and that the idea of glorification is absent.

Wrege in his thorough study of John 12,20-33⁽²⁷⁾ underlines the connections between the suffering of the Servant and the suffering and exaltation of the Just in Wisdom 2–5, a text which seems to stand behind John 12,32.34. In Wis 2,12ff the Just is seen in the light of the Suffering Servant of Isa 52,13ff; 53. The idea of the exaltation of Henoch may have amalgamated with the destiny of the Suffering Servant. Given the messianic connotations of the former, a clear connection between the Messiah and his own, as found in John, is prepared for here. Parallel figures to Henoch seem to be Joseph and Elijah as representatives of the Just. Against this background the verses John 12,24-26 appear less isolated from their context: the destiny of the master will be the destiny of his own followers, but also vice versa: the Lord will share the fate of his own.

⁽²³⁾ Cf. again THÜSING, *Erhöhung*, 36.

⁽²⁴⁾ CHILTON, “John XII 34”, 176-178.

⁽²⁵⁾ THÜSING, *Erhöhung*, 36.

⁽²⁶⁾ H.-Th. WREGE, “Jesusgeschichte und Jüngergeschick nach Joh 12,20-33 und Hebr 5,7-10”, *Der Ruf Jesu und die Antwort der Gemeinde* (FS J. Jeremias; [E. LOHSE al., ed.] Göttingen 1970) 259-288: 271, n. 38; nevertheless W. recognizes the stronger influence of Isa 52,13 LXX: ib.

⁽²⁷⁾ WREGE, “Jesusgeschichte”, 274ff; cf. also M. J. SUGGS, “Wisdom of Solomon 2₁₀-5: A Homily Based on the Fourth Servant Song”, *JBL* 76 (1957) 16-33; E. SCHWEIZER, *Erniedrigung und Erhöhung bei Jesus und seinen Nachfolgern* (ATANT 28; Zürich 1962) 32, 117f.

Before we turn to John 12,20ff, let us elaborate briefly an aspect of the tradition of the Suffering Servant behind John 12,23-36, which is of primary importance for the understanding of the introductory verses. In at least two of the Songs of the Servant in Isaiah (in addition to the last one, to which we shall turn shortly), the role of the Servant for the gentiles is elaborated explicitly. According to the first song (Isa 42,1-4) the Servant will undertake judgment over the gentiles (v. 1), but he will also be the hope for the nations (v. 4). The same message is expressed by the imagery of “light” in the second song, Isa 49,1-6 (cf. 42,16): the Servant announces that he will be glorified (*δοξασθήσομαι*, v. 5) and receives the promise that he will not only restore the tribes of Jacob and convert the diaspora of Israel, but also be a light for the nations for salvation until the ends of the earth (v. 6)⁽²⁸⁾. Here we are very near to John 12,35f, as has been pointed out recently by R. E. Brown⁽²⁹⁾: “The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, that you may become sons of the light”. The addressees of this final exhortation are the Jews, but the role of Jesus as light of the world in the rest of the Fourth Gospel has to be kept in mind.

There is a close parallel to our verses in John 7,33-36. After a twofold attempt to arrest him (7,30-32), Jesus says to the Jews gathered in the temple area: “I shall be with you a little longer and then I go to him who sent me; you will seek me and you will not find me; where I am you cannot come” (7,33f). This is a typical instance of double-entendre: The Jews think of a possible departure of Jesus to the Dispersion among the gentiles in order to teach the Greeks (v. 35). For the evangelist and the reader, the announcement of Jesus would point to his imminent return to the Father. But it is possible that the thought of the Jews may have an ironic sense for the readers of John as well: will his departure to the Father not be the condition for the nations to come to salvation? Cf. 12,32: “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself”.

This brings us back to the beginning of our section John 12,20-36. We shall now try to see whether the coming of the Greeks

⁽²⁸⁾ For the relevance of this passage for John 12,20-36 see H. B. KOSSEN, “Who Were the Greeks of John 12,20?”, *Studies in John* (FS J. N. Sevenster, NTSup 24; Leiden 1970) 97-110.

⁽²⁹⁾ BROWN, *John*, I, 479.

in order to see Jesus may have to do with the imminent death of Christ as seen in the light of the texts of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah.

3. Isaiah in the text: John 12,20-22

The wording of the approach of the Greeks to Jesus echoes in an astonishing way Isa 52,15 LXX:

οὗτως θαυμάσονται ἔθνη πολλὰ ἐπ' αὐτῷ,
καὶ συνέξονται βασιλεῖς το στόμα αὐτῶν·
δτι οὶς οὐκ ἀνηγγέλη περὶ αὐτοῦ, ὅψονται,
καὶ οἵ οὐκ ἀκηκόασιν, συνήσουσι.

Many nations will be astonished about the destiny of the Servant, and their kings will be silent, for those to whom the news had not yet been announced about him will see, and those who have not yet heard will come to understanding. The text of the Septuagint differs here from the Hebrew text in its common understanding in so far as the double relative pronoun *τούς* in 52,15 c.d. is not taken in the neuter sense, but as referring to persons. Whereas the general understanding of the verse is: they (the nations and their kings) will see and hear what they have not yet seen and heard, the sense in the Septuagint becomes: those who had not yet come to knowledge of the Servant will see, and those who had not yet heard (about him) will hear. The reasons for the shift of emphasis in the Septuagint are only partially known. According to R. Hanhart⁽³⁰⁾, who bases his opinion on earlier research, the Septuagint version of Isaiah originated in the period of Jewish persecution in Seleucidic times. Time and place of origin (Alexandria) would make a particular interest in the conversion of the gentiles understandable, especially as the Hebrew text leaves this possibility open.

Now, how can it be shown that John had really Isa 52,15 LXX in mind when he wrote John 12,20-22? Let us give five answers to this question.

First, unlike some of the passages where the allusion to gentiles is at least doubtful, in our text this meaning seems to be beyond doubt. We saw that in John 7,33-36 the reference to the diaspora

⁽³⁰⁾ R. HANHART, "Zum gegenwärtigen Stand der Septuagintafor-schung", *De Septuaginta* (PS J. W. Wevers; [A. PIETERSMA - C. Cox, ed.] Mississauga, Ont. 1984) 3-18: 16.

invited the reader at least to include the Jews of the diaspora in the thought, although “teaching the Greeks” is free from this connotation. In 10,16 the “other sheep not of this fold” could refer either to non-Jews in the sense of non-Judeans or to Jews from the diaspora or to the gentiles, but the latter seems to be the most probable solution⁽³¹⁾. In 11,52, the comment of the narrator on Caiaphas’ judgment, a similar range of answers is possible, but again the universalistic ring is strong. Immediately before our text, in 12,19, the Pharisees say: “You see that you can do nothing; look, the world has gone after him”. The word used here (*κόσμος*) seems to bear a typical Johannine double meaning: in fact, the world is going to follow Jesus: in the next verse, the Greeks come to see Jesus, and Jesus gives a lesson about following him (v. 25f). If John had intended only to include Greek-speaking Jews, the word *Ἐλληνισταί* would have been more appropriate. A universalistic sense of the “*Ἐλληνες* in 12,20 is also underlined by Christ’s “drawing all to himself” in v. 32, as mentioned earlier. Note also his “bearing fruit” (*καρπός*), a missionary term used in v. 24: “much fruit”, and the judgment over “this world” in v. 31. The two disciples referring the Greeks to Jesus bear Greek names. The provenance of Philip from Bethsaida “in Galilee” is noted explicitly, and this could enforce the hint to the area of the gentiles (cf. Isa 8,23–9,1, quoted in Matt 4,15f).

Second, the term “seeing” for “meeting” Jesus is unique in John and rare in the rest of the New Testament. Luke uses it (besides 8,20 and Acts 28,20) in 9,9 for Herod’s wish “to see Jesus”. But here the verb has a negative tone in the perspective of the narrator, alien to John, so that a dependence of John on Luke⁽³²⁾ can be excluded here.

Third, the nearer context of vv. 23-36 suggests an influence of the Fourth Song of the Suffering Servant as has been shown already (above, 2). Isa 52,15 stands between 52,13, the verse which combines the coming *ψωθῆναι* and *δοξασθῆναι* of the Servant, and 53,1,

⁽³¹⁾ Cf. J. BECKER, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, I (ÖkTbKomm, NT; Gütersloh-Würzburg 1979) 332f, who with good reasons pleads for gentile Christians. His theory of literary layers in John 10,1-18 remains debatable; cf. *The Shepherd Discourse in John 10* (SNTSMS; Cambridge [in press]; J. BEUTLER - R. T. FORTNA, ed.]).

⁽³²⁾ In this sense M. GOULDER, “From Ministry to Passion in Luke and John”, *NTS* 29 (1983) 561-568: 564.

which follows in John 12,38. Given the fact that there are more instances where whole sections of the Gospel of John seem to rely on coherent texts or groups of texts in the Old Testament, a similar midrashic way of composition can safely be accepted here. For similar cases I may refer to Barrett's commentary⁽³³⁾ and some previous studies of mine⁽³⁴⁾.

Fourth, the section following John 12,20-36, namely 12,37-43, quotes Isaiah twice explicitly: Isa 53,1 LXX in v. 38, and 6,10 in v. 40, as we have already seen (above, 1). As we noticed, the text seems to have been enlarged by other texts from Isaiah, which speak of the "blinding" of Israel by God. So the midrashic character of the whole section beginning with John 12,20 becomes more evident. The text of the Septuagint seems to be the source of John in all instances. The coincidence of Isa 6,9f and 52,13–53,12 in John 12,37-43 does not seem to be incidental, as has been shown by P. Beauchamp⁽³⁵⁾; the two texts seem to mark the beginning and the end of the career of the prophet as seen in the perspective of a redactor more or less contemporaneous with the so-called Trito-Isaiah.

Fifth, a strong argument for the given interpretation lies in the fact that Saint Paul uses Isa 52,15 LXX in Rom 15,21 in a missionary context. It is the only text in the New Testament (according to Nestle-Aland, 26th ed.) where a direct quotation of this Isaian verse from the Septuagint is given (further instances with an allusion to the Isaian text may be found in 1 Cor 2,9 and Matt 13,16: *ibid.*). In Rom 15,14-21 Paul gives the reason for his clear and outspoken letter to the Romans and why he wants to see them on his way to Spain, but also why he had not yet come to Rome: he is sent to the gentiles in order to bring them the good news, and he had to fulfill a great task in the east as far as Illyria, always building upon fresh ground and not on a foundation laid by others. So the word should be fulfilled:

οἵς οὐκ ἀνηγγέλῃ περὶ αὐτοῦ ὄψονται·
καὶ οἵ οὐκ ἀκηκόασιν συνήσουσιν.

⁽³³⁾ Cf. BARRETT, *St John*, 27-30.

⁽³⁴⁾ Cf. BEUTLER, "Psalm 42/43"; id., *Habt keine Angst. Die erste johanneische Abschiedsrede (Joh 14)* (SBS [KBW] 116; Stuttgart 1984); id., "Der alttestamentlich-jüdische Hintergrund der Hirtenrede in Joh 10", J. BEUTLER - R. T. FORTNA, *Shepherd Discourse*.

⁽³⁵⁾ BEAUCHAMP, "Lecture et relectures", 344f.

The quotation is in complete correspondence with the Septuagint (only B and a few MSS read the ὄψονται at the beginning and not the end of the first line). The text has clearly the meaning given to it by the translators of the Septuagint and refers explicitly to the gentiles, οἱ θύντες, mentioned as such in v. 16 and 18.

It can be virtually excluded that John knew Paul and his letter to the Romans. So a direct influence of Rom 15,21 on John 12,20 is extremely improbable. The similar use of the Isaian verse can be sufficiently explained by common recourse to the Isaian text. Since it is imbedded into one of the most important texts in the history of early Christianity, an occurrence more than once in the New Testament is by no means unusual. The first Christian communities trying to understand the passion of Christ must have started early to interpret it in the light of the Song of the Suffering Servant Isa 52,13-53,12. This is obvious from the eucharistic tradition with its ὑπέρ-formula in all of the four gospels and Saint Paul himself (1 Cor 11,24), cf. Mark 10,45 par.; see also Acts 3,13 (Peter: God has glorified his Servant); 8,32f (the eunuch reads Isa 53,7f). The Greek-speaking reader using the Septuagint of the Isaian Song could not overlook ch. 52,15 LXX, where the suffering and death of the Servant, but also his coming glorification and exaltation are linked with the coming of the gentiles, those who had not seen, to see him, and those who had not heard, to understand. John, who used the Septuagint of Isaiah in the context, must have known this verse and has probably used it in 12,20f⁽³⁶⁾.

IV. Conclusion: The text and its readers

If our observations are correct, the coming of the Greeks in order to see Jesus in John 12,20-22 does not stand apart from the following verses. It has been conditioned by the Old Testament background which has to be seen behind the whole scene in John 12,20-36 and also the following one: 12,37-43 with its twofold quotation of Isaiah. The Suffering Servant seems to be the leading figure behind the christology of John 12,20-43(44-50). It conditions also the soteriology of the section: the Servant has to pass through

⁽³⁶⁾ The nearest position to the one defended here is held by KOSSEN, "Who Were the Greeks". Nevertheless he fails to see the direct influence of Isa 52,15 LXX on John 12,20-22.

death, but he will be a source of salvation for all and hope (Isa 42,4) and light (49,6) for the nations. The coming of the Greeks to Jesus is the coming of those who had not seen, to behold the lamb of God (cf. John 1,29,36: does John 1,19-34, beginning with the quotation from Deutero-Isaiah 40,3 LXX in 1,23, form a great "inclusion" with 12,20-50?⁽³⁷⁾). The missionary aspect of the Gospel of John, which has been elaborated recently by Teresa Okure⁽³⁸⁾ on the basis of John 4,1-44, finds a confirmation in the given interpretation of John 12,20-50. Jesus came to save the world and to lead the nations to belief. He himself is the first missionary, and his exaltation on the cross opens to the gentiles the path to salvation.

What effect could John 12,20-50 have upon the readers? Certainly verses 12,20-36 and 44-50 contain a strong and final invitation to faith. It is the final hour. The coming of the Greeks to see Jesus is a sign of this hour. It is the moment of decision and judgment: "now shall the ruler of this world be cast out" (12,31). So the hour has to be used to believe in the light (12,35f.44-50).

Together with the final invitation to belief in Jesus, John 12,20-50 contains also a theological argument for the unbelief of the Jewish leaders⁽³⁹⁾. This is particularly evident from John 12,37-43 with the double quotation from Isaiah. Scripture has not only foretold the death of the Servant for the sake of the many, but also the reason for this death: unbelief of his people. This lack of faith itself is rooted in God's plan of salvation. The audience of Jesus did not just shut its eyes in front of him, but it was God himself who blinded them lest they be converted and believe. Scripture is a witness to the inscrutable ways of God (cf. Rom 11,33 in its context: the final salvation of all Israel!).

A final message for the readers of John 12,20-50 is the invitation to follow Jesus until death in fearless confession of faith. As Jesus dies, the grain of wheat falls into the earth, the disciple must be ready to die with him, to be there where his master is

⁽³⁷⁾) A correspondence between John 12,20-22 and 1,35ff as to content and *dramatis personae* has been noticed by K. TSUCHIDO, "Tradition and Redaction in John 12:1-43", *NTS* 30 (1984) 609-616; 613, n. 41.

⁽³⁸⁾) T. OKURE, *The Johannine Approach to Mission. A Contextual Study of John 4:1-42* (WUNT, 2nd ser., 31; Tübingen 1988).

⁽³⁹⁾) That the "Jews" in the characteristic johannine sense mean "the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem" has been shown convincingly by U.C. VON WAHLDE, "The Johannine 'Jews': A Critical Survey", *NTS* 28 (1982) 33-60.

(12,24-26). So the Father honours him, as he glorified his name (28) and his Son, the Son of Man (23). There are reasons to presume that the death which the disciple has to face is not just of spiritual nature or natural death after a long life. It may well be violent death due to persecution. This results from 12,42f, the last section, where the theme of “glory” ($\delta\delta\xi\alpha$) is resumed in John 12,20-50: “Nevertheless even many of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God”. The text echoes the healing and conversion of the man born blind in chapter nine, centred — as it seems — around vv.18-23⁽⁴⁰⁾: the readiness of the adult person to confess Christ even at the expense of social excommunication. The situation of the church in many countries today helps us to rediscover this dimension of Christian faith. By following Christ in fearless confession until death Christians prepare the ground for the salvation of many.

Phil.-Theol. Hochschule Sankt Georgen Johannes BEUTLER SJ
 Offenbacher Landstr. 224
 D-6000 Frankfurt am Main 70

SOMMAIRE

La cohérence interne et la place de Jn 12,20-36 en son contexte continuent de soulever de nombreuses questions. L’article montre que la cohérence interne et externe du passage ne peut apparaître vraiment que si l’on perçoit l’arrière-fond isaïen qui innervé narration et discours. Pour Jn 12,20-21, c’est le quatrième Chant du Serviteur, en particulier Is 52,15 LXX qui permet d’entrer dans l’intelligence profonde des enjeux christologiques de la scène et, indirectement, de l’ensemble du chapitre, voire de «l’évangile des signes».

⁽⁴⁰⁾ The seven sections of John 9 (vv. 1-7.8-12.13-17.18-23.24-34.35-38.39-41) seem to form a concentric structure — with strong links between the first and the last, but also the third and the fifth scene — centred around vv. 18-23.



Copyright and Use:

As an ATLAS user, you may print, download, or send articles for individual use according to fair use as defined by U.S. and international copyright law and as otherwise authorized under your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement.

No content may be copied or emailed to multiple sites or publicly posted without the copyright holder(s)' express written permission. Any use, decompiling, reproduction, or distribution of this journal in excess of fair use provisions may be a violation of copyright law.

This journal is made available to you through the ATLAS collection with permission from the copyright holder(s). The copyright holder for an entire issue of a journal typically is the journal owner, who also may own the copyright in each article. However, for certain articles, the author of the article may maintain the copyright in the article. Please contact the copyright holder(s) to request permission to use an article or specific work for any use not covered by the fair use provisions of the copyright laws or covered by your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement. For information regarding the copyright holder(s), please refer to the copyright information in the journal, if available, or contact ATLA to request contact information for the copyright holder(s).

About ATLAS:

The ATLA Serials (ATLAS®) collection contains electronic versions of previously published religion and theology journals reproduced with permission. The ATLAS collection is owned and managed by the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) and received initial funding from Lilly Endowment Inc.

The design and final form of this electronic document is the property of the American Theological Library Association.