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A table of contents for *Grace Theological Journal* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_grace-theological-journal.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_grace-theological-journal.php)

## THE TEXT OF JOHN 3:13

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*Examination of the external and internal evidence for the reading of John 3:13 indicates that the longer reading (which includes the clause ὁ ὢν ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ) should be regarded as authentic. This longer reading has extensive external attestation. Furthermore, transcriptional probabilities and John's style and theology lend strong internal support for this reading. Therefore, John 3:13 is a proof of the omnipresence of the earthly Jesus.*

\* \* \*

### INTRODUCTION

TEXT-CRITICAL studies on the Gospel of John have concentrated mainly on the pericope of the adulterous woman, which is placed in modern editions of the Greek NT between 7:52 and 8:12 (sometimes relegated to the critical apparatus). There is, however, at least one other major textual problem in John which calls for special attention.<sup>1</sup> The present article examines the text of John 3:13 in which the final clause, "who is in heaven" (ὁ ὢν ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ), is lacking in important Greek witnesses to the text of John. It is argued on the basis of both external and internal considerations that the words were original and later were deleted to avoid saying that Jesus was simultaneously present in heaven. Hence, the disputed reading in John 3:13 should be allowed to stand as an explicit statement of the omnipresence of the Son of Man, even as he walked on the earth.

<sup>1</sup>An exhaustive list of the more problematic textual variants in John is given by R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, trans. K. Smyth (New York: Herder, 1968) I. 182-87. The author specifies some 53 examples of textual variation "to give an impression of the need for textual criticism on John" (p. 182). The editorial committee of the UBS Greek NT has considered 207 places of variation in John, setting forth the reasons for including certain variants in the text and for relegating others to the apparatus. See B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1971) 195-258. I am grateful to my colleague Harry Sturz for bringing this variant to my attention. I also acknowledge a special debt to past teachers Bo Reicke and Markus Barth for encouraging me to delve into the textual history of John.

## EXTERNAL CRITERIA

The text of John 3:13 circulated in the early church in two basic yet quite distinct forms, one which included the words  $\delta\ \omega\nu\ \epsilon\nu\ \tau\tilde{\omega}\ \omicron\upsilon\rho\alpha\nu\tilde{\omega}$ , and another which lacked them. The former, which has been traditionally regarded as authentic, is represented by a diversified array of witnesses, primarily non-Alexandrine in character. The other form is attested chiefly by the Alexandrian group of manuscripts, in particular the uncials  $\kappa$  and B, and by early papyrus codices of the Bodmer collection. This section examines in greater detail the external textual evidence for and against the reading  $\delta\ \omega\nu\ \epsilon\nu\ \tau\tilde{\omega}\ \omicron\upsilon\rho\alpha\nu\tilde{\omega}$ .

With the UBS *Greek New Testament*<sup>2</sup> and Tischendorf's 8th Edition<sup>3</sup> serving as sources, evidence from the manuscripts, versions and Fathers has been accumulated and segregated under the leading text-types or groups of witnesses (Table 1).

In assessing the evidence, the following observations can be made. First, considerations of external evidence clearly demonstrate that readings (3) and (4) are secondary. The former has only versional evidence in support, while the latter is supported only by two Greek manuscripts and the Sinaitic Syriac. Each of these readings is an apparent attempt, each in its own way, to alter reading (1) to avoid suggesting that Jesus was at once on earth and in heaven.

Variant reading (2) is also supported by a relatively small number of witnesses. This minority, however, comprises those manuscripts considered to be of the highest quality (as noted by Westcott<sup>4</sup>). The Bodmer papyri p<sup>66,75</sup> attest the shorter reading, as do the fourth century uncials Sinaiticus ( $\kappa$ ) and Vaticanus (B) which are the earliest and best uncial representatives in John of the Alexandrian text-type. The testimony of the Coptic and Ethiopic translations, as well as that of Origen, add further early versional and patristic support to this important array of Greek manuscripts. Thus, if the traditional reading be accepted as original, some attempt must be made to explain how the words were omitted in such early and noteworthy witnesses to the text of the NT.

On the other hand, it is also evident that the shorter reading is supported by a single text-type. In the Greek manuscript evidence, the omission is found only in the Alexandrian text-type. However, other Alexandrian witnesses, most notably several manuscripts of the

<sup>2</sup>Kurt Aland and others, eds., *The Greek New Testament* (3d ed.; New York: United Bible Societies, 1975) 329.

<sup>3</sup>C. Tischendorf, *Novum Testamentum Graece* (8th ed.; Graz, Austria: Akademische Druck und Verlagsanstalt, 1965) l. 765.

<sup>4</sup>B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St John* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 65.

TABLE I

*Witnesses to the Text of John 3:13*

Byzantine	Alexandrian	Western	Caesarean
(1) ἀνθρώπου ὁ ὢν ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ A <sup>vid</sup> (omit ὢν) A <sup>c</sup> EFGHKMSU VΓΛΠΨ 050 063 (θεοῦ for ἀνθρώπου) 1195 1344 1646 Byz <i>Leet</i> Eustathius Jacob-Nisibis Aphraates Epiphanius Basil Amphilochius Didymus Chrysostom Nonnus Theodoret	892 cop <sup>bo</sup> mss <sup>s</sup> Origen <sup>lat</sup> Dionysius	it <sup>a</sup> .aur.b.c.f.ill <sup>3</sup> .j.l.q.r <sup>2</sup> vg syr <sup>h</sup> Diatessaron <sup>a</sup> Hippolytus Novatian Hillary Lucifer	Θ f <sup>1</sup> f <sup>13</sup> 28 565 arm geo Cyril
(2) omit	p <sup>66,75</sup> κBLT <sup>b</sup> W <sup>supp</sup> 083 086 0113 33 1241 cop <sup>sa</sup> .bo <sup>mss</sup> .ach <sup>2</sup> .fay <sup>eth</sup> Origen <sup>lat</sup> Didymus	Diatessaron <sup>am.v</sup>	Apollinaris Cyril
(3) δες ἦν ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ		it <sup>c</sup> syr <sup>c</sup>	
(4) ὁ ὢν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ		0141 80 syr <sup>d</sup>	

Bohairic dialect, indicate that the words  $\delta\ \omega\upsilon\upsilon\ \epsilon\upsilon\ \tau\tilde{\omega}\ \omicron\upsilon\rho\alpha\nu\tilde{\omega}$  were also known early in Egypt. Moreover, concerning the patristic evidence, the testimony of Origen, an Alexandrian Father, indicates only that he was acquainted with the local text as preserved in Greek witnesses and versions. Otherwise, ecclesiastical tradition points to the general acceptance of the phrase as original. Summarizing, then, it appears that the strongest evidence in favor of the shorter reading is the fact that the words  $\delta\ \omega\upsilon\upsilon\ \epsilon\upsilon\ \tau\tilde{\omega}\ \omicron\upsilon\rho\alpha\nu\tilde{\omega}$  are lacking in the early Alexandrian manuscripts  $\rho^{66,75}$ ,  $\kappa$  and  $B$ .

The evidence for the inclusion of the words (reading 1) is as follows. The phrase is found in nearly all the uncial and minuscule manuscripts of the NT as well as in nearly every ancient version, including the Bohairic of lower Egypt. Support for the longer reading is also found in the great majority of the earliest patristic witnesses, including Origen<sup>5</sup> himself, whose testimony at this point is divided equally between readings (1) and (2). Moreover, this reading is not limited to manuscripts of only one geographical area, as is its omission. The reading was accepted as genuine over a wide geographic area, encompassing most of the then civilized ancient world: Rome and the West, Greece, Syria and Palestine, and even Alexandria, the literary capital of Egypt.

These considerations are significant according to generally accepted canons of textual criticism which apply to the external evidence of readings. Greenlee, for example, states that any reading supported by one text-type exclusively is suspect since "no ms. or text-type is perfectly trustworthy."<sup>6</sup> Conversely, "a reading which is supported by good representatives of two or more text-types is generally preferable to a reading supported by one text-type exclusively."<sup>7</sup> This line of thinking favors the longer reading. The external evidence shows almost the entire ancient tradition supporting the disputed phrase (including the Old Latin [*Itala*], which establishes the date of the longer reading as at least the last quarter of the second century).<sup>8</sup> Also significant is the geographical distribution of the witnesses in support of the longer reading. Being from such a wide geographical

<sup>5</sup>"Non dixit qui fuit, sed qui est in caelo" (cited in Tischendorf, *Novum Testamentum*, I, 765).

<sup>6</sup>J. H. Greenlee, *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 119.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Greenlee (*Introduction*, 46) dates the origin of the *Itala* "before the second century had passed," while B. M. Metzger (*The Text of the New Testament* [Oxford: Oxford University, 1968] 72) places the earliest Latin translations in North Africa within "the last quarter of the second century," and adds that "not long afterward translations were also made in Italy, Gaul, and elsewhere."

area, it is highly improbable that there is any genealogical relationship between them. The testimony of the Greek manuscripts, ancient versions, and Church Fathers thus forms, as it were, a strong three-cord strand which is not easily broken. If, therefore, the reading which is both early and supported by independent witnesses from a wide geographical area is more likely to be original, as Greenlee suggests, then clearly reading (I) should be preferred.

The retreat at this point by many scholars, such as Morris,<sup>9</sup> to the early uncials Sinaiticus and Vaticanus is understandable. The reading of  $\kappa$  and B where they agree, and of B alone where they disagree, has long been accepted as original in places of variation. However, despite the acknowledged antiquity and worth of these great uncials, it has become increasingly common since the days of Westcott and Hort to question the reading of these witnesses when they stand alone. Greenlee writes: "The agreement of B  $\kappa$  remains one of the most highly regarded witnesses to the New Testament text, but it is generally doubted that the text is as pure as W-H believed it to be."<sup>10</sup> Metzger concurs:

As a rule of thumb, the beginner may ordinarily follow the Alexandrian text except in the case of readings contrary to the criteria which are responsible for its being given preference in general. Such a procedure, however, must not be allowed to degenerate into merely looking for the reading which is supported by B and  $\kappa$  (or even B alone, as Hort was accused of doing); in every instance a full and careful evaluation is to be made of all the variant readings in the light of both transcriptional and intrinsic probabilities.<sup>11</sup>

All of this does not mean, of course, that the Alexandrian witnesses have become less important in the actual practice of textual criticism. It does mean, however, that the readings of  $\kappa$  and B, even when supported by early papyri, cannot be accepted *prima facie*, for the idea of Hort's "neutral text" is untenable and no longer should be accepted. Critics of the text are thus in general agreement that, in the present state of research, no single group of manuscripts can be given an absolute preference.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup>"The words 'who is in heaven' are absent from some of the most reliable manuscripts and they should probably be omitted" (L. Morris, *The Gospel According to John* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971] 224). For a similar judgment see E. F. Harrison (*John, The Gospel of Faith* [Chicago: Moody, 1962] 26), who writes, "The last clause of verse 13 lacks sufficient manuscript authority to be accepted as part of the text."

<sup>10</sup>Greenlee, *Introduction*, 86.

<sup>11</sup>Metzger, *Text of the NT*, 218.

<sup>12</sup>However, though it claims to be eclectic, there is evidence that the UBS Greek NT is a text dominated by  $\kappa$  and B, as is argued by J. K. Elliott in "The United Bible

Undoubtedly one's idea of the history of the text and one's principles of textual criticism will influence his decision in the present case. My own view, simply stated, is that an early reading supported by representatives from two or more text-types is preferable to a reading supported by witnesses of a single text-type, even a text-type regarded (properly or not) as the best ancient recension. It seems highly unlikely that such a localized reading could have a better claim to originality than a reading which is both early, widespread, and heavily attested. On the basis of external criteria, it therefore appears that the disputed words are original.

Greenlee's summary of the Alexandrian text is worth quoting for those who still may have qualms about rejecting the reading of p<sup>66, 75</sup>, κ and B: "As such, it is probably the best single text of the local texts; but like the others its readings cannot be accepted uncritically but must be submitted to the principles of criticism."<sup>13</sup> An important factor militating against an uncritical acceptance of the early Alexandrian manuscripts is that they show a capacity to support readings which—even in the eyes of the editors of the UBS Greek NT—are likely to be wrong. For example, in 1 Cor 2:10 the reading given in the text of the UBS Greek NT<sup>3</sup> is δέ, but p<sup>46</sup> B 1739 Clement read in its place γάρ, a conjunction which Metzger says "has the appearance of being an improvement introduced by the copyists."<sup>14</sup> Another and more significant example is the reading Χριστοῦ in 1 Cor 1:8, which is omitted in p<sup>46</sup> B, as Metzger says, "either accidentally in copying . . . or perhaps deliberately for aesthetic reasons."<sup>15</sup> The short reading of B 1216 in Matt 13:44 leads Metzger to speak of "the Alexandrian penchant for pruning unnecessary words."<sup>16</sup> Even in the Gospel of John itself there are readings in Alexandrian manuscripts which the UBS Greek NT editors have attributed to scribal error. The omission of Ἰησοῦς by p<sup>75</sup> κ B W in 5:17, of θεοῦ by p<sup>66, 75</sup> B W in 5:44, and of εἰ ὁ θεὸς ἔδοξάσθη ἐν αὐτῷ by p<sup>66</sup> κ\*B C\* D L W in 13:22, as well as the substitution of ἔλιγμα for μίγμα by κ\* B W in 19:39 are but four

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Societies' Textual Commentary," *NovT* 17 (1975) 131ff. Elsewhere Elliott speaks of "the reluctance of the editors to deviate too far from these hypnotic mss. κ B" ("A Second Look at the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament," *BT* 27 [1975] 328). If Elliott's conclusions are correct, one could almost speak of the text of κ and B as a modern "Textus Receptus," the overthrow of which is as difficult today as it was during the period of the struggle for a critical text.

<sup>13</sup>Greenlee, *Introduction*, 86–87.

<sup>14</sup>Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 546.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 544.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 34.

examples.<sup>17</sup> The concurrence of these early witnesses behind doubtful readings raises questions about their integrity as witnesses to the original text.

Summarizing, then, in this case it appears that, according to accepted canons of text-criticism, the reading most likely to be original on the basis of external criteria is the one which includes the words  $\acute{\omicron}\ \acute{\omega}\nu\ \acute{\epsilon}\nu\ \tau\acute{\omega}\ \omicron\upsilon\beta\rho\alpha\nu\acute{\omega}$ . The omission, though early and supported by the chief representatives of the Alexandrian text, is less likely to be original due to the scarcity and geographical limitation of manuscript support (as well as the possibility that this text-type may not be as inherently pure as it was once thought to be). Therefore, there appears to be no conclusive reason based on external criteria for rejecting the strong textual and historical testimony in favor of the longer reading.

#### INTERNAL CRITERIA

In assessing the text of John 3:13, one must also take into consideration *internal* evidence. This involves two kinds of criteria: transcriptional and intrinsic probabilities. The former involves evaluating the kinds of mistakes or alterations a scribe may make as he copied a text while the latter considers what the author was more likely to have written. Under transcriptional probabilities, four canons are generally accepted: (1) the more difficult reading is to be preferred; (2) the shorter reading is to be preferred except where parablepsis may have occurred or where a "scribe may have omitted material which he deemed to be (i) superfluous, (ii) harsh, or (iii) contrary to pious belief, liturgical usage, or ascetical practice";<sup>18</sup> (3) the reading which is verbally dissident is to be preferred to one which is verbally concordant with a parallel passage; and (4) the reading which best accounts for the other variants is to be preferred.

#### *Prefer the More Difficult Reading*

Preference for the longer reading established on the basis of external evidence finds strong internal support in the first of these

<sup>17</sup>Cf. also the text of B L Origen in John 1:26 ( $\sigma\tau\acute{\eta}\kappa\epsilon\iota$  for  $\xi\sigma\tau\eta\kappa\epsilon\nu$ ), the text of p<sup>45</sup> κ\* B in 10:18 ( $\eta\beta\rho\nu$  for  $\alpha\beta\rho\epsilon\iota$ ), and the text of p<sup>66</sup> κ B Θ in 20:31 ( $\pi\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\eta\tau\epsilon$  for  $\pi\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\sigma\eta\tau\epsilon$ ). The evidence for 3:13 is much like that for 10:18, where Metzger (*Textual Commentary*, 231) writes, "a majority of the Committee judged that its external attestation was too limited in extent, representing, as it does, only a single textual type (the Egyptian)." Elsewhere, I have argued along similar lines in relation to the text of Eph 1:1 ("The Peculiarities of Ephesians and the Ephesian Address," *GTJ* 2 [1981] 59-73).

<sup>18</sup>Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, xxvii.



canons, since it obviously is the more difficult reading. Assuming that John 3:13 belongs to Jesus' narrative with Nicodemus,<sup>19</sup> the longer reading has Christ saying that he was *at that moment* present both in heaven and on earth. The awkwardness of this saying would explain the origin of readings (3) and (4), which undoubtedly were produced to make the longer reading less objectionable (it is much more difficult to assert that Jesus "is in heaven" while speaking to Nicodemus than to say that he "was in heaven" or that he "is from heaven"). Thus Metzger, writing on behalf of the minority of the UBS Greek NT editorial committee, remarks, "If the shorter reading . . . were original, there is no discernible motive which would have prompted copyists to add the words  $\delta \omega \nu \epsilon \nu \tau \omega \upsilon \rho \alpha \nu \omega$ , resulting in a most difficult saying."<sup>20</sup> On the whole, therefore, preference should be given to reading (1) as the more difficult of the four variants.

### *Prefer the Shorter Reading*

Because scribes were more prone to add words than to omit them, the shorter reading is generally to be preferred. This fact, coupled with the assumed quality of the external attestation, was no doubt decisive in the decision to relegate  $\delta \omega \nu \epsilon \nu \tau \omega \upsilon \rho \alpha \nu \omega$  to the apparatus in all three editions of the UBS Greek NT. However, it may be that the omission of these words falls under the recognized exceptions to this canon of textual-criticism. This canon states that the shorter reading is to be preferred *unless* the scribe either accidentally omitted material due to parablepsis, or else intentionally omitted material on stylistic, grammatical, liturgical or doctrinal grounds. Thus, one needs to take these other considerations into account in order to decide which reading should be considered original.

On the one hand, it is difficult to see how the words  $\delta \omega \nu \epsilon \nu \tau \omega \upsilon \rho \alpha \nu \omega$  could have been omitted accidentally. The well-known phenomena of homoioteleuton, homoioarcton and haplography do

<sup>19</sup>That in 3:13 we have the words of Jesus and not the meditations of the evangelist is argued persuasively by R. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (I-XII)* (AB; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1966) 149.

<sup>20</sup>Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 203. The possibility exists, of course, that the disputed words are to be taken in an atemporal sense, resulting in the translation, "who was in heaven," as suggested by M. Zerwick (*Biblical Greek* [Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute Press, 1963] 92, par 274; 129, par 372). This rendering, however, would not account for the objectionable nature of the reading which probably led to its modification or omission in the first place. Apparently early copyists understood the participle as referring to "real" or present time rather than a timeless quality, although the latter understanding may indeed be true in the case of Jesus.

not apply in this case,<sup>21</sup> nor can the omission be explained on the basis of an error of the ear, memory or judgment. The possibility of an intentional omission, however, remains a viable option. Certain scribes may have found the expression either superfluous, too difficult, or objectionable for doctrinal reasons. A change in the opposite direction would be possible but less probable, especially in view of the tendency to remove or tone down a reference to Jesus' deity as seen in readings (3) and (4). Despite Metzger's assertion that the longer reading may reflect "later Christological development,"<sup>22</sup> there are no discernible reasons why copyists would have introduced the words *at this point* in John's Gospel. Indeed, Metzger's *Commentary* shows that a minority of the committee agreed that the longer reading, "having been found objectionable or superfluous in the context, was modified either by omitting the participial clause, or by altering it."<sup>23</sup> In view of this possibility, the longer text deserves serious consideration even on the basis of this canon of criticism.<sup>24</sup>

#### *Prefer the Verbally Dissident Reading*

Schnackenburg<sup>25</sup> considered the words  $\delta \omega \nu \epsilon \nu \tau \tilde{\omega} \upsilon \rho \alpha \nu \tilde{\omega}$  to be a later gloss added on the model of 1:18, as did Hort<sup>26</sup> before him. However, the statement in 1:18 is neither directly parallel with 3:13 nor does it belong to the same literary and historical context as the discourse in John 13. John 1:18 refers to the time after the ascension of Jesus. There, as John looks back from his own period of history to the revelation of God which has already taken place, he states that the Father and the Son enjoy the most intimate communion. In 3:13, however, the words  $\delta \omega \nu \epsilon \nu \tau \tilde{\omega} \upsilon \rho \alpha \nu \tilde{\omega}$  are uttered by the earthly Jesus and express his omnipresence at the very time the historical revelation was being made. It therefore seems unnecessary to suppose that the disputed phrase is a comment made from the same standpoint as 1:18.

<sup>21</sup>Homoioteleuton is possible only with reading (4) which concludes with the words  $\epsilon \kappa \tau \tilde{\omega} \upsilon \rho \alpha \nu \tilde{\omega}$ , a phrase found earlier in v 13, but this reading is clearly secondary, as shown above.

<sup>22</sup>Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 204.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Recently J. M. Ross has shown the unreasonableness of simply following the Alexandrian uncial manuscripts or, when in doubt, automatically selecting the shorter reading. He would assign greater weight to transcriptional and intrinsic probabilities in judging between NT variants. See his article, "Some Unnoticed Points in the Text of the New Testament," *NovT* 25 (1983) 59-72.

<sup>25</sup>*John*, I, 394.

<sup>26</sup>"The character of the attestation marks the addition as a Western gloss, suggested perhaps by i 18" (B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek* [London: Macmillan and Co., 1896] 75).

*Prefer the Reading Which Best Accounts for the Others*

Had either reading (3) or reading (4) been original, there is no reason why scribes would have altered the text. If, however, the longer text is original, one can easily understand the other variants as attempts to modify or to remove completely a difficult expression. Readings (3) and (4) are most easily explained as modifications of reading (1) which includes the words  $\delta \omega\nu \epsilon\nu \tau\tilde{\omega} \upsilon\rho\alpha\nu\tilde{\omega}$ . The absence of the words in the Alexandrian witnesses would be due either to accidental omission (though this is improbable) or to their rejection because they were found objectionable for some reason. This is more likely than Schnackenburg's explanation that the longer reading is attributable to the work of a glossator. Therefore, the longer reading best accounts for the rise of the other readings.

There remains now the matter of intrinsic probabilities of what the author was more likely to have written. In this regard one must take into account (1) a reading's harmony with the author's teaching elsewhere; and (2) a reading's harmony with the author's style and vocabulary.

*The Author's Theology*

Although readings (3) and (4) are consistent with Johannine theology (cf. John 1:1, 14), it is more difficult to determine if the expression  $\delta \omega\nu \epsilon\nu \tau\tilde{\omega} \upsilon\rho\alpha\nu\tilde{\omega}$  (which teaches the omnipresence of Jesus during his earthly ministry) is consistent. The absence of parallels to this clause is explained by varying theological emphases John stresses in different contexts, by the gaps in the writer's narrative, and by the uniqueness of this nocturnal dialogue with the Pharisee Nicodemus recorded in 3:1-21 (elsewhere Jesus is engaged only with "the Jews" or "the Pharisees"). Nevertheless, the theological theme discussed here makes an important contribution to the theology of the Fourth Gospel. The Johannine Jesus is not only the preexistent Word (1:1) and the post-resurrection exalted Christ (20:28), but also the Revealer and Savior who remained "with God" while present in the "flesh" (1:1, 14). The apparent anomaly of having God explain God (cf. 1:18) is reconciled in John's doctrine of the incarnate Logos. In the person of Jesus Christ, heaven has come to earth and earth has been linked with heaven. The Word which became flesh did not cease to be what he was before, for the flesh assumed by the Logos at the incarnation was the "tabernacle" (to use John's expression in 1:14) in which God was pleased to dwell with men.<sup>27</sup> Thus the witness who

<sup>27</sup>Cf. E. M. Sidebottom (*The Christ of the Fourth Gospel* [London: SPCK, 1961] 124): "The Son of Man does not, for example, cease to be divine by 'descending'." and

apprehended the divinity of the eternal Logos in and in spite of the flesh could testify, "And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (1:14).

One could also point in this connection to 1:51, where the expression "Son of Man" is first used in John: "You shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." Commenting on this verse Wright says,

This is a record, in pictorial and allegorical language, of the signal manifestations, to be witnessed by the disciples during the Ministry of Jesus, of the unique communion with God which he knew. The passage is expressive of that intercourse between heaven and earth which was manifest throughout the whole Ministry of Him who was truly man.<sup>28</sup>

In 3:13 John is giving expression, in a similarly dramatic way, to the consciousness of Jesus, who himself "ascends" and "descends."<sup>29</sup> 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. "Who has ascended to heaven and come down? Who has gathered the wind in his fists?" (Prov 30:4). The answer, of course, is this Jesus who, whether spoken of as the Christ, the Son of God or the Son of Man, came from "above," from God, where he preexisted as the Logos (1:1). The Son of Man is the *only* authentic revealer of God, since he alone has come down from above. These exalted claims of Jesus, that he is the preexistent Son, whom John has called the "Word," and that because of his Sonship he has authority to reveal what he has seen with the Father, show that Jesus is not only the revealer but the revelation itself. Salvation comes from the acceptance of him, the only-begotten Son of God, sent into the world because of God's love to save the world (3:16). John has recorded this "good news" so that people may come to believe in this revelation, confess Jesus as the Christ, and thus come to eternal life (20:31).

In view of all this, it is difficult to understand Wright's assertion that the words  $\acute{\omicron} \tilde{\omega}\nu \acute{\epsilon}\nu \tau\tilde{\omega} \upsilon\tilde{\rho}\alpha\nu\tilde{\omega}$  "express a more developed, or

"The descent from 'above' to 'below' is not a simple passage from one sphere to the other, but the unification of the two."

<sup>28</sup>C. J. Wright, *Jesus, The Revelation of God* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1950) 73.

<sup>29</sup>Cf. P. Ricca (*Die Eschatologie des Vierten Evangeliums* [Zürich: Gotthelf, 1966] 95): "Die Bedeutung von 1, 51 wird in 3, 13f. und 8, 28 näher bestimmt: Das Herabkommen des Menschensohnes ermöglicht es dem Menschen, mit ihm in den Himmel zu steigen, denn er ist der Weg, der die Erde mit dem Himmel verbindet" ("The meaning of 1:51 is more closely defined in 3:13f and 8:28: the descent of the Son of Man enables man to rise with him into heaven, for he is the Way who binds earth with heaven").

more speculative, Christology than is found in the Gospel."<sup>30</sup> Every essential attribute of deity is predicated of Christ in this gospel which makes several distinct contributions to Christology.<sup>31</sup> The greatest body of evidence to Christ's deity—the seven signs (σημεῖα) of his earthly ministry selected by John from among many others—is further supplemented by the Lord's own assertions (cf. 5:16–18; 10:30–39) and by apostolic testimony ascribing to the earthly Jesus the attributes of omniscience (1:48–50; 4:29; 16:30; 20:24–28; 21:17), omnipotence (5:19; 20:30–31) and omnipresence (1:48). As with the signs, these statements were designed to demonstrate that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (20:31). Even the Lord's reference to himself as ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ("the Son of Man") is an inescapable implication of deity (cf. Dan 7:13). Although this title is only used of Jesus in his human state, it in no way excludes the idea of John's use of "the Son of God," which speaks of Jesus' union with the Father before, during and after the incarnation.

What Moloney has written of the Johannine Son of Man is apropos at this point of our discussion: "The Johannine Son of Man is the human Jesus, the incarnate Logos; he has come to reveal God with a unique and ultimate authority and in the acceptance or refusal of this revelation the world judges itself."<sup>32</sup> In other words, the role of the Son of Man in John can only be understood when one correctly understands his relationship with God. Because he has come from God and indeed is God, he can reveal him with ultimate authority. Thus Jesus, by designating himself as the Son of Man who is also in heaven, reveals that he is conscious of the divine glory and the unique authority which he has with the Father even while walking the earth in the base form of a servant.

The Son of Man, then, was "with God" (1:1) and "in heaven" (3:13) while standing before his interlocutor, revealing the ἐπουράνια ("heavenly things") and speaking "of what he knows." Nicodemus, within limitations, is prepared to see Jesus as a Rabbi "from God," a prophet like the great men of Israel and a teacher *par excellence*, but he cannot or will not understand the message of salvation-condemnation brought by this revealer who has come into the world. The message involves ἐπουράνια, and can be fully understood only by one who has seen it and knows it, and who has come from heaven to tell what he has seen and heard. As a representative of the Jewish authorities Nicodemus confessed to a belief in Jesus which was insufficient, and in spite of his professional knowledge of the OT remained incredulous

<sup>30</sup>Wright, *Jesus*, 134.

<sup>31</sup>See W. R. Cook, *The Theology of John* (Chicago: Moody, 1979) 54–59.

<sup>32</sup>F. J. Moloney, *The Johannine Son of Man* (Rome: LAS, 1978) 220.

of the truth of the new birth. But what Nicodemus had failed to understand, John the Baptist had properly grasped—there is a birth ἀνωθεν (“from above”) because Jesus is ὁ ἀνωθεν ἐρχόμενος (“the one who comes from above,” cf. 3:31). This could only be understood through Jesus himself, in whose earthly existence heavenly things become visible and comprehensible.<sup>33</sup>

### *The Author's Style*

The issue here is not whether John *could* have written these words; an author must be granted the privilege of using rare forms on occasion as the subject matter requires. Yet a general knowledge of the characteristics of an author's style and vocabulary often will help determine whether a variant reading is in harmony with the rest of the author's writings.

The picture of John's literary style is admittedly incomplete. There is nothing in it, however, which requires us to place the words ὁ ὢν ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ outside his own literary capabilities. The clause contains features which, taken at face value, seem faithfully to reflect the apostle's characteristic style, grammar, and vocabulary. A check of Moulton and Geden's *Concordance*<sup>34</sup> reveals that six of the eleven occurrences of ὁ ὢν with a prepositional phrase appear in the Fourth Gospel:

Matt 12:30	ὁ μὴ ὢν μετ' ἐμοῦ κατ' ἐμοῦ ἐστίν
Luke 11:23	ὁ μὴ ὢν μετ' ἐμοῦ κατ' ἐμοῦ ἐστίν
John 1:18	ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς
John 3:31	ὁ ὢν ἐκ τῆς γῆς ἐκ τῆς γῆς ἐστίν
John 6:46	εἰ μὴ ὁ ὢν παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ
John 8:47	ὁ ὢν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ τὰ ῥήματα τοῦ θεοῦ ἀκούει
John 12:17	ὁ ὄχλος ὁ ὢν μετ' αὐτοῦ
John 18:37	πᾶς ὁ ὢν ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας
Rom 9:5	ὁ Χριστὸς τὸ κατὰ σάρκα ὁ ὢν ἐπὶ πάντων
2 Cor 11:31	ὁ ὢν εὐλογητὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας
Eph 2:4	ὁ δὲ θεὸς πλούσιος ὢν ἐν ἐλέει

<sup>33</sup>One cannot help but see Nicodemus, “a ruler of the Jews,” as representing a Judaism which fails due to its incomplete faith, its unwillingness to go beyond the ἐπίγεια (“earthly things”), and its disregard for the message of rebirth from above in the Spirit (cf. H. Leroy, *Rätsel und Missverständnis: Ein Beitrag zur Formgeschichte des Johannesevangeliums* [BBB 30; Bonn: Hanstein, 1968] 124–36). Because the Baptist has correctly understood the mystery of Jesus, he has become the model of one who is open to “heavenly things,” as the evangelist points out in 3:31–36.

<sup>34</sup>W. F. Moulton and A. S. Geden, *A Concordance to the Greek Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975) 279–81.

The construction in Rom 9:5 and the six constructions in John are exactly parallel to the variant  $\delta \omega \nu \epsilon \nu \tau \omega \upsilon \rho \alpha \nu \omega$  in John 3:13. Thus, it appears that this usage is not only Johannine but *almost exclusively* so in the NT. This fact points to the appropriateness of a more detailed examination of this construction in John.

The six occurrences in John are distributed fairly evenly over the gospel. Three of them refer directly to Jesus (1:18; 6:46; 8:47). A decisive element in the choice and formulation of this construction appears to be how useful and significant the texts were for John's Christology. This is clear from 1:18, which is a pronouncement of the evangelist. The metaphorical expression  $\delta \omega \nu \epsilon \iota \varsigma \tau \omicron \nu \kappa \omicron \lambda \pi \omicron \nu \tau \omicron \upsilon \pi \alpha \tau \rho \acute{\omicron} \varsigma$  simply renders "with God" of 1:1 in another way. Thus, at the end of his prologue the author affirmed once more the relationship of the Son of God to the Father which never ceased during his earthly ministry. In so doing, John prepared the ground for his subsequent account of the revelational discourses of Jesus in which Christ's existence is said to be  $\epsilon \nu \tau \omega \upsilon \rho \alpha \nu \omega$  (3:13),  $\pi \alpha \rho \acute{\alpha} \tau \omicron \upsilon \theta \epsilon \omicron \upsilon$  (6:46), and  $\epsilon \kappa \tau \omicron \upsilon \theta \epsilon \omicron \upsilon$  (8:47). Hence, the construction in 3:13 forms a link between the Logos-hymn and the discourses of Jesus presented in the Gospel. John 1:18 explains the eternal mode of existence of the divine Son of God (i.e., one of intimate fellowship with the Father), while 3:13, 6:46 and 8:47 explain his mode of existence as the incarnate Son of Man who remains with the Father even after being sent by him. These four occurrences could, therefore, be based on the consistent theological conception of Jesus' heavenly origin (6:46; 8:47) and his constant communion with the Father (1:18) even while on earth (3:13).

A different appraisal is called for in the three remaining texts. John 3:31 may be the words of the Baptist or the kerygmatic discourse of the evangelist on the preceding incident. But here again Jesus is pictured as the one who is "above all men" ( $\epsilon \pi \acute{\alpha \nu \omega} \pi \acute{\alpha \nu \tau \omega \nu}$ ) because, as the heavenly witness and revealer, he "comes from above" ( $\delta \acute{\alpha} \nu \omega \theta \epsilon \nu \epsilon \rho \chi \acute{\omicron} \mu \epsilon \nu \omicron \varsigma$ ). The expression "he who is from the earth" ( $\delta \omega \nu \epsilon \kappa \tau \eta \varsigma \gamma \eta \varsigma$ ) means men in general, who are inferior to him and completely dependent upon his revelation. Since they are "earthly" ( $\epsilon \kappa \tau \eta \varsigma \gamma \eta \varsigma$ ) in origin, they are also earthly in nature, oriented in thought and language to earthly things ( $\tau \grave{\alpha} \epsilon \pi \iota \gamma \epsilon \iota \alpha$ ), as was Nicodemus. By virtue of origin and nature, "he who is from above" is superior to them in principle, absolutely and unrestrictedly. But here it is not a matter of contrast but of degree. The "heavenly" one surpasses the "earthly," but was also sent by the Father as the salvation of the world which he loved (3:16). This "dualism" is far from being Gnostic in nature, for here the heavenly envoy comes to earth and gives the earth-born that which is necessary to become "children

of God" (1:12) and partakers of the heavenly world when they are "born from above" (3:3, 5).

At first sight, there appears to be nothing significant about 12:17, which speaks of the crowd that was with Jesus (ὁ ὄχλος ὁ ὢν μετ' αὐτοῦ) when he called Lazarus out of his grave. But the explanation given by Barrett allows an application of this text also to the ascending and descending Son of Man motif.<sup>35</sup> The crowd that greeted Jesus as ὁ ἐρχόμενος (v 13) had been stirred by the raising of Lazarus openly to hail Jesus as the Messiah. For the Pharisees this meant that at best they must postpone their plans to kill Jesus until after the Passover (cf. Luke 19:47-48), or at worst it meant the complete failure of all their plans. Some of them felt the latter to be the case, and in a burst of deep despair cried out, "Behold, the world [ὁ κόσμος] is gone after him" (12:19). Barrett sees in this Semitic idiom (ὁ κόσμος meaning "everyone") an allusion to John 3:16-17, where it is stated that Jesus was sent into the world (ὁ κόσμος) to save the world, including Gentiles (although one need not suppose that this motley crowd of enthusiasts included actual Gentiles). The Gospel of John presents the idea of the spiritual character of the Kingdom, although men think its advent will be earthly and political in nature. Not only was Nicodemus and the crowd blind to this spiritual truth, but even the apostles themselves had not yet come to see the real significance of Jesus' pronouncement that the Kingdom of God is within men's hearts. Could not the "crowd" that thronged about Jesus be a symbolic representation of this unbelieving, uncomprehending attitude?<sup>36</sup>

The final occurrence of the phrase in John appears in 18:37, where Jesus informs Pilate, "Every one who is of the truth [πᾶς ὁ ὢν ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας] hears my voice," a statement which prepares the way for Pilate's infamous inquiry, "What is truth?" (v 38). Theologically, the saying is important. Because Jesus himself is the sole means of access to God who is the source of all truth and life, he is in himself the truth and the life for men. As the opening hymn of the gospel sees in the bodily presence of the Logos among men the eschatological fulfillment of God's presence among men (1:14),<sup>37</sup> so here Jesus is pictured as the eternal reality which is beyond and above the phenomena of the world. Life, truth and access are characteristic

<sup>35</sup>See C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John* (London: SPCK, 1960) 349-50.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 350.

<sup>37</sup>In 1:14 Jesus is said to be "full of grace and truth," where "truth" (ἀλήθεια) probably is to be taken in an ontological sense to mean "divine reality" (cf. Schnackenburg, *John*, I. 273).



themes of John's gospel, and are marvelously linked together in the Lord's statement in 14:6: "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except by me." However, only those who are "of the truth" can see and follow and live. Truth stood before Pilate and yet he did not know it. Like Nicodemus, Pilate for all his interest in Jesus' case is not of the truth; he is of the world. Asking the question, "Quid est veritas?", he is ignorant that "Est vir qui adest," as the famous anagram puts it.<sup>38</sup>

When the similarities between 3:31, 12:17 and 18:37 are taken into account, the notion of a characteristic pattern based on the participial form of εἰμί becomes less speculative. Each of the passages provides a supplement for the others, but all together are also apparently deliberate references on the part of the evangelist to the "heavenly-earthly" motif drawing from his latent interest in Christology. The multitudes which follow Jesus are, like Nicodemus and Pilate, of "earthly" origin, unresponsive to "he who is from above." Perhaps the expression ἐκ τῆς γῆς in 3:31 is not as negative as ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου; but the distance is great enough. The earthly realm is populated by men who reveal an earthly way of thinking, who seek out Jesus but fall short of faith in him, who openly hail Jesus as a great man but choose darkness in preference to the light. The reflections of 3:31 and 18:37 on this enigmatic rejection of "the truth" are occasioned, at least in part, by Jesus' personal effort to seek to explain how, in spite of all God's efforts to save and in spite of the clear and unquestionable revelation of the Son, men could still close their hearts to the light. Their inexplicable "hatred" (3:20; 15:24) rises up from the abyss of a heart darkened by sin and corrupted by pride. Faith, however, overcomes all objections and recognizes the divine origin of Jesus in spite of his earthly lowliness. The one who throws away his doubts and proclaims his faith in Jesus as the Messiah is permitted to witness the glory of the Son of God. The conduct of Nathaniel of Cana is but one illustration of a heart ripe for receiving Jesus as Messiah (1:45-51). Such a man, in contrast to Nicodemus, the crowd and Pilate, is "a true Israelite, a man with nothing false in him" (1:47), a man "who is of the truth" (18:37).

It would therefore seem a fair conclusion, based on the above considerations, that the author of the Fourth Gospel was not unacquainted with both the theological content and the grammatical form of the expression ὁ ὢν ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ. Indeed, he is given over to the repetition of such a phrase. On the whole there does not appear to be any theological or linguistic evidence why John could not have

<sup>38</sup>Cited in A. T. Robertson, *The Divinity of Christ in the Gospel of John* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976) 141.

written these words. Since the longer reading is intelligible as it stands, it is preferable to conclude that it is an integral part of the Gospel.

#### CONCLUSION

Although much can be said for certain arguments in favor of the shorter reading, in my judgment the inclusion of the disputed words is the best solution since it is supported by significant external and internal evidence and retains a great deal of John's original use of the term "Son of Man." Given the strength and diversity of the external attestation, the improbability of an accidental omission, and the intrinsic probability favoring the inclusion of the phrase, I suggest that the longer text which includes the words  $\delta \omega \nu \epsilon \nu \tau \omega \upsilon \rho \alpha \nu \tilde{\omega}$  deserves to be taken more seriously by the editors of the UBS Greek NT.<sup>39</sup> The cumulative effect of the data can hardly be ignored; and the individual arguments present a strong *prima facie* reason for examining the matter again.

This witness to Christ's deity, on this reading of the evidence, is thus not a mere theologoumenon handed down by the church, but a witness deriving from Jesus himself, from his own teaching about his person, and verified in the testimony of John the apostle. His record is that the Son of Man, who has come from heaven, speaks truthfully about heavenly realities as a man may speak about his own home,<sup>40</sup> for the incarnation did not—indeed could not—denude heaven of the Son's presence. It is in this context that Augustine, who sounds very Johannine when writing of the Son of Man, could inquire of his reader:

Ecce hic erat et in caelo erat: hic erat in carne, in caelo erat divinitate, natus de matre, non recedens a Patre—Miraris quia et hic erat et in caelo?<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup>Perhaps the editors themselves are heading in this direction. The omission of  $\delta \omega \nu \epsilon \nu \tau \omega \upsilon \rho \alpha \nu \tilde{\omega}$  received an "A" rating in the UBS Greek NT<sup>1</sup>, signifying that this reading is "virtually certain" (Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, xxviii). In subsequent editions the omission is given a "C" rating, meaning that "there is a considerable degree of doubt whether the text or the apparatus contains the superior reading" (Ibid.).

<sup>40</sup>It will hardly do, however, to render the disputed clause "whose home is in heaven," as is found in the NEB. This is especially surprising in a translation which claims to be "a faithful rendering of the best available Greek text" (*The New English Bible New Testament* [Oxford: University Press, 1961] v). Such a rendering can hardly be in keeping with the import of Christ's statement.

<sup>41</sup>"Behold, he was here and he was in heaven: he was here in his flesh, he was in heaven in his divinity, born of a mother, never leaving the Father—Why do you marvel that he was both here and in heaven?" (cited in E. W. Hengstenberg, *A Commentary on the Gospel of St John* [reprint; Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1980], l. 178). Calvin also writes, "But since, for the sake of the unity of person in Christ, it is frequent and

common to transfer the property of the one nature to the other, we need not look for another solution. Hence Christ, who is in heaven, put on our flesh that, by stretching out a brotherly hand to us, He might raise us to heaven along with Himself" (J. Calvin, *The Gospel According to St John (1-10)*, trans. T. H. L. Parker [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959] 72).