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"On the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee"  
(John 2.1)

V. Parkin

What is the significance of the time reference in this verse? Clearly it serves now to link the marriage at Cana with the events of the first chapter of the Gospel, and we shall not concern ourselves with any meaning that "the third day" may have apart from its bearing upon the number of days indicated in chapters one and two of John's work.

There have been differences of opinion about the day in the first chapter from which the third day is to be counted. According to R.E. Brown, Theodore of Mopsuestia counted the third day from the baptismal scene of 1.29-34. /1 But most writers count from the day on which Jesus said to Nathanael that he would see heaven opened (1.51). And this, the more obvious point from which to count, we take to be correct.

On the third day means two days later but, if we count these two days from 1.51, how many days are there in all from the first of the days in chapter 1, which must be the day on which took place the events of 1.19-28?

After the first day, successive days are clearly indicated by the phrase "the next day" at 1.19, 1.35 and 1.43, making, with the two days of 2.1, six days in all. It has, however, been suggested that, in addition to the days so clearly marked, another day has elapsed between 1.39 and 1.41.

When Andrew and the unnamed disciple came to Jesus and stayed with him, it was "about the tenth hour". This is usually taken to be the tenth hour from sunrise at 6 a.m. As sunset would follow in two hours the disciples stayed with Jesus. We are told that they stayed with him "that day". Westcott regarded the phrase "that day" as meaning "that memorable day", the day from which the Christian society took its rise. /2 While Schnackenburg mentions the possibility that the phrase may mean the following day as well, so adding another day to the total. /3

Other writers have also conjectured that another day must be added to the total, not because of any particular

significance attaching to the phrase "that day", but because of the supposition that the day after the meeting of the disciples with Jesus was the Sabbath when no long journey would be permissible. Although there is nothing to indicate the distance Andrew had to travel to find his brother, Simon Peter, for we neither know where Peter was nor where Bethany beyond Jordan was, it would be strange if the distance was not more than the 2000 cubits (little more than half a mile) which a Jew might travel on the Sabbath without breaking the commandment of Exodus 16.29 (interpreted by Numbers 35.5, which defined the suburbs of the cities of the Levites as stretching for 2000 cubits from the city walls). So, Brown writes, "The disciples had to stay with Jesus from 4 p.m. on Friday until Saturday evening when Sabbath was over, for they could not move any distance once Sabbath had begun on Friday evening." /4

Support for the conjecture that the day after the disciples met Jesus was the Sabbath is found, so it is claimed, in the Mishnah (Kethuboth 1) which states that the wedding of a bride who is being married for the first time should take place on a Wednesday. For if Andrew stayed with Jesus on the Sabbath and found Peter on Sunday, it would be Monday when Jesus decided to go to Galilee (1.43), and the third day after that would be Wednesday.

If we accept either the suggestion of Schnackenburg about the significance of the phrase "That day", or the conjectures about a Sabbath day's rest at 1.39f, the total number of days, up to and including the day of the wedding is seven.

There is also some textual evidence for counting another day besides those marked by the phrase "the next day". At 1.41, where the weight of manuscript evidence is in favour of reading prōton as the third word of the sentence, and there is also good support for reading prōtos, a few Old Latin texts depend upon an original proi, which may also be supported by the Sinaitic Syriac.

Bernard favours prōi on the grounds that an original prōi ton adelphon could easily give rise to prōton ton adelphon, that proi is a good Johannine word, being used again at 18.28 and 20.1, and that it gives good sense - "He finds early in the morning his (own) brother, Simon".

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This reading implies that Andrew had stayed the night at the lodging where Jesus was. /5

We note that the day on which Andrew went out to seek for Simon cannot have been the Sabbath, so that the extra day which is yielded by the reading proi cannot have been the same day of the week, (extra to the ones indicated by the phrase "the next day") postulated by those who suppose that the tenth hour of 1.39 was just before the sunset which marked the beginning of the Sabbath.

Nevertheless, the views which accept proi as the correct reading at 1.41, and those which suppose that Andrew spent the Sabbath at Jesus' lodging, agree in yielding seven days in all, for the period beginning at 1.19 and continuing to 2.1.

It is also possible to arrive at a total of seven days without adopting either proi as the correct reading or the suggestion about the Sabbath rest, by supposing that a day was needed for travelling to Galilee after 1.43. The seven days of 1.19 to 2.1, however one arrives at that total, may correspond to the days of creation in Genesis 1 as, according to Bultmann, Quievreux argues. /6 It is, of course, possible, as Lindars says, to allow an extra day at 1.39f and also a day for travelling to Galilee at 1.43, so making eight days in all. /7

It seems reasonable to assume that the number of days has some significance in the pattern of the ministry described by John (Despite Schnackenburg's statement that "the third day" is probably a round number, so implying that the precise number of days is unimportant.) /8 But how are we to decide what the number is when, as we have seen, there have been mooted the possibilities of six days, of seven days, and of eight days?

We suggest that the essential step in reaching a conclusion is to recognize that for the purpose of discerning the significance of the number of days in John's pattern, we can only properly be concerned with the days John himself indicates. Deductions from geographical considerations of distances and the time spent in travel may be sound if one is concerned with the historicity of the material used by John, but irrelevant for any

consideration of the question to which we have addressed ourselves. There may have been a rest day in the ministry described by John in chapter 1, but it has made no contribution to John's scheme.

The story of the wedding at Cana may be based on fact and may correctly be associated with one particular day of the week or, as Dodd suggested, it may have grown out of a parable with no time reference at all /9, or even out of a timeless legend about Dionysus.

None of these possibilities affects the present issue. The only days to be counted are those given by John, and the only uncertainty arises from the textual variants at 1.41, whether John wrote proi, marking the early hours of another day, so adding an extra day to those indicated by him in other ways, or whether he wrote the better attested variants proton or protos, neither of which affects the number of days. No extant manuscript supports proi, and the support from the Old Latin and Syriac versions is slight. Despite this weak attestation, Bernard, as we have seen, favours this reading. As he argues, an original proi could easily have been altered by accident to proton. But it would have been almost as easy for an original proton ton adelphon to have been changed by accident to proi ton adelphon. And while it is impossible for proi ton adelphon to have been changed intentionally to proton ton adelphon, the reverse intentional change could easily have taken place since proton (first) leaves the reader wondering what Andrew did next.

A further argument against the originality of proi is that if John had intended to indicate an extra day one would have expected him to use te epaurion (the next day) as he does at 1.29, 35, 43. We conclude, then, that proton is original and no additional day is indicated, and the tally of days from 1.19 to 2.1 is not seven, nor eight, but six.

The division of the material in the first two chapters of the Gospel according to successive days is, says R.T. Fortna, the result of the superimposition by John of a plan of days on an earlier whole. /10 This view of the origin of the plan of days means that the plan is significant for

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John. Even if Fortna's view is not completely accepted, and one supposes that John may have found some reference(s) to days in his source material, so that some of the details in the plan of days may not have originated with him, it seems clear that in its present form, the plan of days is undoubtedly significant for John.

The similarity of the opening phrase in the Gospel to the opening of the account of the creation in Genesis 1 has often been remarked, so it is not surprising that the days of John 1.19 - 2.1 have been compared with the days of creation. Thus, R.E. Brown writes, "Bernard, Boismard, Strathmann and others believe that in its frequent mention of days in chapter 1 and 2.1 the Fourth Gospel wishes to portray a week of seven days to open the ministry - a week beginning the new creation just as Genesis 1.1 - 2.3 frames the work of the first creation within a week of seven days".  
/11.

Brown goes on to give a possible schematization of the week in John, ending on Tuesday night/ Wednesday, the day regarded as fitting the statement in the Mishnah about the marriage of a virgin, so that Cana marks both the end of the first week of the ministry (seventh day) and, as a Wednesday the beginning of the next week (eighth day). On Brown's scheme, which allows for a Sabbath day's rest, the sequence of days which ended at Cana began on a Wednesday. And, according to the ancient solar calendar (followed in the Jubilees and in Qumran), the week always began on Wednesday.

There are a number of difficulties about this schematization. First, the opening words of the Prologue to the Gospel provide the only obvious verbal connection with Genesis 1 and they are rather far removed from John's account of the days which does not begin until John 1.19. Second, it is not easy to relate the events described by John on the days he mentions to the happenings on the days of creation in Genesis. Third, we have argued that only the days mentioned by John are to be counted and this yields only six days and not seven (Brown seems to want to count both seven and eight!).

In answer to these objections it may be urged that if, as Lindars states, the Gospel did not originally include the Prologue, /12 it is not surprising that John's account of the days does not follow swiftly upon the opening words

of what may have been an independent poem. But it does not follow that the ideas of the Prologue, whose opening words are reminiscent of the creation narrative, are unrelated to John's account of the days. Thus, "We have beheld his glory" (1.14) may be related to "...manifested his glory" (2.11), and the reference to believing in his name in 1.12 is also echoed in 2.11. Less obviously, the superabundance of wine provided by Jesus may be regarded as exemplifying "from his fulness have we all received". (1.16)

It is true that the days during which the Baptist testified and the first disciples met Jesus, seem unrelated to the events of the days of creation in Genesis, but ideas connected with a wedding are not unrelated to those of the day on which God created man and woman; blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply". Moreover, although the creation of man marked the day when the heavens and earth were finished and all the host of them, it is not on that sixth day of creation that God rested. Instead we read, "And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done". So day six at Cana which, as we have seen, picks up words and ideas found in the Prologue, not only looks back to day six of creation, it also points forward to the time when Jesus said, "It is finished" (19.30), after which he rested in the tomb on the seventh day. So the recognition that the days of John 1.19 - 2.1 are six in all and not seven does not destroy comparison with the week of creation. Indeed it may be regarded as enhancing it.

W.H. Brownlee states that in the Gospel there are three different six day periods, each of which begins at a place called Bethany, and each of which has as its climax a manifestation of glory. /13 The first of these is the one we have been considering, beginning with the Baptist in Bethany beyond Jordan (which Brownlee labels Bethany 1). The second begins with Jesus at Bethany 1 (10.40). There he hears of the illness of Lazarus at Bethany near to Jerusalem (Bethany 2). On day six Lazarus is raised from the dead. The third begins with the anointing of Jesus at Bethany 2 (12.1) , and ends with the crucifixion.

Brownlee suggests that it is John's desire to emphasize this six day pattern which has caused him to name the place of the Baptist's activity Bethany. If this suggestion is

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correct it is not surprising that the situation of this Bethany remains unidentified and that the name has been amended in some texts. Brownlee's treatment of the story of the sickness, death and resurrection of Lazarus as falling into a six day period is possible, perhaps even probable. Word was sent to Jesus of the illness of Lazarus. The journey took two days (conjecture). Jesus remained where he was for two days (11.6), then travelled to the home of Lazarus and his sisters, and this journey, like that of the messenger(s) took two days (conjecture) so that when Jesus arrived Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days (11.17) - this reconstruction requires Lazarus, who was ill when the message was sent by his sisters, to have died at the time the message reached Jesus. So we have six days from the sending of the message to the raising of Lazarus.

But if this period of six days had such significance in John's pattern of the ministry one would have expected him to indicate the length of time more clearly. Unlike the period stretching from 1.19 - 2.1 we cannot ascertain the number of days by adding together the days John mentions, for although he gives two days at 11.6 and four at 11.17, these cannot be added together because there must be some overlap. Indeed on the reconstruction given above the two days are completely included in the four. We therefore attempt no comparison between the sign at Cana and the raising of Lazarus.

Where, however, there are periods of six days clearly indicated by John, it is not unreasonable to see if there are significant parallels. If such parallels can be found, the story of Cana not only looks back to the creation narrative, but, as we have already suggested, to the crucifixion which, like the sign of the wedding, was on the last of six days. (We note that, according to John's chronology, the day on which Jesus died was the day on which the lambs of the Passover were killed, so that then there was actualized the title given to Jesus in the first period of six days, The Lamb of God 1.35 ).

The day of the wedding and the day of the crucifixion are linked by their references to the mother of Jesus, who, apart from these two scenes is not mentioned in this Gospel (except in the verse immediately following the story of the



wedding) .

At Cana and at Golgotha Jesus addresses his mother as "woman" - a perfectly respectful form of address, but nevertheless a strange one for a man to use to his mother. At Cana Jesus tells his mother that his hour is not yet come. At 13.1, before the feast of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, and at 17.1 the hour is in immediate prospect and he cries "Father....glorify thy Son" which recalls the words of 2.11

Some who read John's account of the turning of the water into wine may have remembered the reference to wine in Psalm 104 where the writer blesses the Lord for his wonderful works in creation and for wine which makes glad the heart of man. But by the time John wrote his gospel, the thought immediately conjured up a reference to wine given by Jesus would probably be of the wine of the Eucharist. (That there is no account in this Gospel of the institution of the Eucharist cannot be taken as evidence that the sacrament was unknown or of little importance to the readers, especially since we have the sacramental discourse of 6.52-58). But the wine of the Eucharist represented the blood shed by Jesus.

In 1 John 5.8 we learn that there are three witnesses - the Spirit, the water, and the blood. All three are linked with the death of Jesus. From his pierced side there issued blood and water (19.34) . The Spirit was not given before Jesus was glorified (7.39) , and the glorification of Jesus was in his dying. So the evangelist, looking back to Cana, seeing the wine as a symbol of the blood to be shed, says, "Jesus manifested his glory".

If, as we have maintained, there are significant parallels between John's accounts of day six at Cana and at Golgotha, and especially if the marking of the days in chapters 1 and 2 is due to the redactor, it is possible that there may be some connection between the redactional verse 19.35 and the scene at Cana.

The reference in 19.35 to one who has borne true witness expresses a thought which has been prominent in the Gospel. As Lindars says, "In John's handling of the Gospel traditions, it is the chief function of the characters who

figure in the story to give witness to the truth revealed in Jesus". /14

The verse 19.35 speaks of one who is both an eyewitness and a testimony bearer. Both themes - seeing and testifying - are found in the six days up to and including the wedding at Cana. In the account of the wedding day nothing is said of witnessing in the sense of testifying, but those who see the glory of Jesus at Cana and believe, are those whose word will lead others to belief. (17.20) We ask ourselves whether these witnesses at Cana throw any light upon the question of the identity of the eyewitness of 19.35? Is he the beloved disciple or is he someone else? We proceed by asking how many witnesses there were at Cana and whether there was the same number at Golgotha.

In chapter 1 only five disciples are mentioned and on the assumption that, as with the days, we are to count only the number indicated, there were five disciples at Cana. At Golgotha, in all probability, four women stand by the cross and in addition there is the disciple whom Jesus loved (19.26). Since in a special sense the death of Jesus is his glorification (7.39; 12.26,23; 13.31f) there are at Golgotha these five who behold his glory. If there are parallels between Cana and Golgotha it suggests that, as there were five who saw the glory of Jesus at Cana, so there will be five at the cross, and the eyewitness of 19.35 must be one of the five and the identification of him with the beloved disciple is sound.

There is, of course, the difficulty that the effusion of blood and water from the side of Jesus which was seen by the eyewitness of 19.35 occurs after the beloved disciple has taken the mother of Jesus to his home (if we take "from that hour" (19.27) , to mean "from that moment") . But "that hour" may refer to the whole crucifixion narrative rather than just to the precise moment within the narrative when Jesus addressed the beloved disciple.

But there is also the problem posed by the position of Jesus' mother at Cana. Is she to be regarded there as one of the witnesses, as she is in the parallel scene at Golgotha? If the mother is a witness in both scenes, then at Cana we have six witnesses in all. If the number at Golgotha is comparable, the eyewitness of 19.35 is in

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addition to the group of five made up of the four women and the beloved disciple.

James the brother of the Lord became a leader of the Christian community, but at 7.5 we are told that Jesus' brothers did not believe in him. It is possible, therefore, that at Cana Jesus' mother was not yet a witness. This may be implied by the question, "O woman, what have you to do with me?" (2.4) And this in turn may continue the thought of the Prologue, "He came to his own home, and his own people received him not." (1.11). On the whole it may seem more probable that a group of five rather than six is indicated and that the mother of Jesus is not among the witnesses at Cana. But we cannot be certain and the enquiry into parallels between Cana and Golgotha does not enable us to say with confidence whether or not the eye-witness of 19.35 is the beloved disciple.

But we may wonder whether the consideration of parallels can form the basis for legitimate enquiry, or whether it inevitably leads to over-fanciful speculation. Must every detail at Cana have that which corresponds to it at Golgotha, so that for example we look at the later scene to find someone who corresponds with the steward at the feast!

Not everyone will draw the boundary of legitimate speculation at the same place. But it may be suggested that where we clearly have in the text the work of the redactor, where we are dealing with recurring themes in the Gospel such as seeing and witnessing and where, in the present form of the Gospel we have some indication of parallels such as the period of six days, we may reasonably ask whether one scene throws light on the other. The steward at the feast is not involved in the major themes of seeing the glory of Jesus and of witnessing to him and so would be excluded from this kind of enquiry by the criteria we have suggested.

Our conclusions to this enquiry into the implications of the statement, "On the third day, there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee" are that the day of the wedding is day six in the pattern John has given to his material; that the day is associated with day six of the creation narrative in Genesis 1 and also with day six of the Passion of Jesus; and more tentatively, that there are five witnesses at Cana and

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also at Golgotha. The eyewitness of 19.35 is the disciple whom Jesus loved.

### Notes

1. R.E. Brown, The Gospel according to John (London 1971) p97
2. B.F. Westcott, St. John (London 1958), p24
3. R. Schnackenburg, The Gospel according to St John (London 1968, ET, I), p309
4. Brown, op.cit., p75
5. J.H. Bernard, St. John, (Edinburgh 1928), I p58.
6. R. Bultmann, The Gospel of John (Oxford 1971, ET) p119
7. B. Lindars, The Gospel of John (London 1972), p128
8. Schnackenburg, op.cit., p326.
9. C.H. Dodd, Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel, (Cambridge 1963), p227.
10. R.T. Fortna, The Gospel of Signs (Cambridge 1970), p189
11. Brown, op.cit., p105
12. Lindars, op.cit., p76
13. W.H. Brownlee, "Whence the Gospel According to John, in John and Qumran, Ed. J.H. Charlesworth (London 1972) p169.