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GNOSTICISM, DOCETISM, AND THE JUDAISMS OF THE FIRST CENTURY

The Search for the Wider Context of
Johannine Literature and Why It Matters

URBAN C. VON WAHLDE

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>I En.</i>	<i>I Enoch</i>
AB	Anchor Bible
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
<i>Aet.</i>	<i>De aeternitate mundi</i>
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
BETL	<i>Bibliotheca ephimeridum theologiarum Lovaniensium</i>
BZNW	<i>Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>Conf.</i>	Philo, <i>De confusione linguarum</i>
<i>De Op.</i>	Philo, <i>De opificio mundi</i>
<i>Gos Peter</i>	<i>The Gospel of Peter</i>
<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	Eusebius of Caesarea, <i>Historia ecclesiastica</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JSNTS	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
<i>KuD</i>	<i>Kerygma und Dogma</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LEC	Library of Early Christianity
LXX	Septuagint
<i>Mos.</i>	Philo, <i>De vita Mosis</i>
<i>NHC</i>	<i>Nag Hammadi Corpus</i> <i>Gospel of Truth</i> <i>Tripartite Tractate</i> <i>The Apocryphon of John</i> <i>The Gospel of Philip</i> <i>On the Origin of the World</i> <i>Book of Thomas the Contender</i> <i>Gospel of the Egyptians</i> <i>Authoritative Teaching</i> <i>Zostrianos</i> <i>Melchizedek</i> <i>Trimorphic Protennoia</i>
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
NTL	New Testament Library
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>

OT	Old Testament
OTP	<i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i> . Edited by J. H. Charlesworth. 2 vols. New York, 1983
<i>Probus</i>	Philo, <i>Quod omnis probus liber sit</i>
<i>RevQ</i>	<i>Revue de Qumran</i>
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SDQ	Sectarian Documents from Qumran (this abbreviation is intended to distinguish the documents that are distinctive of the Qumran Community from other biblical, apocryphal or pseudepigraphal found there.
<i>Smyrn.</i>	Ignatius of Antioch, <i>Letter to the Smyrnians</i>
<i>Somm.</i>	Philo, <i>De somniis</i>
<i>Spec. Leg.</i>	Philo, <i>De legibus specialibus</i>
T12P	<i>Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs</i>
<i>TRub</i>	<i>Testament of Ruben</i>
<i>TSim</i>	<i>Testament of Simeon</i>
<i>TLev</i>	<i>Testament of Levi</i>
<i>TJud</i>	<i>Testament of Judah</i>
<i>TIss</i>	<i>Testament of Issachar</i>
<i>TZeb</i>	<i>Testament of Zebulon</i>
<i>TDan</i>	<i>Testament of Dan</i>
<i>TNaph</i>	<i>Testament of Naphtali</i>
<i>TGad</i>	<i>Testament of Gad</i>
<i>TAsh</i>	<i>Testament of Asher</i>
<i>TJos</i>	<i>Testament of Joseph</i>
<i>TBen</i>	<i>Testament of Benjamin</i>
<i>TGl</i>	<i>Theologie und Glaube</i>
THNT	Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament
<i>Trall.</i>	Ignatius of Antioch, <i>Letter to the Trallians</i>
WBC	Word Bible Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZLTK	<i>Zeitschrift für die gesamte Lutherische Théologie und Kirche</i>
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

INTRODUCTION

This book is an exploration of three distinct cultural and religious backgrounds against which scholars have proposed that the Gospel and Letters of John are to be read and understood.¹ As will be seen in what follows, there are features within the Gospel and/or Letters of John that do in fact suggest that they were influenced either by Gnosticism, Docetism or one of the variant forms of Judaism. However, in each case, while some of the evidence suggests a particular background, it is equally evident that not all of the evidence suggests the same background.

For example, if we argue that the Gospel of John is Gnostic, then we must explain how it is that the conception of one God in the Gospel is so incompatible with the Gnostic idea of a distinction between the Demiurge and the ultimate God.

If we argue that the Gospel is anti-Docetic in a way similar to the letters of Ignatius of Antioch, then we must account for the lack of any clear authority figure in the Gospel or Letters such as a bishop, to whom Ignatius constantly appeals in his letters. If we argue that the Gospel is actually Docetic then we must explain why others find the Gospel to be *anti-Docetic!*

Yet even the notion of ‘first-century Judaism’ is inadequate as an explanation of the worldview against which the Johannine literature was written. Judaism in the first century was a varied and complex phenomenon and it is only when we realize that the various elements of the Johannine tradition and the Johannine literature reflect more than one of these forms of first-century Judaism that we will be able fully to understand and properly interpret the literature of this sector of early Christianity. In the past, important passages of the Gospel have been misunderstood because of the failure to recognize the precise background of its thought. In the case of Jn 8.38-47, this has had a particularly tragic result for the understanding of Johannine thought.

1. For a recent history of attempts to discover the background of the Gospel, see J. Frey, ‘Auf der Suche nach dem Kontext des vierten Evangeliums: eine forschungsgeschichtliche Einführung’, in *Kontexte des Johannesevangeliums: das vierte Egan gelium in religions- und traditions geschichtlicher Perspective* (ed. J. Frey and U. Schnelle; WUNT 175; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), pp. 3-45.

As a result, in Part III there is a discussion of these three variant worldviews within Judaism, showing how the interpretation of passages within the Gospel and Letters is significantly affected by the worldview within which the passages are cast. In addition, I have included analyses of three important texts and topics of the Gospel and 1 John, showing how the misunderstanding of the background against which the passages were written can lead to conclusions that are false or misleading in quite significant ways. The discussion of these passages also shows how a proper understanding of the background leads to considerably simpler and, I believe, considerably more satisfying, explanations.

It is common when attempting to describe the background of the Gospel to study the Gospel as a whole. Just recently a volume has been gathered together by J. Frey and U. Schnelle with essays on various aspects of the background of the Gospel.² This present volume is distinct from the approach taken in that volume inasmuch as the present approach shows that the background of the Gospel can be understood much more fully and more precisely when viewed within the context of the compositional history of the Gospel and Letters.

Once the compositional history of the Gospel and Letters is understood, the quest for a clearer understanding of the background(s) of the Gospel and Letters becomes much easier and more successful. Of course, it is readily recognized that past attempts to discover the compositional process by which the Gospel of John reached its present form and the relation of 1 John to that process have not been widely accepted. At the same time, if a proposal regarding the composition of the Gospel and the relation of 1 John to the Gospel also shed convincing light on the background(s) of the Gospel, then both the process of composition and the proposal regarding the distinct backgrounds involved in that composition would serve to confirm one another. In addition, as will be seen below, a clear view of the composition process not only sheds great light on the background(s) of the Gospel characteristic of the three stages in its composition, it also helps to account for those features that many have thought to be Gnostic as well as those features that have been thought by others to be (anti-)Docetic.

* * *

2. One exception could be noted. In 1970, George MacRae, published an article entitled 'The Fourth Gospel and "Religionsgeschichte"', *CBQ* 32 (1970) pp. 13-24. In that article, MacRae argued that the background of the Gospel was varied deliberately so as make it appealing to a wide variety of readers.

The reading of the Gospel and Letters put forward here is based on the view that I have taken in my commentary on the Gospel and Letters for the Eerdmans Critical Commentary. In the Prequel of this book, I have given an overview of the composition of the Gospel and 1 John, of the theology of each, and of the background against which each was written, as it is described in that commentary.

As was mentioned above, when we seek to understand the meaning or the background of a given statement, it is important to understand it in its larger context. However, in the case of the Johannine Gospel, it is essential to realize that, because of the editing process that the Gospel has undergone, the 'larger' context of a given statement is not always the 'immediate' context of that statement. Having an overview of the literary composition and theological development of the Gospel (and of the role of 1 John in that development) enables us to see the larger contexts of John more clearly and distinctly. The inevitable result is a more satisfying reading of the Johannine literature as a whole.

The final chapter of this book approaches the understanding of the Johannine school from a new perspective. Although the notion of a Johannine school has been popular for some time, it seems that it is now possible to paint a picture of that school in greater detail than has been done before. It is a picture that brings the growth and development of the tradition into greater clarity but it also shows much more clearly and in greater detail the considerable tensions and theological conflicts that racked this community both from within and from without in the course of its history.

Given the importance of the Johannine literature within early Christianity, a deeper appreciation of these elements not only gives us a new sense of the life of the community but also a sharper perception of its theology.

Prequel

THE COMPOSITION OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

It is generally recognized by critical scholars that the Gospel of John has undergone one or more stages of editing before reaching its final form. In 2010, I published a three volume-commentary on the Gospel and Letters of John in which I set out detailed evidence that the Gospel had undergone three editions in reaching its final form. The criteria used in this analysis are quite numerous but result in a view of the Gospel and Letters that is quite simple. Moreover, as I believe the current volume will show, one of the ‘accidental’ proofs of that proposal is how it deals with other issues related to the Gospel and Letters. Specifically, in the light of this view of the composition of the Johannine Gospel and Letters, it is much easier to understand the background against which the Gospel was written.

In order to provide a context for understanding the discussion of the various backgrounds proposed for the Gospel and Letters of John, I will begin with an overview of the analysis I have put forward in my commentary.

The following overview is adapted from the introduction to the analysis of each of the editions in my commentary. While it may be possible to visualize many of the features described below, it will be difficult to put *all* the pieces together without the detailed analysis of the commentary itself. Consequently if the reader desires to reconstruct *in detail* just how the text of the Gospel yields the meaning described, it would be best to consult the commentary. No attempt has been made here to make reference to the factors that account for the literary ‘seams’ between material of the various additions.

1. The Basic Proposal

The Gospel of John in its final form exhibits three stages of composition and the first Letter of John was written after the second and before the third edition of the Gospel. The purpose of 1 John was to set forth a

modified view of the interpretation put forward in the second edition of the Gospel and the purpose of the third edition was to incorporate the viewpoint put forward in 1 John into the Gospel.

2. An Overview of the First Edition

The first edition of the Gospel was a narrative of the complete ministry of Jesus, ranging from his first encounter with John the Baptist at Bethany-beyond-the-Jordan to his encounters with disciples after his Resurrection. This first ‘Gospel’ focused on the miracles of Jesus and recounted them in all their power as ‘signs’ that Jesus was truly ‘from God’, that he was ‘Messiah’ and ‘Son of God’—and that he should be believed. In all of this, the categories are those of traditional Jewish expectation.

Throughout the ministry, Jesus’ miracles increase in magnitude, culminating in the raising of Lazarus. This final miracle, performed shortly before the third Passover of the ministry, impels the Pharisees and chief priests, who had previously been suspicious and who had even attempted without success to bring Jesus in for questioning (7.45-52), to join with the chief priests to call together the Sanhedrin and to condemn Jesus to death formally (11.45-53). The reason given is political: that, if Jesus were allowed to continue, the Romans might well come and destroy the Temple and take away their nationhood.

We can identify the material of this edition of the Gospel, first, by the terms it uses for religious authorities (‘Pharisees’, ‘chief priests’, and ‘rulers’) and, second, by the use of ‘signs’ as the characteristic term for miracles. The use of the word ‘sign’ for miracle is significant for it is the same term that was used in the Jewish Scriptures to describe the miracles of Moses at the Exodus. Also, as was the case with the Mosaic signs, the miracles of Jesus in the first edition are presented as *leading to* belief rather than as actions that *presuppose* belief as in the Synoptics. Another significant indication of the parallels drawn between Jesus and Moses is the fact that, within the first edition, there is considerable speculation whether Jesus was ‘the Prophet’ (6.15; 7.52; cf. 1.21, 25). This title, which appears only within the first edition and nowhere else in the NT, reflects the Jewish hope based on Deut. 18.15-18 for a future prophet like Moses who would appear in the last days.

In this edition, the Greek word Ἰουδαῖοι (which itself has a variety of meanings) is used with the meaning ‘Judeans’, i.e., inhabitants of the region of Judea (e.g., 11.19, 31, 36, 45; 12.11). Just as is the case with the terms for religious authorities and the term for miracle, this usage does not appear in the other editions. The first edition is also marked

by a consistent but curious pattern of translation of terms between Greek and Hebrew. Often, religious terms appear first in Hebrew and then are transliterated into Greek (e.g., 1.38, 41). At the same time there are a number of geographical references that appear first in Greek and then are translated into Hebrew (e.g., 5.2; 9.7; 19.13, 17). In this edition, we also notice repeated explanations of Jewish feasts and customs (e.g., 2.6; 6.4; 19.40). Such explanations are not present in the later editions. What is curious about this process of translating and explaining is that while they are so prominent in the first edition, not all places or terms are translated and even more significantly, in the later editions, concepts and terms that are much more complex and specifically Jewish are not explained or translated. This would give the impression that this first edition was composed for an audience significantly different from that of the later editions.

The first edition is also marked by stereotyped formulas of belief in which it is said that ‘many (of a particular group) came to believe in Jesus because of his signs’. Not only is the statement of this belief formulaic in its expression, but it always involves the term ‘signs’ and seems intent to demonstrate that such belief occurred in widely diverse groups of people (i.e., the people of Jerusalem, the Samaritans, the people of Judea, etc.). Also characteristic of belief in the first edition is the way this is often portrayed as occurring in a chain-reaction sequence. Thus, one disciple believes in Jesus and gets another who in turn also believes; the Samaritan woman believes and gets others do to the same; the royal official comes to believe along with his entire household; so also the crowd witnesses the raising of Lazarus and then tells others who also believe. None of this appears in later editions.

The first edition focused almost exclusively on the ‘signs’ of Jesus. Because of this, it is not surprising to find that in the first edition there is also repeated reference to the *quantity* and *quality* of Jesus’ signs. Remarks about the signs constantly use adjectives such as ‘many’ (πολύς; e.g., 11.47), ‘so many’ (τοσοῦτος; e.g., 12.37), ‘so great’ (τοιοῦτος; e.g., 9.16), and so on. There are other statements that create the same effect, statements such as that of the crowd in ch. 7 wondering whether the Christ could be expected to perform ‘more signs’ than this man. And in ch. 10 John the Baptizer is contrasted with Jesus in that John performed ‘no signs’. There is nothing like this in the other editions.

I spoke above of the religious authorities. In the first edition, there is a division of opinion about Jesus among the religious authorities. This is evident as late as ch. 9 where ‘the Pharisees’ debate among themselves regarding the meaning of Jesus’ signs (7.45-52; 9.16; 12.42). Yet, as we

shall see below, there is not a hint of division regarding Jesus among the authorities of the second edition (where they are identified as ‘the Jews’). In the first edition, there are clear indications that the hostility of the authorities increases throughout the ministry, beginning with the skepticism of 1.24 and culminating in the decision of the Sanhedrin to put Jesus to death. But when we compare this with the presentation in the second edition, we see that the hostility toward Jesus is intense from the outset and that there are repeated attempts to put Jesus to death beginning as early as ch. 5. Thus, the first edition presents a more historically plausible account of the ministry with a true narrative development while the second edition seeks to represent ‘typical’ resistance to Jesus on the part of official Judaism.

We can also see that the portrayal of the authorities in the two editions is different in other important respects. In the first edition, there is first a narrative report of belief among the people, usually on the basis of signs. This is followed immediately by some reaction on the part of the ‘Pharisees’, ‘chief priests’, and/or ‘rulers’. It is also evident that some people such as the temple police of ch. 7 and the blind man of ch. 9 resist the urgings of the religious authorities, fail to obey their orders, and in the case of the man born blind of ch. 9, talk back to and even debate with them. By the scene of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, in ch. 12, the Pharisees are actually fearing the reaction of the people and express their own inadequacy in dealing with Jesus. In the second edition, there is no such debate. ‘The Jews’ in these texts are monolithic and so intensely hostile throughout that the only reaction on the part of the common people is abject fear of them. So we see the statements that people did not speak ‘for fear of the Jews’; that people hid ‘because they were fearing the Jews’. Such expressions as these are never associated with the authorities described as ‘Pharisees’, ‘chief priests’, and ‘rulers’. Related to this is the fact that in the first edition, the religious authorities fear the Romans. Yet in the second edition, there is no evidence that ‘the Jews’ fear the Romans. Indeed, during the trial of Jesus, they seem to intimidate even Pilate.

While the ‘Pharisees’, ‘chief priests’, and ‘rulers’ react to Jesus, they do so almost exclusively on the basis of his signs. In the second edition, ‘the Jews’ almost ignore the miracles of Jesus and focus on his claim to equality with the Father, charging him with blasphemy.

In the first edition, the religious authorities as a group are *never* in dialogue with Jesus but rather talk among themselves and with others. In the second edition, ‘the Jews’ are almost always in dialogue and debate with Jesus. This is their primary narrative role!

There are a number of instances of supernatural knowledge on the part of Jesus in the Gospel as a whole. In the first edition, the supernatural knowledge of Jesus functions as a ‘sign’ to bring about belief. But in the second edition, such supernatural knowledge functions only for the reader, to indicate Jesus’ superiority to all human plans and intentions.

Theologically, the first edition focuses almost entirely on the miracles of Jesus, as we have seen (BELIEF).¹ There is a marked attention to details that demonstrate the greatness of the miracles and why they should be a cause of belief. Such belief is also presented as an easy affair and something that occurs in various groups within the nation and even among the Samaritans. It is only the ‘Pharisees’, ‘chief priests’, and ‘rulers’ who do not believe! But in the second edition, belief is a much more complex affair. In that edition, belief on the basis of miracles continues to be seen as a valid form of belief, but the entire context shifts. Now (1) they are termed ‘works’ (not ‘signs’), (2) they are described as a ‘witness’ to the identity of Jesus, and (3) the works are one of four ‘witnesses’ to Jesus (alongside the witness of John, the witness of the words of Jesus, and the witness of the Scriptures).

When we look at the first edition it is immediately apparent that the discussion of Jesus’ identity is always on the level of ‘low’ Christology. We have seen the references to him as ‘the Prophet’. There is also the general discussion whether Jesus is ‘from God’ (3.1-2; 9.16), whether he is Elijah returned, whether he is ‘the Christ’, ‘the one who is to come’, ‘the Son of God’. But even with such titles as ‘Son of God’ it is clear from the context that the title is being used in a traditional sense rather than in the later ‘Christian’ sense. In short, there is not a hint of the ‘high’ Christology that marks the second and third editions (CHRISTOLOGY).

The structure of the first edition is built around the constantly increasing magnitude of the signs of Jesus, together with the increasingly widespread belief of the people and the increasing hostility of the

1. In my commentary, I have proposed that the theology of the Johannine tradition develops through four stages: from the first edition to the second and from there to 1 John and then to the third edition of the Gospel. I trace the four stages of this development in eleven categories of theology: Christology, Belief, Pneumatology, Eternal Life, Eschatology, Knowledge of God, Soteriology, Ethics, Anthropology, Ecclesiology, and Attitude Toward Material Aspects of Religion. I have indicated each of these categories by printing them in small caps as each appears at each stage of the tradition.

However, given the simplicity of the first edition, a number of these categories do not appear within this edition at least insofar as this material is present in the final state of the Gospel.

religious authorities. This structure is still evident from what remains in the Gospel even though the original order of the multiplication and the healing at the Pool of Bethesda has been reversed by the second author. The first edition was a true narrative. The narrative moved toward a true climax in the decision of the Sanhedrin and then to arrest, trial, death, and resurrection. We will see that the second edition, unlike the first, regularly ignores all elements of narratology in order to pursue its theological purposes.

When we examine the material of the first edition, we find that it is this material that preserves the numerous traditions unique to the Gospel. It is, for example, in the first edition that we find the twenty geographical references that are either unique to this Gospel or that contain information and reflect a remarkably detailed knowledge of first-century Palestine. It is in the material of this edition that we find the other information that presents a chronology of the ministry different from that of the Synoptics. It is here that we read of multiple trips to Jerusalem and of the chronology of the Passion that places both the Last Supper and the death of Jesus before the occurrence of Passover. And it is also this chronology that is increasingly being judged to be more accurate than that of the Synoptics.

When the first edition is compared with the second in this respect, it becomes clear once again how different the first is from the second. In the second, we see no concern for historical sequence and almost no concern for locating events in relation to particular geographical locations. Instead we see disruptions of narrative time and anachronistic elements such as synagogue exclusion and a general level of theological reflection too advanced to have been articulated during the historical ministry. In the first edition, there is none of the symbolism so typical of the second edition. There is no reference to Jesus as ‘living bread’, ‘the good shepherd’, ‘the gate’, or ‘the true vine’, let alone statements by Jesus referring to himself as ‘the Resurrection and the Life’, or ‘the Way, the Truth, and the Life’.

In spite of all that we can know about the first edition, it is also clear that a considerable amount of the first edition has not been preserved. This is evident both from the fact that questions posed in the first edition are regularly answered by material of later editions and also by the fact that many topics central to a full presentation of Jesus are absent. Just how much material was removed is impossible to say. Yet, the theological *lacunae* are striking. There is no mention of the Spirit (PNEUMATOLOGY), no mention of eschatology (ESCHATOLOGY), no mention of eternal life (ETERNAL LIFE), no special focus on ‘knowing’

God or Jesus (KNOWING), no ethical instruction (ETHICS), no significant soteriology (SOTERIOLOGY), no attempt to present a distinct picture of the individual as transformed by belief (ANTHROPOLOGY), no ecclesiology (ECCLESIOLOGY), and no special attitude toward the value of material reality (ATTITUDE TOWARD MATERIAL ASPECTS OF RELIGION). Whether the absence of these topics, which we would consider so central to theology today, is due to editing or whether they were never part of the first edition is impossible to say. It is clear from the material of the first edition present in ch. 9 that the first edition did contain extended discussions regarding Jesus. Thus, the first edition may have been considerably longer than would appear from what remains. Although some of the material bears a similarity to the Synoptics, there was no concern at this stage of the tradition to imitate (or to avoid) the material (or the sequence) of the Synoptic Gospels.

We know very little of when the first edition was composed. We do not know the identity of the author or where it was composed. But we do know that the author must have been a Jew with considerable familiarity regarding the ministry of Jesus in Palestine.

In all, the first edition emerges as a document with a very clear identity and profile. Once we become familiar with the features that mark this material, it becomes quite easy to recognize it and to get a clear sense of its overall purpose and orientation. The orientation (and the limits) of this material becomes clearer when the material of this edition is compared with that of the second and third editions as will be done below.

3. An Overview of the Second Edition

In the first edition of the Gospel, the characteristic terms for religious authorities were ‘Pharisees’, ‘chief priests’, and ‘rulers’. In the second edition, the characteristic term for those who represent the official position of Judaism is the single term ‘the Jews’ (οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι). However, as we saw in the discussion of the word Ἰουδαῖοι in the first edition, the various meanings of this term must be distinguished. Although this word can be used to designate the inhabitants of Judea and can also be used to refer to the entire nation as a religious and ethnic group, in a number of instances in the Gospel this term is used to refer to a group of persons who are distinguished from other Jews and who exercise functions and present opinions typical of the Jewish tradition over against the views of Jesus and the Johannine community. It is these that are of importance for the present discussion for they contrast with the terms for authorities in the first edition.

As 'sign' was used for miracle in the first edition, so 'work' is the characteristic term for miracle in the second edition. This shift in terminology is not intended for its own sake but in fact reflects a change in perspective within the second edition. Thus, the individual 'works' of Jesus are seen by the second author to be individual aspects of the larger 'work' of 'the Father' that Jesus, 'the Son', has been 'sent' to bring to completion. Moreover, in the second edition, the word 'sign' appears twice, but the use of 'sign' in this edition is conceived of much differently than in the first. In the second edition, the term is used in a pejorative sense as a proof that is demanded by 'the Jews' (and rejected by Jesus), rather than being used in the positive sense typical of the first edition.

The narrative perspective of the second edition is also quite different from that of the first. In the second, the author presents the hostility of the religious authorities as having essentially the same level of intensity from the beginning (cf. 9.18-22). This contrasts with the presentation in the first edition where the hostility of the authorities grows throughout the Gospel. In this sense, it is apparent that the second author is not concerned about matters of narrative realism but rather about simply presenting representative objections of 'the Jews' regarding Jesus, objections more at home in the community at the end of the first century than in the actual historical ministry of Jesus.

Moreover, in the second edition there is no indication of division among the religious authorities. They constitute a monolithic group united in their opposition to Jesus and devoid of features that would individuate them. In this way the authorities simply represent 'those opposed to Jesus' and illustrate the objections to Jesus typical of later first-century Judaism. These authorities are in almost constant dialogue with Jesus in contrast with the religious authorities of the first edition, which, as we have seen, are never in dialogue with Jesus. In the second edition, the common people are in deathly fear of the authorities and this is expressed in the stereotyped expression 'for fear of the Jews' (cf. 7.13) or 'because they were fearing the Jews' (9.22). In this edition, in contrast to the presentation in the first, 'the Jews' exhibit no fear of, or concern for, the actions of the common people but rather inspire fear in them and even in Pilate.

In the second edition, there is almost no interest expressed in the miracles of Jesus themselves. Instead, the focus is on the Christological claims of Jesus – and these are always matters of 'high' Christology rather than the 'low' Christology of the first edition. In ch. 5, where the issue begins as one of Sabbath violation, the debate quickly moves to matters of Christology and the objection that Jesus makes God his own

Father. In ch. 10, ‘the Jews’ say to Jesus ‘we do not stone you for a good work (i.e., because of your miracles) but for blasphemy’. In the trial before Pilate, ‘the Jews’ again say that their chief objection is that Jesus ‘makes himself God’. As part of the Christology of this edition, Jesus is portrayed in a state of indwelling with the Father as a result of which he can say that he and the Father are ‘one’. In short, the obsessive focus of the second edition is ‘high’ Christology whereas the focus of the first edition had been the miracles.

As part of this ‘high’ Christology, the second edition portrays Jesus as superior to all human events. In contrast to the first edition, his supernatural knowledge functions to show this superiority. Jesus has an ‘hour’ set by the Father and before that hour human efforts against him are of no avail. He cannot be arrested; he cannot be stoned; he cannot be seized.

The worldview of the second edition is, like that of the first, simply the traditional view of the Jewish Scriptures. But the second edition introduces a more profound understanding of Jesus and introduces a number of topics not found in the first edition. It is this theological perspective that becomes the heart of much of Johannine theology. But, at the same time, it is a one-sided interpretation of this theology that gives rise to the schism portrayed in 1 John and which prompts the author of 1 John to write his Letter or tract to correct those extreme views.

In its simplest form, the theology of the second edition presents Jesus as one who possesses the Spirit and who is sent to announce the definitive outpouring of the Spirit upon all who believe in him. Jesus himself is ‘son’ in relation to God as ‘father’. But Jesus’ relation to God as Father, as presented by the Evangelist, is quite different from the traditional Jewish understanding of God as Father. Jesus is ‘sent’ by the Father to bring the Father’s ‘work’ to ‘completion’. Jesus’ ‘works’ (miracles) are conceived of as elements that contribute to the completion of this overall ‘work’. In doing the ‘work’ of the Father, Jesus seeks only the ‘glory’ of the Father, but at the same time his actions reveal both his own ‘glory’ and that of the Father (CHRISTOLOGY).

Belief in Jesus is primarily acceptance of his claims about himself and is based on four ‘witnesses’ (John the Baptist, the works of Jesus, the words of Jesus, and the Scriptures) (cf. 5.31-40; BELIEF). Jesus promises the gift of the eschatological Spirit to those who believe in him (3.3-10; 4.10-15; 7.37-39; PNEUMATOLOGY).²

2. Among the texts promising this future outpouring of the Spirit are: Isa. 32.14-15; Ezek. 11.17-19; 36.26-27; 39.29; Joel 2.28-29 (LXX 3.1-2).

This gift of the Spirit, typically described symbolically by the rubric of ‘living water’, will result in the believer possessing all of the prerogatives associated with the eschatological outpouring of the Spirit in the Jewish Scriptures.

The first and most important of these prerogatives is that the Spirit, which is the principle of eternal life, will bring the believer to a new level of existence so that the believer will possess eternal life and live with the life of God himself (ETERNAL LIFE).³ This life comes to the believer in the present and at death the believer passes beyond death and continues in eternal life (ESCHATOLOGY).⁴ The gift of the Spirit also makes full and complete knowledge of God and of his will a reality (KNOWLEDGE OF GOD).⁵ As a result, the believer has no need of specific teaching from Jesus since the eschatological Spirit will give all who receive it an internal knowledge of God and of his will. Yet, in contrast with the third edition, the Spirit is presented more as a power than a person and in an absolute sense, without qualification. In the second edition there is no mention of a ‘spirit of Deceit’ as opposed to the ‘spirit of Truth’.

In the second edition, the death of Jesus is not thought of as an atonement for sin. Rather, the death of Jesus is understood as his departure to the Father and the prerequisite for his giving of the Spirit. Thus, the focus is on the giving of the Spirit. In the second edition, cleansing from sin is thought to be accomplished by the action of the Spirit rather than by Jesus’ death (SOTERIOLOGY).⁶

3. Just as the gift of the ‘natural, human’ spirit was the principle of human life (cf. Ezek. 37.4-10), so the possession of the Spirit of God would result in the possession of the life characteristic of God.

4. The Wisdom of Solomon provides the first clear evidence of belief in the reward of eternal life beyond physical death. Wisdom of Solomon witnesses to a state of ‘spiritual immortality’, that is, a state in which the spirit continues in an unbroken state after death but without any corporeal form. In the early chapters of Wisdom, there are repeated references to the fact that unrighteousness leads to destruction and death (1.12, 16; 2.23-24; 5.14) and righteousness leads to life and immortality (3.1-4; 5.15-16; cf. 2.23-24). However because the definitive outpouring of the Spirit was thought to occur *within history*, the individual would be transformed and the possession of the life of God would begin in the present.

5. Among the texts from the Jewish Scriptures describing this future ‘knowing’ are: Isa. 1.2-4; Jer. 9.2-3; 31.33-34.

6. Ezek. 36.25-28: ‘I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your

Not only is the believer cleansed of past sin but, because the believer is so radically transformed by the Spirit and now has inward knowledge of God and lives with the life of God, the believer is also cleansed of any evil inclination that would lead to future sin. As a result the believer has no need of ethics (ETHICS).⁷

Because the believer now lives with the life that is the gift of the Spirit, the believer is understood to be ‘born again’ of the Spirit and since he/she lives now with the life of God, the person can be truly said to be a ‘child’ of God (ANTHROPOLOGY). In a remarkable turn of events, the status of the believer is now seen as so exalted that this status begins to blur with the status of Jesus, who was also born of human parents, given the Spirit, and embodied in himself all of the prerogatives of the Spirit.⁸ This can challenge any sense of a unique role for Jesus from the perspective of anthropology just as forgiveness of sin through the Spirit challenged a role for Jesus in soteriology. As fantastic as this may seem, when we look at the pages of 1 John we will see that the author attempts to refute just such conceptions.

At the time of the second edition, the Johannine community gives no indication of being a group that had any hierarchical organization (ECCLESIOLOGY). The believer’s relationship is with the Spirit, with Jesus, and with the Father. It is the common beliefs of the community that bind them together—and that are responsible for their expulsion from the synagogue. In everything, it is the Spirit that matters and all material prerogatives such as one’s physical birth, where one worships, and human leadership, are insignificant. There is no talk of what will

body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances’ (NRSV).

That the action of the Spirit is behind the cleansing is even more evident in 1QH 8.19-20: ‘I have appeased your face by the spirit which you have given me, to lavish your favor on your servant for[ever], to purify me with your holy spirit, to approach your will according to the extent of your kindnesses’.

7. This is clear in Ezek. 36.28: ‘I will put my Spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances’ (NRSV). The Spirit will be the cause of observing Yahweh’s ordinances in the time when the Spirit is given. Proper behavior will be spontaneous once one has the Spirit.

8. From the perspective of the present Gospel, it is impossible to hold such a view. However, as the complete analysis shows, it is only at the time of the third edition that the Gospel expresses those elements of Christology that definitively distinguish the status of Jesus from that of the believer. It is only in 1 John and in the third edition that Jesus is designated the ‘unique’ son and it is only in these later stages of the tradition that Jesus is said to be preexistent, to be ‘I AM’, and to be addressed as ‘My Lord and My God’.

later be identified as ritual actions such as the Eucharist or Baptism. There is no belief in bodily resurrection. What matters is only the Spirit and the eternal life that comes through the Spirit and which leads to immortality (ATTITUDE TOWARD MATERIAL ASPECTS OF RELIGION).

The focus of this second edition was on theological issues and the author sought to portray the conflict between his community and the synagogue against the backdrop of the ministry of Jesus. As a result, the material of the second edition contains a number of features that are anachronistic with regard to the ministry, but which reflect accurately the situation of the community at the time of the second edition. Rather than the historical reality of a variety of groups with religious authority, there are only 'the Jews'. Rather than discussion of traditional titles, the discussion centers on a level of advanced Christology appropriate to the later first century. And there is the portrayal of formal synagogue exclusion, a process that took place later in the first century rather than during the actual ministry of Jesus.

Rather than the simple narrative sequence of the first edition, the second author imposes an artificial theological arrangement upon the material, accompanied by the inevitable disruption of the earlier narrative sequence. This artificial arrangement focuses primarily on illustrating the various 'witnesses' to Jesus and the responses to them. Taking up material from the first edition and modifying it only slightly, the second author begins his presentation by showing that the disciples were models of proper response to Jesus. Their belief is based on a proper response to all four of the witnesses to Jesus. In the narrative and discourse units of chs. 6–10, the author shows how Jesus provided ample evidence of each of these witnesses also to 'the Jews', but 'the Jews' rejected the witnesses.

Another of the second author's foci is, as we have seen, Jesus' promise of the Spirit. Jesus portrays this by means of a series of passages in which he offers the Spirit to those he meets. Here again the second author takes up material from the first edition and modifies it, introducing themes dealing with the Spirit (especially in the discussion with Nicodemus and with the Samaritan woman). Not only does the second edition disrupt the sequence of the narrative, but it also disregards the time sequence of true narrative by presuming the availability during the ministry of realities that were only present after the death of Jesus (e.g., the gift of the Spirit offered to the Samaritan woman even though, as 7.39 explains, the Spirit was not yet available since Jesus had not yet been glorified).

The material of this second edition proceeds primarily through discourse and debate, rather than by narrative. Where there is narrative, it serves the purposes of the debate that follows and that debate is the ultimate focus. The second edition is Jewish throughout and reflects various forms of sophisticated rabbinic thought and argument not evident in the first edition. We see, for example, that, in ch. 5, Jesus' justification for his work on the Sabbath is based on the rabbinic argument that God himself worked on the Sabbath. The discourse of ch. 6 is cast in the stereotyped format of Jewish exegetical homilies on Scripture. In ch. 7, Jesus makes use of the rabbinic argument of *qal wehōmer*. In ch. 8, Jesus justifies his witness on the basis of rabbinic laws regarding what constitutes valid witness.

One of the more prominent literary features of the second edition is the introduction of the notion of 'misunderstanding', the technique by which a person takes the words of Jesus to refer to a material reality rather than the spiritual reality intended by Jesus. This technique occurs frequently in the Gospel and always in the second edition. Moreover, the technique presumes guilt for failing to respond to the Spirit—even though, as we have seen, 'the Spirit was not yet' (cf. 7.39).

In contrast to the material of the first edition, the second edition has no desire to record historical details of the ministry but focuses almost exclusively on theological issues. As a result, the material of the second edition is of little use for discussions of the historical ministry. Nevertheless, the material reflects quite accurately the history and theology of the later community as it confronted opposition within the synagogue!

As was the case with the first edition, what we know of the author, the community, the date, and the locale of composition is slight and can only be gleaned from the material itself. The author was a Jew, knowledgeable in later Jewish thought. The second edition was undoubtedly composed some years after the first edition but the locale of its composition is difficult to determine. The fact that it is cast in the traditional Jewish worldview rather than the more radical and more Hellenized worldview of apocalyptic tells us that it represents what was probably a truly faithful picture of the response of traditional Jewish believers to Jesus.

4. An Overview of 1 John

By the time 1 John was written, the Johannine community constituted a community independent of the synagogue but one that was undergoing its own internal theological crisis resulting from differing interpretations of community traditions. One group (the 'opponents') takes a

strict interpretation of the theology of the second edition of the Gospel regarding the outpouring of the eschatological Spirit and the implications of that outpouring. The group has drawn conclusions that the author of 1 John holds to be inadequate. Consequently, the author writes 1 John to explain the errors of the opponents and to put forward his own understanding of the tradition.

a. The Views of the Opponents

For the opponents, the ministry of Jesus was focused primarily on the promise that God would give the Spirit, which would be given in its eschatological fullness and would be the source of eternal life, to all who believed in Jesus. Belief for the opponents centered on the person of Jesus: those who believed in him would receive the Spirit.

Implicit in this overall view of the ministry were a number of other beliefs that they understood to be based on the second edition of the Gospel. The opponents had their own distinctive understanding of Jesus (CHRISTOLOGY). While they agreed that Jesus was all that he claimed to be, they saw this to be the result primarily of his having received the Spirit at his baptism. He was anointed and he was Son of God. His ministry consisted of announcing that God was about to bestow the Spirit in its eschatological manifestation on all those who believed in him (PNEUMATOLOGY). When the believer received the Spirit, that person too was reborn and became a son (daughter) of God and could be said to be ‘anointed’—and to possess the (eternal) life of God, just as Jesus did. Moreover, because of the transforming effect of the Spirit, the believer would no longer sin and so had no need of ethical directions such as the commandment to love (ETHICS). The believer had already passed over from death to life (ESCHATOLOGY). In all these respects, according to the opponents, the believer was similar to Jesus (ANTHROPOLOGY). Yet another effect of the transformation by the Spirit was that the individual would now know God fully (KNOWLEDGE OF GOD) and would have no need of the ‘historical’ words of Jesus (BELIEF). The Spirit would provide all the direction that was needed.

The opponents also believed, in accordance with numerous texts in their Scriptures, that the eschatological Spirit would wash them clean from their sins. Thus, although they believed in Jesus, he was considered important because he announced God’s gift of the Spirit. However, his death was not an atonement for sin but his means of departure to the Father (SOTERIOLOGY). Because the believer’s guidance came from the Spirit, there was no need or place for human authority. All were united through the Spirit (ECCLESIOLOGY). Because the reception of the Spirit

was all-important, ritual or anything dealing with the material aspects of religion were simply unnecessary and ineffectual (ATTITUDE TOWARD THE MATERIAL ASPECTS OF RELIGION).

b. The Views of the Author

When the author of 1 John corrects his opponents, he does so in what might be called a ‘both/and’ manner. The author was a member of the same community and accepted the same traditions as the opponents although he understood many of those traditions differently. Thus, the task that confronted the author was not one of confirming belief in Jesus versus unbelief, as it had been at the time of the second edition. Rather, the author must now confirm correct belief versus incorrect belief (BELIEF).

Like the opponents, the author believed that Jesus was anointed and was Son of God, but he believed that Jesus’ sonship was unique (4.9) and one of the aspects of this uniqueness was that Jesus had existed before coming into the world (cf. the repeated references to Jesus’ entry into the world as his being ‘revealed’). Jesus was not simply human; he was also uniquely divine. Thus, as exalted as the Christology of the second edition was, the third edition makes it even more exalted and brings the identity of Jesus closer to that of God the Father (CHRISTOLOGY).

Moreover, for the author of 1 John, although the believer had received an anointing (2.20, 27), had been born again (3.1), had received eternal life, and was now a child of God (3.1-2), the transforming effect of the Spirit was not yet total and complete (3.2-3; PNEUMATOLOGY; ANTHROPOLOGY). The believer had eternal life (2.25; 3.14) but needed to continue to work to bring that life to fulfillment (3.2-3; ETERNAL LIFE). It was possible for the believer to lose eternal life and a future judgment would decide one’s final destiny (ESCHATOLOGY). Although the believer was inchoatively sinless, the believer could still sin and so needed ethical directives such as the love commandment (5.18, but see 5.16-17; ETHICS). Although the believer had knowledge of God and of what was right (2.3-4), the individual still needed to have the external guidance provided by the actual words of Jesus and so needed the commandment to ‘keep the words of Jesus’ (2.7; KNOWLEDGE).

Even though the Spirit was the principle of life, it was the atoning death of Jesus that took away sin (1.7; 2.2; SOTERIOLOGY). Moreover, for the author of 1 John, the ongoing religious life was not a purely spiritual undertaking but had a human and material element to it (ATTITUDE TOWARD THE MATERIAL ASPECTS OF RELIGION). The believer should keep to the historical words of Jesus (rather than just the

inspiration of the Spirit). In addition the ‘fleshly’ death of Jesus was essential for the forgiveness of sin. But the most important aspect of the author’s thought was the introduction of an apocalyptic worldview as the framework within which the overall ministry of Jesus was to be understood. Thus, although there is no indication that the conflict between the author and his opponents involved the issue of worldview in itself, clearly there *is* a new worldview introduced at the time of 1 John.

c. 1 John as a ‘Handbook’ for Understanding and Dealing with the Community Crisis

In the earliest period of Christianity, it was said that 1 John functioned as a kind of handbook for explaining the Gospel of John and that the interpretation this afforded enabled the acceptance of the Gospel into the canon.⁹ The view of the role of 1 John presented here confirms that. For the community at the time, the author of 1 John presented the views of the opponents and then explained why they were erroneous. At the same time, he explained the correct interpretation of the tradition.

For the modern reader, the first Letter has something of a different function. Once the material of the second and third editions of the Gospel has been identified, we are able to recognize certain features as characteristic of those sets of material. In a number of cases, however, the particular significance of those features is not fully intelligible until we read 1 John. For example, we have noticed the absence of any attention to ethics in the second edition. While we may speculate about the significance of this feature, it is only when we read in 1 John that the opponents held to a theory of ethical perfectionism that we see the full meaning of the absence of ethical material in the second edition (cf. 2.1, 4-6; 3.4-9). At the same time, it is only when we realize that the author of 1 John argued that ethical instruction is still necessary that we can understand the importance of the love commandment for 1 John and for the third edition of the Gospel.

When we understand 1 John’s insistence on keeping the word of Jesus and of remaining faithful to what was ‘from the beginning’, we are able to see that this is a reaction to the lack of attention to the ‘historical’ words of Jesus (i.e., Bultmann’s so-called ‘the revealer without a revelation’) in the second edition. In addition, once we see that the second edition had a one-sided understanding of the role of the Spirit, we are

9. This view of the function of 1 John is not confined to early Christianity. Scholars such as C. Koester, K. Grayston, and S. Smalley still refer to it in these terms.

able to see the significance of the description of the Paraclete as ‘not speaking on his own’ but only reminding the believer what Jesus had said. Thus, 1 John confirms not only the understanding of the crisis put forward here but also indirectly confirms the editorial analysis of each edition of the Gospel.

5. An Overview of the Third Edition

Like the authors before him, the third author uses distinctive terminology, has distinctive literary techniques, and a distinctive theology. However, unlike the previous two editions, there are no distinctive features of narrative orientation since the third author focuses almost entirely on theology rather than on narrative. The third author introduces a number of new terms or terms with new meanings. In the earlier editions, κύριος was used in the secular sense as a form of respectful address or to refer to the ‘master’, for example, in a slave relationship. Now it is used in the religious sense meaning ‘lord’ (e.g., 4.1; 6.23; 11.2; 21.7). Ἀδελφός (brother, sibling) is now used in the religious sense of one’s coreligionist (20.17, 23). The disciples are at times referred to as ‘the Twelve’ (6.67; 20.24). Believers are referred to as ‘children’ or as ‘little children’. The title ‘Jesus Christ’ appears for the first time. In addition, a more substantive change is the use of ‘commandment’ as a conceptualization of the ministry of Jesus (in contrast to the use of ‘work’ for this in the second edition). Yet in a remarkable contrast to these distinctive terms used by the third author, there is a *lack* of a distinctive terminology for religious authorities. Rather, the third author simply adopts the terminology that had been employed most recently and uses it to communicate his own distinctive theology.

However, the most far-reaching aspect of the third edition is the introduction of the apocalyptic worldview. This represents a major change within the world of the Gospel, but one that had been introduced to the broader Johannine tradition by the author of 1 John. This dualism finds its closest parallels in the SDQ¹⁰ and the T12P. In the identification of this material within the Gospel, I have focused on using what might be called ‘micro-features’ of apocalyptic rather than ‘macro-features’ because these more detailed elements are more likely to be apparent in passages where larger elements of apocalyptic thought may not always be evident. Among the elements of apocalyptic with parallels in the

10. I.e., ‘Sectarian Documents from Qumran’.

Synoptic Gospels is the use of the title 'Son of Man', which is associated with apocalyptic and appears only in the third edition (e.g., 1.51; 3.13-14; 5.27; 6.62, etc.). So also are the two references to the 'kingdom of God' (3.3, 5).

This edition also introduces a fundamental symbolic expression of apocalyptic dualism: the images of light and darkness. In the third edition, we read of the dualistic opposition between 'the Spirit of Truth' (which had been explicitly contrasted with 'the Spirit of Deception' in 1 John; cf. Jn 14.17; 15.26; 16.13). There is also the dualism implicit in such expressions as 'knowing the truth'. There are several expressions that express the person's relation to one's spiritual 'father' (generally expressed as a pair of dualistically opposed 'fathers'). Along with this, there is the expression 'sons of' (especially the distinctive expression 'sons of light'), used to express spiritual relationship to a father (12.36); the expression 'being of [this or that 'father']; e.g., 8.44, 47), also appears. The term 'works' is used in the idiomatic expression 'to do the works of', meaning to do the will of someone, i.e., one's 'father', again conceived of dualistically (e.g., 6.28; 8.39, 41). The obligation to love is not expressed in a universal way in which love of one's enemies is encouraged; rather the love is the sectarian love directed only to the members of one's community (13.34-35; 15.12). There are the convictions (typical of apocalyptic) of a Second Coming of Jesus (5.28-29; 6.39, 40); of a future judgment at the end of time;¹¹ and of the coming wrath of God (3.36; ESCHATOLOGY).

If the first author had presented a straightforward narrative of the miracles of Jesus and if the second author had chosen to arrange the material of the Gospel artificially to demonstrate the 'witnesses' to Jesus, the third author also superimposes his own distinctive structure, one that echoes the overriding structure of 1 John. He symbolizes Jesus as the

11. In Johannine theology, 'judging' and 'judgment' have a meaning that is different from the one common today. In Johannine theology, these terms always have a negative connotation and are better represented in English by the words 'condemning' and 'condemnation'. Thus, in Johannine theology, on the last day all people will arise either to a resurrection of life or a resurrection of judgment (cf. Jn 5.29). Consequently, the future eschatology associated with the apocalyptic worldview is best and most accurately described as a time of 'final accountability'. However, the intermixing of these two meanings is so common that some confusion cannot be avoided and it seems too awkward constantly to substitute the term 'final accountability'. As a result, the distinction in meaning will be made explicit only where it is thought to be essential.

light of the world. Thus, by building on the theme of the 'hour' of Jesus from the second edition, the third author presents the public ministry as a 'day' of twelve 'hours' in which 'the light' shines. The Passion is 'the night', a time when Jesus demonstrates his love to the utmost.

In addition to the imposition of this overarching perspective, the third author comments on the text of the Gospel by means of extensive glossing. That is, he makes additions of considerably varying length but primarily in relation to material that already existed rather than by creating new narrative. Theologically, these glosses have two specific intentions. First, the third author seeks to clarify the thought of the Gospel in accord with the views put forward by the author of 1 John. Second, the author seeks to address a number of other topics that go beyond the issues of 1 John but which he considers important for the later community.

In the discussion of the theology of the previous editions and 1 John, we saw eleven theological categories that contained distinctive elements of each author's theology. In his editing of the Gospel, the third author presents his own distinct perspective on each of these eleven topics. Thus, in matters of Christology, the author provides an even more exalted understanding of Jesus than the second author had done. Jesus is now said to be preexistent, to have descended from heaven and to return there after his death, to have a unique sonship, to have the Spirit without measure, and ultimately to be 'I AM' (e.g., 8.24, 28; 13.19; CHRISTOLOGY). Thus, not only does the author exalt the person of Jesus but he also distinguishes his status more clearly from that of the believer (ANTHROPOLOGY).

In matters of belief, the third author preserves the second author's view of the 'witnesses' to Jesus but includes two additional witnesses (the Spirit of Truth and the disciples) appropriate for the time after the ministry (15.26-27; cf. 15.22-25). In addition, the third author focuses on the proper *content* of that belief. A correct belief is essential (as we have seen in the discussion of Christology) and that belief must be based on the historical words of Jesus. No one can attain eternal life except through Jesus (e.g., 10.9; 14.16; BELIEF). The third author now views the Spirit within the context of apocalyptic and whereas for the second author the issue was the contrast between Spirit and flesh (i.e., whether one had the Spirit or not), the issue for the third author is essentially whether one has 'the Spirit of Truth' or 'the Spirit of Deception'. And so the third author is careful to point out that the Spirit of Truth will remind the disciples of what Jesus had told them. The Spirit of Truth will not speak on his own but only what he hears (e.g., 14.26; 15.26; 16.13-15).

Thus, the Spirit will not deviate from the message of Jesus and the third author emphasizes this in order to refute the opponents' view that the specific teaching of Jesus was not important and that there was no need to record it except insofar as it pertained to his promise of the Spirit (PNEUMATOLOGY).

The third author shares with the second author the conviction that Jesus came to give eternal life through the imparting of the Spirit. However, in the second edition of the Gospel, there had been no discussion of ethics (i.e., the behavior expected of the believer) and the result is the so-called 'ethical vacuum' of the Gospel. From a reading of 1 John, it became apparent that this lack of ethics is due to the fact that the opponents claimed to have a 'perfectionism' based on their possession of the eschatological Spirit that guaranteed freedom from future sin. The third author agrees with the author of 1 John that the believer's possession of eternal life is inchoative (ETERNAL LIFE) but that the believer is still capable of sin and so needed the commandment of mutual love, modeled on the love that Jesus exhibited to his own (ETHICS).

In keeping with the apocalyptic viewpoint, all believers are accountable for their actions and will undergo a final judgment and possible condemnation. For those whose actions are good, the possession of eternal life will become final in physical resurrection from the dead (ESCHATOLOGY).

The third author agrees with the author of the second edition that the believer is given the prerogative of 'knowing' God, but the historical word of Jesus has a priority over, and is the measure of, any direct knowledge the believer may claim to have (KNOWLEDGE OF GOD). In matters of SOTERIOLOGY, the author of the third edition differs radically from the view expressed in the second edition. In various ways, the third author affirms that Jesus' death was not just a departure to the Father but was a death that took away the sin of the world. This was an issue that was addressed repeatedly in 1 John and that the third author now made clear also within the Gospel itself.

In matters of ecclesiology, the third author shows a remarkable departure from the perspective of earlier stages of the tradition. In keeping with his view that the realms of the physical and the material have a continuing importance, we see that a human person, the Beloved Disciple, has a special role as witness to the tradition. At the same time, the community recognizes a role for human leadership of the community in the person of Peter. By repeated comparison of the roles of these two individuals, it becomes clear that the community now accepts the importance of human leadership and that this leadership is embodied in

Peter rather than the Beloved Disciple. Although this is a very minimal ecclesiology, when this is viewed within the history and theology of the Johannine tradition, it represents a major change from earlier periods in the life of the community (ECCLESIOLOGY).

Finally, the third author holds a considerably different appraisal of the role of material reality in religious life. This author would not say, with the second author, that ‘the flesh is useless’ (6.63). Rather, he would affirm, along with the author of 1 John, that the physical death of Jesus (‘in blood’) was essential for gaining eternal life (e.g., 1.29; 6.51; 10.11; 15.13). Moreover, physical resurrection was an essential element in the future life (5.28) and participation in ‘physical’/‘material’ rituals such as the Eucharist (6.51-58) was also essential for obtaining eternal life. Moreover, the human authority of Peter becomes significant (21.15-17) in addition to the role of the Spirit, as we have seen (THE RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE OF MATERIAL REALITY).

Beyond these theological features, it becomes clear from the analysis of the material of the third edition that in some cases the third author intended to introduce elements into his Gospel that would correlate the Johannine tradition with that of the Synoptics (e.g., 4.44; 12.1-8; 19.23-24). These comments are loosely tied to their context and at times introduce confusion in relation to earlier elements of the Gospel. Yet the actual content is so similar to that found in the Synoptics that it would appear that the primary purpose of their inclusion was precisely to reflect that similarity.

At the time of the third edition, the social location of the community manifests yet another (fourth) distinctive configuration. The community is one that is in continuity with the tradition as manifest at the time of the second edition, but like the community at the time of 1 John it now exists apart from the synagogue. Unlike the community at the time of 1 John, the community now manifests contact with other areas of early Christianity and also manifests a desire to be seen as existing in harmony with the Petrine tradition and the Great Church.

When we attempt to determine the date of the third edition, we need to address two issues. First we must ask about the actual date of the third edition and also about the date of the third edition relative to that of 1 John. On the basis of external evidence, namely, the first citation of the Gospel, the final edition was probably composed as early as 95 CE and likely before 117 CE. However, perhaps more importantly, there is considerable evidence that the third edition was written *after the composition of 1 John*.

The discussion of the author of this edition also necessarily involves the figure of the Beloved Disciple (BD). The BD was an historical figure, probably the person who identifies himself as the Elder in 2 and 3 John. By the time of the third edition of the Gospel, this disciple had died and the community had assigned to him the honorific title of ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved’. This is a title that he surely would not have given to himself. Thus, while the Elder may be the author of 1 John, he is not the author of the third edition, even though the third edition has as one of its goals to enshrine the Elder’s views within the Gospel. Beyond the general characteristics known from the third edition itself, we do not know the identity of the author of the third edition.

The place where the third edition was written cannot be determined with certainty, but a number of indications suggest that the Gospel may have reached its final form in or near Ephesus.

With this overview as a framework for viewing the development of the theology of the Johannine tradition, we will examine the three most commonly proposed cultural/religious backgrounds for understanding the Johannine literature, as will become apparent in the pages that follow. The above reading of the tradition provides a number of major new insights into the world of the Gospel and the Letters of John.

6. The Plan of the Book

We will begin our inquiry with the possibility of the Gospel and Letters being Gnostic—or anti-Gnostic. As we shall see, the frequent references to ‘knowing’ and ‘not knowing’ in the Johannine Gospel are one of the primary factors leading to the belief that the Gospel (particularly) was influenced by Gnosticism. However, once we see that truly ‘knowing’ God was one of the prerogatives of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit according to the Jewish Scriptures, and so one of the prerogatives of the one who had received the Spirit through belief in Jesus, we are in a position to explain this feature of the Gospel in a way that accounts more fully for the feature than is possible by attributing it to Gnosticism.

In Part II, we will see that the claims by some scholars that the Gospel was Docetic—or anti-Docetic—rest, by these scholars’ own admission, on very few texts either within the Gospel or within 1 John. At the same time, the allegedly Docetic features can be explained much more adequately and within the context of the entire Gospel and 1 John by the view described fully in my commentary.

In Part III, we will see that even ‘Judaism’, understood as a monolithic entity, cannot be used as a background adequately to explain the Gospel. Failure to distinguish the specific type of Judaism lying behind a given theological conception can lead to serious errors. We will look at ‘realized eschatology’ from the point of classical Judaism and see that even the term is in some sense a misnomer since in classical OT Judaism all future hopes were thought to take place within history. Consequently, if, at one stage, the Johannine Christians understood the ministry of Jesus to have brought about the fulfilment of the Scriptural promises, these would necessarily have been given in their fullness within the first century!

At the same time, sensitivity to this view of the development of the tradition gives a clear framework for understanding the apocalyptic background of the allegedly anti-Jewish statement of 8.44 (‘you are of your Father the devil’) as well as the supposed ‘limitation’ on Christian love to one’s ‘brothers’ and the supposed failure to extend it to one’s enemies!

Part IV attempts to draw together the results of the investigation and to explore their implications. Finally, in a Postlude, I attempt to sketch a history of the Johannine community as it appears in the light of this analysis.

Part I

GNOSTICISM AND THE JOHANNINE TRADITION

Chapter 1

GNOSTICISM AND THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

1. Past Attempts to Articulate the Relation of the Gospel of John to Gnosticism: Gnostic? Anti-Gnostic? Proto-Gnostic? Gnostic Milieu?

Throughout early Christianity, the Gospel of John held a special attraction for Gnostics.

In the past, this has been regularly espoused by scholars and explained in a variety of ways. The most famous of the proposals seeking to explain this relationship was that of R. Bultmann, who was convinced that a major component of the Gospel was a series of discourses that had been taken over from a ‘gnostic discourse source’ by the Evangelist and modified in such a way as to be, in the end, anti-Gnostic.¹ The Gnosticism that Bultmann spoke of was not the ‘Hellenized Gnosticism’ found in many of the Nag Hammadi documents, but a reconstructed, pre-Christian Gnosticism, mainly on the basis of the then recently discovered Mandaean and Manichean documents.² In this view, the background of the Gospel was at the same time Gnostic and anti-Gnostic.³

Bultmann brought this view to bear in the famous commentary he wrote on the Gospel of John (1941). This commentary went through many editions in German before being translated into English (1971).⁴ In it, Bultmann claimed that the discourses of the Gospel were Gnostic in orientation and had been derived from a Gnostic source.⁵ The discourses

1. In his first discussion (‘Die Bedeutung der neuerschlossenen mandäischen und manichäischen Quellen für das Verständnis des Johannesevangeliums’, *ZNW* 24 [1925], pp. 100–146), Bultmann made use of Mandaean and Manichean documents for this investigation. The Nag Hammadi documents had not yet been discovered.

2. M. Lidzbarski, *Ginza: Der Schatz oder das Große Buch der Mandäer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1925).

3. R. Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity in Its Contemporary Setting* (New York: Meridian, 1956).

4. R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971).

5. For a succinct summary-discussion of Bultmann’s approach, see E. Haenchen, *John* (Hermeneia; 2 vols.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), II, pp. 34–7. For a more detailed discussion, see D. M. Smith, *The Composition and Order of the Fourth Gospel: Bultmann’s Literary Theory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965).

were taken over by the Evangelist (i.e., the author of the Gospel) and were ‘Christianized’ and thus made to refer to Jesus rather than to the Gnostic god. All of this was done in order to lure Gnostics away from their viewpoint and to show them that Christianity could fulfill their hopes even better than Gnosticism. Although this view held sway among scholars, particularly German ones, for decades, scholarship eventually came to view the position of Bultmann as too extreme. Not only was there no actual text that Bultmann could point to as the ‘source’ from which these discourses had derived but the texts Bultmann did refer to were Mandaean and came from a time much later than the first century. Nevertheless, although Bultmann’s specific proposal was abandoned, the seeming affinities between the Gospel and Gnosticism continued to attract scholars.

In the 1970s, after the widespread dissemination of the Nag Hammadi documents, the conviction that the Fourth Gospel was Gnostic or influenced by Gnosticism experienced something of a rebirth and in some respects flourished, even though the documents from Nag Hammadi were recognized to be later copies of documents which themselves were almost certainly post-Christian.⁶ For example, Louise Schatz declared that the Gospel of John was the first document that showed how Gnosticism absorbed and articulated the Christian message. In Schatz’s view, the Jesus of the Gospel ‘is to be called without restriction a Gnostic revealer’.⁷ Kurt Rudolph, in his masterful survey of Gnosticism, believed that the Gospel was not immune to Gnostic influence.⁸

In the 1980s, Raymond E. Brown became the most famous proponent of another approach to the question of the relationship between Gnosticism and the Gospel. In 1981, Brown published a commentary on the Johannine Epistles that is now generally accepted as one of the most thorough and most thought-provoking yet composed. In it, he suggested another relationship between the Gospel and Gnosticism. He argued that, at the time of the writing of 1 John, the community was experiencing a schism. One group proposed an ‘orthodox’ view of the tradition while the other group proposed a more radical interpretation. According to Brown, this second group left the community and moved toward becoming a

6. See for example the dating proposed by B. Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism: Traditions and Literature* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007).

7. L. Schatz, *Der Glaubende und die Feindliche Welt: Beobachtungen zum Gnostischen Dualismus und seiner Bedeutung für Paulus und das Johannes-evangelium* (WMANT 37; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1970). Quoted by K. Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism* (ET of 2d. rev. ed.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983), p. 159.

8. See, for example, Rudolph, *Gnosis*, p. 159.

Gnostic movement.⁹ Brown summarized his own view by proposing ‘that the adversaries eventually *became* Gnostics and, indeed, that their Johannine background may have catalyzed the development of early Gnostic systems’.¹⁰ In this view, it is not the Gospel itself that has Gnostic elements but rather one group within the Johannine community interpreted the Gospel in a way that had Gnostic affinities and eventually drifted into Gnosticism.

In the 1990s, a third approach to the question of the Gospel and Gnosticism emerged and is exemplified in the work of PHEME PERKINS. In her book *Gnosticism and the New Testament*, Perkins devoted two chapters to a discussion of similarities between the Fourth Gospel and Gnosticism.¹¹ In her discussion of discourse material, Perkins pointed out similarities between the discourses of the Fourth Gospel and Gnostic writings and also between the various ‘I AM’ sayings in both. Perkins argued that, in spite of the striking similarities, ‘the Gnostic material has developed independently of the Fourth Gospel’. Nevertheless, ‘[r]econstruction of the sources and patterns of discourse used in Gnostic texts provides important clues about the conventions employed in the Fourth Gospel... Johannine discourses draw upon a tradition of Jesus’ sayings as well as a style of revelation discourse that has been more extensively developed in Gnostic circles.’¹² Thus for Perkins, it was not a question of Johannine dependence upon Gnosticism—or the reverse. Rather it was a matter of both the Gospel of John and the Gnostic documents drawing from a common milieu but each developing differently, in distinctive ways.

In 2005, two essays were published in a volume deriving from the Johannine seminar of the Society for New Testament Studies, both attempting to discover relationships between parts of the Gospel and various Gnostic documents. Once again PHEME PERKINS explored similarities

9. R. E. Brown, *The Epistles of John* (AB 30; Garden City: Doubleday, 1982), pp. 55–68, 104–6.

10. Italics in the original. Brown (*Epistles*, p. 65) goes on to express his surprise that ‘while second-century Gnostics used GJohn (almost to the point of appropriating it), there is no clear evidence that they drew upon I John as a source for reflection. Indeed, as I shall point out..., I John became a tool of the orthodox church writers in their arguments against the Gnostic interpretations of GJohn. This would indicate that, whether or not he was combating proto-Gnostics, the thought of the author of I John was oriented in a direction that Gnostics could not find amenable.’

11. P. Perkins, *Gnosticism and the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993). In ch. 9, Perkins discusses the dialogue form. In ch. 8, she discusses the Prologue of the Gospel and its relation to Gnosticism.

12. Perkins, *Gnosticism*, p. 141.

between the *Apocryphon of John* and 1 John, arguing that similarities exist between Gnosticism and the Johannine tradition but that appropriate paradigms that would account satisfactorily for the complexity of the relationships had not yet been articulated.¹³ In the same volume, John Turner proposed a somewhat stronger thesis of ‘a common history-of-religions background for two early second century sectarian movements, namely Johannine Christianity and...“Sethian Gnosticism”’.¹⁴

Although many other scholars have addressed the relation between the Gospel and Gnosticism, the scholars mentioned above exhibit representative approaches to the question of this relationship. From this brief survey it is evident that, through time, scholars have reformulated their proposals regarding the relationship in such a way that the relationship is seen to be less and less direct: from a belief in dependence upon Gnostic texts to the proposal that both simply share a common milieu.

This topic has been further, and more seriously, complicated by the fact that, as scholars have continued to understand these documents more precisely, they have come to recognize that documents that were previously considered to express essentially the same system of thought are in fact quite different. The result is that the phenomenon once thought to be homogeneous is now understood to be far from such. In its most thorough-going form, some scholars now call into question whether there is (or was) an actual phenomenon known as Gnosticism.¹⁵

Because of this on-going debate, the question also arises whether it is still possible to address, in any form, the relation of the Gospel of John and its worldview to the group of documents that have traditionally been identified as Gnostic. The full range of features commonly thought to be

13. P. Perkins, ‘Gnostic Revelation and the Johannine Sectarianism: Reading 1 John from the Perspective of Nag Hammadi’, in *Theology and Christology in the Fourth Gospel: Essays by the Members of the SNTS Johannine Writing Seminar* (ed. G. Van Belle, J. G. van der Watt, and P. Maritz; BETL 184; Leuven: Peeters, 2005), pp. 245–76.

14. J. Turner, ‘Sethian Gnosticism and Johannine Christology’, in Maritz, Van Belle, and van der Watt, eds., *Theology and Christology*, pp. 399–433.

15. See, for example, M. Williams, *Rethinking ‘Gnosticism’: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). Williams represents a more radical skepticism. But see also K. King, *What Is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003). While this question is an important one, it is also important to realize that this may be a purely modern question and that in the ancient world there may have been more toleration for diversity of viewpoints within a given group than would be considered acceptable today. This is evident in varying degrees not only in the ‘library’ of Qumran but also in the ‘canon’ of the NT itself.

Gnostic does not appear in any one single Gnostic document. By picking and choosing, one can find elements of similarity between the Gospel and various Gnostic documents, but a central, unifying element of thought and worldview that would bring these elements into a unity is not found in the Gospel of John nor does any single document in the collection found at Nag Hammadi match closely the thought and worldview of the Gospel. In its most optimistic form, it is as if one can identify various ‘spokes’ of the Gnostic ‘wheel’ but not the unifying ‘hub’.¹⁶ Consequently no satisfactory proposal that the Gospel is somehow related, in any significant way, to Gnosticism (or to the milieu of Gnosticism) has been found.¹⁷

2. A New Perspective

In this article, I propose that another approach to this problem is possible, one that seems to offer some possibility of providing more clarity to the question of the relation between Gnosticism and the Gospel

16. After this study was complete, I came across the following comment by W. Meeks, referring to and accepting an opinion by Bultmann that is quite similar to what I have attempted to describe with the image of a wheel: ‘Not the least of Rudolf Bultmann’s enduring contributions to Johannine studies was his recognition and insistence that any attempt to solve the ‘Johannine puzzle’ must begin with this picture of the descending/ascending redeemer. Moreover, he saw that it is not simply a question of explaining the concept “pre-existence”, but rather of perceiving the origin and function of a myth. The solution could not be found, therefore, by comparisons with philosophical developments in the Hellenistic schools, such as the long-favored *logos spermatikos* of the Stoics, or its adaptation by middle Platonists or Alexandrian Jews. Myths have a logic of their own, which is not identical with the logic of the philosophers’ (W. Meeks, ‘Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism’, *JBL* 91 [1972], pp. 44–72 [44], referring to Bultmann, ‘Bedeutung’). What Bultmann and Meeks refer to as the underlying ‘myth’ is what I have referred to as the ‘hub’ joining the independent elements into a unified whole. We will see below (chapters 5 and 6) that the Gospel does contain a complete ‘myth’—that of the OT outpouring of the Spirit, together with the prerogatives that flow from that outpouring, but that the myth has been ‘muddied’ by the overlay of the ‘myth’ characteristic of apocalyptic.

17. The second drawback to this theory, but one that is related to the first, is that scholars regularly point to other features in the Gospel that are considered to be most similar to the thought and worldview of Judaism in general as well as to the sectarian documents from Qumran (SDQ) and the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (T12P) in particular. How these features are to be related to and integrated with others that are said to be Gnostic is not explained. Thus scholarship has been making it more and more difficult to hope to explain the relationship between the Gospel of John and Gnosticism in any significant way.

of John. If we were able to demonstrate that the thought of the Gospel does have within it not only the ‘spokes’ but also a ‘hub’ that explains the phenomena in question thoroughly, then a recourse to Gnosticism would be no longer necessary or, I would argue, even possible. If it is possible to show that the thought of the Gospel is a coherent whole without recourse to Gnosticism and that the features of the Gospel that were previously thought to be ‘spokes’ from the ‘wheel’ of Gnosticism can be better accounted for in another way, then we will have perhaps laid a significant foundation for understanding in a more nuanced way the special relationship between the Gospel and Gnosticism without positing a dependence in either direction.

In my recently published commentary on the Gospel and Letters of John, I have put forward a detailed description of the literary and theological growth of the Johannine Tradition. In the Prequel of this book, I have included a summary of the views put forth there. My purpose here is to suggest that this commentary does in fact present a view of the Gospel in which all of the material of the Gospel can be gathered consistently around three ‘hubs’. These three hubs are the three editions and the worldview and theology characteristic of each.

I would propose that the features commonly thought to reflect a Gnostic worldview can be accounted for more consistently and systematically by seeing them as prerogatives of the eschatological outpouring of God’s Spirit as this is articulated within non-apocalyptic, OT Judaism and presented in the second edition of the Gospel. Moreover, because of the material introduced at the third stage of the Gospel’s formation, a clear perception of the worldview of the Gospel became all the more difficult, confusion arose, and the apparent similarity to Gnosticism increased.

3. The Prerogatives of the Eschatological Outpouring of the Spirit

As was described above in the Prequel in the second edition of the Gospel Jesus is presented as the Son endowed by the Spirit and sent by the Father to offer the eschatological Spirit to those who believe in him. According to the OT, this outpouring of the eschatological Spirit had a number of prerogatives associated with it.¹⁸ For example, by receiving the Spirit, the individual would come to possess the very life of God.

18. These prerogatives are discussed in a more comprehensive way in vol. 1 of my commentary. I also discussed these prerogatives in *The Johannine Commandments: 1 John and the Struggle for the Johannine Tradition* (Mahwah: Paulist, 1990), pp. 105–98.

All the other prerogatives were essentially derivative of this new life. The believer, by receiving God's life, would come truly to know God. The person would have no need for teaching from others but would be 'taught by God'. The reception of the Spirit would free the individual from past sins and so transform the person that future sin would be impossible. Because of this, the person would not come into judgment but upon death would pass immediately into a spiritual existence with God.

4. A Means of Proceeding

It is the purpose of this chapter to examine once again several aspects of the Gospel that are often thought to reflect Gnostic thought and to compare the Johannine view (distinguishing between the viewpoint in the second and third editions of the Gospel) with similar features found in Gnosticism.¹⁹ I have selected eleven elements of the Gospel that are most often thought to reflect Gnostic thought and theology and will discuss each in what follows. This, I think, will help set the possible relationship of the Gospel to Gnosticism in a clearer light.²⁰

Gnosticism as an overall phenomenon is notoriously difficult to define and the Nag Hammadi documents demonstrate well the considerable variety of forms that it can take.²¹ Here I am less concerned to define the phenomenon than to discuss features found in Gnosticism that are said to be paralleled in the Johannine literature. In a study such as this, it is impossible to discuss all the unique features of the various systems but it should be apparent as the study progresses that the features discussed are generally those found most widely in 'Gnostic' literature.²²

19. That the Gospel reflects Gnostic thought is to a certain extent an anachronism. The Gospel precedes all of the Gnostic documents from Nag Hammadi by two or more centuries. Yet the writings of Irenaeus clearly indicate that a developed form of Gnosticism existed by the last third of the second century CE.

20. The eleven elements I have selected are intended to reflect some of the most basic tenets of Gnosticism and at the same time call attention to features of the Gospel that are said to reflect Gnosticism even if some of these features are not found in all forms of Gnosticism.

21. Some scholars prefer to abandon the overall term and to speak only of specific systems such as Sethianism, Valentinianism (distinguishing between 'Eastern' and 'Western' types), Basilidian gnosis, etc. While many of the Nag Hammadi documents reveal an affiliation with one or other of these more clearly defined 'systems', it is difficult to determine the affiliation of a number of the other documents in that Coptic collection.

22. In order to provide an objective control on this list of features, I have chosen to base it on the definition of Gnosticism presented by Birger Pearson in his recent

5. Prominent Features of the Gospel Commonly Thought to be Related to Gnosticism

a. The Importance of Knowing and Knowledge

In the Gospel of John, the Greek verbs for 'knowing' (οἶδα and γινώσκω) occur over seventy times.²³ This is a frequency much greater than in any other book of the NT. John the Baptist admits that he did not 'know' Jesus (1.31, 33) but that the one who sent him to baptize revealed to him who Jesus was. The Father 'knows' Jesus (10.15) and Jesus knows the Father (7.29; 8.55 [twice]; 10.15; 17.25). Jesus also knows his own (10.14) and his own 'know' Jesus (10.4, 5, 14, 27).

However, the Samaritan woman does not 'know' (4.10). But by far it is 'the Jews' who do not 'know'. They do not 'know' the Father (7.28; 8.19, 27, 55; 16.3; 17.25) nor do they 'know' Jesus (8.19; 16.3). They do not 'know' what Jesus is saying (3.10) or the parable about the sheep and the shepherd (10.6). 'The Jews' say they 'know' the father and mother of Jesus (6.42). They also claim to 'know' Jesus, but actually they do not (7.28); and they claim to 'know' where Jesus is from, but actually they do not (7.28). In addition to 'the Jews', 'the world' should 'know' that the Father has sent Jesus (17.23) but it does not 'know' the Father (17.25).

The disciples are urged to 'know' the Father (14.7 [twice]) and to 'know' Jesus (14.7). They will 'know' that Jesus is in the Father and the Father in him (14.20); they 'know' the way Jesus is going (14.4). They 'know' that the Father sent Jesus (17.25), that Jesus has come forth from the Father (17.8), and that all Jesus has the Father has given him (17.7). Yet in spite of this the disciples' knowing is still incomplete before Jesus' glorification (12.16; 13.7 [twice]; 14.9; 16.18, 30).

This emphasis on knowing is one of the features that first caught the attention of scholars, who suggested that the usage had a Gnostic background.²⁴ In Gnosticism, knowledge of the soul's true situation in the world and its heavenly origin with God is necessary in order to begin the escape from this material world and to return to its heavenly abode.

(2007) book on the topic. To it I will add certain other features of the Johannine tradition that bear a remarkable similarity to Gnosticism.

23. However the noun γνῶσις never appears.

24. Pearson (*Gnosticism*, p. 12) begins his definition of the essential features of Gnosticism by stating that 'knowledge (γνῶσις) is of central importance in Gnosticism; indeed, it is a prerequisite for salvation'. He then goes on describe the type of knowledge he is talking about: 'a knowledge of God and a knowledge of the true nature of the human self'.

The very name of the movement reflects the importance of this knowledge for salvation.²⁵ One example of such orientation is found in *The Book of Thomas the Contender* (II.138.7-18), where the Savior says:

[E]xamine yourself that you may understand who you are, in what way you exist, and how you will come to be. Since you are called my brother, it is not fitting that you be ignorant of yourself. And I know that you have understood, because you had already understood that I am the knowledge of the truth. So while you accompany me, although you are uncomprehending, you have (in fact) already come to know, and you will be called 'the one who knows himself'. For he who has not known himself has known nothing, but he who has known himself has at the same time already achieved knowledge about the Depth of the All.²⁶

However, close analysis of the notion of 'knowing' in the Gospel of John shows it has little in common with Gnostic notions. Knowledge for the Johannine believer is knowledge of God not knowledge of self. Moreover, in Gnostic systems the possession of knowledge and its 'effects' vary. In some Gnostic systems, it is said that there are three types of persons: the 'spiritual' or 'pneumatic' (πνευματικός), the 'psychic' (ψυχικός), and the 'fleshly' (σαρκικός), who were also called 'earthly' (χοϊκός) or 'hylic' (ύλικός). For pneumatics, the ability to 'know' is connatural and, once knowledge is attained, salvation is assured.²⁷

At times, such knowledge is conceived of as a gift from God given also to psychics.²⁸ Yet in some systems, the psychics, even with the gift of knowledge, are not capable of entering into the Pleroma.²⁹

25. Rudolph, *Gnosis*, pp. 55, 113–18, with multiple examples.

26. Rudolph, *Gnosis*, pp. 55, 113–18, with multiple examples.

27. For example *The Gospel of Truth* 21.5–22.15. A general description of the myth appears, in various forms, in Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 1.1-8; Clement, *Exc.* 45.2–65.2; and Hippolytus, *Haer.* 6.29.2-6.36.4. However, in other works such as the *Tripartite Tractate* (I.5, 125.1-10), psychics may also attain salvation but not as easily as pneumatics.

28. This was the view of the 'western' Valentinian school. Heracleon's commentary on the Gospel of John (fragments 17–39) interprets the Samaritan woman as 'pneumatic' and the story of the healing of the official's son as an allegory of the salvation of 'psychic' individuals. With this gift, salvation is assured even for the psychic. See Pearson, *Gnosticism*, pp. 163–4.

29. This was typical of western Valentinianism. See Pearson, *Gnosticism*, pp. 156–8, 188. However, according to documents such as the *Tripartite Tractate* (I.5, 122.12–129.34), in the end the 'psychicals' who respond properly will achieve the same salvation as the spirituals. Again see Pearson, *Gnosticism*, pp. 186–7. On the development of Valentinian theology and the distinctions between western and

In their basic conception, these ideas have almost nothing in common with the Johannine conception of the ability to know. At the same time, it is easy to see how, on a superficial level, the Johannine contrast between the insufficiency of the flesh and the importance of the Spirit (cf. Jn 3.6; 6.63) could appeal to Gnostics, who held to the existence of different ‘types’ of men. Moreover, the conviction that salvation was assured to the pneumatic person was similar in some respects to the ‘realized eschatology’ of the Gospel inasmuch as the believer who possessed the eschatological Spirit already possessed eternal life in its fullness and so would not come into judgment.

However, the Johannine concept is completely different in origin and nature from the Gnostic notion. In the Gospel of John, the background of the failure to ‘know’ and the ability to ‘know’ is derived from the OT portrayal that, throughout their history, Israel had not ‘known’ God.³⁰ This had led them into sin and idolatry.³¹ But the prophets had promised that ‘in the last days’ all this would change and the Israelites would know God fully.³²

This knowledge of Yahweh is an eschatological gift; it is not something that the people have achieved or were born with, as was the case with Gnostics. Second, this knowledge of God will be direct. That is, the people will not be dependent upon intermediaries for attaining this knowledge. They will not need teachers (Jer. 31.34). Third, this knowledge is not only an intellectual comprehension but a comprehension that is directly linked to correct action (Jer. 24.7).³³

eastern Valentinianism, see especially E. Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the Valentinians* (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 60; Leiden: Brill, 2006).

30. Isa. 1.2-4 says: ‘The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master’s crib; but Israel does not know, my people do not understand’ (NRSV).

31. Jer. 9.2-3: ‘For they are all adulterers, a band of traitors. They bend their tongues like bows; they have grown strong in the land for falsehood, and not for truth; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not know me, says the Lord’ (NRSV).

32. Jer. 31.33-34: ‘But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them; and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the Lord”, for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord’ (NRSV).

33. The fact that Jeremiah says ‘they will return to me’ implies the action consequent upon this knowledge. See also the discussion of ‘The Spirit and Enthusiasm’, in J. D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (2d ed.; Philadelphia: Trinity, 1990), pp. 174–202.

While the similarities to this OT conception of eschatological ‘knowledge’ are implicit as they appear in the second edition, in 1 John it becomes explicit that the author and his opponents are basing their understanding on this OT background. Even at a time when he is arguing that the community must ‘keep the word’ of Jesus, the author states that ‘you know all’ (2.20) and ‘[y]ou have no need for anyone to teach you’ (2.27). There can be no doubt that the author is here attempting to articulate his view of ‘knowing’ against the background of Jeremiah’s prophecy about the end times. Thus it is easy to see that elements of the Gospel of John could be attractive to Gnostics who saw some similarity in them; but, in fact, in origin and nature they are radically different.

b. Jesus as Revealer

In Gnosticism redemption comes through revelation.³⁴ But Gnosticism has a variety of notions about the coming of revelation. In some systems, there is only a primeval revelation, once-and-for-all. In others, there is a continuing series of revelatory acts in different aeons, i.e. at different periods of time. But in all systems, as K. Rudolph states, ‘man can only become aware of his calamitous situation because it has been made known to him by means of revelation. The Gnostic view of the world simply demands a revelation which comes from outside the cosmos and displays the possibility of deliverance.’³⁵ This ‘redeemer’ can also be called a revealer or emissary or messenger, ‘who at the command of the supreme God imparts the saving message of the redeeming knowledge’.³⁶

The Gospel of John, too, has an emphasis on ‘revelation’. Yet, within the Johannine tradition, Jesus is, in Bultmann’s much-discussed phrase, to a certain extent ‘a revealer without a revelation’.³⁷ Jesus appears as a revealer who speaks primarily about himself. He does not reveal the hidden nature of the believer, but instead presents the believer with the possibility of receiving the Holy Spirit as a gift from the Father. In the Gospel, Jesus is essentially attempting to establish his credentials for announcing the offering of the Spirit. Unless a person is willing to accept that Jesus is who he claims to be, the individual will not believe that

34. Pearson (*Gnosticism*, p. 12) comments: ‘In Gnosticism saving gnosis comes by revelation from a transcendent realm, mediated by a revealer who has come from that realm in order to awaken people to a knowledge of God and a knowledge of the true nature of the human self’.

35. Rudolph, *Gnosis*, p. 119.

36. Rudolph, *Gnosis*, pp. 55, 66, 119.

37. R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (2 vols.; London: SCM, 1952), II, p. 66.

Jesus is the herald of the giving of the Spirit. In the second edition of the Gospel, Jesus explains that there are four witnesses to his identity (5.31-40): (1) John the Baptist witnesses to him; (2) his works witness to him; (3) the Father witnesses to him (through the word of Jesus which is the word of the Father); (4) and the Scripture witnesses to him.

These four witnesses become the organizing principle for much of the second edition.³⁸ In the first four incidents of public ministry, the second edition presents the disciples as responding (1) to the witness of John the Baptizer (1.19-51); (2) to the works (signs) of Jesus exemplified in the first Cana miracle; (3) to the Scripture (2.13-17, cf. 2.22); and (4) to the word of the Father given through Jesus (2.18-21, cf. 2.22). The second author also presents Jesus offering himself to ‘the Jews’ in the major discourses of chs. 6–10 and showing once again how he is attested by (1) the witness of Scripture in 6.30-50;³⁹ (2) the witness of his word in 8.12-59; and (3) the witness of his works in 10.22-39.

In all of this, there is no hint of Gnosticism but only the attestation of the credentials of Jesus to announce the giving of the Spirit—an attestation that is grounded in the OT scriptures, in miracles given to Jesus by the Father, and by the word of the Father proclaimed through Jesus. In all of this, Jesus himself is acting in response to the Spirit given to him by the Father.

c. Jesus as a Heavenly Redeemer

A prominent feature of Gnosticism is the descent of a heavenly Redeemer into the world of matter.⁴⁰ Although at one time it was thought that there was a single ‘redeemer myth’ which underlay all Gnostic systems, scholars now know that this is not the case. While the purpose of the Redeemer’s advent is always the same, the forms and the nature of the revealer are manifold. At times, the redeemer is associated with

38. For a preliminary discussion of this feature of the Gospel, see U. C. von Wahlde, ‘The Witnesses to Jesus in 5.31-40 and Belief in the Fourth Gospel’, *CBQ* 43 (1981), pp. 385–404.

39. Although the word ‘witness’ does not appear here, it is clear this is the purpose from the form-critical exposition of Scripture as applying to Jesus. The three discourses in chs. 6–10 have been extended by editing, but the foundational material comes from the second edition as is explained in my commentary.

40. Again, Pearson (*Gnosticism*, p. 12): ‘As for the bearer of revelation, this differs from one Gnostic system to another. In Christian forms of Gnosticism, the revealer is Jesus Christ, but in other forms of Gnosticism other revealers are posited, often mythological beings (for example, Sophia, “Wisdom”, in various manifestations), biblical characters (for example, Adam, Seth), or other noted figures from the past (for example, Zoroaster, Zostrianos).’

Adam, Eve, the sons of Adam, Seth⁴¹ and Enoch, Melchizedek,⁴² Baruch, and others. At other times, the redeemer is associated with abstract entities such as wisdom, spirit, insight, logos, and ‘light-bearer’.⁴³

In one conception, the Redeemer himself is ‘redeemed’. That is, the redeemer had fallen from heaven into the world at some time in the past. He was able to escape from this world only by leaving some parts of himself (‘sparks of light’) behind. He must then return to earth to gather to himself those ‘sparks’. By doing so the redeemer redeems himself.⁴⁴ This redeemer is the supreme god’s son sent to free the ‘self’ from the material world by revealing the ‘self’s’ true identity and so enabling the self to return to its true home.⁴⁵

In Christianized Gnosis, Jesus is understood to redeem through the imparting of knowledge (γνώσις) rather than through an atoning death. This absence of an atoning death is also a feature of the second edition of the Johannine Gospel.⁴⁶ In that edition, Jesus is presented as the emissary of God who announces the eschatological outpouring of the Spirit. However, an analysis of the Gospel’s literary genesis reveals that the actions of the Johannine Jesus are quite different from the actions of these figures and that the Johannine acts entirely in accord with the ‘orthodox’ understanding of the Old Testament.

At the time of the second edition, Jesus was conceived of as ‘one sent by God’ and as one who possessed the Spirit and so one who was ‘Son of God’ and ‘anointed’ (i.e., χριστός), but there is no indication that the community at the time of the second edition thought of Jesus as pre-existent or that his sonship was unique (Gk: μονογενής).⁴⁷ In the Gospel of John, the new life brought by the Spirit and announced by Jesus is not

41. *Gospel of the Egyptians* 64.1-2; *Zostrianos* 129-131.

42. *Melchizedek* (IX.1 1, 1-27, 10). Melchizedek and the figure of Jesus are closely associated in this text.

43. See Rudolph, *Gnosis*, p. 131.

44. See, for example, *The Tripartite Tractate* I.5, 124-125; *The Gospel of Philip* II.3, 71; *The Odes of Solomon* 8.22.

45. For example, *Tripartite Tractate* I.5, 125.1-10.

46. Scholars note that both conceptions occur in the Gospel as a whole, yet the dominant conception is that the death of Jesus is a return to the Father rather than a sacrificial death. See, for example, G. Nicholson, *Death as Departure* (SBLDS 63; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983).

47. Of course, it may well seem that to exclude preexistence and the uniqueness of Jesus’ sonship from consideration is simply a kind of *deus ex machina* to support the view presented here. However, it goes beyond the bounds of this article to present the evidence for this view. The position is argued in detail in my commentary.

in any sense a return to a state with which the individual is by nature associated. In the Gospel of John, the gift of the Spirit is just that—a gift—not something already possessed. This gift raises the believer to a new level of existence; it is not a return to a state that is already possessed and only in need of being brought to consciousness.

Yet, when the author of 1 John (and the author of the third edition of the Gospel after him) deepened the understanding of Jesus by articulating the belief in Jesus as preexistent, the picture of Jesus changed substantially. Yet, even here the picture of Jesus retains its full Jewishness. In Jn 5.19-29, the second author had portrayed Jesus as having received the power to give life and to judge. These were the activities unique to God in the OT. The third author built on that picture of Jesus and brought the image of Jesus even closer to that of the Father in that the Father was said to give to Jesus to have ‘life in himself’, which is the very way in which the Father possess life. Consequently Jesus becomes all the more closely identified with the Father, but this is an identity with the Father of the OT.

d. Dualism

In at least some forms of Gnosticism there is a thorough-going dualism. There is a dualism within God, within humanity, and within the world. Common to Gnosticism is a view in which, as Pearson says, ‘the transcendent God of the Bible [is split] into two: a super-transcendent supreme God who is utterly alien to the world, and a lower deity who is responsible for creating and governing the world in which we live’.⁴⁸ In the Gospel of John, although there are two (three) ‘divinities’, their relationship is entirely different than in Gnosticism. The creator god is not a lower god who is inferior to the supreme god and neither divinity is malevolent, as the inferior god sometimes is in Gnosticism. In the Gospel of John as in Judaism, the supreme God is the creator God. In the Gospel, the Son is not created and not inferior to the supreme God.⁴⁹

48. Pearson, *Gnosticism*, pp. 12–13.

49. The question whether the Son incarnate as Jesus was always considered divine and equal with the Father is a complicated one. It would appear that at the time of the Gospel’s second edition, Jesus, who had received the Spirit, had been given eternal life and so raised to the status of Son of God through rebirth from that Spirit but in that edition it was possible for the Son to say “the Father is greater than I” (14.28). However, in the third edition and in 1 John, it is clear that Jesus was considered preexistent and able to identify himself with titles otherwise used only of God the Father (e.g. ‘I AM’) and accepted such exalted titles from others (e.g. ‘My Lord and my God’, 20.28).

In the Gnostic view of humanity there is also a dualism. 'The human body and the lower emotive soul belong to this world, whereas the higher self (the mind or spirit) is consubstantial with the transcendent God from which it originated'.⁵⁰

Finally, 'the spatio-temporal universe in which we live (the cosmos) is regarded by Gnostics as a prison in which the true human self is shackled. Created and governed by the lower creator and his minions, it is the realm of chaos and darkness in the view of most of the ancient Gnostics.'⁵¹

The situation in the Gospel of John is complicated by the interweaving of three editions. In the material of the first edition, there is no evidence whatsoever of a dualism. In the second edition, there are a number of contrasts which are not truly dualistic, e.g. the contrast between spirit and flesh. These are contrasts but do not represent features of two opposed principles of good and evil as is characteristic of both modified and absolute dualism. That is, in the Gospel, the realm of the flesh is understood as the realm of naturally created humanity. The realm of the Spirit is another type of life, the life characteristic of God himself, eternal life, which is promised in the Scriptures as a freely given gift of God. It is not that spirit and flesh are related to one another as good to evil, as they are in Gnosticism where the material world is the work of the evil Demiurge. Rather, they are related to one another as the original gift of life received at physical birth as contrasted to a higher, specially promised gift of God's own life (Spirit) beyond the natural. In the Gospel of John the contrast between Spirit and flesh is a stark one and one that is essential to comprehend and transcend if one is to have eternal life: but it is not dualism.⁵²

Once this distinction is understood, it is easier to see that the same (non-dualistic) contrast is implied in the distinction between 'above' and 'below' and between 'earthly' and 'heavenly'. Even though these concepts may bear a superficial similarity to the thought of Gnosticism, they are radically different.

50. Pearson, *Gnosticism*, p. 13.

51. Pearson, *Gnosticism*, p. 13. Pearson goes on to say, 'However, it must be admitted that this radical dualism is somewhat mitigated in later Gnostic systems. Even so, the cosmos is regularly regarded as a product of creation, and not in any sense eternal.'

52. The clearest and most abrupt expression of this contrast in the Gospel of John is in Jn 6.63 ('The Spirit is what gives life; the flesh is useless').

However, in the third edition, there is a true apocalyptic dualism. This dualism is often referred to as ‘modified’ or ‘ethical’ dualism. That is, this worldview is based on the conviction that there are two opposed personal beings: one is good (God) and the other is evil (Satan, Belial). However, these two beings are not thought of as equal. God is thought of as ultimately superior to the principle of evil. However, for a time and for reasons known only to him, God has allowed Satan to exercise his power within the universe. It is also part of the apocalyptic worldview that, in a time determined by him, God would reassert his kingly power and destroy the power of Satan. In this worldview, Jesus declares that ‘the ruler of this world’ will be cast out at his death (12.31). God and Satan are truly opposed to one another. Both are personal beings, and the images of ‘light’ and ‘darkness’ are just that – images used to symbolize these two opposed beings. The third edition speaks of some ‘who come to the light so that it can be seen that their deeds are done in God. Others remain in darkness because their works are evil’ (cf. 3.19-21). Near the end of his public ministry Jesus declares: ‘yet a brief time the light is among you. Walk about while you have the light, lest the darkness overtake you... While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become sons of light’ (12.35, 36).

Some individuals are said to be ‘of God’; some are said to be ‘of Satan’. The same notion is conveyed by describing either God or Satan as one’s ‘father’ (cf. 8.41-49). Dualistic allegiance is also expressed by the phrase ‘to do the works of’ (e.g., 8.39, 41). This is clearly the dualism of opposed forces. Modified, apocalyptic dualism also employs other symbols to represent this opposition, for example ‘truth’ versus ‘falsehood’ (cf. 8.38-49) and ‘Jesus’ and ‘the believer’ versus ‘the world’ (cf. 8.23; 15.19; 17.6, 14-15).

Thus we see that the thought world of the Gospel is complicated by the interweaving of material (from the third edition) that describes true (modified) dualism together with other, earlier, material (from the second edition) that describes contrasts rather than dualism. It is essential to distinguish these two types of expression in order fully to understand the Gospel. Undoubtedly it is the failure properly to distinguish these that has facilitated the (false) conclusion that the Gospel contains a notion of ‘spirit’ and ‘flesh’ parallel with the notion of ‘spirit’ and ‘flesh’ in Gnosticism (where the flesh is genuinely looked upon as evil).⁵³

53. On ‘flesh’ and the material world in general as evil, see below (‘Attitude Toward the Material World’). It should be clear that the presence of modified dualism in the Gospel of John cannot be construed as evidence of Gnostic influence

e. Attitude Toward the Material World

As we have seen, for the Gnostic, life in this world is an exile. The self is trapped within a material body within the material world and, when it becomes aware of its situation, longs to be freed from this situation in order to return to its true origin in heaven. For the one who is 'spiritual' by nature, the material world is evil and the means by which the individual is entrapped.⁵⁴ As we have seen, such individuals who are spiritual by nature thought of themselves as saved entirely by the revelation of their true nature. For them, the notion of proper conduct within the 'material' world was irrelevant because they were spiritual by nature and redeemed by 'knowledge'. For these persons, morality and their association with the material world in general was of no importance. Resurrection did not entail a corporeal dimension.⁵⁵

However, as was mentioned above, in some Gnostic systems there were other types of individuals, the 'psychics' who were able to attain an advanced status. For these, it was necessary to 'achieve' salvation. For these persons, there were rituals such as baptism, anointing, sacred meals, the recitation of prayers and revealed incantations, and ceremonies connected with marriage and with death, all of which were an aid to achieving proper 'knowledge'.⁵⁶

In the Gospel of John, Jesus repeatedly disparages the flesh in favor of the Spirit. When he speaks with Nicodemus about rebirth, Jesus reminds him (3.6) that 'that which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit'. In response to the Samaritan woman's question about the proper place for worship, Jesus declares that neither place is correct because 'an hour is coming and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth... God is Spirit and it is necessary that those who worship him do so in Spirit and truth.' In 6.63 we read, 'the Spirit is what gives life; the flesh is useless'. Within

on the Gospel. Such modified dualism is found throughout the sectarian documents from Qumran as well as in other Jewish documents that have no relation to Gnosticism.

Pearson (*Gnosticism*, p. 18) comments, 'an important constituent of Gnosticism is a metaphysical dualism, somewhat akin to that of Platonism. Dualism is also a feature of apocalyptic Judaism, but in the latter the dualism is more of an ethical dualism involving contrasts between good and evil, light and darkness, and a divine struggle involving God and his angels on the one hand, and the Devil (under various names) and his angels on the other. Even so, it can clearly be seen that Gnosticism has borrowed some of these elements from Jewish apocalypses'.

54. Rudolph, *Gnosis*, p. 88.

55. Pearson, *Gnosticism*, p. 175.

56. Rudolph, *Gnosis*, pp. 172–3, 215–52.

the context of the second edition, from which the above statements all derive, Jesus declares that it is essential to have the Spirit in order to gain eternal life. And because God is Spirit, those who worship him should do so in the Spirit.

In the language of the second edition, the possession of the eschatological Spirit is possible for the believer in the present time. As a result, at death, the material body dies but the person continues to live with God forever in a spiritual state. The clearest statement of this belief appears in 5.24-25:

Amen, Amen, I say to you, the one who hears my word and believes in the one who sent me has eternal life and does not come into judgment but has crossed over from death to life. Amen, Amen, I say to you, an hour is coming and is now present when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those hearing it will live.

Here the second author is speaking of crossing over from *spiritual* death to *spiritual* life and such a person will not come into judgment. This is the view that most scholars would identify as the dominant paradigm of the Gospel, ‘realized eschatology’.⁵⁷

This view of ‘spiritual immortality’ was regularly found in Jewish religious documents of the time and cannot be said to have derived from Gnosticism. Perhaps the most famous of the representatives of such spiritual immortality is the deuterocanonical Wisdom of Solomon. Such belief is echoed in statements such as 3.1 (‘...the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God’); 3.4 (‘their hope is full of immortality’); 5.15 (‘the righteous live forever’); and 6.18-19 (‘giving heed to her [Wisdom’s] laws is assurance of immortality and immortality brings one near to God’) (NRSV).

As a result we can see that Judaism at the time of Jesus had at least one current of thought that saw the material world as not being permanent and that the Spirit of God was the principle of eternal life in a spiritual (not material) existence with God.

57. This conception of crossing over from death to life does not involve any bodily existence after death (i.e., resurrection). This is most evident from 5.27-28, which follow the above verses almost immediately: ‘Do not marvel at this, that an hour is coming in which all those in the tombs will hear his voice and will come forth, those who have done good to a resurrection of life, those who have practiced evil to a resurrection of judgment’. This passage, which is from the third edition, presents a corrective view of that previous to it. Here there is a clear belief in a bodily resurrection at the end of time and a universal judgment. In spite of this passage, as was mentioned above, realized eschatology is considered the dominant paradigm for the Gospel.

At the same time, this notion of the material world is essentially different from that of the Gnostics. In spite of its *relative* lack of value, the material world of itself is never considered evil, as it is throughout Gnosticism. Although the attitude toward the material world in the second edition of the Gospel has several superficial similarities to Gnosticism, when the background of this view is understood in its context, it becomes clear that this has nothing to do with Gnosticism or beliefs stemming from Gnosticism.

f. Determinism

Among some gnostic schools, it was believed that, from its origin, the self was a spark of light entrapped in the material world and in need of awakening in order to be aware of its true source and destiny. This awakening occurs through the redeemer's revelation. For these Gnostics, one might speak of redemption being 'determined'.⁵⁸

It is true that, in the Gospel of John, at the time of the second edition, there are statements that would seem to imply a predestination of the individual by God. At the same time, the Gospel contains other statements that would seem to indicate a kind of determinism with regard to those who will receive the Spirit. In 6.37, Jesus says that only those whom the Father 'gives' will come to Jesus (cf. 6.65; 17.2). In 10.26-30, Jesus explains that 'the Jews' are not 'of his sheep' and that no one is able to take anyone 'from the hand of the Father' once that person has been 'given'. But this is simply the Gospel's way of affirming that an individual manifests by means of his/her belief or unbelief whether he/she has been given by God. The context of the second edition makes it clear that all are responsible for their acceptance or rejection of Jesus, but that at the same time even the rejection of Jesus does not take place outside the providence of God. For example, in Jn 6.44, Jesus says, 'no one is able to come to me unless the Father who sent me draws the

58. Valentinians held to a somewhat different view and understood this divine spark to be at times something freely given to the individual by God even if not possessed by nature. In such a case, it was necessary to conduct oneself properly in order to achieve the final redemption. At one part of the *Tripartite Tractate*, each person is said to contain elements of the pneumatic, psychic, and hylic (I.5, 104.4–108.12). Yet later, these terms are applied to three different kinds of persons (I.5, 118.14–122.12). Perhaps the meaning here is that the reaction to the coming of the savior causes one or other element of the individual to predominate. The concluding statement of *On the Origin of the World* (II.5, 127.16) illustrates the relation of behavior to nature: 'For each one by his deed and his knowledge will reveal his nature'.

person'. This could appear to express a kind of determinism. However, this expression is clarified by the context, where Jesus goes on to say (6.45): 'it is written in the prophets, "And all will be taught by God". Everyone listening to the Father and learning comes to me.' Thus, while no one can come to the Father unless the Father draws the person, it is clear from the Scriptures that *all will be taught by God* and all that is needed is to listen to the teaching of God the Father.

Nowhere does the Gospel present a view of the believer as someone endowed by nature with a destiny. Rather, the believer receives the Spirit as a gift from the Father. However, as we will see in the next section, for the community at the time of the second edition, once the Spirit had been received there was no more effort needed to achieve eternal life – the person 'does not come into judgment but has crossed over from death to life' (Jn 5.24). This conception of the believer bears some similarity to the 'deterministic' type of Gnostic thought in that, *once the Spirit has been received*, the person has been reborn and one of the consequences of that rebirth is sinlessness.

g. Lack of Ethics

It is widely acknowledged that the Gospel of John, even in its present form, gives little attention to ethics. For example, R. E. Brown speaks of 'the ethical silence of GJohn'. He goes on to say: 'no specific sins of behavior are mentioned in GJohn, only the great sin, which is to refuse to believe in Jesus (8.24; 9.41)'.⁵⁹ D. M. Smith comments: 'only after he has withdrawn with his disciples, his own, does Jesus offer instruction regarding the conduct of life. Even then his instructions lack specificity.'⁶⁰ W. Meeks states bluntly, '[The Gospel] offers no explicit moral instruction... The maxims (gnomes) that are so characteristic of Jesus' sayings in the Q, Synoptic, and Thomas traditions... are missing altogether from John.'⁶¹ In this respect, the Gospel shows considerable similarity to some of the strains of Gnosticism spoken of above. The two types of documents, however, first with regard to the source of this 'perfectionism' and also (at the time of the third edition) to its extent.

59. Brown, *Epistles*, pp. 80–1.

60. D. M. Smith, *Johannine Christianity: Essays on Its Settings, Sources, and Theology* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1984), pp. 175–89 (178).

61. W. Meeks, 'The Ethics of the Fourth Evangelist', in *Exploring the Gospel of John* (ed. R. A. Culpepper and C. C. Black; Louisville: Westminster, 1996), pp. 317–26 (318).

Gnostic systems had differing views of ethics and these were, to a certain extent, determined by the ‘type’ of person the individual was.⁶² Irenaeus says (*Adv. Haer.* 1.6.4) that the ‘psychics’ must practice morality to attain a higher state while the ‘spiritual’ persons need not be concerned with such matters:

On this account, they tell us that it is necessary for us whom they call animal men, and describe as being of the world, to practice continence and good works, that by this means we may attain at length to the intermediate habitation, but that to them who are called the spiritual and perfect such a course of conduct [i.e., avoiding evil] is not at all necessary. For it is not conduct of any kind which leads to the Pleroma, but the seed sent forth thence in a feeble, immature state, and here brought to perfection.

But this is not the only determinant of the Gnostic’s attitude toward ethics. Hans Jonas perceptively summarized the two attitudes:

Generally speaking, pneumatic morality is determined by hostility toward the world and contempt for all mundane ties. From this principle, however, two contrary conclusions could be drawn, and both found their extreme representative: the ascetic and the libertine. The former deduces from the possession of gnosis the obligation to avoid further condemnation by the world and therefore to reduce contact with it to a minimum; the latter derives from the same possession the privilege of absolute freedom.⁶³

62. Rudolph (*Gnosis*, pp. 252–63). For a view in which there was no system that advocated perfectionism among the pneumatics, see Perkins, *Gnosticism*, pp. 134–5, who refers to Pagels, ‘Conflicting Versions of Valentinian Eschatology: Irenaeus’ Treatises vs. the Excerpts from Theodotus’, *HTR* 67 (1974), pp. 35–53. However, I believe that Perkins misreads Pagels. In her book, *The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis* (SBLMS 17; Nashville: Abingdon, 1973), Pagels refers to her article and summarizes it. Pagels observes that Irenaeus’ statements in *Adv. Haer.* 1.6, 8 agree with the statements of Theodotus and Heracleon and that it is only the statement in *Adv. Haer.* 1.7.1 that is ‘polemically distorted’ (*Johannine Gospel*, p. 96). Speaking further of Heracleon’s interpretation of John 4, Pagels states ‘The psychic, as the “called”, can never achieve in the present the certainty of his salvation... The pneumatic, as the “chosen”, received even in this world an utterly “certain” and “imperishable” redemption... Her “life” cannot be extinguished or lost’ (*Johannine Gospel*, p. 97).

Such would also seem to be the viewpoint of *Authoritative Teaching* (VI, 3), where the soul (in the image of a fish) is freed by knowledge and does not succumb to the lures of the world (in the image of a fisherman). The question is not whether instruction in ethics was superfluous for *all*, but whether it was superfluous for *some*.

63. H. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (2d ed.; Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), p. 46.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that the Gnostic documents in the Nag Hammadi codices contain very little discussion of ethics but focus primarily on the ‘mythic’ dimension of Gnostic thought.

The second edition of the Gospel of John also reflects a notion of ‘perfectionism’. This inability to sin was understood to result from the reception of the Spirit, which constituted a rebirth to the (eternal) life of God as a child of God, a life that could not admit of any sin. While the second edition hints at such a perfectionism by the absence of any discussion of ethics, when we read 1 John we become certain that the second edition spoke of such a perfectionism. In 1 John, there is an explicit discussion of perfectionism, and the author, while admitting to a kind of perfectionism, rejects the *absolute* perfectionism of the opponents and modifies it in such a way that it is understood to be an *inchoative* perfectionism. That is, the believer has the roots of sinfulness but not a total inability to sin.⁶⁴

Thus we see that both the second edition of the Gospel and some varieties of Gnostic thought held to theories of absolute perfectionism, nevertheless, the origin of this perfectionism is radically different in each and the worldviews out of which those views came show no *intrinsic* similarities.

h. Discourse Material

We now come to a literary feature of the Gospel of John that is often said to be derived from Gnostic traditions: the frequency of long discourses in John. These are often thought to exhibit the same literary form as that of Gnostic revelation discourses.⁶⁵ Bultmann first suggested that these discourses were taken from what he called a ‘gnostic discourse source’. Over fifty years later, P. Perkins proposed that, while not directly Gnostic, the discourses of the Fourth Gospel suggested an origin in a similar milieu.⁶⁶

However a look at the discourses reveals that, in several cases, the form of the Johannine discourses can be directly identified from Jewish rather than Gnostic parallels. For example, the discourses after the Last Supper (Jn 13.31–17.26) are in the format of a Jewish Farewell discourse. This is a form represented in the OT itself (e.g. Jacob [Gen. 49];

64. See especially 1 Jn 3.3.

65. Perkins (*Gnosticism*, p. 122) states: ‘The case for a connection between the Fourth Gospel’s tradition and Gnostic origins does not rest solely on the parallels between its prologue and Gnostic texts. The style of revelation discourse in which Jesus speaks constitutes one of the most distinctive elements of the Fourth Gospel.’

66. Perkins, *Gnosticism*, p. 241.

Moses [Deut.]) but also in the collection of such farewell discourses in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*.⁶⁷ Although the testamentary form was borrowed by the *Apocalypse of Adam*, the presence of a discourse in this form cannot of itself be considered a 'gnostic discourse'.⁶⁸

The discourse in Jn 6.30-58 can be identified form-critically as having the format of a Jewish synagogue-homily.⁶⁹

But what of the other major discourses of the Gospel? Two observations can be made.

First, apart from those considered above, the primary discourses are those of 5.19-47; 8.12-59, and 10.22-39.⁷⁰ Beginning in 5.19-30, Jesus presents and explains his claim to be able to give life and to judge because these powers were given to him by the Father. Within this discourse, Jesus makes it clear that his claims are directly related to the claims of God the Father as they are presented in the Old Testament.

Then in 5.31-40, Jesus lists four 'witnesses' that testify to the validity of his claims: (1) the witness of John the Baptist (although his witness is not essential since he was a human); (2) the witness of the works of Jesus; (3) the witness of the word of the Father who speaks through Jesus; (4) the witness of Scripture. Then in the discourses of 6.30-50, 8.12-59, and 10.22-35, in conversation and debate with 'the Jews', each of these witnesses is presented and rejected by 'the Jews'. In 6.30-50, Jesus interprets the scripture presented to him by the crowd in such a way that it testifies to his being the bread from heaven. In 8.12-59, Jesus presents and explains that his word is in reality the word of the Father and so can be a legitimate witness to him.⁷¹ Finally, in 10.22-35, Jesus

67. It should also be noted that in Gnosticism the favorite period for imparting special revelation to the disciples is in the forty days between Jesus' resurrection and ascension. The discourses of Jn 13.31-17.26 fittingly occupy a position immediately before the death of Jesus, the appropriate time and place for a 'farewell discourse'.

68. While it is true that Gnostic documents such as the *Apocalypse of Adam* take over apocalyptic and testamentary forms from Judaism, the origin of these literary genres is clearly Jewish. It would be wrong to conclude that because a document contains material in the form of a farewell discourse that therefore it is Gnostic. In addition, the Gnostic documents that most clearly reflect these genres are among the earliest of the Gnostic corpus.

69. See P. Borgen, *Bread from Heaven: An Exegetical Study of the Conception of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo* (NovTSup 10; Leiden: Brill, 1965).

70. Monologues such as that in 3.3-21 would have been understood as the result of the prophetic activity of the Paraclete but derive their length from the process of editing in which material from distinct editions was woven together.

71. See the essence of the charge that Jesus witnesses to himself and his explanation in 8.14-17.

explains to ‘the Jews’ that his works witness to him. Thus in spite of these witnesses to Jesus and the fact that ‘the Jews’ had access to each of them, ‘the Jews’ rejected them. This is hardly the form or content characteristic of Gnostic dialogues.⁷²

Secondly, it is evident in all of these discourses that the purpose is not the relation of some heavenly doctrine but simply the establishment of Jesus’ identity as the one who will reveal the Spirit.

But if these features of the discourses themselves indicate that they are not of Gnostic origin or purpose, what accounts for the distinctiveness of their form, so different from the words of Jesus in the Synoptics? The answer lies in the theology of the Gospel itself. The authors and the community of which they were members had believed in Jesus and saw themselves as recipients of the Spirit of Truth. The Gospel was not only a recollection of the words of the historical Jesus but also the expression of their meaning, articulated through the power of the Paraclete. Thus the Gospel itself is a manifestation of what is proclaimed in Paraclete sayings:

[T]he Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of all things that I have told you. (15.26)

[H]e will lead you in all truth. For he will not speak on his own but will speak whatever he hears and will proclaim to you what is to come. That one will glorify me because he will take from what is mine and will proclaim it to you. (16.13-14)

Unlike Gnosticism, this proclamation is not given to a select group of disciples after the Resurrection. The message about Jesus is proclaimed to all: to the crowds, to the Samaritans, the Galileans, and the Jewish authorities. Moreover, there is no distinction between the message of Jesus before and after the Resurrection, nor between the message given to the crowds and that given to the disciples. In fact, the author of 2 John specifically rejects the notion that there could be some revelation later that was not linked to the teaching of Jesus (2 Jn 9).⁷³

72. It should also be pointed out that all of these discourses, in their present form, contain editing. The original length of the discourses and dialogues was shorter and, in that form, the fact that they are debates with ‘the Jews’ is clearer.

73. It should be pointed out however that even the aberration of the opponents as described in the Johannine Letters is not Gnostic but is simply a one-sided understanding of the role of the eschatological Spirit. The opponents believed that they had received the eschatological Spirit but they saw no intrinsic relation between what the Spirit taught and what Jesus taught. They may have been ‘heretical’ but they derived the heresy from Judaism, not from Gnosticism.

i. 'I AM' Statements

Another literary form unique to the Gospel of John in the NT that is regularly said to derive from Gnosticism is the presence of 'I am' statements with a predicate, e.g. 'I am the shepherd', 'I am the truth', and so on.

There are three types of 'I am' statements in the Gospel of John. The one that is most striking and that is unique to the Gospel of John within the NT is the so-called 'absolute' 'I am' statement. These have been shown conclusively to derive from the self-identification of Yahweh as expressed by 'I AM' (ἐγώ εἰμι) of the Septuagint.⁷⁴

The second type of statement is a secular use employed as self-identification. It is used to identify the speaker, presumably in cases where something in the context should enable the questioner to recognize the respondent. An obvious example of this is the ability to recognize the voice of the respondent even though the respondent does not mention his own name. In English, the form of the statement would commonly be 'it is I'.

The third form of 'I am' statement in the Gospel is the 'I am' with a predicate (e.g. 'I am the gate', 'I am the good shepherd', 'I am the way, the truth and the life').⁷⁵ Several proposals have been made for the background of this last usage. Among them is the similarity to sayings of Isis in Egyptian religion and to statements in the Gnostic documents from Nag Hammadi. However a majority of scholars interpret them against the background of the OT. It is true that all or almost all of the predications are found in the OT but not in the same linguistic form (i.e., 'I am the...'). Raymond Brown argued that in some of these latter statements the emphasis is as much on the 'I' (indicating that only Jesus is the true embodiment of the quality discussed) as on the quality itself.⁷⁶ Thus 'I am the gate' could be intended to emphasize that Jesus (and no other) is the gate as well as to emphasize that Jesus is in many ways like a 'gate' to eternal life. Werner Kelber suggests that they are instances of prophetic speech intended to indicate the presence of Jesus in the midst of the community.⁷⁷ John Ashton also understands them to be instances

74. See the standard commentaries, e.g. R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (2 vols.; AB 39, 39a; New York: Doubleday & Co., 1966, 1970), I, pp. 533–8.

75. There are seven such predications. In addition to those listed in the text, there are four others: 'I am the bread of life' (6.35, 51); 'I am the light of the world' (8.12; 9.5); 'I am the resurrection and the life' (11.25); 'I am the vine' (15.1, 5).

76. Brown, *Gospel*, I, pp. 533–8.

77. W. Kelber, *Oral and Written Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), pp. 98–101.

of prophetic statements made within the community, which ‘express insights which can only have been reached through a profound reflection on the essence of Jesus’ message’.⁷⁸

David Ball, in his study of the ‘I am’ sayings, also finds the general background of the sayings in the OT. He comments that ‘the sayings occur in the context of discussions on Jewish subjects (Jn 4; 6; 8) involving the Jewish ancestors (Jacob, Jn 4; Moses, Jn 6; Abraham, Jn 8) and reflect Jewish expectations (Jn 6 and 11). Furthermore, Jesus explicitly tells the disciples that Jewish Scripture will be fulfilled in his betrayal and as a result they will believe that ἐγώ εἰμι (13.19).’⁷⁹

I would count it as particularly significant that one instance appears as the topic sentence of the homiletic midrash of 6.30-50. The statement in 6.35 (‘I am the bread of life’) constitutes the principal articulation of the theme of the discourse, that the bread given by the Father (which is superior to the bread given by Moses) is Jesus himself. Thus both the theme and the grammatical form of the statement are completely accounted for the (Jewish) context in which it appears.

Thus although the theme of the various ‘I am’ statements is derived from the OT, the form in which they appear is very likely to be due to the prophetic prerogative the community understood itself to possess. In any event, there is no hint of a Gnostic background to the statements.⁸⁰

j. Humanity as Composed of Sparks of Light in a World of Darkness

As we have seen above, in some Gnostic currents dualism was conceived of as absolute. There is no evidence of this sort of dualism anywhere in the Johannine tradition. In other currents within Gnosticism, humanity was understood to be made up of three types of persons: the pneumatic, the psychic, and the hylic. Those of the first type are best described as ‘sparks’ of the heavenly light that have fallen from heaven and are imprisoned in a material body in this world, alienated from their true home and source.⁸¹ Psychics are capable of enlightenment but such knowledge is not theirs by nature. Hylic individuals are not capable of enlightenment.

78. J. Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), p. 187.

79. D. Ball, *I Am’ in John’s Gospel* (JSNTSup 124; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic), p. 257.

80. Perkins (*Gnostic*, p. 134) also points out that in contrast to the ‘riddle’ quality of Gnostic ‘I am’ statements, those of the Gospel of John are quite straightforward and intelligible.

81. See Rudolph, *Gnosis*, pp. 113–15.

In the Gospel, there is no evidence of such a threefold division of humanity. This is another major difference between the Gospel and Gnosticism.

In the second edition of the Gospel there are no references to the dualism of light and darkness. The material that comes from the second edition of the Gospel and which is so clearly defined as associated with Jesus' offering of the eschatological Spirit and its prerogatives makes no use of the images of light and darkness.

There is *no* indication, in the second edition, that some are saved by nature or that some are by nature incapable of being saved.⁸² Everyone is free and capable of coming to the light.

It is only in the third edition of the Gospel that we meet the images of light and darkness. Jesus describes himself as 'the light of the world' (3.19, 20, 21; 8.12; 9.5; 12.46; cf. 12.35-36). Believers are said to come to the light (3.19, 21; cf. 11.9); unbelievers and those who do evil do not come to the light (3.19-20). Individuals are urged to come to the light so they might become 'sons of light' (12.36). Throughout, this 'light' is opposed to 'darkness'.

However, this imagery of 'light' and 'darkness' is the modified, 'ethical' dualism characteristic of apocalyptic. That is, it is possible for an individual to move from darkness to light (3.19-21; 9.5; 11.9; 12.35-36).

While this bears some similarity to the 'psychic' person described in Gnostic systems, it would be rash to assume that this is the case, since any religious system holding to a belief in free will would qualify for such similarity. When we search for the background of the dualism of light and darkness in the third edition of the Gospel and in the Letters, we find its closest parallel in the apocalyptic worldview best exemplified in the sectarian documents from Qumran and in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*.

For example, in the War Scroll, the opposition between the 'sons of light' and the 'sons of darkness' appears at the beginning (cf. 1QM 1.1-10) and also in 13.6 ('truly they are the company of Darkness, but the company of God is one of [eternal] Light') and 13.16 ('[For Thou hast appointed] the day of battle from ancient times...[to come to the aid] of truth and to destroy iniquity, to bring Darkness low and to magnify Light...to stand for ever, and to destroy all the sons of Darkness').

82. It should be remembered that the discussion of determinism above showed that there was no sense of absolute determinism in either the second or third editions of the Gospel. Rather, all individuals are capable of movement from one orientation to the other and the individual has both the freedom and the obligation to believe.

In 1QS, the members of the community are urged ‘that they may love all the sons of light...and hate all the sons of darkness’ (1.10). Also, ‘all the children of righteousness are ruled by the Prince of Light and walk in the ways of light, but all the children of injustice are ruled by the Angel of Darkness and walk in the ways of darkness’ (3.21).

But, as was the case with the second edition of the Gospel, nowhere is there the slightest evidence that persons were subject to an absolute dualism or to any of the features typical of Gnosticism.

k. Mythopoeia

One of the most pronounced features of Gnosticism is, as Pearson proposes, ‘mythopoeia’, that is ‘the construction of elaborate myths through which revealed gnosis is transmitted’. These myths dealt with the origin of the universe, the nature of God, and the varying spheres between the realm of the transcendent almighty, the creator God, and the lower world. In some cases this process reached remarkable extremes, with exotic names often taken from philosophy or other religions.

In the Gospel of John, there is nothing that resembles any Gnostic myth. There is a ‘myth’ but it is the myth regarding the eschatological outpouring of God’s Spirit as promised in the OT. In the third edition, we encounter the worldview of Jewish apocalyptic. Consequently, in the most obvious of ways, there is a large gulf between the writings of the Gnostics and those of the Johannine community.

In addition to these features to which we have dedicated more attention, there are a number of other features that appear in Gnosticism that have some similarity to features in the Johannine Gospel but are less significant. For example, the Gnostics had an interest in secret revelations to special disciples, e.g. Mary Magdalene. This has been compared to the function of the Beloved Disciple in the Gospel of John. At first sight, there could appear to be some similarity, especially since no figure like the Beloved Disciple appears elsewhere in the NT. However, the Beloved Disciple is a title given to the individual who is the author of 1 John and who articulated the correct understanding of the tradition in the pages of 1 John. This person referred to himself simply as ‘the Elder’ (2 Jn 1; 3 Jn 1). It was only the later community, at the time of the Gospel’s third edition, after the disciple’s death, that gave him the title of ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved’.⁸³

83. The evidence for this view is presented in detail in *Excurses on the Elder and the Beloved Disciple* in my commentary.

Moreover, the Beloved Disciple is not the recipient of special esoteric revelations but is the model of faithfulness and insight. At no time is he given special revelation not given to the others. The reason this disciple is said to be 'loved by Jesus' is precisely because, according to Jn 15.10, the one who obeyed the commandments given by Jesus would be loved by Jesus.

The term 'living waters' appears frequently both in the Gospel of John and in both the *Trimorphic Protennoia* and the *Apocryphon of John*, yet in very different senses. In the Gospel of John, the term 'living water' (which appears only in the second edition) is a symbol for the Spirit. In the *Trimorphic Protennoia* XIII.1, 46, 16-19, the Logos pours forth 'living water' upon the Spirit.

Gnostic writings were often put in the form of apocalypses. The Gnostics took over this genre from Judaism but gave it a content that was completely different – very much as Christianity took over the genre but gave it its own unique content. But while the third edition of the Gospel of John is couched in an apocalyptic worldview, it is not an apocalypse and does not claim to present special revelations about the future. Rather it simply portrays the ministry of Jesus within the framework of apocalyptic's cosmic conflict between God and Satan, showing the ministry of Jesus as a victory over Satan.

6. Conclusions

My purpose in this chapter has been to examine features in the Johannine literature that have been said to bear some similarity to various elements of Gnosticism and to do so from the viewpoint proposed in my recently completed commentary. Although such a narrow inquiry may seem to be motivated simply by authorial narcissism, in fact I believe the perspective provided in this commentary has something significant to contribute to the question of this relationship.

I would suggest that this proposal provides a perspective on the development of the Johannine tradition, which explains both the background of the editions as well as the way other features of each edition (especially of the second) relate to the root worldview and convictions of that edition. To use the image introduced at the beginning of this study, it provides both the 'hub' as well as the 'spokes' of the wheel.

When those features regularly identified as being 'gnostic' are examined from the perspective presented in this commentary, I believe that it becomes clear that these various 'gnostic-like' features are better

explained as consistent with the ('traditional') Jewish outlook rather than by some relation to Gnosticism—and that their similarity to features in Gnosticism is only accidental.

In the past, attempts to describe the background and relationship of the Gospel to Gnosticism have been made more complicated by the interweaving of the two worldviews and the perspective of each. When these worldviews are distinguished and are able to be isolated from one another within the text of the Gospel, the task is simplified considerably.

In short, I believe that this perspective enables us to reject the possibility of *intrinsic* connections between the Johannine tradition and Gnosticism. However, the fact remains that there are a number of features that *are* similar, but this similarity is *extrinsic and accidental*.

Ultimately, it was not the Johannine community that had an interest in Gnosticism but rather Gnosticism that had an interest in the Johannine literature. The resemblance was accidental but the Gnostics found it appealing. The fact that the first extant commentary on the Gospel is from the Gnostic Heracleon is a clear testimony to this fact. The fact that the *Apocryphon of John* in its present state consists of a substratum of a non-Christianized Gnostic document that has been secondarily Christianized in clearly Johannine terms is also evidence of the fascination with the Johannine tradition on the part of Gnostics. But as scholars have regularly pointed out, Gnosticism regularly Christianized its own documents⁸⁴ but also interpreted Christian documents in such a way as to show that they were faulty and imperfect understandings of humanity and the true source of salvation.⁸⁵ The *Apocryphon of John* is an example of this first tendency; Heracleon's commentary on the Gospel is an example of the second.

At the beginning of this study, I called attention to the view of specialists in the study of Gnosticism that the origins of Gnosticism lay in the *re-interpretation of Jewish materials*. The perspective proposed in this current essay would seem to confirm this and to provide a clearer perspective on the Gospel and its relation to Gnosticism. We have seen that the thought of the second edition of the Gospel has derived in what might be called a 'pure' and 'simple' form from the traditional Jewish understanding of the eschatological outpouring of the Spirit and its prerogatives. There is no evidence that this Jewish perspective has in any way been modified in the direction of Gnosticism. Rather, every aspect

84. A clear example of this is the *Apocryphon of John* although there are many others.

85. An example of this is Heracleon's commentary, commented on by E. Pagels in *Johannine*.

of its content derives from OT thought. Even in the third edition, where the worldview of apocalyptic Judaism is introduced, the *Tendenz* of the material is to correlate the thought of the Gospel with that of 1 John and with that of the Synoptic Gospels.

Perkins, in her discussion of Gnostic history, comments: ‘writings from the Johannine school also attest the existence of Gnosticizing speculation in Asia Minor’.⁸⁶ I cannot see evidence of this. Gnosticism made use of the Johannine writings, not the reverse!

Nevertheless it is true that, within the Prologue of the Gospel, there is evidence of a thought-world distinct from that of the remainder of the Gospel. Thomas Tobin has argued persuasively that ‘the hymn in the Prologue, like [the works of] Philo of Alexandria, was part of the larger world of Hellenistic Jewish speculative interpretations of biblical texts’.⁸⁷ But Tobin does not argue that the background of the Prologue is in any way Gnostic.

86. Perkins, *Gnosticism*, p. 43.

87. T. Tobin, ‘The Prologue of John and Hellenistic Jewish Speculation’, *CBQ* 52 (1990), pp. 252–69 (268).

Part II

DOCETISM AND THE JOHANNINE TRADITION

Chapter 2

DOCETISM IN THE FIRST LETTER OF JOHN

Among the various schools of thought that are said to have influenced the composition of the Johannine literature is Docetism. Although few scholars today seek a direct relationship between the Johannine literature and Gnosticism, this cannot be said of Docetism. As is the case with Gnosticism, this view has a long history; but, unlike the case with Gnosticism, the tendency is still strong to see both 1 John and the Gospel as Docetic (or alternatively as anti-Docetic).

Several respected scholars have argued that the Gospel of John is Docetic. E. Käsemann has argued that the Christology of the Gospel is 'naïve docetism'.¹ On the other hand, two German scholars, G. Strecker and his student U. Schnelle, have both addressed this issue at length and have argued the reverse of Käsemann: that not only the Gospel, but also 1 John, are deliberately anti-Docetic.² The fact that prominent scholars have argued for opposite readings of the Johannine literature regarding Docetism indicates something of the problem confronting the interpreter. The evidence in both the Gospel and the Letters is not so self-evident as to make one or other perspective compelling.

This present review sheds new light on the question why the possibility of Docetism (and alternatively anti-Docetism) in the Johannine literature is so attractive. But it also suggests that neither of these views is the proper reading of the evidence.

As was the case in the review of the evidence for Gnostic influence on the Gospel of John, if we are able to demonstrate that the apparently Docetic features of the Gospel can be explained more adequately by another view of the Gospel's background, and if that other view is able to provide a more comprehensive account of the Gospel's background,

1. E. Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), pp. 26, 66, 70.

2. G. Strecker, *The Johannine Letters* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996); U. Schnelle, *Antidocetic Christology in the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).

then we would have a more fully satisfying explanation of the background of the Gospel—one that would acknowledge not only the apparently Docetic features but also the anti-Docetic ones *and yet explain them more fully and adequately than either a Docetic or anti-Docetic background alone.*

Although a number of scholars have seen Docetic (or anti-Docetic) polemic in the Gospel and Letters, the three German scholars mentioned above have developed these views most extensively.³ Consequently, I will focus my analysis on the views of G. Strecker and U. Schnelle (that 1 John is anti-Docetic and written first to confront Docetists and that the Gospel was written second and intended to reaffirm the anti-Docetic views of the author of 1 John) and the view of E. Käsemann (that the Gospel is an example of naïve docetism).

In order to evaluate the accuracy of these views, it will be helpful to say something of what the phenomenon of Docetism is. We will examine 1 John in this chapter and then in chapter 3 we will examine the parts of the Gospel that are pointed to by both groups as indicating, for some, a naïve Docetism, and for others, anti-Docetic thought.

1. Docetism

To properly understand what came to be known as ‘Docetism’, we need to distinguish its earliest manifestations and refutations from its later forms and responses. As a Christian heresy, it sought to ‘protect’ the divinity of Christ by diminishing (or denying) the human aspect of Jesus. Historically, the first mention of the belief that Jesus Christ only *appeared* to live historically and to die and rise again appears in the writings of Ignatius of Antioch (who died between 98 and 117 CE).

Ignatius says to his readers in Smyrna:

You are established in immoveable faith, as if nailed to the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, both in flesh and spirit, and confirmed in love by the blood of Christ, being fully persuaded as touching our Lord, that he is in truth of the family of David according to the flesh, God’s son by the will and power of God, truly born of a Virgin, baptized by John that ‘all righteousness might be fulfilled in him’, truly nailed to a tree in the flesh for our sakes under Pontius Pilate and Herod the Tetrarch... For he suffered all these things for us that we might attain salvation, and he truly suffered even as he also truly raised himself, not as some unbelievers say, that his Passion was merely in semblance ... (*Smyrn.* 1.1-2)

3. S. Smalley (*1, 2, 3 John* [WBC 51; Waco: Word, 1984], pp. xxiii–xxxii) considers the possibility of Docetism carefully as being one of ultimately four groups being represented in 1 John.

Ignatius does not give a systematic account of the heresy but refers to certain aspects of this belief. He uses the infinitive of the Greek verb *δοκέω* (literally ‘to seem, to appear’) to indicate that their belief was that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus was only an ‘appearance’. Ignatius also indicates that the Docetists did not participate in the Eucharist, apparently because it communed with the body of Jesus and, for the Docetists, the body was not divine. Only ‘the Christ’ was divine and he took on the appearance of a body (*Smyrn.* 7.1). In response to these heretics, Ignatius urges his readers: ‘let not office exalt anyone’ (*Smyrn.* 6.1). Instead he urges them ‘to follow the bishop’ (*Smyrn.* 8.1; *Trall.* 1.2; 8.1; 13.2).

An additional element of the Docetic belief, according to Ignatius, was that ‘for love they have no care, none for the widow, none for the orphan, none for the distressed, none for the afflicted, none for the prisoner, or for him released from prison, none for the hungry or thirsty’ (*Smyrn.* 6.2).

Later in the second century, Irenaeus of Lyons wrote to oppose a similar phenomenon. As the title of his work dealing with the topic (‘On the Detection and Overthrow of the So-Called “Gnosis”’; c. 180 CE) indicates, Irenaeus did not consider Docetism a separate heresy but a feature of that large body of thought known collectively as Gnosis.

The word ‘Docetist’ as a term identifying a specific group first appears in a letter of Serapion, bishop of Antioch (190–203 CE), to the church at Gnosso. Only a fragment of Serapion’s letter remains in a quote by Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 6.12.6). In it, Serapion discusses the *Gospel of Peter* and says that it was begun by a group, the successors of whom ‘we call Docetae’. According to Serapion, ‘the most part [of the *Gospel of Peter*] indeed was in accordance with the true teaching of the Saviour, but...some things were added, which also we place below for your benefit’.⁴

Unfortunately we do not have the list of the objectionable features that Serapion refers to, although in a fragment of the Gospel found in 1886, the cry of Jesus on the cross is ‘My power, O power, you have forsaken me’.⁵ After this, the text continues: ‘and having said this, he was taken up’. Both of these statements would seem to indicate that the ‘power’ of Jesus was taken away at the moment of his death and that this ‘power’ was taken to heaven while Jesus, the man, died. This is in keeping with the view described earlier by Ignatius.

4. Translated by J. E. D. Olton in the LCL.

5. *The Gospel of Peter* 5.19, in R. E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah* (ABRL; 2 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1994), II, pp.1318–22 (1319).

Among the major proponents of ‘Docetic views’ in the later second and third centuries were Cerinthus, Saturnilius, Cerdon, Marcion, and the author of the *Acts of John*. In addition to the three writers mentioned earlier, Docetic views were opposed by Polycarp, Justin, Hippolytus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen. Such thought was obviously a considerable threat to orthodox Christianity during the second and third centuries.

Of the three scholars that are the focus of this present study, Käsemann does not attempt to define Docetism but simply takes a definition for granted. However his understanding becomes clear in his discussion of the Gospel. It does not differ significantly from that put forward by Schnelle and Strecker.

Schnelle conducts what is essentially an historical review of those early figures who propose and who counteract Docetism.⁶ He begins with Ignatius and then reports the words of Irenaeus against Saturnilius, Cerdon, and Marcion. He also reviews what he sees as the Docetic tendencies of the *Acts of John*. He then moves to show similarities between the teachings of these individuals and the issues confronted in 1 John. As he summarizes, for Docetists, ‘the heavenly Christ alone is relevant for salvation; the existence of the earthly Jesus, by contrast, has no soteriological function’.⁷

Strecker discusses Docetism in the context of 1 John, choosing three sets of texts from the Letter and arguing that these texts most accurately reflect opinions of the Docetic opponents. Strecker understands 1 Jn 2.22 as evidence of Docetic separation of the earthly Jesus from the heavenly Christ.⁸ According to 1 Jn 4.2, the opponents do not confess ‘Jesus Christ come in the flesh’.⁹ As was the case with Schnelle, Strecker proposes

6. While Schnelle’s work was primarily on the Gospel, he does make frequent reference to 1 John. The reason for treating Schnelle before Strecker in the present work is because Schnelle’s book (1987; ET 1992) was published prior to Strecker’s commentary (1989; ET 1995). Schnelle has recently published a commentary on the Johannine Letters (*Die Johannesbriefe* [THNT 17; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2010]) but his opinion remains much the same as in his earlier work. See especially his Excursus on Docetism (*Antidocetic*, pp. 138–46). However, in his commentary he does note the parallel between the opponents of Ignatius and the opponents in 1 John with regard to the lack of brotherly love, something I did not find to be the case in his earlier book.

7. Schnelle, *Antidocetic*, p. 68.

8. Strecker, *Letters*, p. 70.

9. Strecker, *Letters*, pp. 70–1.

that ‘since all of this [the earthly life of Jesus of Nazareth, his birth, his suffering, and his death] cannot be reconciled with the idea of a divinity that, as such, is impassible and removed from the coming to be and passing away of worldly things... Consequently, Docetism opposes the doctrine of the incarnation.’¹⁰

2. What Are the Criteria We Should Use for Evaluating Such Proposals?

I would propose that among the criteria for evaluating the proposal of Docetism or anti-Docetism in the Johannine literature one of the primary ones should be how much of either 1 John or the Gospel of John is taken into account in identifying the opponents. While it is not impossible that only a limited part of the document concerns Docetism, it is important to question such limiting of the evidence since such limiting can potentially lead to theories that only account for part of the actual evidence, resulting in distorted conclusions.

Second, how well does the proposed solution account for the data: Are there texts that are not explained—or are explained only awkwardly—by a given explanation?

Third, if an explanation accounts for a variety of features not only in one document but in more than one, that explanation should ordinarily be considered the more likely.

Fourth, if a document is said to be anti-Docetic, we should expect the document to confront a substantial number of features that are known to be characteristic of Docetism.

Fifth, if reputable scholars are divided among themselves regarding the interpretation of the same body of evidence, we must inevitably ask what there is about the document in question that allows for such radically different interpretations of the same data.

Consequently, as we review the evidence for and against the presence of Docetic views in the Johannine writings, we will do well to keep these criteria in mind.

10. Strecker, *Letters*, p. 71. The third set of verses appear in 1 Jn 5.6-8 and also are seen to speak of the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist, which the Docetists deny. These verses will be discussed in detail below but do not add anything to the definition of Docetism.

3. Deliberate Anti-Docetism in 1 John (Schnelle, Strecker)

In the past and continuing up to the present, a number of commentators have proposed that the opponents in 1 John were Docetists.¹¹ However, G. Strecker and U. Schnelle have put forward the most detailed arguments for this view and it is with them that I will dialogue primarily.¹²

a. Passages Thought to Reflect the Docetic Beliefs of the Opponents

The views of Strecker and Schnelle on the nature of the opponents in 1 John are practically identical. They both argue that only those sections that address issues of belief can be said to be directed towards the opponents.¹³ They consider the other parts of 1 John to be ‘parenetic’ and so concerned not with the opponents but with the community itself. In his own words, Schnelle argues that:

[W]e first need to define the teaching of the opponents in 1 John. In doing so, we may adduce only those texts in which the author of 1 John clearly engages the opponents’ thought or attacks it, either by naming the opponents directly as ψεύστης, ἀντίχριστος, or ψευδοπροφήται [liars, antichrist, false prophets], or by rejecting their theology by means of positive or negative confessional formulae. Antithetic formulations, possible allusions, warnings and moral defamations are, however, not adequate criteria for the description of opposing positions.¹⁴

11. A. E. Brooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912), pp. xlv–xlv, gives a summary of those who considered the opponents Docetists up to his time. More recently, in addition to those mentioned in the text, D. M. Smith, *First, Second, and Third John* (Interpretation; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), p. 20, describes the opponents in these categories although he does not use the term. However, among those opposed to this view are Brown, *Epistles*, pp. 57–9; R. Schnackenburg, *The Johannine Epistles* (ET of 7th German ed. of 1984; New York: Crossroads, 1992), pp. 22–3.

12. Strecker (*Letters*, pp. 69–76) provides an excursus entitled ‘The False Teachers in 1 John (Docetism)’. Schnelle also provides an excursus (*Antidocetic*, pp. 63–70). Strecker comments: ‘The influence of the Docetists on the Johannine school is not to be minimized, either before or after their separation [from the Johannine community]’ (*Letters*, p. 70). See also the excursus in Schnelle, *Johannesbriefe*, pp. 138–46.

13. See, for example, Strecker (*Letters*, p. 33) who comments: ‘...the problem of false teaching represents only one question among others and cannot be the key to 1 John as a whole’. Thus Strecker adds: ‘This immediate address to the audience [concerning sin and sinfulness, in 2.10], and not a concealed polemic against false teachers, is the author’s real concern’.

14. Schnelle, *Antidocetic*, p. 61.

On the basis of these criteria, Schnelle identifies 1 Jn 2.22 (and the related statements in 4.15; 5.1, 5) and 4.2 (and the related statements in 1.9; 2.2; 4.10) as indicating the views of the opponents.¹⁵

According to Strecker, 1 Jn 2.22-23 and 4.1-6 are the primary texts reflecting the beliefs of the opponents. As a result, it is only in these sections that the author confronts Docetic views.¹⁶

b. A Passage Thought to Reflect Sacramental Polemic

In addition to the two sections dealing with confessional statements, both Schnelle and Strecker would argue that 1 Jn 5.5-8, which they believe to be concerned with the sacraments, is also directed at the opponents. Strecker comments, quoting Ignatius,

[T]he opponents are consistent in absenting themselves from the Eucharist, since they 'allow not that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, which flesh suffered for our sins, and which the Father of his goodness has raised up' (*Smyrn.* 6).¹⁷

Strecker states,

[T]heir [the opponents'] reticence regarding the Lord's Supper suggests that their teaching had docetic features..., since this was regarded by the church fathers as a mark of Docetism.¹⁸

In his 1992 book, Schnelle recognizes that there is no *explicit* reference to sacraments in 1 Jn 5.5-8 but goes on to argue that

the author's argumentation is directed toward vv. 7-8, according to which, from a Johannine point of view, the saving event and its representation in the sacrament cannot be separated since water and blood are the elements of the sacraments.¹⁹

15. Schnelle, *Antidocetic*, pp. 61-3; *Johannesbriefe*, pp. 107-8, 136.

16. Strecker (*Letters*, pp. 69, 78) proposes that after the dogmatic statements of 2.18-27, there is 'another extensive parenetic section' that extends from 2.28-3.24. This, in turn, is followed by the second section dealing with the teaching of the opponents (4.1-6) (cf. Strecker, *Letters*, pp. 79, 131). In turn, in 4.7-5.4a, 'the author is not interested in continuing "a discussion with the false teachers"' (*Letters*, p. 143). The third dogmatic section then begins in 5.4b-12 (*Letters*, p. 181) and ends with a conclusion in 5.13-21 (*Letters*, pp. 197-8).

17. Strecker, *Letters*, p. 73.

18. Strecker, *Letters*, p. 74.

19. Schnelle, *Antidocetic*, p. 68. Thus, 'water' would refer to the sacrament of Baptism and 'blood' would refer to the sacrament of the Eucharist.

However, by the time of his 2010 commentary on the Letters, Schnelle takes a stronger view of the sacramental meaning of 1 Jn 5.5-8 in spite of its not being explicit.

From the point of view of ritual theory it is untenable to deny that Johannine theology has any interest in the Sacraments... Rituals are, like symbols, a central category for the transmission of religious meaning and Johannine theology makes use of them...in order to give a distinctive profile to the central thought of their conviction: the incarnate, crucified and risen Jesus Christ, the true giver of life is present in Baptism and the Eucharist.²⁰

4. Some Observations on the Views of Schnelle and Strecker

a. Are the Views of the Opponents Limited to the ‘Dogmatic Sections’?

The approach of Schnelle and Strecker has the benefit of focusing on statements within 1 John that clearly describe elements of the opponents’ views.²¹ Of course, even this fact does not indicate that the passages actually *are* Docetic, but only that they are the ones that attract such attention. One can discuss these statements with the reasonable certainty that they concern the views of the opponents. But on the other hand, this *presupposes* that the other material in 1 John *does not contribute* elements to the discussion.²² Strecker and Schnelle have reached their

20. My translation. The German is, ‘Schon aus ritualtheoretischer Sicht ist es unhaltbar, der johanneischen Theologie jegliches Interesse an den Sakramenten abzusprechen... Rituale sind wie Symbole eine zentrale Kategorie religiöser Sinnvermittlung und die johanneische Theologie bedient sich ihrer...um den zentralen Gedanken ihrer Sinnbildung ein unverkennbares Profil zu geben: Der inkarnierte, gekreuzigte und auferstandene, in der Taufe und der Eucharistie gegenwärtige Jesus Christus ist der wahre Lebensspender’ (Schnelle, *Johannesbriefe*, pp. 168–9).

21. In fact, these are the passages that have traditionally been questioned as possibly Docetic, even before the work of Schnelle or Strecker. For example, if one consults ‘Docetism’ in the index of Brown, *Epistles*, p. 806, it becomes clear that, for all practical purposes, apart from references to Docetism in the general introduction, all references are indeed to these three sections. The same is true of the discussion in Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*; J. Lieu, *I, II, & III John* (NTL; Louisville, Westminster John Knox, 2008), etc. So it would seem that a view which restricts the evidence to these sections is in danger of creating a self-fulfilling prophecy.

It should also be pointed out that Lieu (*I, II, & III John*, p. 11) finds such ambiguity in the text that she concludes the author is not intending to confront any specific group of opponents ‘but focuses on exploring the implications of those [positions] already held by himself and by his readers’.

22. See also Strecker (*Letters*, p. 61) where he distinguishes parenthesis (in the previous material) from ‘a more dogmatic and theoretical instruction’. I would

decisions by first narrowing the body of evidence on which their conclusions will be based. By including only passages ‘x’, ‘y’, and ‘z’, Schnelle and Strecker do not have to account for the remainder of the material in 1 John in their description of the opponents. Consequently, it is essential to determine if this is a valid approach.²³ There seem to be considerable reasons for thinking it is not.

First, it must be said that there seems to be considerable *prima facie* evidence that more of 1 John is concerned with refuting the views of the opponents than simply these three passages. For example, there is a debate about sinlessness in 1 John. In 1 Jn 1.8 the author says: ‘If we say that we do not have sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us’. Two verses later, we read: ‘If we say that we have not sinned, we make him [God] a liar, and his [God’s] word is not in us’. Clearly the author is confronting an opinion he considers wrong. Of course, if we do not have to include such statements in our picture of the opponents, then we will have fewer features to account for and our work will be easier.

The same can be said of 1 Jn 2.4: ‘the one claiming, “I have come to know him [God]” but not keeping his [God’s] commandments is a liar, and the truth is not present in him’. It seems quite evident that the author is confronting a view of the opponents—and here he is indicating that the claim itself is not wrong, it is wrong only if the claim does not lead to the correct actions.

In 2.6 we read: ‘the one claiming to “abide” in him [God] must himself also walk as that one [Jesus] walked’. Again we see that the claim is not in itself wrong but if the person does not ‘walk as that one walked’ then the person has no right to make the claim.

In 2.9 we read: ‘the one claiming to be “in the light” and hating his brother is still in darkness’.

These examples could be multiplied, but this selection shows that simple assertion is not enough to remove these passages from consideration when explaining the views of the opponents. At the very least, there should be more argumentation explaining why they should not be considered.

disagree. Why would the author have put forward *this type of paranesis* and *why here?* Rather, the entirety of 1 John deals with a correction of the views of the opponents. The author exhorts with regard to both action and belief.

23. But this is hardly a universal view. For example, Smalley (*1,2,3 John*, p. 222) lists himself as well as Brooke, O’Neil, Lampe and Schnackenburg as opposed to that view.

At the same time, it should be said that an explanation of the views of the opponents that would include all such passages in 1 John would *ipso facto* merit greater consideration.²⁴

b. Are the ‘Parenetic Sections’ Concerned with the Views of the Opponents?

As was indicated above, Strecker and Schnelle argue that the sections they label ‘parenetic’ are simply exhortations directed to the faithful members of the community. I have proposed some initial observations that would suggest problems with this view, but there are also more weighty ones.

First, the notion of parenesis as applied to 1 John appears to be faulty methodologically; ‘parenesis’ simply means ‘exhortation’. In 1 John, the author exhorts his reader both *to believe correctly* and also *to act correctly*. The exhortation to believe correctly is being enjoined on the faithful members of the community just as energetically as correct belief. The sections that Schnelle and Strecker have labeled ‘dogmatic’ are just as exhortatory as the others.

Second, in 1 John (and in the Gospel) *both* correct belief (i.e., the issues that Strecker and Schnelle see as directed to the opponents) *and* mutual love are objects of ‘commandments’.²⁵ These commandments are presented by the author as essential to the life of the faith. In short, both of these aspects of the author’s message are equally important. Both are the object of parenesis and both are the object of commandments.

Third, and perhaps most strikingly, when we look at 1 John as a whole, we see that the author of 1 John reports twelve claims that are being made within the community. For each of these twelve claims, it is both correct belief and correct behavior that are said to be necessary in order for the claim to be truthfully made. I have listed these in my commentary

24. See U. C. von Wahlde, *A Commentary on the Gospel and Letters of John* (3 vols.; ECC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), III, pp.339–85. Following the lead of R. E. Brown, I created four charts (lists) of the statements in 1 John pertaining to the convictions of the two groups (the author and his opponents) regarding various elements of belief and action. In the first of the five charts presented in the commentary, I gave the convictions shared by the two groups regarding their status as believers. In Chart 2, the views of the two groups regarding the Spirit are listed. Chart 3 lists the differences between the two groups regarding the role of Jesus. Chart 5 lists the differences between the two groups regarding, sin, ethics, and eschatology.

25. I have treated this at length in von Wahlde, *Commandments*, and also in my commentary. See esp. Appendix 5, III, pp. 386–401.

on the Letters and have included them in Chart 1.²⁶ What is remarkable about this is, first, the fact that such a considerable number of claims are made. The second remarkable feature is that so many claims are tested by *both* the issue of correct belief *and* by correct behavior. The consistency and extent of these features can only be a secure indication that both these topics were issues of conflict between the author and his opponents. Hence it would appear that the distinction between ‘parenesis’ and ‘dogma’ is a faulty one.

Chart 1. Correct Belief and Correct Behavior as the Two Central Issues
in the Crisis Confronted by 1 John

1. Being ‘of God’

- 3.10: (put negatively) ‘everyone not acting justly is not of God—and the one not loving his brother’.
- 4.2: ‘every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ come in the flesh is of God’.

2. Being ‘of the truth’

- 2.21: (implicit in this negative statement) ‘I did not write to you that you do not know the truth, but that you know it and that every lie is not of the truth’.
- 3.18-19: ‘Children, let us not love in word nor with the tongue, but in work and in truth. And in this we shall know that we are of the truth.’

3. Born of God

- 4.7: ‘everyone loving has been born of God’.
- 5.1: ‘everyone believing that Jesus is the Christ is born of God’ (see also 5.4-5).

4. Knowing God

- 2.4-5: (implicit) ‘the one claiming “I have come to know him” but not keeping his commandments is a liar... But the one who keeps his word.’
- 4.7-8: ‘everyone loving...knows God. The one not loving did not know God because God is love.’

5. Remaining (‘abiding’)

- 4.12: ‘If we love one another, God remains in us’. (See also 4.16 [‘the one remaining in love remains in God and God in that person’].)
- 4.15: ‘Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God remains in that person and that person in God’. (See also 2.24: ‘if it remains in you [what you heard from the beginning], you remain in the Son and in the Father’; see also 2.6.)

26. See von Wahlde, *Commentary*, III, pp. 375–7.

6. Being ‘in the Light’

- 1.7-8: ‘If we walk in the light as he is in the light,... the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we do not have sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.’
- 2.9-10: ‘The one claiming to be in the light and hating his brother is still in darkness. The one who loves his brother remains in the light...’

7. Knowing the Truth

- 2.21-22: ‘I did not write to you that you do not know the truth but that you know it and that every lie is not of the truth. Who is the Liar if not the one denying that Jesus is the Christ?’
- 3.18: ‘let us not love in word nor with the tongue but in work and in truth’.

8. Loving God

- 2.5: ‘but the one who keeps his word, in this person truly the love of God is brought to perfection’.
- 5.2-3a: ‘in this we know that we love the children of God, whenever we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God that we keep his commandments.’

9. Having Eternal Life

- 3.15: (negatively) ‘Everyone hating his brother is a murderer and you know that every murderer does not have eternal life remaining in himself’.
- 5.2: (Throughout the Letter, the author insists that it is necessary to believe and confess Jesus properly. He refers to this as ‘having the Son’): ‘the one who has the Son has life; the one not having the Son of God does not have life’.

10. ‘From the Beginning’

- 1.1-3: ‘that which was from the beginning... we proclaim to you’. (See also 2.24: ‘may what you heard from the beginning remain in you’.)
- 3.11: ‘...this is the proclamation that you heard from the beginning, that we love one another’.

11. Two Commandments: Belief and Love

- 2 Jn 5: ‘and now I ask you, Lady, not as one writing you a new commandment but one that we have had from the beginning: that we love one another’. (See also 1 Jn 4.21 and below.)
- 2 Jn 6: ‘this is the commandment as you heard it from the beginning, that we walk in [the truth]’. (See also 1 Jn 2.7 and below.)

In 3.23, the two commandments are described in sequence and arranged chiastically:

- + ‘and this is his commandment,
- + that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ
- + and
- + that we love one another,
- + as he has given us commandment’.

12. These Commandments Are Both ‘from the Beginning’

- 2 Jn 5: ‘and now I ask you, Lady, not as one writing a new commandment but one that we have had from the beginning: that we love one another’.
- 2 Jn 6: ‘this is the commandment, as you heard it from the beginning, that we walk in [the truth]’.

c. Are the Three ‘Dogmatic’ Sections of 1 John Anti-Docetic?

The next step in the analysis of the evidence for anti-Docetism in 1 John is to examine the three passages listed by Schnelle and Strecker more closely.

1 Jn 2.22: Is this Statement Intended to Refute a Docetic View of Jesus?

In 1 Jn 2.22, the author declares that ‘the Liar’ is the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ (ὁ ἀρνούμενος ὅτι Ἰησοῦς οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ Χριστός). Literally, this translates as ‘the one denying that Jesus is the Christ’.²⁷ This statement rejected by the author is not intrinsically Docetic. It could be made by any who denied that the person Jesus was the fulfillment of the Jewish hopes regarding ‘the Christ’. Such a person might well admit that Jesus was an individual from Nazareth, but not that he fulfilled or possessed the qualities expected of ‘the Christ’. In fact, this is the way the verse is read by a number of scholars, who think that the statement is intended to confront Jews who totally deny the messiahship of Jesus.²⁸

But there is another way the verse can be read. According to the author of 1 John, believers were said to be begotten by God and born of him and they are regularly referred to as ‘children of God’ (cf., e.g., 3.1). It is regularly pointed out that the designation as ‘children’ (rather than as ‘sons’) of God was intended to respect and preserve the title of ‘son’

27. In Greek, the double negative (as here) is typical, but is not translated into English.

28. So J. C. O’Neill, *The Puzzle of 1 John: A New Examination of Origins* (London: SPCK, 1966), pp. 28–9, 60; Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, p. 114. As Smalley comments, ‘This is, after all, the obvious meaning of the Gr. as it stands’. See also Lieu (*I, II, & III John*, pp. 10, 105), who considers the option but dismisses it since they had been believers but departed. It is also rejected as a possibility by Schnelle, *Johannesbriefe*, p. 107.

for Jesus. It was also true that those who believed in Jesus received an ‘anointing’ (χρῖσμα) through the Spirit. Because believers had received an anointing, they could legitimately be given the title of ‘Christ’, but it is very likely that this title was also reserved for Jesus.²⁹

Next, it is true that the author of 1 John recognizes a valid basis for the believer having a status very similar to that of Jesus. In fact, the author makes an effort to make absolutely clear the distinction between the status of Jesus and that of the believer: Jesus is pre-existent (i.e., he is ‘revealed’: 1.3; 3.5, 8); Jesus’ sonship is unique (μονογενής) (4.9); the believer must work to be like Jesus (3.3). Nevertheless, the author makes it clear that at the time of Jesus’ final revelation ‘we will be like him’. In short, in the Johannine tradition the anthropology was so ‘high’ that the status of the believer needed to be distinguished from that of Jesus (recall that for the first generation of believers there was no doubt that Jesus was ‘human’). As a result, the author of 1 John works to distinguish anthropology from Christology. The point in all of this is that the opponents’ exalted anthropology (i.e., they were sons and anointed just as Jesus was now that they had the Spirit—as Jesus did) did away with any unique status for Jesus. Therefore Jesus was not ‘*the Son*’ or ‘*the Christ*’.

Perhaps the best way to decide between these interpretations would be to consider 2.22 in its context. Indeed, it is in this very context that the author reminds his readers that they have an ‘anointing’ (χρῖσμα) (2.20, 27). Thus, the author recalls that the believers are anointed also by the Spirit. Yet the author’s view is different from that of the opponents because he reminds his readers (2.27):

- + As for you—the anointing that you received from him [God] abides in you,
- + and you do not have need that anyone teach you,
- + but as his [God’s] anointing teaches you about all
- + and it is true and not false,
- + and just as it taught you,
- + you abide in him [Jesus].

What does the Spirit teach? It teaches the believer to abide in Jesus. This clarifies the meaning of the previous verses. It is not a matter of abiding in a particular view of Jesus but abiding in Jesus *simpliciter dictum*. It is not a matter of *Docetic* polemic, but a matter of the opponents’ denial of any permanent role for Jesus. For the opponents, Jesus had truly been the herald of the giving of the eschatological Spirit; but he

29. More detail on this is available in von Wahlde, *Commentary*, I, p. 532–40, III, pp. 82–100.

was only the herald, and once the Spirit was given, he was thought to have no further role. From that point on, it was the Spirit that was the effective agent of salvation. The author of 1 John works through his 'tract' to refute this.

Thus we see that, while 1 Jn 2.22 could be construed as rejecting a Docetic view, or it could be construed as opposing Jewish non-belief, both the immediate context of the verse as well as they context of 1 John as a whole would seem to suggest another interpretation.

Is 1 John 4.1-6 Anti-Docetic? In 1 Jn 4.2-3, there are two statements that Strecker and Schnelle think deal with the issue of Docetism. The first expresses the proper view of Jesus and the second expresses the view of the Docetists.

The Author's View of 'Correct' Confession. According to 4.2, 'every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ come in the flesh is of God'. Strecker and Schnelle propose that the author's reference to the belief that 'Jesus Christ [has] come in the flesh' is anti-Docetic. For them, this statement declares that Jesus was truly human and had true human flesh. This certainly could be understood as dealing with Docetism since Docetism was so much concerned with the relation between the divine and the 'fleshly' aspects of Jesus' identity. But there are questions we must answer before we can be sure.

It is valuable to note that, like the previous section, this material is arranged chiastically. Although the author introduces the section with a statement that is not part of the chiasm,

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God... (1 Jn 4.1a)

the remainder of the verses are then composed in a chiastic arrangement of antithetical statements.

- + because many false prophets have gone out into the world.
- + In this way you know the Spirit of God:
 - + every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ come in the flesh is of God,
 - + and
 - + every spirit that does away with Jesus is not of God.
- + And this is the (spirit) of the Antichrist, which you have heard is coming,
- + and is now already in the world (1 Jn 4.1b-3)

To understand this statement properly, we must examine the meaning of the verbal phrase 'to come in'. The phrase appears three times in the Letters: first in 1 Jn 4.2 ('every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ come in the flesh is of God'). In 1 Jn 5.6, the phrase appears again but with

‘water’ and with ‘blood’ as the objects of the preposition, not ‘flesh’ as previously (‘this is the one coming through water and blood, Jesus Christ. Not in the water only but in the water and the blood’).³⁰ Finally it appears in 2 Jn 7 in the same form as in 1 Jn 4.2.

In each of these texts ‘to come in’ refers to *the means by which the purposes of Jesus are realized*.³¹ It is not simply a statement indicating that Jesus *appeared* in the flesh. Rather, the flesh was the means by which his saving purposes were achieved.³² Thus, in 1 Jn 4.2 and 2 Jn 7, the flesh of Jesus is the means by which the purposes of Jesus (i.e., the giving of eternal life) are brought about. In 5.6, it is the water and the blood that are specified as the means.³³

But what is the difference between coming ‘in the flesh’ and coming ‘in the blood’? The evidence from 1 John indicates that the reference to ‘blood’ refers to the atoning death of Jesus.³⁴ The reference to ‘flesh’ is more general than ‘blood’ and refers to *all the material aspects of his ministry*. Is this, then, an anti-Docetic statement?

Strecker and Schnelle are correct in that the author of 1 John is addressing the value of the fleshly existence of Jesus. However, given the understanding of the verbal phrase ‘come in’ presented above, it was not just a question of *whether* Jesus was truly human and truly divine; it was a question of *the soteriological value* of that fleshly existence, i.e. was it an atonement?

30. I would see no difference between the use of the preposition ἐν and διὰ. For a discussion, see Brown, *Epistles*, pp. 473–4, and von Wahlde, *Commentary*, II, p. 183.

31. Brown (*Epistles*, p. 505) also recognizes that the issue is whether the ministry of Jesus was genuinely salvific when he comments: ‘[T]he issue is not that the secessionists are denying the incarnation or the physical reality of Jesus’ humanity; they are denying that what Jesus was or did in the flesh was related to his being the Christ, i.e. was salvific’.

32. This is the view described by Brown (*Epistles*, p. 576) as the most common and is adopted by him. So also Schnackenburg, *Epistles*, p. 232.

33. As we had occasion to see earlier, at the time of the second edition of the Gospel it was claimed that Jesus came only to give the Spirit and that his death was not a means of salvation but only his departure to the Father. Thus the author of 1 John explains to his readers that Jesus did not come just to give the Spirit (i.e., he did not ‘come in water only’). Notice that the author does not deny that Jesus came to give the Spirit but he adds that the other purpose of his ministry was to die as an atonement for sin.

34. See below on 1 Jn 5.6-8.

The Incorrect Confession According to the Author of 1 John. In 1 Jn 4.3, in a statement that is parallel to the one above within the overall chiasmic structure, the author gives an example of an incorrect view of Jesus. He says: ‘every spirit that does away with Jesus is not of God’. We need to discuss two features of this verse.

First, the textual variants. There are two major textual variants in the verse. The first provides the reading ‘that does not confess Jesus’ (ὁ μὴ ὁμολογεῖ τὸν Ἰησοῦν); the second is ‘that does away with Jesus’ (ὁ λυεῖ τὸν Ἰησοῦν). The first is attested by Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, Vaticanus, as well as by numerous later minuscules and versions. The second is attested almost exclusively in early Christian writers such as Irenaeus, Clement, Origen, and Tertullian. Thus, judging by manuscript evidence, the first is clearly to be preferred. Nevertheless, a number of respected modern scholars have opted for the second reading.³⁵ Among the reasons in favor of λυεῖ are: (1) it is the *lectio difficilior*; (2) the majority reading can be seen as a deliberate imitation of 2 Jn 7; (3) the reading is found in both the Greek and Latin traditions; (4) it is unusual that the majority reading uses the negative μὴ with the indicative mood; finally (5), the majority reading is taken as a confessional statement of ‘Jesus’. This last is quite important in that believers never made confessional statements regarding the single name ‘Jesus’.

Of these, the most significant is the last: that ‘confessing Jesus’ is not a true confessional statement. It is curious that Strecker does not discuss the problem in his commentary since as it stands the majority reading is neither Docetic nor anti-Docetic.³⁶

Second, there is the meaning of the resulting text. The statement with the majority reading could perhaps be seen as an elliptical expression meant to be a shortened version of the previous statement. On the other hand, ‘doing away with Jesus’ does make sense if the issue is a total rejection of a role for Jesus. I would support this second alternative. There are other places in 1 John where the denial of any role for Jesus seems to be the issue. For example, in the seemingly innocuous statement of 1.5, the author makes it clear that his followers have fellowship with both the Father and with the Son. This is not a matter of qualification but of absolute acceptance/rejection. Read in a context where there is mention elsewhere of rejection of Jesus, this supports the view that the ultimate question is one of simple acceptance or rejection. In this context, there is not a great difference between either textual reading. The opponents simply reject a role for Jesus.

35. Von Wahlde, *Commentary*, pp. III, pp. 142–3.

36. Strecker, *Letters*, pp. 134–5.

Thus, while I would argue that the text does not have an intended anti-Docetic polemic, I would agree that, read in a particular way, it could appear to be anti-Docetic.

Does 1 Jn 5.6-8 Exhibit an Anti-Docetic Interest in Sacraments? Both Strecker and Schnelle understand 1 Jn 5.6 to refer to the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist. I have summarized their view above.

Although Schnelle, in his commentary, gives an excellent explanation of the relevance of the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist for Johannine theology, I do not find evidence that the term 'blood' in 1 Jn 5.6-8 actually refers to the Eucharist except on the theory that it literally refers to the atoning death of Jesus and that, as we know from the Gospel (Jn 6.51-58), this death was commemorated in the Eucharist. But this does not give actual *evidence* that 'blood' in 1 Jn 5.6-7 is meant to refer to the Eucharist.

Consequently, we must ask if it is correct to say that 'blood' in 5.6 and 5.8 refers to the Eucharist. First, if we focus only on the usage in 1 John (as we should), the proper way to check whether 'blood' in 1 Jn 5.6 refers to the Eucharist is to examine the meaning of the term 'blood' (when used alone) elsewhere in 1 John. The word is used in only one other text in 1 John, in 1.7. There, the 'blood' of Jesus is that which effects atonement. It is in no way a sacramental blood.

Second, if we are to look to other texts that may help clarify the present text even though we do not find the word 'blood' in the texts, we notice that there are no other texts that could be said to make even a remote reference to the Eucharist. However, the notion of atonement, which is expressed in 1.7 with the use of the word 'blood' ('the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin'), is spoken of other places in ways that are quite similar but that do not use the term 'blood', for example, 1 Jn 2.2: 'He [Jesus] is an atonement for our sins and not only for ours but also for those of the entire world'. A similar text appears in 3.2 ('and we know that that one [Jesus] was revealed to take away sins'), 3.8 ('for this the Son of God was revealed, that he might do away with the works of the devil'), 4.2 ('Jesus Christ come in the flesh'), and 4.10 ('[God] sent his Son as an atonement for our sins'). Finally, the notion of the atoning death of Jesus is spoken of again in 4.15 ('the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world'). The widespread occurrence of this theme in 1 John, expressed in a variety of ways, confirms the linguistic use of 'blood' and at the same time confirms the *unlikelihood* of its referring to the Eucharist.

Third, if we look at the Gospel we see that, when 'blood' appears in a reference to the Eucharist in 6.51-58, it is quite explicit that the

Eucharist consists of *both* eating *his flesh* and drinking *his blood*. 1 John 5.6 speaks only of ‘blood’. Thus there is no evidence in the Johannine tradition for the use of ‘blood’ alone to refer to the Eucharist although there is evidence of its use to refer to atoning blood.

Once again the problem seems to center on the meaning of ‘to come in’. As we saw above, a much more likely understanding of this phrase in this sort of context is that it refers to the manner by which the salvific result of Jesus’ activity is realized.

As was the case above, a better explanation presents itself. In 1 Jn 5.6, the author provides a contrast between his view and that of his opponents: eternal life is not just attained by the giving of (‘living’) water (i.e., the Holy Spirit which was described in these terms in the second edition of the Gospel, cf. Jn 4.10-15; 7.37-39), but in addition to this, the shedding of Jesus’ blood is essential to the gaining of eternal life.

There are several advantages to this view.³⁷ It not only fits the phraseology but also the lexical meaning of the statement in 1 Jn 5.6. Moreover this interpretation fits well with polemic that is present elsewhere in 1 John. That is, as we have seen, throughout 1 John the author is arguing that Jesus did not just come to give the Spirit (as was focused on in the second edition of the Gospel) but also to die as an atonement for sin. Thus we have confirmation for this interpretation not only from language and context: we also see that this fits closely with the remainder of the context of 1 John. But this is not all. It is also important to notice that this interpretation fits with the larger context of the conflicting interpretations of the tradition as were put forward by the opponents (who based themselves on a reading of the second edition of the Gospel and the related Jewish eschatological hopes) and the author of 1 John who seeks to balance and correct their interpretation.

Of course, if 1 Jn 5.5-8 does not refer to the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist, then we must face the fact that there are *no* references to these sacraments in 1 John.³⁸ But, if this is the case, then the view of Schnelle and Strecker, who argue that 1 John is deliberately formulated to attack Docetic beliefs, is deficient in this important regard.

37. First this explanation corresponds to the use of language within the tradition. Second, it also fits well with the background of the second edition of the Gospel which spoke only of the giving of the Spirit without a soteriological view of the death of Jesus. It also fits well with the larger context of 1 John where there are a considerable number of references to the atoning death of Jesus. Finally it is consistent with the addition of such references to the material of the third edition of the Gospel.

38. Some scholars would see references to the sacrament of Baptism elsewhere in the letter. See the discussions in Brown, *Epistles*, pp. 242–5, 319–23.

5. Conclusions Regarding the Strecker–Schnelle Proposal of an Anti-Docetic Polemic in 1 John

This review of the work of Strecker has shown that he finds anti-docetic elements in three passages within 1 John. An initial review suggests that it may not be appropriate to limit the evidence for the views of the opponents so greatly. The alleged distinction between ‘parenthetic’ and ‘dogmatic’ sections is artificial and is not supported by the evidence. Moreover, by restricting the texts that are thought to refer to the views of the opponents to only three dogmatic sections within 1 John, Strecker and Schnelle have *ipso facto* greatly limited the statements that need to be reconciled with the proposal of Docetism.³⁹

Second, an analysis of 1 John shows that there are twelve claims pertinent to the correct understanding of the Johannine tradition as the author of 1 John understands it (cf. esp. Chart 1, above). At the same time, as the evidence of 1 John shows, each of these claims is tested by both belief and by correct action, categories that even Ignatius recognizes as essential. Each of the twelve ‘claims’ are just that—genuine claims—and these claims are not verified only by correct belief but by correct action, manifest in love of one another. Thus to limit the passages that are thought to be significant is not an adequate way to approach the views of the opponents. The views of the opponents are much more pervasive within 1 John and are more adequately explained by the proposal that the opponents’ views are all derivative of the theology of the second edition of the Gospel.

Third, when we look at each of the so-called dogmatic sections of 1 John, we see that there are substantial problems with a Docetic reading of them. In 2.22, we see that the plain sense of the verse does not support a Docetic reading. It is only with some difficulty that the statement can be seen as opposing Docetism. The explanation of the verse that derives from the proposal put forward in my commentary on the Letters is much more likely to explain not only the verse itself but also its context.

39. In his commentary on the letters, Schnelle continues to divide 1 John into ‘dogmatic’ and ‘parenthetic’ sections (*Johannesbriefe*, pp. 57–8). However by recognizing that the issue of ‘brotherly’ love was an issue between Ignatius and his docetic opponents (cf. pp. 143–4) and so relevant to the identification of the author’s opponents also, he blurs the distinction between dogmatic sections that concerned the opponents and the parenthetic sections that concerned the community by saying that he seems to accuse his opponents of lack of brotherly love ‘directly or indirectly’.

In 4.2, the meaning of the confessional statement that ‘Jesus came in the flesh’ hinges on the meaning of ‘came in’, a phrase which appears elsewhere in the Letters and does not mean ‘truly exist in’ but refers to the means by which the salvific action of Jesus was accomplished. Thus in spite of having a *prima facie* resemblance to a Docetic statement, the statement is actually concerned with something else—the role of the death of Jesus in soteriology.

Nor does an examination of the use of the term ‘blood’ in 5.6-8 support an interpretation that the verses refute a Docetic attitude toward the Eucharist. Consequently, the Strecker–Schnelle hypothesis that 5.5b-12 is a refutation of a Docetic rejection of sacraments cannot be supported. On the other hand, if we examine these texts in the light of the proposal that the author of 1 John is confronting a misreading of the second edition of the Gospel, we again have not only a more satisfying explanation of these texts but also of the overall context of the Letter.

Fourth, we would expect 1 John to counter Docetism with the same sort of reliance upon a human authority such as the bishop, as does Ignatius in his Letter to the Smyrnians. Not only does 1 John not address the issue of a human authority but in fact it gives every impression that there is no source of human authority for the author. Instead, the only authority for the author is the ‘anointing’ that the believer has received from the Spirit and the teaching that comes from the Spirit to abide in the words of Jesus together with the witness of those who have seen and heard.

Fifth, as we have seen above in the discussion of 1 Jn 5.6-8, John does not discuss the absence of, or argue for, a proper attitude toward the Eucharist. If 1 John intended to confront Docetism, the reader would expect such an issue to be addressed as Strecker and Schnelle indicate.

In the light of these various problems, it seems there is little justification for seeing 1 John as anti-Docetic. Rather, the texts alleged by Strecker and Schnelle to be anti-Docetic can be explained more satisfactorily not only in themselves but also within the larger context of the Letter by the view put forward in my commentary.

As was the case with the analysis of the possibility of incipient Gnosticism in the Gospel, we find that there are statements that have a distant similarity to some tenets of Docetism, but closer examination shows that these features are better explained by other proposals.

Chapter 3

DOCETISM (AND ANTI-DOCETISM) IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN?

We now turn to an examination of the possible relation of Docetism to the Gospel of John. Here we will first examine the view of E. Käsemann, who proposes that the Gospel is an example of ‘naïve docetism’. We will then examine the view of U. Schnelle, who does not simply reject the idea that the Gospel is Docetic, but argues the exact opposite: that it is consciously anti-Docetic.

The fact that scholars could argue for exactly opposite views, using the same Gospel as evidence, indicates clearly the nature of the problem faced by all interpreters of the Gospel: What is there about this Gospel that can lead scholars to such different conclusions in spite of their reading the same evidence?

1. ‘Naïve Docetism’ in the Gospel of John (Käsemann)

E. Käsemann, in his influential book, *The Testament of Jesus*, described the Gospel as reflecting a ‘naïve docetism’. By ‘naïve docetism’, Käsemann meant that the Evangelist did not consciously hold to a theory of Docetism but presented the ministry of Jesus in such a way that the result was a Docetic portrayal of Jesus. In Käsemann’s words, the Evangelist’s ‘naïve docetism’ is ‘not thought through nor elevated into dogma’.¹ Käsemann sees several elements of the Gospel that are Docetic. In what follows, I will examine them one by one and present an evaluation of his position.

1. Käsemann, *Testament*, p. 45.

2. The Overall Portrayal of Jesus in the Gospel

Käsemann's overall view is best expressed in his own words as he summarizes what he sees as the overriding perspective of the Gospel. I have added numbers in parentheses for each statement to be able to readily refer to them in the critique that will follow it.

(1) In what sense is he flesh, (2) who walks on the water and (3) through closed doors, (4) who cannot be captured by his enemies, (5) who at the well of Samaria is tired and desires a drink; yet has no need of a drink and has food different from that which his disciples seek? (6) He cannot be deceived by men, because he knows their innermost thoughts even before they speak. (7) He debates with them from the vantage point of the infinite difference between heaven and earth. (8) He has need neither of the witness of Moses nor of the Baptist. (9) He dissociates himself from the Jews, as if they were not his own people, and (10) he meets his mother as the one who is her Lord. (11) He permits Lazarus to lie in the grave for four days in order that the miracle of his resurrection may be more impressive. (12) And in the end the Johannine Christ goes victoriously to his death of his own accord. (13) Almost superfluously the Evangelist notes that this Jesus at all times lies on the bosom of the Father and (14) that to him who is one with the Father the angels descend and from him they again ascend. (15) He who has eyes to see and ears to hear can see and hear his glory. (16) Not merely from the prologue and from the mouth of Thomas, but from the whole Gospel he perceives the confession, 'My Lord and my God'. How does all this agree with the understanding of a realistic incarnation?²

3. Critique of Käsemann's Statement

This summary is a general one of the Gospel and certainly presents a view of the Gospel that many may recognize as representative of their own initial reaction to the Gospel. However, upon closer scrutiny, much of what appears as evidence of a 'naïve Docetism' is, in fact, not at all Docetic. Nevertheless, when gathered together in the way they are by Käsemann, these features create an impression that is ultimately misleading. Some brief comments on each of his assertions will show another understanding of them.

As we saw above, Käsemann begins (1) by asking how the figure identified as Jesus in the Gospel can be considered 'flesh'. He then continues by pointing to a considerable list of features which he sees as incompatible with such a view. First, Käsemann points to Jesus as one who 'walks on water' (2)—but this is true throughout the Synoptics and

2. Käsemann, *Testament*, p. 9.

so this is nothing special to John. Käsemann joins this with ‘passing through closed doors’ (3). But the juxtaposition of this element from the post-resurrection period with the previous miracle is misleading. All the Gospels portray Jesus’ post-resurrection body as different from its pre-resurrection state. To group this with material from the ministry is to distort the portrayal of the Gospel.

It is true that Jesus cannot be captured by his enemies (4), but this is part of the theme of his ‘hour’ determined for him by the Father. It is a statement more about the Father than about Jesus. Käsemann’s reference to the Samaritan episode and to the fact that Jesus is tired and hungry and stops at the well in Sychar (5) are indeed indications of a human side to Jesus. However, it is misleading to join this with Jesus’ subsequent remark to the disciples that he has another food (to do the will of the Father). This latter should not be taken as a description of a lack of physical needs but rather as a theological statement regarding the central motivating feature of his ministry.

It is true that Jesus is regularly portrayed as having supernatural knowledge (6), but really this is little different from the Synoptic portrayal of Jesus’ predictions of his Passion and death.

Just what Käsemann is referring to when he says (7) that Jesus debates with his opponents ‘from the vantage point of the infinite difference between heaven and earth’ is not clear. If it means that Jesus expects his opponents to evaluate him not just on the level of earthly reputation, that is correct. But this is also true of what even the prophets of the Jewish Scriptures hoped: they were sent by God and that needed to be taken into account when people assessed them.

Käsemann says (8) that Jesus does not have need of the witness of either Moses or the Baptist. While this is true of the witness of the Baptist (cf. 3.34), it is not at all true of Moses, whose writings are considered to have the authority of Scripture (5.39, 45-47; 7.19, 23). Jesus claims that the witness to his reality comes from God—and this is, in essence, no different from the claim that miracles attest that a person is sent by God.

Käsemann says (9) that Jesus ‘dissociate(s) himself from the Jews, as if they were not his own people’. Three comments are appropriate here. First, if Jesus does dissociate himself from the Jews this in no way can be said to affect the presentation of Jesus as incarnate. Second, although some would understand the statements of 8.17 and 10.34 (where Jesus speaks to ‘the Jews’ about ‘your Law’) as indicating that Jesus distances himself from the Jewish Law, it is more likely that Jesus is simply pointing out to them that his claims do not have some new and unique

basis but are in fact based on a correct reading of the Law, which even his opponents consider sacred. Third, Käsemann uses the term ‘the Jews’ in an uncritical way. In the Gospel, the term refers to at least three different groups, one of which is restricted to a group with religious authority. It is with this group that Jesus disagrees, but he does not ‘dissociate’ himself from them.

The statement that Jesus meets his mother as one who is her Lord (10) is correct insofar as it refers to Jesus meeting with her in 2.1-11. But this is intended to show that he is not under any human constraints but that all of his actions are determined by his response to the Father and in obedience solely to him. This may be an indication that his motivation is not based on human concerns, but this is hardly evidence that the presentation is docetic. The scene at the foot of the cross (19.25-26), where Jesus entrusts his mother to the Beloved Disciple and vice versa, although somewhat enigmatic, does not indicate any ‘distancing’ or impersonality; it rather tends to express genuine concern for her.

It is true that Jesus ‘lets’ Lazarus remain in the tomb for four days (11). Yet it is not to make the miracle more impressive, but almost surely so that the passage of time will be evidence that Lazarus was truly dead (since in Jewish thought the soul could remain with the body for up to three days).

It is also true that Jesus goes to his Passion with great determination (12). Jesus demonstrates that what is happening is not outside the plan of God. It is the supreme obedience and confidence of one who does the will of the Father and seeks to bring the Father’s work to completion. From this statement it would appear that there is none of the ‘agony’ that is found in the Synoptics, yet this statement needs to be balanced against 12.27-28 (‘Now my soul is shaken. And what should I say: “Father, save me from this hour”? But it was for this very reason that I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name’). Here there is evidence of a human dread of what is about to happen but also the restatement of the resolution that this was an essential part of the ‘work’ given to him by the Father.

Käsemann’s statement that, ‘almost superfluously the Evangelist notes that this Jesus at all times lies on the bosom of the Father’ (13) is also a distortion of the Gospel text. The statement, which is, of course, a reference to 1.18 in the Prologue, does not say that Jesus is ‘always’ at the bosom of the Father. Rather, the point of the statement is the intimacy of the pre-existent Jesus with the Father.

Next (14) Käsemann refers to 1.51 (‘And he said to him, “Amen, Amen, I say to you, [all of] you will see the sky opened up and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man’’’). Again the statement itself is somewhat difficult to understand but does indicate that Jesus is on earth but that the heavens have been opened and he is the locus of an interchange between heaven and earth. It certainly points to a high Christology but it does not demand any sort of Docetic existence for Jesus.

Just why Käsemann claims that ‘he who has eyes to see and ears to hear can see and hear his glory’ (15) is anti-incarnational is not evident. It is an expression that a certain attitude of openness is necessary in order to believe and when one does truly see and hear, the person will see the glory of Jesus.

Finally (16) Käsemann comments: ‘not merely from the prologue and from the mouth of Thomas, but from the whole Gospel he [the reader] perceives the confession, “My Lord and my God’’’. It is certainly true that the divinity of Jesus shines through more clearly in John than in the Synoptics, but it is not Docetic.

In short, while Käsemann’s overview of the alleged Docetism of the Gospel can easily give the impression of a Docetic Christ, when viewed closely this claim is not as convincing as might first appear.

4. Features that Suggest Docetism in the Gospel

a. The δόξα of Jesus

Käsemann also argues that the δόξα (glory) of Jesus is such that it removes him from a true human existence. According to Käsemann, Jesus is above all human interaction. He writes:

It has always been recognized that no other Gospel narrates as impressively as John the confrontation of the world and of the believers with the glory of Jesus, even in the passion story... In John, the glory of Jesus determines his whole presentation so thoroughly from the very outset that the incorporation and position of the passion narrative of necessity becomes problematic.³

...

One can hardly fail to recognize the danger of his [John’s] Christology of glory, namely, the danger of Docetism. It is present in a still naïve, unreflected form and it has not yet been recognized by the Evangelist or his community. The following generations were thoroughly enchanted

3. Käsemann, *Testament*, pp. 4–26, esp. 7–10, here 6–7.

with John's Christology of glory. Consequently the question 'Who is Jesus?' remained alive among them. But those generations also experienced the difficulties of this Christology of glory and had to unfold and deepen its problems and, in so doing, had to decide for or against Docetism. We, too, have to give an answer to the questions of the centre of the Christian message. From John we must learn that this is the question of the right Christology, and we have to recognize that he was able to give an answer only in the form of a naïve Docetism. Thus we ourselves are forced to engage in dogmatics. An undogmatic faith is, at the very least, a decision against the Fourth Gospel.⁴

It is true that, when we read the Gospel in its final form, it is easy to combine the conception of the glory that Jesus had before the foundation of the world (cf. 17.5) with the glory of Jesus that was discernible during his public ministry (cf. 5.41-43). But John makes it clear that this glory of the preexistent Jesus was something that was not seen and not intended to be seen during the ministry.

What is the δόξα of the earthly Jesus? This is explained in 5.41-47. According to Jesus' words there, every person can be said to have a δόξα. This is the identity of the person as it is made manifest in the person's existence. In 5.41-47, Jesus explains that he does not accept glory from humans. By this he means an understanding of his identity that is based simply on considerations that derive from human existence. He explains that his opponents 'accept glory from one another', that is, they accept a glory that consists entirely of one's actions and reputation as evaluated on a human level. The glory that was to be seen during Jesus' ministry was the glory of one sent by the Father; it was a glory that was not Jesus' own but totally a result of what had been given to him by the Father.

While Käsemann may speak of a 'confrontation with the glory' of Jesus, we see clearly in 5.31-40 that Jesus presents four witnesses to the Jews to substantiate his claims: (1) the witness of John the Baptizer—which Jesus does not consider essential; (2) his 'works' given to him by the Father; (3) his 'words' which are the words of the Father; (4) the Scriptures, which also witness to him. In all of this, there is no hint of a Docetic confrontation with an overwhelming 'glory'. Rather, it is as if Jesus has to plead with his opponents to see what is before them.

If we emphasize one set of texts, it is easy to read a Docetism into the Gospel. If we emphasize another set of texts, Docetism becomes much less of a possibility. And it is this fact that makes the interpretation of the

4. Käsemann, *Testament*, p. 26.

Gospel so difficult. The root cause of this ambiguity and conflicting texts is the fact that the Gospel has been through a sequence of editions, each of which was intended to emphasize a particular element, and it is only when these various editions are understood in relation to one another that we are able clearly and fully to understand the texts and their meaning in relation to one another.⁵

b. The Lack of a True Theology of the Cross?

As part of his understanding of the Gospel, Käsemann points to the Johannine presentation of the death of Jesus as being evidence of a Docetic view. As we saw in the quote given above, in Käsemann's view the glory of Jesus so dominates the Gospel that the inclusion of the passion becomes problematical. This is commonly referred to in the literature as the lack of a *theologia crucis*, a 'theology of the cross'. Jesus' acceptance of his death is said to be not that of a true human being. It is a glorification just as his public ministry had been (cf. 13.31-32: 'Now the Son of Man has been glorified and God has been glorified in him. [If God has been glorified in him] God will glorify him in him, and he will glorify him immediately').

A proper understanding of this does not indicate an overwhelming demonstration of divinity in the Passion, but rather, as the text says, 'God has been glorified in him [the Son of Man]'. It is the fact that the Son, who is so obedient and who has deferred all glory to the Father, even now in his passion and death is equally obedient and this fact gives glory to the Father. Jesus' glory is that of one who is obedient to the point of death. When Jesus says, 'it is finished' (19.30), we do not see the glory of one who transcends suffering and death through untouchable divinity. Just as when Jesus reflects on his ministry and understands his glory to be that of one who obeys (5.41-47), so also in his suffering the 'glory' that should be seen is of one who is totally obedient to the Father—right to the end.

It should also be remembered that in true Docetism, there is a separation of the heavenly Christ from the earthly Jesus. In the varying systems, this is expressed in a variety of ways. But there is not the slightest hint of this in the Gospel.

5. In my view, this is one of the major benefits of examining the composition history of the Gospel and its relation to the composition of the Letters. When the material of the third edition is distinguished from that of the second edition, the overall thought of each body of material is made clear.

But we may then ask about the meaning of the prayer in ch. 17, where Jesus shows awareness of the glory that he had with the Father ‘before the creation of the world’. While this reflects a clear awareness of Jesus’ existence before his ministry on earth, it does not contribute in any way to a Docetic view of Jesus but simply reflects the belief in an incarnate Jesus.

c. The Johannine Understanding of the Sacraments and of Church

Docetists saw no value in the Eucharist and so did not participate in it (cf. Ignatius, *Smyrn.* 6.2; 7.1).⁶ In the third chapter of his book, Käsemann addresses the issue of the sacraments in John, recognizing that scholars often disagree considerably about the Gospel’s attitude toward them. He thinks that at the end of the first century, one should normally expect clear references to the sacraments and asks why the Gospel does not narrate the institution of any of them. He points especially to the lack of a Eucharistic scene at the Last Supper.⁷

In the light of this fact, Käsemann argues that the Incarnation is usually understood in the light of the sacraments while the reverse should be true. The Gospel of John does not see the Church, anchored in history, as the ‘institution of salvation’. Rather, in John, the believer has direct contact with the Logos and the sacraments ‘are robbed of the kind of “sacramental” quality usually associated with them. Instead for John, all is related to the Word.’⁸ Käsemann continues:

In radical reduction John made Jesus and his witness into the sole content and criterion of the true tradition of time when otherwise it had already receded or disappeared, a time when the sound doctrine of a developing orthodox and the edifying historicizing report became important. For John, Jesus himself is the continuity of the Christian community in all ages, whose other qualities must be judged from there.⁹

Thus for Käsemann, John’s ecclesiology is all but non-existent and the role of sacraments is also thereby diminished. The primary relationship is between the individual and the Word. Consequently, the believer is not called upon to focus on sacraments, but to see the call to abide in the

6. However, it appears, as Schnelle points out, that if Jesus did not truly suffer, then the resurrection did not take place and so the Eucharist (which celebrates the flesh of Jesus) is emptied of meaning (Schnelle, *Antidocetic*, p. 64).

7. Käsemann is inclined to attribute the Eucharistic material in 6.51b-58 to a redactor (*Testament*, p. 32).

8. Käsemann, *Testament*, pp. 44–5.

9. Käsemann, *Testament*, p. 46.

Word and not in dogmatic formulations. Thus Käsemann relates the sacramental themes in John to a minimal role in a conventicle that is not at all a 'church' in the institutional sense or in the sense of a dispenser of salvation. In doing so, he takes a stand exactly opposite to that of Schnelle, and decades earlier, Cullmann.

Again, we see two interpretations of the same text that are at odds with one another. If we look at the view of Käsemann and those of Schnelle and, before him, Cullmann, we see that there is also substantial evidence for the existence of sacraments. It is not a simple case of one interpreter being wrong and the other being right. Both point to distinct texts in distinct contexts. How is this to be resolved? I would argue that the difficulties are caused by the fact that the Gospel has gone through a process of composition resulting in various literary strata, each of which sought to confront specific problems. When these problems are taken out of their original context (which is difficult to avoid without understanding the stages of the Gospel's composition), the proper perspective is very difficult to preserve.

As we have seen above¹⁰ and as we will see in more detail below,¹¹ at the time of the second stage of the Gospel's development, the author stressed the utter necessity of receiving the Spirit. In doing so, the author declared the absolute uselessness of all things material in the pursuit of eternal life. Thus physical birth was of no importance; birth from the Spirit alone guaranteed eternal life. Physical water was of no importance; only the living water of the Spirit. Worship on Gerizim or in Jerusalem was of no importance; only worship in the Spirit.

However, the tract known as 1 John countered the extreme interpretation of this and asserted that the realm of the physical and material were sometimes essential. Among the most important elements of the physical world were the facts of Jesus' physical death and the shedding of his blood.

By the time of the third edition of the Gospel, the community had even more fully appreciated the role of physical and material reality and included belief in the resurrection of the physical body on the last day as a constituent element of reality in addition to the earlier belief in eternal life without a physical resurrection. The community had also come to a belief in the importance of rituals (which were by their very nature

10. See the 'Prequel', pp. 1–23 above.

11. See the discussion of the influence of canonical Judaism on the theology of the Gospel in chapter 4.

physical and material) such as the Eucharist.¹² But if we distinguish in this way the various strata of the Gospel (and of the larger tradition) we are able to achieve a consistent explanation of how at one point in the community's existence there could be a disdain for anything resembling a sacrament and at another time a clear assertion of the importance of sacraments.

5. Anti-Docetic Elements in the Gospel (Schnelle)

As was mentioned above, scholars have also proposed that the Gospel of John is, in fact, anti-Docetic.¹³ That is, they have interpreted the Gospel in a way diametrically opposed to Käsemann. The major recent proponent of this view is Udo Schnelle, who has argued this position both in his book *Antidocetic Christology in the Gospel of John* and more recently in his commentary on the Gospel.¹⁴ Schnelle proposes that 1 John was written before the Gospel of John and that the opponents of 1 John were Docetists and that the Gospel continued a confrontation with Docetism.¹⁵ We have already examined the view that 1 John is anti-Docetic and the various problems that this view seems to involve. Here we will investigate to what extent the Gospel contains evidence that it was written with the intention of refuting Docetic opponents.

In his monograph, Schnelle points to three elements of the Gospel that indicate an anti-Docetic intent: the miracles, the sacraments, and the prologue. We will examine each in turn.

a. The Miracles as Anti-Docetic

After a one-hundred-and-one page redaction-critical analysis of the miracles in the Gospel, Schnelle reaches the conclusion that they are anti-Docetic in their purpose.¹⁶ As was the case with Käsemann, it seems best to quote Schnelle's own summary words.

12. The lack of a reference to the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper is undoubtedly a vestige of the earlier stage of the community's existence even though the community now asserted the centrality of the Eucharist for the possession of eternal life in Jn 6.51-58.

13. A widely known proponent of this view at the middle of the twentieth century was O. Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship* (trans. A. S. Todd and J. B. Torrance; SBT 10; Chicago: Regnery, 1953).

14. Schnelle, *Antidocetic*, and *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (THNT 4; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1998), pp. 40, 134-5, 'Excursus on Docetism', pp. 135-40.

15. Schnelle, *Antidocetic*, pp. 70, 228-36; cf. Strecker, *Letters*, pp. 4-6.

16. This is antithetical to the view of Käsemann, *Testament*, pp. 21-2.

As powerful deeds of the λόγος ἔνσαρκος [Logos enfleshed], the miracles in the Gospel have an anti-docetic function. With their mass and their reality, they show that Jesus Christ has really entered space and time. The simultaneous emphasis on Jesus' humanity also serves the purpose of indicating the fleshly existence of the miracle worker. If faith follows a vivid seeing of the miracle, this means that John insists on the importance for faith of Jesus' appearing in the flesh and that he opposes any docetic erasure of it. Since the miracles are visible, this-worldly demonstrations of Jesus' majesty, and at the same time are part of the Johannine *theologia crucis*, because in them the *doxa* of the Incarnate One is visible and evokes faith, they emphatically secure the identity of the Preexistent One with the fleshly, suffering, and exalted Jesus Christ. Consequently, from the point of view of the evangelist, they are to be understood as anti-docetic.¹⁷

Part of my reason for quoting Schnelle at such length is to show just how fully he opposes the conclusions of Käsemann. Although not addressing the position of Käsemann directly, it is evident that Schnelle does address elements of Käsemann's position in his references to understanding the *doxa* of Jesus and his *theologia crucis*. By conducting what he refers to as a 'redaction-critical' analysis of the miracles, he comes to the conclusions I have quoted above.

This is not the place for a detailed analysis of Schnelle's entire redaction criticism of the Gospel. However, some more general critique is in order. It will show some of the ways I would disagree with Schnelle and why.

First, Schnelle performs redaction criticism only of selected passages within the Gospel. He does not analyze the entire Gospel. Although the situation created by Schnelle is quite different from Strecker's restriction of passages dealing with Docetism in 1 John, the ultimate effect is the same: the analysis does not taken into account the entire document and so the interpreter is methodologically in danger of neglecting features that would alter the conclusions arrived at from an analysis of a limited body of material. Schnelle holds that the Gospel is composed of only two bodies of material. In fact, he discusses the possibility that it is composed of more than two layers of tradition and rejects it on methodological grounds.¹⁸

17. Schnelle, *Antidocetic*, p. 175. Schnelle opposes Käsemann, who although he emphasizes the reality of Jesus' miracles in the Gospel of John, does not acknowledge their antidocetic function (*Testament*, pp. 52–3).

18. Schnelle, *Antidocetic*, pp. 9–25.

Second, it should be pointed out that Schnelle is the only modern scholar to propose that the use of σημεῖα ('signs') in the Gospel is the work of the Evangelist rather than of the earlier tradition. He rightly recognizes that the various instances of σημεῖα appear both in miracles and in other narratives within the Gospel. However, unlike others he attributes this usage to the Evangelist rather than to the tradition.¹⁹ By rejecting the existence of a 'σημεῖα source', Schnelle argues that the various miracles narrated in the Gospel come from a variety of sources within the overall tradition and that they were not a part of a continuous narrative document.

Ultimately, Schnelle concludes his discussion of the healing of the man born blind with a statement that also sums up his entire view of the miracles as anti-Docetic.

Thus, the miracle not only serves the interest of Christology but is the *expression* of the evangelist's christological concept, apparent in his emphasis on the epiphanic character of the *sēmeia* and thus on the this-worldly visibility of Jesus' activity and the reality of his incarnation.²⁰

b. *Theologia Crucis* in the Gospel

As we have seen, Käsemann had argued that the presentation of the sacraments was such that it contributed to a Docetic view. Schnelle argues the opposite: "[F]or John the miracles are both compositionally and in their content the matter and the expression of his *theologia crucis*'.²¹

In this matter Schnelle is quite clear. In a long response to the view of U. B. Müller,²² who had agreed with Käsemann that there is no *theologia crucis* in the Gospel, Schnelle writes,

Following E. Käsemann, U. B. Müller believes that it is not possible to speak of a theology of the cross in John. Müller sees the characteristically Johannine concept in the passages that speak of Jesus' going to God (ὑπάγειν [to withdraw], see only 7.33; 8.14; 13.4; 14.28) and of his ascending and descending (see ἀναβαίνειν / καταβαίνειν in 3.13; also in 1.51; 6.62; 20.17). Here, according to Müller, the idea of returning to God, not the cross, is the focus... [T]he designation of Jesus as ἀμὸς τοῦ θεοῦ (1.29, 36) and the statements about Jesus' atoning death (10.11, 15, 17; 15.13) are simply said to be 'specifically Johannine' in order to

19. For example, I would see many of those passages (and all the uses of σημεῖα except those at 2.18 and 6.30) as coming from the first edition of the Gospel.

20. Schnelle, *Antidocetic*, p. 124 (original emphasis).

21. Schnelle, *Antidocetic*, p. 172.

22. U. B. Müller, 'Die Bedeutung des Kreuzestodes Jesu im Johannes-evangelium', *KuD* 21 (1975), pp. 49–71.

secure Müller's own proposal. In contrast, it should be emphasized that the Johannine understanding of Jesus' death is adequately grasped only when *all* the statements about Jesus' suffering and death are taken into account. The numerous redactional preferences to the passion in the miracle stories; Jesus repeated journeys to feasts in Jerusalem, the place of his suffering and death; the statements about his atoning death and the placement of the cleansing of the temple (as well as the anointing story in 12.1-11)—all these, taken together, show that we must speak of a Johannine *theologia crucis*. Moreover, according to 19.30, the revelation of Jesus reaches its fulfillment on the cross (τετέλεσται [it is finished!]).²³

Here we see that once again two scholars come to different conclusions regarding the presence of a theology of the cross in John on the basis of different sets of passages. Müller focuses on passages which speak of Jesus' departure to the Father, while Schnelle focuses on passages which speak of an atoning death and on lesser features such as 'redactional references to the Passion in the miracle stories' and Jesus' frequent trips to Jerusalem, in which Schnelle finds indicators of a theology of the cross.

Once again the problem is that both sets of texts appear *in the same Gospel*. How does one go about explaining them? The difficulties experienced by both Müller and Schnelle are an indication of the problems presented by the text. A satisfactory explanation must do justice to both sets of texts. This fact alone suggests that the final resolution to the problem of these conflicting views rests in an accurate description of the composition process of the Gospel.

c. The Sacramental Interest in John

The role and the extent of texts in the Gospel of John referring to the sacraments has been a matter of some dispute, with 'classical' opposing positions represented by Bultmann (non-sacramental) and Cullmann (extensively sacramental). Käsemann, as we have seen, recognizes sacramental passages but minimizes their importance in the light of what Käsemann saw as the overall context of the Gospel.

Again much of Schnelle's argument for an anti-Docetic polemic is built on his theory of redaction. His view is expressed succinctly by the following:

To the traditional bread of life discourse, John added a eucharistic interpretation (vv. 51-58). Apparently, Docetists within the Johannine school denied the soteriological importance of the Lord's supper, with the result that the evangelist felt it necessary to present his own understanding of

23. Schnelle, *Antidocetic*, p. 173.

the Eucharist... [T]he antidocetic intention of the text is evident in the use of σάργη in v. 51c, in the exclusive conditional clause in v. 53, and in the use of the realistic τρώγειν and the eschatological perspective in vv. 54b and 58b. In v. 54a, and possibly also in v. 51c (ἡ σάργη μου ἔστιν ὑπέρ), the evangelist used Eucharistic traditions of the Johannine school that were in accord with his antidocetic purpose. John was not interested in a substantive teaching about the Eucharist. In his controversy with the Docetists he was guided exclusively by a christological interest: in the Lord's Supper the identity of the exalted Son of man with the Incarnate and Crucified One is made visible. In its Eucharistic practice, the community confirms this identity, but it is denied by those who absent themselves from the Lord's Supper.

Some comments are in order. It is quite remarkable that Schnelle attributes the bread of life discourse to 'tradition' rather than to the Evangelist. First, this has to be a view unique within Johannine studies. Second, if we recall Schnelle's criterion used in the analysis of the first Cana miracle, i.e. that *hapax legomena* indicate traditional material while frequently used terminology indicates the work of the Evangelist, one would be hard put to assign 6.30-50 to 'tradition.²⁴ On the other hand, the fact that τρώγειν appears only in 6.51-58 in John (except in a quote from Ps. 41.10) and is used elsewhere in the entire NT only at Mt. 24.38 should according to Schnelle indicate that these verses are traditional, not redactional! Further, the verb μαχέσθαι appears only here in the Gospel. The word βρωσις appears only three times, here and in two passages which Schnelle says are traditional (4.32; 6.27). In short, it appears again that this particular criterion used by Schnelle is not only subjective but inconsistently applied.

Käsemann had certainly raised a critical point in asking why the Gospel references to the Eucharist were not located at the scene of the Farewell Supper as they are in the Synoptics. Even in its final form, the Gospel indicates an unwillingness to do so. This surely must indicate that at one stage of the tradition there was no recollection of the Eucharist at that supper. However, the wording of 6.51-58 is such that the importance of the Eucharist cannot be underestimated. Not only is consuming the flesh and blood of Jesus essential for eternal life, but there is a clear emphasis on the material reality of the sacrament.

24. The inconsistency of Schnelle's method is evident in this claim that the majority of 6.30-50 (specifically 6.30-35, 41-51) (*Antidocetic*, p. 201) comes from tradition. Yet he argues that 'the motif of misunderstanding [in vv. 32-34] is a literary form employed by the evangelist' (p. 183). It cannot be both ways.

Nevertheless, Schnelle does not prove his conclusion that 6.51-58 is anti-Docetic *in its intent*. It is not possible to conceive of the passage being given a Docetic interpretation, but this is not the same as speaking of its *intent*.

There are two sets of texts within the Gospel that speak of the (lack of) value of the physical, material aspects of reality. In the first set, there is an emphasis on the belief that material reality alone is not sufficient for salvation. To Nicodemus, Jesus speaks of the necessity of being born of the Spirit: ‘that which is born of the flesh is flesh; that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit’ (Jn 3.6). Jesus offers the Samaritan woman a water that is the Spirit, which will lead to eternal life. He speaks to her of a worship ‘in Spirit and Truth’ that will be neither on Gerizim nor in Jerusalem. There are also texts that speak of eternal life without a bodily dimension.

Yet there is also a wider circle of texts in the Gospel to which this Eucharistic text belongs, one in which there is a decided emphasis on the importance of the material as opposed to the merely spiritual. This is seen clearly in those texts which speak of the value of the physical death of Jesus and which speak of the reality of a resurrection of the body, and of course those which speak of the importance of material reality expressed in ritual, such as the Eucharist.

As was the case with texts which speak of the role of Jesus’ death, we have two views within the same document. Any satisfactory solution must take these two sets into account. It is also clear that it is not satisfactory to ignore either set nor is it satisfactory to so interpret the one as to devalue the other. This contrast is not Docetic or anti-Docetic; the contrast is between reality without the Spirit and reality with the Spirit.

Schnelle sees a second reference to Baptism and the Eucharist in the description of the flow of blood and water in Jn 19.34-35.²⁵ He had treated this briefly in his discussion of 1 Jn 5.6-8 which spoke of Jesus’ coming ‘not in water only but in water and blood’. What held true for the discussion there is also applicable in this instance, namely, that nowhere is the Eucharist referred to only under the image of blood, whereas ‘blood’ does appear as a reference to atoning death. That the image of ‘water’ in 19.34-35 refers to baptism is difficult to conceive since in 7.7-39, Jesus had promised that ‘living’ water would flow from his side and the Evangelist goes on to explain that ‘living’ water referred to the Spirit.

25. Schnelle, *Evangelium*, pp. 292-4.

d. The Prologue of the Gospel

Schnelle provides a detailed analysis of the Prologue, giving his view of what is tradition and what is redaction (i.e., the work of the Evangelist). We need not concern ourselves here with the full study. Inevitably Schnelle's study of the Prologue focuses on the meaning of v. 14a ('and the Word was made flesh') and it is here that we are able to see his thinking at work. Surprisingly, Schnelle attributes this to 'tradition'. As he states, 'v. 14 reveals itself to be an integral part of the tradition, which cannot be attributed to a preredactional accretion, or to the evangelist, or to a redactor working after the evangelist'.²⁶ He then goes on to say,

The complete incarnation of the Revealer is unacceptable to Docetists, and therefore v. 14a should be interpreted, at the level both of tradition and of the evangelist, as a conscious polemic against Docetists.²⁷

Schnelle's thinking here is interesting. Nowhere does he give a textual basis for claiming that v. 14 is 'conscious polemic'. Rather, he states that *because* such a statement would be unacceptable to Docetists, it is conscious polemic. However, although he does not state it here, his argument is founded on his position, arrived at much earlier in his book, that 1 John was written before the Gospel and was consciously anti-Docetic. Consequently, when the Gospel was written it too was anti-Docetic. His argument thus is founded ultimately not on the text of Jn 1.14 but on his view that 1 John was written earlier and was anti-Docetic.

6. Conclusion: Is the Gospel Docetic...or Anti-Docetic...or Neither?

In our discussion, we have seen a number of significant problems associated with the views of Käsemann and Schnelle on Docetism in the Johannine Gospel. Recapping the evidence we have examined, we can see that the very fact of Käsemann's proposal and Schnelle's rebuttal shows the ambiguity of the evidence when the Gospel is treated as a completely homogeneous document. Attempts to show that there is a devaluing of the fleshly, material world conflict with texts that stress the importance of the flesh. Texts which would suggest that Jesus simply departed to the Father at his death conflict with statements that his death was an atoning one. Those texts that stress Jesus' $\delta\acute{o}\xi\alpha$ conflict with those that stress his earthly origins. In short, these attempts to interpret the Gospel in two diametrically opposed ways indicate the complexity of the Gospel text as it stands.

26. Schnelle, *Antidocetic*, p. 221.

27. Schnelle, *Antidocetic*, p. 222.

Käsemann presents a reading of the Gospel that at first appearance seems to have much to recommend it. Yet upon closer inspection many of the features Käsemann calls attention to mean something other than what he proposes.

What Schnelle shows is that there are elements of the Gospel of John that are not compatible with a theory of Docetism. But this is different from claiming that the Gospel is *anti-Docetic*. The proper question to bring to this discussion is not whether the Gospel and the Letters *can* be viewed as supporting or not supporting a Docetic interpretation, but whether there is evidence that a confrontation with Docetism was the *intention* of the Evangelist. I cannot find evidence that it was.

At this point two questions pose themselves. First, if there is no evidence of deliberate anti-Docetism in the Gospel, then how are we to explain those features that Schnelle calls attention to? And how are we to reconcile these features with those posed by Käsemann?

The question also poses itself whether there is a better paradigm within which to explain these various features of the Gospel, not only the features that argue for and against a concern on the part of the Evangelist about Docetism, but also how to account for the various sets of texts which seem to be, at the very least, at odds with one another and, in some cases, seem to contradict one another.

As was indicated at the outset, I would propose that the same view of the Gospel that enabled us to understand the apparently Gnostic texts in the Gospel also provides a more comprehensive context within which to understand more fully and more adequately the texts thought to be associated with Docetism. Moreover, this proposal also explains these issues not only as they appear in the Gospel but also as they appear in 1 John.

As I have explained in detail in my commentary (and summarized in the Prequel to this book), there is considerable linguistic, ideological, and theological evidence that the Gospel of John reached its present form as a result of three stages of composition, with the First Letter of John composed after the second and before the third edition of the Gospel.

As we have seen, the first edition of the Gospel contains material that provides the basic narrative of Jesus' ministry. The second edition of the Gospel presents the ministry of Jesus as being concerned to announce the eschatological outpouring of the Spirit on all those who believed in Jesus. This outpouring and the prerogatives that stemmed from it were understood in the context of the hopes expressed in the Jewish Scriptures for such an outpouring.

Among the prerogatives of this outpouring were: (1) believers would receive eternal life in its fullness through the Spirit of God. As a result (2) they could rightly be called ‘anointed’ by the Spirit. (3) Moreover, they would be reborn to the status of ‘children of God’. (4) The eschatological Spirit would teach them all things and they would have no further need for teachers. (5) Their sins would be forgiven through the cleansing action of the Spirit and (6) believers would be so transformed that they would have no further need of ethical directives. (7) Because of the importance of the Spirit, material birth and all material aspects of life were of no religious significance; only the Spirit was important.

However the author of 1 John sought to balance and nuance the tradition in his ‘tract’. By the time of his writing, the opponents, who held to a literal reading of the second edition of the Gospel, had departed from the community. However, the author sought to correct and clarify the tradition for those who remained. In doing so, the author introduced an apocalyptic viewpoint and addressed each of the prerogatives traditionally associated with the bestowal of the eschatological Spirit.

In clarifying the views of the second edition of the Gospel, he argued (1) that believers truly had received eternal life, but it was not an absolute possession: they could lose it by sin; (2) that they were anointed by the Spirit, but they had received ‘of’ the Spirit (3.24; 4.13). Their anointing was not the same as that of Jesus; (3) that they were truly children of God as Jesus was, but they were not equal to Jesus who had pre-existed and who was a unique Son of God; (4) that they did not need further teachers but they should remain faithful to the word of Jesus; (5) that the Spirit took away sin, but nevertheless Jesus’ physical death was an atonement for sin; but, (6) although they were inchoatively sinless, they were still capable of sin and so needed the ethical principle of loving one another and needed to work to attain a state similar to (but not identical with) that of Jesus. Finally, (7) because they were capable of sin, they would undergo a final judgment at the end of time and could undergo punishment.

As can be seen, in 1 John the views of the opponents are built on the theology of the Gospel’s second edition. The views of the author of 1 John correct and balance these views and finally the views of 1 John, together with some advances over them, are reflected in the third edition of the Gospel. But all of this is built on the understanding of the eschatological outpouring of the Spirit as it is presented in the canonical Jewish Scriptures.

Thus while there was a devaluing of material/fleshly existence in the material of the second edition of the Gospel, this is not created by a Docetic emphasis on a divine Christ that abandoned the physical/material/fleshly Jesus. Rather, the contrast in the second edition was between all things belonging to the purely material and those things belonging to the spiritual realm, associated with the possession of the eschatological Spirit.

For the Johannine community, it was not a question of whether Jesus was truly in the flesh, it was a question whether he ‘came in the flesh’, that is, whether the removal of sin was simply due to the cleansing action of the Spirit (as the second edition indicated) or whether Jesus’ death was the effective cause of the forgiveness of sin (as 1 John and the third edition suggested). While in the second edition Jesus’ death was viewed as a departure, this was in no way intended to describe a Docetic separation of the human Jesus from a heavenly/divine Christ.

The second edition of the Gospel sought to portray Jesus as one who himself possessed the eschatological Spirit and was sent to offer the gift of eternal life through rebirth from the eschatological Spirit. Consequently, the second edition focused on Jesus’ obedience to the Father and his intention to do only the will of the Father. The primary polemic of the second edition was to show that Jesus was who he claimed to be—and so this edition provided four witnesses to the identity of Jesus. This ‘identity’ is the δόξα that was evident throughout his earthly ministry both in his miracles (the ‘works’ given to him by the Father) and in his passion, death, and resurrection. Yet the second edition made it clear that his opponents knew his earthly origins. He was not simply a divine being; nor was he simply a human being.

The third edition of the Gospel continued, developed, and extended the importance of the material dimension of religious reality through its emphasis on material rituals such as Baptism and the Eucharist but also through the belief in physical, bodily resurrection on the last day and also the recognition of Jesus’ appointment of a human authority within the community in the person of Peter.

As a result, when we return to the texts of the Gospel and of 1 John that have been thought by some to reflect Docetic or anti-Docetic views, it becomes apparent that these texts can be seen to be explained more fully and more consistently by this other perspective. This has two major benefits. First, this is a theory that presents a view that is *consistent throughout the Johannine literature*. Second, unlike the proposal of Docetic or anti-Docetic views that are based on only a few texts within the Gospel and within 1 John, it takes into account *the full text of 1 John but also the full text of the Gospel*.

Thus, from this perspective, the final answer to the question whether the Johannine tradition was either Docetic or anti-Docetic would be that it was not. Rather, it is the complexity of the tradition and the conflict over the meaning of the tradition that has given rise to such proposals. When this complexity is understood and unraveled, the original meaning of the various stages of the tradition can be more fully understood as can the religious context within which the Johannine tradition was formed and developed.

Part III

FIRST-CENTURY JUDAISMS
AND THE JOHANNINE TRADITION

Chapter 4

FIRST-CENTURY JUDAISMS: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

As we have seen, in the past, there has been much discussion about the cultural and religious worldview against which the Gospel and Letters of John were written. We have already explored two of the more widely discussed possibilities: Gnosticism and Docetism. However, there remains one more that has considerable claim to our attention: the Judaisms of the first century.

The title of this chapter may seem curious and to my knowledge this term has not been used before in discussions of the background (or ‘worldview’) of the Johannine literature. However, I think that such a term is perhaps the most adequate one to use to describe the backgrounds of the Johannine literature. To summarize the thesis of Part III briefly: I would propose that the Gospel and Letters of John exhibit three strains of Judaism as these are evident in the writings contemporary with the composition of the Johannine literature. In addition, there are important consequences of this fact although these are not always fully realized.

When we seek to interpret the Gospel, we must take into account the background against which it is written. This is certainly a truism but it is often not acted upon. Moreover, as we shall see, it is not enough to recognize that the background of the Gospel or of 1, 2, or 3 John is ‘first-century Judaism’. We must ask what *kind* of Judaism it is, against which these documents are written. In this and the following two chapters, we will see that recognizing three kinds of Judaism helps considerably in interpreting the Gospel and Letters and, conversely, failure to recognize the specific form of Judaism reflected in passages can lead to serious misconceptions and misunderstandings of texts.

In its present (final) form, the Johannine Gospel reflects the weaving together of three distinct forms of first-century Judaism. There is nothing similar to this in any of the other canonical Gospels. Not only does the

recognition of a variety of Jewish worldviews and the resulting conceptualizations of Jesus' ministry of Jesus lead to a clearer understanding of the Gospel itself, it also provides a much clearer and more dynamic picture of the 'Johannine school'. As we will see in chapter 10, the weaving together of various worldviews found in the first century carried with it major theological implications for the understanding of the tradition. As a result, the integration of these various forms of Judaism cannot have been without tension and conflict. Recognizing this allows us to perceive the process by which the Johannine tradition was formed in a way that has not been fully realized before.

In this sense we see not only the variety of theological viewpoints but also the way these were woven together, at times with some tension and stress, into the Johannine tradition as we know it in its canonical form.

2. The Judaisms of the Gospel and Letters

Among the Judaisms of the first century, there is, first, what might be called the 'classical Judaism' of the canonical writings of the Jewish Scriptures.¹ Second, there is the 'apocalyptic' Judaism typical of the sectarian Jewish writings found at Qumran and as witnessed by the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*. Third, there is the 'Hellenistic Judaism' typical of the writings of Philo.

The Gospel of John bears evidence of each of these Judaisms and reflects the considerable diversity that existed in Judaism at the turn of the era. In turn, this diversity reflects the diversity and tensions that existed within the Johannine school.

While what I will say in the following sections is derivative of the view of the development of the Johannine tradition expressed in my commentary on the Gospel and Letters, I believe that the background of the various statements can be recognized and evaluated apart from any detailed familiarity with my commentary.

3. Canonical Judaism in the Gospel of John

By 'canonical' Judaism, I mean the Judaism of the canonical Hebrew Scriptures without apocalyptic elements such as are found in Daniel.

1. Some might want to exclude parts of the books of Ezekiel and Daniel, and perhaps parts of Isaiah. Whether these books (especially Ezekiel, which seems to have what might be called 'proto-apocalyptic' elements) are or are not apocalyptic has been debated. The issue is not important for our present purposes since none of these books figure in the discussion that follows here.

‘Canonical Judaism’ pervades what I have termed the first and the second editions of the Gospel of John. While these two editions vary considerably from one another in terms of the theological appraisal of Jesus, they are both cast within the worldview of the Judaism that is typical of the canonical Scriptures.

4. Apocalyptic Judaism

Apocalyptic Judaism developed in the second half of the Second Temple period. It is characterized by a considerably different worldview than that of the canonical Jewish Scriptures and, as a whole, was rejected by that stream of Judaism responsible for the canonical Scriptures. However, apocalyptic formed the primary worldview of the community that settled at Qumran and also for the group responsible for the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*. It also became a primary worldview within which the message of Christianity was composed. However, in the Johannine tradition, the apocalyptic worldview was a relatively late addition and the Johannine tradition as a whole bears a distinctive mix of both the canonical Jewish worldview and also of apocalyptic.

5. Hellenistic Judaism

Hellenistic Judaism took shape in the Diaspora in the wake of the general Hellenization of the Near East by Alexander the Great and his successors. It sought to integrate Jewish thought with Greek thought. One of the prime purposes of Hellenistic philosophy was to show that Jewish religious thought, which was sometimes considered primitive by Greek standards, in fact embodied concepts and forms of thought that were equals of Greek philosophical thought. Among the primary representatives of Hellenistic Judaism extant today are Flavius Josephus and Philo of Alexandria. Hellenistic Judaism has also influenced the development of the Johannine tradition although less so than the other streams of thought mentioned above.

Chapter 5

CANONICAL JUDAISM AND THE GOSPEL OF JOHN: THE PRESENCE OF A JEWISH ‘MYTH’ ABOUT ESCHATOLOGICAL FULFILMENT

1. Introduction

When we spoke of Gnosticism as a potential context within which the Gospel of John was written, we recalled the statement of R. Bultmann that the essence of Gnostic religion was the presence of a ‘myth’ which undergirded the thought of Gnostic documents.¹ One of the conclusions of our analysis of the similarities between Gnosticism and the Gospel of John was that, while there were a number of elements in the Gospel of John that could be said to bear some relationship to Gnosticism, it was as if we were in contact with the ‘spokes’ of a wheel but that there was no evidence of a ‘hub’ that would join them all together into a unified whole, into a coherent ‘myth’.

It will be proposed here that there does exist within the Gospel of John clear evidence of a myth. It is the myth by which the canonical Jewish scriptures articulated the nation’s hopes for the fulfillment of the promises made by the prophets regarding the future status of the people of Israel. There were, in fact, several strands of such hopes, but the one underlying the Gospel of John involved the outpouring of God’s Spirit upon the entire nation, an outpouring that was to have certain specific prerogatives associated with it.

It was a general conviction of early Christianity that the mission of Jesus involved the outpouring of the Spirit. This is evident most obviously in the Acts of the Apostles’ account of the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost. However, in the Gospel of John, the essential need for the Spirit is evident almost from the beginning of the Gospel and it is

1. W. Meeks, in his article ‘The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism’, also called attention to the importance of such myths for Gnostic thought. See Meeks, ‘Man From Heaven’, p. 44.

developed to a much greater extent than in any other Gospel. As early as ch. 3, Jesus explains to Nicodemus that it is necessary to be born again of water and the Spirit. In ch. 4, Jesus offers the Samaritan woman living water (later explained to be a symbol for the Spirit) that will well up to eternal life. In ch. 7, Jesus explains that when he is glorified, those who believe in him will receive ‘living water’, which refers to the Spirit. Then in ch. 20, after his glorification, Jesus bestows the Spirit on his disciples.²

2. Four Peculiar Features of the Gospel and Their Relation to the Myth of the Eschatological Outpouring of the Spirit

Throughout the Jewish Scriptures, this outpouring of the Spirit was said to have certain prerogatives. In the Prequel of this book, I described how by being sensitive to the literary, ideological, and theological characteristics of the Gospel a stratum of text within the Gospel can be identified in which the narrative thrust presents Jesus as offering the eschatological Spirit to those who believe in him. The material of that edition also presents the prerogatives of the reception of that Spirit.³ I also gave examples there of numerous texts from the Jewish Scriptures which link the giving of the Spirit with these Prerogatives.

Here I would like to approach this understanding of the Gospel from a different perspective. Rather than engaging in a literary analysis, I would like to call attention to four striking features of the Gospel in its present form. These might be called ‘macro-features’ of the Gospel. These macro-features are quite evident in the Gospel without recourse to any analysis of the composition process. Although these features are regularly noticed and have been pointed out as ‘curious’ and ‘peculiar’, they have never been explained. It will be argued here that these four features are, in fact, elements regularly associated with the giving of the eschatological Spirit, as envisioned in Jewish scriptures. But prominence of these features and of their relation to the ‘myth’ of the giving of the eschatological Spirit has been obscured by the addition of other material to the Gospel.⁴ Let us look closely at each of these features.⁵

2. These references do not include those passages where the Spirit is referred to as ‘the Spirit of Truth’ or as ‘the Paraclete’.

3. See pp. 32–3 above.

4. In terms of the analysis conducted in my commentary, if the material of the third edition of the Gospel were removed, the original Jewish myth which undergirded the second edition would become apparent.

a. ‘Knowing’ God/Jesus

First among the distinctive features of the Gospel is the Gospel’s remarkable emphasis on ‘knowing’—or not ‘knowing’—God, Jesus, where Jesus comes from, where he is going, and so on. As we saw in our discussion of Gnosticism, in times past, scholars often posit a relation of the Gospel to Gnosticism precisely because of the frequency of this term.⁶ Yet, in the Jewish Scriptures, the notion of ‘knowing’ and ‘not knowing’ God is a common theme and it is said repeatedly that when the nation receives the eschatological Spirit, they will finally come truly to ‘know’ Yahweh. Yet, as we saw when discussing Gnosticism, in the Jewish Scriptures it is said repeatedly that when the nation receives the eschatological Spirit, they will finally come truly to ‘know’ Yahweh. For example, in Jer. 24.7 we read: ‘I will give them a heart to know that I am the Lord; and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart’ (NRSV). In Jer. 31.33-34 we read:

But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, ‘Know the Lord’, for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord. (NRSV)

This is such a common theme in the OT that it is often overlooked in favor of more exotic possibilities.

b. The Lack of ‘Revelation’ on the Part of Jesus

Second, there is a peculiar lack of attention to the content of Jesus’ revelation except insofar as it seeks to establish the identity of Jesus as the Son sent by the Father. Bultmann’s famous statement, ‘Jesus was a revealer without a revelation’ is echoed by many scholars, although in a somewhat more nuanced way. For example, W. Meeks has commented: ‘The total “testimony” of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, the sole object of

5. Recently a study of the Spirit in the Old Testament (D. G. Firth and P. D. Wegner, eds., *Presence, Power, and Promise: The Role of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011]) was published with a very hopeful subtitle. However, in this collection of essays, I was not able to find any of the four features of the giving of the Spirit to humans that I will speak about below. This is unfortunate because these prerogatives of the Spirit are witnessed with great clarity in the Jewish Scriptures.

6. Various forms of the verbs “to know” appear over fifty times in the gospel.

his mission in “the world” (18.37), is in fact about himself...⁷ If we are to modify Bultmann’s statement, it is in the direction that Meeks indicates and which Raymond Brown also proposed: ‘Jesus’s only revelation is about himself, about *who he is*’⁸).

Although Bultmann’s statement has been hotly disputed, there is much truth in it, particularly when all ‘revelation’ dealing with the identity of Jesus’ own character is excluded. Among the revelations of Jesus in the Gospel is his promise that, when he goes to the Father, he will send the Spirit to those who believe in him. Yet beyond this, the primary focus is on the identity of Jesus himself.

c. The Lack of Specific Ethical Instruction

Third, there is a strange lack of attention to any explicit ethical instruction in the Gospel. This lack of attention to ethical matters is also noticed regularly by scholars. We have called attention to this element of the Gospel in our discussion of Gnosticism. As we have seen, Meeks has written about this lack of ethics, stating: ‘[The Gospel] offers no explicit moral instruction... The maxims (gnomes) that are so characteristic of Jesus’ sayings in the Q, Synoptic, and Thomas traditions—are missing altogether from John.’⁹ R. E. Brown speaks of ‘the ethical silence of GJohn’. He goes on to say: ‘No specific sins of behavior are mentioned in GJohn, only the great sin, which is to refuse to believe in Jesus (8:24; 9:41)’.¹⁰ D. M. Smith comments: ‘Only after he has withdrawn with his disciples, his own, does Jesus offer instruction regarding the conduct of life. Even then his instructions lack specificity.’¹¹

d. The Lack of Attention to the Death of Jesus as Atonement

Fourth, there is the curious lack of attention to the death of Jesus as atonement in the Gospel. Rather, the dominant view of the Gospel is that the death of Jesus is simply his ‘*departure*’ to the Father. This was also noticed by Bultmann, who commented that the death of Jesus does not have any real and independent significance.¹² R. E. Brown understands the role of the secessionists in 1 John in a way that overlaps this view considerably. Brown comments that by the interpretation of the

7. Meeks, ‘The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism’, p. 56.

8. Brown, *Letters*, p. 80.

9. Meeks, ‘Ethics’, p. 317.

10. Brown, *Epistles*, pp. 73–9.

11. Smith, *Johannine Christianity*, p. 178.

12. Bultmann, *Theology*, II, p. 54.

secessionists: ‘...the real purpose of Jesus’ earthly life was simply to reveal God’s glory in human terms..., but not to do anything new that changes the relationship between God and human beings’.¹³

This aspect of the Gospel was developed at length in Geoffrey Nicolson’s book, *Death as Departure*. This feature is evident in a positive sense in that there are numerous statements describing the events surrounding the death of Jesus as ‘going to the Father’. It is also evident in the negative sense in that there are very few references to the death of Jesus as sacrificial or atoning. In the Gospel of John, soteriology assumes a central role but is almost entirely positive, focusing not on removing sins, but on attaining eternal life, which is the life of God, the life that transforms one from the realm of the flesh to the realm of the Spirit and from death to life. Soteriology in this sense is thus defined as gaining eternal life. The Johannine Jesus offers eternal life and the possession of eternal life is the hope of all Johannine believers. This life comes through the reception of the Spirit of God.

3. Once Again We See That Each Feature Is Directly Related to the Prerogatives Associated with the Outpouring of the Spirit

The reader who is familiar with the Gospel of John will, I think, recognize these four features and the attention that has been called to them. Here, I would like to point out that these four features are, in fact, directly related to four of the prerogatives associated with the outpouring of the eschatological Spirit. According to the Scriptures, the gift of the Spirit was to result in the believer finally knowing God in a true and full sense.¹⁴ Moreover, when the Spirit of God filled the person, the individual would no longer sin because the Spirit would make them follow the commandments of God. In addition, once the individual received the Spirit, the person would no longer need to be taught by anyone; the Spirit would give full knowledge of all that was necessary. Finally, the Spirit would wash the person free from sin.

Thus we see that each of these four perennially puzzling features can be explained as prerogatives of the reception of the eschatological Spirit. But if this is so, then why is the myth not more evident in the Gospel? The answer is that this myth has been modified and ‘confused’ by the addition of other material.

13. Brown, *Epistles*, p. 75.

14. The scriptural texts that support this interpretation are given in the Prequel and in more detail in my commentary.

As I have shown in detail in my commentary, this other material present in the Gospel is not simply ‘other material’. It is material that is specifically intended to correct or nuance the material of the myth.¹⁵ Moreover, and in some ways most importantly, this additional material introduces the apocalyptic worldview into the Gospel. As a result, the Gospel in its present form does not present a simple account of the Jewish myth regarding eschatological fulfillment, but one that has been modified in various ways. Finally, it is not accidental that each of the four features to which we have called attention (as well as others that are less obvious in the Gospel as a whole) is discussed in detail in 1 John and a reading that presents a different perspective (that of apocalyptic Judaism) is presented.

As a result, we are able to understand, perhaps for the first time, that while there is a Jewish ‘myth’ at the base of the Gospel, it has been modified in such a way as to articulate eventually within the Gospel, a modified view of the earlier Johannine tradition, a view that was hammered out in the discussion of 1 John.

By distinguishing these two levels of tradition within the Gospel and by recognizing that one is not apocalyptic and one is, we are able not only to understand better the Gospel as a whole but also to be ready to distinguish between those passages that reflect the worldview of canonical Judaism and those that reflect the worldview of apocalyptic.

4. A Summary of the Differences Between Canonical and Apocalyptic Judaism

As was mentioned earlier, the designation ‘canonical Judaism’ is an attempt to label the worldview that pervades all of the canonical Jewish Scriptures, except for parts of the books of Ezekiel and Daniel. While this worldview does not require an extensive introduction, it will be helpful to distinguish it from several major features of apocalyptic Judaism.

15. I do not intend to say that all of the material in the Gospel that does not support the ‘myth’ associated with the giving of the Spirit is directly intended to correct or modify that myth. There is material that (as scholars have regularly pointed out) is intended to relate the Gospel of John to elements of the Synoptic tradition. In addition there is material that is intended to explain the relationship of the Johannine tradition to other sectors of early Christianity as a whole by describing the expressed hope that various groups of believers may be gathered into one under the leadership of Peter.

a. Prophecy and History

In the canonical Scriptures, prophecy was intended to interpret God's will for the nation, but it was always concerned with what was to transpire *within history*. In apocalyptic, prophecy was often concerned with the state of affairs *at the end of, or beyond, history*.

b. Sinfulness

In canonical Judaism, prophecy spoke of the repeated sins of the nation and the action of God in history to punish Israel for its transgressions. In apocalyptic, the nation was understood to be favored by God and its opponents were conceived of as the manifestation of evil.

c. Dualism

Essential to the view of the canonical Jewish Scriptures is the belief that Yahweh is always and everywhere in complete command of reality. There is no struggle between Yahweh and Satan such that one could speak of the need for Yahweh to reassert his kingly power (i.e., 'the Kingdom of God') over Satan. Such dualism occurs in other literature as a result of the belief that there was a cosmic struggle in the unseen world that pitted God against Satan.¹⁶ There is none of this in the canonical Scriptures. Yahweh has his enemies, but they are not pitted against Yahweh in dualistic combat.

d. Duality of Spirits

In canonical Judaism there is only one Spirit: the Spirit of God. It was part of the belief of canonical Judaism that God gave a share of his Spirit to the king, to the prophets, and, perhaps, to the high priest. There are no evil spirits sent by other beings.¹⁷ In apocalyptic there are a multitude of spirits, all of which are demonic, except for the Spirit of God.

In the Gospel of John, the conception of the Spirit is that of the canonical Jewish Scriptures (1.32, 33; 3.5, 6, 8 [twice], 34; 4.23, 24; 6.63 [twice]; 7.39 [twice]; 19.30; 20.22), except in the Paraclete passages

16. It is important to recognize the difference between the opposition that comes from apocalyptic dualism and the *contrasts* that can occur in any worldview. For example, in the canonical worldview, one can contrast those who have received the Spirit of God with those who have not, those who 'know' God with those who do not, those who are alive with those who are not. But this is not dualism.

17. God was able to send an 'evil spirit' upon Saul (cf. 1 Sam. 16.14) but this curious expression is devoid of all the trappings found in apocalyptic and it is God himself that sends this spirit.

(14.15-17, 26; 15.26; 16.7-11, 12-14) where there is clear evidence of a dualistic worldview.

e. The Miracles

In canonical Judaism, miracles are presented according to the model of the ‘signs’ performed by Moses at the time of the Exodus. They are ‘proofs’ that the worker is ‘from God’. However, in the apocalyptic worldview, miracles (often referred to as works of ‘power’) are essentially exorcisms and so demonstrations of the assertion of God’s power over Satan.

f. Eternal Life and the Kingdom of God

In the canonical Jewish Scriptures, there are repeated references to the promise that sometime in the future God will pour out his spirit on all humanity. This promise is reflected within the Johannine tradition in Jesus’ repeated offer of the Spirit to those he meets.

In the apocalyptic tradition of the Synoptics, the term ‘Kingdom of God’ (as in the phrase ‘The Kingdom of God is at hand’ [Mk 1.15]) is a primary and essential element of the presentation of the message and ministry of Jesus. It is the process of the reassertion of the kingly power of God over Satan that is portrayed in these Gospels.¹⁸ Yet in the Gospel of John, the term appears only twice (3.3, 5). Moreover, the terms appear in texts where they are only awkwardly related to the surrounding context. They speak of ‘seeing’ and ‘entering’ the Kingdom of God, two verbs that are not typically associated with the notion of ‘kingdom’ in apocalyptic texts.

g. The Time of Fulfillment

Both canonical and apocalyptic Judaism believed that God would act in the future to bring about blessings upon the individual and also upon the nation of Israel. However, there was a major difference in the time frame within which the fulfillment of these hopes was conceptualized. In canonical Judaism, the post-exilic prophets declared that Yahweh would restore the nation at some time in the future but this future was always understood to take place and the promises to be fulfilled within the normal course of history. However, in apocalyptic Judaism, it was understood that the promises of Yahweh would only be fulfilled at the

18. It is true that the reassertion of God’s kingly power over Satan resulted in the destruction of death and so the attainment of life, which is understood to be unending life, but the conceptual frameworks of both presentations are quite distinct.

end of human history, at a time when the world would come to an end and there would be a universal judgment and resulting reward or punishment.¹⁹

Thus it is evident that canonical Judaism typified by these features contrasts clearly with corresponding apocalyptic features. Distinguishing these features enables one to identify the background proper to a given text in the Gospel of John. In the following chapter, we will see how recognition of the proper background of passages alters considerably our understanding of a number of the prominent theological features of the Gospel.

19. There were varying conceptions of exactly what would happen at the end of the world. For example, some held that all would rise, some to judgment and some to reward. Others believed that only the good would rise to life and the others would remain dead. But all agreed that there would be a time of reward and punishment.

Chapter 6

‘REALIZED ESCHATOLOGY’: AN EXAMPLE OF THE FAILURE TO RECOGNIZE ‘CANONICAL’ JUDAISM IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

1. Introduction

Since its introduction by C. H. Dodd in 1935 in his book *Parables of the Kingdom*, the term ‘realized eschatology’ has become a buzz word in biblical studies.¹ It is one of three terms used to describe the eschatological outlooks found in the NT. First, there is the ‘consistent eschatology’ associated primarily with the work of Albert Schweitzer. This was the view that the eschatology of Jesus was an apocalyptic one in which the end of the world together with resurrection and universal judgment was to take place either at or soon after the death of Jesus. It is ‘consistent’ in the sense that it interprets all statements dealing with eschatology in this way.

The second type of eschatology is ‘realized eschatology’. By this term Dodd intended to indicate that the arrival of the eschatological period had taken place in the ministry of Jesus. Dodd held that, although Jesus had preached a future eschatology, realized eschatology was the position taken by early Christianity to account for the failure of the apocalyptic culmination of history preached by Jesus himself.²

The third type of eschatology is known as ‘inaugurated eschatology’, that is, an eschatology that was begun and to a certain extent realized during the ministry of Jesus but will reach its fulfillment sometime in the future, at a time and in a manner consistent with that described in apocalyptic eschatology.³

1. C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (rev. ed.; New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1961).

2. C. H. Dodd, *The Coming of Christ* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), pp. 6–7.

3. For a detailed discussion of the history of research on Johannine eschatology, see Jörg Frey, *Die johanneische Eschatologie* (3 vols.; WUNT 110; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998). The entirety of volume 1 of Frey’s work is dedicated to a review of the more important works on Johannine eschatology since Reimarus.

2. Some Past Attempts to Account for the Presence of ‘Realized Eschatology’ in John

Various accountings have been made for the state of affairs in John. Some proposals accentuate the presence of realized eschatology and attempt to explain away or minimize future eschatology. Others do the reverse. Still others recognize the presence of both types of eschatology but give various explanations. For example, C. H. Dodd had concluded that the original eschatology of early Christianity was apocalyptic, but when the author of the Gospel of John attempted to present the message of Jesus within the worldview of Hellenistic religion he found no comparable category and so expressed it in the only way he was able, that is, as a present reality.⁴

Bultmann claimed that the ‘realized eschatology’ of the Gospel was the original contribution of the Evangelist and was intended to call the reader to an immediate decision regarding faith in Jesus. All references to future eschatology were added by an ‘ecclesiastical redactor’ to bring the eschatology of the Gospel in line with that of the remainder of early Christianity. These texts were not to be considered part of the ‘true’ Gospel.

David Aune studied the present eschatology of the Gospel in connection with other instances of it in early Christianity and concluded that it originated in the cult of early Christianity and was an attempt to make present the reality of Jesus within the service of worship.⁵

Recently Alan Culpepper, in an essay he contributed to a collection on the topic of *The Resurrection of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, addressed the topic of the Resurrection from the point of view of Johannine eschatology.⁶ Near the beginning of his essay, he states:

This essay returns to this perennial crux of Johannine scholarship, looking at the intersection of text and context and asking, ‘What did it mean to the early Johannine Christians to live in a community in which the hope of the resurrection was already being fulfilled?’⁷

4. We also need to understand that, for Dodd, the question of ‘realized eschatology’ arose in his study of the Synoptics and then in a comparison of the eschatology dominant in the Synoptics with that found in the Gospel of John.

5. D. E. Aune, *The Cultic Setting of Realized Eschatology in the New Testament* (NovTSup 28; Leiden: Brill, 1972).

6. R. A. Culpepper, ‘Realized Eschatology in the Experience of the Johannine Community’, in *The Resurrection of Jesus in the Gospel of John* (ed. C. R. Koester and R. Bieringer; WUNT 222; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), pp. 253–76.

7. Culpepper, ‘Realized Eschatology’, p. 254

To a large extent, this is the question that scholars commonly ask, but approaching the question in that way determines to a large extent the type of answer one will get in return. To ask the question that way seems to presume that the Johannine community, indeed all Jews (whether or not they believed in Jesus), held to a belief in bodily resurrection. It also presumes that belief in Jesus would necessarily involve that. Not all sectors of Judaism held to a resurrection of the body and so 'Jewish eschatology' (without making further distinctions) cannot be said to involve 'hope of resurrection'.⁸

My purpose here is to propose another, simpler, and, I believe, more satisfying explanation why there is realized eschatology in the Gospel. Second, I hope to show the background of the so-called realized eschatology. Third, I would like to show evidence of how the Johannine tradition ultimately not only tolerated, but indeed integrated the two eschatologies within its overall theological perspective.

3. Eschatology in the Jewish Scriptures

As we have seen in the Prequel, I have proposed that the second edition of the Gospel understood that Jesus was the Son sent by the Father to proclaim the definitive outpouring of the Spirit as was promised in the canonical Jewish Scriptures. I also proposed that many of the distinctive features of the Gospel at the time of the second edition can be explained as prerogatives of this outpouring of the Spirit.

In order to put this in its proper context, it is important to review and clarify for the reader a sense of 'eschatology' as it appeared in the Jewish Scriptures.⁹

8. In fact, texts dealing with bodily resurrection do not appear in the canonical books of the Jewish scriptures with the exception of Dan. 12.2, the book/text that is generally recognized to be the only book in the Jewish Scriptures that is apocalyptic. At the same time, early texts on resurrection do appear in documents such as the T12P and the SDQ, documents recognized as being apocalyptic. See J. Charlesworth, 'Prolegomenous Reflections Toward a Taxonomy of Resurrection Texts', in *The Changing Face of Judaism, Christianity, and Other Greco-Roman Religions in Antiquity* (ed. I. Henderson and G. Oegema; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2006), pp. 1–21.

9. When it is discussed, it is often done in specialized studies focused on the thought of one or other prophet. The value of Gowan's book is that it provides an *overview* of canonical Jewish eschatology.

a. Always Within History

The problem of eschatology in the canonical Jewish Scriptures is, to a certain extent, related to the meaning of the term itself. 'Eschaton' is a Greek word meaning 'last'. Thus technically 'the last things' have to do with what is expected to happen at the end of time or the end of history. However, within the canonical Jewish Scriptures what is commonly called 'eschatology' refers to the expectation of a definitive restoration that would arise after the destruction of Jerusalem and after the Exile of the Jewish inhabitants at the hands of the Babylonians. There was considerable diversity of thought about when this would happen, how it would take place, and what it was to be like, but all agreed that it would take place *within history*.

Donald Gowan, in his book *Eschatology in the Old Testament*,¹⁰ when attempting to define the expectations regarding the future that informed canonical Jewish thought, tends to avoid the term 'eschatology' and uses such phrases as 'promises concerning a better future', or 'a future with significant discontinuities from the present'.¹¹ These hopes

speak of circumstances that scarcely could be expected to arrive as the result of normal, or even extraordinary, human progress, and so most scholars agree in distinguishing them from ordinary hopes for a better future by calling them 'eschatology'... One of the distinctive features of these hopes is their sense of the radical wrongness of the present world and the conviction that radical changes, to make things right, will indeed occur 'in that day', that is, at some time known only to God. The OT vision of the future deals throughout with the world in which we now live.¹²

b. Types of Hopes for the Future

Gowan helpfully distinguishes several types of hopes for the future. The first type is the hope for a restoration of the political, military, and economic life of the nation. Another type of hope concerned the transformation of human society into a more just and equitable form. A third type concerned the transformation within the human individual and a fourth type concerned the transformation of nature.¹³

10. D. Gowan, *Eschatology in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986). For an extensive bibliography prior to 1978, see H. D. Preuss, ed., *Eschatologie im alten Testament* (Wege der Forschung CDLXXX; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1978).

11. Gowan, *Eschatology*, p. 1.

12. Gowan, *Eschatology*, p. 2.

13. Gowan bases this division on his reading of Ezek. 36.22-38: God will transform the human person (Ezek. 36.25-27); he will transform society, restore

It was among the third of these types that we would locate the prophets' foretelling of a future outpouring of Yahweh's Spirit upon the people of Israel. When this outpouring took place, the relation of the people to Yahweh would be radically transformed. The people would fully 'know' God; they would obey him spontaneously; they would be taught by God directly and would have no need of anyone else to teach them. In short, the arrival of this time was understood to bring such a radical transformation that the relation of the people to one another and to their God would be 'perfect'.

c. The Time of Fulfillment

It was promised by the prophets that Yahweh would act to bring about these changes sometime in the future. This future was described in such a way that it was certain *that* the events would take place, but the time *when* they would take place was not made specific.

The expression favored by Isaiah for describing this future time was 'in that day': Isa. 2.11; 3.18; 4.1; 12.1, 4; 20.6; 22.12; 28.5; 52.6 ('Therefore my people shall know my name; therefore in that day they shall know that it is I who speak; here am I'). Similar expressions occur in other prophets: Joel 3.18 ('For then, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem'); Mic. 4.6-7 ('In that day, says the Lord, I will assemble the lame and gather those who have been driven away, and those whom I have afflicted... And the Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion now and forevermore'). There is always a sense of finality to the time of fulfillment and the sense that Yahweh's blessings will be absolute and everlasting.

The most common expression in Jeremiah and Ezekiel is 'the day or days is or are surely coming'. This articulates the conviction that the named events will take place but does not specify the time. The events of those days can cause distress and punishment (Ps. 37.13; Isa. 39.6; Jer. 47.4; Ezek. 30.9; Joel 2.1) but they can also be days of reward and restoration (Jer. 16.14; 23.5, 7; 30.3; 31.27, 31, 38; 33.14; 51.47; Joel 2.28).

Israel to the promised land, rebuild cities, and make Israel's new status a witness to the nations (36.24, 28, 33-36); and he will transform nature to make the land abundant in produce and to banish hunger forever (*Eschatology*, p. 2).

It is notable that Culpepper, in his review of Jewish thought on bodily resurrection, refers only to apocalyptic works (Dan. 12; 2 Baruch; *T. Job*; and 4Q521 [*On Resurrection*] and 4Q385 [*Pseudo-Ezekiel*]; Culpepper, 'Realized Eschatology', pp. 263-5), thus failing to distinguish between the beliefs typical of apocalyptic and those typical of traditional, canonical Judaism.

It is important to notice that the promise is a simple one: that what is predicted will indeed happen. The promises are absolute; they are in no way qualified, limited, or partial. This is a promise of ideal circumstances in an ideal age. *But it is all to take place within history.*

4. The Johannine Conviction That These Hopes Had Been Fulfilled

It was the conviction of the Johannine community at the time of the second edition that the fulfillment of their hopes for the outpouring of the Spirit had indeed taken place in the ministry of Jesus.

As we have seen,¹⁴ in the second edition of the Gospel the hoped for gift of Jesus is the Spirit, which is the means of attaining eternal life, the very life of God. This gift was understood to be the fulfillment of the promises made in the prophets about the giving of the Spirit to the people. In keeping with the time-frame of Israel's hopes, this was understood to take place within the time span of 'history'. Moreover, in keeping with the nature of this worldview, there were no indications that there would be such a thing as a partial bestowal of the Spirit in the present and a further, more complete bestowal at some time in the future.

There are numerous passages in the Gospel of John that suggest that this gift of the Spirit was to be made in the 'present' i.e. as a result of the ministry of Jesus. That this gift of eternal life is something given in the present is expressed in 4.10-15:

Jesus responded and said to her, 'If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink", you would have asked him and he would have given you living water'. [The woman] said to him, 'Sir, you do not have a bucket and the well is deep, so how do you have living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us this well and who drank from it himself, along with his sons and his herds?' Jesus responded and said to her, 'Everyone who drinks this water will get thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water that I will give will never get thirsty. Rather, the water that I will give will be a well within the person bubbling up to eternal life.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water so that I may not thirst nor come here to draw water'.

Later, in 4.23, Jesus expresses the present reality of the fulfillment of the promises in his further words to the Samaritan woman: 'But an hour is coming and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth'. Here Jesus makes explicit that his ministry

14. See for example the 'Prequel', pp. 1-23, above.

constitutes the arrival of the hope for the fulfillment of Israel's promises. However, the clearest statement of this belief is presented in the words of Jesus in 5.24-25:

Amen, Amen, I say to you, the one who hears my word and believes in the one who sent me has eternal life and does not come into judgment but has crossed over from death to life. Amen, Amen, I say to you, an hour is coming and is now present when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those hearing it will live.

This was what many in the Johannine community understood to have taken place through the giving of God's Spirit by Jesus to those who believed in Jesus. It was a viewpoint that was in complete harmony with the viewpoint expressed in the canonical Jewish Scriptures. This 'eschatology' was 'realized' because when the promises made through the prophets came to actualization, these promises were indeed going to be definitive, i.e., 'realized'!

a. The Difficulty in Seeing This Eschatology for What It Is

If the passages that speak of the giving of eternal life through the gift of the Spirit are simply couched in the worldview and time-framework of the canonical Scriptures, why has it been so difficult to understand it properly? There are two reasons, each related to the other.

First, because the Gospel has been so thoroughly edited, going through a total of three editions, it has been difficult to separate this 'classical', 'within-history eschatology' from the apocalyptic eschatology that also appears in the Gospel (and in 1 John).

Second, because the Synoptic Gospels are so thoroughly imbued with the apocalyptic worldview, when the interpreter reads the Gospel of John he or she is conditioned to expect either of two things. On one hand, when the interpreter finds elements of apocalyptic eschatology in the Gospel of John, he/she is conditioned to presume that this viewpoint is fundamental to the Gospel of John just as it is to the Synoptics. Christianity in general is so imbued with the belief in a final judgment and the resurrection of the body on the last day that it becomes difficult to conceptualize a form of Christianity that did not hold to this view. As a result, when the reader meets the considerable emphasis on 'realized' eschatology in the Gospel, the tendency is to think that this is some 'new' and perhaps uniquely Johannine view of eschatology.

However, when the composition history of the Gospel is understood, it becomes clear that the worldview of the first two literary strata within the Gospel were written within the non-apocalyptic worldview of canonical Judaism. Once this fact is established, it is possible to see the 'realized

eschatology' of the Gospel not as some unique Johannine creation, but simply the 'eschatological' expectation characteristic of traditional, canonical, non-apocalyptic Judaism.

This worldview understands the gift of the Spirit and the resultant possession of eternal life to be the benefit of the ministry of Jesus. In the second stage of the Johannine tradition, the bestowal of the Spirit was understood to have taken place on the evening of the Resurrection. In keeping with the worldview of canonical Judaism, there was no thought of this bestowal *and its prerogatives* being somehow 'partial'. The promises of Yahweh had been fulfilled in a complete way. The expectations described by the prophets had truly been 'realized'. This was the time spoken of as 'in those days', 'at that time'.

For the Johannine community, the possession of the eschatological Spirit was definitive. It was a full and present reality as were all of the prerogatives associated with the bestowal of that Spirit according to the canonical Jewish Scriptures.

b. A Problem That Did Not Exist

It is this worldview that is expressed in those passages of the Gospel that were described by C. H. Dodd as being 'realized eschatology'. Dodd believed that such eschatological thinking was introduced by the early Church as a way of accounting for the obvious failure of the apocalyptic viewpoint preached by Jesus and recognized by Schweitzer and others.

However, this realized eschatology was nothing other than the viewpoint of classical, canonical Jewish thought about the fulfillment of the prophetic hope for the outpouring of the Spirit. Taken out of its proper context, it took on a meaning that was far from its originally intended meaning at the time of the composition of the second edition.

c. The Relation Between the 'Eschatology' Characteristic of the Second Period of the Gospel's Development and That of the Third Period

To this point, this study has argued that the 'realized' eschatology of the Gospel of John is, in fact, the ordinary understanding of the fulfillment of the prophetic hopes for the future as expressed in classical, canonical Judaism. However, in order properly to understand the eschatology of the entire Johannine tradition, we must ask about the presence of the passages in the Gospel that reflect the future eschatology of apocalyptic.

We will discuss apocalyptic in greater detail in the following chapter, but here we may remark specifically about passages such as Jn 5.27-29. In Jn 5.27-29, it is clear that there is an expectation that the world will

come to an end and it will only be at that point that the full realization of 'eschatological benefits' will be enjoyed. How is this viewpoint of benefits coming at the 'end' of the world to be correlated with a view in which all hopes are realized within history?

Does Johannine theology provide an answer to this? The answer is Yes. Above we saw that scholars speak of three types of eschatology: future, realized, and inaugurated. Is inaugurated eschatology just a construct of modern theologians who attempt to make sense of passages such as Jn 5.24-29? No. In spite of the fact that to correlate and to integrate apocalyptic and non-apocalyptic eschatology may seem like a sleight of hand, there is clear evidence of such integration in 1 Jn 3.1-3.

In this passage, the author of 1 John is speaking about the sonship¹⁵ of believers. This sonship is related to the Fatherhood of God and is based on the belief that believing in Jesus resulted in a new birth from the Spirit, a birth that resulted in the believer becoming truly one who possessed the life of God and therefore a 'child' (son or daughter) of God. In 1 Jn 3.1-3, the author makes it emphatically clear that the present sonship of the believer is real.

Behold how great a love the Father has given us,
that we may be called children of God; and we are.
Because of this the world does not know us—
because it did not know him [the Father].

But the author then goes on to say that the present state of the believer is not the perfection of the state of sonship.

Beloved, now we are children of God,
and it has not yet been revealed what we will be.

Thus there is a difference between what the believer is now and what the believer will be at the end of time, in the apocalyptic understanding of history.

Finally, the author makes clear the basis of the integration of the present and the future state of the believer. Although the believer is now, in the present, a child of God, the person must strive to make himself or herself holy as 'that one' is holy.

We know that, when he [Jesus] is revealed, we will be like him and that we will see him as he is.
And everyone having this hope in him makes himself holy as that one is holy.

15. The term 'sonship' is of course a relic of a society and culture in which the male form of such words was considered satisfactory.

Here we have a clear example of the integration of present and future merged in such a way as to explain the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’ of the status of the believer. Here we do not have scholars at work forcing interpretations. Rather, we have a clear example of how the author of 1 John himself understood the relation between these two conceptions of history and reality. For him there was clearly and genuinely an ‘already’ and a ‘not yet’ of eschatology.

But this is not all. The author of 1 John integrates the already and the not yet of other aspects of the believer’s life. A particularly important example has to do with the question of whether a believer can sin and whether the believer has eternal life in the present in a perfect way. According to the prerogatives of the outpouring of the Spirit as they are set forth in the canonical Jewish Scriptures, once one receives the Spirit the person will receive eternal life, the life of God, and be so transformed that sin will no longer be a possibility. The author of 1 John addresses both of these issues and affirms the reality of what had been promised in the Scriptures but at the same time acknowledges the reality of future failure. In 1 Jn 3.6-9 we read,

Everyone abiding in him [Jesus] does not sin. Everyone sinning has neither seen him nor known him. Dear Children, let no one deceive you. The one acting justly is just, as that one [the Father] is just. The one committing sin is of the devil because from the beginning the devil sins. For this the Son of God was revealed, that he might do away with the works of the devil. Everyone begotten of God does not commit sin because his [God’s] seed abides in him [the believer], and he [the believer] is not able to sin because he has been begotten of God.

In these four verses, the author states three times that the believer does not or is not able to commit sin. This is an accurate account of one of the effects of receiving the Spirit as is promised in the canonical Jewish Scriptures.

Yet earlier, in 1 Jn 2.1, the author presented another aspect of the reality of the believer’s experience.

My Dear Children, I write these things to you so that you will not sin. But if someone sins, we have a Paraclete before the Father, Jesus Christ, the Just One.

That the believer is indeed able to sin is clear from this passage. Moreover, this view is confirmed later in 1 Jn 5.16 by the author’s discussion of two types of sin.

If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he [the believer] will ask, and he [God] will give life to him [the sinner], to those [sinners] not sinning unto death.

This passage introduces the complex issue of 'sin unto death' (cf. 1 Jn 5.16c, 17). Our intention here is not to enter into a discussion of the nature of these two types of sin, but simply to point to the fact that the author of 1 John is clearly acknowledging the possibility and the reality of sin for the believer.

This passage also leads us into a discussion of yet another of the prerogatives of the Spirit: the reception of eternal life. Earlier, the author had acknowledged that the believer has eternal life in the present, as the Scriptural promises indicate. 1 John 3.14 reads, 'We know that *we have crossed over from death into life* because we love the brothers'. The similarity of this verse to Jn 5.24-25, the clearest example of 'realized eschatology' (i.e., typical of the view of future hopes in the canonical Jewish Scriptures) in the Gospel, is unmistakable. In fact, the primary theological content of Jn 5.24-25 is verbally identical to the central part of 1 Jn 3.14. John 5.24-25 reads,

Amen, amen, I say to you, the one who hears my word and believes in the one who sent me has eternal life and does not come into judgment, but *has crossed over from death to life*. Amen, amen, I say to you, an hour is coming and is now present when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those hearing it will live.

However, in spite of the fact that the believer 'has crossed over from death to life', it is clear from 1 Jn 5.16 that it is possible for the believer to lose this life, but if the fellow believer prays, God will give the sinner 'life'. Thus yet again what had been presented in the second edition of the Gospel in an absolute way is modified in 1 John so as to be less absolute and to admit of failure or inadequacy in the future.

Finally, we may look at one other of the prerogatives of the Spirit as described in the Jewish Scriptures and manifest in the second edition: the fact that when the Spirit is given, the recipient will have no need for anyone to teach them. Twice in 1 John the author reminds his reader that he/she has an 'anointing' (1 Jn 2.20, 27) and that the believer has no need for anyone to teach them. In this latter verse, the author is clearly echoing the words of Jer. 31.34 ('no longer shall they teach one another') about the 'eschatological' age. And so he affirms what Jeremiah predicts about the eschatological age, but goes on to clarify this by explaining that the anointing by the Spirit will teach them—to remain in the teaching of Jesus!

And as for you—the anointing that you received from him [God] abides in you, and you do not have need that anyone teach you, but as his [God’s] anointing teaches you about all and is true and not false, *and just as it taught you, you abide in him [Jesus]*. (1 Jn 2.27)

The meaning of these italicized words is easy to miss. They have no need to be taught except by the Spirit, but the Spirit will teach them to remain in the teaching of Jesus. If the believer really listens to the Spirit, he or she will find out that the Spirit wants the believer to remain in the teaching of Jesus—and not to follow falsely some deceptive thinking that is thought to be the inspiration of the Spirit!

We have just reviewed four topics from 1 John that deal with issues associated with the future hopes expressed in the canonical Jewish Scriptures.¹⁶ From this review, we have seen that in all cases prerogatives associated with the outpouring of the Spirit that were expressed in terms of absolute fulfillment in the second edition of the Gospel are modified in 1 John to integrate them with a conception of the future in which these prerogatives were understood to be genuine but not absolute until ‘the last day’, when Jesus would again be revealed and there would be a universal judgment.

5. Conclusions

We set out to examine the notion of realized eschatology in the Johannine literature and to do so in the light of the analysis put forth in my commentary on the Gospel and Letters. According to that analysis, the statements concerning realized eschatology are introduced into the

16. In this context, I have not discussed one other of the primary prerogatives of the eschatological Spirit: that the one who has received the Spirit will ‘know’ God completely. The author’s approach in dealing with this prerogative seems to be somewhat different. He does not seem to make a distinction between the present ‘knowing’ and future ‘knowing’. Rather, he claims that the believer does ‘know’ but the opponents do not. In 2.3, the author argues that it is possible to determine whether a person truly ‘knows’ by whether the person keeps the commandments. Something similar appears in 4.7-8 where the evidence of ‘knowing’ is shown in whether a person truly ‘loves’. In 2.13-14, he argues that ‘the fathers’ of the community have ‘known’ God ‘from the beginning’. The absoluteness of this ‘knowing’ is asserted in 2.20 (‘you have an anointing from the Holy One and you know all’). The author provides another test in 4.6: ‘The one knowing God hears us’. Yet at the same time, throughout 1 John, the author reminds them of what they ‘know’: 2.5, 13, 14, 18, 21, 29; 3.2, 4, 14, 16, 19, 24; 4.2, 13, 16; 5.13, 15, 18-20.

Gospel at the time of the second edition. As was shown in the commentary, the background of the second edition was what I have referred to as the 'classical, canonical Jewish Scriptures'.

These scriptures promised that Yahweh would pour forth his Spirit upon all the people, as he had done in the past on the king and the prophet. Because these hopes were conceptualized in the worldview of the canonical Jewish Scriptures, it was understood that the bestowal of the Spirit would take place 'once and for all'.

The Johannine community at the time of the second edition understood this promise to be brought to fulfillment in the ministry of Jesus. Because it was understood within the framework of the canonical Scriptures, there was no thought of an initial, partial fulfillment that would be brought to a culmination at the end of the world (as there was in apocalyptic).

As a result of our understanding of the process of the Gospel's composition, we gain a new and much simpler understanding of those passages in the Gospel that speak of the present possession of the 'eschatological' gifts. It was not a unique and original contribution of Johannine theology as Bultmann thought. Nor was it a result of the cultic celebration of the ministry of Jesus, as Aune thought. Nor was it the attempt to translate apocalyptic thought into the worldview of Hellenistic Judaism, as Dodd thought. It was simply the worldview of the canonical Scriptures—but it occurred in a document that also contained editorial additions couched in the worldview of apocalyptic. The incorporation of the apocalyptic material obscured the worldview of the prior form of the document.

It is clear from both the Gospel and from 1 John that ultimately the community believed that the reality of the gifts of God was not expressed fully within the worldview of canonical Judaism and so modified this understanding by the addition of a future dimension as was expressed within apocalyptic Judaism. It was the modification of this theology by integrating it within the worldview of apocalyptic that was the achievement of the author of 1 John.

Chapter 7

APOCALYPTIC JUDAISM: A RADICAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE TRADITION

1. Introduction

Apocalyptic is generally thought to have appeared in Judaism about the time of the Maccabean Revolt. It is manifest in both a worldview and a type of literature. However, it is important that these be distinguished from one another. That is, the worldview of apocalyptic is found manifest in a wide variety of documents but not all of these documents would be classed as apocalypses. Within the NT, many documents are informed by the worldview of apocalyptic but there is only one true apocalypse, the Apocalypse of John.

One of the greatest advances in understanding the worldview of the Gospel of John was the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The study of the scrolls found at Qumran led to the recognition that the worldview of parts of the Gospel had a remarkable similarity to the worldview of many of the scrolls. Although a number of the scrolls contained copies of books that were part of the canon of Jewish scriptures and other non-canonical books, it was in the documents that were intended to form the foundation of the community at Qumran, the so-called ‘sectarian’ documents from Qumran (SDQ), that the clearest expression of this worldview appeared. After the discovery of the SDQ, it was also recognized that the pseudepigraphal *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* contained a type of apocalyptic dualism that was quite similar to that of the SDQ and also to parts of the Gospel of John.¹ When these similarities

1. There can be no doubt that the Jewish Scriptures contained material that speaks of resurrection in various metaphorical ways. Consequently it is essential to distinguish these metaphorical texts from those that express a genuine hope for bodily resurrection. For a recent evaluation of texts that appear to refer to bodily resurrection, see the survey conducted by Charlesworth, ‘Prolegomenous Reflections’, pp. 1–21; C. D. Elledge, ‘Resurrection of the Dead: Exploring Our Earliest Evidence Today’, in *Resurrection: The Origin and Future of a Biblical Doctrine* (ed. J. Charlesworth; New York: T&T Clark, 2006), pp. 22–52. See also N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), pp. 85–206. Those documents in late Second Temple times that most clearly contain references

first began to be noticed, there was no attempt actively to distinguish passages with apocalyptic features from those without them.²

The significance of the apocalyptic tradition for the study of the Gospel of John is not always fully recognized. Moreover, there has been no attempt previously to identify and isolate the apocalyptic material in the Gospel from the material that is not apocalyptic. The analysis of the composition process presented in my commentary hopes to remedy this. This chapter is a development from that analysis and hopes to focus on the importance of recognizing this presence of apocalyptic for the interpretation of such passages.

2. Some Distinctive Features of Apocalyptic in the Johannine Literature

Apocalyptic as a literary genre takes on many forms. A complicating factor is that not all features are found in all instances, but they do overlap to an extent that it is possible to speak of them all manifesting the basic genre.³

In the case of apocalyptic as found in the Johannine literature, the SDQ, and the T12P, the prominent feature is a modified (or 'ethical') dualism as opposed to 'absolute' (or Gnostic) dualism. All dualism is characterized by the presence of two opposed beings, one representing good (i.e., God) and the other representing evil (i.e., Satan). However, in the absolute dualism of Gnosticism, the two opposed principles of Good and Evil are understood to be equal and in eternal combat. In addition, the allegiance of an individual to either God or Satan is pre-determined. There is no possibility of shifting allegiance from one to the other.

to bodily resurrection are apocalyptic: from the canon of the OT but nevertheless apocalyptic (Dan. 12); two texts from Qumran (4Q521 [*Messianic Apocalypse*]; 4Q385-88, 391 [*Pseudo Ezekiel*^{a-e}]; four texts from the T12P [*T. Sim.* 6.7; *T. Jud.* 25; *T. Zeb.* 12.1-4; *T. Ben.* 10.6-10]; and NT documents throughout.

2. A prominent example of this was R. E. Brown's article, 'The Qumran Scrolls and the Johannine Gospel and Epistles', in *New Testament Essays* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965), pp. 138-73, a remarkable article that was an outgrowth of a paper that Brown presented to a seminar at Johns Hopkins University in 1955 (only eight years after the first scrolls were discovered!) while he was a graduate student.

3. One of the foremost scholars of apocalyptic is J. J. Collins. He has written extensively on the genre. He presents a helpful but short discussion of apocalypticism in *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 1-11. I have also discussed it with extensive references in my *Commentary* (I, pp. 250-93). See also O. Bücher, *Der johanneische Dualismus im Zusammenhang des nachbiblischen Judentums* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1965).

In the modified dualism of apocalyptic, although there is a struggle between opposed beings representing Good and Evil, the two beings are not thought of as equal. Rather, God is understood to be dominant but in spite of that fact and for reasons known only to God, he has allowed Evil to exercise a controlling power in the world. Thus this is referred to as 'modified' dualism.

One's allegiance to either God or Satan is determined by one's actions and although the influence of one or the other cosmic being is real, it is possible to shift allegiance from one to the other. Hence the name 'ethical' dualism, i.e. a dualism founded on one's actions, to describe this form of dualism.

The common paradigm in modified dualism is that each person can be said to have a 'father' (either God or the devil). The human person is said to be a 'son' of either God or the devil. Further, it is presumed that one always does the will of one's 'father'. The idiomatic expression for doing the will of one's father is to do 'his works'. The process of becoming allied with one or the other is referred to as a 'birth'. In apocalyptic, if one's 'father' is known, it is possible to know how that person will act. Conversely, by observing how the person acts, one is able to determine who one's father is.

In addition to this basic paradigm, apocalyptic often refers to individuals' allegiance in symbolic terms. Thus one can be referred to as a 'son of light' or a 'son of darkness'. Deeds can be described as 'done in light' or 'done in darkness'.

The ordinary way of explaining how individuals are influenced by God or Satan is that they are influenced by 'spirits'. In some forms of apocalyptic (e.g. in the Synoptic Gospels) the influence of these spirits is referred to as being 'possessed' by a given spirit. In the Synoptic Gospels, the evil spirits are often referred to as 'unclean' spirits.

3. Apocalyptic in 1 John

Although it is possible to recognize the presence of apocalyptic with some facility once one is sensitized to its features, just how apocalyptic came to be introduced into the Johannine tradition remains unknown. It is generally recognized by scholars that the worldview of 1 John is thoroughly apocalyptic. In my commentary, I have proposed that 1 John was written before the completion of the Gospel. That is, it was written after the second edition of the Gospel and before the third.

Consequently, in this view, it was at the time of 1 John that this major shift in worldview took place within the Johannine tradition. The introduction of apocalyptic at the time of 1 John was not simply a matter

of stylistic changes and the introduction of some symbolic expressions not found previously. *Rather the introduction of apocalyptic brought about a major change in the perception of how God's reality 'worked' and God's plans for the way history unfolded and would end.* This had major implications for Johannine theology especially for the understanding of ethics and for eschatology. For example, with the introduction of apocalyptic, one had to decide whether the view of the canonical Jewish Scriptures was correct that one day God would pour out his Spirit on all persons and that the resulting transformation would be so absolute that the believer would never sin again and so absolute that the believer would spontaneously know God and have eternal life permanently and never come into judgment in the future. Or should the believer hold that sin was still possible and ethical directives were still necessary?

If sin was still possible, would that mean that the believer would be in need of further forgiveness in addition to the primary act of atonement in the death of Jesus? Was it then possible to lose eternal life? Apocalyptic held that there would be a future judgment at the end of time. How would that relate to the view that the believer would not undergo future judgment as the earlier view had held? Does the believer fully know God through the Spirit without a need for any concrete directives such as were found in the historical teaching of Jesus—or should the believer use the teaching of Jesus as the unassailable foundation of what God wanted?

The introduction of apocalyptic thus raised major questions for the Johannine understanding of what was required of a believer. It constituted a major challenge to the way salvation had been understood and how it was to be understood in the future.

4. Apocalyptic in the Gospel of John

When we turn to the Gospel of John, there is much less recognition that apocalyptic plays a significant part in the document. At its very heart, 1 John had sought to correct the extremes of the second edition. From that time on, the believer who would continue to be a member of the Johannine community needed to integrate the apocalyptic viewpoint with the earlier worldview of classical Judaism or, in some cases, to replace the previous worldview and its theological implications with those of apocalyptic.

In the case of the Gospel, apocalyptic was introduced at the time of the third edition. In other words, at the time of the third edition the community introduced into the Gospel the nuances and the corrections first spelled out by the author of 1 John. When these nuances and corrections were introduced into the Gospel tradition, they were presented within the

apocalyptic worldview. As a result, in the present text of the Gospel the worldview may suddenly and without notice change from the worldview of canonical Judaism to that of apocalyptic. A clear example of such a transition occurs when the canonical view of the future hopes described in the Scriptures (i.e., the so-called ‘realized eschatology’, 5.24-25) are presented alongside the apocalyptic viewpoint (5.26-29). These examples could be multiplied. However, what is important for our present purposes is to recognize the presence of apocalyptic in the Gospel and to interpret these passages correctly. Failure to recognize the presence of the worldview within the Gospel can lead to serious errors of interpretation.

Here we will examine two topics, one in the First Letter and one in the Gospel. From 1 John, we will study the love commandment. Although the love commandment appears in both the Gospel and 1 John, chronologically it appears first in 1 John and then is later incorporated into the Gospel. So actually the first reference (chronologically) to the love commandment appears in 1 Jn 3.10, where it seems intended to lead the reader by means of a catchword into the following unit of the Letter, where the author discusses the commandment in greater detail. Our discussion of the love commandment will not focus on any one passage but will deal with the notion of love of one another generally. This discussion will follow in Chapter 8.

The second passage that we examine is from the Gospel: Jn 8.38-47. That will appear in Chapter 9 of this book. While hardly the only passage used throughout the centuries to justify anti-Jewishness, it is certainly the most famous. However, when these verses are examined closely, it becomes apparent that they are couched within the apocalyptic viewpoint and have been inserted into the Gospel at the time of the Gospel’s third edition and do not at all intend to confront the unbelief of ‘the Jews’, an issue that was prominent at the time of the second edition of the Gospel but which was not at all in play at the time of the third edition. Understanding the worldview of these passages gives a radically new understanding of these verses—one that makes it clear that there was absolutely no anti-Jewish intent in the mind of the author.⁴

4. The recent book, C. Rowland and C. Williams, eds., *John’s Gospel and Intimations of Apocalyptic* (London: T&T Clark, 2013), is a somewhat curious combination of two approaches to the study of apocalyptic and the Gospel of John. While a very thoughtful collection of essays (from a conference held at Bangor University in Wales, UK), the title is somewhat misleading in that a number of the essays address the issue of similarities between the Gospel and Apocalypse as literary genre rather than the relationship between the worldview of the Gospel and that of apocalyptic, as one might expect from the title.

Chapter 8

LIMITED LOVE IN THE JOHANNINE TRADITION

1. Introduction

The Johannine literature is known for some of the loftiest and most moving descriptions of Christian love in the NT. Yet, it is a puzzle for many that in the Johannine literature, this love is restricted to one's 'brother', that is, to one's fellow religionist. Is Johannine love, for all its depth of description, really less inclusive than, for example, the love of one's enemies, as it is expressed in Mt. 5.44-48? Many would say yes. The present author once had the experience of discussing Johannine love with a prominent systematic theologian who decried the fact that all too soon in the history of Christianity the love that Matthew spoke of as being so expansive became limited (in 1 John) to only the members of one's community. That discussion motivated the writing of the present chapter. The failure to interpret the Johannine love statements in the context of the worldview in which they are cast is the cause of this misunderstanding.

2. The Terminology of Love in John

It is well known that, throughout the NT, the type of love expected of the believer is what is known in Greek as ἀγάπη, a love that is rightly described as benevolent, altruistic, and self-sacrificing. At the same time, it is curious that the Johannine tradition does not seem intent on distinguishing ἀγάπη from φιλία (the love of friendship).¹ Although the noun ἀγάπη and verb ἀγαπάω do tend to predominate over the nouns φίλος (a friend) and φιλία (friendship love), and the verb φιλέω, there is no consistent usage.² For example, in John 21, in a passage that would surely preserve the distinction if one were intended, the author alternates

1. The third and fourth types of love generally distinguished as ἔρος and στοργή do not appear in the Johannine writings.

2. This has been established by C. Spicq's immense study, *Agapē in the New Testament* (3 vols.; St. Louis: Herder, 1966).

between the verb ἀγαπάω and φιλέω in Jesus' three-fold questioning of Peter whether he 'loves' Jesus. Consequently, an understanding of the Johannine presentation of love does not hinge on a particular vocabulary so we must look elsewhere to understand fully love in the Johannine tradition.

3. The Overall Johannine Presentation of 'Love for One Another'

a. In 1 John

As we will see in the survey that follows, we find the most detailed discussion of the love commandment and the overall context within which it is to be understood (i.e., the way it relates to God who is love and the primacy of his love for us) within the pages of 1 John. The appearance of the commandment in the Gospel, while substantial, is not as complete.

In 1 Jn 2.10-11, the author describes the state of the one who loves his brother by means of two images:

The one loving his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one hating his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

With this statement we are thrust into the world of apocalyptic dualism. The one who loves 'abides in light', while the one who hates his brother 'is in the darkness and walks in darkness and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes'. The one who loves sees reality clearly and avoids the pitfalls of existence, whereas the one who hates his brother does the reverse. This is the world of modified (apocalyptic) dualism. It is 'dualistic' because the author conceives of only two possibilities of allegiance or of action: the individual person is either in the light or in the darkness; there is no in-between. It is 'modified' because allegiance to the group to which one belongs is not something completely fixed and determined; it is possible for a person to change and consequently to move from one allegiance to the other.

It is also in these verses that we first meet the notion of loving one's 'brother'. Not only is this the first time that we read that the 'other' person is one's 'brother'; this is also the first time we hear that there are others who are said to 'hate' the brothers. Yet, we must remember that, in the author's dualistic worldview, there is no possibility of being neutral. Not to love is *ipso facto* to 'hate'.

The next time we read about love is in 1 Jn 3.10-11. There we hear that those who love are 'children of God'. And once again, the children

of God are contrasted with their opposites: ‘the children of the devil’. All this is due to the fact that the individuals have received a commandment from God that they should love one another and so it is possible to tell the one group from the other by whether they obey this commandment and truly love the brothers.³

In 1 Jn 3.14 we read yet another prerogative of the one who loves: that person has passed over from death to life.⁴ Moreover, the one who does not love is a murderer.⁵ Earlier we had heard that the one not loving was one who ‘hated’; here we learn that the person is also a ‘murderer’.

In 1 Jn 4.7, the author again refers to the conviction that the believer is a child of God when he says that ‘everyone loving has been begotten of God and knows God. The one not loving did not know God because God is love.’

The Model for Johannine Love. When the author of 1 John speaks of the model for the love the believers are to have toward one another, he puts forward Jesus. He says it with a kind of concreteness that is striking: ‘in this we have known love inasmuch as that one [Jesus] has laid down his life for us’. It is not some abstract conception of love that is to motivate them but a recollection of the concrete reality of the passion and death of Jesus *for us*. Then the author continues ‘and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers’. The author is not speaking just of a love that is convenient (or even of one that is ‘inconvenient’) but of one that can demand *everything one has to give, just as Jesus loved!*

Love of the Brothers and Love of God. The author of 1 John then moves on to another dimension of love: the relation of the love of one another to love of God. In 3.17, the author asks rhetorically: ‘whoever has the life of the world and sees his brother in need and closes his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?’ Not only has the author made the expression of love concrete, he joins love for one’s brother with love of God. How could one claim to love God, if the person did not love his brother? It is not just the brother that is being offended by the lack of love, but God himself. In 4.20a, he again says, even more forcefully,

3. ‘In this are made manifest the children of God and the children of the devil: Everyone not acting justly is not of God and the one not loving his brother. Because this is the proclamation that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another’ (1 Jn 3.10-11).

4. ‘We know that we have crossed over from death into life because we love the brothers. The one not loving, abides in death.’

5. ‘Everyone hating his brother is a murderer, and you know that every murderer does not have eternal life abiding in himself’.

‘If someone says, “I love God” and hates his brother, the person is a liar’. The author follows this in 4.20b with, ‘For the one not loving his brother, whom he has seen, is not able to love God whom he has not seen’.

Next, the author will make the same point but in a slightly different way: ‘And we have this commandment from him [God], that the one loving God should also love his brother’ (4.21). In the next verse (5.1), the author says, ‘everyone loving the begetter loves the one begotten of him’. The ‘begetter’ is, of course, God, from whom the believer is born as a ‘child of God’. And so the author turns the argument around, as if to show that its truth is confirmed by looking at it also from the perspective of the begetter (God). But the author is still not done. Now he presents one more perspective. We can tell ‘that we love the children of God, whenever we love God and obey his commandments’ (5.2).⁶

And so finally, the author says that if we truly love God and obey his commandments, then we can be sure that we are also loving our brothers. Although the truth of this perspective is perhaps not as immediately apparent, upon reflection it is true that living one’s life in accord with God’s commandments confirms that the believer loves the brothers and in fact leads to the realization and actualization of that love toward the brothers. The author rephrases his thought as if he wants to confirm the truth of what he is saying by showing that it is true from every possible perspective.

The Primacy of God’s Love for Us. In his exposition of Christian love, the author calls upon his reader to reflect on yet another aspect of this love (4.10): ‘this is the love, not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atonement for our sins’. Thus not only does the author show the various dimensions of love, he also shows that the true origin of love is God. It is because of the love that God has shown that we should reciprocate with love to both God and to one’s fellow religionist.⁷ He confirms this in 4.19–5.1, where we read, ‘Let us love because he [God] first loved us’.

6. In the Johannine tradition, the reference to ‘commandments’ does not refer to the Decalogue nor does it refer only to the commandment of mutual love, as many modern commentators think. The plural is used for a reason. For the author of 1 John, God had given the community two special commandments: to keep the word of Jesus (and so resist the baseless claims of those who said they spoke under the inspiration of the Spirit) but also the commandment to love one another. See von Wahlde, *Commentary*, III, pp. 386–401.

7. ‘Beloved, if God so loved us, we too should love one another’. The author confirms this later, in 4.19: ‘Let us love because he [God] first loved us’.

b. In 2 John

Here the author, now explicitly identified as ‘the Elder’, addresses a satellite community. His main concern is to encourage the community not to accept any dissident believers into the community. The author begins by greeting the members of the community ‘whom I love in truth’. Although this could be interpreted to mean ‘whom I truly love’, this is almost surely not the case. As the Letter proceeds, it becomes clear that the author is specifically concerned with *the truth* of the tradition. He urges his readers to follow that they have heard ‘from the beginning’ and not to be deceived by those who ‘go beyond and do not remain in the teaching of the Christ’ (v. 9). He acknowledges that many of them ‘walk in the truth’ and have the ‘truth abiding’ in them. He then refers to the commandment of mutual love and shows by means of logical argument that the one who truly loves will thereby walk in truth.

The author begins by reminding the community that they have received a commandment that they should walk in truth (v. 4a-c). Then he changes to the topic of mutual love and reminds them that they are to love one another (v. 5d). But his primary interest at the moment is ‘truth’ and so he then states that love is manifest in keeping the commandments (v. 6a-b) and then he defines the commandment as ‘that we walk in it’ (v. 6d). Although the final word ‘it’ is grammatically ambiguous, it is clear from the overall context and from the place of the clause within the chiasm, that the author is urging them to ‘walk in truth’.

Thus, by means of a chiasm and his series of definitions (of ‘love’ and of ‘commandment’), he argues that even the commandment of mutual love, rightly understood, urges that the community ‘walk in truth’.

I rejoiced greatly to find
 + some of your children *walking in truth*,
 + just as *we received a commandment* from the Father. And now
 I ask you, Lady (not as one writing a new commandment to you
 but one that we had from the beginning)
 + that *we love* one another.
 + And this is *the love*,
 + that you *walk according to his commandments; this is the*
 commandment, as you heard from the beginning,
 + that we *walk in it*.

The point of all of this is that the author links ‘love’ with ‘truth’. Those who truly love do so ‘in truth’. For the author, love must be in service of the truth.⁸

8. For more detail, see U. C. von Wahlde, ‘The Theological Foundation of the Presbyterian’s Argument in 2 Jn (vv. 4-6)’, *ZNW* 76 (1985), pp. 209–24.

c. In 3 John

In this Letter, the Elder writes to a single individual in a community at some distance from his own. The person's name is Gaius. The Elder declares that he loves Gaius 'in truth' and that he is happy to hear that the 'brothers' of that community witness to Gaius' 'truth' and that others of his children in that community are 'walking in truth' (v. 4). The Elder urges Gaius to accept the missionaries that are coming to his community. He also tells Gaius that when the author comes to visit the community, he will reprimand Diotrephes who is attempting to impose some restraint upon the community and to exclude all such missionaries.

Again we see that the author has great concern (and joy) that the believers there were walking in truth and that he loves them 'in truth'. As was the case with 2 John, love is directed to those who 'walk in (i.e., adhere to) the truth'.

d. In the Gospel

We now turn to the description of love as we find it in the Johannine Gospel. At the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus attracts disciples who respond to him with belief. They come to Jesus after John the Baptist witnesses to Jesus. They see the miracle at the wedding in Cana and are said to believe. And then they go with Jesus to Jerusalem for Passover where they witness Jesus disrupting the selling of animals and the changing of money inside the temple area (1.29–2.22). Surprisingly, however, the disciples do not figure prominently in the remainder of the public ministry. Rather the majority of Jesus' ministry is directed to the common people throughout Israel (in Jerusalem [2.23]; throughout Judea [3.22]; in Samaria [4.38, 42]; in Galilee [4.46–54]; Jerusalem at Tabernacles [7.32]; and in Bethany [11.45–46?]; and to 'the Jews' [i.e. the Jewish authorities; 6.30–59; 8.13–59; 10.22–39]).

But after his last meal with his disciples, on the night he was to be arrested, Jesus gives the disciples extensive instruction by means of a series of Farewell Discourses. Such Farewell Discourses were common in Jewish literature and served to present wishes, hopes, and final instructions to those closest to the one about to die. It is within these Farewell Discourses that Jesus gives his disciples the commandment to love one another.⁹

9. Jesus also speaks of love in its other dimensions but these do not concern us here: (a) disciples' love for Jesus: 14.28; 15.15, 21, 23–24; 16.27; (b) Jesus' love for the disciples: 15.9; 17.25; (c) Jesus' love for the Father: 14.31; (d) the Father's love for the disciples: 16.27; 17.23, 25; (e) the Father's love for Jesus: 15.9; 17.23, 25; (f) the world's love for its own: 15.19.

The first reference to the love commandment in the Gospel is in 13.34-35: 'A new commandment I give you that you love one another; as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.' Here Jesus tells his disciples that he is giving them a new commandment, a commandment to love one another. As was the case in 1 John, the model Jesus gives them is the love with which Jesus has loved them (13.34). He then tells them that this love for one another will be the sign by which all will know that they are disciples of Jesus. It will be the way they are distinguished from the disciples of other religious leaders.

For Jesus, the most genuine demonstration of love for him is that the disciples keep his commandments and, of course, this includes his commandment that they love one another (14.15): 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments'. Then, in 15.9-17, Jesus proclaims his most extensive instruction on the necessity of loving one another and the benefits that will come from that. He begins by declaring in 15.9a that his love of them is equal to the love that the Father has for Jesus ('As the Father loved me, I also loved you'). He then explains that the Father loves Jesus because Jesus himself keeps the commandments given to him by the Father. Likewise Jesus urges the disciples to remain in his love—and they will do this if they keep his commandments. 'Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love just as I have kept the commandments of my Father and I remain in his love' (15.9b-10). Thus the person will not remain in Jesus' love unless the person keeps Jesus' commandments. But the obligation that Jesus imposes upon the disciples is no different from the obligation given to Jesus himself by the Father.

If the disciples fully understand what this is that is being promised to them, they will rejoice and will have the same joy that Jesus experiences in being loved by the Father: ('I have said these things to you in order that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be complete', 15.11). And then he reminds them once again that this commandment is that they love one another (v. 12): 'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I loved you'. Having spoken of the obligation to love and the benefits the disciples will experience from loving in this way, he now tells them of the greatest expression possible of such love (v. 13): 'No one has greater love than this, that a person lay down his life for his friends'. Without saying it explicitly, Jesus describes the motive that underlies the coming act of laying down his own life for the disciples.

Jesus then indicates to the disciples that if they fulfill what he has commanded them, there will be a basic change in their relationship with Jesus. While he states that they will become his 'friends' rather than his

‘slaves’, undoubtedly the notion of ‘slave’ is not meant to be taken literally. However, like the slave’s relation to the master, up to this point the disciples have followed Jesus without fully understanding. But if they keep his commands, he will make (and has made) known to them all that the Father has made known to him (15.14-15):

You are my friends if you do the things that I command you. I no longer call you slave, because the slave does not know what the master is doing. I have called you friends because I have made known to you all that I heard from my Father.

Then, in a shift in topic, Jesus reminds the disciples that they have been chosen by Jesus to bear fruit and, if they do, they will be able to petition the Father in Jesus’ name and the Father will grant it to them (15.16):

You did not choose me, but I chose you and have appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit and that your fruit might remain so that whatever you request from the Father in my name, he would give to you.

And then Jesus ends by returning to the major topic of the passage, mutual love: ‘These things I command you: love one another’.

Thus to summarize the basic elements of the Johannine understanding of love in the Gospel, we see the following: God is love and he first loved us rather than our loving God first. God’s unique son Jesus loved us so much that he gave his life for us. In response, the believer should love God and also should love his brother. If the believer does not love his brother, then he cannot be said to love God. This is the most fully developed description of the origin, model, and requirements of love in the NT.

4. Why Is This Love Limited to One’s Fellow Religionist?

Yet why is this love directed only to one’s fellow religionist? Why does this lofty conception of love lack the breadth of the Matthean love of enemies? In all of the discussions of love in both the Letters and in the Gospel, there is no explanation of why this love is expressed as it is and why it is limited only to the other members of the community. What about one’s enemies? What about the stranger? What about the ‘other’? As we shall see, this omission is not an accident.

Although the notion of mutual love first appears in 1 John (and then in 2 and 3 John), I have postponed the discussion of the seemingly strange limitation of love until now in order to show first the continuity of the conception of Johannine love in both the Letters and the Gospel. But just as it is clear that the profundity of love in the Johannine tradition is

the same in both the Letters and the Gospel, it is also clear that the limitation on its expression is also consistent throughout the Johannine literature.

And so the question arises: Why is the Johannine conception of love so limited?

5. A Problem with Properly Understanding the Background of Johannine Love

I would propose that the major impediment to understanding the love commandment properly is the fact that most people meet it first in the Gospel. The overriding worldview of the Gospel is that of canonical Judaism and within that worldview such a limitation on Christian love would indeed be strange. However, this is not the correct way to approach the issue.

As we have seen, it was at the time of 1 John that the apocalyptic worldview was introduced into the Johannine tradition. The author of 1 John employed this worldview in order to correct and nuance the worldview of canonical Judaism that had informed the background of the earlier editions. The introduction of the apocalyptic worldview brought about major changes in the way the Johannine tradition was understood.

One of the changes introduced into the community's worldview by the introduction of apocalyptic was a belief in dualism, as we have seen. This dualism was based on the belief that there were opposed beings in the invisible world: God and Satan. The opposition between God and Satan is reflected in the physical world in the opposition between good and evil persons. The apocalyptic view of reality understands all persons as belonging essentially to either of these two opposed categories. These opposed categories are variously described as consisting of 'sons of light and sons of darkness'; 'children of God and children of Satan'; 'those not belonging to this world and those belonging to this world', and so on. In this view, the good and the evil are diametrically opposed to one another and there is no middle ground. An important implication of this worldview is that one cannot 'love' those who are evil.

However, in 1 John, the notion of love is understood to be different. Here the notion of love for enemies is not under consideration, rather love is thought of as involving support, help, and aid of various kinds that one gives to another. The author of 1 John is urging that the members of the community give genuine support for one another in all their needs. As an example of such love, the author speaks of the one who has sufficient material goods necessary for existence. If that person does not

share these goods with his brother, the person cannot be said to have love (cf. esp. 1 Jn 3.17). For the Johannine believer, it is already presumed that, according to the model given by Jesus, the believer will seek the good of his or her fellow believer even to the point of giving one's life.

But, in the light of the dualistic worldview within which 1 John is framed, one cannot give this sort of love to those who are under the influence of Satan. In the case of 1 John, such persons would include the author's adversaries, whom he groups generally as belonging to 'the world'. These are the ones who have been said to be born of the devil and to be in the darkness. One cannot give aid and support to people who are doing such evil.

The reason for this limitation should be evident once one reflects on the nature of love in an apocalyptic context, but the reason is never made explicit. Nevertheless, in 2 and 3 John, we see examples of this limited love in action and the reasons for limiting it. These Letters were sent to communities at some distance from the community of the author. In 2 John 9–10, the author exhorts the members of the satellite community to be careful of those who bring false teaching: 'If someone approaches you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house and do not give greetings to him. For the one who gives him a greeting also takes part in his evil deeds.' To extend 'love' in the form of hospitality of any sort to those who had previously been members of the Johannine community but now have split off as a dissident group (cf. 1 Jn 2.19) would be wrong, because in the eyes of the apocalyptically oriented author, doing so would be to 'take part in (their) evil deeds'.

In 3 John we see the same principle being expressed, although the concrete situation is, remarkably, the reverse of that in 2 John. Here, in vv. 5-8 the author writes to Gaius, a member of a satellite community, and urges him to receive missionaries being sent out from the author's community:

Beloved, you (will) act faithfully in whatever you may do for the brothers and this for strangers. (They witnessed to your love before the assembly!) And you will act well, having sent them on in a way worthy of God. For, for the sake of the name, they went out, accepting nothing from the nations. Therefore, we ought to accept such as these so that we may become coworkers for the truth.

The author asks that the visiting missionaries be accepted and supplied with whatever may be necessary for their continuing journey and Gaius is reminded that doing so makes the members of the community 'coworkers for the truth'.

From these two statements, it is evident that love is conceived of as supplying the needs of the other. But there is another reason why it is difficult fully to appreciate the nature of love in the Johannine tradition and why it is restricted to 'one another'. As was pointed out above, most people encounter the Johannine concept of mutual love first in the Last Discourses of the Gospel. In the Gospel, its first appearance is in Jn 13.34-35. It appears as an insertion between 13.33, where Jesus tells his disciples that where he is going they cannot come, and 13.36, where Peter asks where Jesus is going. Appearing as it does, awkwardly interrupting the previous sequence of the Discourse, it catches the reader unaware. As a result, appearing without a context that would enable a correct understanding of its true apocalyptic context, it is all but impossible to understand it properly.¹⁰ However, when understood within its intended apocalyptic worldview, one is able to gain an understanding of what such limited love meant and why it was important within the worldview and the historical context of the author and his readers.

6. An Understanding of Love for the Christian Today

While the Christian today may undoubtedly find the apocalyptic understanding of reality narrow, the fullest picture of Christian love can be gained by combining the insights of both the Matthean and the Johannine perspectives on love. As Matthew points out, God gives what is good (sun, rain) on both the good and the evil. God may receive love in return from the good and not from the evil, but this does not prevent him from giving what is good and essential for humanity to both the good and the evil. But from 2 and 3 John it is clear that such love cannot be construed to exhort believers to give support in any way to those who do evil. As the Elder says, to do that would be to take part in their evil deeds. Both perspectives are correct, when applied in the proper contexts.

At the same time, while Matthew (7.12) may set what we would like to be done to ourselves as the model for love of others, the model for love in John is even more profound inasmuch as such love is to be exercised in imitation of the love of Jesus for humanity, to the point of laying down his life.

10. As a further indication of just how awkward 13.34-35 are in this context, Jesus' reference to the commandment being 'new' cannot be understood without reference to 1 Jn 2.7-8, where the author explains that the commandment he is speaking about is both 'old' and 'new'.

Chapter 9

‘YOU ARE OF YOUR FATHER THE DEVIL’ IN ITS CONTEXT: APOCALYPTIC POLEMIC IN JOHN 8.38-47

1. Introduction

The issue whether or to what extent the Fourth Gospel is anti-Jewish continues to be a problem not only for the understanding of the Gospel within the canon of inspired scripture but also for Jewish–Christian relations.¹ Within the Gospel, attention is often called to Jn 8.44 as the fiercest attack on the Jews. This verse has been accused again and again of being a major cause of Christian anti-Judaism.²

If we are to address the question of anti-Judaism in Jn 8.44, it is important to recognize that there are two quite different aspects to this problem. The first problem is the need to determine the meaning of the text and the intention of the author as clearly as possible. In this case, the question is an historical one: Was the author of the Gospel anti-Jewish and if so, in what way and to what extent?

The second problem is how to present the text today so that it is not misunderstood when it is read or heard by persons other than scholars. It is only when the first aspect is fully understood and faced openly that one will be able to deal properly with the second.

1. For bibliography and a recent treatment of this text, see S. Motyer, *Your Father the Devil? A New Approach to John and ‘The Jews’* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997).

2. One of the more famous comments is that of J. Becker, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (2 vols.; Ökumenischer Taschenbuch-Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 4/1–2; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn; Würzburg: Echter, 1979 [unrev. 2d ed. 1985]), II, p. 304, who calls the verse ‘wohl die antijudaistischste äußerung des NT’. A. Reinhartz, ‘A Nice Jewish Girl Reads the Gospel of John’, *Semeia* 77 (1997), pp. 177–93 (179), comments: ‘What after all, beyond the gap in time and place, is to distinguish those Jews whom the Johannine Jesus reviles as unbelieving descendants of the devil (8.44), blind, sinful, and incapable of understanding their own scriptures, from ourselves and the Jews around us?’ See also the title of M. Brumlick’s article: ‘Johannes: das judenfeindlichste Evangelium’, *Kirche und Israel* 4 (1989), pp. 102–13.

It is my intention to discuss the genre and function of this verse within the context of 8.38-47 as an aid to understanding what the text would have meant to an informed first-century reader. Given the importance which 8.38-47 (and, within this passage, 8.44 particularly) has assumed in discussions of alleged anti-Judaism, the importance of a correct understanding of its genre as a means to its proper interpretation cannot be underestimated.³

2. John 8.38-47 in the Context of Chapter 8: General Remarks

I will begin by situating 8.38-47 within the context of ch. 8 as a whole. Chapter 8 contains a long (47 verses) discourse without the presence of any significant narrative. Except for the mention of Pharisees in 8.12, the interlocutors throughout are 'the Jews' (8.22, 31, 48, 52, 57).

The chapter as a whole should be seen in relation to the extended discourses with 'the Jews' on either side of it.⁴ In 6.30-58, the discourse with 'the Jews' focuses on the homiletic exposition of scripture, showing that it points to Jesus as the bread of life. In 10.22-39, Jesus again enters into discourse with 'the Jews' about how his works witness to him.

The present discourse (8.12-59) focuses on the witness of Jesus' *word*. This is evident from the explicit statement regarding witness in 8.14-16. It is also evident from the fact that there are no references to his miracles ('works') in the discourse and no significant discussion of particular scripture texts. But throughout 8.12-59 there are frequent references to all dimensions of the speaking activity of Jesus. He speaks what he hears but they do not believe his word (λόγος) or his speech (λαλιά). Λόγος appears in 8.31, 37, 43, 51, 52, 55; λαλιά in 8.25, 26 (twice), 28b, 38, 40, 43, 44 (twice); λέγω in 8.45, 46; ῥήματα in 8.47. This emphasis is

3. Attention has been called to the role and the importance of such study by Louis H. Feldman, 'Is the New Testament Anti-Semitic?', *Humanities, Christianity and Culture* 21 (1987), p. 14: 'Let Jews and Christians study the nature of rhetoric in antiquity to discern the vigor—and virulence—of speech in that era'. C. Thoma, *Das Messiasprojekt: Theologie Jüdisch-christlicher Begegnung* (Augsburg: Pattloch, 1994), p. 197, who quotes Feldman (above) goes on to say: 'In der Tat ist das Studium damaliger Redeweisen, Argumentationsvorgänge und überredungsversuche die unentbehrliche Voraussetzung, bevor ein Urteil über Antisemitismus im Neuen Testament gefällt werden kann'. L. T. Johnson provides a very helpful overview in his article 'The New Testament's Anti-Jewish Slander and the Conventions of Ancient Polemic', *JBL* 108 (1989), pp. 419–41. The present study is an attempt to bring special focus to 8.44 in its literary and rhetorical context.

4. See von Wahlde, 'Witnesses to Jesus', pp. 385–404.

reinforced by the repeated use of ἀλήθεια in v. 32 (twice), 40, 44 (twice), 45, and 46 (which is more frequent than in the remainder of the public ministry put together).

If the chapter focuses on the witness value of the word of Jesus, it does so by means of the elaboration of the theological significance of Abraham in relation to Jesus. The figure of the patriarch Abraham occurs only here in the Gospel but is developed extensively and draws upon three elements of traditions associated with him: (1) his fathering of a son to his wife Sarah, the free woman, and also a son to the slave, Hagar;⁵ (2) the claim of the Jews to be ‘sons’ of Abraham; (3) his great age. Thus after the primary discussion of the witness of the words of Jesus in 8.12-31, we have the following three topics: (1) Abraham and Freedom (8.32-37); (2) Abraham and Sonship (8.38-47); (3) Abraham and the Age of Jesus (8.48-58).⁶

3. The Worldview of Chapter 8

a. The Structure of the Argument in 8.12-37

We now come to a more complex issue: the worldview of the chapter as a whole. Throughout the chapter there are a number of elements which exhibit a kind of dualism. But these ‘dualisms’ are not all of the same type. The first ‘dualism’ consists of contrasts between a number of features characteristic of Jesus and his opponents. Thus in 8.12-37: (1) I know where I come from and where I go; you do not (v. 14); (2) you judge according to the flesh (implicit is the conviction that Jesus does not; v. 15); (3) you do not know me or the Father (vv. 18-19; implicit is the conviction that Jesus does know the Father); (4) you are from below; I am from above (v. 23); (5) you are from this world; I am not (v. 23); (6) you are slaves but could be free (vv. 32-37).

5. On this see for example, B. Lindars, ‘Slave and Son in John 8:31-36’, in *Essays in Honor of Bo Reicke* (ed. W. C. Weinrich; 2 vols.; Macon: Mercer University Press, 1984), I, pp. 269–86.

6. Proposals for the division of ch. 8 are numerous. The present one is simply based on the shifts created by the various parallels with Abraham, yet even then there is some bridging between vv. 37-38 in the mention of the ‘seed of Abraham’. It should be noted that the triple development of the figure such as Abraham is unique in the Gospel. In ch. 4, Jesus makes only a single point regarding Jacob: he who gave a well with constant flowing water to his people is counterposed to Jesus who offers living water. In ch. 6, Moses who gave bread in the desert is counterposed to Jesus who is the living bread come down from heaven. In the light of this, the triple development of the figure of Abraham is striking. On the figure of Abraham here, see for example, T. Dozeman, ‘*Sperma Abraam* in Jn 8 and Related Literature: Cosmology and Judgment’, *CBQ* 42 (1980), pp. 342–8.

While these six pairs of features are clearly contrasts, they do not represent a true dualism for they are not the result of opposed principles but rather reflect the presence or absence of a given trait.⁷ Thus the opponents do not know the origin of Jesus nor do they really know him or the Father (1, 3 above), but they could. They judge according to the flesh (2), but the flesh simply represents the human condition without the Spirit (cf. 3.3-6). The opponents are from below and from the world (4, 5) and are contrasted with those (born) from above. They are slaves when they could be free (6).

b. The Structure of the Argument in 8.48-58

Next we turn to 8.48-58 (in order to leave for last the passage which is the focus of our attention). At the beginning, the topic changes rapidly, from 'the Jews'' charge that Jesus is a Samaritan and possessed (v. 48) to Jesus' countercharge that opponents do not give him honor, yet even so he does not seek glory for himself (vv. 49-50). Jesus then returns to the topic of keeping his word and says that the one who keeps it will not die forever (v. 51). This in turn leads to the question whether he is greater than Abraham who died and to the question who he claims to be (vv. 52-53). Jesus responds that he does not seek his own glory but that the Father, whom they call their God, will glorify him (v. 54). Jesus declares that 'the Jews' do not know the Father but Jesus does know him and keeps his word (v. 55). Moreover Abraham rejoiced to see his day (v. 56). When 'the Jews' ask if he is older than Abraham, Jesus replies identifying himself as I AM and 'the Jews' take up stones to stone him (vv. 57-59).

However when we examine 8.38-47 we find something entirely different. Jesus begins by saying that he speaks what he has seen from his Father while they do what they have heard from their father. The opponents then say that their father is Abraham (v. 39). But Jesus counters by saying that if their father were Abraham, they would 'do the works of Abraham' (v. 39). But they seek to kill him and Abraham would not have done that (v. 40). Jesus then explains that they do the works of their father (v. 41). The opponents respond that they were not born of adultery and that they have only one father, God. Jesus responds by explaining why God cannot be their father. If he were they would 'love' Jesus

7. Thus I would disagree with scholars such as F. Porsch, 'Ihr habt den Teufel zum Vater (Joh 8:44): Antijudaismus im Johannesevangelium?', *Bibel und Kirche* 44 (1989), pp. 50-7, who would not distinguish between the contrasts between above/below; spirit/flesh and the true dualism as found in 1QS (and in 8.38-47).

because he came from God (v. 42). Moreover they do not accept his word because they cannot (v. 43). They have the devil as father and they do his wishes (v. 44).⁸ He was a murderer from the beginning⁹ and has never stood in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he utters a lie, he speaks out of his own resources because he is a liar and the father of lying.¹⁰

c. The Structure of the Argument in 8.38-47

Certainly the pattern of argument in 8.38-47 is not that found in the last section of the chapter (vv. 49-58) where the question is whether Jesus is greater than Abraham. Nor is the pattern that of the first part of the chapter (vv. 12-37) although at first glance it might appear to be. Throughout vv. 38-47 it is not a matter of having or not having a particular quality (as was the case in vv. 12-36); rather, it is matter of true dualism.

8. Grammatically this could read ‘you are of the father of the devil’ but this is not the sense intended. See the discussion in R Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* (3 vols.; New York: Crossroad, 1980–82), II, p. 213.

9. Some scholars think this reflects a tradition in the Palestinian Targum on Gen. 5.3 that the father of Cain was not Adam but the devil. See for example Brown, *Gospel*, I, p. 358. This line of argument has been extended by N. A. Dahl, ‘Der Erstgeborene Satans und der Vater des Teufels (Polyk. 7.1 und Joh. 8.44)’, in *Apophoreta* (ed. W. Eltester; BZNW 30; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1964), pp. 70–84, who attempted to argue that the father of all the Jews was Cain. Dahl’s position has not been widely accepted. See the survey of opinion and the response by G. Reim, ‘Joh 8.44—Gotteskinder/Teufelskinder: wie anti-Judaistisch ist “Die wohl anti-judaistischste äußerung des NT?”’, *NTS* 30 (1984), pp. 619–24. If the present study is correct, the fact that the passage employs a pattern of argument based on a stereotyped contrast of good and evil indicates that the search for any specific figure is misguided.

10. Literally the text reads ‘the father of it’ (ὁ πατήρ αὐτοῦ). This could mean either the father of ‘lying’ or the father of ‘the liar’. Because the context speaks of the origin of lying, the first meaning seems the more likely. If the second sense is taken, it would refer, not to the father of the devil, but to the devil as the father of a human being who lies. See e.g. Brown, *Gospel*, I, p. 358; E. Grässer, ‘Die Juden als Teufelssöhne in Johannes 8,37-42’, in *Antijudaismus im neuen Testament* (ed. W. P. Eckert, N. P. Levinson, and M. Stohr; Munich: Kaiser, 1967), pp. 157–70 (166); Schnackenburg, *Gospel*, II, p. 214. Because Jesus speaks the truth, they cannot hear him (v. 45). Jesus then challenges the opponents to say whether he speaks anything that is not true (v. 46). Then he explains a final time: the one who is of God hears the words of God; the reason you do not listen is because you are not of God (v. 47).

If we examine 8.38-47 more closely we find that there are five basic elements to the argument. First, there is a contrast of the sources of the actions (i.e., the 'fathers' in question). In this case the alternative sources are first posed as Abraham or the devil (vv. 39-41a). Yet, the alternatives rapidly change so that God or the devil become possible fathers (v. 41b).

Second, the principle is established that the child does the wishes of the father. This appears first in v. 38 ('I say those things which I have seen with the Father and you do those things which you have heard from your father').¹¹ In v. 39 the principle is even clearer: 'If you were children of Abraham, you would do the works of Abraham'. In 8.41 it is said of the opponents that they do the wishes of their father. Not only is the principle established, but twice the idiomatic expression 'to do the works of' one's father (ποιεῖτε τὰ ἔργα τοῦ πατρὸς) is used to express this principle (cf. v. 39, 41).¹² Third, after the principle of acting like one's father is stated, general actions characteristic of each group are named. Here the characteristics are associated with truth and with deceit. Jesus speaks the truth which he heard from his father; the opponents do not accept the truth because their father is the Liar and does not stand in truth.

Fourth, more specific actions are then identified which are associated with the general characteristics of truth and deceit and which are said to be typical of each father. Thus the opponents 'seek to kill' Jesus (v. 40a) just as the devil was 'a murderer from the beginning' (v. 44b). But as v. 42a says, 'If God were your father, you would love me'.

In this discourse the general notion of 'truth' also has a special importance since the overriding theme of the entire discourse is the response to the word of Jesus. The opponents refuse to accept the truth which Jesus has spoken and which he has heard from God (v. 40b); but the devil 'does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he utters a lie, he speaks from his own resources because he

11. There is actually some variation in that Jesus says that he 'speaks' what he has 'seen' but in the second part of the verse the principle is stated clearly in relation to the opponents.

12. This expression has also appeared in 3.19-21, 6.28-29, and 9.4-5. For a detailed discussion of this usage see U. C. von Wahlde, 'Faith and Works in Jn vi 28-29: Exegesis of Eisegeisis?', *NovT* 22 (1980), pp. 304-15; See also R. Bergmeier, 'Glaube als Werk? Die "Werke Gottes" in Damaskusschrift II, 14-15 und Johannes 6, 28-29', *RevQ* 6 (1967), pp. 253-60. This expression contrasts with the two other uses of ἔργον in the Gospel, where (1) it is used to refer to the task given Jesus by the Father (cf. 4.34, etc.) and (2) it is used to refer to the miracles of Jesus (cf. 5.35, etc.). For more detail see Brown, *Gospel*, I, pp. 526-7.

is a liar and the father of lying. Because I speak the truth you do not believe me... If I speak the truth why do you not believe me?' (vv. 44-45).

Fifth, in spite of the intensity of the accusations, it is evident that the dualism expressed is an ethical, or modified, dualism. This modified dualism is distinguished from the absolute dualism of Gnosticism by two features. First, the principle of evil is ultimately under the control of, or created by, God. Second, there is evidence that change from one orientation to the other is possible. In this passage, the two sets of parents are identified solely by the actions of those who are said to be the 'children'. Implicit in this is the conviction that the opponents could, if they wished, choose God as their father and could choose to do his works rather than those of the devil. This is also evident from the places elsewhere in the Gospel where the failure of the opponents to believe is referred to as sin (e.g. 8.24).

This pattern of argument can be summarized as:

1. The person's father is 'X' and is described as one of two dualistically distinct 'fathers.'
2. General statement: The person does the wishes ('will' or 'works') of the 'father'.
3. The *general* actions typical of the father are described (usually truthfulness or deceit).
4. *More specific* actions typical of the father are described and shown to be typical of the 'child'.
5. In spite of the dualism evident in the worldview, it is clear that the dualism is 'modified' ('apocalyptic').

4. Parallels to the Structure of 8.38-47 in Other Late Jewish and Early Christian Literature

It has often been observed in commentaries and in other literature on this passage that the language of 8.38-47 bears some similarity to that found in other types of late Second Temple Jewish literature, particularly the sectarian scrolls from Qumran.¹³ While this is true, there are also

13. Observations of commentators will be mentioned below. See also Porsch, 'Teufel'. Porsch's study is deficient in three respects. First, although Porsch speaks of an 'entscheidungs dualismus', he fails to distinguish the categories of this dualism of decision sufficiently clearly. First, while the opposition of light and darkness, truth and falsehood are characteristic of such dualism, the opposition between Spirit and Flesh is not (cf. 53). Second, Porsch reverses the sequence of the process that is envisioned in a dualism of decision when he says 'Der Ursprung bestimmt das

similarities in other literature, namely in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* and in one of the later Johannine works, the First Letter of John.

However, in addition to being more widespread than is commonly recognized, the similarities are also more extensive than has been recognized. These similarities are due to the presence of this larger pattern involving five distinct elements. This extended pattern of argument constitutes a literary *topos*, a stereotyped pattern of argument whereby two alternative ways of life and their characteristics and consequences are described within the categories and worldview of apocalyptic dualism.¹⁴ It is the point of this study that, in order to be properly understood, Jn 8.44 must be read against the background of this *topos*.

In what follows, I will examine passages in *three distinct types of documents from Second Temple Judaism* that exhibit the same type of dualistic argument found in Jn 8.38-47: (1) the Community Rule from Qumran (1QS 3.13-4.26); (2) the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (*T. Lev.* 3.3; 19.1; *T. Jud.* 18.1-19.4; 20.1-5; *T. Naph.* 2.3-3.1; *T. Ash.* 1.3-9); and (3) 1 Jn 2.29-3.10; 4.1-6.

Wesen und Tun' (p. 53). In a dualism of decision, one's actions (*Tun*) determines one's Being (*Wesen*) and one's origin (*Ursprung*). This second error is evidently due to the failure sufficiently to distinguish the true dualism since he links this dualism with being born of the Spirit or being born of the Flesh (i.e., whether one has the spirit or not). In ethical dualism, the contrast is not between being born of the spirit and being born of the flesh but rather regarding which spirit one has (the spirit of truth or the spirit of deception [see e.g. 1 Jn 4.1-6; 1QS *passim*]). Third, although Porsch notices the dualism, he does not discuss the parallels in the DSS or in the T12P and mentions only briefly '1 Jn 3,8-15 [*sic*]'.¹⁴

I. Broer, 'Die Juden im Urteil der Autoren des Neuen Testaments', *Theologie und Glaube* 82 (1992), pp. 2-33, mentions both the similarities in the scrolls and in the T12P but does not discuss them at length (cf. p. 17 n. 56). S. Pedersen, 'Anti-Judaism in John's Gospel: John 8', in *New Readings in John: Literary and Theological Perspectives: Essays from the Scandinavian Conference on the Fourth Gospel in Arhus 1997* (JSNTSup 182; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), pp. 172-93, although making reference to dualism of 8.12-59, does not distinguish true dualism from what I have called simple contrasts. Moreover Pedersen interprets the section as a whole in the light of a creation theology which he finds delineated in 1.1-18 and 20.30-31 as well as throughout this section.

14. M. Vellanickal, *The Divine Sonship of Christians in the Johannine Writings* (AnBib 72; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1977), p. 262, speaks of a 'criterion scheme' and a 'fruit scheme' in relation to 1 Jn 2.29-3.10, but this refers only to the basic relation between actions and sonship. It does not recognize the full pattern.

At times there is a fluidity in the construction of the argument, a fluidity that could mask the overall forms of argument, and so the detailed analysis is warranted. I am willing to risk the readers' boredom resulting from such detailed analysis because of the importance of the question whether this passage is anti-Jewish and/or anti-Semitic and because of the importance of what the analysis of these passages reveals in relation to that question, namely, that *the structure of the argument in Jn 8.38-47 is a stereotyped form of argument used within the worldview of apocalyptic dualism and should be interpreted as such rather than as specifically anti-Jewish or anti-Semitic rhetoric.*

a. Parallels in the Dualism of the Dead Sea Scrolls¹⁵

In the sectarian documents from Qumran, particularly in the Rule of the Community (1QS), we see an extended presentation of the five principles found in Jn 8.38-47. They are present most clearly and explicitly in 1QS 3.13-4.26.¹⁶

In 1QS, we find first the clear division of humanity into groups which have opposed leaders (the first of the characteristic features), a division identical in function to the contrast of fathers in John. For example, in 1QS 2.1-4 we find a contrast between 'the men of God's lot' and 'all the

15. The sectarian scrolls from Qumran have a *terminus ante quem* of AD 70. But almost all scholars agree that they were composed considerably earlier. For example, F. M. Cross has dated 1QS to the Hasmonean period on the basis of paleography. Composition may have been in the first half of the second century BC. The text used here is from J. Charlesworth (ed.), with F. M. Cross, J. Milgrom, E. Qimron, L. H. Schiffman, L. T. Stuckenbruck, and R. E. Witaker, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English Translations* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994-95).

16. Numerous scholars have pointed to similarities in the Qumran documents. The most complete study is that of Bücher, *Johanneische Dualismus*, esp. pp. 72-133. In addition to Bücher, the most extensive discussion of the dualism of 1QS is in P. von der Osten-Sacken, *Gott und Belial. Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zum Dualismus in den Texten aus Qumran* (SUNT 6; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969). Von der Osten-Sacken does not discuss the parallels in the Gospel of John or in 1 John, but mentions only Jn 12.31 and various passages of the Apocalypse (see p. 264). See also Brown, 'The Qumran Scrolls', pp. 138-73; *idem*, *Gospel*, p. 365; Grässer, 'Teufelssöhne', p. 164; Motyer, *Father*, pp. 186-7; Schnackenburg, *Gospel*, II, p. 215. However, none of these recognizes the full pattern of the argument. Schnackenburg lists other texts which reflect this worldview (i.e., *Jub.* 15.26, 33; 1QS 1.10; IQM 13.11-12; 4Qflor 1.8-9). 1QS 3.13-4.26 is the fullest elaboration of the pattern. Various of these scholars also call attention to similarities in the T12P.

men of the lot of Belial'.¹⁷ In 1QS 3.20–4.1 the opposing principles are identified as two spirits that God has placed within man so that he would walk with them until the moment of his visitation, namely the spirits of truth and of deceit.¹⁸ The Prince of Lights has dominion over the sons of justice; and the Angel of Darkness makes the sons of justice stray.

The image of 'sonship' is the typical term for the members of these two groups. For example, we read of 'sons of justice' (1QS 3.20, 22), 'sons of light' (1QS 3.24, 25), and 'sons of truth' (1QS 4.5, 6). These are contrasted with the 'sons of deceit' (1QS 3.21).

In 1QS two terms are used to describe the actions typical of the two groups (the second of the features typical of such an argument). The author asserts (3.20-21) the 'sons of justice' 'walk on the paths of light' whereas 'the sons of deceit' 'walk on the paths of darkness'. In 3.25 we are told that 'every deed' is associated either with the spirit of light or the spirit of darkness. In 3.26–4.1 we read that 'god loves the one without end and delights in its works forever; the advice of the other one he despises and hates its ways forever'. These expressions are functionally identical with the expressions in the Gospel of John, and are verbally quite similar to the notion in the Gospel of the children of God doing the wishes of God.

This notion of choosing what is pleasing to God is also taken up in CD 2.14-16 where we find an exact verbal parallel to the idiomatic 'works of God' as found in the Gospel.

And now, O sons, listen to me and I shall open your eyes so that you can see and understand the works of God in order that you can choose what he wishes and reject what he hates, so you can walk perfectly on all his paths and not wander after the thoughts of a guilty inclination and lustful eyes.

In all these cases, 'works' does not refer to works of the Law in a legalistic sense but is parallel with 'that which pleases Him'. These are the actions which are typical of, or pleasing to, God (or the devil).¹⁹

17. As Grässer ('Teufelssöhne', pp. 164–5) points out there is no clear evidence in the Qumran scrolls of references directly to people having Satan as 'father'. However, I would not judge the absence of an exact verbal parallel to be significant since it is clear that the basic issue is of one's ultimate allegiance to God or to Belial.

18. The notion of two 'spirits' within individuals which affect their actions is also evident in 1 John (see below) and is implicitly present in the Gospel where the Paraclete is referred to as 'the Spirit of Truth'. Consequently there is no opposition between systems which speak of opposing 'fathers' and of opposing 'spirits'. See further below.

19. Of course there is a deeper sense in which what is pleasing to God is thought to be expressed in the Law, but it is not 'the works of the Law' that are being spoken

Returning to the passage of 1QS referred to above, we see the third of the characteristic features: that those who follow the Prince of Lights are associated with truth and justice. They are called ‘sons of truth’ (4.6) and walk on ‘the path of truth’ (4.2). And they are called ‘sons of justice’ (3.20) and walk on ‘the path of justice’ (4.2). Undoubtedly the references to truth are intended to characterize the *beliefs* of the group while justice is intended to characterize their *actions*.²⁰

In 1QS those who follow the Angel of Darkness are called ‘sons of deceit’ (3.21) and ‘all their sins, their iniquities, their failings and their mutinous deeds are under his dominion’ (3.22); they represent a failure to serve justice (4.9). This usage is closely paralleled in Jn 8.38-47, where the focus had been on the acceptance of the words of Jesus (i.e., belief) and the children of God are characterized repeatedly by their acceptance of truth and the children of the devil by their refusal of the truth.

In 1QS 4.2-8 the author then gives an extended description of the specific qualities of the ones who walk in the path of justice and truth (as well as their final reward, the fourth characteristic feature).

And these are their paths in the world: to illumine the heart of man, make straight before him all the paths of true righteousness, establish in his heart the fear of the ordinances of God... These are the principles of the spirit for the sons of truth in the world. And the visitation of all those who walk in it will be healing, bountiful peace in a long life, fruitful offspring with all everlasting blessing, eternal joy with endless life.

Then, in 4.9-14, the qualities of those led by the spirit of deceit are specified along with the final judgment.

However these are the ways of the spirit of deceit: greed, slackness in the service of justice, wickedness and lies... And the visitation of those who walk in this spirit will be a horde of punishments at the hand of all the angels of destruction.

Above, two criteria were suggested for identifying modified dualism and constitute the fifth characteristic feature in 8.38-47. Both of those are found in 1QS. For example it is clear that both of the spirits are not

of here. Because of the stereotyped nature of this expression, I would be reluctant to argue that the author had some particular ‘work’ of Abraham in mind (*pace* Motyer, *Father*, pp. 190–1).

20. Schnackenburg (*Gospel*, II, p. 215) observes that the dualism of Qumran is almost exclusively manifested as a dualism between truth and lies. Among the examples of this contrast between truth and lies, Schnackenburg gives 1QpHab 2.2; 5.11; CD 20.15; 1QH 1.26-27; 2.13-14; 4.10. This is only partially true, however, since there are repeated references to the importance of correct actions also.

absolute but under God's ultimate control. 1QS 3.15 states: 'from the God of knowledge comes all there is and all there shall be'. 1QS 3.17-18 states: 'he created man to rule the world and put within him two spirits to walk with them until the moment of his visitation: they are the spirits of truth and of deceit'. 1QS 3.25 states: 'he created the spirits of light and of darkness and on them established all his actions'.

At Qumran it is possible to move from the influence of one spirit to the other. This is evident from texts such as 1QS 4.19 ('God will refine, with his truth, all man's deeds, and will purify for himself the configuration of man ripping out all spirit of deceit from the innermost part of his flesh, and cleaning him with the spirit of holiness from every irreverent deed'). Moreover, according to 1QS 5.21, when a person entered the community, the individual was tested 'with respect to his insight and to his deeds in law'. Each year the member was tested again: 'and their spirit and their deeds must be tested, year after year, in order to upgrade each one to the extent of his insight and the perfection of his path, or to demote him according to his failings' (5.24). These statements, together with the repeated references to a future judgment, clearly indicate that the individual's lot is not fixed but can improve or deteriorate.

Thus we see in 1QS, the Rule of the Community, a very clear parallel with the pattern of argument evident in Jn 8.38-47 except that it is present in a more expanded form. That they reflect the same worldview is evident.

b. Parallels in the Dualism of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (T12P)

This same modified dualism is also present in the T12P and is expressed by means of the same five-fold pattern as above, although the pattern is not as condensed as it is in 1QS.²¹ Nevertheless, even when dispersed, the consistency of the similarities confirms that the author is aware of a stereotyped pattern even though he is more flexible in the way he employs it.²²

In the T12P, there is repeated mention of the same two contrasting principles: the spirit of truth and the spirit of deception (the first feature characteristic of such argument). Thus in *T. Jud.* 20.1-5 we see:

21. This variation is probably due to the influence of Hellenistic philosophy (esp. Stoicism) on the T12P as a whole. See for example H. C. Kee's Introduction in *OTP*. For further discussion of the similarities between the structure of the argument in 1QS and in the T12P, see von der Osten-Sacken, *Gott und Belial*, pp. 200-205.

22. The examples from the T12P will be treated together since, in spite of the format of several testaments, they are in fact a single work.

Be aware, My children, that two spirits influence humanity, the spirit of truth and the spirit of deception. And in the middle is the mind's discrimination of toward which spirit it may wish to incline. Indeed both things of truth and of deception are written in the heart of humanity. And the Lord knows each one of them. And there is no time in which the deeds of a person are able to be hidden because they are written in the depths of the heart in the presence of the Lord. And the spirit of truth witnesses to all and accuses all and the one who has sinned is on fire in his heart and is not able to raise his face before the judge.

In *T. Ash.* 1.3-9 we see a similar pattern, but the spirits appear more as inclinations than at Qumran, although it is clear that the root of these inclinations remain God and Belial, the evil spirit.

God gave two paths to the sons of men and two ways of thinking and two actions and two models and two goals. Because of this all things are opposed, the one against the other. There are two paths: of good and of evil. In these there are two ways of thinking in our hearts, discriminating them. If the soul inclines to the good, its every deed is done in justice and if it sins, immediately it repents. For it thinks good things and immediately rejects evil and roots out sin. If its way of thinking inclines toward evil, its every deed is done in evil and driving away good, it welcomes evil and is lorded over by Beliar, and if it does good, it turns it into evil. For whenever it begins to do good, it makes the effort to turn the purpose of the deed to evil since all his way of thinking is filled with an evil spirit.²³

We see in *T. Naph.* 2.6–3.1 a number of references occurring in close proximity, all of which present the 'two ways', the two choices of the dualistic thought-world. For example, *T. Naph.* 2.6 reads, 'As is his intention, so also is his accomplishment; as is his heart, so is his speech; as is his eye, so is his sleep; as is his soul, so also is his plan, whether on the Law of the Lord or on the law of Beliar'.

As can be seen from the examples above, not all descriptions of the actions which follow from one's orientation (i.e., the second feature of such argument) are described as 'the works of'. At times the descriptions are more general, as was the case in *T. Jud.* 20.1-5 and *T. Ash.* 1.3-9. However something very close to the idiom appears in *T. Naph.* 2.10 where we read,

If you tell the eye to hear, it is not able; so you are, while you are in darkness, unable to perform the works of light. Do not be eager to corrupt your actions through greediness or to deceive your souls with empty phrases, because those who keep silent in cleanness of heart will be known to hold tight to God's will and to turn away the will of the devil.

23. See also *T. Ash.* 6.2.

In *T. Lev.* 19.1, the meaning and the dualistic context are just as clear and the exact expression appears: 'And now, my children, you have heard everything. Choose for yourself either the darkness or the light, the Law of the Lord or the works of Beliar.'

In every case the context and the language are clearly dualistic. Both the images of light and darkness and the choice of 'that which pleases the Lord' and the 'works of Beliar' are also contrasted. Again it is clear that 'works' of Beliar does not have a legalistic sense but refers to actions which would be considered typical of or desired by Beliar.

Here we call attention to the complex of basic terms associated with each of the opposed groups and the general description of their characteristic actions (the third characteristic feature). Although the T12P is a single work, its division into 'testaments' means that we do not find the complete schema in each testament, but rather find elements distributed throughout the entire work. In *T. Jud.* 20.1-5 we get a brief statement of what might be called the basic paradigm: the spirits are spirits of 'truth' (20.1) and the deeds in their hearts are 'of truth' (20.3). The evil spirit is a spirit of 'deception' (20.1) and leads one to sin (20.5).

In *T. Lev.* the scheme is more diffuse but still discernible. In *T. Lev.* 3.3 the author speaks of the 'day of judgment on the spirits of deception and of Beliar'. Thus deception is associated with Beliar as is darkness and sin. The author does not speak explicitly of the spirit of truth although in 18.11 we hear of the 'spirit of holiness'. In 18.2 we hear of the 'judgment of truth'. In 19.1 the basic choice is presented: 'light or darkness, the law of the Lord or the works of Beliar'.

In *T. Naph.* elements of the schema are also apparent. The author speaks of the choice again between 'the Law of the Lord or the law of Beliar' (2.6; 3.2) and the difference between light and darkness (2.7) and speaking of the inability to do the 'works of light while you are in darkness'.

In *T. Ash.* the two ways open to humanity are described in pairs. As the author says, 'everything is in pairs' (1.4). The deeds of the one under the dominion of Beliar are sinful (1.8-9). Sinful persons 'seek to please Beliar' (3.2). But the good are those who stay away from 'those things which God hates' (4.5).

In the four Testaments that we have examined (*T. Lev.*; *T. Jud.*; *T. Naph.*; *T. Ash.*), the specific actions typical of each spiritual orientation are described, some at considerable length but in a variety of formats. These descriptions do not take the form of the 'lists' that we saw in 1QS but at the same time they are as extensive.

In *T. Lev.* 14.4-5 the evils are associated with the history of Israel: the people will be darkened with impiety and will destroy the 'light of the Law', teaching commandments contrary to those of God, stealing the offerings made to the Lord. But the Lord will have compassion and will restore the nation and there will be a jubilee of seventy weeks and in each will be a priest who will restore the actions of the nation (*T. Lev.* 17-18). While these comments are similar to the more traditional description of the 'two ways',²⁴ the references to the role of controlling spirits locate it within the realm of apocalyptic dualism. So also in *T. Naph.* 3.1-4.5 there is a list of specific evils and their proper counterpart.

After the description of the two inclinations in *T. Ash.* 1.3-9, the remainder of the Testament focuses on an extended description of the good and evil actions which are to be imitated and avoided. The same is true of *T. Jud.* 18.1-19.4. Although they are expressed somewhat more generally than in John or in 1QS, the actions are clearly described.

Finally both characteristics of modified dualism are evident in the T12P (the fifth element). Both inclinations are said to be ultimately under the control of God and there is no thought of an absolute dualism. This is patently clear in *T. Naph.* 2.2: 'for as the potter knows the capacity of the vessel...so the Lord makes the body in a way appropriate to the spirit... There is nothing made and no thought which the Lord did not know for he created every person according to his image.'

That a person can change his/her allegiance is clear from the exhortation in *T. Naph.* 2.9-10: 'so, my children, be oriented toward God in your action, in fear of God and do nothing in an undisciplined way nor at the proper time. Because if you tell your eye to hear, it cannot. In the same way, while you are in darkness you are not able to do the works of light.'²⁵ In *T. Lev.* there is a heavenly journey granted to Levi (2.6-3.10) in which he learns the secrets of the heavens. He sees the armies of spirits ready 'for the day of judgment upon the spirits of deception and of Beliar'. Moreover the mention of imminent judgment (4.1) attests to the responsibility of 'the sons of men' for their actions. In 19.1 Levi's exhortation to choose either light or darkness also clearly attests to the conviction that one's orientation is not pre-determined. Although

24. Texts such as Deut. 30.15 ('I have put before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity') present options open to humanity and are often referred to as 'two ways' exhortation (cf. also Josh. 24.15; Jer. 21.8-14). However, those instances are not cast within the apocalyptic worldview. The difference in the passages under discussion is that there is present the conviction that the inclination to a given way is influenced by the presence of certain spiritual forces stemming from either God or Satan.

25. See also *T. Naph.* 2.10 quoted above.

T. Jud. does not discuss the origin of the two spirits, there is no reason to suspect that the spirits of truth and error are independent of God and the repeated exhortations to correct conduct (cf. 13.1–17.6; 18.2; 19.4) indicate the freedom to choose which marks modified dualism.

c. Parallels in the Dualism of 1 John

The Importance of Passages in 1 John. Although 1 John comes from the same tradition as the Gospel, it is generally recognized to come from a different author and to address a considerably different social situation. Consequently the appearance of the stereotyped pattern in 1 John can be said to constitute another independent example of the pattern. In 1 John there are in fact two instances of the paradigm. The first appears in 1 Jn 2.29–3.10; the second in 4.1–6.

Parallels in the Dualism of 1 John 2.29–3.10. In the first epistolary passage the same conviction regarding the opposing sources of one's actions is evident as in the previous examples (the first feature). It is expressed in three related ways: (1) being 'of' God (3.9) or the devil (3.8); being a 'child' of God (3.1, 2, 10) or the devil (3.10); and (3) being 'born' of God (3.9) or the devil (2.29). At the very end of the Johannine passage there is an explicit statement of this principle: 'in this are revealed the children of God and the children of the devil' (3.10).

The exact phrase 'to do the works of' in the idiomatic sense of doing what is pleasing to someone (i.e., the second feature characteristic of this mode of argument) does not appear in 1 Jn 2.29–3.10. Yet is clear that certain works are in fact characteristic both of the child of God and the child of the devil. Rather the author moves directly to a discussion of the actions typical of each group.

In 1 John the actions typical of the child of God (the third characteristic feature) are described in terms almost identical to those found in 1QS where the proper actions are said to be done in truth and justice. In 1 Jn 2.29–3.10, the focus is entirely on doing justice. In his exposition the author had begun from the point of view of the one who 'does justice' and said that that person was born of God (2.29). The child of God does justice (3.7) and does not do lawlessness or sin (3.9). The child of the devil does lawlessness and does sin (3.4, 8) and in turn that person does not do justice (3.10). The contrast in these characteristics is eminently clear.

In 1 Jn 2.29–3.10 there is relatively little mention of specific actions (the fourth characteristic feature) when compared with the previous parallels. But this is in keeping with the overall orientation of 1 John which focuses on two basic issues: the importance of proper confession

of the role of Jesus and the need to love one another (cf. esp. 3.23).²⁶ The single all-encompassing commandment of proper action for the Johannine tradition is ‘love of one another’. In this context, it follows that the one basic specification of ‘not doing justice’ would be ‘not loving his brother’. And that is what we find in 3.10!

The ethical nature of the dualism in 1 John (the fifth characteristic) is not immediately clear from 2.29–3.10 itself. Yet it becomes abundantly clear from the larger context. The mention of the second coming of Jesus (2.28; 3.1), of a final judgment (2.18, 28; 4.17), and of the necessity of proper ethical action (1.6, 8; 2.4; 3.11–18; 4.7), as well as the fact that persons must strive to make themselves holy as he is holy (3.3), all testify to the underlying conviction that this dualism is not absolute.

What is evident in 1 Jn 2.29–3.10 is that the pattern has been adapted to the needs of the author’s particular situation. Rather than begin with the principle of the two sources of action, he ends with it. In addition, as we have seen earlier the author of the Gospel adapted the paradigm to its Gospel context by beginning with a reference to the fatherhood of Abraham but then switching to the traditional contrast of God and the devil. Here the traditional contrast between the children of God and the devil is evident but its working out is modified by the addition of references to the work of Jesus (cf. 3.2b–3, 5–6, 8b). These additions are of course not paralleled in the traditional paradigm. While the additions are understandable in the light of the author’s intention to affirm Jesus’ role against the opponents, their presence had undoubtedly made recognition of the underlying pattern of argument more difficult.

Parallels in the Dualism of 1 John 4.1–6. In this passage the author makes use of the same paradigm but uses it somewhat differently. Again rather than beginning with a presentation of the schema, he seeks to raise for the reader the issue of opposing spirits. This is due to the fact that, although his community was divided, both factions claimed to have received the eschatological spirit. In the face of this, the author wishes to remind his reader that not every spirit is from God. Consequently he calls attention to how one can identify the different spirits.

In 1 Jn 4.1–6 the contrast is between opposing spirits (i.e., the first feature of the form of argument). But the precise nature of the spirits is

26. This is the position taken by a number of scholars. See for example Brown, *Epistles*, pp. 71–85. It is precisely correct belief (the proper understanding of the role of Jesus) and correct action (proper ethics) that are the object of the ‘commandments’ here and throughout the Johannine tradition. For further detail on this, see von Wahlde, *The Johannine Commandments*.

not identified until the end. When they appear (v. 6), exactly the same titles are used as in 1QS and the T12P: the Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Deception. Moreover the relation between the Spirit of Truth and God himself is also explicit in 4.2 where it is identified as being the Spirit of God. The opposing spirit is said not to be of God but of the Antichrist (4.3).

There is no explicit discussion of the second element of the stereotyped structure (i.e., 'doing the works of the devil'), although it is certainly implicit in what follows.

The general characteristics of each group (the third element of the structure) are only touched on. The spirit that is not of God is said to be the spirit of the Antichrist who is in the world. The followers of this spirit are characterized as false prophets (v. 1), as belonging to the world (v. 4), and as 'of the world' (v. 5). They speak 'out of the world' (i.e., from the world's point of view) and the world hears them (v. 5). Those who are of the Spirit of Truth do the opposite, in particular the one who knows God listens to the author and his followers (v. 6a).

When he turns to specific characteristics (the fourth element), the author focuses on one issue: every spirit which confesses Jesus Christ come in the flesh is of God (v. 2) and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God (v. 3). Thus here, where the focus is on truth (rather than on doing justice), the issue is correct belief (rather than correct action). Consequently we see that although the discussion of specifics is limited, it is fully appropriate to the paradigm.

Finally, as was the case with 1 Jn 2.29–3.10, the passage is so short that the nature of the dualism (the fifth element) is not immediately clear. However, as was seen above, the overall context of the Letter makes it abundantly clear that the dualism of the Letter is apocalyptic (modified) rather than absolute.

d. The Importance of These Parallels and Their Relationship to John 8.38-47

From our review of the paradigms of apocalyptic polemic in 1QS, the T12P, and 1 John, we are able to draw several observations helpful for the proper understanding of Jn 8.38-47.²⁷

27. It should be noted that a number of scholars see no problem of anti-Judaism in the verses at all since they interpret them in the light of 8.31 which they understand to refer not to 'Jews' (either common people or authorities) but to believers who have failed to continue in belief. The present discussion prescind from that question in order to face the text in its most difficult interpretation.

First, what is apparent in all of these cases is that the argument constitutes a literary *topos*, a pattern of polemical argument, cast within an apocalyptic worldview, in which the author and his opponents are shown to have contrasting origins and that these origins are evident in the actions of each group. In all of the instances, a basic choice is presented either to follow God or to follow the devil.

Second, in spite of its overall consistency, it is clear that there is some flexibility in the articulation of the pattern. As we have seen, not all elements of the pattern are always present. The most extensive presentation is in 1QS. In T12P, although some passages (e.g. *T. Jud.* 20.1-5) clearly intend to present the basic pattern, the development of the pattern is less extensive. Moreover the opposing principles can be described either as opposed spirits, or as God and the devil themselves. But, as we saw above, these two ways of expressing the dualism are functionally synonymous. In 1QS 2.1-4, persons belong either to the lot of God or the lot of Belial and are later (1QS 3.19) said to follow either the Spirit of Truth or the Spirit of Deception. In *T. Lev.* 3.3 we see the expression ‘the spirits of deception and of Beliar’. This is hendiadys and identifies the spirits of deception with the spirits of Beliar. Early in *T. Jud.*, in 2.6 and 3.4, we see the basic choice between ‘the Law of the Lord or the law of Beliar’. Later (*T. Jud.* 20.1-5) these choices are described as between ‘the spirits of truth’ and ‘the spirits of deception’.

The identification is even clearer in 1 John where the same Spirit is said to be ‘of God’ in 4.2 and ‘of Truth’ in 4.6. The same is evident in the Gospel of John although it is less explicit. In 8.38-47 the opposites are described as God and the devil. But in the Paraclete passages, where the Spirit given to the disciples is identified as the Spirit of Truth (15.26; 16.13), its opposite, the Spirit of Deception, is implicitly present.

Third, the use made of the paradigm in 1QS and the T12P is slightly different from its use in the Gospel and in the first epistle of John. In 1QS and the T12P, the polemic is used to describe general options for life; in the Gospel and epistles of John the polemic is brought to bear on specific issues. In the Gospel it is used to explain the failure to listen to Jesus, to accept his word, and to believe in him. In 1 John it is used to explain the fact that the opponents do not love the brothers (3.10) or confess that Jesus has come in the flesh (4.3).

Fourth, that the author of the Fourth Gospel recognizes, and intends to make use of, this pattern is evident from the fact that immediately after beginning the discussion in 8.38, he switches from speaking of children ‘of Abraham’ versus children of the devil to speaking of children ‘of God’ versus children of the devil. Thus after beginning the argument in a way consistent with the surrounding context, the author alters his

argument in order to accommodate the standard format of the apocalyptic alternatives.²⁸

Fifth within the context of the Gospel as a whole it is important to recognize that the author of the Gospel is also capable of presenting choices non-dualistically. In ch. 9, a discussion arises between the man born blind and the Pharisees. In the course of the debate, the Pharisees argue: 'you are a disciple of this man; we are disciples of Moses'. This is not the same sort of pattern. Although two alternatives are present, they are not dualistic. Thus the differences between the two instances help confirm the dualistic pattern in 8.38-47.

Sixth, our study suggests that those presented as opponents in such polemic need not always be a specific historical group. In the case of its use at Qumran, it would seem that no specific group of opponents is intended. The same would seem to be true of the T12P. In both instances, the wider context suggests that the purpose is general exhortation.²⁹ But general exhortation need not always be the case. In 1 John the opponents are specifically identified as those who hold opinions different from those of the author.³⁰ In the Gospel, it would seem that a specific group is also intended: those who rejected Jesus during his ministry and who oppose the beliefs of the Johannine community at the time of the Gospel.

5. The Social Situation of Such Polemic and the Meaning of John 8.38-47

Our review of the parallels to Jn 8.38-47 also enables us to make several observations specific to the meaning of Jn 8.38-47 and the question of anti-Judaism in the text.

28. Schnackenburg (*Gospel*, II, p. 211) finds this shift problematic: 'This change of subject from descent from Abraham to descent from God is abrupt. Ought we to assume that the following section really belongs in another place and was placed here by the editors?... Or is the abrupt transition to be explained by the literary technique the Evangelist adopts to lead up to the charge of descent from the devil?' Recognizing the presence of the apocalyptic paradigm solves the problem posed by Schnackenburg since it becomes clear that the sudden shift is dictated by the form of the stereotyped paradigm.

29. We do know that the Teacher of Righteousness was in conflict with someone referred to as the Wicked Priest. This is associated with the fact that the community stood in opposition to the ruling authorities in Jerusalem, but this dated from an earlier time. See VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), pp. 101-4. However, there is no evidence that the opposition expressed in IQS 3.13-4.26 is intended to refer specifically to the Wicked Priest / Man of Lies.

30. Note that it is said that they *went out* from us. This is not the same situation as that of the Johannine community at its earlier stage when they *were expelled*.

First, it should be apparent that it is wrong to describe the type of argument used in Jn 8.38-47 as ‘Johannine polemic’. R. E. Brown used this phrase to describe the argument of Jn 8.38-47 and saw a reflection and imitation of it in 1 Jn 2.29-3.10.³¹ However, the pattern of argument in 8.38-47 is not a Johannine invention; it is a stereotyped form of argument which had a much wider social location in the first century than the Johannine community.

Second, it would also be wrong to describe the polemic of 8.38-47 as a Christian invention. The polemic is first evident in Jewish literature of the second century BC and in at least two distinct social settings (i.e., the Essene community at Qumran as well as the [Jewish] community responsible for the T12P).

Third, the polemic itself cannot be said to be inherently anti-Jewish. Indeed it is precisely a Jewish invention. Rather than being anti-Jewish, the polemic is ‘anti-opposition’. It characterized two alternative ways of life: one holy and faithful to God and one perceived as sinful. It was a way of describing what was seen by the author as a sinful alternative to the way of life he was proposing. In 8.38-47 the author believes that ‘the Jews’ are guilty of sin and of not being faithful to God, but he is not anti-Jewish.

Fourth, when Christians used it, they were not saying anything about Jews (e.g. in Jn 8.38-47) that Jews did not say about their fellow Jews (e.g. in 1QS 3.14-4.23; *T. Lev.*, *T. Jud.*, *T. Lev.*, *T. Ash.*) or that they did not say about their fellow Christians (1 Jn 2.29-3.10; 4.1-6). The same pattern and the same intensity of polemic is evident in all of these cases.

Fifth, the first-century reader who heard (or read) the author of the Gospel of John say to his opponents ‘you are of your father the devil’ would not understand it as an expression created by the author nor as an expression of invective with a unique degree of animosity, hostility, and bitterness. Rather, he/she would take it in the context of other uses of such polemic. It was an expression of strong and sincere conviction that the opponents were doing evil and that they were not faithful to God (to whom in all cases they claimed to be faithful).

Sixth, there is no evidence in the parallels that the purpose of this polemical *topos* was to appeal to the opponents for a change of heart. This is certainly the case in 1QS. It is also true of T12P inasmuch as, since there is no specific opponent being addressed, there would be no opponent to be converted. It is also the case in 1 John where the argument is clearly an exhortation to the author’s followers to remain

31. Brown, *Epistles*, pp. 92-3.

faithful to the tradition as he understands it. It is said that these opponents have already gone out, and that they were never 'of us'. This would seem to be a significant argument against the position of Motyer who argues that the polemic of ch. 8 is intended to appeal to and to convert 'the Jews' so that they will be saved from the state described.³² Given the nature of apocalyptic dualism, the reader would see that the opponent *could* be converted, but the purpose of the polemic was to exhort and to strengthen the author's followers rather than to convert others.

6. The Real Issue in 8.38-47

Once the rhetorical methods and purposes of 8.38-47 have been understood, we may return to the text to look with a fresher eye at the basic meaning of the passage. What we find is ultimately a simpler message, one devoid of the false starts due to a misperception of its true nature.

In 8.38-47, the real issue is the failure to respond positively to Jesus. According to Jesus, as the author portrays him, 'the Jews' seek to kill Jesus (v. 40); they do not love him (v. 42); they do not 'know' his speech and are not able to hear his word (v. 43); Jesus speaks the truth and they do not believe him (v. 45); Jesus is not sinful but speaks the truth (v. 47). The author believes that, by failing to respond positively to Jesus, the opponents are failing to respond properly to God. But if one fails to respond to God, then one is responding to and following evil, and the source of that evil is the devil.

Attention has been repeatedly called to the fact that the worldview of Jn 8.38-47 is that of modified dualism. It is important to recognize this because the harshness of the Johannine expression is due to the fact that while it is cast in dualistic language, it is generally heard by listeners who do not possess a dualistic mentality. Without awareness of the differences inherent in these two worldviews, significant misunderstanding is possible.

In non-dualistic rhetoric, the evil that one's opponents do can be expressed in a variety of ways, and degrees of evil can be recognized.³³ Consequently, to say in such non-dualistic speech that one's opponents are children of the devil is to make an extreme statement, readily recognized as the ultimate and most damning of a long series of possibilities. It is to associate one's opponents with the very source of all evil.

32. Motyer, *Father*, pp. 197-8.

33. The same would be true of the description of the goodness or holiness of those praised by the author.

However, in dualistic language such a range of expression is not open to the writer. There are only two possibilities: to be a child of God or a child of the devil. In such a framework, to say that a person is a child of the devil contains none of the connotations present in the other worldview; it is simply ‘the other option’.

In essence, then, the statement of Jn 8.44 simply restates the basic conviction that, because his opponents do not accept what he has to say, they are doing wrong. When he says that they are not of God, that they are not of the truth, that they are followers of the father of lies, he is using a series of categories which his reader would immediately recognize as a standard type of apocalyptic argument.³⁴ The reader would certainly understand that the writer recognized the other group as an opponent and was accusing them of doing evil. They would also recognize that the argument had no more hostility to it than any other argument cast in apocalyptic polemic.

7. Is John 8.38-47 Anti-Jewish?

Is 8.38-47 anti-Jewish? No, not from the author’s point of view. Just the opposite. The author’s interest is precisely in what he sees as true Judaism. From his point of view, it is precisely his opponents who are not being true sons of Abraham (or of God).³⁵ The author is not saying that the Jewish perspective is wrong; he is saying that his opponents do not have the true Jewish perspective!³⁶ As much as the author’s opponents would have disagreed with him then and as much as the Jews disagreed with Jesus before him, the author was not anti-Jewish. Such a charge would have been unthinkable to the author—and, I suspect, unthinkable to his original opponents.

34. F. Porsch (‘Teufel’, p. 53) is wrong to state that ‘Der Ursprung bestimmt das Wesen und Tun’. This reverses the actual process and in fact describes the basic viewpoint of Gnosticism. In modified dualism it is one’s actions that determine one’s ‘sonship’. Yet later (p. 54) Porsch does speak of the ability to move from one realm to the other.

35. Brown (*Gospel*, I, pp. 361–2) sees 8.38-47 as a continuation of the argument that started in 8.31 and considered those addressed to be Jewish Christians of inadequate faith. Thus it is those ‘Jews’ who believed in him in 8.31 who are the recipients of this harsh-sounding polemic. Thus Brown would argue that it is not ‘all Jews’ who are addressed in 8.38-47.

36. See for example Jn 7.19: ‘Did not Moses give you the Law? Yet none of you keeps the Law.’

The Gospel was born in a context in which there were opposing points of view on the true meaning and future of the Jewish tradition. Within this period, what is now referred to as 'Johannine Christianity' should perhaps be more correctly referred to as 'Johannine Judaism'. That is, the Johannine community represented a group, Jewish by birth and by choice, a group which had, until just recently, lived and worshipped within the synagogue. It was a tradition that was developed among followers of Jesus who were ethnically Jewish. They did not reject the synagogue (i.e., 'Judaism'); the synagogue rejected them. They would have said the synagogue was wrong but they would not have said that Judaism was wrong.³⁷

8. Why Call These Opponents 'the Jews'?

'The Jews' of the Gospel of John are certainly a group with authority in religious matters. But more specifically the Greek term Ἰουδαῖοι could mean what English refers to as 'Jews' and also 'Judeans'³⁸ referring to 'those in Judea', i.e. the religious authorities in Jerusalem with whom the Johannine community saw themselves in conflict and who were ultimately responsible for the exclusion of the Johannine community from the synagogue. In this sense, their situation would have been not unlike that of the community who settled at Qumran after it had experienced conflict with authoritative Jewish groups in Jerusalem.

9. The *Wirkungsgeschichte* of John 8.38-47

The history of the interpretation of Jn 8.38-47 is all too well known. It is a painful and embarrassing history. It is a history which the churches must face and must change for the future. But at the same time the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the passage must be distinguished from the passage's original meaning as it can be historically reconstructed. We do no justice to early Christianity or to the author(s) of the Gospel or to Christianity itself if we fail to do this, for it seems that our sins were not their sins.

37. This is a position very similar to that of M. de Jonge, 'The Conflict Between Jesus and the Jews and the Radical Christology of the Fourth Gospel', *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 20 (1993), pp. 341-55 (355).

38. Among the many studies which point this out see M. Lowe, 'Who Were the *Ioudaioi*', *NovT* 17 (1975), pp. 101-30; U. C. von Wahlde, 'The Johannine "Jews": A Critical Survey', *NTS* 28 (1982), pp. 33-60; J. Ashton, 'The Identity and Function of the *Ioudaioi* in the Fourth Gospel', *NTS* 21 (1985), pp. 40-75.

Chapter 10

HELLENISTIC JUDAISM AND THE PROLOGUE OF JOHN'S GOSPEL

1. Introduction

Hellenism is the name given to the culture that was spread throughout the ancient world in the wake of the conquests of Alexander the Great.¹ Hellenism was generally a mixture of Greek culture, language, and philosophy with the cultures indigenous to the various areas where Hellenism spread.² It was not just a matter of Greek influence on the East, but the intermixing of various native, Eastern cultures with that of the Greeks. Yet when it comes to the relation between Greek and Jewish culture, there was a greater influence of Greek culture on Jewish than the reverse.

Here we are not concerned with all aspects of Hellenism but only with the influence of Hellenistic culture on Jewish religious literature. The influence of Greek thought on Judaism is evident in two ways. First, there are documents among Jewish religious literature that manifest similarities to Greek literary genres. Among the early examples of such literature are Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes. However, later, additional works of Wisdom literature, including Sirach, the Wisdom of Solomon, and Baruch show even more similarities to Greek thought. Most of these exhibit functional similarities to some elements of the Logos as it appears in the Johannine Prologue. These include being present at the creation of the world, dwelling with humanity, and rejection by humanity.

1. Not all scholars find this term helpful. S. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishna* (LEC 7; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1987), pp. 35–7, finds the term too vague to refer to ‘the Judaism of the diaspora from that of Palestine and the Judaism of Greek-speaking Jewish from that of Hebrew- and Aramaic-speaking Jesus’. However, that distinction also seems to have its drawbacks since the language that the individual spoke does not necessarily indicate the form of Judaism he or she adopted.

2. For a succinct history of scholarship on the topic of Hellenism and Judaism, see L. I. Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity: Conflict or Confluence* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998), pp. 3–32 and the literature referred to there.

Another type of Greek influence is manifest in works that deliberately sought to relate Jewish thought to Greek thought. In the words of Shaye Cohen, ‘no area of Hellenistic culture influenced the Jews as much as philosophy’.³ The attempt to relate Jewish thought to Hellenistic philosophy began by at least the middle of the second century BC, but knowledge of its development is sketchy. The Jewish writer Aristobulus of Paneas, who lived in the middle of the second century BC, is the first writer we know who attempted to show explicitly that Jewish thought was equal to that of the Greek philosophers, or that Greek philosophical thought was already present in the writings of Moses.⁴

The next such writer that we know of was Philo of Alexandria. However, that there was a well-developed tradition of such approaches to the study of the Jewish texts between the time of Aristobulus and Philo is evident from Philo himself, who makes reference to such a tradition in his *Spec. Leg.* 1.8.⁵ Philo was born in Alexandria of an aristocratic family about 20 BC and died about AD 50. His works are voluminous with over forty individual works still in existence. His thought manifests considerable familiarity with what came to be known as Middle Platonic philosophy.⁶

These two currents of Jewish thought—Wisdom literature and the philosophical writings of Philo—influenced by Hellenism, are now thought to be the prime contenders for furnishing the background to the Logos of the Johannine Prologue.

2. The Background of the Hymn of the Prologue

The five documents that make up the Johannine corpus make substantial use of the Greek word *λόγος*. However, the meaning of the term in the Prologue of the Gospel goes beyond any of the other uses in the Gospel or in any of the Letters.

In its present form within the Gospel, the Prologue is a combination of what was probably a hymn used within the Johannine community and prose additions that were intended to tie the Prologue to its present

3. Cohen, *Maccabees*, p. 44.

4. Philo was to follow precisely in this same vein of convictions (*Probus* 57; *Aet.* 19; *Mos.* 1.1-3). See J. M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 163.

5. See D. M. Hay, ‘Philo’s References to Other Allegorists’, *Studia Philonica* 6 (1979–80), pp. 41–75.

6. This is hardly the only philosophical influence on his thought. Platonism was itself influenced by Pythagorean and Stoic thought.

context as part of the Gospel. In my commentary I have provided arguments for seeing vv. 1-5, 10-12, 14, and 16 as belonging to the original hymn and vv. 6-9, 13, 15 and 17-18 as additions.⁷

There has been a considerable variety of opinion about the background of the Hymn of the Prologue. During the period when, under the influence of Bultmann, scholars sought parallels to the Gospel as a whole within Gnosticism, there was particular interest in apparent parallels between the *Trimorphic Proténnoia* and the Prologue.⁸

However, the more recent view is that the Hymn was composed against the background of Jewish Wisdom literature. G. Rochais has presented one of the most extensive descriptions of these parallels.⁹ Rochais finds parallels in Prov. 8.22-31, 35; Sir. 1.15; 24.3-12; Wis. 6.12; 7.22-8.1; 8.13; 9.9; and Bar. 3.12, 31; 3.37-4.1. The chief similarity, as pointed out by Rochais, is that Wisdom is understood to exist prior to creation and to be present at creation. A brief review of the texts proposed by Rochais suggests that while there are indeed general similarities, in many cases the similarities are very general and when compared with texts from Philo, those of Philo show greatest similarity. For example, Prov. 8.22-31 speaks of Wisdom existing before creation but there is no indication that it is somehow involved in the creation process. The similarity of Sir. 1.15 is too general to be helpful. In Sir. 24.3-12, there is a notable similarity with Jn 1.10-11 in that Wisdom goes forth to dwell among humanity. But unlike Wisdom, the Word is not received by humanity. Again, Wis. 6.12 is very general. In Wis. 7.21, Wisdom is described as πάντων τεχνίτης ('craftsman of all things'). Yet she is constantly described as a 'mirror of the working of God'. Yet from the surrounding context (7.20-8.1) there is no indication that Wisdom is an entity rather than one of the attributes of God.

Other currents within Judaism that are related to Wisdom literature are also suggested, for example in *I En.* 42.1-3. However, the basic pattern in Enoch is different. In Enoch, Wisdom goes out and does not find a place to dwell and so returns and settles among the angels. In the Hymn, the Word is the agent of creation, but there is no hint of this in the Enoch passage. Moreover, the Word does dwell with humanity; Wisdom does not.

7. Von Wahlde, *Commentary*, pp. II, pp. 17-24.

8. For an evaluation of the similarities and differences, see C. Evans, *Word and Glory: On the Exegetical and Theological Background of John's Prologue* (JSNTSup 89; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993). See also Perkins, *Gnosticism*, pp. 109-21.

9. G. Rochais, 'La formation du prologue [Jn 1,1-18]', *Science et Esprit* 37, no. 1 (1985), pp. 5-44; 37, no. 2 (1985), pp. 161-87.

While there are undoubted similarities between the Prologue and Wisdom literature, there remain a number of significant differences, as scholars have indicated. More recently the exploration of the relationship of the Hymn to Hellenistic Judaism has come in for detailed examination. As can be expected, opinion has ranged from there being no relationship,¹⁰ to their being a direct dependence,¹¹ to the view that the Hymn is actually anti-Philonic!¹²

Among the primary proponents of the view that the background is to be found in Hellenistic Judaism are T. Tobin¹³ and more recently, J. Leonhardt-Balzer.¹⁴ Both Tobin and Leonhardt-Balzer have argued that there are a number of features not accounted for by Wisdom literature that can be found in the works of Philo.¹⁵ As is the case with the other proposals made for the background of the Hymn, there are a considerable number of similarities but significant dissimilarities remain. Tobin's careful articulation of both the similarities and dissimilarities is such that by not claiming too much for this hypothesis, the hypothesis emerges as the most likely to date.

Working from the analyses of Tobin and Leonhardt-Balzer, I will call attention to a number of similarities and dissimilarities between the Hellenistic Judaism found in Philo and the Hymn of the Gospel and also show how this world of Hellenistic Judaism accounts for more aspects of the Hymn than does the world of the Wisdom literature.

3. John 1.1-2

First, the context of the discussion of 'the Word' is similar in both Philo and John. Both employ the term Word while commenting on the Genesis account of creation: John in the opening words of the Hymn and Philo in *De Op.* 7-25.¹⁶ While Wisdom is said to exist before creation it is not said to be involved in the act of creation itself.

10. As would be the case with those who see a Gnostic or Wisdom background.

11. F. Delitzsch, 'Johannes und Philo', *ZLTK* 24 (1863), pp. 219–29.

12. For example, H. H. Wendt, 'Das Verhältnis des Prologs zum Philonismus', in *Die Schichten im vierten Evangelium* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1911), pp. 98–103.

13. Tobin, 'Prologue', pp. 252–69.

14. J. Leonhardt-Balzer, 'Der Logos und die Schöpfung: Streiflichter bei Philo (Op 20-25) und im Johannesprolog (Joh 1, 1-8)', in *Kontexte des Johannes-evangeliums: das vierte Evangelium in religions- und traditions-geschichtlicher Perspektive* (WUNT 175; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), pp. 295–319.

15. It should be said that Tobin ('Prologue') is somewhat more detailed in showing the differences between the Logos and Wisdom.

16. Tobin, 'Prologue', p. 258; Leonhardt-Balzer, 'Logos', pp. 311–12.

Second, in both John (1.1) and Philo (*Som.* 1.228-230) the Logos is said to be θεός, ‘divine’—(without an article).¹⁷ This designation is regularly understood to attribute divinity to the Logos but in such a way as not to be a challenge to the unicity of God.

4. John 1.3

In John and in Philo, creation is said to take place δι’ αὐτοῦ (i.e., ‘through the Word’) rather than by the dative (λογῶ), which would be simply an ‘instrumental dative’ as in the Wisdom literature.¹⁸ For the author of the Hymn, for Philo, and for authors elsewhere in the NT, the choice of such expressions was not haphazard but was intended to reflect the existence of and activity of a mediating figure in creation.¹⁹ This mediating figure was understood to be the Word. This is not present in the Wisdom literature.

5. John 1.4-5

For Tobin, the use of ‘light’ and ‘darkness’ in the Hymn has some affinity for the treatment of the creation of light and darkness in Philo. While recognizing the similarities, he also recognizes the differences and, without over-reaching the evidence, describes this possibility of a similar background as ‘plausible’.²⁰ Leonhardt-Balzer also associates the use of ‘light’ and ‘darkness’ with the creation story in Genesis, having recourse to the same Philonic texts as Tobin (*De Op.* 33-34). Both note the difference, however, in that in the Genesis account it is a matter of separating the light from the darkness to prevent conflict. For the author of the Johannine hymn, there is actual conflict described, something not found in Genesis or in Philo.²¹

In Philo and John, there is an association of life with the Logos. However, within the works of Philo this association is less direct. As Tobin explains, in Philo’s view the first day of creation is when the

17. Tobin, ‘Prologue’, p. 257; Leonhardt-Balzer, ‘Logos’, p. 312.

18. Tobin, ‘Prologue’, pp. 257–60; Leonhardt-Balzer, ‘Logos’, p. 313.

19. Tobin (‘Prologue’, p. 229) calls attention to a similar use in 1 Cor. 8.6 and Heb. 1.2 where in both cases the creation of the world is said to take place through an intermediate figure.

20. Tobin, ‘Prologue’, pp. 262–5.

21. Leonhardt-Balzer, ‘Logos’, p. 314. However, Leonhardt-Balzer is a bit too eager to associate the Johannine account with the Philonic text in spite of the differences.

intelligible world is created and on the remainder of the days, the various parts of the world perceptible by the senses are created. The breath of God is the cause of life and because breath (πνεῦμα) is part of the intelligible, non-corporeal creation, it is part of the creative activity of the Logos.²² Therefore it can be said that the Logos is connected with the giving of life.

6. John 1.12

In Philo and in John, the believer is said to be a ‘child of God’. But again there are differences. In Jn 1.12, we are told that Jesus, the Word, gave all who believed in him ‘the power to become children of God’. In Philo, the process is more complex. The individual first becomes a son of the Word, and then a son of God (*Conf.* 147).

7. John 1.14

In the Gospel and in Philo, the Logos is said to have a special filial relation to God.²³ Again, this is not to say that the filial relation is precisely the same in both. There can be no doubt that Jesus is understood as ‘son’ in the Gospel; but in the Hymn, the issue is somewhat more complex. Tobin points to the similarity of μονογενῆς in Jn 1.14 to Philo’s use of προτοτόνος (*Conf.* 63 and *Conf.* 146) in reference to the Logos.²⁴ While there can be no doubt that the Hymn understands the Word to be a ‘son’ of God, I do not believe this is expressed by the term μονογενῆς. Following D. Moody and others, I would hold that μονογενῆς does not mean ‘only begotten’ but rather ‘unique’. Moreover, the description of Jesus as μονογενῆς has a polemical purpose, namely to distinguish the sonship of Jesus from that of the believer who is given the power to become a child of God (v. 12). Yet that there is some similarity cannot be denied.

22. Tobin, ‘Prologue’, p. 265. Tobin points to *De Op.* 24, 29-30 as an indication of this connection. See also Leonhardt-Balzer, ‘Logos’, pp. 298-9.

23. But the terminology is not the same as in John. For a discussion of the Johannine term, see D. Moody, ‘God’s Only Son: The Translation of John 3.16 in the Revised Standard Version’, *JBL* 72 (1953), pp. 213-19. See also the discussion in von Wahlde, *Commentary*, II, pp. 11-12, on Jn 1.14.

24. Tobin, ‘Prologue’, p. 261.

8. Additional Dissimilarities Between Philo and the Hymn

In spite of these similarities, there are differences. Some have been mentioned already, but there are others. First, it should be noted that the similarities referred to by Tobin and Leonhardt-Balzer are not always found gathered together as they are in the Johannine Hymn. Rather, they occur throughout Philo's writings. Nevertheless, when used critically, they are able to show a consistent understanding within the full corpus of Philo's work.

In Jn 1.4, the statement that the Logos is the source of life is without parallel in Philo. The same is true of the ready association of life with light and the portrayal of this light immediately in conflict with darkness but not being overcome by it.

In both Philo and in the Hymn, the Logos is distinct from God but is not independent of Him. However, the Logos in the Johannine hymn has a more clearly individuated existence in the form of Jesus of Nazareth. In Philo, one is more likely to conclude that the Logos is simply an aspect of God.

In Philo, the Logos is responsible for the 'noetic' world, a world of pure intelligibility which must precede the creation of the 'sensible' world. There is no such distinction of phases of creation in the Hymn. This is a major difference.

John 1.10-12 begins by indicating that the Logos was 'in the world' and by repeating that 'the world came to be through him' but that 'the world did not know him'. In these verses, the author is already presenting the conflict that resulted from the presence of Jesus in the world although Jesus is not named as such. However, just who 'his own' are is difficult to determine. If one reads this statement from the perspective of the remainder of the Gospel, it would be natural to conclude that it refers to the Jewish people of the time. But if it is read simply in the context of the Gospel from Jn 1.1-11, it would be natural to conclude that it referred to all humanity, which had been created by the Logos. However, when we read v. 12 ('to as many as did accept him he gave to them power to become children of God, to those believing in his name'), it is clear that we are in the realm of distinctive Johannine theology.²⁵

25. See for example Jn 7.39, where the Spirit is given to those who believe in Jesus. When this is combined with 3.3-5, it is clear that the reception of the Spirit results in a rebirth as 'children of God'.

John 1.14 effectively returns chronologically to the point of v. 10, with its reference to the Word's becoming flesh. Again the vocabulary (apart from the use of *Logos*) is primarily Johannine²⁶ although it also contains terminology ('full of grace and truth') that does not appear in this combination elsewhere in the Gospel. Philo's discussion leads to the general validity of Law while the Hymn leads to the particularity of Jesus.²⁷

Finally, in v. 16, the terms 'fullness' and 'grace upon grace' do not bear a close relationship to either Philonic or Johannine thought.

Thus we see that the Hymn's notion of the *Logos* in relation to creation has definite similarities to the thought of Philo and thus to the world of Hellenistic Judaism of which he was a part. The *Logos* in both Philo and in the Hymn of the Prologue are the means by which God relates to the world. The greatest similarities occur in the first few verses of the Prologue. As the Prologue continues to speak of the *Logos* and describes his relation to post-creation time, the similarity to Johannine thought increases and the similarity to Hellenistic philosophy decreases. In the portrayal of the relation of the *Logos* to its incarnate existence within the world, the language contains elements that do not appear to be specifically Philonic or Johannine.

Another feature that becomes evident is that it is only here in the Gospel, when the author speaks of the *Logos*, that he reflects on the role of Jesus/the Word in creation. The (third edition of the) Gospel and 1 John had spoken of the pre-existence of Jesus, but there was no attempt to give any details of that state and there was no mention of Jesus' role in relation to creation. In this sense, the Hymn alone takes the world of the Gospel and the existence of Jesus back to the time before time.

So while there are similarities between features in the Hymn and features of Philo's thought in no way does this indicate that the author of the hymn was dependent upon Philo but, at the same time, as Tobin says, 'it is difficult to imagine that the two are not part of the same Hellenistic Jewish tradition of interpretation and speculation', a tradition that was much older and broader than that represented by Philo alone.

26. The reference to seeing his (the *Logos*'s, Jesus') glory is evident in passages such as Jn 2.11; 11.40, etc. The reference to the Word as *μονογενής* here bears some similarity to the Philonic view but had appeared previously (in the chronology of the composition of the Johannine writings) in 1 Jn 4.9; Jn 3.16, 18, in contexts where the adjective has a polemical purpose and so is not likely to be derived from the philosophical background regarding the *Logos*.

27. Leonhardt-Balzer, 'Logos', pp. 296, 318.

It may be helpful to quote part of Tobin's conclusions because he summarizes well what can *and what cannot* be said about the relationship between the Logos of John and the Logos of Philo.

The argument is not that the author of the hymn had read Philo of Alexandria; the parallels are not close enough to maintain that kind of position. But the parallels do show that both the author of the hymn and Philo of Alexandria were part of the larger tradition of Hellenistic Jewish biblical interpretation and speculation. Both were making use of similar structures of thought and were expressing those structures through the use of similar vocabulary, even though the results were very different.

The author of the hymn developed an interpretation of the *Logos*, that is, the *logos* had become incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, that would have been unimaginable for someone like Philo. Yet that is not the same as saying that the world of Hellenistic Jewish speculative interpretation was not the world of which the author of the hymn was a part. Rather, the author of the hymn, in keeping with the speculative character of that tradition, moved it in a new and quite different tradition.²⁸

9. Conclusions

As we have seen, the thought world in which the Word in the Hymn is conceptualized is different from anything seen elsewhere in the Gospel or the Letters. Thus, it becomes evident that the Hymn introduces a worldview that is radically different from both the canonical view in the earliest strata of the Gospel and the apocalyptic view introduced at the time of 1 John and later incorporated into the Gospel at the time of the third edition.

For those who study the Prologue, it is clear that, although the Prologue serves as an excellent introduction to, and summary of, the thought of the Gospel, it does so using a number of terms that appear nowhere else in the tradition. While Jesus had spoken λόγοι and those λόγοι had been part of a larger λόγος that he was bidden to deliver, here in the Prologue, he is identified as ὁ λόγος (*the Logos*), a concept that expresses his relation to God the Father in a uniquely profound way and which appears nowhere else in the Gospel.

If earlier stages of the tradition had spoken of the pre-existence of Jesus, the Hymn of the Prologue makes explicit certain convictions about the pre-existence of Jesus that appear nowhere else in the Gospel. Here alone is it indicated explicitly that Jesus was 'in the beginning...with God'. While pre-existence *could* mean this, preexistence alone need not

28. Tobin, 'Prologue', p. 268.

indicate that Jesus was ‘in the beginning’. Even Jn 17.5 (‘and now glorify me, Father, in your presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed’), which comes from the third and final edition of the Gospel, does not say this explicitly.²⁹ More significantly, there is no indication elsewhere in the Gospel that the preexistent Jesus, who was the Word, was the one through whom all creation came to be. It is significant that this belief did not derive from a biblical perspective but from a philosophical perspective. This conviction which today occupies such a prominent role in Christian theology is, at the very least, *triggered* by philosophical reflection, although undoubtedly the truth of the assertion would have been considered by the community to have been ratified by the Spirit. So even in the Prologue, the community’s reflection on their experience of Jesus leads them to deeper convictions, convictions that give an even greater cosmic perspective to the meaning of Jesus.

If we speak in terms of the chronology of the Gospel’s composition, the addition of the Hymn is the final re-conceptualization of the ministry that will become part of the Gospel. For the reader who was sensitive to the thought world of the Hymn, it would become evident that the reader is now being presented with the meaning of the ‘Jesus-event’ in categories that transcend those of either canonical or apocalyptic Judaism. The reader is now being taken into the world of Hellenistic Jewish speculation. Leonhardt-Balzer makes a comment with regard to Philo himself and his interpretation of the Bible: ‘without reference to his philosophical background he [Philo] is not able to be understood’.³⁰ The same is strikingly true of the Hymn in the Johannine Prologue. The Hymn cannot be fully understood without reference to the philosophical world of Hellenistic Judaism. At the same time, it becomes clear that, with such language, the Johannine tradition transcends the world of biblical thought and enters, albeit briefly, the world of philosophical speculation.

29. The belief that Jesus existed before the creation of the world is compatible with the portrayal of Wisdom as portrayed in Prov. 8.22-31, but this is not precisely the same as saying that Jesus existed ‘in the beginning’.

30. Leonhardt-Balzer, ‘Logos’, p. 297.

Part IV

WHY IT MATTERS

Chapter 11

THE IMPORTANCE OF RECOGNIZING THE VARIOUS BACKGROUNDS PRESENT IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

1. Introduction

The Gospel of John presents to its reader some of the most profound theology in the NT. But it does this within a document that is also one of the most complex documents in the NT from a literary and theological point of view. This present book has attempted to point out one particular type of complexity: the complexity that is a result of varying worldviews. Most interpreters do not raise the question of the worldview presupposed by the Gospel when they go to interpret it. This has been the cause of a number of serious errors in interpretation.

Nevertheless, some do note tensions created by discordant features. Probably the most commonly noticed feature is the presence of what have been termed realized eschatology and future eschatology. But this tends to be the limit. We can note that even R. E. Brown in his justly famous article on the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Gospel of John noted that in the Gospel a number of passages reflected the worldview that permeated the sectarian documents from Qumran. Yet Brown did not attempt to distinguish this worldview from that of the remainder of the Gospel—the worldview of canonical Judaism.¹

1. A. Culpepper, in the article discussed previously (Culpepper, ‘Realized Eschatology’, pp. 273–4), rightly notes several discordances even though he does not feel able to account for them. For example, discussing whether the believer is able to sin or not, he comments: ‘Because the community already shared in the life of the resurrection, its members could not continue in sin, as though the ruler of this world continued to have power over them... First John [i.e. the First Letter of John] reflects the theological quandary that the ideal of perfection created for the community. On the one hand it could not deny the reality of sin (1 Jn 1.8, 10). On the other hand it could not continue to sin (1 Jn 3.3-10)... Commentators have wrestled to resolve this quandary, while recognizing that it is a logical inconsistency born of

2. Why Recognition of the Worldviews Present in the Johannine Literature Matters

While some might feel that such mixing of worldviews is inconsequential for the understanding of the Gospel, the results of the study presented in the previous pages would suggest that this is hardly the case.

a. The First Reason: To Interpret the Gospel Properly

The first reason for properly recognizing the worldview within which the material of the Gospel is presented is its importance for the interpretation of those specific passages. As we have seen, understanding Jn 8.38-47 as presented within a dualistic framework enables us to see that what appears to be such strong invective is actually part of a stereotyped form of argument in use among Jews of the time. As such, it was intended to articulate what was perceived to be the truth of the author's view and the incorrectness of the opponents' view. In such polemic, there was no middle ground: either one was siding with God or with Satan. To read the passage from a modern perspective would be to do it an injustice.

In the case of the commandment of mutual love, to read it without recognizing the apocalyptic background within which it is written is to think that the Johannine conception of love is restricted and narrow and not sufficiently expansive to embrace one's enemies. Viewed within its apocalyptic milieu, it can be understood as making it clear that love (in the sense of support and aid) cannot be given to those who spread falsehood and error.

We have not referred previously to Jn 17.9, where Jesus 'does not pray for the world', but this is another of the jarring and inconsistent statements of the Gospel. Various attempts have been made by scholars to reconcile this with the attitude of Jesus elsewhere in the Gospel, but unless one interprets this within the worldview of apocalyptic, it is easy to get the impression that even Jesus has finally stopped loving those who reject him. In a world that is understood dualistically, praying for

Johannine realized eschatology. Had John not placed such emphasis on the new status of those who had already been born from above and shared in the life of the age to come, the attendant affirmation of deliverance from the power of sin would not have been such an acute problem.' When this inconsistency is viewed from the perspective of the proper worldview, we see that when looked at from the perspective of traditional Jewish eschatology, there would be no sin after the outpouring of the eschatological Spirit. However when viewed from the perspective of apocalyptic eschatology, it becomes evident that sin is still possible and that a believer can sin, can lose eternal life and will undergo a final judgment either of life or condemnation.

the ‘world’ would be to implicitly approve of its values and beliefs. Jesus cannot do this. And yet this statement is consistent with the viewpoint in 3.16, where in fact the originating intention of Jesus’ mission was to ‘save the world’.

b. The Second Reason: An Indication That the Gospel Is the Result of More than One Stage of Composition

The second reason recognition of, and sensitivity to, the worldview(s) of the Gospel matters is that the very fact that the Gospel *is* a document that contains material that is manifestly apocalyptic and other material that is manifestly not apocalyptic and in addition still other material that manifests a background of Hellenistic philosophical reflection. This is what might be called a ‘macro-feature’ of the Gospel that, if properly understood, provides major evidence that the Gospel is the work of more than one author. Once we recognize the multiplicity of worldviews in the Gospel, we must seek a means to explain them.²

A person has a single worldview if it is a genuine conviction about how reality ‘works’. If we look at 1 John, we see a document that has a single worldview: that of apocalyptic. This is what we would normally expect. If we examine Paul’s Letters, we see that they are all written against the background of apocalyptic. In fact, it seems that there is no single document in the NT other than the Gospel of John that contains material reflecting more than one worldview.³

Whether we like it or not, this has implications for the proper understanding of the Gospel. It is understandable that some find it wearying to ponder the question of the composition of the Gospel. Analysis of language, ideology, and all of the contextual aporias involved in such analysis can be wearying unless one is convinced that the payoff will be worth it. Here we have not addressed the question of authorship or composition. But what we have looked at has significant implications

2. We need only recall the presentation of the miracles of Jesus in the Gospel. In the Synoptics, exorcisms abound, but in John no miracle is understood as an exorcism. There can be little doubt that the first edition of the Gospel was written within the worldview that pervades the OT.

3. One might ask about the collection of documents considered canonical by Jews. This collection is written almost exclusively within a single worldview, but in fact contains material that is apocalyptic (e.g., the portions of the book of Daniel, sections of Ezekiel, etc.). Here the issue is different. It is not a question of a single document with multiple worldviews. Rather, the canon of the Jewish Scriptures is clearly a collection with a considerable variety of genres. Nor is it in any way a question whether a single author is responsible for such a mixture.

for understanding the composition of the Gospel. We have looked at several passages of the Gospel and noticed that they are indeed written within three distinct worldviews. The fact that such an occurrence is without precedent in the NT should lead us to ask for an explanation. That explanation, I would argue, cannot be found without recognition that in fact the Gospel has gone through more than one stage of composition at the hands of more than one author, each of whom wrote from a distinctive view of the world and how reality ‘worked’.

c. The Third Reason: Greater Insight into the Nature of the Community That Produced the Gospel

The third result of our investigation is greater clarity about the community that produced the Gospel.

I have, with regularity, made reference to my view of the composition of the Gospel and Letters of John. That view concludes from the evidence of the Gospel that the first two editions of the Gospel were written against the background of canonical Judaism and that the third, on the other hand, is suffused with material written within the worldview of apocalyptic.

If the Gospel of John does contain more than worldview and if, as I would argue, this fact is an indication that the Gospel has undergone more than one stage of composition, we might ask whether the presence of these worldviews is of any help in understanding the nature of the so-called ‘Johannine school’. We will turn to that in the final chapter, dedicated to a survey of the history of the Johannine community as it is revealed through its various contexts.

Chapter 12

SOME INSIGHTS INTO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE JOHANNINE COMMUNITY DERIVED FROM THE AWARENESS OF THE ‘CONTEXTS’ OF THE JOHANNINE LITERATURE

1. Introduction

Since the valuable work of Alan Culpepper in his dissertation on *The Johannine School*, it has been recognized that the body of the Johannine literature is the product of a school, that is, a group of individuals who were followers of the school’s founder, a figure traditionally thought to be John, the Son of Zebedee.

Culpepper focused his analysis on schools known from antiquity (e.g., the Pythagorean School, the Academy, the Lyceum, etc.).¹ However, it is true that the group of individuals associated with the preservation and transmission of the Johannine tradition are never called a ‘school’. In fact, as a group they are never identified either as a school or by any means other than the collective ‘we’. But this ‘we’ is never identified.

J. L. Martyn proposed that the Gospel was written to reflect simultaneously the events of the ministry of Jesus and those of the Johannine community later in the first century.² In his study he proposed that there were three periods in the history of the community: before the Gospel, concurrent with the Gospel, and after the Gospel. At the time of the Gospel itself, four groups were evident: ‘the Jews’ who represented the synagogue leaders, crypto-Christians who believed but were still within the synagogue, other communities of Jewish Christians who had been expelled from the synagogue, and the Johannine community. All of these groups were Jewish Christians.

1. R. A. Culpepper, *The Johannine School* (SBLDS 26; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975), pp. 261–90.

2. J. L. Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (2d ed.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1979).

One of the most famous discussions of the community's history is that of R. E. Brown.³ Brown posited four phases in the history of the community: before the Gospel, the period of the Gospel, the period of the epistles, and the time after the epistles. Within the Gospel itself, Brown detected seven groups: (1) the world, those who reject Jesus; (2) 'the Jews'; (3) followers of John the Baptist who did not come to believe in Jesus; (4) 'crypto-Christians', members of the synagogue who believed but did not confess openly (e.g., Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea); (5) persons of inadequate faith, who believed but later rejected belief because they found the message too strong (e.g., those described in 6.63) and the 'brothers' of Jesus' (7.2-12). The sixth group (6) Brown detected within the Gospel consisted of those of the Petrine churches, who constituted a group of believers distinct from the Johannine community but with whom the Johannine believers desired unity. Finally, (7) there were the Johannine believers themselves.

Nevertheless, the notion of a 'school', if understood in a 'loose' sense, remains appropriate for a variety of reasons. First, scholars tend to agree that the figure of 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' (aka 'the Beloved Disciple') is not the disciple John, son of Zebedee, although it is often speculated that the tradition may go back to that individual. Second, many have thought that the author of 1 John is a figure distinct from that of the Beloved Disciple and so constitutes what may be a third individual associated with the composition of the Johannine literature. Finally, if we are to assume that the author of 2 and 3 John, who identifies himself as 'the Elder', is yet another individual, then the number of figures associated with the overall production of the Johannine literature rises to four.

2. The History of the Johannine Community

Building on the concept of a 'school', I would like to suggest a different and, I believe, somewhat clearer view of the development of the Johannine tradition and the processes that were involved in that development. As will be evident in what follows, I would distinguish the various periods in the history of the community not simply on the basis of chronology (before, during, or after the Gospel), nor on groups of

3. R. E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist, 1979). Brown also provides helpful summaries of the reconstructions of J. L. Martyn, G. Richter, O. Cullmann, M.-E. Boismard, and W. Langbrandtner (*Community*, pp. 171-82).

people (with various reactions ranging from unbelief to belief), all of which relate in various ways to a single consistent theological view of Jesus and the meaning of the ‘salvation’ that came through him. Rather I will propose that the stages of the Johannine community’s history are most clearly and most meaningfully distinguished by the evolution of the Johannine theological tradition under what the community believed was the profound guidance of the Spirit.

a. The First Phase of the Community’s History as It Is Reflected in the Johannine Literary Tradition

This long subtitle is intended to reflect the fact that we can only learn about the history of the Johannine tradition from what we can discern from the extant documents of the community. At the same time, the various stages of the Johannine tradition can be discovered with reasonable certainty, provided the right criteria are used in the determination of the various stages.⁴

The earliest stage of literary evidence regarding the Johannine tradition is found in the material of the first edition of the Gospel.⁵ This material reflects an author (and certainly a community) that was thoroughly Jewish in its worldview and very likely located in Judea.

The Jewishness of this document’s worldview is shown by the use of ‘sign’ (σημείον) for miracle, similar to the OT use of the term to describe the miracles performed by Moses. The theology associated with these ‘signs’ was also thoroughly Jewish in that they are said to show that Jesus was indeed ‘from God’ (cf. 3.2; 9.30-33). Moreover, this material focused on the miracles of Jesus, works of power that are never conceived of as exorcisms as they were in the Synoptic Gospels. Nevertheless the expectations associated with Jesus are completely in keeping with the

4. The work of J. L. Martyn is most readily associated with the phase of the community’s history in which expulsion from the synagogue occurred. However, proceeding from the conviction that the earliest stages of the Gospel derived from homilies delivered within the community, he proposed that Jn 1.35-49 ‘constitutes part of a very early sermon’ (J. L. Martyn, ‘Glimpses into the History of the Johannine Community’, in *L’Évangile de Jean* [ed. M. de Jonge; BETL 44; Leuven: University Press, 1977], p. 152). Brown (*Community*, pp. 26–40) appears to have taken up on this as the basis for his proposal that something of the history of the community lay behind the material and the sequence of the material in chs. 1–4, a proposal that has met with almost universal skepticism.

5. The reader will recall that a brief summary of the thought of the three editions of the Gospel, as I have described them in my commentary, appears in the Prequel of this book.

traditional expectations expressed in the Jewish Scripture, including the title ‘the prophet like Moses’, a title that appears nowhere else in the NT but is based on Deut. 18.15.

The proposal that this edition was composed in or near Judea derives from the numerous remarkably accurate and specific topological references found in the Gospel—and in no other document in the NT.

This first document was a straightforward document containing the basic narrative of the Gospel and that of all the signs of Jesus except that in ch. 21. There is an evident progression in the magnitude of the signs throughout Jesus’ ministry, culminating in the raising of Lazarus. In accord with this presentation, there is an equal increase *in the belief* of the common people and an equal increase *in hostility* on the part of the ‘Pharisees’, ‘chief priests’, and ‘rulers’. Although there had been skepticism on the part of the religious authorities before the raising of Lazarus, it is not until after that miracle (which occurs six days before Passover) that the authorities convene the Sanhedrin and condemn Jesus to death. Moreover, they condemn him on the grounds that if they do not do something, the Roman authorities will intervene and will be likely to destroy the Temple and take away the nation’s independence.

It was evidently the case that at this time, the community continued to worship within the synagogue and the community saw itself as the ‘next stage’ in the history of Israel, namely a group that believed that the promises made to Israel regarding the future restoration of the nation under the guidance of a figure like Moses had been fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth.

Another feature of this first stage in the history of the community is the remarkably detailed and accurate knowledge of the places where the ministry of Jesus took place, a feature that appears throughout the material of this edition of the Gospel and not in the material of the other stages of the Gospel’s development.⁶ This suggests that this part of the community’s Gospel was written by someone who was very familiar with the places and the customs of the Jews in Judea and therefore probably a Judean himself.⁷ The group was Jewish and probably continued to worship in the synagogue.

6. A full listing and discussion of these features can be found in my article ‘Archaeology and John’s Gospel’, in *Jesus and Archaeology* (ed. James H. Charlesworth; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), pp. 523–86. These sites are also discussed in the notes on the corresponding verses in my commentary on the Gospel.

7. Yet even this does not ‘prove’ that this edition of the Gospel was written in Judea. A person with this knowledge could well have written from some location in Asia Minor.

b. The Second Phase of the Community's History

The second phase of the community's history includes a major disruption in relation to its parent Judaism. The community continued to see itself as a part of Judaism and also understood its proper place was to continue to worship in the synagogue. However, by the time of the second phase in the community's development, theological disagreements between those who believed in Jesus and the synagogue authorities had reached such a point that the community was expelled from the synagogue.

Even more ominous is the possibility, expressed in Jn 16.2 ('but an hour is coming in which those who kill you will think they are giving worship to God'), that the Johannine believers were at risk of being put to death for their beliefs. Thus it must have been a genuine likelihood that members would be put to death, probably by stoning and certainly for religious reasons, on the basis of the perceived blasphemy involved in their convictions about the divinity of Jesus.

While the basis for condemning Jesus to death as expressed at the time of the first literary stratum of the Gospel was principally political (i.e., the Romans will destroy the temple and take away our independence, cf. 11.48-50), at the time of the second edition, when the adversaries were the synagogue officials, the charge was religious: Jesus was a blasphemer, making himself equal to God, calling God his own Father (5.18; 10.33; 19.7).

The theological change that takes place at this stage of the tradition is so great that it is, at first, difficult to believe that this material could be in any way a *development* of the material of the earlier stage.

There are a number of features of this material that hint at the state of affairs during this period. The adversaries at the earlier stage of the tradition had names (i.e., 'Pharisees', 'chief priests', 'rulers') that were specific and historically appropriate to the time of the ministry. In the second stage of the tradition, the designation of the adversaries has changed and they are now simply referred to as 'the Jews', a term that has caused enormous misunderstanding throughout the millennia.⁸

8. I have attempted to contribute to the understanding of this confusing term several times: U. C. von Wahlde, 'The Terms for Religious Authorities in the Fourth Gospel: A Key to Literary Strata?', *JBL* 98 (1979), pp. 231-53; 'The Johannine "Jews"', pp. 33-60; 'The Gospel of John and the Presentation of Jews and Judaism', in *Within Context: Essays on Jews and Judaism in the New Testament* (ed. L. Klenicki, D. Efroymson, and E. Fisher; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1993), pp. 67-84; 'The Jews' in John's Gospel: Fifteen Years of Research (1983-1998)', *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* (Belgium) 76 (2000), pp. 30-55. Levine (*Judaism and*

Although they are seen as religious adversaries, the Johannine community continues to consider itself as the genuine, authentic development of the Israelite tradition. It is just that the synagogue leaders (and their followers) no longer allow those who believe in Jesus to be members of the synagogue. But just as the hostility of the synagogue has increased to the point where these believers are no longer able to be part of the conventicle, the theology of the believers now shows a remarkable advance over that of the tradition's earlier stage.

At this second stage of the tradition, the (canonical) Jewish understanding of the tradition continues. In fact, the Jewishness of the tradition is evident more than ever and on a much more sophisticated level. In this stratum of the community's literary tradition, the primary theological conviction is that Jesus had come to give the (Holy) Spirit to those who believed in him (3.3-8; 4.10-15; 7.37-39; 20.22). Moreover, this conviction is based on, and sees itself as the fulfillment of, the Jewish conviction that 'on that day' Yahweh would send forth his Spirit in a definitive way on all people. In keeping with their conviction that Yahweh would send his Spirit on all people, they understood themselves to be the possessors of the prerogatives associated with this outpouring.

The changes that were brought about in the community's theology as a result of this perspective are difficult to exaggerate.⁹ As we have seen, the Jewish Scriptures had promised that 'in that day' they would 'know' God; that they would follow Him spontaneously; that they would not undergo judgment; that they would have no need for anyone to teach them; and that that they would no longer sin.¹⁰

In support of their belief, the community proposed there were four 'witnesses' to Jesus and to the correct understanding of his identity (5.31-40). Those four witnesses were (1) John the Baptist (although, because he was human, his witness was not essential); (2) the witness of

Hellenism, p. 59) says without argument that Josephus used the term 'the Jews' (οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι) to refer to Jerusalemites who opposed Hellenization. This is a very interesting comment although I am not sure it can be fully proved.

9. I do not think that anyone discussing the history and make-up of the community has called attention to these features previously. As the reader will recognize, the present author is profoundly convinced that by understanding the compositional process of the Gospel, we are able to not only account for many of the inconsistencies and tensions of the Gospel, but we are able to see its theological development as well. The present discussion is one example of the clarity that is gained by such analysis of the composition.

10. A fuller discussion along with citations from the Jewish Scriptures related to these prerogatives can be found in the 'Overview of the Second Edition' of the Gospel in the Prequel.

the 'works' ('signs') of Jesus; (3) the words of Jesus, which were actually the words of the Father; and (4) the Scriptures. As it is presented in the Gospel at the time of the second edition, 'the Jews' had failed to respond to these witnesses, but the disciples had, in fact, responded to all four and so were authentic believers.

The arguments presented in this edition were fully 'Jewish'. That is, it used techniques that were known from Jewish exegesis.

A striking example of this type of argument is found in Jn 5.17. In the verses preceding 5.17, 'the Jews' had argued that Jesus sinned by healing the man who had been crippled for thirty-eight years by healing him on the Sabbath. Jesus responds by saying 'My Father works until now and I work'. As many commentators on this verse remark,¹¹ the argumentation put forward here by Jesus is quite different from that used in the Synoptics and reflects rabbinic argument. Thus the person who recorded this statement was sufficiently learned in Jewish thought to be aware of and to understand this type of argument. Again, this indicates a person with a higher level of education.

Although the giving of God's Spirit to all believers as a result of Jesus' ministry is one of the most pervasive features of the NT, nowhere else in the NT is such a fully Jewish understanding of the effects of the giving of the Spirit evident.

A second type of more advanced religious argument was the Jewish homiletic exegesis evident in 6.30-50. This form of argument, pointed out by P. Borgen in his justly famous book *Bread from Heaven*, was a form of *peshet* exegesis known elsewhere in late Second Temple Judaism. Such skills in exegesis would be primarily learned by professionals (i.e., rabbis) for use in expounding the scriptures in the synagogue. This was not a technique that would be known to every Jew. The fact that the Johannine community used it in its preaching about Jesus indicates something of the educational level of the one responsible for it.

A third type of rabbinic argument evident in the Gospel was the so-called '*qal wehomer*' argument' evident in 7.21-24. Although less complex than the previous two types, this type of argument was used to argue 'from the lesser to the greater'. That is, if something was true in a given case, then it would be all the more true in a case of greater importance.

11. See for example J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, (ICC; 2 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1929), I, p. 236; C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (2d ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), p. 256; Brown, *Gospel*, I, p. 217; von Wahlde, *Commentary*, II, p. 221.

A fourth particularly Jewish feature of the material composed during this second stage of the Gospel's development is present in the formula referring to the fulfillment of Scripture. In the material from the later (third) stage of the Gospel's composition, we find the formula normally found in Christian writings to indicate that a given saying or action of Jesus was a fulfillment of Scripture: 'in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled'. However, in the material written during this stage of the community's existence, a different and much more typically Jewish formula was used. Seven times, and almost always in close association with texts containing the term 'the Jews', the formula 'as it is written' (καθώς ἔστιν γεγραμμένον) is used.¹²

The presence of techniques such as these indicates that the community was of sufficient intellectual level and sophistication to articulate their understanding of Jesus by techniques and forms of argument that were more sophisticated than those found, for example, in the Synoptics. These techniques also indicate that the community at this time in its existence was 'traditional', not influenced by more Hellenistic forms of argument, expression, or worldview.¹³ Since the time of the Hasmonians, Israel had undergone varying degrees of influence by Hellenistic forms of thought. Of course, the spread of Hellenism was a complex and uneven affair. It did not affect all parts of the country in the same way or at the same time. Nor did it affect all classes of society to the same degree.

But during the second stage of the Johannine community's development, the community shows no signs of being substantially Hellenized. The community understood itself within the worldview of canonical Judaism rather than within that of apocalyptic or other forms of Hellenistic thought.

The author of this edition of the Gospel was surely an individual different from that of the earlier material. While we have no external verification of this, the differences in theology make it difficult, if not impossible, to believe that both literary strata come from the same individual.

12. Jn 2.17; 6.31, 45; 8.17; 10.34; 12.13, 15. See also the discussion in my *Commentary*, III, pp. 295–322.

13. If Levine is correct in saying that Josephus' use of 'the Jews' was intended to represent that class of Jewish society that was most 'conservative' and most resisted change (cf. the events described in Josephus, *Ant.* 15.267-93), this group would seem to closely resemble that reflected in the second stage of the development of the Gospel of John.

But most importantly, we see that, not only is there a major theological development from the first to the second stages of the community's history, there is also a major social dislocation involving the expulsion of the community from its home in the Jewish synagogue.

The religious development evident in the second edition of the Gospel would have meant that the community was convinced that God had brought to fruition his promises of bestowing his Spirit on all believers. The members of the community believed that a radical transformation had taken place in accord with the scriptural promises of the 'restoration' of Israel. The members of the community also believed that they themselves were the recipients of the prerogatives of this transformation. We do not know just how these beliefs affected the community's day-to-day actions. There is no evidence that the community was given over to libertinism. But given the lack of authority structure evident until very late in the community's existence, it is likely that they saw themselves as related to God through the Spirit and that their interpersonal relationships (if we are to judge from the later criticisms by the author of 1 John) were not informed by any unified and authoritative directives other than inspiration by the Spirit.¹⁴

It is almost certain that during this period of its history, the Johannine community had no significant ritual actions. The Jesus of the second edition had said that the proper place for worship was neither on Gerizim nor in Jerusalem 'but in Spirit and truth' (4.24). This edition also has the words of Jesus 'the Spirit is what gives life; the flesh is useless' (6.63). Thus the community would find rituals too 'materialistic' now that they had experienced the Spirit.

The central point of contention between the Johannine community and its Jewish matrix during this period had to do with the identity of Jesus. As we have seen, in the second edition of the Gospel this is the primary issue. The material of this edition is clearly structured with this issue in mind. The author believed that there were four major ways of confirming that Jesus was who he said he was. These were the four 'witnesses'

14. A. Reed ('Rabbis, "Jewish Christians" and Other Late Antique Jews: Reflections on the Fate of Judaism After 70 C.E.', in Henderson and Oegema, eds., *The Changing Face of Judaism*, pp.323–5 [338–9]) suggests that 'Jewish Christianity' may attest as much to the diversity in late first-century Judaism as to the diversity within Christianity. 'Early Jewish self-definition may have still been fluid enough to even encompass those Jews who approached Christ-devotion as an option within Judaism.'

to him: John the Baptist, the works of Jesus, his words, and the Scriptures. These were spelled out paradigmatically in Jn 5.31-40. Jesus' disciples had responded positively to them (Jn 1.19-2.22) and, although the three major witnesses were presented to 'the Jews' (i.e., the witness of *Scripture* in 6.30-51; the witness of the *word* of Jesus in 8.12-59; and the *works* of Jesus in 10.22-39), they had rejected the 'witnesses' to Jesus and had not believed.¹⁵

In much of the second edition of the Gospel, the charge leveled at Jesus (and implicitly at the Johannine community, resulting in the community's expulsion from synagogue) was whether Jesus' claims were blasphemous.

The social dislocation resulting from the community's expulsion from the synagogue must have been considerable. It would have meant a loss of friends and close acquaintances, and patterns of life would have changed. It would seem that the Johannine community differed from what might be called 'mainstream' synagogue Judaism as much as the Qumran community did, although they differed in very different ways.

c. The Third Phase of the Community's History

The third phase of the community's history is revealed to us in the pages of 1 John. Sometime between the composition of the material of the second edition of the Gospel and the writing of 1 John, two major events transpired within the community, the one probably the result of the other.¹⁶

During the previous phase of the community's history, the community had been expelled from the synagogue. Now a further crisis occurs within the community itself and results in the departure of a significant number of members of the community.

The earlier crisis, involving separation from the synagogue, had been caused primarily by what Christians would call 'Christological' issues (i.e., the charge that the claims made for Jesus were blasphemous). This new crisis seems to have occurred at least in part because of the introduction of the apocalyptic worldview. The introduction of this

15. Although these three major discourses are associated with each of the 'witnesses' to Jesus, they have been further edited by the author of the third edition of the Gospel, a process that makes a smooth reading of the material more difficult.

16. To my knowledge, no one has previously suggested that the introduction of the apocalyptic worldview created a crisis for the community, yet this new worldview had major implications for the life and belief of the community.

worldview resulted in a major new disagreement about the meaning of the tradition, specifically as a result of a disagreement about the precise nature of the benefits received from the bestowal of the Spirit.¹⁷

As we have seen, the apocalyptic worldview came into Judaism in the wake of Hellenization. And so, by the time it was introduced into the Johannine tradition, apocalyptic was hardly a new phenomenon within Judaism. It had also been evident within Christianity since the time of Paul's Letters in perhaps the middle 40s. It was also the worldview of the Synoptic Gospels, whose origins range from about 70 to 85 CE. So the introduction of apocalyptic into the Johannine tradition at the time of 1 John was not something new to Christianity—it was only new to the Johannine tradition. Whatever the reason for its introduction (and we will speak briefly of one possible reason later), the person through whom it is introduced to the tradition is the author of 1 John.

The crisis reflected in the pages of 1 John was not due only to the introduction of the apocalyptic viewpoint, but this change of worldview and the theological implications of that change constituted the primary cause of the crisis. It is easy to forget just how significant the introduction of the apocalyptic worldview was. Among the changes created by this perspective is the conviction in 1 John that there are a plurality of Spirits, not simply 'the Spirit' as was the case in traditional, canonical Judaism.¹⁸ Secondly, the gaining of 'eternal life' through possession of the Holy Spirit was no longer thought of as a once-and-for-all event as it

17. Although we do not know precisely when any edition of the Gospel or when 1 John was composed, the first two editions of the Gospel and all of the Johannine Letters were almost certainly composed during the lifetime of a first-generation believer. By the time the third edition of the Gospel was composed, the author, who was considered the primary witness to the traditions enshrined in the Gospel and who had clarified them by his tract known as 1 John, had died. This can be the only meaning of the statement in Jn 21.21-23. Yet the author of 1 John does not see himself as a 'teacher'. Since the members of the community had received the Spirit, they had no need of teachers. Rather, the author 'witnessed' and 'recalled' what they had heard 'from the beginning'.

18. The classic text for this is 1 Jn 4.1-6: 'Beloved, do not believe every spirit but test the spirits to see if they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. In this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does away with Jesus is not of God. And this is the (spirit) of the Antichrist, which you have heard is coming, and is now already in the world.' In the final verse of the section, we read: 'From this we know the Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Deception'. Thus while the previous stage of the Gospel spoke only of 'the Spirit', there is now a clear duality of Spirits and they are 'named'.

had been conceived of in the canonical Jewish worldview. Now eternal life in the present was understood to be a partial attainment.¹⁹ This had a considerable number of major implications. Third, the author of 1 John makes it clear that it is possible to lose eternal life by sinning but that it is also possible to regain this life, provided the sin committed is not a ‘sin unto death’.²⁰

Fourth, as a result of the overall apocalyptic timeframe, salvation was reconceptualized. The individual has received life in the present (i.e., ‘realized’ eschatology),²¹ but there would be another time in the future

19. In 1 John, the author makes it clear that the gift of the Spirit given to the believer is a partial gift. In the Gospel, the gift of the Spirit is just that, without qualification of any sort. However, twice in 1 John the author tells us that God has given the believer *a portion of the Spirit*: ‘And in this we know that he [God] abides in us, from the Spirit of which he [God] gave us’ (1 Jn 3.24); ‘In this we know that we abide in him [God] and he [God] in us, because he [God] has given of his Spirit to us’ (1 Jn 4.13).

20. The question of whether the believer could commit sin after receiving the Spirit is discussed repeatedly in 1 John. In the Gospel, ‘sin’ was conceived of primarily as the failure to believe. References to ethical transgressions are few. However, in 1 John, this is not the case. According to the author of 1 John, ‘If we say that we do not have sin, we deceive ourselves’ (1.8); ‘If we say that we have not sinned, we make God a liar’ (1.10); the one who believes and has received the Spirit should not sin (‘I write these things to you so that you will not sin’ [2.1]), but if the person does sin, ‘we have a Paraclete before the Father, Jesus Christ, the Just One. And he [Jesus] is an atonement for our sins and not only for ours but also for those of the entire world...’ (2.1-2). Ideally, ‘Everyone abiding in him [Jesus] does not sin’ (3.6). ‘The one committing sin is of the devil because from the beginning the devil sins. For this the Son of God was revealed, that he might do away with the works of the devil’ (3.8). The author explains also that there are two kinds of sin and the believer should pray for the fellow believer provided it is not a ‘sin unto death’: ‘If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he [the believer] will ask, and he [God] will give life to him [the sinner], to those [sinners] not sinning unto death. There is a sin-unto-death. I do not say that a person should make a request about that. Every injustice is sin and there is a sin not unto death’ (5.16-17). Clearly the author of 1 John holds to a view that admits that the believer will sin again after receiving the Spirit, even if the author believes that the person *should no longer sin*.

21. According to the author of 1 John, the believer has eternal life in the present. In his view, one is able to tell that this is so because the person loves his ‘brothers’. ‘We know that we have crossed over from death into life because we love the brothers’ (3.14). Here the author explains that one of the requirements for having life is keeping the commandment of loving the ‘brothers’: ‘One who hates one’s brother is a murderer and has no life: The one not loving, abides in death. Everyone hating his brother is a murderer, and you know that every murderer does not have eternal life abiding in himself’ (3.14-15). The author then goes on to explain that the model

in which the individual will go through a judgment and possible condemnation.²² Salvation was not assured once and for all. This meant that sin was still possible, eternal life could be lost, and forgiveness of continuing sin was still needed. It also meant that ethics were needed as a guide to the proper living of life in accord with the wishes of God.²³ All of this is immediately related to the introduction of the apocalyptic view of reality.

But this was not all that was new. The view of 1 John also affirmed other truths not directly related to the apocalyptic worldview. For example, the realm of material reality, which had been thought to have no role in gaining eternal life,²⁴ was now thought to have an importance and this was nowhere more evident than in 1 John's firm assertion that the bodily death of Jesus was an atonement for sin.

for our loving the 'brothers' is Jesus who laid down his life for 'us': 'In this we have known love inasmuch as that one [Jesus] has laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers' (3.16). Next, the author then explains that if the believer 'closes his heart to a brother' then it is not possible to have love for God either: 'Whoever has the life of the world, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?' (3.17).

22. The author of 1 John holds to the view that at the end of time there will be a day of reckoning based on the behavior of the believer. The author addresses this first in ch. 2, where he speaks of the one whose behavior has been proper, having confidence and not being fearful at the (second) coming of Jesus: 'And now, Dear Children, abide in him [Jesus], so that when he [Jesus] is revealed, we may have confidence and not shrink from him [Jesus] at his coming' (1 Jn 2.28). In ch. 3, the author again makes a clear distinction between the present state of the individual and the future state when Jesus will be revealed. This passage also makes it clear that the individual should make the effort to become holy in the meantime: 'Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we will be. We know that, when he [Jesus] is revealed, we will be like him [Jesus] and that we will see him [Jesus] as he is. And everyone having this hope in him [Jesus] makes himself holy as that one [Jesus] is holy' (1 Jn 3.2-3). Finally, in ch. 4, the author again speaks of having confidence on the 'day of judgment' rather than having fear. 'In this, love has been brought to perfection among us, that we have confidence on the day of judgment' (1 Jn 4.17).

23. In 1 John, the notion of ethics is summarized in the commandment for believers to 'love one another'. Yet even in this notion of love, the apocalyptic perspective of the author is evident. As we have seen in chapter 8, the Johannine notion of 'love' is limited by the dualistic worldview of apocalyptic in which one is not able to love one's enemies since that would mean cooperating with the enemies in their evil actions.

24. See Jn 4.23-24; 6.63.

The second edition of the Gospel (and the second period in the community's development) was dominated by the view that Jesus had been given the Spirit and had been sent by the Father to give the Spirit²⁵ and there was no mention of the conviction that the death of Jesus was atonement for sin. Rather, in the earlier tradition and in keeping with the view common in the Jewish Scriptures, humanity's sins were to be washed free by the action of the Spirit. This was the view that was common in the canonical Jewish scriptures but it was not the case in 1 John, as is evident from the frequent and unambiguous references: Jesus was an atonement for sins in his blood.²⁶

In addition to these elements of 1 John that are due to the introduction of the apocalyptic worldview, there are a number of other features manifest in 1 John and these also reflect this particular period in the development of the community.

Perhaps the most important of these other features was the insistence of 1 John that the members of the community cling to what was 'from the beginning'. In the earlier period of the community's existence, members of the community had relied so much upon the belief that the gift of the Spirit made it unnecessary for anyone to teach them, that they relied solely upon the inspiration that came from the Spirit to tell them what was proper to do and what was proper to believe. We recall that one of the most striking and most discussed features of the Gospel in that earlier period was that the earlier Gospel presented a Jesus that was 'a revealer without a revelation'. Although the validity of that statement has been debated through the decades, when we see that feature of the

25. See Jn 3.5, 6; 4.10, 13-14; 7.37-39; 20.22.

26. 1 Jn 1.7 ('the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin'); 1 Jn 2.1-2 ('we have a Paraclete before the Father, Jesus Christ, the Just One. And he [Jesus] is an atonement for our sins and not only for ours but also for those of the entire world'); 1 Jn 3.5 ('we know that that one [Jesus] was revealed to take away sins'); 1 Jn 4.2 ('every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ come in the flesh is of God'); 1 Jn 4.11 ('he loved us and sent his Son as an atonement for our sins'); 1 Jn 4.14 ('the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world'); 1 Jn 5.6 ('This is the one coming through water and blood, Jesus Christ. Not in the water only but in the water and the blood').

We see from these quotations, that the author of 1 John repeatedly proclaims as part of the purpose of Jesus' ministry his mission to be an atonement for sin, to be savior of the world. However, it is not until we read 1 Jn 5.6 that we are able to see just how the author of 1 John understood the mission of Jesus. Jesus did not come in water only (i.e., using the imagery of the Gospel to express that part of the ministry of Jesus that was concerned with the giving of the Spirit—living water) but 'in water and blood', that is, Jesus also came to give his life as an atonement for sin.

Gospel in the light of the community's convictions about their reception of the eschatological Spirit, we can see much more clearly the reason for that phenomenon. And our recognition of the phenomenon and the reason for its presence is now understood much more clearly when we see that in the next phase of the community's development there was a considerable change of focus on the importance of keeping 'what was from the beginning'. We also see clear evidence that this was a problem for the community in the words of 2 John 9: 'Everyone who is "progressive" and who does not remain in the teaching of the Christ, does not possess God; the one who remains in the teaching has both the Father and the Son'.²⁷

If what we have just surveyed from 1 John gives us a sense of the issues that the author was dealing with, we may still ask why it was that the author of 1 John introduced the apocalyptic viewpoint. This remains, I believe, a complicated question and although we may make some suggestions regarding the reason, the final answer remains elusive.

In order to say something helpful about the introduction of apocalyptic by the author of 1 John, we need to look forward somewhat to the introduction of apocalyptic into Gospel itself at the time of the final editing of the Gospel (in the fourth period in the history of the community). We will notice some features in that fourth phase

Earlier in this book, we saw solid indications that there was apocalyptic in the Gospel of John. But there are substantial reasons for concluding that the incorporation of apocalyptic into the Gospel took place after its incorporation into the tradition generally through the pages of 1 John.

When we look at the material (apocalyptic and other) that makes up the final stratum of the Gospel, we see some significant differences from its appearance in 1 John. One striking difference is that the third edition of the Gospel makes repeated reference to bodily resurrection 'on the last day'. This is clearly an apocalyptic feature.²⁸ But there is no mention of

27. We can also get a sense of the delicacy of the author's position when we realize that even though the author of 1 John was exhorting his community to remain faithful to the words of Jesus he also recognized that the believers had received the Spirit and that they had no need for any person to teach them ('And as for you—the anointing that you received from him [God] abides in you, and you do not have need that anyone teach you, but as his [God's] anointing teaches you about all'). If this is the case, then how is the believer to respond? Curiously, the author tells his readers to listen to the Spirit ('it is true and not false') but then the author feels compelled himself to speak for the Spirit and to tell his readers what the Spirit will tell them ('just as it taught you, you abide in him [Jesus]')!

28. See Jn 6.39-40, 44, 54; 11.24; 12.48.

bodily resurrection in 1 John. Scholars have regularly speculated that if the community believed in bodily resurrection at the time of 1 John, there would have been some reference to it in that document. The earlier (second) edition of the Gospel stressed the insignificance of the bodily material dimension of life and 1 John is so thoroughly polemical that surely he would have made explicit his conviction about bodily resurrection if he had one.

The same is true regarding references to the sacraments. There are references to Baptism (3.5), Eucharist (6.51-58), and reconciliation/penance (20.23) in the final edition of the Gospel but not in 1 John or before. What are we to make of this? The absence of any mention of them in 1 John would seem to indicate that they were not counted as part of the tradition during that period. We recall that in the second stage of the community's history there was clear 'anti-material' polemic. If the author of 1 John held convictions embracing sacramental actions, he would surely have included them in 1 John since 1 John is otherwise so polemical!

Another feature of the final edition of the Gospel that is absent in the previous editions is the inclusion of a number of comments, generally quite short, that do not fit well with their context but which almost surely were intended to correlate the Gospel of John with the Synoptics but which are very unsatisfactory in their attempts.²⁹ There is also the account

29. Among these brief but awkward insertions is 3.24, a comment by the narrator which attempts to relate this period of Jesus' ministry (i.e., before John was put in prison) to the fact that in the Synoptics, Jesus' ministry does not begin until after John the Baptist's imprisonment. A second example is 4.44, a saying that mentions the lack of respect Jesus received in his 'native country'. Although the saying has close Synoptic parallels, given its context in ch. 4 it is impossible to determine just what the 'native country' really is. A third example of such a saying occurs in 4.2, where after three statements referring to the fact that Jesus himself was baptizing (3.22, 26; 4.1) the narrator explains that actually Jesus himself was not baptizing. A longer passage that seems to have a similar function is 12.2-6. That passage recounts the action of Mary anointing the feet of Jesus with precious oil and then wiping the feet with her hair. Again the passage does not make sense since normally one would anoint the head with oil (not the feet) and using one's hair to dry would apply to the use of water, not oil. Yet another awkward passage in the Gospel occurs at the time of the dividing of the garments of Jesus at his crucifixion. The quotation that is understood to have been fulfilled is: 'they divided my garments and for my vesture they cast lots'. In Hebrew poetry, there is only one action described but it is done in synonymous parallelism. However, the author of the third edition, who apparently was attempting to introduce this quotation as another example of the fulfillment of Scripture, paralleled in the Synoptics, did not recognize the synonymous parallelism and treats the two parts of the verse as distinct actions.

of Jesus appointing Peter as the shepherd of the sheep in ch. 21 of the Gospel. This passage is almost surely intended to show that the Johannine community recognized the leadership of Peter even though when he was compared with ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved’ Peter was always shown to be inferior to this other disciple in either insight, faithfulness, or courage. This was another passage that was almost surely intended to articulate what the author understood to be the relationship of the Johannine community/communities to the churches under Petrine leadership.

There is also the figure of the ‘disciple whom Jesus loved’. This figure appears only in the last stage of the Gospel’s development, after 1 John had been written. While many have speculated about the origin of this title, my own opinion is that it is intended as the designation of the disciple who fulfilled the qualities spoken of in Jn 14.21:

The one possessing my commandments and keeping them, that one is the one loving me. And the one loving me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself to him.

If we read this verse in reverse, we can see that this is the description of the ‘disciple whom Jesus loves’. Starting from the end of the verse, we see that (1) the disciple whom Jesus loves (2) will receive from Jesus himself a ‘manifestation’ of his identity; (3) the reason that Jesus loves this disciple is that this disciple loves Jesus and manifests his love for Jesus by keeping the commandments given to him by Jesus.³⁰ This is, in fact, what the ‘disciple whom Jesus loved’ does during the ministry. He is the ‘perfect’ disciple and fulfills all that is asked of him. This is the person that had written 1 John and who, in his own personal life, exhibited all the qualities of the perfect disciple.

30. Although we cannot discuss this in detail in the present context, there are two commandments given to Jesus by the Father. The first of these is the commandment to speak the word given to Jesus by the Father (Jn 12.49-50). The second commandment is to manifest his love for the Father and for the disciples by giving up his life for them (10.15-18). In turn Jesus gives two commandments to the disciples, each of which is a corollary to the commandments given to Jesus by the Father. That is, the ‘first’ commandment given to the disciples is to ‘keep the word’ given to Jesus by the Father (14.21-25). The ‘second’ commandment is to love one another, following the example of Jesus’ love (13.34-35; 15.12-17). These commandments are introduced to the tradition by the author of 1 John. The first has to do with the word of Jesus, i.e., the importance of ‘keeping the word of Jesus that they had heard ‘from the beginning’ (1 Jn 2.3-8) and believing in the name of Jesus (1 Jn 3.23a). The second commandment is to live the proper form of human life by ‘loving one another’ (1 Jn 3.23b-24; 4.21; 2 Jn 4-5). See von Wahlde, *Commandments*, *passim*.

This disciple whom Jesus loved appears only in the fourth stage of the tradition although he was very likely the disciple who wrote 1 John. Although his tract (1 John) was very polemical in purpose, the incorporation of the disciple into the final edition of the Gospel is surely intended to reflect the foundation of the community's tradition in such a reliable and trustworthy individual, whom the community believed to be the most faithful and insightful witness to the ministry of Jesus.

d. The Fourth Phase in the Community's History

The Second and Third Letters of John may well represent a phase in the life of the community later than that of 1 John. It is difficult to tell whether these Letters simply reflect circumstances essentially contemporaneous with the time of 1 John or whether they reflect aspects of the community's existence distinct from, and later than, those of 1 John. It is, however, clear that they were written before the final edition of the Gospel, because there is no doubt that they were written by the Elder and it is likewise clear that the Elder had died before the composition of the third edition of the Gospel.³¹

e. The Fifth Phase in the Community's History

A third edition of the Gospel, incorporating the new and considerably modified view of salvation seen through the apocalyptic worldview, now emerges as the next stage of the community's history, a stage reflected in the third edition of the Gospel. This final stage in the development of the Gospel's account of the ministry of Jesus is composed after the community has undergone yet another traumatic event: the death of the Elder, the individual who was the author of 1 John and the one who was very likely the disciple referred to in this edition as 'the disciple whom Jesus loved'. In the material of the third edition, which often appears as both short and long 'glosses' on the material of the earlier editions, it is also clear that the material is the work of a group, a 'school', as is indicated by the presence of 'we' and 'you' (pl.) in several instances (e.g., 1.51; 3.11-12; 4.48, etc.).

Among the theological changes evident in this phase of the community's history is the incorporation of many of the changes introduced and

31. This is explained in detail in my *Commentary*, III, Appendices 8 and 9. When one realizes that 1 John was written before the completion of the Gospel and that it is 1 John that is responsible for clarifying the tradition against those who would interpret it incorrectly, then it is almost certain that the author of 1 John was the Elder who is identified in 2 and 3 John and who is given the honorific title of 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' in the third edition.

explained in 1 John: necessity of ethical instruction, the reality of a final judgment for all, and the importance of the words of Jesus which take precedent over private inspiration that is said to be Spirit-inspired.

However, the most remarkable change in this material concerns the titles used for Jesus. The first and most striking change is the introduction of words of Jesus that declare him to have the title reserved for God the Father in the OT. Jesus now declares that he is to be declared as 'I AM' (8.24, 28, 58; 13.19; 18.6). In the Jewish tradition, this is the title reserved for Yahweh. Once Jesus declares that he is to be understood as I AM, there can be no doubt of Jesus' relation to the Father!³² In addition, the author of the third edition often uses the title 'Lord' to refer to Jesus.³³ The use of this title is clearly distinguished from the ordinary 'secular' use of the title elsewhere in the Gospel.

The second title appears in two forms in the material of the third edition. First, we see that when Thomas confronts the risen Jesus (20.28) he proclaims him 'My Lord and My God'. In his book *Jesus: God and Man*, R. E. Brown declares that this text more than any other in the NT is a clearly confessional declaration of Jesus as divine.³⁴

From the pages of 1 John, it was clear that the status and role of Jesus in relation to eternal life was a topic of major concern. The opponents of the author of 1 John saw Jesus' role as essential in the announcement of the gift of the Spirit but they did not feel that his role was permanent or that his death was an atonement for sin.³⁵ From that dispute, it was clear that the opponents believed in God the Father and in the Spirit but did not have a sufficiently proper understanding of the status of Jesus. Now in the final edition of the Gospel, the author makes the status of Jesus as clear as possible.

This stage of the tradition represents a period after the death of the Beloved Disciple, the disciple who was the community's primary witness to Jesus. Inevitably the death of one so important for the life of the community would have been the occasion of considerable sorrow for the members. The community's link to the living witness to Jesus was now gone. This must have been even more calamitous since at least some in the community believed that he would not die (cf. Jn 21.21-22).

32. This identification of Jesus as divine derives from the Jewish tradition. In the next stage of the Johannine tradition he will be addressed as divine also but from the perspective of the philosophical categories of Hellenistic Judaism.

33. John 4.1; 6.23; 9.38; 11.2, 27; 20.2, 18, 20, 25, 28; 21.7 (twice), 12, 15, 16, 17, 20, 21.

34. R. E. Brown, *Jesus: God and Man* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1967), p. 28.

35. See 1 Jn 2.22-24; 3.23; 4.2, 9-10, 15; 5.1-5, 6-12, 13, 20.

The third edition of the Gospel had for its primary purpose the incorporation of the apocalyptic worldview into the Gospel tradition together with the related theological viewpoint as it was presented in 1 John. But this was not all. In addition to incorporating the witness of the author of 1 John into the Gospel, the third edition of the Gospel introduced three other types of changes into the tradition.

The first such change is an extension of the renewed emphasis on the importance of the physical, material dimension of reality for religious life and belief. The first Letter of John had put emphasis on the physical, atoning death of Jesus in blood. The third edition of the Gospel makes it clear that the community's belief now also includes a belief in bodily resurrection (5.27-29) as well as assertion of the importance of the Eucharist (6.51-58) and Baptism (as expressed by the addition of the words 'water and' in 3.5). A fourth ritual action also appears in 20.23, where Jesus gives the disciples the authority to declare which sins are forgiven and which are not. What is remarkable about this is that not only is it a ritual but it involves *human decision making* in the process.

The second new element during this period is that the community now understands itself to be in a relationship to other sectors of early Christianity. In 10.16, Jesus speaks of having other sheep that are not of that fold and of his desire to bring them together into one. In 11.52, Jesus speaks of his death as bringing together the children of God scattered about. Both of these statements speak of groups that already believe in Jesus but which need to be brought together into unity so that they may genuinely constitute 'one flock and one shepherd'. Related to this is Jn 21.15-17, which explains that the single shepherd is Peter rather than the disciple whom Jesus loved.

An additional factor that indicates awareness of other sectors of Christianity distinct from the Johannine group but also the desire to have a harmonious account of the public life of Jesus is the presence of passages that attempt to reconcile narrative elements and the theology of the Johannine Gospel with the traditions known through the Synoptics. There is a clear intent in 3.24 to correlate that account with the Synoptic account of the arrest of John the Baptizer (cf. Mk 1.14). In 4.4, there is an attempt to correlate the Johannine account with the Synoptic accounts by denying that Jesus himself baptized. In 4.44, there is a (confused) attempt to apply the saying about the rejection of a prophet in his own territory to the ministry of Jesus. In 12.24-26, there are sayings that have a resemblance to Synoptic *logia* relevant to the death of Jesus. Above, we saw that there is also a concern for the 'sacramental' ritual of the forgiveness of sins. Such a ritual was accepted in other sectors of early

Christianity as is evident from its mention in Mt. 16.19 and 18.18. The similar ritual mentioned in Jn 20.23 testifies to the fact that the Johannine community now accepts this ritual also.

The fourth striking element found in the third edition is the recognition of a role for human authority within the community. The first instance of this appears in 20.23, where the disciples are given the power to declare what is and is not forgiven. When we reflect on the fact that this is the first time any such human authority and power within the community is acknowledged within the Gospel and when we realize that this power is acknowledged but not at all explained in relation to the previous convictions regarding the uselessness of ‘the flesh’, it is all the more striking.

But this brief insertion is not the only instance of such a conviction regarding a role for human authority. The other, and the most important, instance is Jn 21.15-17. For the first (and only) time in the history of the Johannine community there is recognition that Jesus had appointed a human authority to guide the community. Prior to this, the community had grown from the conviction that the Spirit was the only guide that was needed, to the conviction that the teaching of the Spirit would not vary from the teaching of Jesus, and then finally to the conviction that a human person could embody and channel the direction previously reserved for the individual’s relation with the Spirit.

This text also makes clear that, even though the community believed that ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved’ was more faithful, more insightful, and more courageous than Peter, it was Jesus’ desire that Peter be the one chosen to lead. By incorporating this passage within the Gospel, the author makes it clear that the Johannine community was acknowledging and accepting the authority of the ‘Petrine churches’.

Once again, the community had made a major shift in its self-understanding. Having moved away from the synagogue, and having weathered the storm of internal division, the community now recognizes the importance of the insights found in the Synoptic tradition and moves away from its traditional ‘independence’ to accepting the leadership of Peter.³⁶

f. The Sixth Phase of the Community’s History

But there was one more significant addition to the tradition yet to come. In the final phase of its literary development, the community incorporated what has come to be known as the Prologue at the beginning of its

36. Particularly interesting in this regard is the chapter entitled ‘The Heritage of the Beloved Disciple and the Epistles of John: A Community of Individuals Guided by the Spirit’, in R. E. Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (Mahwah: Paulist, 1984), pp. 102–23, esp. 122–3.

Gospel. Many scholars believe that this was a hymn that had been in use within the religious services of the Johannine community. The introduction of this new genre ('hymn') into the Gospel indicates that the community had been reflecting on the tradition by means of such hymns probably for some time.

In the process of incorporating the hymn into the Gospel tradition, the community modified the hymn by means of several prose additions. The resulting composition, known today as 'the Prologue', was prefixed to the Gospel as an attempt to summarize the message of the Gospel in a hymnic or poetic way.

It is important to recognize that this hymn exhibits yet another worldview and another stream of first-century Jewish thought, distinct from the two worldviews evidenced earlier. Second, it cannot be said to be simply a hymnic rendition of theology already found in the Gospel. The Prologue introduces a number of theological concepts not found elsewhere in the Gospel. These new concepts are not minor nuances of the earlier theology. Rather, in some cases, they take the Johannine theology to a whole new level.

In chapter 10, we asked the question about the nature of this worldview. Here we will call attention to elements of the Prologue that appear nowhere else in the Gospel. At the same time, it will be clear that these theological elements unique to the Prologue have been joined to other elements that echo the language, context, and theology of the remainder of the Johannine tradition.

First, in the Prologue there is discussion of Jesus' relation to the creation of the world. The beginning of the Prologue is striking and powerful in its statement 'In the beginning was the Word'. The Prologue puts the ministry of Jesus into the context of all history and even to the 'beginning' where we find out that the Word was already in existence. There is no 'time' when the Word did not exist. This is the ultimate 'context' of the Logos, who is Jesus, who is the subject of the Gospel. Nothing similar appears anywhere else in the Gospel.

In composing and attaching the Prologue to the Gospel, the community not only provided reflections on additional dimensions of the identity of Jesus but did so in categories that were not to be found in either canonical or apocalyptic Judaism.

Although 1 John spoke implicitly of the pre-existence of Jesus when it referred to Jesus as having been 'revealed' (1 Jn 1.2; 3.5, 8), there had been no attempt previously elsewhere in the tradition to say anything about the activity of Jesus in the time before his ministry on earth. In the third edition of the Gospel, reflection on the pre-existence of Jesus

continued to develop. The third edition spoke of what Jesus had ‘seen’ with the Father (clearly implying pre-existence). That edition also incorporated the titles ‘I AM’ and ‘Lord’. However, the Prologue now brings reflection to bear, even if only briefly, on a phase of the existence of Jesus/the Word that is not mentioned elsewhere in the Johannine tradition: the time of creation.

The notion of ‘the Word’ as a designation for the pre-existent Jesus appears only here. The term as used in the Prologue finds its parallels not in the Gospel and Letters, but in a literature and a worldview that is different from anything else in the Johannine tradition.

The Prologue also asserts the role of the Word in the process of creation, asserting that ‘all things’ were made through him. It is then this same Word who was the agent of God in creation who also comes into the world to give those who believe in him the power to become children of God. With the notion of becoming a ‘child of God’ we enter into the realm of theological concepts common to the Gospel and the Letters. The Prologue makes quite clear the means by which it becomes possible for believers to become ‘children of God’. They are

born, not from blood, nor from the will of the flesh, nor from the will of a man, but from God. (Jn 1.13)

The phrase ‘child of God’ appeared for the first time in 1 Jn 3.1-2.³⁷ There the author emphasizes that this notion is not just a metaphor but a reality: sonship is a result of rebirth. In 1 Jn 5.1-2, we again meet the notion of ‘children of God’ and the author elaborates on the notion that God is the begetter and the one who loves the begetter must also love the begotten. It is this notion that appears here again.

As the Prologue progresses, the message changes from the more abstract ‘All things came to be through him and without him came to be not one thing that has come to be’ to the more concrete. Three times the author of the prologue attempts to make a transition from the heavenly realm to the earthly: ‘He was in the world’ (v. 10); ‘He came into his own’ (v. 11); ‘and the Word became flesh’ (v. 14). But eventually it becomes clear that the remainder of the Gospel will concern the time of the Word among humanity.

Interspersed with these verses are prose passages, almost quotes from the first chapter of the Gospel. The purpose of this process is to begin the transition to the events of the historical ministry. However, the need to

37. It is essential to distinguish this use from the similar usage by the author of 1 John to refer to the members of the community, whom he describes as (my) (dear) children.

rely so much on the wording to follow suggests that the Prologue was not added by the author of the third edition but rather annexed to the Gospel by someone else, someone less comfortable moving from the Prologue to the beginning of the actual Gospel.

The Prologue then continues with something of a paraphrase of the main lines of the Gospel's view of the ministry of Jesus. Believers are 'born' of God, through the power of God. They have seen the 'glory' of Jesus dwelling among humanity. But Jesus is described as full of grace (χάρις) and believers are said to have received from his 'fullness' (πληρώμα) 'grace upon grace'. Both of these terms are clearly intended to describe essential theological features, but they are terms whose meaning is not explained here nor anywhere else in the Gospel!

Throughout, the thought of the Prologue has been alternating between the realm of the Word and his 'fullness' (πληρώμα), a realm populated with terms and concepts that echo Hellenistic philosophy, and the realm of the Gospel proper that is to follow.

But why was this Prologue added to the Gospel? Does it add anything intrinsically significant to the message of the Gospel? The answer to this question depends to a certain extent on the question of the *genre* of the Prologue. Was it a hymn before being affixed to the Gospel? Some scholars believe that the impetus to preface this hymn to the community's account of the ministry of Jesus appears to have come from within the worship of the community. Such worship was intended to capture and express the convictions of the community in terms and categories they found to be appropriate. Such worship is intended for insiders, not outsiders.

I myself am inclined to think that the Prologue had another purpose and another origin. It seems more likely that the Prologue was intended to have much the same purpose as the *Contra Apionem* of Josephus and much of the work of Philo. It shows that the ministry of Jesus could be understood in terms of, and in relation to, similar philosophical investigation that was going on among the intellectuals of the Hellenistic world. It functions, in a sense, as an *apologia* for the (Jewish-)Christian way of life and for the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, a Jewish figure who was believed to be divine and to have come from heaven to reveal the means to receive eternal life. By describing Jesus in terms that reflected Hellenistic philosophy, the community that produced this Gospel showed itself to be deserving of the same respect accorded other such philosophical schools. In this way, the Hymn may also give us a glimpse of something of the social stratum of the Johannine community during this period. As L. I. Levine has pointed out with regard to Jewish society in

general, the upper, more wealthy classes were much more likely to be open to foreign influences than the lower classes. Likewise contact with foreign cultural influences was much more likely in urban centers than in rural areas and small villages.³⁸ This observation may also have a relevance for the Johannine community. The Johannine community must have been located in an urban area and composed of a significant number of individuals of the upper classes familiar with such sophisticated philosophical thought that they used such material in their reflection on, and their conceptualization of, the ministry of Jesus. Jerusalem could have been such a place but so could cities such as Ephesus and Alexandria.

Finally, there is one other aspect of the Johannine community that may be revealed by the thought world of the Prologue. J. Barclay, speaking of the allegorical method of Philo, comments that such speculation as Philo customarily engaged in may have been appealing only to those who had 'the necessary rational souls capable of discerning the intellectual truths in the text... No doubt the majority found such rarified exercises of little interest or relevance.'³⁹ We do not know the reaction of the Johannine community to the presence of 'Logos' thought at the beginning of their Gospel. But the presence of such thought must give some indication of the social and intellectual level of the Johannine community. This was a community at home with such thinking and comfortable in using its categories to express their belief. Given the sophistication of the Hymn and given the level of thought and sophistication throughout the community's earlier history, without denying the community's own belief in the teaching of the Spirit that they believed was the true source of their articulation of the identity of Jesus, we may suspect that the Johannine community was indeed a community of individuals who were above average in their intellectual gifts and able to plumb the depths of those beliefs in such a way.

3. Conclusions

Our review of the history of the Johannine tradition has suggested that the literature of this community reveals six stages in its development. When we look at this development from the point of view of a 'school', we may perhaps gain new insights into the nature of this particular group. The history of the Johannine community reveals a development

38. Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism*, pp. 16–32, 90–1, esp. 23–4.

39. Barclay, *Jews*, p. 167.

that is far from homogeneous. The shift from the first to the second stage of the community's literary and theological development does not reflect conflict or tension but certainly reflects a quantum leap in theological depth from the relative simplicity of the first edition to fully worked out theology of the Spirit in the second. The development from the second to the third phase and from the third to the fourth reveals major challenges and major changes. But this development also reflects a considerable increase in the sophistication of the argument used to reflect on the identity of Jesus.

The change evident between that second edition and the introduction of the apocalyptic worldview in 1 John created another period of tension and led to the refusal of a number in the community to accept these changes. The result was another schism within the community and the departure of a considerable segment of the community,

Once this second major crisis had occurred and the implications of a shift in worldview that caused that crisis had been assimilated, we see evidence of a period (in the third edition of the Gospel) in which the community recognized the need for a leader whose authority stemmed from the wishes and actions of Jesus himself. This was a period in which the desire for unity among various groups of Christians became more important than what had previously been the community's desire to articulate their own distinctive understanding of the ministry of Jesus.

Finally the community's worldview is cast into yet another form of reflection on the ministry of Jesus. This time, the overall meaning of Jesus' ministry is articulated in a form that would seem to make the ministry of Jesus more appealing and more understandable to those who were familiar with the worldview of Hellenistic Judaism.

Looking back at this development, it can certainly be said that the Johannine 'school' was not one in which there was a simple, organic development in theology. Rather the tradition was rocked again and again by crisis, a tumult caused by repeated reconceptualizations and reinterpretations of the ministry. In his analysis of ancient schools, Culpepper pointed to the 'lively interest in the ideal of friendship (φιλία) or fellowship (κοινωνία)'.⁴⁰ While this is certainly a marked element of the Johannine tradition, it is also evident that not all members shared this interest—for a variety of reasons.

After his analysis of various ancient 'school' traditions, Culpepper describes what he sees as their greatest similarities:

40. Culpepper, *School*, p. 250.

1) they were groups of disciples which usually emphasized *φιλία* and *κοινωνία*; 2) they gathered around and traced their origin to a founder whom they regarded as an exemplary wise, or good man; 3) they valued the teachings of their founder and the traditions about him; 4) members of the schools were disciples or students of the founder; 5) teaching, learning, studying, and writing were common activities; 6) most schools observed communal meals, often in memory of their founders; 7) they had rules or practices regarding admission, retention of membership, and advancement within membership; 8) they often maintained some degree of distance or withdrawal from the rest of society; and 9) they developed organizational means of insuring their perpetuity.⁴¹

It should be noted that Culpepper does not advance these characteristics as absolute requirements of every 'school'. Rather, they are features that *generally* appear in such movements. Reflecting on these features in the light of the proposal advanced above, it is possible to see various ways in which the Johannine tradition mirrored these secular schools, but also we are able to see that in other ways the Johannine community went its own way either because of external forces or because of religious convictions.

A question of particular interest arises from comparing the results of the proposal given here and Culpepper's distinguishing features: Who was the founder of the Johannine school? It is often thought that either John, the Son of Zebedee, or the Beloved Disciple performed this function. However, modern scholarship has seriously questioned whether the 'John' said to be the author of the Gospel was John the son of Zebedee. Was the founder, then, 'the disciple whom Jesus loved'? It certainly is true that, in its present form, the Gospel pays great respect to this disciple as the witness to the truth of what is recorded in the Gospel. However, if it is correct that this disciple is the same as the author of 1 John and if that author is actually the 'Elder' of 2 and 3 John, then we have substantial evidence for thinking that the Beloved Disciple was John the Elder.⁴² But the influence of this individual appears after the second edition of the Gospel. We do not know anything about his relation to the previous stages of the tradition. Therefore, it would seem that he was, in some ways, not the founder of the (*literary*) tradition even though he was an eyewitness to the ministry of Jesus. In his own words, he is a witness, and the importance of this designation cannot be overestimated. Only Jesus, the Father, and the Spirit were 'teachers'. It was also clear that

41. Culpepper, *School*, pp. 258–9.

42. I have spelled out the reasons for this view in detail in my *Commentary*, III, pp. 409–34.

the Spirit would say nothing that was not consistent with the words of Jesus, which Jesus had received from the Father. All humans could only 'witness'. If this is correct, then we must say that Jesus himself was the founder of the community and so, while the community might well trace the truth of the tradition to the 'disciple whom Jesus loved', he was less the 'founder' of the tradition and more the 'guarantor' of the tradition.

And so it becomes clear that one of the constant factors of the Johannine tradition, one that perdured through the three distinct changes in worldview, remained the belief in the central importance of the Spirit alongside the roles of the Father and the Son. If this reliance on the Spirit was the cause of major upheaval at times, it was also this same Spirit that ultimately led the community to nothing other than the words of Jesus. This was the truth of the words of Jesus as they are finally articulated in the Gospel and Letters as we have them today. It is a unique and remarkable articulation that rises to unparalleled heights in its lofty understanding of the meaning of the ministry of Jesus.

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