

(Detailed summary)

Introduction: Problem and Method in Discerning Johannine Ecclesiology p. 13-24

1. Vocabulary

The word "church" (*ekklēsia*) is absent from the fourth Gospel and the first two Johannine epistles, and is found only in the third epistle, where two of the three occurrences are associated with Diotrephes, whom the author condemns. Similarly, other words usually associated with ecclesiology are absent, such as "kingdom of God" (only in 3:3, 5 in the dialogue with Nicodemus), "people of God," and "apostle." One would search in vain in this theology for the salvific aspect of being together in a community.

2. Was the Johannine Church a cult?

One feature of Johannine ecclesiology is its strong opposition to those outside the church, whether they be the "world," the "Jews," or other Christians. This raises the question: are we dealing with a sect? Of course, it all depends on our definition of "sect," i.e., in relation to other religious groups, including other Christians, or in relation to society at large.

Therefore, the fundamental question we should be asking is this: was the Johannine community recognized by other Christian churches, or was it closed in on itself and formed a kind of exclusive circle? Therefore, the Johannine church would be a de facto sect if, implicitly or explicitly, it had broken communion (*koinōnia*) with most other Christians. Some biblical scholars have claimed that it was a sect based on the fact that the Gnostics, a heretical movement in the early 2nd century, adopted the fourth Gospel as their own, forgetting that Irenaeus of Lyon, at the same time, recognized this Gospel as orthodox. But we could speak of a sect if we found in the Gospel of John an anti-sacramental or non-sacramental tendency, or even an anti-Petrine or anti-institutional tendency, or if it presented a certain naive docetism (Jesus only pretended to be human). In all this, one would search in vain for conclusive evidence. Therefore, it is better to pursue more fruitful avenues of analysis.

3. A multi-level reading

Over the past ten years, biblical scholars have favored a multi-level approach that allows us to discover both Jesus and the community that believes in him. Such an approach presupposes the following:

- First, a Gospel reveals how an evangelist conceived of and presented Jesus to a Christian community during the late first century, which indirectly gives us some insight into community life at the time the Gospel was written.
- Second, through source analysis, the Gospels reveal something of the pre-Gospel history of the evangelist's Christological views; and indirectly, they also reveal something of the history of the community earlier in the first century, especially if the sources were part of the community's heritage;
- Third, the Gospels offer limited means for reconstructing the ministry and message of the historical Jesus.

4. The difficulties of such an approach

While we accept in principle the ability to detect a community life beneath the surface of the Gospel narrative, we must nevertheless clearly recognize the methodological difficulties of such an approach. Since the presentation of Jesus and his message is the evangelist's primary goal, it goes without saying that Jesus' actions and words are included in his account because they appear relevant to the benefit of his community. And this is how we gain some knowledge of this community. But it is difficult to be more precise.

Take, for example, the author of the Gospel according to Mark, who describes the Twelve, and Peter in particular, as people incapable of understanding Jesus when he speaks of the necessity of his passion (Mk 8:17-21, 27-33; 9:6, 32; 14:37). The author makes it quite clear to his community that it is difficult to attain authentic faith in Jesus, because it requires participation in his passion; this is what he means by the Twelve's incomprehension. But to go further and speak of a conflict between the Twelve and the early Christians, as some biblical scholars have done, goes beyond the Gospel data.

All the Gospels were written several years after the experience of Jesus' resurrection and therefore interpret Jesus' ministry in the light of Easter faith. Since Mark was the first to write a Gospel, he is the one who made the least effort to retouch the character of Jesus in this light. Thus, he does not hesitate to never present Mary as a disciple of Jesus during his ministry (Mk 3:21, 31-35; 6:4), a fact he considers useful in his catechesis to demonstrate that the physical family enjoyed no privileges in the Christian movement. But to assert on this basis that Mary never became a Christian, as some biblical scholars have done, goes beyond the Gospel data.

5. The pitfalls of the silence argument

We must be careful not to draw conclusions based on what the Gospels do not say. Take, for example, the original ending of the Gospel according to Mark (16:8), which does not contain any accounts of appearances to the Twelve. How should we interpret this fact? One way to interpret it is to see it as an example of an early stage of the Gospel genre before the development of the resurrection narratives. But some biblical scholars venture to see it as a way of demoting the Twelve.

6. The danger of posing hypothetical sources

Some biblical scholars propose hypothetical sources and, based on these, determine a theological vision by observing how the evangelist modified this source. The only case where we can postulate a source with any certainty is that of Matthew and Luke: it is fairly clear that one of their sources was Mark. But in the case of Mark and John, determining their pre-evangelical sources can only be pure conjecture. Some biblical scholars think they recognize certain themes in what they see as pre-evangelical material, then add other passages that seem to be in harmony with them. It is not surprising that the theological vision that emerges from this reconstruction is similar to the criteria used for this reconstruction; we are in a circular argument.

7. Our approach

- i. Our conclusions will be based on the existing text, not on a hypothetical reconstruction of the sources.
- ii. We will focus on those passages in John that differ significantly from the Synoptic Gospels, particularly those that are most likely to be historical. It should be remembered that the fourth Gospel claims to be an eyewitness account (19:35; 21:24) and, in fact, presents an important historical tradition about Jesus. Therefore, a passage in which John modifies the image of Jesus' historical ministry reflects a significant theological interest.
- iii. If we derive certain arguments from the author's silence, we will restrict these arguments to things that the author could hardly have overlooked accidentally. Thus, when John ignores the term "apostle," which is widely used by most New Testament authors, this silence is probably deliberate and significant. Similarly, the absence of the Eucharistic action on the bread and cup during the Last Supper, given the presence of this tradition in the Synoptics and in Paul, can hardly be accidental. On the other hand, the absence of a virginal conception of Jesus, present only in Matthew and Luke, could be explained simply by the evangelist's ignorance of such a tradition.

8. The four phases of Johannine community life

In our reconstruction of the Johannine community, we identify four phases.

- i. Phase One refers to the pre-evangelical era, which bears witness to the origins of the community and its relations with Judaism in the middle of the 1st century. This period is marked by controversies between Johannine Christians and synagogue leaders. It is also marked by the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in the year 70 (see Jn 11:48), and by what preceded it, i.e., the Jewish revolt against Rome that began around the year 66. This entire period, which began around the middle of the year 50 and ended around the end of the year 80, preceded the writing of the fourth Gospel, which took place after the expulsion of the Johannine Christians from the synagogue (Jn 9:22; 16:2) around the year 85 because of their claims about Jesus. This expulsion reflects a situation in the last third of the first century when the center of Jewish teaching was located in Yavne and under Pharisee control, and where the twelfth blessing of the Eighteen Blessings (*Shemoneh Esreh*), which was recited in the synagogue, was probably modified to include a curse against the *minim*, i.e. the deviants who seem to include Christian Jews.
- ii. Phase Two covers the period when the Gospel was written. Although there may have been more than one version of the Gospel, the main text is believed to have been written around the year 90. At that time, the expulsion from the synagogue was a past event, and persecution by the Jews continued, leaving deep wounds, as can be seen from the use of the word "the Jews" in the Gospel. Debates with these Jews became all the more intense as Christians emphasized a high Christology, i.e., the association of Jesus with divinity. Such Christology also had an impact on relations with other Christians whom the Johannine Christians considered to have an inadequate faith. Then, faced with the difficulties of reaching pagans in their preaching, Johannine Christians began to consider the world as belonging to darkness.
- iii. Phase Three is reflected in the Johannine Epistles, where we find divided communities (see 1 Jn 2:19), probably around the year 100. The dissensions seem to revolve around two groups that interpret John's Gospel in opposite ways with regard to Christology, ethics, eschatology, and pneumatology. Judging by the pessimistic tone of the author, who denounces false teachers and believes that the last hour has come, the secessionists seem to be more numerous (1 Jn 4:5).
- iv. Phase Four sees the dissolution of both groups after the writing of the epistles. The secessionists, breaking communion with the more conservative elements of the Johannine community, quickly evolved in the 2nd century towards Docetism, Gnosticism, Cerinthianism, and Montanism. As for those who remained faithful to 1 John, they seem to have joined what Ignatius of Antioch calls "the Catholic Church" at the beginning of the 2nd century, as indicated by the growing acceptance of Johannine Christology of the pre-existence of the

Word. But this amalgamation came at the price of accepting a more authoritarian ecclesial structure and recognizing that the Paraclete alone as a teacher did not offer sufficient guidance in the face of the secessionists. And the secessionists' use of the fourth Gospel delayed its acceptance into the canon of Scripture.

Phase 1: Before the Gospel - Johannine Community Origins, p. 25-58

Despite the diversity of reconstructions of the Johannine community, biblical scholars agree on at least two phases of its development. First, there is agreement on its beginnings, when it was made up of Jews whose faith in Jesus reflected a low theology, i.e., Jesus was given titles derived from the expectation of a messiah or prophet or servant or son of God, as kings were given titles that in no way implied divinity. Later, a high Christology emerged, in which Jesus now belonged to the sphere of divinity, bringing the community into direct conflict with the Jews, who accused it of blasphemy, and pushing it to radicalize itself with even bolder claims.

1. The Originating Group and a Lower Christology

From chapter 1 of the Gospel according to John, two remarkable points distinguish this Gospel from the Synoptics concerning the account of Jesus' ministry.

- i. First, in the fourth Gospel, John the Baptist has knowledge of Jesus' pre-existence (Jn 1:15, 30). This notion of pre-existence, which never appears on Jesus' lips, is surely the product of Johannine theology.
- ii. The Synoptics name Peter, Andrew, James, and John as the first disciples, but John 1:35-51 names Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael instead. Similarly, these disciples' understanding of Jesus' identity varies greatly. In Mark, there is no confession that he is the Son of God until the moment of his death, and in Matthew, Peter's confession (Matthew 16:16-17) is due to a special revelation from God. In John, on the other hand, a set of titles appears in the first chapter: rabbi, Messiah, the one spoken of in the Law and the Prophets, Son of God, King of Israel. Moreover, these titles are inadequate for Jesus, because the disciples will eventually see heaven and earth meet in him (Jn 1:50-51).

What does all this say about the origins of the community?

A. Description of the Originating Group of Johannine Christians

The community began among Jews who considered Jesus to be the expected Messiah. On this point, there are similarities between the Synoptic Gospels and the fourth Gospel, primarily concerning the characters among the first disciples and the titles attributed to Jesus. One would search in vain for a significant difference between the beginnings of this Church and that represented by the Twelve and by Paul. Let us simply compare Jn 1:45 ("We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Book of the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote") and Lk 24:44 ("Everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled").

The same can be said when analyzing the miracle stories ("signs"). Both in John and in the Synoptics, the types of miracle stories are similar: healings of the sick, the crippled, the blind, the multiplication of loaves, resurrections. Of course, in his final form, the evangelist expanded these stories through dialogue with theological interpretation. But this expansion is done in continuity, not rupture. Let us compare Jn 6:51 ("The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh") and Lk 22:19 ("This is my body given for you"). Thus, the sacred material of the tradition of the original community became the source of further reflection and the expansion of its teaching towards a high Christology.

Such continuity can be observed on other points, such as the role of the Paraclete: "He will guide you into all truth" (Jn 16:13). However, this Paraclete will not introduce anything new, but will only interpret what comes from Jesus. Of course, when the Gospel affirms the pre-existence of Jesus, it goes further than the meaning given to the title of Messiah by Andrew (Jn 1:41) and to that of Son of God by Nathanael (Jn 1:49). But this high Christology only reveals the profound meaning of these early confessions. This is why, at the end of his Gospel, the author simply repeats the traditional words: "These things are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (Jn 20:31).

Continuity with the origins is also suggested by the figure of John the Baptist. Indeed, when the fourth Gospel was written, there was open conflict between Christians and the disciples of the Baptist, who rejected Jesus and considered their master to be the true Messiah, or at least his envoy; hence the evangelist's need to put these words in the mouth of John the Baptist: "I am not the Messiah" (Jn 3:28). But the fourth Gospel refuses to reject him. On the contrary, it affirms that John the Baptist was sent by God, and even puts into his mouth titles of Jesus typical of his theology, such as his pre-existence (Jn 1:15, 30). This can only be explained historically if some of the early Johannine Christians came from the Baptist movement. Having John the Baptist speak in this way as a Johannine Christian presupposes continuity with the Baptist's preaching.

Some biblical scholars have noted a certain similarity between the vocabulary of the Essenes, who lived in a settlement known today as Qumran, on the shores of the Dead Sea, and the fourth Gospel: the dualism of light/darkness, truth/falsehood, the prince of light or the spirit of truth leading the sons of light against the sons

of darkness, the Law as a source of living water. However, there is no conclusive evidence that the Johannine author was familiar with the literature of Qumran. It is more likely that Jews who listened to the preaching of John the Baptist, whose ministry was geographically close to Qumran, and who joined the Johannine community, conveyed ideas similar to those found in the Dead Sea Scrolls. It was at a later stage in the community's development, when the high theology of Jesus' pre-existence emerged, that this vocabulary was used to present him as light descended from heaven and Christians as sons of light.

B. The Role of the Beloved Disciple

A special bond between the disciples of John the Baptist and the early Johannine community is personified by the figure of the beloved disciple. Although this figure remains mysterious and appears only in the fourth Gospel, where he becomes the hero of the community, he is nonetheless real. And it was because it claimed to have the testimony of this disciple that the Johannine community was able to defend its particular Christology and ecclesiology in the eyes of the larger Church, which referred instead to the testimony of the Twelve and Peter. This is illustrated by the elevation of the beloved disciple over Simon Peter in the fourth Gospel. If the figure of the beloved disciple were fictional, the entire argument of the Gospel would collapse. This is also the case in the first epistle of John, which from the outset refers to this disciple as the source of the tradition of eyewitness testimony (1 Jn 1:1-3) in order to correct the abuses of those who claim to speak in the name of the Spirit (1 Jn 4:1). The author of the epistle is not an eyewitness, but his community is aware of its roots in a tradition of eyewitness testimony, which presupposes that the beloved disciple was one of those who followed the historical Jesus. This is the meaning of the "we" that we encounter both in the fourth Gospel and in the Johannine epistles.

The portrait of the Johannine community becomes more understandable if the beloved disciple, like some of the early disciples named in John 1:35-51, was first a disciple of John the Baptist (perhaps the unnamed disciple in John 1:35-40 who was with Andrew). Thus, the beloved disciple would have had the same status in this nascent Johannine community of Jewish Christians as the Twelve had in other Christian communities. But why does this title of beloved disciple only appear in chapter 13 when Jesus speaks of "his hour"? This disciple could only receive the title "beloved" in a Christological context. This means that he experienced the same Christological growth as the whole community, and it was this growth that enabled the community to give him his identity as "beloved."

Who is this beloved disciple? It is probably not John, one of the sons of Zebedee; in fact, they are strangely absent from the fourth Gospel, appearing only in the appendix to the Gospel (chapter 21). By contrasting him with Peter, the evangelist gives the impression that he was outside the group of best-known disciples, a group that must have included the sons of Zebedee. Of course, there is the testimony from the end of the 2nd century that identifies the beloved disciple with the apostle John. But all this testifies to a tendency already present in the New Testament to reduce Christian origins to the group of the Twelve. What can we say, nevertheless, about this beloved disciple? He was a disciple of John the Baptist who began to follow Jesus in Judea, while Jesus himself was still in the Baptist's entourage. He shared his master's life during his last stay in Jerusalem. We also know that he was known to the high priest. His relationship with Jesus was different from that of Peter, the representative of the Twelve.

2. The Admission of a Second Group and a Higher Christology

Chapters 2 and 3 of John are not really different from what can be found in the Synoptic Gospels.

- The account of the miracle at Cana is very similar to that of the multiplication of the loaves, just as the intervention of Jesus' mother (John 2:3-4) resembles the mother-son dialogue in Luke 2:48-49 and Mark 3:31-35.
- The cleansing of the temple and the announcement of its future destruction are also present in the Synoptics.
- The visit of the notable Nicodemus, who is open to Rabbi Jesus, and his questioning about entering the kingdom resembles the synoptic account of a notable man questioning Rabbi Jesus about the inheritance of eternal life (Lk 18:18).
- The idea that John the Baptist's disciples do not understand Jesus (Jn 3:22-26) echoes the account of the Baptist's disciples asking Jesus if he is the one who is to come (Lk 7:18-23).

Thus, in these two chapters there is no trace of any major conflict between the early Johannine community and "the Jews."

It is in chapter 4, with the story of the Samaritan woman, that the fourth Gospel departs from the synoptic Gospels. Indeed, while in Matthew 10:5 Jesus forbids his disciples to enter a Samaritan city, according to Luke 9:52-55 the Samaritans were very hostile towards Jesus, and Acts 8: 1-25 informs us that it was several years after Jesus' resurrection that Samaria was reached by Christian preaching through Philip, John 4:4-42 affirms, on the contrary, that Jesus passed through Samaria and led an entire village of Samaritans to believe that he is the Savior of the world. Therefore, historically speaking, there are strong reasons to doubt that Jesus converted many Samaritans to his preaching during his ministry, and it is likely that John's account reflects a post-Easter historical situation.

A. Description of the Second Group of Johannine Christians

The second group to join the Johannine community consists of a large group of Samaritans (Jn 4:4-42). This conversion is not attributed to the disciples in chapter 1, and the fact that this second group gives Jesus the title “Savior of the world” distances us from the standard Old Testament expectations of chapter 1. And it is after this conversion that the evangelist emphasizes the rejection of Jesus by the Jews, who cry out, “Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and possessed by a demon?” (Jn 8:48).

It would not be accurate to say that this second group consisted only of Samaritans (Jn 4:22: “You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation comes from the Jews”). It would be more accurate to say that this second group consisted of anti-temple Jews (Jn 4:21: “Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.”) who converted the Samaritans, while borrowing elements of Samaritan thought, including a Christology not centered on the Davidic Messiah.

Chapters 6-8 of the Acts of the Apostles give us a description of the Hellenists of Jerusalem (Jews who spoke only Greek) to whom the Jewish leaders were very hostile because they opposed the temple in Jerusalem (Jn 7:48-50) and who became Christians. When they were expelled from Jerusalem, they went to preach Christ in Samaria. A Johannine community composed of people hostile to the temple and Samaritans would thus have become detestable to traditional Jews.

Such a community could be located in the greater Palestinian region, including Transjordan and Syria. But can we be more precise? In fact, we can only say that this Johannine community, which is primarily a Jewish Christian community, also includes converted Galileans and Samaritans.

B. Resultant Conflict with “the Jews”

Let us focus on this conflict with “the Jews,” which becomes a prominent theme after chapter 4. Note the strangeness of this term in the mouth of Jesus, who is Jewish, and in the mouths of other Jews such as the parents of the man born blind who are “afraid of the Jews” (Jn 9:22). This is a case where events that took place during the time of the fourth Gospel are projected onto the time of Jesus’ ministry. In fact, Johannine Christians were expelled from the synagogues and prevented from worshipping with other Jews. All this led them to no longer consider themselves Jews, despite their Jewish ancestry. And this language is found in the fourth Gospel.

The term “the Jews” refers to both the high priests and the Pharisees, and John speaks of “the Jews” when the Synoptics speak of the Sanhedrin (compare Jn 18:28-31 and Mk 15:1). He deliberately uses the same term for the Jewish authorities at the time of Jesus as for those who frequented the synagogue at the time he wrote his Gospel. For during Jesus’ ministry, the chief priests and some scribes in the Sanhedrin were hostile to Jesus and took part in his death. Later, those who expelled the Johannine Christians from the synagogues and put some of them to death (Jn 16:2) were considered the heirs of the first group, so much so that the evangelist allows himself to put into Jesus’ mouth the statement that the Jews are children of the devil (Jn 8:44). It should be noted that the synagogue authorities, who defined themselves as disciples of Moses and considered Christians to be “disciples of this fellow” (Jn 9:28-29), did not use any gentler language.

What are we to think of John’s accusation that “the Jews” killed Christians while imagining that they were worshipping God (Jn 16:2)? We know that in the first century certain Christians were put to death: Stephen (Acts 7:58-60), James, son of Zebedee (Acts 12:2-3), and James, the brother of the Lord (Flavius Josephus, [Antiquities of the Jews](#), 20:9). In the second century, Justin, who was born in Palestine, tells us that the Jews could not kill directly, but only through denunciation to the Roman authorities. Indeed, since Judaism was a religion tolerated by the Romans, they were exempt from public worship. So, as long as Christians remained Jews, the Romans had no legal reason to bother them. But the situation changed with their expulsion from the synagogue, where they were now subject to the cult of the emperor, and if they failed to submit, they suffered the legal consequences. According to what we learn from the [Martyrdom of Polycarp](#) (circa 155), the Jews were very zealous in this task. This gives us the background to John’s accusation against “the Jews.”

C. The Higher Christology

We stated earlier that the arrival of the Samaritans in the Johannine community was the catalyst for a high theology. It is time to be more specific. It was through the notion of the Messiah that this theology, different from that of the first members of the community (see Jn 1:35-51), became established. When the Samaritan woman says, “Could he be the Messiah?”, what Messiah is she talking about? It is certainly not the traditional Messiah of the Davidic line. For the whole Samaritan theology was directed against the claims of the Davidic dynasty and against Jerusalem, the city of David. Rather, the Samaritans were waiting for a *Taheb* (one who returns, a restorer), a teacher and a revealer. This is confirmed by Jn 4:25: “The woman said to him, ‘I know that a Messiah is coming—the one called Christ. When he comes, he will tell us all things.’” Samaritan theology was centered on the figure of Moses, so much so that he was often thought to be the one who would return: it was believed that after seeing God, he would return to the people to reveal what God had told him. In the Johannine context, the figure of Moses was replaced by that of Jesus, who saw God and came to earth to speak of what he had heard above. It is in this sense that the arrival of the Samaritans was the catalyst for a high theology.

It is this high theology that runs through the entire fourth Gospel. Thus, the Word, who existed in the presence of God before creation, became flesh in Jesus (Jn 1:1, 14), he was the light of the world (Jn 1:9-10; 8:12; 9:5), he

revealed God, for he alone came from heaven and saw the face of God and heard his voice (Jn 3:13; 5:37), he is one with the Father (10:30), so that to see him is to see the Father (Jn 14:9), and he can speak as the "I am."

This theology is the highest in the entire New Testament. There is nothing equivalent even in Paul. Even a passage such as 1 Cor 8:6 ("For us there is but one God, the Father, from whom everything comes and to whom we belong, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom everything exists and through whom we exist") does not speak of a pre-existence. Similarly, Philippians 2:6-7 ("who, being in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited. But he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, becoming like men, and, recognized in his appearance as a man") does not refer to an incarnation, but emphasizes the fact that, being the image of God like Adam, he did not rebel like Adam because he was a servant. Finally, Col 1:15-16 ("He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, for in him everything was created, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, Thrones and Sovereignities, Authorities and Powers. Everything was created through him and for him") simply means that Jesus is the first of all creation. Thus, we do not find in these epistles any equivalent to a divine Word pre-existing before all creation and to a phrase such as Jn 8:58: "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I Am."

We can now understand why the Johannine community was accused of blasphemy and why the Jews could no longer tolerate them: "From that moment on, the Jewish authorities sought all the more to put him to death, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was also calling God his own Father, thus making himself equal to God" (Jn 5:18). While the *Shemoneh Esreh* proclaims, "You sustain the living and revive the dead... You bring the dead back to life," the fourth Gospel puts these words in Jesus' mouth: "Just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will" (Jn 5:21). For the Jews, the Johannine Christians proclaimed a second God, thereby violating their fundamental creed: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord" (Dt 6:4). Such blasphemy deserves death: "The Jews answered him, 'We are not stoning you for any good work, but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, are making yourself God'" (Jn 10:33).

D. Corollaries for Johannine Theology

Because of the conflict with their Jewish brothers, the Johannine Christians had to choose between the glory that comes from God and the glory that comes from men (Jn 12:45), and so they had to make a radical choice: to cut off their Jewish roots. Until then, Christian preaching had focused on a new covenant, which was simply a renewal of the old covenant. And for several years, the Christian mission focused solely on the Jews (see Matthew 10:5-6). The Acts of the Apostles tells us that it was very late in the day that the mission opened up to the Samaritans, and that was through the Hellenists (Acts 8:5; 11:19-20). But in the Gospel according to John, the tone has completely changed: "He came to his own, and his own did not receive him" (Jn 1:11). And now, the Jews are no longer the children of God, but those of the devil (Jn 8:44, 47), and they will die in their sin for refusing to believe in Jesus (Jn 9:41; 8:24). Those who welcomed this revelation became the new Israel (Jn 1:13, 47). Thus, the mere birth of the flesh, which the Jews claim as their membership in the people of God, is useless, for only a birth from above through faith in Jesus enables one to become a child of God. This is what Nicodemus does not understand.

From then on, the entire Jewish cultic system, which had lost all its meaning, was replaced in the Johannine community. This begins with the very gift of the Law at Sinai, when "the cloud covered the tent of meeting and the glory of the Lord filled the dwelling" (Ex 40:34). Now it is God himself who has dwelt among us in Jesus and through him has shown his gracious love and profound faithfulness (Jn 1:17). Similarly, the Temple in Jerusalem was replaced by the body of Jesus, the true temple (Jn 2:19-21). Then all the Jewish feasts lost their meaning, whether it was the Sabbath, Passover, Tabernacles, or Dedication. Like God, Jesus works on the Sabbath (Jn 5:17). The Feast of Tabernacles is useless for asking for rain, because from Jesus "rivers of living water will flow" (Jn 7:37-38). Finally, the celebration of the consecration of the Temple at the Dedication is replaced by the one whom the Father has consecrated and sent into the world (Jn 10:36). In short, Johannine Christianity became a new religion, separate from Judaism. Through this break, it considered its gains to be greater than what it left behind. And on the other side of the fence, this break reinforced the Jews in their choice to expel them.

One of the corollaries of this high theology concerns eschatology, i.e., the last things. Let us remember that the early Christian sermons displayed a strong sense of the imminent end of time: Jesus would return again to fulfill all that had been foretold in the Law and the Prophets (Acts 3:21); and at that time he would exercise judgment and reward those who believed in him (Luke 12:8-9). But the fourth Gospel is dominated by the idea of a realized Christology: what was expected of this second coming of Jesus has already been accomplished, for Jesus is already exercising judgment (Jn 3:13), so that whoever believes in him is not condemned, and whoever does not believe has already been condemned. Similarly, while the synoptic Gospels consider eternal life to be a gift received at the final judgment (Mark 10:30; Matthew 18:8-9), for John, those who believe already possess eternal life (John 5:24). For Luke (Luke 6:35; 20:36), being a child of God is a reward in the life to come, but for John this gift is granted here and now (Jn 1:12); in fact, in the fourth Gospel, Christians no longer need to wait to see God, for they see him now in Jesus (Jn 14:7-10).

E. Continuity with the Earlier Stage

With the emergence of high Christology and its corollaries, are we witnessing a break in the Johannine community with its past? The answer is no. Rather, we are witnessing a reinterpretation of tradition. In fact, the evangelist keeps together the elements of low theology with those of high theology, just as he keeps together those of final

eschatology with those of realized eschatology, the emphasis on individualism with the emphasis on community, a sacramental understanding of reality with a lack of interest in the institution of individual sacraments. For he thinks synthetically, not dialectically, with new perceptions reinterpreting old ones.

All this explains the passages that seem contradictory in the fourth Gospel, such as those that present him as equal to God and others as subordinate to God (compare Jn 5:19, 30 and Jn 5:26). Similarly, in John 10:30 we read: "I and the Father are one," and then in John 14:28: "the Father is greater than I." The very presence of what seems contradictory shows that the Johannine community did not deny its past and does not present Jesus as a rival to God. But, of course, we are still far from the Christology of Nicaea. Another indication of Christological continuity is given to us by the fact that John preserved the old terminology, while giving it a new meaning. This is the case with the verb "to send," which is constantly applied in Scripture to the prophets: the evangelist applies it to Jesus, but the one who is sent is the pre-existing Son sent into the world.

The evangelist carries out the same process of reinterpretation in the old scenes of a low Christology. This is the case, for example, in the synoptic scene of Jesus' baptism, which reveals that he is the Son of God through the descent of the Holy Spirit upon him. John has already made this revelation to us in his Prologue. Nevertheless, he feels the need to indirectly preserve the elements of this scene through the voice of John the Baptist (Jn 1:33), while integrating the idea of pre-existence (Jn 1:30): from then on, baptism no longer corresponds to the beginning of Jesus' ministry, but is simply a stage in the sending of the pre-existent Word. Another example comes from the post-Easter appearance narratives. In the Synoptics, these narratives represent his victory after his rejection and condemnation. In John, Jesus is already victorious at the crucifixion, which becomes an "elevation"; the appearance narratives have been preserved, but their importance is no longer the same.

3. The Gentiles and a More Universalist Outlook

Let us summarize what we have said so far: at the very beginning, the Johannine community consisted of Jewish Christians, including disciples of John the Baptist; later, a group of Jewish Christians with anti-temple tendencies joined the community along with Samaritans whom they had converted. But that's not all, because we have evidence that pagans also joined the community; for example, in John 1:41, the author has to explain what the word "Messiah" means, which would be unnecessary for someone of Jewish origin. It is to this arrival of pagans that chapter 12 refers. First, in John 12:20-23, we learn that some Greeks want to see Jesus. For Jesus, this is a sign that his ministry is coming to an end, that he has achieved his goal. At this point, the evangelist quotes Isaiah 6:10 on the hardening of the hearts of "this people," a passage used by Christians to explain the Jews' failure to accept Jesus and the reason why they turned to the Gentiles (see Acts 28:25-28). And since John refers at this point to expulsion from the synagogue, we can assume that it was when the Johannine Christians of Jewish descent were rejected by Judaism and no longer considered themselves Jews that they opened the door of the community to the Gentiles.

It may be surprising that this integration of pagans took place without any real conflict or struggle. But in its evolution, the community had already moved significantly away from Judaism by accepting the Samaritans and promoting worship in spirit and truth rather than in Jerusalem or on Mount Gerizim (Jn 4: 21-24), and by recognizing that entry into the Kingdom is not based on physical birth but on being born of God (Jn 3:3, 5). The community's new vision is clearly expressed in Jn 11:52 when John completes Caiaphas's sentence prophesying that Jesus must die for the nation by writing: "and not only for her, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad." Thus, the entry of the Gentiles into the community took place peacefully and smoothly. The only real struggles were with people "from outside," which implied a clear segregation between 'them' and 'us.'

Since tradition places the composition of the fourth Gospel in Ephesus, in Asia Minor, several biblical scholars see the announcement of a departure from Palestine in John 7:35: "Where then is he going that we may not find him? Is he going to those scattered among the Greeks? Is he going to teach the Greeks?" In fact, this ironic passage is typical of John, where irony is often used to insert an element of truth. And what concerns Jesus would apply more accurately to the Johannine community. When we read through the fourth Gospel, we can better understand certain parallels between Johannine terminology and thought and various elements of Hellenistic and pagan literature. This does not mean that John borrowed from pagan literature, but simply that he sought to make Jesus intelligible to another culture. He is universalist when he uses different symbols to present Jesus and convince men and women from different backgrounds to understand that Jesus transcends ideologies.

Phase 2: When the Gospel was Written - Johannine Relations to Outsiders, p. 59-91

We have already suggested that the pre-evangelical period of the formation of the Johannine community extends from the 50s to the 80s. This chapter aims to present the Johannine view of a variety of non-believers in the eyes of the community. This view adapted to the arrival of pagans in the community, and we can perceive a certain universalism in phrases such as: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life... but that the world might be saved through him" (Jn 3:16-17). But this does not prevent him from categorizing the human race into believers and non-believers: "Whoever believes in him is not judged; whoever does not believe has already been judged, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God" (Jn 3:18). And of course, believers refer to the Johannine community, and people "outside" belong to the world of darkness. No other Gospel defines its relationships in such strong terms of opposition.

However, we should not think that this community defines itself negatively in opposition to others. Rather, it defines itself as a communion (*koinōnia*) (1 Jn 1:3), where members consider each other brothers and sisters and where the call to love one another is a central commandment (Jn 13:34). Even the vision of a high Christology contributes to this idea, for the fact that Jesus saw the Father reveals that he is a God of love and that it is through love that he gave himself through Jesus (Jn 3:16). Such an understanding of God and Jesus requires Christians to behave in a way that reflects them: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35).

Some biblical scholars see in the fourth Gospel an elitist group that developed an esoteric and opaque language that became unintelligible to outsiders. This exaggerates the difficulty posed by John's literary devices. When he presents a dialogue, the interlocutor who does not understand Jesus' language reflects those whose eyes are earthly and find Jesus completely incomprehensible. John knows that the reader is more intelligent than the interlocutor in the dialogue. But at the same time, he challenges the reader to go further than Nicodemus or the Samaritan woman. The fourth Gospel is not the manifesto of an elitist group seeking to set itself apart from "outsiders." Its purpose is to invite the Johannine community itself to a deeper understanding of Jesus, for he is from God and therefore remains beyond what human beings can grasp. It is therefore not surprising that the theme of incomprehension runs throughout the Gospel.

The question that interests us now, and which is more relevant than that of his opponents, concerns the relationship of Johannine believers with a variety of non-believers and with other believers. The fourth Gospel gives us an answer only indirectly, through clues drawn from a polemical and conflictual context.

1. Non-Believers Detectable in the Gospel

A. Group I: The World

A sentence such as John 3:5 ("For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life") gives the impression of a favorable attitude toward the world. But more often than not, the term refers to those who have rejected the light.

- Jn 7: 7: "The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify against it that its works are evil."
- Jn 9: 39: "Jesus said, 'I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see may see and those who do see may become blind.'"
- Jn 12: 31: "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out"
- Jn 14: 17: "This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him because he abides with you, and he will be in you."
- Jn 16: 20: "Very truly, I tell you, you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice; you will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy"
- Jn 16: 33: "I have said this to you so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution, but take courage: I have conquered the world!"
- Jn 17: 9: "I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours"

Some biblical scholars have identified the "world" with "the Jews." However, while the Prince of this world is often associated with Satan, considered the father of the Jews according to John 8:44, the concept of "world" is much broader. While opposition from the Jews dominates chapters 5-12, opposition from the world dominates chapters 14-17. This fact suggests a certain chronology in the opposition. Indeed, we have seen that it is in chapter 12 that the Greeks come to Jesus, at the moment when the break with the Jews is complete, while the Johannine Christians are expelled from the synagogue. That the opposition shifts from "the Jews" to "the world" suggests that the Johannine Christians now face the unbelief of the pagans. And this rejection goes beyond Christology, as indicated in 1 Jn 2:16: "For everything in the world —the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life— does not come from the Father but from the world."

That Jesus came to be rejected by the Jews in particular and by the world in general had a tragic impact on Johannine thought ("he came to his own, and his own did not receive him," Jn 1:11). Jesus was perceived as a stranger on earth, and it is by returning to the Father that he returns home (Jn 17:5). Johannine Christians view their situation in the same way ("If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, since my choice has drawn you out of the world, for this reason the world hates you," Jn 15:19). And so, ultimately, the dwelling place of Johannine Christians is also in heaven ("When I go to prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you with me, so that where I am, you may be too," Jn 14:3). In short, this feeling of rejection produced a growing sense of alienation, so that the community felt like strangers in this world.

Can we go further in determining the geographical and chronological location of this community? Tertullian tells us that the pagans were furious to see the brotherhood in Christian communities where people called each other "brother" and "sister." But the question remains: had this struggle between the community and the pagans reached the intensity of persecution? Biblical scholars have suggested that the Gospel was written in Asia Minor around 95-100 AD and reflects the persecution of the Roman emperor Domitian (reigned 81-96). But this would reflect the same period proposed for the writing of Revelation. However, the attitude toward Pilate and the emperor in the fourth Gospel does not have the bitter tone toward Rome that is found in Revelation; at most, there was harassment by local Roman authorities in connection with the synagogue-church conflict. What is clearer is that at the time of the Gospel's writing, the community must have spent enough time with non-Jews to realize that

many of them were no more willing to accept Jesus than “the Jews,” and that the term “world” was appropriate to describe this opposition.

B. Group II: The Jews

The expulsion from the synagogue took place some time before the writing of the fourth Gospel. But that does not prevent the fact that Johannine Christians continued to be persecuted, even killed by “the Jews.” This means that even though they moved to live in an environment dominated by pagans, that environment also had synagogues. And we know that after Yavne, the Jewish authorities followed the lead of the Pharisees, who were very harsh towards deviants. There are several regions where synagogues of some importance can be found to explain the hostile interactions with Johannine Christians. On this point, the virulent attacks in Revelation against the synagogues of Asia Minor in Smyrna and Philadelphia reinforce the idea of Ephesus as the location of the Johannine community.

Some biblical scholars have suggested that the fourth Gospel was written as a missionary tract to convert Jews. This is an untenable position, as it confuses the past history of the Johannine community with the situation in which the Gospel was written. Of course, the fourth Gospel contains traces of ancient discussions between Christians and Jews that include topics also found in other New Testament writings, such as violating the Sabbath and thereby violating the Law of Moses (Jn 5:16), the resurrection of Jesus (Jn 2:18-22), the incredible nature of the Eucharist (Jn 6:52), and Jesus' lack of education (Jn 7:15). Nevertheless, the dominant debate in the fourth Gospel concerns the divinity of Jesus. And the arguments of the Christian position were perfected through subsequent disputes, which led to the expulsion of the Johannine Christians from the synagogue. When Jesus says that no one can come to him unless it is granted by the Father (Jn 6:37, 39, 44-65), this means that there is no longer any real hope in Johannine circles of being able to reach the Jews.

Thus, even though the Johannine Christians no longer sought to convert Jews, there are several reasons why the details of the old debates were retained. First, any religious group that has separated from another group will retain the arsenal of arguments that led to this position and that will be useful for the education of new generations. Second, as we will see later, there were Jews in the synagogues who secretly believed in Jesus. So this arsenal of arguments could be used to give them courage and to openly confess Jesus, even if it meant being expelled from the synagogue.

C. Group III: The Adherents of John the Baptist

We have seen that the Johannine community has its roots among the disciples of John the Baptist. So it may seem surprising to find a number of negative statements about him in the fourth Gospel.

- Jn 1: 8: "He himself was not the light"
- Jn 1: 15: "He who comes after me ranks ahead of me"
- Jn 1: 20: "I am not the Messiah"
- Jn 3: 30: "He must increase, but I must decrease"
- Jn 10: 41: "John performed no sign"

But everything becomes clear when we read this passage from John 3:22-26 in an autobiographical way, where John the Baptist's disciples are indignant that Jesus is making more disciples than their master: This means that when the fourth Gospel was written, there were disciples of John the Baptist who did not believe in Jesus, and therefore the writing of the Gospel constitutes an apogetic against them.

It must be acknowledged that no synoptic account has as many reservations about John the Baptist. This can be understood in light of Acts 18:24 – 19:7, where Apollos and a group of twelve disciples had only received the baptism of John the Baptist; they had to receive catechesis on Jesus. Thus, in Ephesus, where the fourth Gospel was probably written, the Baptist movement was very much alive. Furthermore, we learn from the Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions (a 3rd-century apocryphal work) that the sectarians of the Baptist claimed that their master was the Messiah, not Jesus. All of this provides us with clues that there were probably disputes in Ephesus between Johannine Christians and disciples of John the Baptist. This would explain why in the fourth Gospel there is an effort to correct an erroneous portrait of the one presented as the precursor of Jesus, but without directly attacking him and his disciples, as he did with the group of unbelievers, no doubt in the hope of seeing them convert. John 3:22-26 presents the unbelieving disciples of John the Baptist as jealous and envious, but does not present them as hating Jesus. This lack of severity can be explained by the fact that the Johannine community has its origins among the disciples of the Baptist.

2. Other Christians Detectable in the Gospel

The Johannine writer tells us quite clearly that there were a number of people who believed in Jesus but who, in fact, were not true believers.

A. Group IV: The Crypto-Christians (Christian Jews inside the synagogue)

Nevertheless many, even of the authorities, believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue, for they loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God. (Jn 12, 42-43)

The man born blind (John 9) personifies the Johannine community, a community that shows little tolerance for those who refuse to make the difficult choices it has made. His negative comments about non-believing "Jews" also apply to crypto-Christians; by not daring to confess their faith publicly, they show that they do not truly believe in him. Like "the Jews," crypto-Christians have chosen to be recognized as disciples of Moses rather than disciples of "this man" (Jn 9:28). Nevertheless, by inserting so many scriptural references, the fourth Gospel still seems to hope to change their minds and lead them to leave the synagogue.

What was the Christology and ecclesiology of this group? We can only speculate that, in their view, the radicalism of the Johannine Christians led to an unnecessary and tragic expulsion from the synagogue. These crypto-Christians probably did not share the high Christology of the Johannine community and did not accept the idea of exalting Jesus above Moses or discarding the cultic heritage. For them, Jesus was a Jew who evolved within the synagogue itself, just like James and Peter. And their expulsion from the synagogue was due as much to the radicalism of the Johannine Christians as to the intransigence of the synagogue. By remaining silent, they were not guilty of cowardice in their eyes, but were setting an example of prudence. Their goal, therefore, would have been to work from within to bring the leaders of the synagogue to greater tolerance towards Christians.

The history of Crypto-Christians reflects the choices that people who embraced the Gospel had to make, torn between breaking away from their social milieu and working stubbornly within it to bring about change.

B. Group V: The Jewish Christian Churches of Inadequate Faith

This was a group of Jewish Christians who had left the synagogue (or had been expelled from it), who were publicly known as Christians and formed churches, but toward whom John remained hostile at the end of the first century.

a. A first example is given to us in Jn 6:60-66 :

60 When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" 61 But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, "Does this offend you? 62 Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? 63 It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. 64 But among you there are some who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who were the ones who did not believe and who was the one who would betray him. 65 And he said, "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father." 66 Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. (Jn 6 : 60-66)

The context of this passage is that Jesus has just left the synagogue and is talking to people whom John calls "disciples." These disciples find it difficult to accept what he has said about the bread of life, which is his flesh given to be eaten, and his blood shed to be drunk, in order to have life. Jesus replies that his words are Spirit and life, and that no one can believe without the action of the Father. From then on, several disciples left him. Here we have Jewish Christians who were not considered true believers by John, because they did not share his vision of the Eucharist.

b. A second example is given to us in Jn 7: 3-5:

3 So his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea so that your disciples also may see the works you are doing, 4 for no one who wants to be widely known acts in secret. If you do these things, show yourself to the world." 5 (For not even his brothers believed in him.)

John's assertion that Jesus' brothers did not believe in him is surprising at the end of the 1st century, given that James, the "brother of the Lord," received a vision of the risen Jesus and was a figure of authority in the church of Jerusalem (Gal 1:19), that other brothers of Jesus succeeded him in Jerusalem, and that members of his family were prominent figures in Palestine in the 2nd century. This is not simply an echo of a historical memory in which, at the very beginning, Jesus' family reacted badly to his ministry (see Mk 3:21, 34-35; 6:4). If, for example, he presents Jesus' mother in an unfavorable light because of her interference at Cana (Jn 2:1-11), he takes pains to save her image by presenting her as a believer at the foot of the cross (Jn 19:25-27). Why does he not do the same with Jesus' brothers? It should be remembered that the "brother of the Lord" was followed during his lifetime by Jewish Christians in Jerusalem who were much more conservative than Peter and Paul (Gal 2:12), and that after his death he became the hero of 2nd-century Jewish Christians who gradually separated themselves from the "Great Church."

c. A third example is given to us in Jn 8: 31-59:

31 Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." 33 They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, 'You will be

made free?”... 37 I know that you are descendants of Abraham, yet you look for an opportunity to kill me because there is no place in you for my word. 38 I declare what I have seen in the Father’s presence; as for you, you should do what you have heard from the Father.” 39 They answered him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you are Abraham’s children, you would do what Abraham did... 44 You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies... 48 The Jews answered him, “Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?”... 52 The Jews said to him, “Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and so did the prophets, yet you say, ‘Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.’ 53 Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets also died. Who do you claim to be?”... 57 Then the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” 58 Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.” 59 So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

We are probably dealing with Jewish Christians who were greatly irritated by the Johannine community because of its high theology and its mixture of Samaritan elements. This may be an echo of debates between conservative and less conservative Jewish Christians around the notion of the “seed of Abraham,” a notion perceived by conservatives as very physical, which led them to doubt that the Johannine Christians were truly descendants of Abraham, given the presence of Samaritans. But for John, Abraham’s physical descendants did not guarantee that these Jewish Christians were truly Abraham’s descendants, since Ishmael, Abraham’s son, was born a slave and was considered illegitimate by contemporary Jews. But it is with the Christological question (“before Abraham was, I Am”) that the debate reaches its turning point: they want to kill Jesus, echoing the figures of Ishmael and Cain (Jn 8:44), two men who killed or threatened their brothers, a thinly veiled allusion to the attitude of Jewish Christians towards the Johannine community. Thus, in John’s eyes, failure to recognize the true character of Jesus means that these “Jews who believed in Jesus” are no better than “the Jews.”

- d. A fourth example is given to us in Jn 10: 12:

The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.

Who is the mercenary? He is defined as the shepherd of the flock, which refers to the leader of a Christian group, probably a Jewish Christian church. The wolf would refer to the Jews who want to bring Christian Jews back to the synagogue. Thus, these leaders did not make enough effort to distance Christians from the community in relation to Jews, because, deep down, they did not really accept the Johannine thesis that Judaism had been replaced by Christianity.

- e. What conclusions can be drawn from these four cases? All of these churches probably included Christians who claimed the support of James and the Lord’s brothers, who insisted on the importance of physical descent, who professed a low Christology, and who rejected a high sacramental understanding of the Eucharist. But is the existence of such churches possible at the end of the 1st century? For in the 2nd century, there is abundant evidence of Jewish Christians who adhered to the main principles of Judaism, to a low theology, and to a separation from these churches of Christians converted from paganism. A great testimony is given to us by Ignatius of Antioch who, writing to the churches of Asia Minor, attacks Jewish Christians who venerate Jesus as a teacher but are not prepared to admit that his person disrupts the unity of the Godhead, who gather for the sacred meal to experience brotherhood rather than a sacrament. Also, in John, we would have a portrait of these groups two decades earlier, precisely because Johannine theology forced the earlier arrival of this conflict between Johannine Christians and Jewish Christians.

C. Group VI: The Christians of Apostolic Churches

This group is represented by Peter and the other members of the Twelve (Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Judas-not-Iscaiot, Nathanael), and for this reason, they are called “apostolic.” John would not have called them that, as he avoids the term “apostle,” but they would certainly have seen themselves that way, as the idea of the Twelve Apostles was widespread in the second third of the first century. The fact that John chose Peter and the Twelve to represent them suggests that this group was of Judeo-Christian origin. In John 12:20, Philip and Andrew are involved in the scene where the Greeks want to see Jesus, a scene that shows openness to pagans. Thus, the apostolic community and the Johannine community had a similar ethnic composition, with a mixture of Jews and pagans.

- a. A Separate Group

Did John want to symbolize a special and distinct group through the figures of Peter and the Twelve? We have a number of clues. The first comes from John 6:60-69, a passage about the bread of life, which we examined earlier. A first group of disciples who left the synagogue are unable to continue following Jesus when he speaks of his body being given as food; for John, these are Judeo-Christians with inadequate faith. In contrast, the Twelve, represented by Peter, say, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (Jn 6:59). This scene symbolizes Christians with a more adequate faith.

But how can we know whether this last group of Christians does not represent all the others, including those of the Johannine community? The key to answering this question lies in the effort made in the fourth Gospel to elevate the figure of the beloved disciple above Peter and make him its hero:

- In John 13:23-26, he rests against Jesus' chest, and Peter must turn to him for information.
- In John 18:15-16, he is able to accompany Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, and it is he who allows Peter to enter.
- In John 19:26-27, he is at the foot of the cross with Jesus' mother, while Peter is on the run.
- In John 20:2-10, he beats Peter to the tomb.
- In John 21:7, he recognizes Jesus standing on the shore and informs Peter of his identity.
- In John 21:20-23, when Peter, somewhat jealous, asks Jesus about the fate of the beloved disciple, he is answered: "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me."

Such a contrast between the beloved disciple and Peter is not accidental. The two men express the contrast between two communities, the Johannine community and the one that venerated Peter and the Twelve, which we have called the apostolic community.

b. The Perception of This Group

What was the attitude of the Johannine community toward the apostolic community? In a way, it was favorable. In the discourse on the bread of life, these apostolic Christians accept Jesus' difficult words (Jn 6:59). At the Last Supper (Jn 13:1), they are among "his own" whom Jesus loved to the end and for whom he prayed (Jn 17:9, 20), because they kept his word (Jn 17:6) and were hated by the world (Jn 17:14). Likewise, they are witnesses to Jesus' resurrection (Jn 20:19, 24), and Peter, their spokesman, will glorify God through his death (Jn 21:19).

However, the apostolic community does not represent the fullness of the Christian vision. The apostles scatter and abandon Jesus when he is arrested (Jn 16:32), while the beloved disciple remains with Jesus at the foot of the cross (Jn 19:26-27). Simon Peter denied Jesus (Jn 18:17, 25) and had to be restored three times by Jesus (Jn 21:15-17), while there was no need for restoration for the beloved disciple. At the empty tomb, the beloved disciple understands the significance of the clothes left there, while Peter understands nothing (Jn 20:8-10). During the miraculous catch, the beloved disciple recognizes Jesus (Jn 21:7), but Peter does not. Thus, the Johannine community claims to have a deeper Christian understanding than the apostolic community.

c. Christological Comparison

It is on the Christological level that the distinction between the two groups is made. Even if the Christology of the apostolic community seems high enough to accept Jesus' words about giving his flesh to eat, it is not yet high enough for the fourth Gospel. Thus, when the disciples say, "Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you. That is why we believe that you came from God," Jesus replies, "Do you believe now? Behold, the hour is coming, and now it is here, when you will be scattered, each going his own way, and you will leave me alone" (Jn 16:29-32). Even the post-Easter scene with Thomas indicates that the faith of the Twelve needs improvement (Jn 20:24-29). In fact, Thomas' final confession ("My Lord and my God") perhaps expresses what apostolic faith should be.

To be more precise, what John believes is missing from apostolic Christology is faith in Jesus' pre-existence and his origin from above. For him, to affirm that Jesus is the Son of God means that he is always at the Father's side (Jn 1:18), that he does not belong to this world (Jn 17:14), but to the divine world (Jn 3:13, 31). Nowhere in the other Gospels do we find any indication of a belief in the pre-existence of Jesus or anything equivalent to a phrase such as, "Before Abraham was, I am" (Jn 8:58).

d. Comparison in Terms of Ecclesiology

There is also a certain demarcation between the two communities in ecclesiological terms. In the works of the New Testament, and particularly in Matthew and Luke/Acts, emphasis is placed on continuity with the testimony of the apostles Peter and the Twelve. In the fourth Gospel, on the other hand, no attention is paid to the "apostles," because what is important is fidelity to the testimony of the beloved disciple. Furthermore, in Matthew and Luke/Acts and in the apostolic letters, there is a growing institutionalization of the churches with an interest in different functions. But in John, the importance of the institution is relativized, and rather than using the image of the body and its members as in Paul in 1 Corinthians 12, the image of the vine and its branches is used, emphasizing the importance of the branches remaining in the vine; the disciple must keep the commandment of love.

Another aspect that distinguishes the two ecclesiologies concerns the period after the disappearance of the great witnesses such as Peter, Paul, and James of Jerusalem in the 60s. For the apostolic community, church leaders had to remain faithful to what the apostles had taught without changing anything (Acts 20:28-30; Titus 1:9). For the Johannine community, after the departure of the beloved disciple (John 21:20-23), the

teacher was now the Paraclete, who would remain forever in anyone who loved Jesus and kept his commandments (John 14:15-17); he is the guide to the whole truth.

Finally, it should be noted that, unlike Matthew 28:19 (“make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”) and Luke 22:19 (“This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me”), John’s Jesus does not ask for the institution of baptism or the Eucharist. For Matthew and Luke, the sacraments are linked to ecclesial life, while for John, the sacraments are the continuation of the power of Jesus manifested during his ministry, when he opened the eyes of the blind (baptism as illumination) and fed the hungry (the Eucharist as food).

In short, there is no controversy in the ecclesiology of the Johannine community vis-à-vis the apostolic community. Rather, there is a kind of warning against doctrinal succession, the institutionalization of roles, and sacramental practice: we must not forget the essential, the living presence of Jesus in Christians through the Paraclete.

3. Was the Johannine Community a Sect?

To ask whether the community was a sect is to ask: did this community break communion (*koinōnia*) with other Christians? We have seen that the Johannine Christians were hostile towards the Jews (group II), but they were not alone in this, as we see in Paul and Matthew. Similarly, they were not alone in condemning crypto-Christians (group IV) and Christians with insufficient faith (group V).

But it is true that the Johannine community emphasizes, on the one hand, a sense of alienation: their Jesus is a stranger who was not understood by his people and is not even of this world. On the other hand, it emphasizes a sense of superiority by displaying a deeper theology: the beloved disciple, hero of the community, is the object of Jesus’ special affection; implicitly, it is asserted that Johannine Christians are those who best understand Jesus, and they are guided by the Paraclete. To say the least, this community developed a particular style, marked by abstract symbolism (life, light, truth) and a technique of incomprehension among various characters.

That being said, despite a sectarian tendency, the community’s attitude toward the apostolic Christians (group VI) proves that it had not really become a sect and had not broken communion with them. For, judging by the scene of the Last Supper, it considered them to be those whom Jesus considered “his own” and who practiced the commandment to love one another (Jn 13:34). Their hope for the future was expressed in Jn 10:16: “I have other sheep that are not of this fold, and I must bring them also; they will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock and one shepherd.” This hope is also expressed in Jn 17:21: “May they all be one, just as, Father, you are in me and I am in you, so that they also may be in us.”

History teaches us that the wider church eventually adopted the Christology of Jesus’ pre-existence. Apostolic Christians recognized that Johannine language was not really an enigma and that his words were not foreign: his theology simply reflected an acceptable variation of tradition.

Phase 3: When the Epistles Were written - Johannine Internal Struggles p. 92-144

The story of the community of the beloved disciple continues after the Gospel period through the epistles. Let us first give a brief description of these epistles, then the hypotheses about the author, and finally the reasons for dating them after the writing of the fourth Gospel.

a. A Description of the Three Epistles

The second and third epistles are single-page epistles written by the same person who identifies himself as “the presbyter.” In 2 Jn, while he is associated with one church (v. 13), he writes to another (v. 1 “to the chosen lady and her children”) to suggest that they should not welcome people who deny that Jesus came in the flesh (vv. 7, 10-11). In 3 John, the presbyter addresses Gaius to praise his hospitality towards missionary preachers (vv. 1, 5-8) and to ask him to welcome Demetrius, who is about to arrive (v. 12). He addresses Gaius directly because a previous letter to “the church” (v. 9) was ignored by Diotrephes, the leader of the church, who refuses to receive the missionary preachers and excommunicates anyone who welcomes them. In both epistles, the presbyter announces an upcoming visit. And in 3 John, he warns that when he comes, he will bring up the matter of Diotrephes’ hostility toward him (v. 10a).

The author of the first epistle does not identify himself. His work is more of a treatise than a personal note. His main concern is to support his readers against a group that is doing the work of the devil and the antichrist (2:18; 4:1-6), a group that has seceded from the community (2:19) but is trying to win followers. The split is Christological and ethical: the group denies Jesus who came in the flesh and does not see the importance of keeping the commandments, while feeling guilty of no sin (1:6, 8; 2:4).

b. The Question of Authorship

We assume that the three epistles were written by the same person, whom we will refer to interchangeably as “the presbyter” or “the author.” This is because the same doctrinal and moral issues are addressed in 1 Jn and 2 Jn, and both 2 Jn and 3 Jn are concerned with the reception of missionary preachers, so that we are dealing with the same phase of

Johannine history. As for the author, it is reasonably certain that he is not the beloved disciple; it is unlikely that the beloved disciple would have called himself "presbyter," and it is unthinkable that the secessionists would have ignored such an imposing figure. Finally, despite certain stylistic and theological similarities, it is unlikely that the author of the epistles is the author of the fourth Gospel. But there was a Johannine school of writers who shared the same theological positions and style, and the authors of the fourth Gospel and the Johannine epistles were probably part of it.

c. The Question of the Date

Some biblical scholars have cited certain ancient motifs in the epistles (final eschatology, the humanity of Jesus, the sacrificial dimension of his death) as well as Jewish features (false prophets, the Antichrist, idolatry) to suggest a Jewish audience and a date earlier than that of the fourth Gospel. They have been misled by the oldest layer of the epistles and by the fact that the author, in order to correct the falsehoods of his opponents, must emphasize what was proclaimed "from the beginning" (1 Jn 1:1). This gives no indication of the date of composition. Similarly, it is normal for the author of the epistles not to emphasize the pre-existence of Jesus, precisely because opponents exaggerate this theological point to the point of denying his existence in the flesh.

The decisive observation concerning the dating of the epistles is provided by the fact that the Johannine community is not confronted with external opponents, but with internal opponents. The secessionists have now replaced the "world" (1 Jn 4:5) and have become the children of the devil (3:10). If the epistles had been written before the fourth Gospel, we would have a divided and decimated community in the Gospel; but we have no evidence of such a situation. On the contrary, as we shall see later, it is the message embedded in the Gospel that led to a split in the Gospel, because two groups interpreted it in two different ways. Also, since the Gospel is thought to have been written around the year 90, we can date the epistles to around the year 100, halfway between the Gospel and the writings of Ignatius of Antioch (around the year 110).

1. The Life-Situation Envisaged in the Epistles

A. The Johannine Churches

The second and third epistles are sent to different churches some distance from the author (whom he intends to visit soon), and so we know that the Johannine communities were not all located in the same geographical area. Different cities or towns are therefore involved. And since they met in house churches, the number of people at these gatherings was limited. It is therefore likely that Gaius and Diotrephes in 1 John, even though they lived in the same town, belonged to different Johannine churches, and that the presbyter wanted his emissaries to be welcomed into one church after being rejected by the leader of another. The geographical area in question could not have been a remote corner of the world, because the fourth Gospel leads us to believe that non-Johannine churches (Jewish Christians, Apostolic Christians) could be found in the same region, as well as synagogues and disciples of John the Baptist.

All this leads us to imagine a large metropolitan center (Ephesus?) with house churches comprising Johannine Christians, to whom 1 John is primarily addressed; and within a reasonable distance, there were also provincial settlements with Johannine churches, to which 2 John and 3 John are addressed. The conflict with the secessionists would have taken place in a large center, because 1 John seeks to strengthen those who are loyal to him there. As these secessionists also try to win over the provincial communities to their cause, the author sends 2 John to one of these communities to warn them of the arrival of these missionaries with false ideas. It was probably in another city that Diotrephes decided to refuse the emissaries of both the author and his opponents, and so 3 John was sent to another house church in the same city to obtain hospitality for his emissaries.

B. The Johannine School

What was the role in these churches of the author who identifies himself as "the presbyter"? We know that at the end of the 1st century, an ecclesiastical structure developed in which a group of 'presbyters' or "elders" were responsible for the administration and pastoral care of a church. But this does not really describe our author, who refers to himself as "the presbyter" in his fight against the secessionists, while addressing churches other than his own. Nor can we speak of a kind of bishop, or even archbishop, because this model does not yet exist in the New Testament. Moreover, the author cannot appeal to such a form of authority to discipline his opponents.

There is another use of *presbyteros* attested by Irenaeus and Papias in the 2nd century. It refers to the generation of teachers after the disappearance of the eyewitnesses: these are people who saw and heard those who saw and heard Jesus; their authority comes from the fact that they were in contact with the first witnesses. In the Johannine community, after the death of the beloved disciple, the community understood that the work of the Paraclete was continuing through the disciples of the beloved disciple who had transmitted the tradition and helped to formulate it.

This second meaning of *presbyteros*, as modified in the Johannine perspective, would explain why the presbyter of the Johannine epistles speaks as if he were part of a collective "we" who bears witness to what he has seen and heard from the beginning (1 Jn 1:1-2). All of this brings to the fore the idea of a "Johannine school." The study of the term "school" among certain groups in antiquity (Pythagoras, Plato's Academy, Aristotle's Lyceum, the Essenes) has revealed a number of characteristics of these schools and led to the conclusion that the Johannine

community meets these characteristics. Thus, on several occasions, the author of the epistles uses “we” to include his “brothers” on an equal footing. On other occasions, his “we” represents all the bearers and interpreters of a tradition who are distinct from a “you,” those to whom he addresses himself and whom he also calls “little children.” Thus, “we” does not include everyone in the community, but those who were historically closest to the beloved disciple, just as some were more active in writing and bearing witness. It is for them that we reserve the term “Johannine school” at the heart of the greater Johannine community. This therefore includes the author of the Gospel, its editor (and all the writers involved), the author of the epistles, and all the bearers of the tradition with which they identify in their writings, in short, the “we” of John 21:24 (“This disciple is the one who testifies to these things and who wrote them down, and we know that his testimony is true”) and 1 John 1:3 (“What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also”).

It is as a representative of this Johannine school that the presbyter speaks. He can say “what we have heard... from the beginning,” not because he himself was an eyewitness, but because of the closeness of the Johannine school to the beloved disciple who did see Jesus. But at the time the epistles were written, two groups claimed to interpret the tradition of the beloved disciple. So the presbyter sought to correct his opponents by acting as the spokesperson for the Johannine school, which truly knew the thinking of the beloved disciple.

C. The Intra-Johannine Schism

The author of 1 John tells us: “They went out from us, but they did not belong to us” (1 John 2:19). Who are these people who “went out” from the community? Note that we have here the point of view of the presbyter, who considers them adversaries, secessionists, or schismatics. It is possible that, from their point of view, it was the presbyter’s group that was schismatic, and they may have been right in that sense, since they had become more numerous, according to 1 John 4:5.

Our only way of knowing the ideas of the secessionists is derived from the assumption that they held the positions that 1 John was fighting against and, by grouping them together, discerning a coherent line of thought. It must be acknowledged that these disputes led the secessionists to express themselves in pithy phrases that 1 John takes up in order to refute them. So it will be important to show that they are not without a certain logic and persuasive power, given their presuppositions; this will allow us to see both sides of the coin.

But what were the presuppositions of the secessionists? What was the catalyst for this theological division that runs so strongly through 1 John? Biblical scholars have proposed various theories, such as that of external influence, such as the Gnostic, Docetist, or Cerinthian currents. But the characteristics of these currents do not fit with the ideas of the secessionists. Other biblical scholars have suggested the influence of a new group joining the community, either of pagan origin or Greek-speaking Jews, bringing with them ideas contaminated by a philosophical religion of Hellenistic origin. But 1 John never suggests that there was any outside influence.

In our opinion, the best hypothesis to explain both the positions of the author of the epistles and the secessionists is this: both parties were familiar with this proclamation of Christianity, which is available to us through the fourth Gospel, but they interpreted it differently. Thus, the adversaries are not outsiders, but people formed by Johannine thought itself, justifying their positions by referring to the Johannine Gospel and its implications. Later, when the ecclesial community accepted 1 John into the canon of Scripture, it showed that it approved the author’s interpretation rather than that of his opponents. Thus, the Gospel according to John is in a sense neutral, but it could not answer the new questions that arose, and in their effort to answer them, the two conflicting groups claimed that their interpretation of the Gospel was the most accurate.

This hypothesis explains not only the secessionists’ view, but also the style of argumentation in 1 John, which does not directly refute its opponents’ slogans, but rather nuances them. This hypothesis also explains the constant appeal to “what you have had from the beginning” (1 Jn 2:7); for the opponents claim to know the Johannine Gospel, but they pervert it by ignoring the tradition that underlies it. In fact, a few years before this schism, the fourth Gospel was shaped by conflicts with outsiders, particularly with “the Jews,” so that the evangelist emphasizes what these people deny. From then on, the secessionists’ thinking was based on this limited point of view and was not faithful to the presuppositions of the tradition that were not included in the Gospel during these disputes. This is why, by referring to “what you have had from the beginning,” the presbyter returns to points that are barely sketched out in the fourth Gospel but which are part of the original heritage of the community, a heritage shared equally with other Christian groups.

2. The Areas of Dispute

A. Christology

We saw earlier that the central point in the Johannine community’s debates with Jews and other Christians concerned its high Christology. Belief in the pre-existence of the Son of God was key to the Johannine assertion that believers possess divine life. The fourth Gospel was written to support the Johannine Christians’ faith on this point. Inevitably, a belief defended so ardently would have been transmitted to the community as the central Christian message. And this would have two consequences.

- i. The emphasis on divinity, exacerbated by controversy, overshadowed less contentious points, such as the humanity of Jesus.
- ii. When a community accepts enormous reprisals for its Christology (exclusion from the synagogue and persecution), it will be very intolerant of deviations from that Christology.
 - a. Position of the Secessionists

Here is the data on the conflict in 1 John:

- 1 Jn 2: 22: "Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ?" (see also 2: 23 in relationship with the Son)
- 1 Jn 3: 23: "that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ"
- 1 Jn 4: 15: "that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ"
- 1 Jn 5: 1: "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ[a] has been born of God"
- 1 Jn 5: 5: "Who is it who conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"

Clearly, the author emphasizes Christ (the Messiah), Son of God. Isn't this exactly what the fourth Gospel affirms (20:31, "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God")? Despite the similarities, there are differences: the fourth Gospel takes the trouble to describe Jesus' earthly career in order to identify this Jesus at the heart of his ministry with the pre-existent Son of God, taking the opposite view to those who propose the titles "Christ" and "Son of God" without making an inseparable link with his earthly ministry. The question is therefore this: is the Jesus whose life and death we know the same as the pre-existent Son of God? And as a corollary: is it important that the Son of God lived and died as Jesus did? This question is well expressed in 1 John 4:2-3:

Every who acknowledges Jesus Christ come in the flesh
reflects the Spirit which belongs to God,
while everyone who negates the importance of Jesus
reflects a spirit which does not belong to God.

What does it mean to deny the importance of Jesus and deny his coming in the flesh? It must mean that opponents place so much emphasis on the divine principle in Jesus that they neglect the earthly career of that divine principle.

We now have more information about this Christian Docetism through the Gnostic works discovered in Egypt at Nag Hammadi in 1945. For example, we read: "I clothed Jesus. I carried him from the accursed wood and set him in his Father's dwelling place. And those who watch over their dwellings did not recognize me" (Trimorphic Protennoia, 13, 50, 12-15, written around the year 200); thus, the Son of God simply clothed Jesus as one wears a garment. In another work, a very much alive Jesus laughs at his persecutors who torment an external Jesus (Apocalypse of Peter, 7, 81, 15-25). But is this really the Docetism preached by the adversaries in 1 Jn? If it were, the presbyter would have had no difficulty refuting it, for there is no indication in the fourth Gospel that Jesus had a semblance of a body or that the Word and Jesus functioned as two distinct entities during his ministry. One need only think of John 20:24-29, when Jesus shows Thomas the nail marks and his wounded side, proof that his body was real after the resurrection. How could people who practiced such Docetism have been part of the Johannine community, knowing the tradition about Thomas? This is the danger of interpreting a situation in the light of a heresy that developed later.

A more fruitful approach is to ask whether the secessionists did not draw from the fourth Gospel itself the elements to support their Christological claims that the presbyter finds dangerous. For, fundamentally, the secessionists believed that Jesus' human existence, although real, had no salvific value. According to them, his human existence was only one stage in the career of the divine Word and not an intrinsic component of redemption. What Jesus did in Palestine was not really important to them, nor was the fact that he died on the cross; salvation would not have been any different if the Word had been incarnated in a totally different human figure who would have led a different life and died a different death. What mattered to them was only that eternal life had come to men and women through the Son who passed into the world. But how could such an interpretation be based on the fourth Gospel?

- i. John gives us a portrait of Jesus that somehow relativizes his humanity. This is why it is dangerous to read a verse in isolation. For example, we cannot read Jn 1:14ab ("And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us") without adding Jn 1:14cd ("and we have seen his glory, that glory as of the only begotten Son from the Father, full of grace and truth"). There is no doubt that for John, Jesus' humanity is real, but he prefers to emphasize the glory of God that shines through this humanity. In the Synoptic Gospels, this glory is revealed at the Transfiguration. For John, it is revealed at the wedding at Cana. This high Christology colors his entire Gospel.

The Jesus of the fourth Gospel seems to have very few human traits:

- When he speaks of food (Jn 4:32), bread (6:33), or water (Jn 4:7-14; 7:38; 9:7), he is referring to spiritual realities.
- His love for Lazarus is strangely lacking in human sympathy, for he does not rush to see him when he is sick (Jn 11:5-6) or when he dies, and his death becomes a joyful moment to teach about faith (Jn 11:11-15).
- The sight of Lazarus' sister weeping irritates him (Jn 11:33).
- Even when Jesus weeps, we do not know if it is because of grief or because of lack of faith (Jn 11:35).
- John's Jesus knows all things (Jn 16:30), so he does not need to be informed, as in the scene where he feeds the crowd (Jn 6:5).
- He chooses Judas as a disciple, knowing from the outset that he will betray him (Jn 6:64, 70-71).

Regarding Jesus' relationship with his father:

- Jesus is one with the Father (Jn 10:30), so much so that he does not need to pray to him to change his will.
- In Gethsemane, Jesus refuses to pray like the Jesus of the Synoptics, because there is no distinction between his will and that of his Father.

- ii. There are elements in John that diminish the salvific significance of Jesus' ministry. According to the fourth Gospel, the Word brought eternal life from God to men and women, but the secessionists may have thought that this eternal life was made available by the mere presence of the Word in the world, and not through what the Word did while he was present; for them, it was enough that the Word became flesh, and the kind of life he led and the way he died were of little importance. Phrases such as Jn 17:3 ("eternal life is that they know you, the only true God, and the one you have sent, Jesus Christ") and Jn 17:8 ("They have truly known that I came from you, and they have believed that you sent me")—phrases focused on the sending, not on any particular action—may have led to this perception.

The salvific value of Jesus' ministry comes through his baptism as well as his death. For the secessionists, these two realities are of secondary importance. This is why the presbyter writes this obscure sentence: "It is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with water alone, but with water and blood" (1 Jn 5:6); water refers to baptism, blood refers to the cross. In fact, the fourth Gospel does not describe Jesus' baptism. It makes an indirect reference to it (Jn 1:30-34) and makes it a moment of revelation of the presence of the pre-existing Son of God, for John the Baptist says: "After me comes a man who is ahead of me, because he was before me." I myself did not know him, but it is in view of his manifestation to Israel that I have come to baptize with water."

Similarly, the implications of Jesus' passion and death in the fourth Gospel differ from what we find in the other New Testament writings:

- Whereas in the Synoptic Gospels, it is Jesus' action during his last week in Jerusalem, driving the merchants from the Temple, that causes his death (Jn 11:15-18; 14:55-61), John takes the trouble to move this scene to the beginning of Jesus' ministry (ch. 2), announcing his resurrection after three days, in order to reinterpret Jesus' passion and death as a victory or "elevation."
- In John, Jesus is no longer a victim: "No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again" (Jn 10:18).
- In John, Jesus does not fall to the ground in Gethsemane in a gesture of supplication (see Mk 14:35); rather, it is the Roman soldiers and the Jewish police who fall to the ground before him when he utters his majestic "I am" (Jn 18:6).
- John's Jesus clearly tells Pilate that he has no power over him (Jn 19:11).
- On the cross, John's Jesus is surrounded by the original group of disciples, the beginning of the Church (Jn 19:25-27).
- John's Jesus has such control that it is only when he says, "It is finished," that he bows his head and gives up his spirit (Jn 19:30).
- A phrase such as "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34) is inconceivable on the lips of John's Jesus, who said, "But I am not alone, for the Father is with me" (John 16:32).
- In his death, John's Jesus is already "lifted up" in triumph and draws all people to himself (John 12:32-33).

Thus, the concept of expiatory sacrifice for sins disappeared in favor of the concept of revelation.

In short, for the secessionists, baptism is only a public reminder that the Son has come into the world. Death is only the necessary return of the Son to the Father. All of this is derived from the fourth Gospel's emphasis on the concept of revelation.

b. Refutation by the Author

How can 1 John respond to his opponents who propose a theology that is not an impossible interpretation of the fourth Gospel? Thus, he is not free to deny the pre-existence of the Son of God on the pretext that the

secessionists use it to diminish the importance of Jesus' career in the flesh. The presbyter also believes that eternal life has been revealed to us, that God sent his only Son into the world, and that Jesus is true God. But he will challenge the erroneous conclusions that his opponents draw from this, and so he will accompany the statements that imply pre-existence with other statements emphasizing the career of the Word made flesh, an emphasis that is more formal and explicit than that found in the fourth Gospel.

A fine example is given to us by the respective prologues of John and 1 John:

John	1 John
<p>1 In the <u>beginning</u> was the <u>Word</u>, and the <u>Word</u> was with God, and the <u>Word</u> was God. 2 He was in the <u>beginning</u> with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was <u>life</u>, and the <u>life</u> was the light of all people...</p> <p>14 And the <u>Word</u> became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.</p>	<p>1 We declare to you what was from the <u>beginning</u>, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the <u>word of life</u> 2 this <u>life</u> was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it and declare to you the eternal <u>life</u> that was with the Father and was revealed to us 3 what we have seen and heard we also declare to you so that you also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. 4 We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.</p>

Similar words are found in both prologues, but with different meanings: beginning, word, life. Whereas in the prologue to the fourth Gospel, "beginning" means before creation, in 1 John the word refers to "what we have heard... seen... contemplated... touched," that is, the beginning of Jesus' ministry. but this meaning is not new, as it is also found in the fourth Gospel in Jn 2:11; 6:64 and 16:4. Similarly, regarding the words "Word" and "life," the Gospel prologue tells us that the Word was turned toward God and that he was life, echoing the creation story in Genesis 1-3, and it is further on (John 1:14) that we learn that this Word became flesh. The prologue of 1 Jn, for its part, associates the expression "Word of life" with "what we have seen," and thus emphasizes the revelation of this reality in the career of Jesus, who became the source of life. Finally, while the Johannine prologue presents the incarnation in a general way (Jn 1:14: "the Word became flesh"), 1 Jn personalizes this reality: "What we have seen with our eyes..." (1 Jn 1:1), to emphasize this human career.

We have seen that the secessionists fail to grasp the salvific value of Jesus' death. How does the presbyter address this problem? This value is mentioned in a secondary and scattered manner in the fourth Gospel: 6:51 ("And the bread that I will give is my flesh, given so that the world may have life"); 11:51-52 ("Caiaphas made this prophecy that Jesus must die for the nation, and not only for the nation, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad"); 12:24 ("Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit"); 18:14 ("It was this same Caiaphas who had suggested to the Jewish authorities that it was advantageous for one man to die for the people"). And in particular, we have this testimony from John the Baptist: "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29). The secessionists undoubtedly understood this passage as the elimination of sin through the coming of the light. But the presbyter certainly saw in it an evocation of the suffering servant or the Paschal lamb, which explains phrases such as:

- 1 Jn 1: 7: "and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin"
- 1 Jn 2: 2: "and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world"
- 1 Jn 3: 16: "that he laid down his life for us"
- 1 Jn 4: 10: "not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins"

Thus, when Jesus gives his life, it is not only to take it back, but also to atone for sins. The importance of the blood shed is expressed in 1 John 5:6: "He came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not by water only, but by water and blood." Thus, the presbyter, more clearly than the evangelist, presents Jesus as a redeemer, without forgetting that he is also a revealer.

The change in emphasis compared to the Gospel is also expressed by the frequent use of the word "confess" rather than "believe." Indeed, 1 Jn and his opponents agree that eternal life consists in recognizing that Jesus Christ is the one sent by God (see Jn 17:3), but the presbyter shows them their shortcomings by insisting on the coming in human flesh (1 Jn 4:2; 2 Jn 7). Without this human life, no revelation would have been possible (1 Jn 1:1-2).

B. Ethics

While Christology was the main battleground between the presbyter and the secessionists, there were also skirmishes over the implications of this Christology for Christian behavior.

a. Intimacy with God and Sinlessness

Opponents claimed such intimacy with God that they were perfect and sinless. Here are the passages from John that seem to reflect their point of view:

- If we boast, "We are in communion with him" (1 Jn 1:6)
- If we boast, "We are free from the guilt of sin" (1 Jn 1:8)
- If we boast, "We have not sinned" (1 Jn 1:10)
- If anyone claims, "I know him" (1 Jn 2:4)
- If anyone claims to "abide in him" (1 Jn 2:6)
- If anyone claims to be in the light (1 Jn 2:9)
- Anyone who claims, "I love God" (1 Jn 4:20)

All of the above statements can be justified by the fourth Gospel, except for 1 Jn 1:8 and 1 Jn 1:10, two passages that concern sin and may seem foreign to the Johannine tradition. However, let us take a closer look. In Jn 8:34 we read: "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin," and in Jn 8:31-32: "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Thus, while the unbeliever is a slave to sin, the believer is free from sin. This is also the meaning of the scene of the man born blind (accused of being born in sin, Jn 9:34) who receives enlightenment, while the Pharisees, who do not recognize their blindness, remain in sin (Jn 9:41). Thus, the secessionists consider that they have been enlightened like the blind man and are therefore free from the guilt of sin.

What about the claim to be without sin (1 Jn 1:10)? Does this mean that they have never sinned in their lives, or rather that they have not sinned since becoming believers? The latter point may have a basis in the fourth Gospel, where we read in Jn 1:12: "But to those who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." The secessionists may have claimed that by becoming children of God, they became sinless, just as the Son of God is sinless (Jn 8:46). Moreover, were not Johannine Christians taught that they had received the Spirit who gives authority over sin (Jn 20:22-23)? Then, "He who has bathed needs no washing, except for his feet, but is completely clean" (Jn 13:10).

The Johannine tradition therefore lends itself to the thesis that there is no more sin after becoming a believer. And in fact, this is what the presbyter seems to be saying: "Whoever is born of God does not commit sin, because his seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God" (1 Jn 3:9). If both 1 Jn and its opponents seem to claim sinlessness and perfectionism, what difference is there between them? If the presbyter recognizes that being born of God implies a sinless state, this at the same time gives rise to an obligation to remain in that state. It must be understood that the expression "he cannot sin" means that he cannot be a sinner all the time. Indeed, elsewhere he acknowledges that failures are possible, so much so that he responds to his perfectionist opponents as follows: "My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, who is righteous" (1 Jn 2:1). The error of the adversaries is to consider their perfectionism as a realized truth, and not simply as a call and an obligation.

b. Keeping the Commandments

This is the reproach of the presbyter addressed to his adversaries: "Whoever says, 'I know him,' but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 Jn 2:4). What does this tell us about the ethics of the secessionists? Let us first distinguish between practice and theory. In practice, were the secessionists libertines, leading immoral lives? In 1 Jn 2:15-17, the author names all the vices that exist in the world. But this passage seems to be addressed to everyone and refers to a standard list of vices also used elsewhere in the New Testament. Otherwise, the author does not name any particular vice among the secessionists. Therefore, the secessionists' guilt regarding the commandments would be theoretical.

The most plausible explanation for the secessionists' attitude toward the commandments is that they do not attribute any salvific value to ethical behavior, and this attitude stems from their Christology: if Jesus' earthly career had no salvific value, why should the Christian's earthly life have any? Isn't the essential thing simply to know God and the One He sent?

It must be acknowledged that the fourth Gospel is deficient in moral teaching. While Matthew presents Jesus' ethical demands in his Sermon on the Mount, there is nothing like this in John. While Matthew 7:16 insists on the criterion of behavior ("By their fruits you will know them"), Jn 15:5 speaks rather of attaching oneself to Jesus: "Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit." In the Synoptics, the disciple is the one who does the will of God (Mark 3:35; Matthew 12:50; Luke 8:21), but for

John 8:31: "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples." Terms such as repentance/change of behavior (*metanoia*) are not part of John's vocabulary. For the evangelist, the only great sin is not believing (John 8:24; 9:41). Is it surprising that the secessionists show no interest in the commandments?

How can the presbyter correct his opponents' perception? Since he cannot refer to any specific directive from the Johannine tradition that would have been authoritative, he must refer to the example of Jesus' earthly life and propose it as a model for Christian life: "Whoever claims to abide in him must walk in the same way that he walked" (1 Jn 2:6). If the secessionists hope to see God as he is, they must make themselves pure "as" he is pure (1 Jn 3:3). It should be noted that the adverb "as" remains a vague notion in the ethical domain, but it reflects the vagueness of Johannine ethics and the challenge faced by the presbyter in his refutation of the secessionist vision.

c. Brotherly Love

If opponents did not attribute any salvific value to the commandments, could they justify their position on the basis of John's Gospel, since John's Jesus does indeed speak to his disciples about the commandments? But in the fourth Gospel, the commandments are linked to the commandment of love:

- Jn 15: 12: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you"
- Jn 13: 35: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"

The same is true in 1 John. Even when the author uses the word "commandment" in the plural, it all boils down to that of brotherly love:

- 1 Jn 3: 23: "And this is his commandment, that we should ... love one another, just as he has commanded us"
- 1 Jn 4: 21: "The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also"

Consequently, the only specific wrongdoing that the author accuses the secessionists of is that of not loving their brothers (1 Jn 2:9-11; 3:11-18; 4:20).

But was this accusation justified? In what way did the secessionists not love their brothers? It all depends on the definition of "brother." For the author of 1 Jn, brothers were those in the Johannine community who were in communion with him and accepted his interpretation of the Gospel; since the secessionists had left the community, they were no longer brothers, and even their departure was a sign that they lacked love for the author's community. But we can imagine that the secessionists had the same feelings: for them, brothers were those who remained united against the presbyter and his group, because it was the latter who had strayed from the authentic Johannine tradition and lacked love for them; moreover, the harsh tone of 1 John was proof of a lack of love.

All this leads us to note a certain inconsistency on the part of the presbyter. On the one hand, the author preaches brotherly love with evangelical fervor: "We love because he first loved us" (1 Jn 4:19). On the other hand, he condemns in extremely harsh terms his opponents who were once members of his community but are no longer: they are demons, antichrists, false prophets, and they embody eschatological disorder (1 Jn 2:18, 22; 3:4-5). Likewise, he urges us not to receive them (2 Jn 10-11). While he asks us to pray for brothers who sin, but whose sin is not mortal, he does not want us to pray for those whose sin is mortal, i.e., those who are guilty of apostasy, like his opponents (1 Jn 5:15-17).

If the presbyter and his opponents share the same vision of brotherly love, it is because they are inspired by the same Johannine Gospel. However, it is here that we see the dangers of the dualistic tendency of the fourth Gospel, especially when it is transplanted into debates between Christians. While Matthew's Jesus says, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Mt 5:44), there is no equivalent in the Johannine tradition, because the commandment of love is not defined by love of neighbor (as in Mt 19:19), but by love of one another (Jn 13:34-35; 15:12, 17), and love "one another" refers to Christ's disciples who obey his commandments (Jn 15:13-15). And the attitude of the Johannine Jesus, who refuses to pray for the world (Jn 17:9), is translated in 1 Jn by the refusal to pray for other Christians who have seceded (1 Jn 5:16).

When we compare the fourth Gospel and 1 John, we notice that the dualistic language used by Jesus in his attacks against the world or "the Jews" (love/hate; light/darkness; truth/lies; from above/from below; from God/from the devil) is now used to attack Christians with whom he disagrees.

Gospel According to John	1 John
Jesus assures his disciples that they do not walk in darkness (Jn 8:12; 12:46), for the world of darkness belongs to those who do not welcome Jesus (Jn 1:5; 3:19-21; 12:35).	Christians who disagree with the presbyter's ethics walk in darkness (1 John 2:9-11)
The Paraclete convicts the world of righteousness (Jn 16:8, 10)	The presbyter offers a criterion for determining who is righteous and upright (1 Jn 3:7-8; 2:29), a

	critterion that, according to him, the secessionists do not meet.
Jesus attacks Jews who say they believe in him, telling them that they belong to the devil, their father, who is a murderer and a liar (Jn 8:44).	The presbyter uses the same language toward the secessionists, telling them that they are children of the devil, that they are like Cain, who belongs to the Evil One and was a murderer from the beginning (1 Jn 3:8-15; 4:1-6; 2:22).
Quoting Isaiah 6:10, the evangelist asserts that God has blinded the eyes of the Jews.	The presbyter applies this passage from Isaiah to the secessionists: darkness has blinded their eyes.

Thus, in his fight against the secessionists, the presbyter took drastic measures, but this defense of the truth came at a certain price. For this attitude of complete rejection would fuel Christians throughout the ages who would feel justified in hating other Christians for the love of God.

C. Eschatology

There are no clear eschatological claims among the secessionists that the presbyter would condemn. But their claims to perfection indirectly contain eschatological implications, and it is a realized eschatology emphasizing what God has already done for those who believe in his Son, a dominant theme of the fourth Gospel:

- The believer is not judged and will not face judgment (Jn 3:21; 8:12; 11:9; 12:46).
- They already have eternal life (Jn 6:54; 8:12; 10:10, 28; 17:3).
- They are children born of God (1:13; 3:3-8).
- He is in union with God and with Jesus (Jn 6:56; 14:23; 15:4-5; 17:21)
- He already knows God and sees him (Jn 3:3; 12:45; 14:7.9; 17:3)

For secessionists, such an eschatology is consistent with their Christology and ethics, and they probably do not see what a future eschatology could add: they already have eternal life, they will not die, but they will pass from this world to which they do not really belong to the home that Jesus has prepared for them.

The author of the Johannine epistles also professes a realized eschatology:

- The evil one has already been defeated (1 Jn 2:13-14)
- Eternal life has been revealed (1 Jn 1:2)
- We are already walking in the light (1 Jn 1:7; 2:9-10)
- Divine love has reached its perfection (1 Jn 2:5)
- There is fellowship with God (1 John 1:3)
- We are truly God's children (1 John 3:1)
- God dwells in the believer (1 John 4:15)

To avoid this complacency on the part of his opponents in such a realized eschatology, the presbyter takes a two-step approach.

- i. First, he makes eschatology contingent on ethical requirements.
 - We are in communion with God if we walk in the light (1 Jn 1:7)
 - Love reaches its perfection if we keep his word (1 Jn 2:5)
 - We remain in the light if we love our brother (1 Jn 2:10)
 - We are children of God if we act in righteousness (1 Jn 3:10)
- ii. He then goes on to discuss future eschatology. It should be noted that future eschatology is a very minor theme in the fourth Gospel, because, being in conflict with the Jews, he did not need to mention what was already accepted throughout Judaism; what mattered was to affirm that the blessings promised in this eschatology were now being fulfilled in the person of Jesus. However, the presbyter finds himself in a different situation and must therefore refer to what was probably in a later stratum of the Gospel, but which was a minor theme precisely because it was not a subject of dispute.

Here is what the presbyter writes:

- 1 Jn 3: 2-3: "Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure"
- 1 Jn 2: 28: "And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he is revealed we may have confidence and not be put to shame before him at his coming"
- 1 Jn 3: 18-19: "Little children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him"

What does the presbyter say? Future blessings depend on how Christians live their lives. And a realized eschatology is not an end in itself (as it is for opponents), but simply assurance for the future.

Because of the seriousness of the schism in the community, the author's description of future eschatology is very dark, as he draws on both Jewish and Christian apocalyptic imagery: the secessionists are the antichrists and false prophets foretold for the end times (1 Jn 2:18, 22; 4:1-3), their indifference to sin represents the final disruption of the final battle (1 Jn 3:4), it is the sign of the last hour (1 Jn 2:18), the time of judgment when Christ will reveal himself (1 Jn 2:8).

D. Pneumatology

We read in 1 John 4:1: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world." We can guess that the adversaries called themselves teachers and prophets, and claimed to speak under the guidance of the Spirit. Is such a claim justified by an appeal to the Johannine tradition that we know through the fourth Gospel?

The personal role of the Spirit in John under the title of Paraclete is unique. He resembles Jesus so closely that we can say that the Paraclete is the permanent presence of Jesus after the latter returned to heaven, and his role as revealer in relation to Jesus is the same as that of Jesus in relation to the Father. The fact that this Paraclete remained forever (Jn 14:16) relativized the delay of the parousia, for in him Jesus had already returned to teach everything (Jn 14:26) and guide believers to the whole truth (Jn 16:13). We can assume that the secessionists justified their Christological proclamation by referring to this Paraclete.

How does the presbyter respond to this claim? It is important to note what he does not say.

- i. He hardly mentions the Spirit. In fact, it is mentioned in two passages, first in 1 Jn 3:24 – 4:6,13, where the author insists on a test and criteria for distinguishing between the Spirit of God and the false spirit of the devil, and in 1 Jn 5: 6-8, addressed to his opponents, where the testimony of the Spirit is linked to the testimony given by the baptism and death of Jesus. Otherwise, he remains silent on the different roles of the Spirit in the fourth Gospel and refers only indirectly to the Paraclete when speaking of Jesus' role as intercessor with the Father (1 Jn 2:1-2).
- ii. The second eloquent silence is the absence of the affirmative "I" as ecclesial authority entrusted with the responsibility of being guardian of the faith. We saw earlier that the apostolic churches had become institutionalized by the end of the first century, so that in many places presbyter-bishops had appeared in every city. Their role was to ensure that teaching was in accordance with doctrine and to refute those who contradicted it (see Titus 1:9). But there is nothing like this in the Johannine communities, where the role of authoritative teacher is entrusted to the Paraclete, and the gift of the Paraclete concerns all members of the community ("As for you, you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know" (1 John 2:20). Therefore, the presbyter cannot use his title to correct his opponents: he has no doctrinal authority. So what does he do? He appeals to all the members of the community: "As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you; but as his anointing teaches you about everything—and it is true and does not lie—since it has taught you, you remain in him" (1 Jn 2:27). It will therefore be up to the entire Johannine community to correct the adversaries, of whom the presbyter is of course a part; it is the communal "we" that will be the instrument of the Paraclete. If the adversaries are wrong, it is because they have broken communion with the believers who have been anointed by the Word and the Spirit.

This method of indirect correction was probably countered by the secessionists, who undoubtedly invoked their own communal "we," which had also received the anointing, to justify their interpretation of tradition. Faced with such a situation, all the presbyter could do was ask for a test of the manifestation of the Spirit of God to determine which side was right, which side reflected the Spirit of God as opposed to the antichrist (1 Jn 4:1-3). But in fact, such a test is a doctrinal one that favors his own position: "By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that divides Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist" (1 Jn 4:2-3); in other words, the criterion is to agree with one's own side.

The clue that this test has been ineffective is given to us by the presbyter's admission that "the world" listens to his opponents (1 Jn 4:5). The term "world" used in the fourth Gospel to refer to non-believers now refers to the secessionists. And the mention of success in the world suggests that the adversaries are gaining followers at the expense of the author's community. How should this success be interpreted? For the secessionists, it is proof that they are the true Johannine community fulfilling the prayer of Jesus, who foresaw all the conversions to come (Jn 17:20), a gift from the Father to Jesus, who continues to make his name known as a sign in the world. On the other hand, the presbyter sees this success of the adversaries as confirmation that the world is incapable of accepting the Spirit of truth (Jn 14:17) and that they belong to the Prince of this world, not to Christ, a sign that the last hour has come.

Phase 4: After the epistles - Johannine Dissolution p. 145-164

The presbyter's words concerning the "last hour" seem to have been prophetic, for in the 2nd century all trace of a distinct and separate Johannine community is lost. What happened? It is likely that the presbyter's followers and the secessionists were "swallowed up," the former by the "Great Church," the latter by the Gnostic movement. And in this transition and in the effort to adapt, both groups lost the distinct identity of Johannine Christianity that we know from the fourth Gospel and the epistles. Let us summarize what may have happened before going into detail.

If the Johannine community around the presbyter gradually joined the “Great Church,” it brought with it the high Christology of pre-existence, but with the nuances of its interpretation that had been required by its struggle against the secessionists, in order to avoid the error of Docetism and Monophysitism. But at the same time, because an ecclesiology centered on the Paraclete offered no protection against schismatics, the members of this Johannine community eventually accepted in the 2nd century a teaching structure centered on the role of the presbyter-bishop, a structure dominant in the “Great Church” but foreign to the Johannine tradition.

For their part, the secessionists, deprived of the moderating role of the presbyter’s supporters, evolved towards an ultra-high Christology that became true Docetism. Considering that Jesus’ earthly life had no salvific value, they ended up believing that this earthly life was not real. Moreover, after believing that they were sons of God by God’s choice, they came to believe that they had been sons of God before their earthly birth, so that they too were of divine origin like Jesus. Thus, like the Son, they too came into the world, but they went astray; it was therefore Jesus’ role to show them the way back to heaven. For the Docetists and Gnostics, the fourth Gospel brought by the secessionists provided a basis for developing their thinking.

The “Great Church” was initially suspicious of the fourth Gospel, which was used by those considered heretics. But with the addition of the Johannine epistles to guide a correct interpretation of the Gospel, it proposed it as orthodox and part of the New Testament canon (cf. Irenaeus, around 180). Let us now give the details of this evolution.

1. The History of the Fourth Gospel in the Second Century

Historical data indicates that the fourth Gospel was first widely accepted in heterodox circles before being accepted by orthodox Christians. The oldest commentary on John comes from the Gnostic Heracleon (160-180). Moreover, this Gospel was highly appreciated by the Valentinian Gnostics, as Irenaeus had to refute their exegesis of John. The Gnostic book The Odes of Solomon (early or mid-2nd century) has affinities with John. In the Gnostic writings of Nag Hammadi, we find a Christology of the Word in the Tripartite Tractate and a Christology of “I am” in the Second Apocalypse of James, as well as in Thunder, Perfect Mind, and the Trimorphic Protenoia. Montanus (around 170), founder of a spiritual, prophetic, and eschatological movement, considered himself to be the incarnation of the Paraclete.

What about the circles considered orthodox in the early church? There are no Johannine quotations in either Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35–110) or Polycarp of Smyrna (c. 69–155). The oldest undisputed use of John in orthodox circles is that of Theophilus, bishop of Antioch (169–182), in his Apology to Autlycus (around 180). Its acceptance into the canon of Scripture before the year 200, as evidenced by the Muratorian Fragment (late 2nd century), came at the cost of a long process of ensuring that it had an apostolic origin, which Irenaeus attempted to demonstrate.

This curious history of the fourth Gospel becomes understandable if we accept the idea that both the supporters of the presbyter and the secessionists took this Gospel with them. This would explain why in the 2nd century we find Johannine ideas but no quotations from the Gospel in the writings of the early church, due to its use by the Docetists, Gnostics, and Montanists. But ultimately, the example of 1 John paved the way for an orthodox reading of the fourth Gospel, and its campaign against the secessionists encouraged writers such as Irenaeus to use the Gospel against the Gnostics.

Let us now consider the possible theological development of the secessionists in various forms of a heterodox movement in the second century.

2. The Secessionists and Second-Century Heterodoxy

a. Gnosticism

A thesis common to all Gnostic systems implies the pre-existence of human beings in the divine world before their life on earth. But for the fourth Gospel, only the Son of God pre-exists, while humans become children of God through faith, water, and the Spirit during their earthly life. The status of “not being of this world” is a choice, not an ontological status. Nevertheless, the Gospel served as a matrix for the Gnostic conception of a pre-existence of human beings who come from God and must return to Him. Similarly, John’s insistence on the predestination of the children of light was the catalyst for the Gnostics’ idea that human beings are drawn to God long before the coming of Jesus, so that Jesus merely reveals their predisposition (Jn 3:17-21). For the Gnostics, this natural orientation toward God is explained by the pre-existence of human beings in God. When the secessionists claimed to be sinless, the Gnostics explained this by the fact that they were by nature sons of light, and not by the faith that sanctifies.

b. Cerinthus

The Docetism of Cerinthus, for whom the divine element of Jesus left him just before the crucifixion, may have stemmed from a misinterpretation of John’s insistence on the crucifixion as “exaltation” (Jn 12:32-33; 3:14; 8:28). Let us recall that from the beginning of his last supper, John tells us that the time has come for Jesus to pass from this world to his Father, and he puts various references to his departure into Jesus’ mouth, particularly Jn 17:11: “Now I am no longer in the world.” Cerinthus would have interpreted this last sentence literally.

c. Montanus

Montanus saw in the announcements of the Paraclete (Jn 14:15, 26; 15:26; 16:7, 13) a prediction of his own career as a person inspired by the Spirit. The emphasis on prophecy among the Montanists may have been a continuation of the emphasis on prophecy among the Secessionists. Montanus used two female prophets, Risca and Maximilla, who revealed the words of the Lord in ecstasy. This can be seen as a continuation of the place John gives to women as heralds: the Samaritan woman converts a village through her words (Jn 4:39), Martha confesses that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (Jn 11:27), Mary Magdalene is the first to see the risen Jesus (Jn 20:14) and the first to proclaim the resurrection (Jn 20:18).

3. The Author's Adherents and the Great Church

Even though there are no clear references to the fourth Gospel in the last quarter of the second century, Johannine ideas had been accepted earlier. Let us focus on Ignatius, bishop of Antioch.

a. High Christology

First, it should be noted that there is a similar atmosphere between the Johannine writings and the letters of Ignatius, as the latter had to fight on two fronts: against Jewish Christians who displayed inadequate faith, such as the group V analyzed earlier, and against Docetism and emerging Gnosticism.

In Ignatius, we find elements of a high Christology similar to that of John:

Ignatius of Antioch	John
"The one God who manifested Himself through Jesus Christ, His Son" (<u>Epistle to the Magnesians</u> , 8, 2)	"that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (Jn 17: 3); "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14: 9)
"God's <u>Word proceeding</u> from silence who in all things was pleasing to Him who <u>sent</u> him" (<u>Epistle to the Magnesians</u> , 8, 2)	Johannine elements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word • Sent by God • Proceeding from

Similarly, it is fascinating to discover in Ignatius a mixture of ideas from both John and the apostolic tradition. For example, alongside the mention of Jesus' pre-existence, there is that of his virgin birth: "The prince of this world ignored Mary's virginity and her childbirth" (Epistle to the Ephesians 19:1); "born of Mary and born of God, first subject to suffering and now impervious to suffering, Jesus Christ our Lord" (ibid., 7:2). However, the notion of Mary's virginity has come down to us only through Matthew/Luke. Another example of a mixture of Johannine and non-Johannine elements is given to us in the Epistle to the Trallians, 9:2: "... who is also truly risen from the dead... apart from whom we have no true life": to speak of "true life" is typically Johannine, to speak of the resurrection of the dead is not. We attach some importance to this theological mixture, because it fulfills the prayer of John 17:21 ("that they may all be one"), a desire of Johannine Christians for unity with apostolic Christians. And Ignatius of Antioch illustrates this compromise between the high Christology of Jesus' pre-existence and the low Christology of birth through a woman.

b. Eucharist

In addition to sharing a theology rich in Christology, Ignatius and John share a sacramental vision of the Eucharist, in both cases opposing Jewish Christians: "Take care, then, to participate in only one Eucharist; for there is only one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup to unite us in his blood" (Epistle to the Philadelphians, 4:1). Speaking of the flesh and blood of Jesus is very Johannine. Similarly, a phrase such as "breaking the same bread, which is the remedy of immortality, the antidote to death, but to live in Jesus Christ forever" (Epistle to the Ephesians, 20:2) is very close to what John says in Jn 6:51-58, where the flesh and blood of Jesus are true food and drink, and "whoever eats this bread will live forever."

c. Church Structure

Despite the similarity of Christological and sacramental positions, there is a major obstacle to the integration of Johannine Christians into the Catholic Church or "great church": the ecclesial structure. It should be remembered that in the Johannine community there was no specific role for exercising doctrinal control, such as that of presbyter-bishop, which is found in Luke-Acts, the Pastoral Epistles, and Matthew. Ignatius goes even further in his hierarchical model with the bishop at the top who controls baptism and the Eucharist; this human authority becomes the visible sign of divine authority, as evidenced by the following:

"All of you, follow the bishop as Jesus Christ follows his Father; and follow those in the presbyterate as if they were the apostles; and reverence those in the diaconate as you would a commandment from God" (Epistle to the Smyrnaeans, 8, 1)

"It is good to know God and the bishop. He who honors the bishop has been honored by God; he who does anything without the knowledge of the bishop is serving the devil" (Epistle to the Smyrnaeans, 9, 1)

"Let us be careful not to oppose the bishop, that we may be subject to God" (Epistle to the Ephesians, 5, 3)

"When you are obedient to your bishop as through to Jesus Christ, it is clear to me that you are living after the manner of Jesus Christ himself." (Epistle to the Trallians, 2, 1)

How could Johannine Christians accept an ecclesiology in which the bishop receives the prerogatives of the Paraclete? Clearly, this was not in harmony with Johannine tradition. But it is possible that they reluctantly tolerated such a structure for the greater good, especially in view of the ineffectiveness of dependence on the Paraclete as teacher. The supporters of the presbyter may have observed that the truth could not be preserved in the face of theological errors simply by appealing to the anointing of the Spirit who teaches all things (1 Jn 2:27). In their own way, they learned the same lesson as the Pauline churches, that a form of authority under the teaching role of presbyter-bishops could be a bulwark against doctrinal errors (1 Tim 6:3). Thus, the Johannine community came to recognize that the hierarchy proposed by the "Catholic Church" constituted a valid teaching role, insofar as this function was exercised in the name of the Paraclete.

We may have an early example of acceptance of a more authoritarian ecclesial structure during the presbyter's lifetime in the figure of Diotrephes in 3 Jn. Indeed, the tension between the latter and the presbyter does not seem to concern Christology or ethics, but two styles of authority for preserving believers from erroneous teaching. Diotrephes could be an emerging bishop according to the Ignatian model. Indeed, 2 John tells us that false teachers and false emissaries were circulating, and the presbyter believes that they should be refused entry into a house church (2 John 1:10). Diotrephes, for his part, believes he is authorized to distinguish between true and false teachers himself, and considering the testing of spirits to be completely impractical, he would have decided to exclude all emissary-teachers and to discipline those who welcome them (3 Jn 1:10).

Finally, let us mention what appears to be a testimony to how the Johannine community integrated into the apostolic church, which comes to us from John 21. Indeed, chapter 21 of the fourth Gospel, which appears as an appendix to the Gospel, was probably written and added at the time when the presbyter wrote 1 Jn. In chapter 21, the beloved disciple retains the same dignity he has throughout the Gospel, even though he does not die a martyr like Peter. At the same time, the writer recommends the figure of Peter, to whom Jesus assigns a pastoral role. Of course, he did not understand Jesus as deeply as the beloved disciple, but by saying three times that he loves Jesus, he meets the Johannine criterion of the true disciple, and that is why Jesus can give him pastoral authority. Since no similar role is given to the beloved disciple, we are faced with the structural difference between two types of church. Therefore, in chapter 21, we would have a moderate voice seeking to persuade Johannine Christians that the pastoral authority practiced by the apostolic churches and the Catholic Church was instituted by Jesus and is acceptable without denying the special place in history given to the beloved disciple.

4. Reflection

Our reflection focuses on the significance of the Johannine community's integration into the wider church and the acceptance of the Johannine writings into the canon of Scripture. On several occasions, we have described the fourth Gospel as a challenging text because it is so different, volatile, dangerous, and the most adventurous of the New Testament. The history of the Johannine secessionists, who claimed this Gospel as their own, should explain these adjectives. Over the centuries, the Gospel of John has been fertile ground for many exotic forms of individualistic pietism and quietism. Johannine Christology has nourished a widespread, unconscious monophysitism, popular today, according to which Jesus is not really like us in everything except sin, but omniscient, incapable of suffering or being tempted, foreseeing the whole future.

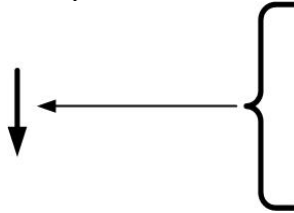
However, what is remarkable is the Church's hermeneutical decision to place John in the same canon as Mark, Matthew, and Luke, Gospels that implicitly support several positions opposed to those of John. This means that "the great church," or, to use the language of Ignatius of Antioch, the Catholic Church, consciously or unconsciously, chose to live with tension. It chose not a Jesus who is either God or man, but both; it chose not a Jesus who is either virginally conceived or a pre-existent Son of God, but both; not either a Spirit associated with a magisterium or a Paraclete-teacher given to every Christian, but both. Not either Peter or a beloved disciple, but both. Such tension is not easy in ordinary life, and there is a tendency to want to eliminate it. The same is true in the history of the Church. But because of its initial decision to accept this tension in the canon of Scripture, any effort to replace this tension with the static position of one side or the other is unfaithful to the entire New Testament.

Today, a church like the Catholic Church, which places great emphasis on authority and structure, can find in the Johannine writings an integrated conscience against the abuses of authoritarianism. Like a branch of the Johannine community, Roman Catholics have come to understand that Peter's pastoral role is truly willed by the risen Lord, but the presence in our Scriptures of a disciple whom Jesus loves more than he loves Peter is an eloquent commentary on the relative value of ecclesiastical office. Similarly, the importance of power in various offices is not necessarily proportional to Jesus' esteem and love.

Chart 1
The History of the Johannine Community

PHASE ONE:
ORIGINS
(mid-50s to late
80s)

ORIGINATING GROUP: In or near Palestine, Jews of relatively standard expectations, including followers of JBap, accepted Jesus without difficulty as the Davidic Messiah, the fulfiller of the prophecies, and one confirmed by miracles. Among this group was a man who had known Jesus during the ministry and who would become the Beloved Disciple.



SECOND GROUP: Jews of an anti-Temple bias who believed in Jesus and made converts in Samaria. They understood Jesus against a Mosaic rather than a Davidic background. He had been with God, seen Him, and brought down His words to people.

The acceptance of the Second group catalyzed the development of a high, pre-existence christology, which led to debates with Jews who thought the Johannine community was abandoning Jewish monotheism by making a second God out of Jesus. Ultimately the leaders of these Jews had the Johannine Christians expelled from the synagogues. The latter, alienated from their own, saw "the Jews" as children of the devil. They stressed a realization of the eschatological promises in Jesus to compensate for what they had lost in Judaism. The Disciple made this transition and helped others to make it, thus becoming the Beloved Disciple.



GENTILE CONVERTS

PHASE DEUX :
L'ÉVANGILE
(vers l'an 90)

Since "the Jews" were blinded, the coming of the Greeks was God's plan of fulfillment. The community may have moved from Palestine to the Diaspora to teach the Greeks. This contact brought out the universalistic possibilities in Johannine thought. However, rejection by others and persecution by "the Jews" convinced Johannine Christians that the world was opposed to Jesus, and that they should not belong to this world which was under the power of Satan. Rejection of the high Johannine christology by Jewish Christians was seen as unbelief and led to a breaking of communion (*koinōnia*). Communications were kept open to the Apostolic Christians (**see Chart Two**) with hopes for unity, despite differences of christology and church structure.



The defensive concentration on christology against "the Jews" and the Jewish Christians led to a split within the Johannine community.

PHASE THREE :
EPISTLES
(ca. 100)

THE ADHERENTS OF THE
AUTHOR OF THE EPISTLES: To
be a child of God one must

THE SECESSIONISTS: The One
who has come down from above
is so divine he is not fully human;

confess Jesus come in the flesh and must keep the commandments. The secessionists are the children of the devil and the antichrists. The anointing with the Spirit obviates the need for human teachers; test all who claim to have the Spirit.

he does not belong to the world. Neither his life on earth nor that of the believer have salvific import. Knowledge that God's Son came into the world is all important, and those who believe in this are already saved.

PHASE FOUR:
AFTER THE
EPISTLES
(2nd century)

UNION WITH THE GREAT CHURCH:
Unable to combat the secessionists simply by appealing to tradition, and losing out to their opponents, some of the author's adherents accepted the need for authoritative official teachers (presbyter-bishops). At the same time "the church catholic" showed itself open to the high Johannine christology. There was a gradual assimilation into the Great Church, which was slow, however, to accept the Fourth Gospel since it was being misused by gnostics.

ROAD TO GNOSTICISM: The larger part of the Johannine community seems to have accepted secessionist theology which, having been cut off from the moderates through schism, moved toward true docetism (from a not fully human Jesus to a mere appearance of humanity), toward gnosticism (from a pre-existent Jesus to pre-existent believers who also came down from the heavenly regions), and toward Montanism (from possessing the Paraclete to the embodiment of the Paraclete). They took the Fourth Gospel with them; it was accepted early by gnostics who commented on it.

Chart 2

Different Religious Groupings Outside the Johannine Community As Seen Through the Pages the Fourth Gospel

Those Who Do Not Believe in Jesus

I. The World	II. "The Jews"	III. The Adherents of John the Baptist
Those who prefer darkness to the light of Jesus because their deeds are evil. By this choice they are already condemned; they are under the power of the Satanic "Prince of this world" and hate Jesus and his disciples who are not of this world. Jesus refuses to pray for the world; rather he has overcome the world. "The world" is a wider conception than "the Jews" (II) but includes them. This opposition gave the Johannine community an alienated sense of being strangers in the world.	Those within the synagogues who did not believe in Jesus and had decided that anybody who acknowledged Jesus as Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. The main points in their dispute with the Johannine Christians involved: (a) Claims about the oneness of Jesus with the Father—the Johannine Jesus "was speaking of God as his own Father, thus making himself God's equal"; (b) Claims that understanding Jesus as God's presence on earth deprived the Temple and the Jewish feasts of their significance. They exposed the Johannine Christians to death by persecution and thought that thus they were serving God. In John's view they were children of the devil.	Although some of JBap's followers joined Jesus or became Christians (including Johannine Christians), others refused, claiming that JBap and not Jesus was God's prime emissary. The Fourth Gospel carefully denies that JBap is the Messiah, Elijah, the Prophet, the light, or the bridegroom. It insists that JBap must decrease while Jesus must increase. Yet the adherents of JBap are pictured as misunderstanding Jesus, not hating him. There seems to remain hope for their conversion.

Those Who (Claim to) Believe in Jesus

IV. The Crypto-Christians	V. The Jewish Christians	VI. Christians of Apostolic Churches
Christian Jews who had remained within the synagogues by refusing to admit publicly that they believed in Jesus. "They preferred by far the praise of men to the glory of God."	Christians who had left the synagogues but whose faith in Jesus was inadequate by Johannine standards. They may have regarded themselves as heirs to a Christianity which had	Quite separate from the synagogues, mixed communities of Jews and Gentiles regarded themselves as heirs of the Christianity of Peter and the Twelve. Theirs was a moderately high

<p>Presumably they thought they could retain their private faith in Jesus without breaking from their Jewish heritage. But in the eyes of the Johannine Christians, they thus preferred to be known as disciples of Moses rather than disciples of Jesus. For practical purposes they could be thought of along with "the Jews" (II), although John was implicitly still trying to persuade them to confess their faith publicly.</p>	<p>existed at Jerusalem under James the brother of the Lord. Presumably their low christology based on miraculous signs was partway between that of Groups IV and VI. They did not accept Jesus' divinity. They did not understand the eucharist as the true flesh and blood of Jesus. In John's view they had ceased to be true believers.</p>	<p>christology, confessing Jesus as the Messiah born at Bethlehem of Davidic descent and thus Son of God from conception, but without a clear insight into his coming from above in terms of pre-existence before creation. In their ecclesiology Jesus may have been seen as the founding father and institutor of the sacraments; but the church now had a life of its own with pastors who carried on apostolic teaching and care. In John's view they did not fully understand Jesus or the teaching function of the Paraclete, but the Johannine Christians prayed for unity with them.</p>
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Appendix I: Recent Reconstructions of Johannine Community History, p. 171-182

A reconstruction of the history of the Johannine community is at best probable. I therefore think it is fair and useful to summarize some other reconstructions in order to familiarize the reader with the range of opinions among specialists on this subject. In the introduction to my Anchor Bible commentary on John, by discussing many theories of composition, authorship, and destination, I have already surveyed the classic approaches to Johannine history; and so here I shall confine myself to reconstructions that have appeared in the 1970s since my commentary was finished.

J. Louis Martyn

For years Martyn has been most active in developing the thesis that the Fourth Gospel must be read on several levels, so that it tells us not only about Jesus but also about the life and struggles of the Johannine community (n. 18 above). It is significant that now he has attempted an elaborate reconstruction of Johannine church origins, based on the following principle: "The literary history behind the Fourth Gospel reflects to a large degree the history of a single community which maintained over a period of some duration its particular and somewhat peculiar identity." Martyn distinguishes three periods of Johannine community history: Early, Middle, and Late.

- I. THE EARLY PERIOD. (Before the Jewish revolt until some point in the 80s.) The pre-Gospel formation began with separate homilies, e.g., a homily underlying John 1:35-49 wherein a preacher sought to persuade (fellow) Jews, who had well-formed messianic expectations, to come to Jesus and find him to be the Messiah. The miracles of Jesus were narrated as signs that he was the Messiah. Success in conversions at first produced relatively little alienation from the Jewish heritage, viz., no debates about the validity of the Torah nor about the Gentile mission. The resultant Johannine group consisted of Christian Jews who stood "in a relatively untroubled stream of social and theological continuity precisely within the synagogue." One of the preachers in this inner-synagogue messianic group gathered the traditions and homilies about Jesus into a rudimentary written Gospel, somewhat similar to the Signs Gospel or Signs Source posited by many scholars. "The possibility that the Beloved Disciple was a historical person who played a role in the Early Period cannot be pursued in the present essay."
- II. THE MIDDLE PERIOD. (Presumably the late 80s.) Becoming suspicious of this rapidly growing messianic group, some in the synagogue demanded exegetical proof for what the group proclaimed about Jesus. This led to midrashic debates and to degrees of alignment within the synagogue for and against the group. Two traumas precipitated new developments. The first trauma occurred early in the Middle Period when the synagogue authorities introduced the reworded *Birkat ha-Minim* (curse on the deviators) into the liturgical service in order to be able to identify and eject those who confessed Jesus as the Messiah. Some of the messianic group (and some attracted toward it) turned back to remain safely within the synagogue community. Those who continued in the group now became Jewish Christians (no longer Christian Jews), separate and alienated from the synagogue. The second trauma occurred when the synagogue authorities, in order to prevent further defections to the Jewish Christian group, put on trial and executed some of the Johannine community's evangelists on the charge that they were misleading Jews "into the worship of a second god alongside Adonai" (see John 5:18; 10:33; 16:2). Expulsion and persecution led the Johannine community to new christological formulations; and instead of a simple *heilsgeschichtlich* continuity with Jewish expectations, a dualism of above/below came to the fore. Jesus was now presented as a Stranger who had come from above (3:31) and been rejected by "his own people" (1:11). Those who accept him are hated by this world and are not of this world (17:14, 16); they are no longer "Jews" but have become "true Israelites" (1:47) chosen by the Stranger from above (15:16). By the judgment of the synagogue itself, they are no longer disciples of Moses but disciples of Jesus (9:28).
- III. THE LATE PERIOD. (Not precisely dated by J.L.M.) This complex period involved the increasing self-identification of the Johannine community in relation to other Christian groups (and not only in relation to the synagogue). First, a relationship to Crypto-Christians who remained within the synagogue. The Johannine group argued that one is either from above or from below and that no fence straddling is possible. The Christian Jews in the synagogue were judged unable to maintain a dual allegiance; they were equivalent to the hated "Jews" and were "disciples of Moses,

not of Jesus." Moreover, the Crypto-Christians seemed to have aided the synagogue authorities in their persecution of the Johannine Jewish Christians by informing on them. Second, a relationship to other Jewish Christians who had left the synagogue and were scattered by persecution. These were the "other sheep" of 10:16 who would ultimately be joined with the Johannine community into one flock under one Good Shepherd. When the Gospel was written, at least a quadrilateral situation existed:

1. The synagogue of "the Jews."
2. Crypto-Christians (Christian Jews) within the synagogue.
3. Other communities of Jewish Christians who had been expelled from the synagogue.
4. The Johannine community of Jewish Christians.

* * *

By way of brief comment, it should be obvious to the reader of this book that I agree on many points with Martyn whose work I greatly respect. But let me note briefly my disagreements. First, he does not come to grips with the role of the Beloved Disciple, a figure who can scarcely be left in suspension if one wants to be faithful to the Gospel's own sense of history. Second, he does not explain why the Christian Jews from the early period developed a christology that led to their expulsion from the synagogue and their becoming Jewish Christians. What was the cause or, at least, the catalyst? Third, he dates the middle period too late. Granted that the most probable date for the introduction of the *Birkat ha-Minim* was ca. A.D. 85, an opposition between the community and the synagogue must have been developing for a considerable period before that. The late 80s would be a better date for his *late* period. Fourth, Martyn needs to give more attention to the Gentile component, not only in the Johannine community (since simple Jewish terms are explained in the Gospel), but also in what he calls "other communities of Jewish Christians." By the end of the century the main churches were mixed.

Georg Richter

The late G. Richter proposed a reconstruction of Johannine history whose guiding principle is *prima facie* diametrically opposed to Martyn's guiding principle of continuity within the same community. Richter is not tracing the history of one community adapting itself to changing circumstances; for he finds in the Fourth Gospel traces of the theological views of four different communities, all of whom worked with and upon an early basic Johannine writing (*Grundschrift*):

- I. MOSAIC-PROPHET CHRISTIANS. Rejecting the idea of a Davidic Messiah, a group of Jews, resembling the Ebionites, proclaimed Jesus as a prophet-like-Moses. Expelled from the diaspora synagogues in the area of North Palestine, Syria, and the Transjordan, this group produced a *Grundschrift*, a foundational Gospel-like work, out of the traditions that were available (including a Signs Source and a non-synoptic passion account).
- II. SON-OF-GOD CHRISTIANS. Part of this Jewish Christian community developed a higher christology of Jesus as the preexistent, divine Son of God, a figure who came down from heaven bringing salvation. This christology caused conflict with other members of the community who retained the earlier christology of the group. The Son-Of-God Christians split from the Mosaicprophet Christians and rewrote the *Grundschrift* as a vehicle of their higher christology. For example, they added the *Logos* hymn of 1:1-13 and the pre-existence statements of the Johannine Jesus. The rewriter may be called the evangelist.
- III. DOCETIST CHRISTIANS. Some of the Son-of-God Christians interpreted the evangelist's high christology in a docetic way: Jesus' divine origins were so stressed that he became a totally divine being whose earthly appearance was only an illusion. The docetist Johannine Christians withdrew from the communities of Group II, as attested in I John 2:19, but continued a missionary activity which produced strife. The Gospel, as it had been revised by the evangelist, served the Johannine docetists as their Gospel, and no new docetic revision was made—only a docetic interpretation.
- IV. REVISIONIST CHRISTIANS. A redactor who was decidedly anti-docetic rewrote the *Grundschrift* by making additions (1:14- 18; 19:34-35) and composed I John as an apologetic defense of a theology of Jesus as the Son of God come in the flesh. The result was that he and his congregation stood somewhere in-between the Johannine Christians of Group I and Group II; for, in rejecting the docetism of Group III, he had pulled back to a position that was less adventurous than that of the evangelist of Group II.

* * *

Like Martyn, Richter thinks the Johannine community arose among Jews who believed that Jesus had fulfilled well-known Jewish expectations, and at a later stage there developed within the Johannine community a higher christology that went beyond Jewish expectations. Let me note briefly my disagreements with Richter. First, on the basis of 1:35-51 Martyn is right over against Richter in seeing the originating group's expectations as more standard Davidic expectations. I would judge that the substitution of Mosaic expectations came later, after the contact with the Samaritans. Second, Richter is probably wrong in positing two totally different communities (I and II). As I pointed out in discussing chap. 4 of John, the disciples of Jesus accepted the new Samaritan converts without acrimony. Perhaps the correct position is between Martyn and Richter: a basic group underwent development (so there is continuity); but part of the development is attributed to the entrance of and amalgamation with a second group, who catalyzed the higher christology. Third, while Richter does a service in carrying the development beyond stage II (where Martyn stopped for all practical purposes), he is wrong in reading the struggle between

docetist Christians and revisionist Christians into the Gospel. That struggle is documented in the period of the Epistles (after the Gospel). Fourth, the designations "docetist" and "revisionist" do not do justice to the subtlety of the issues involved in the struggle between the author of the Epistles and those who seceded.

Oscar Cullmann

For over thirty years and in scattered articles Cullmann has discussed aspects of Johannine community history, but only recently has he given us an overall and detailed picture of the development as he sees it. In one sentence³¹⁸ he sums up his thesis about a Johannine circle which embraces several writers (at least the evangelist and a redactor) and a community with a special tradition: "We thus arrive in the following line, moving back in time: Johannine community—special Hellenist group in the early community in Jerusalem—Johannine circle of disciples—disciples of the Baptist—heterodox marginal Judaism." These cannot be broken down neatly into I, II, etc., as with the previous reconstructions; but let me describe the direction of Cullmann's reconstruction.

At the front of Johannine life there is a strong but distinctive historical tradition and direct relationship to Jesus. The Fourth Gospel, which can be called a life of Jesus, was the work of the Beloved Disciple (who is thus the author or evangelist), an eyewitness of the ministry of Jesus. The original (unredacted stage) of John was composed "at least as early as the synoptic Gospels and probably even earlier than the earliest of them." The differences between John and the Synoptics are explicable, at least in part, by the fact that Jesus had two different styles of teaching.

The Johannine movement drew its followers from among "heterodox" Jews, including those who were followers of JBap and then of Jesus, and those who were very close to or identical with the Hellenists of Acts 6. The community that emerged was not a small group polemicizing against a larger church, but a group with distinct origins that had its own peculiar components.

* * *

Obviously in my own reconstruction I am close to Cullmann on a number of significant points: the importance of the Beloved Disciple; origins among disciples of JBap; the importance of the Samaritans and of Jews *similar* to the Hellenists; a core historical tradition behind the Gospel. However, Cullmann overly simplifies the situation, leading me to list the following disagreements. First, it is fundamentally inadequate to explain the differences between John and the Synoptics on the basis of different styles of speech stemming from Jesus; those differences are the product of editorial and theological development. Second, precisely those differences make it most implausible (nay impossible) that the Fourth Gospel was written by an eyewitness of the ministry of Jesus; the role of the Beloved Disciple was therefore not that of the evangelist. Third, the term "heterodox Jews" is too much of an umbrella term bringing under the same cover movements that were more distinct. Moreover, it is inaccurate historically since it implies Jewish orthodoxy at the time of Jesus. Fourth, more needs to be said about the shaping of Johannine thought by struggles with other Christians and by internal division.

Marie-Émile Boismard

The honors for the most elaborate and detailed reconstruction of Johannine literary history belong to Boismard whose volume on John is really a commentary on four hypothetical stages of composition. Each stage is intricately involved with the life of the Johannine community:

- I. DOCUMENT C. This was a complete Gospel stretching from JBap to the resurrection of Jesus, written in Aramaic in Palestine about the year 50. This may have been composed by the Beloved Disciple (whether he was John Son of Zebedee or Lazarus). Its christology was primitive, with Jesus pictured as the Prophetlike- Moses or as the Danielic Son of Man. It had no pejorative attitude toward the Jews. The order of material in the document was close to that of the Synoptic Gospels, although it was more archaic than Mark.
- II. JEAN IIA. Another writer (John the presbyter, mentioned by Papias) subsequently did two editions of Document C (and wrote the Epistles). He was a Jew who wrote this first edition in Palestine ca. A.D. 60-65. In it he added new material to C, and began to speak pejoratively of the world, as well as showing some opposition to the Jews—reflections of the changing life-situation of the community.
- III. JEAN IIB. His second edition, done ca A.D. 90, drastically changed the order of the original to the order of the Gospel much as we now know it. He now knew all three Synoptic Gospels and some Pauline letters, and so had contact with other Christian groups. The writer had moved to Ephesus from Palestine, and this edition was in Greek. Persecution had left its trace in a strong aversion to "the Jews"; and Jesus was now presented as a preexistent figure, clearly superior to Moses. Sacraments also came to the fore.
- IV. JEAN III. Still a third writer, an unknown Jewish Christian of the Johannine school at Ephesus, was the final redactor early in the second century.

Although Boismard's reconstruction of such exact literary stages will probably not receive wide acceptance, there are aspects of real importance in his theory. By positing three Johannine writers, he portrays well the complexity of the Johannine school. Correctly he sees a shift from an original Jewish background and a more primitive christology to a Gentile setting and a higher christology; and he may well be right in connecting this to a geographical move (from Palestine to Ephesus) on the part of the main writer and presumably of some of the community.

Wolfgang Langbrandtner

Another type of reconstruction, represented by this young scholar, brings gnosticism into the heart of Johannine development. He distinguishes three community stages:

- I. *GRUNDSCHRIFT*. There was an early basic Johannine composition which organized the Jesus-material thematically: John 1:1-13 was a statement of christology and soteriology; John 3 dealt with anthropology; John 4 and 6 dealt with the need for faith; etc. Jesus was portrayed as in the world but not known by the world, and signs were regarded as irrelevant to faith. The author of the *Grundschrift* had a gnostic, dualistic outlook, so that the modern scholarly attempts to interpret the Fourth Gospel as gnostic do more justice to this basic work than to the final Gospel. It was not written before A.D. 80, and the Johannine community that gave expression to its thought therein did not go so far back (as a social unit) as the Jewish War of the late 60s.
- II. REDACTION. A complete reshaping of the *Grundschrift* both as to material and order gave us the Gospel as we now know it, with the journeys to Jerusalem and the calendar offcasts that runs through chaps. 5-10. Although the redactor was not the Beloved Disciple, he appealed to the Beloved Disciple (an aged man of great status and the living vehicle of the Paraclete) as the guarantor of the tradition. The redactor needed this support precisely because he was reinterpreting the *Grundschrift* in an antignostic, anti-docetic way; and a major struggle was underway within the community. This redaction, which was done ca. A.D. 100, stressed the fleshly existence and bodily resurrection of Jesus, ethics, sacraments, and future eschatology.
- III. EPISTLES. These were written in the order II John, III John, I John (n. 177 above). The redactor had gathered a group around him, including the presbyter of II-III John; and this "we" presented themselves as community teachers, while those who opposed the redacted Gospel had now seceded. Although relatively few years had passed since the Gospel was redacted, the community of the redactor was moving in the direction of "early Catholicism." Some, however, like the Diotrefes of III John, thought the situation was still too ambiguous and more church order was demanded.

* * *

In my judgment there are some valuable observations in Langbrandtner's analysis, especially as to the final directions of Johannine history. However, I would have the following points of disagreement. First, he does not do justice to the pre-Gospel situation, to the tie between Jesus and early Johannine origins and tradition, and to the struggle with "the Jews." Second, his theory depends on his ability to reconstruct verse-by-verse the *Grundschrift* and the additions of the redactor. No firm theory can be built on so disputable a base, for every scholar will have a different assignment of verses to the putative *Grundschrift*. Third, he has moved back into the heart of the Gospel an inner-Johannine dispute that is attested clearly only in the Epistles, and so has neglected the major struggle of the Gospel with outsiders, whether Jews or other Christians. Fourth, he has overdone the gnostic orientation of the Fourth Gospel which he attributes to its earliest layer. The fascination of German scholarship with the gnostic orientation of John produces some contradictory results in terms of allotting the gnosticism to different stages of composition. Bultmann allotted it to Revelatory discourse source (that few scholars now accept); Langbrandtner allots it to the *Grundschrift*; and both agree that the main writer of the Gospel was correcting the gnostic tendencies of the earlier material that came to him. Other German scholars think that the main Johannine writer was the source of the gnosticism, so that he was introducing gnostic ideas into the material that came to him; for Kasemann he was "naively docetic"; for Luise Schottroff he was a rather developed gnostic. I would argue that, while the Gospel was capable of being read in a gnostic manner, it was the Johannine secessionists, mentioned in I John, who first began to go down the path toward gnosticism, and that at no period documented in either the Gospel or the Epistles can one yet speak of a real Johannine gnosticism.

Appendix II: Roles of Women in the Fourth Gospel p. 183-198

A. Our Approach

There are several ways of approaching the biblical evidence pertinent to the contemporary debate about the role of women in the Church and about the possibility of ordaining women to the priesthood.

1. One approach is a general discussion of first-century ecclesiology both in itself and in its hermeneutical implications for the present. How does one read the NT evidence about the foundation of the church and the institution of the sacraments, and to what extent is that evidence culturally conditioned? Following the teachings of the Council of Trent, Catholics have spoken of the institution of the priesthood at the Last Supper. Does that mean that at the Supper Jesus consciously thought of priests? If he did not and if the clear conceptualization of the priesthood came only toward the second century, does the fact that men exclusively were ordained reflect a divine dispensation? Or are we dealing with a cultural phenomenon which can be changed? In other words, do we work with a "blueprint ecclesiology" wherein Jesus or the Holy Spirit has given us a blueprint of church structure in which virtually no changes can be made? While I regard the discussion of these questions as most important, I have written on them elsewhere and shall not repeat my observations here.
2. A second approach to the biblical evidence is to discuss the explicit texts that refer respectively to the equality and the subordination of women in society and cult. I am not convinced of the usefulness of such a discussion, since for

every text pointing in one direction there is usually a countertext. If Eph 5:24 states that wives must be subject in everything to their husbands, Eph 5:21 introduces that section by commanding "Be subject to one another." If I Cor 11:7 says that the man is the image and glory of God, while woman is the glory of man, Gen 1:27 states that both man and woman are in the image of God. If I Cor 14:34 rules that women should keep silence in the churches, I Cor 11:5 recognizes the custom that women pray and prophesy—and prophecy is the charism ranking second after apostleship (I Cor 12:28), to the extent that Eph 2:20 has the church, the household of God, built upon the foundation of apostles and prophets. I might continue listing contrary voices, but then we would still have the question of how to evaluate the voices that stress subordination. Once more we would have to ask: Is that purely a cultural pattern or is it divine revelation?

3. I prefer here to follow a third approach and to consider the general picture of women in one NT work, the Fourth Gospel, and in one NT community, the Johannine community. I have chosen the Fourth Gospel because of the perceptive corrective that the evangelist offers to some ecclesiastical attitudes of his time—his should be a voice heard and reflected upon when we are discussing new roles for women in the church today.

I presuppose that the evangelist was an unknown Christian living at the end of the first century in a community for which the Beloved Disciple, now deceased, had been the great authority. I do not think that the evangelist was either antisacramental or antiecclesiastical. He knew that other churches of his time were stressing both structure and sacraments; yet he counteracted some of the tendencies inherent in that situation by writing a Gospel in which he attempted to root the Christians of his community solidly in Jesus. They may be members of the church, but the church does not give God's life; Jesus does. And so, in order to have life, they must inhere in Jesus (John 15:1-8). The sacraments are not simply church actions commanded or instituted by Jesus; they are the continuation of the power that Jesus exhibited in signs when he opened the eyes of the blind (baptism as enlightenment) and fed the hungry (eucharist as food). At the end of the first century, when the memory of the apostles (now more often identified with the Twelve) was being increasingly revered, the Fourth Gospel glorifies the disciple and never uses the term "apostle" in the technical sense, almost as if the evangelist wishes to remind the Christian that what is primary is not to have had a special ecclesiastical charism from God but to have followed Jesus, obedient to his word. In short, it is a Gospel that seeks to make certain that in the structuring of the church the radical Christian values are not lost. What information does such a perceptive evangelist give us about the role of women?

B. Various Women in the Gospel

1. A Woman in a Church Office: Martha

There is not much information about church offices in the Fourth Gospel and, a fortiori, about women in church offices. Perhaps the only text that may reflect directly on this is 12:2, where we are told that Martha served at table (*diakonein*). On the story-level of Jesus's ministry this might not seem significant; but the evangelist is writing in the 90s, when the office of *diakonos* (service) already existed in the post-Pauline churches (see the Pastorals) and when the task of waiting on tables was a specific function to which the community or its leaders appointed individuals by laying on hands (Acts 6:1-6). In the Johannine community a woman could be described as exercising a function which in other churches was the function of an "ordained" person. But, except for that one passage, our discussion must center rather on the *general* position of women in the Johannine community.

2. A Woman in a Missionary Function: the Samaritan Woman

Let us begin with the story of the Samaritan woman. In the sequence of reactions to Jesus found in the dialogues of chaps. 2, 3, and 4, there seems to be a movement from disbelief through inadequate belief to more adequate belief. The "Jews" in the Temple scene are openly skeptical about his signs (2:18-20); Nicodemus is one of those in Jerusalem who believe because of Jesus' signs but do not have an adequate conception of Jesus (2:23 ff.); the Samaritan woman is led to the brink of perceiving that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah; 4:25-26, 29) and shares this with others. Indeed, the Samaritan villagers believe because of the woman's word (4:39,42). This expression is significant because it occurs again in Jesus' "priestly" prayer for his disciples: "It is not for these alone that I pray, but also for those who believe in me through their word" (17:20). In other words, the evangelist can describe both a woman and the (presumably male) disciples at the Last Supper as bearing witness to Jesus through preaching word. One may object that in chap. 4 the Samaritan villagers ultimately come to a faith based on Jesus's own word and thus are not dependent on the woman's word (4:42). Yet this is scarcely because of an inferiority she might have as a woman—it is the inferiority of any human witness compared to encountering Jesus himself. A similar attitude may be found in chap. 17, where Jesus prays that those who believe in him through the word of his disciples may ultimately be with him in order that they may see his glory (17:24).

That the Samaritan woman has a real missionary function is made clear by the dialogue between Jesus and his male disciples which precedes the passage we have been discussing. In 4:38 we have one of the most important uses of the verb "to send" in John. Jesus has just spoken of the fields being ripe for the harvest—a reference to the Samaritans coming out from the village to meet him because of what the woman has told them (4:35 following 4:30). This is missionary language, as we see from the parallel in Matt9:37-38: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray to the Lord of the harvest that He send out laborers into the harvest." But curiously the harvest of the Samaritans verifies the saying "One sows, while another reaps" (John 4:37). Jesus explains this to his male disciples: "What I sent you to reap was not something you worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have come in for the fruit of their work." Whatever this may have meant in reference to the history of the

Samaritan church (see pp. 35-39 above), in the story itself it means that the woman has sown the seed and thus prepared for the apostolic harvest. One may argue that only the male disciples are sent to harvest, but the woman's role is an essential component in the total mission. To some extent she serves to modify the thesis that male disciples were the only important figures in church founding.

3. A Woman in a Quasi-Apostolic Role: Mary Magdalene

The phenomenon of giving a quasi-apostolic role to a woman is even more apparent in chap. 20. Essential to the apostolate in the mind of Paul were the two components of having seen the risen Jesus and having been sent to proclaim him; this is the implicit logic of I Cor 9:1-2; 15:8-11; Gal 1:11-16. A key to Peter's importance in the apostolate was the tradition that he was the first to see the risen Jesus (I Cor 15:5; Luke 24:34). More than any other Gospel, John revises this tradition about Peter. Matthew 28:9-10 recalls that the women who were leaving the empty tomb were the first to encounter the risen Jesus, but in Matthew they are not contrasted with Peter. In John 20:2-10 Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple go to the empty tomb and do *not* see Jesus (also Luke 24:12,24); in fact, only the Beloved Disciple perceives the significance of the grave clothes and comes to believe. It is to a woman, Mary Magdalene, that Jesus first appears, instructing her to go and tell his "brothers" (the disciples: 20:17 and 18) of his ascension to the Father. In the stories of the angel(s) at the empty tomb, the women are given a message for the disciples; but in John (and in Matthew) Mary Magdalene is sent by the risen Lord himself, and what she proclaims is the standard apostolic announcement of the resurrection: "I have seen the Lord." True, this is not a mission to the whole world; but Mary Magdalene comes close to meeting the basic Pauline requirements of an apostle; and it is she, not Peter, who is the first to see the risen Jesus. Small wonder that in some gnostic quarters Mary Magdalene rather than Peter became the most prominent witness to the teaching of the risen Lord (see n. 300 above). And in Western Church tradition she received the honor of being the only woman (besides the Mother of God) on whose feast the creed was recited precisely because she was considered to be an apostle—"the apostle to the apostles".

4. A Woman Who Confesses that Jesus Is the Christ: Martha

Giving to a woman a role traditionally associated with Peter may well be a deliberate emphasis on John's part, for substitution is also exemplified in the story of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. The most famous incident in which Peter figures during the ministry of Jesus (and his other claim to primacy besides that of witnessing the first appearance of the risen Jesus) is the confession he made at Caesarea Philippi, especially in its Matthean form (16:16): "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Already the disciples had generally confessed Jesus as a "Son of God" (no definite article in Matt 14:33), but it is Peter's more solemn confession that wins Jesus' praise as a statement reflecting divine revelation. The closest parallel to that confession in the four Gospels is found in John 11:27: "You are the Christ, the Son of God," and it appears on the lips of a woman, Martha, sister of Mary and Lazarus. (And it comes in the context of a major revelation of Jesus to Martha; it is to a woman that the mystery of Jesus as the resurrection and the life is revealed!) Thus, if other Christian communities thought of Peter as the one who made a supreme confession of Jesus as the Son of God and the one to whom the risen Jesus first appeared, the Johannine community associated such memories with heroines like Martha and Mary Magdalene. This substitution, if it was deliberate, was not meant to denigrate Peter or deny him a role of ecclesiastical authority, any more than the introduction of the Beloved Disciple alongside Peter in crucial scenes had that purpose. If I interpret John correctly, at a time when the Twelve Apostles (almost personified in Peter, as in Acts) were becoming dominant in the memory of the ministry of Jesus and of church origins, John portrays Simon Peter as only one of a number of heroes and heroines and thus hints that ecclesiastical authority is not the sole criterion for judging importance in the following of Jesus.

5. Women as disciples of Jesus

The importance of women in the Johannine community is seen not only by comparing them with male figures from the Synoptic tradition but also by studying their place within peculiarly Johannine patterns. Discipleship is the primary Christian category for John, and the disciple par excellence is the Disciple whom Jesus loved. But John tells us in 11:5: "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister [Mary] and Lazarus." The fact that Lazarus is the only male in the Gospel who is named as the object of Jesus' love—nothing similar is said of the Twelve—has led some scholars to identify him as the Beloved Disciple. And so it is noteworthy that John would report that Jesus loved Martha and Mary, who seem to have been better known than Lazarus. Another proof that women could be intimate disciples of Jesus is found in chap. 20. In the allegorical parable of the Good Shepherd John compares the disciples of Jesus to sheep who know their shepherd's voice when he calls them by name (10:3-5). This description is fulfilled in the appearance of the risen Jesus to Mary Magdalene as she recognizes him when he calls her by her name "Mary" (20:16). The point that Mary Magdalene can belong to Jesus' sheep is all the more important since in 10:3-5 the sheep are twice identified as "his own," the almost technical expression used at the beginning of the Last Supper: "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (13:1). It is clear that John has no hesitation in placing a woman in the same category of relationship to Jesus as the Twelve who are included in the "his own" in 13:1.

C. The Mother of Jesus

It is as a continuation of this idea that I now turn to John's treatment of the mother of Jesus, who appears in the Fourth Gospel at the first Cana miracle and at the foot of the cross. There are many symbolisms that John may have intended his reader to associate with the mother of Jesus; in my [Anchor Bible](#) commentary on the two scenes I have explained some

of them at length. But here I am concerned only with discipleship and with the relative importance of men and women in the Johannine community. I shall be concise, since I do not want this Appendix to be more than a note and since elsewhere I have given detailed arguments.

1. Wedding at Cana

Let us begin with the wedding at Cana. Many theorize that there was a pre-Johannine form of the story. One form of this theory suggests that John drew the basic Cana miracle story from a tradition of the *preministry* career of Jesus—a tradition wherein the christology of the ministry was anticipated by describing Jesus as endowed with divine power and knowledge during his youth, when he was still living with his family. In this tradition Jesus spoke freely of his divine mission and worked miracles in order to help family and friends. It is borne witness to in the apocryphal Gospels of the second century (e.g., The Infancy Gospel of Thomas) and in one other place in the canonical Gospels, namely, the scene in Luke 2:41-50 where as a youth Jesus shows extraordinary knowledge and refers to the Temple as his Father's house. This background would explain many peculiar features in the story of the water changed to wine at Cana: Jesus is still up in the highlands of Galilee (where he does not work miracles in the Synoptic tradition); he has not yet left his home and moved to Capernaum, which will be the center of his public ministry (2:12); he is in the family circle of his mother and brothers (2:12) and he is attending the wedding of a friend of the family (2:1-2); his mother expects him to use his miraculous power to solve the shortage of wine at the wedding (2:3); the miracle he performs is particularly exuberant (about 100 gallons of wine from the six stone jars mentioned in 2:6).

I have described one form of the theory that a pre-Johannine story underlies the present Cana narrative. There are other forms of this theory, but almost all propose that there was no response of Jesus such as now appears in 2:4—a response which makes the story very hard to understand. It is a seeming refusal; and yet Jesus' mother goes ahead as if he had not refused, and Jesus does what she requested. The substance of the pre-Johannine story may have gone thus:

Now there was a wedding at Cana of Galilee and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus himself and his disciples had been invited to the wedding celebration. But they had no wine, for the wine provided for the wedding banquet had been used up. The mother of Jesus told the waiters: "Do whatever he tells you." There were at hand six stone water jars, each holding fifteen to twenty-five gallons. "Fill those jars with water," Jesus ordered. . . .

Such a popular picture of Mary's ability as a mother to intervene in Jesus' activities, to ask for a miracle for her friends and to have it granted, did not correspond with the oldest Gospel tradition about Jesus' attitude toward family. In Mark 3:31-35 we find Jesus strongly rejecting intervention by his mother and brothers in favor of obedience to God's will. And so, when John brought this miracle story into the Gospel, he modified it by inserting 2:4, where Jesus carefully dissociates himself from his mother's interests ("Woman, what has this concern of yours to do with me?") and gives priority to the hour dictated by his heavenly Father ("My hour has not yet come"). Thus the Fourth Gospel agrees with the other three that Mary had no role in the ministry as Jesus' physical mother. The Jesus who asked his disciples not to give any priority to family (Mark 10:29-30; Matt 10:37; Luke 14:26) was not himself going to give priority to family. This interpretation of John 2:4 is valid whatever theory one accepts about the origins of the Cana story.

If one had just Mark 3:31-35, the only scene common to the Synoptics in which the mother and brothers of Jesus play a role, one might conclude that Jesus completely rejected them from his following. According to Mark, when Jesus was told that his mother and brothers were outside asking for him, he replied: "*Who are my mother and my brothers?*" *And looking about at those who sat around him, he said: 'Here are my mother and my brothers!'*" He then stated that whoever did the will of God was his brother and sister and mother—in other words, his disciples take the place of his family. But this was not Luke's understanding of Jesus' intent. His version of the scene (8:19-21) omits the Marcan words I have italicized above and reads thus:

Then Jesus' mother and his brothers approached him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. He was given the message: "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside waiting to see you." But he replied: "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it."

For Luke, the hearers of the word of God do not *replace* Jesus' mother and brothers as his true family; for his mother and brothers hear the word of God and do it and so are part of the true family of disciples. Luke preserves Jesus' insistence that hearing the word of God and doing it is constitutive of his family, but Luke thinks that Jesus' mother and brothers meet that criterion. That this is a correct interpretation is confirmed by Acts 1:14, where, among the 120 "brethren" who constitute the believing community after the resurrection-ascension, Luke lists "Mary the mother of Jesus and his brothers."

2. Jesus' mother at the foot of the cross

This is also John's understanding of the role of Jesus' mother in relation to discipleship, as we see from the other scene in which she appears (19:25-27). At the foot of the cross there are brought together the two great symbolic figures of the Fourth Gospel whose personal names are never used by the evangelist: the mother of Jesus and the Disciple whom Jesus loved. Both were historical personages, but they are not named by John, since their primary

(not sole) importance is in their symbolism for discipleship rather than in their historical careers. During the ministry, as we saw in the final Johannine form of the Cana story (especially 2:4), the mother of Jesus was denied involvement as his physical mother in favor of the timetable of the "hour" dictated by Jesus' Father; but now that the hour has come for Jesus to pass from this world to the Father (13:1), Jesus will grant her a role that will involve her, not as *his* mother but as the mother of the Beloved Disciple. In other words, John agrees with Luke that Jesus' rejection of intervention by Mary did not mean that his natural family could not become his true family through discipleship. By stressing not only that his mother has become the mother of the Beloved Disciple, but also that this Disciple has become her son, the Johannine Jesus is logically claiming the Disciple as his true brother. In the Fourth Gospel, then, as well as in the Synoptic scene, Jesus has reinterpreted who his mother and his brothers are and reinterpreted them in terms of discipleship. If in Acts 1:14 Luke brought back the mother and brothers of Jesus as disciples after the ascension, John chooses the "hour" when Jesus has been lifted up (12:32) to bring onto the scene the mother of Jesus who is made the mother of the Beloved Disciple, now Jesus' brother.

I pointed out earlier that discipleship is the primary Johannine category and that John included women as "first-class" disciples by telling us that Jesus loved Martha and Mary and that Mary Magdalene was one of "his own" sheep whom he called by name. John's treatment of the mother of Jesus is a step further in that direction. If the Beloved Disciple was the ideal of discipleship, intimately involved with that Disciple on an equal plane as part of Jesus' true family was a woman. A woman and a man stood at the foot of the cross as models for Jesus' "own," his true family of disciples.

I spoke earlier of the Samaritan woman to whom Jesus revealed himself as the source of life and the Messiah, a woman who in a missionary role brought men to him on the strength of her word. In the scene in 4:27, we are told that when Jesus' male disciples saw him speaking to her, they were surprised that he was dealing in such an open way with a woman. In researching the evidence of the Fourth Gospel, one is still surprised to see to what extent in the Johannine community women and men were already on an equal level in the fold of the Good Shepherd. This seems to have been a community where in the things that really mattered in the following of Christ there was no difference between male and female—a Pauline dream (Gal 3:28) that was not completely realized in the Pauline communities. But even John has left us with one curious note of incompleteness: the disciples, surprised at Jesus' openness with a woman, still did not dare to ask him, "What do you want of a woman?" (4:27). That may well be a question whose time has come in the church of Jesus Christ.