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“OTHER SHEEP NOT OF THIS FOLD”: THE JOHANNINE PERSPECTIVE ON CHRISTIAN DIVERSITY IN THE LATE FIRST CENTURY*

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WAS the Johannine community a sect? This has become a burning issue with implications both for Fourth Gospel studies and for our understanding of Christian origins.¹ To some extent the answer to the question depends on the definition of “sect.” Does one define “sect” in terms of a stance over against another religious body (in this instance, either against parent Judaism or against other Christians), or of a stance over against society at large (against “the world”)?²

Working in the context of the latter understanding of “sect,” R. Scroggs³ argues that the whole early Christian movement was sectarian, for it met the following basic characteristics of a sect: (1) it emerged out of an agrarian protest movement; (2) it rejected many of the realities claimed by the establishment (claims of family, of religious institution, of wealth, of theological intellectuals); (3) it was egalitarian; (4) it offered special love and acceptance within; (5) it was a voluntary organization; (6) it demanded a total commitment of its members; and (7) it was apocalyptic. Obviously, in such an understanding of “sect,” the Christian community known to us through the

*The Presidential Address delivered 29 December 1977, at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, held at the San Francisco Hilton, San Francisco, CA.

¹It would also have implications for the nature of scripture, since a sectarian understanding of the Johannine community might imply that the church canonized within the NT the writings of groups who would not have acknowledged each other as true Christians.

²W. Meeks (*JBL* 95 [1976] 304) distinguishes between Americans who are accustomed to use “sect” as a sociological term, and many European scholars who use the term only in a theological and church-historical sense. His own solution to my opening question is clear from the title of his article: “The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism,” *JBL* 91 (1972) 44-72. Caution is inculcated by D. M. Smith, Jr. (“Johannine Christianity: Some Reflections on Its Character and Delineation,” *NTS* 21 [1974-75] 224): “If this [Johannine] sectarian or quasi-sectarian self-consciousness is not a matter of dispute, its roots, causes and social matrix nevertheless are. What thereby comes to expression? A Christian sense of alienation or separation from the world generally? From the Synagogue? From developing ecclesiastical orthodoxy?”

³“The Earliest Christian Communities as Sectarian Movement,” in *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults—Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty* (ed. J. Neusner; 4 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1975) 2. 1-23. He gives a bibliography on the sociology of “sect,” as does R. A. Culpepper, *The Johannine School* (SBLDS 26; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975), 259, n. 10.

Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles was a sect, as part of the larger Christian sectarian movement.⁴

Even if one takes "sect" in a purely religious framework, the whole early Christian movement may have been considered a sect, or at least the Jewish Christian branch of it. In Acts 24:5, 14, Jews who do not believe in Jesus describe other Jews who do believe in him as constituting a *haireisis*—the same word used by Josephus (*Life* 10) when he speaks of the three "sects" of the Jews: Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. But my interest here is the applicability of the religious term "sect" to the Johannine community in its relationship to other Christian communities at the end of the first century. Was this community an accepted church among churches or an alienated and exclusive conventicle? In this dialectic, the Johannine community would *de facto* be a sect, as I understand the term, if explicitly or implicitly it had broken *koinōnia* with most other Christians,⁵ or if because of its theological or ecclesiological tendencies, most other Christians had broken *koinōnia* with the Johannine community.

Some have argued for Johannine sectarianism on the basis of the relatively quick acceptance of the Gospel by second-century Gnostics.⁶ The logic is that these "heretics" had correctly recognized the innate tendencies of Johannine thought. D. M. Smith, however, correctly observes that Irenaeus was able to accept the gospel as orthodox, so that second-century usage is not a clear criterion of the sectarian status of Johannine thought in the first century: "If there was a Johannine line of development [trajectory], it has not yet proved possible to identify it clearly in the second century and thus to follow it back into the first."⁷

Still another argument for Johannine sectarianism has come from radical interpretations of the theology and ecclesiology of the Fourth Gospel.⁸ The likelihood that the Johannine community was a sect sharply different from most other Christians would be increased if the Fourth Gospel is anti-

⁴The Johannine community may fit certain of these characteristics better than do other Christian groups, e.g., No. 4; yet (at least as seen through the Fourth Gospel) it would fit poorly other characteristics, e.g., No. 7.

⁵See S. Brown, "Koinonia as the Basis of New Testament Ecclesiology?" *One in Christ* 12 (1976) 157-67.

⁶That the Fourth Gospel was first accepted by groups who could be classified as heterodox has been proposed by J. N. Sanders and by M. R. Hillmer; the opposite thesis has been defended by F.-M. Braun. See my *AB* commentary, I. lxxxi, lxxxvi; also E. H. Pagels, *The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis* (SBLMS 17; Nashville: Abingdon, 1973).

⁷"Johannine Christianity," 225.

⁸I shall confine myself in this paper to the Fourth Gospel, with occasional references to the Johannine Epistles. More could be determined about Johannine ecclesiology through recourse to Revelation with its seven letters to the churches. E. S. Fiorenza, "The Quest for the Johannine School: the Apocalypse and the Fourth Gospel," *NTS* 23 [1976-77] 402-27 argues that the author of Revelation "appears to have been more familiar with Pauline than with Johannine school traditions." I am willing to accept the thesis that the author of Revelation is an unknown Christian prophet named John (not the son of Zebedee); but I find Fiorenza's hypothesis exaggerated both as regards Pauline similarities and Johannine dissimilarities. Nevertheless, I shall not use Revelation in this paper.

sacramental or decidedly non-sacramental (so Bultmann who attributes the clearly sacramental passages to an ecclesiastical redactor of the gospel), or if the gospel is anti-Petrine (with the understanding that Peter is symbolic of the larger church's interest in apostolic foundation);⁹ or if the gospel is anti-institutional, rejecting the presbyter/bishop structure that was emerging at the end of the century;¹⁰ or if its christology is a naive docetism, so that the church committed an error when it ultimately declared the gospel to be orthodox (Käsemann). However, since such radical interpretations of the Fourth Gospel have often been challenged (and in my judgment, refuted), I prefer here another approach to the problem of the relation of the Johannine community to other Christian communities.

This approach is based on the supposition that from the story of Jesus' ministry in the Fourth Gospel we can deduce much information about the Johannine community. J. L. Martyn¹¹ brought such a method of investigation into prominence by using the dialogues between Jesus and "the Jews" to determine the relationship between the Johannine community and the synagogue. Recently Martyn, G. Richter, and I have all attempted to reconstruct the pre-gospel history of the Johannine community from hints in the gospel.¹² The three of us agree that the Johannine community originated among Jews who believed that Jesus had fulfilled well-known Jewish expectations, e.g., of a messiah or of a prophet-like-Moses. (The best indicator of this is John 1:35-50 where the first disciples are Jews who accept Jesus under titles known to us from OT and intertestamental literature.) At a later stage there developed within the Johannine community a higher christology that went beyond Jewish expectations by describing Jesus as a pre-existent divine savior who had lived with God in heaven before he became man. (As an indicator of this, in John 4 there is a description of new converts in Samaria who recognize Jesus as the savior of the world; and in 5:18 and 8:48 there are accusations that Jesus is making himself equal to God and is a Samaritan.) This high christology led to friction between the Johannine community and the synagogue and ultimately to its expulsion (9:22; 10:31-33;

⁹See G. F. Snyder, "John 13:16 and the Anti-Petrinism of the Johannine Tradition," *BR* 16 (1971) 5-15.

¹⁰E. Schweizer (*Church Order in the New Testament* [SBT 32; London: SCM, 1961] 127): "Here [in the Johannine Epistles in continuity with the Gospel] there is no longer any kind of special ministry, but only the direct union with God through the Spirit who comes to every individual; here there are neither offices nor even different charismata."

¹¹*History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968). This will soon be published in a new edition by Abingdon.

¹²J. L. Martyn, "Glimpses into the History of the Johannine Community," in *L'Évangile de Jean: Sources, rédaction, théologie* (ed. M. de Jonge; BETL 44; Gembloux: Duculot, 1977) 149-75. This paper was given at the 1975 Colloquium Biblicum Lovaniense (Journées Bibliques) and will be republished in a collection of Martyn's Johannine essays (New York: Paulist Press, 1978). G. Richter, "Präsentische und futurische Eschatologie im 4. Evangelium," in *Gegenwart und kommendes Reich: Schülergabe Anton Vögtle* (ed. P. Fiedler and D. Zeller; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1975) 117-52. An English digest by A. J. Mattill appears in *TS* 38 (1977) 294-315. R. E. Brown, "Johannine Ecclesiology—the Community's Origins," *Int* 31 (1977) 379-93.

16:2). And so we find a community increasingly conformed to its own image of Jesus, for he too had been rejected by "his own" (1:11). This estranged community, like Jesus, found itself in the world but not of it (17:16).

At the end of his study of pre-gospel history, Martyn¹³ concluded that when the gospel was written there were at least four groups in the Johannine religious purview:

¹³"Glimpses," 174.

DIFFERENT RELIGIOUS GROUPINGS IN THE JOHANNINE PURVIEW OF THE LATE FIRST CENTURY*

VI. Secessionist Johannine Christians

Following the high christology of the Fourth Gospel to what they considered its logical conclusion, they thought that the One who had come down from heaven and did not belong to this world was not fully human. It was of no salvific import that he had truly "come in the flesh" and had really died. In turn they relativized the importance of earthly life for Christians and the decisiveness of moral behavior. They interpreted the freedom brought by Jesus as a freedom from the guilt of sin. In a dispute with members of Group V, they had withdrawn and broken koinonia, leaving themselves open to the charge of not loving the brethren. They defended their views as the work of the Spirit.

V. The Johannine Christians

Although now of mixed Jewish and Gentile stock, in earlier history they originated among various types of Jewish converts (perhaps followers of John the Baptist mixed with anti-temple Jewish Christians who had evangelized Samaria). In conflict with "the Jews" (I), they had developed a very high christology. Not only had they been separated from the synagogues over the charge that they were ditheists, but also they had no koinonia with Jewish Christians of a low christology (II and III). They retained koinonia with Christians who confessed Jesus as Son of God (IV), although for them true unity could be based only on a christology of the pre-existence of Jesus and his oneness with the Father. The priority they placed on unity with Jesus relativized for them the importance of church office and structure; and sacraments were seen as continuations of the actions of Jesus.

IV. Christians of Apostolic Churches

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 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.

*The columns are meant to be read in order from right to left.

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

I am now going to suggest that the situation was more complicated, and that at the end of the century, if we include the witness of the Johannine Epistles, we can detect no less than six groups. (See the accompanying chart.)

DIFFERENT RELIGIOUS GROUPINGS IN THE JOHANNINE PURVIEW OF THE LATE FIRST CENTURY (Continued)

III. The Jewish Christians

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 existed at Jerusalem under James the brother of the Lord. Presumably their low christology based on miraculous signs was partway between that of Groups II and IV. They did not accept Jesus' divinity. They did not understand the eucharist as the true flesh and blood of Jesus.

II. The Crypto-Christians

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." 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 (V), 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" (I).

I. "The Jews"

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 (V) 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.

More important, I think that an analysis of these groups throws considerable light on the question of whether the Johannine community was a sect within Christianity. Let us discuss the groups one by one.

I. "The Jews" or the Synagogue

In the pre-gospel history of the Johannine community there was a severe struggle with Jews who did not believe in Jesus and who reacted hostilely to those who did believe in him—a struggle fought in part with the weapon of scriptural exegesis (5:39, 46-47). This struggle led to banning from the synagogues Jews who believed in Jesus (9:22; 16:2). By the time that the Fourth Gospel was written,¹⁴ the polemics between the Johannine community and the synagogues included topics known to us from other NT or early Christian writings, e.g., that Christians violate the sabbath and thus violate the law given by God to Moses (5:16; 7:19, 22-24); that there was no resurrection of Jesus (2:18-22); that the eucharist is incredible (6:52); that Jesus was no great teacher (7:15); and that he could deceive only the uneducated (7:49). Nevertheless, these are only secondary issues; the primary object of contention is the Johannine Christian proclamation of the divinity of Jesus. As S. Pancaro¹⁵ has shown, even the battles over the law and the sabbath have become christological battles, for the sovereign attitude of the Johannine Jesus flows from his being above and beyond the law. There is a uniqueness to the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel:¹⁶ he is the Word who was in God's presence from the beginning (1:1), the only one who has heard God's voice and seen his face (5:37); and now that he has descended from heaven, he is the exclusive means of knowing the Father (3:13; 8:19); indeed, he is one with the Father (10:30). In response to such claims "the Jews" charge that Jesus is being made a god; but John answers subtly that such claims do not *make* anything of Jesus; rather Jesus is entirely dependent upon the Father for all that he is and does (5:19-47).

That the issue of ditheism is the primary bone of contention has been

¹⁴There is reasonably wide consensus that the Fourth Gospel was written after the destruction of the temple when the teaching center of Judaism had moved to Jamnia (Jabneh)—now largely a pharisaic Judaism, and thus no longer so pluralistic as before 70. The hostility between the Johannine community and the synagogues may well have developed over several decades after the mid-60s; but Martyn (*History and Theology*) has argued well for dating the written gospel after A.D. 85, the approximate date for the introduction into the synagogues of the reworded Twelfth Benediction (of the *Shemoneh Esreh*) called the *Birkat ha-Minim*, involving a curse on heretical deviators, including those who confessed Jesus to be the messiah.

¹⁵*The Law in the Fourth Gospel* (NovTSup 42; Leiden: Brill, 1975).

¹⁶Although I stress the uniquely high christology of John, this gospel is still a long way from the theology of Nicaea: "true God of true God . . . consubstantial with the Father." See C. K. Barrett, "The Father is greater than I" (Jo 14, 28): Subordinationist Christology in the New Testament," in *Neues Testament und Kirche* (Festschrift für R. Schnackenburg; ed. J. Gnlika; Freiburg: Herder, 1974) 144-59.

recognized by many scholars, and most clearly by Martyn. But I think there is a second major point of contention, namely, the Jewish cult. Derivatively from his high christology, John contends that the most sacred cultic institutions of Judaism have lost their significance for those who believe in Jesus. Jesus is now the place of divine tabernacling (1:14: *skēnōn*); his body is the temple (2:21); and what Jesus says on the occasion of prominent Jewish feasts (Sabbath, Passover, Tabernacles, Dedication) systematically replaces the significance of those feasts.¹⁷ If the Jewish synagogues have expelled Christians, John's Christianity has negated and replaced Judaism. The believer in Jesus is a true Israelite (1:47); "the Jews" are the children of the devil (8:44).

In my analysis of pre-gospel Johannine history,¹⁸ I suggested that it was the entrance into the community of a second group of believers which explained the high christology that surpassed Jewish expectations. This second group of believers I saw reflected in John 4, and speculated that it consisted of Jews with anti-temple views (4:21) and their Samaritan converts (4:35-38). That the existence of such a group is not pure imagination may be seen from the description of Hellenist theology in Acts 7:47-49 and of the Hellenist mission in Samaria in Acts 8:4-8.¹⁹ Added support for associating Johannine high christology and the Johannine attitude of replacing the Jewish cult is supplied by Hebrews, a work with Johannine affinities.²⁰ High christology appears in the use of "God" for Jesus in the psalm exegesis of Heb 1:8, and this is followed by a lengthy argument that Jesus has made otiose an earthly cult centered on tabernacle, priesthood, and sacrifice. In both John and Hebrews the ramifications of a belief in the divinity of Jesus involve a reinterpretation of new covenant to mean that the old covenant has been replaced.

II. *The Crypto-Christians or Christian Jews within the Synagogues*

John 12:42-43 is our clearest reference to a group of Jews who were attracted to Jesus and could be said to have believed in him, but were afraid to confess their faith publicly lest they be expelled from the synagogues. John has contempt for them and holds up the blind man as an example of the kind

¹⁷See my *AB* commentary, 1. *cxliv*, 201-4, for the outline of chaps 5-10.

¹⁸"Johannine Ecclesiology," 388-90.

¹⁹O. Cullmann has rendered service in seeking to relate Johannine Christianity to the Hellenists of Acts (as did B. W. Bacon before him), even if Cullmann's position may need more nuance. See the reviews of his *The Johannine Circle* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976) in *JBL* 95 (1976) 304-5 and *TS* 38 (1977) 157-59. C. H. H. Scobie, in a paper delivered at the 1976 SBL St. Louis meeting ("The Origin and Development of the Johannine Community") stressed the role of the Hellenists in a modified form of the Cullmann hypothesis.

²⁰C. Spicq (*L'Épître aux Hébreux* [2 vols.; Paris: Gabalda, 1952] 1. 109-38) treats sixteen parallels between John and Hebrews. I am attracted to the possibility that, if we use the language of Acts 6-7, Hebrews is a Hellenist Christian tract addressed to Hebrew Christians, trying to convince them that in the last third of the century it was no longer possible for them to remain within Judaism as it had been during the middle third of the century.

of courage such people should have—courage to leave the synagogue and come to Jesus (9:22-23, 34-35). Undoubtedly, much of the Johannine polemic against “the Jews” who did not believe in Jesus would touch these Christian Jews as well; for in John’s judgment, by not publicly confessing Jesus, they were showing that they did not really believe in him. Like “the Jews” the Crypto-Christians had chosen to be known as disciples of Moses rather than as disciples of “that fellow” (9:28). Yet John’s very attention to them implies that he still hopes to sway them, while he has no hope of swaying “the Jews.”

From this mirror view of the Crypto-Christians it is difficult to reconstruct the details of their christology and ecclesiology. We may suspect that in their view the Johannine Christians had unnecessarily and tragically brought about a division. The blind man, whom John presents as a hero, may have seemed to them an uncompromising and rigid fanatic determined on eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation, a figure whose rudeness to the synagogue authorities made expulsion a virtual necessity. Perhaps the Crypto-Christians recalled that Jesus was a Jew who had functioned *within* the synagogue, as had James, and Peter and other Christian leaders. Like the recipients of the Epistle to the Hebrews, they may have felt no necessity to have Jesus exalted over Moses and to have their whole cultic heritage negated. One’s judgment on their presumed preference for compromise rather than confrontation will depend on the extent to which one thinks it really was possible to put new wine into old wineskins.

III. *The Jewish Christians of Inadequate Faith*

In isolating the first two groups within the Johannine purview I have been in harmony with Martyn and others, but now I would seriously modify that aspect of Martyn’s treatment which applies to the Crypto-Christians all the unfavorable Johannine references to Jews who believe in Jesus. I think there were also Jewish Christians who had left the synagogues (or been expelled) but toward whom John had a hostile attitude. For instance, to whom does John refer in 2:23-25 when he speaks of the many in Jerusalem who believe in Jesus’ name on the basis of his signs, but to whom Jesus refuses to entrust himself? These are quite distinct from “the Jews” of the preceding episode who deny the resurrection (2:18-22), and I see no reason to think that they represent Crypto-Christians within the synagogues.²¹ We are more plausibly dealing with a Jewish Christian community, associated in some way with Jerusalem, in whom John has no trust.

I find even more difficult to interpret as Crypto-Christians the disciples of 6:60-66 who are clearly distinct from “the Jews” of the synagogue debate which ends in 6:59. Nor do they seem to be Crypto-Christians since they have gone about with Jesus publicly (6:66) in a manner not hitherto distinct from

²¹If the Jerusalemites of 2:23-25 are represented by Nicodemus who makes his appearance immediately afterwards (3:1-2), it becomes clear in 19:39 that Nicodemus ultimately became a public follower of Jesus.

that of the twelve (6:67). Since this scene takes place in Galilee rather than in Jerusalem, the object of the author's ire may be Jewish Christians in Palestine.

The picture may be filled out by the Johannine hostility toward the brothers of Jesus recorded shortly afterwards: his brothers, who have urged him to show off his miracles in Judaea, "did not really believe in him" (7:3-5).²² In 2:12, John had distinguished between the family of Jesus ("his mother and his brothers") and "his disciples,"²³ even though both groups went with Jesus to Capernaum. In the gospel, John refers once more respectively to Jesus' mother and to Jesus' brothers. The reference to the brothers is in terms of unbelief, as just mentioned. The mother appears at the foot of the cross (19:25-27) as part of a faithful community who will remain on after Jesus' death. Indeed, she is associated with the Johannine hero *par excellence*, the beloved disciple, who becomes her son—perhaps an attempt to redefine the family of Jesus so that the beloved disciple replaces the unbelieving brothers.²⁴ In any case, the hostile portrait of the brothers of Jesus, without any hint of their conversion, is startling when we reflect that the Fourth Gospel was written after James, the brother of the Lord, had led the Jerusalem church for almost thirty years and had died a martyr's death. Since his name was revered as a teaching authority by Jewish Christians (James 1:1; Jude 1), are we having reflected in John a polemic against Jewish Christians, particularly in Palestine, who regarded themselves as the heirs of the Jerusalem church of James?²⁵ Are their church leaders the hirelings of 10:12 who do not protect the sheep against the wolves, perhaps because they have not sufficiently distanced their flocks from "the Jews"?²⁶

In John 8:31 there begins a difficult section addressed to Jerusalem Jews who believe in Jesus.²⁷ This probably refers to Crypto-Christians still within the synagogue since the author soon calls them simply "the Jews" (8:48) and describes them as seeking to stone Jesus (8:59). John might think that some Jewish Christian churches outside the synagogue no longer truly follow Jesus, but he would scarcely accuse them of seeking to kill Jesus. Nevertheless, some

²²Their lack of faith in 7:5 continues a sequence of reactions to Jesus begun in 6:66: some disciples would no longer accompany Jesus (6:66); Simon Peter as a spokesman for the twelve continues to believe in Jesus (6:68-69); Judas, one of the twelve, will betray him (6:71); and his brothers do not believe in him (7:5).

²³For the textual problems and critical suggestions, see my *AB* commentary, 1. 112.

²⁴For a development of this idea see R. E. Brown, "The 'Mother of Jesus' in the Fourth Gospel," in *L'Évangile de Jean* (see n. 12 above) 307-10. Note too that in 20:17-18 the disciples of Jesus are actually called his brothers.

²⁵According to church tradition James was succeeded as head of the Jerusalem church by other brothers or relatives of the Lord (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.11.20, 32).

²⁶Martyn ("Glimpses," 171) sees these as leaders among the Crypto-Christians. The figurative language would seem to portray them, however, as openly acknowledged shepherds of Christian groups. Even though outside the synagogue, presumably they were not so persecuted as the Johannine community whose divine claims for Jesus they did not share.

²⁷See B. E. Schein, "'The Seed of Abraham'—John 8:31-59," Abstracts of SBL Meeting, Atlanta, 1971, S159, pp. 83-84: "The opponents of the Johannine circle called 'Jews who had believed' are the circle of tradition-minded, pharisaic-oriented Christians from Jerusalem."

of what John ascribes to "Jews who had believed in him" in 8:31-59 may pertain to Jewish Christians as well as to Crypto-Christians, namely, that although they remain proud that they are Abraham's children (8:39), they firmly reject the thought that before Abraham even came into existence, Jesus is (8:58-59). John would then be seeing a double-defect in the faith-commitment of the Jewish Christians. Although they could accept Jesus as a wonder-worker, they refused to identify him as the divine "I AM." Secondly, they did not believe that in the eucharist Jesus had really given his flesh to eat and his blood to drink (6:60-64). The existence of such Jewish Christians just after A.D. 100 is attested in the letters of Ignatius of Antioch. Recently the Jewish Christian opponents of Ignatius were described thus:²⁸ "They revered Jesus as a teacher, but perhaps were not prepared to allow his person to upset the unity of the Godhead. . . . They adopted the sacred meal . . . and thought of it in terms of fellowship rather than as a sacrament on Ignatian lines." John may be giving us a picture of similar Jewish Christians twenty years earlier.

IV. *Christians of Apostolic Churches*

There are two groups of Jesus' disciples sharply contrasted in John 6:60-69. The first group who left the synagogue with him but subsequently drew back has been discussed above. Over against their inadequate faith stands the confession of the twelve who through Peter acknowledge that Jesus has the words of eternal life. Here we have the traces of those who in Martyn's quadrilateral church situation are characterized as: various communities of Jewish Christians who had been expelled from the synagogue but with whom there is hope of unification. I wish to change the description somewhat. If we speak of a group of late first-century Christians represented in the Fourth Gospel by Peter and other members of the twelve (Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Judas-not-Iscaiot, Nathanael²⁹), the very choice of symbolic representatives suggests that they were Jewish Christian in origin. Everything said about Peter and the twelve would lead us to think that such Christians were no longer in the synagogue (see 16:2 addressed to a group which includes members of the twelve). But I see no reason to assume that there were not many Gentiles among these Christians. Philip and Andrew are involved in the scene where the Greeks come to Jesus at the end of the ministry (12:20-26); and elsewhere I have argued (against Martyn) that this scene, taken with 7:35, points to the presence of Gentiles in the Johannine community as well.³⁰

²⁸C. K. Barrett, "Jews and Judaizers in the Epistles of Ignatius," in *Jews, Greeks and Christians* (W. D. Davies Festschrift; ed. R. Hamerton-Kelly and R. Scroggs; Leiden: Brill, 1976) 220-44, esp. 242.

²⁹I am not suggesting that Nathanael is to be identified with anyone listed in the synoptic lists of the twelve, e.g., with Barnabas. But since the three synoptic gospels show disagreement on who should be named among the twelve (see *JBC* 78:171), Nathanael may have been counted in the never-given listing of the twelve by the Johannine community.

³⁰Brown, "Johannine Ecclesiology," 391-93.

Moreover, any attempt to restrict the Christians represented by Peter to Jewish Christians would run against solid NT evidence that Peter was a Jewish Christian leader open to the admission of the Gentiles (Acts 10:1-11:18; Gal 2:9). Therefore, I prefer to designate the Christians under discussion with a term that is more neutral, "Christians of Apostolic Churches,"³¹ and to hold open the possibility that there is no ethnic difference between them and the Johannine Christians—both groups consisted of Jews and Gentiles.

If we call upon Peter and the other named disciples as clues to John's attitude toward these Apostolic Christians, his attitude is fundamentally favorable. They are clearly distinct from Jewish Christians who no longer follow Jesus, and their presence at the last supper means that they are included in Jesus' "own" whom he loves to the very end (13:1). They are among those who have kept Jesus' word (17:6); and he prays for them (17:9), since they are hated by the world (17:14). They see the Risen Lord (20:24); and their most prominent spokesman, Simon Peter, glorifies God by his death in the following of Jesus (21:19).³²

Nevertheless, these named disciples do not seem to embody the fullness of Christian perception. We see this when we compare them in general, and Simon Peter in particular, to the beloved disciple, the symbolic representative of the Johannine community.³³ The others are scattered at the time of Jesus' passion leaving him alone (16:32), while the beloved disciple remains with Jesus even to the foot of the cross (19:26-27). Simon Peter denies that he is a disciple of Jesus (18:17, 25), a particularly serious denial granted the Johannine emphasis on discipleship as the primary Christian category; and so he needs to be rehabilitated by Jesus who three times asks whether Peter loves him (21:15-17). No such rehabilitation is necessary and no such questioning is even conceivable in the case of the disciple *par excellence*, the disciple whom Jesus loved. Closer to Jesus both in life (13:23) and in death (19:26-27), the beloved disciple sees the significance of the garments left behind in the empty tomb when Peter does not (20:8-10); he also recognizes the risen Jesus when Peter does not (21:7). The Johannine Christians, represented by the beloved

³¹I use the term "apostolic," not necessarily because John would have used it, but because most of the symbolic representatives are called apostles in other NT works; and so the term may represent the self-understanding of this group.

³²I think that John 21 is the work of a redactor, but a redactor whose theology has considerable continuity with that of the evangelist; see my *AB* commentary, 1. xxxvi-xxxviii.

³³Though of symbolic value in the Fourth Gospel (even as is Simon Peter), the beloved disciple is no less historical than Simon Peter. I agree with Culpepper (*Johannine School*, 265): "The actual founder of the Johannine community is more likely to be found in the figure of the Beloved Disciple . . . [who] probably represents the idealization of a historical person . . . the role of the BD is the key to the character of the community." I think that his background was similar to that of the prominent members of the twelve, but he underwent a christological development that placed a distance between him and them. He achieved his identity as the beloved disciple in a christological context, and that is why he is not mentioned by title in the gospel until "the hour" has come (13:1): see my "Johannine Ecclesiology," 386-88.

disciple, clearly regard themselves as closer to Jesus and more perceptive than the Christians of the Apostolic Churches.³⁴

The one-upmanship of the Johannine Christians is centered on christology; for while the named disciples, representing the Apostolic Christians, have a reasonably high christology, they do not reach the heights of the Johannine understanding of Jesus. Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael know that Jesus is the messiah, the fulfiller of the law, the Holy One of God, and the Son of God (1:41, 45, 49; 6:69);³⁵ but they are told that they are yet to see greater things (1:50). As Jesus says to Philip at the last supper, "Here I am with you all this time and you still do not know me?" (14:9)—a rebuke precisely because Philip does not understand the oneness of Jesus with the Father.³⁶ When later on the disciples make the claim, "We believe that you came forth from God," Jesus' skepticism is obvious: "So now you believe? Why, an hour is coming, and indeed already has come, for you to be scattered, each on his own, leaving me all alone" (16:29-32). Even after the resurrection, the scene with Thomas indicates that the faith of the twelve can stand improvement (20:24-29). In fact, Thomas' reluctant confession of Jesus as "My Lord and my God" may be paradigmatic of the fuller understanding of Jesus' divinity to which, John hopes, the Apostolic Christians may ultimately be brought. We may make an informed guess that the precise aspect of christology missing in the faith of the Apostolic Christians is the perception of the pre-existence of Jesus and of his origins from above.³⁷ Both Apostolic and Johannine Christians say that Jesus is God's Son, but Johannine Christians have come to understand that this means that he is ever at the Father's side (1:18), not belonging to this world (17:14), but to a heavenly world above (3:13, 31). Once again the christology I attribute to the Apostolic Christians is not a pure hypothesis based on an interpretative reading of the Fourth Gospel. From the gospels of Matthew and Luke we know of late first-century

³⁴O. Cullmann (*The Johannine Circle*, 55) notes: "Its members were probably aware of the difference which separated them from the church going back to the Twelve and also saw that their particular characteristics laid upon them the obligation of a special mission, namely to preserve, defend and hand on the distinctive tradition which they were sure had come down from Jesus himself."

³⁵Since I think it possible that the figure who *became* the beloved disciple is the unnamed disciple of 1:35-50, I find no difficulty in using 1:35-50 to detect the christology both of the Apostolic Christians and of Johannine *origins*. However, the Johannine community and the beloved disciple moved beyond this christology by accepting into their midst another group of Jewish and Samaritan Christians who introduced new categories, such as pre-existence. See my "Johannine Ecclesiology," 388-91.

³⁶M. de Jonge ("Jesus as Prophet and King in the Fourth Gospel," *ETL* 49[1973] 162) writes: "Jesus' kingship and his prophetic mission are both redefined in terms of the unique relationship between Son and Father, as portrayed in the Fourth Gospel." This redefinition constitutes the difference between Apostolic and Johannine Christians.

³⁷In the NT, pre-existence christology is not peculiar to John; but only John has this christology in a non-poetic narrative context (indeed on Jesus' lips) and only John makes it clear that the pre-existence was before creation. It would seem logical that the gospel format, rooted in the historical memory of Jesus, would be more resistant to pre-existence speculation than would the theology of hymns.

Christians who revered the memory of Peter and the twelve and who acknowledged Jesus as the Son of God through conception without a human father; but in whose christology there is no hint of pre-existence. They know a Jesus who is king, lord, and savior from the moment of his birth at Bethlehem, but not a Jesus who says, "Before Abraham was, I AM."³⁸

A difference in ecclesiology may also have separated Johannine Christians from Apostolic Christians. Other NT works of the late first-century, especially Luke/Acts, show that continuity with the "apostles" was becoming an important factor in church identity and self-security. The Fourth Gospel, however, gives virtually no attention to the category of "apostle"³⁹ and makes "disciple" the primary Christian category, so that continuity with Jesus comes through the witness of the beloved *disciple* (19:35; 21:24).⁴⁰ Furthermore, Matthew, Luke/Acts, and the Pastorals all testify to the increasing institutionalization of churches toward the end of the century, with a developing interest in ecclesiastical offices. On the one hand, I have repeatedly opposed the assumption by E. Schweizer and others that the Johannine community had no ecclesiastical offices—we simply do not know that, and there are contrary indications in the Johannine Epistles, especially 3 John. On the other hand, there is much in Johannine theology that would relativize the importance of institution and office at the very time when that importance was being accentuated in other Christian communities (including those who spoke of apostolic foundation). Unlike Paul's image of the body and its members which is invoked in 1 Corinthians 12 to accommodate the multitude of charisms, the Johannine image of the vine and branches places emphasis on only one issue: dwelling on the vine or inherence in Jesus.⁴¹ (If John was interested in diversity of charism, he could have written of branches, twigs, leaves, and fruit, even as Paul wrote symbolically of foot, hand, ear, and eye.) The category of discipleship based on love makes any other distinction in the

³⁸John's lack of interest in Jesus' Davidic origins and birth at Bethlehem, as reflected in the debates with "the Jews" (7:41-42), may constitute a correction of the kind of christology we find in Matthew and Luke, a christology which (in John's eyes) puts too much emphasis on a matter of Jewish concern. Similarly John's exaltation of Jesus on the cross relativizes the importance of resurrection appearances and so implicitly corrects a christology which associates divine sonship with the resurrection (Acts 2:32, 36; 5:31; 13:33; Rom 1:4). As M. de Jonge points out ("Jewish Expectations about the 'Messiah' according to the Fourth Gospel," *NTS* 19 [1972-73] 264), in the debates described in the Fourth Gospel, "Johannine christology is developed not only in contrast with Jewish thinking but also with other christological views."

³⁹*Apostolos* appears only in the non-technical sense of messenger (13:16). The verb *apostellein* appears, sometimes interchangeably with *pempein*, but the sending is scarcely confined to those who are considered "apostles" in other NT documents.

⁴⁰C. K. Barrett (*The Gospel of John and Judaism* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975] 75), following Hoskyns, catches the paradoxical Johannine attitude well: "John intended to bind the church to the apostolic witness; but in other respects he meant to leave it free." For the prominence that John gives to women disciples, to the point that they seem to be on the same level as members of the twelve, see R. E. Brown, "Roles of Women in the Fourth Gospel," *TS* 36 (1975) 688-99.

⁴¹See J. O'Grady, "Individualism and Johannine Ecclesiology," *BTB* 5 (1975) 227-61, esp. 243: "As with the flock, the point of interest [in the vine and the branches] is the relationship between Jesus and the individual believer."

community relatively unimportant, so that even the well-known Petrine and presbyteral image of the shepherd⁴² is not introduced without the conditioning question, "Do you love me?" (21:15-17). The greatest of the named apostles in the NT, Peter, Paul, and James of Jerusalem, all died in the 60s; and in the subsequent decades the churches which invoked their names solved the teaching gap that resulted from these deaths by stressing that the officials who succeeded the apostles should hold on to what they were taught without change (Acts 20:28-30; Titus 1:9; 2 Pet 1:12-21). But the Fourth Gospel, which knows of the problem of the death of the beloved disciple (21:20-23), stresses that the teacher is the Paraclete who remains forever within everyone who loves Jesus and keeps his commandments (14:15-17); he is the guide to all truth (16:13).⁴³ Finally, unlike Matt 28:19 and Luke 22:19, John has no words of Jesus commanding or instituting baptism and the eucharist just before he left this earth. The image of Jesus instituting sacraments as a final action tends to identify them with the sphere of church life, while for John the sacraments are continuations of the power that Jesus manifested during his ministry when he opened the eyes of the blind (baptism as enlightenment) and fed the hungry (eucharist as food).⁴⁴ In summary, let me stress that I do not interpret these Johannine ecclesiological attitudes as aggressively polemic, for there is no clear evidence that the Johannine community was condemning apostolic foundation and succession, church offices, or church sacramental practices. The Fourth Gospel is best interpreted as voicing a warning against the dangers inherent in such developments by stressing what (for John) is truly essential,⁴⁵ namely, the living presence of Jesus in the Christian through the Paraclete. No institution or structure can substitute for that. This outlook and emphasis would give Johannine ecclesiology a different tone from that of the Apostolic Christians known to us from other late first-century NT writings—a Johannine ecclesiology the peculiarity of which reflects the peculiarity of Johannine christology.

⁴²The shepherd image is found in Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:1-5; Matt 18:12-14.

⁴³For the Paraclete as the Johannine answer to the problems raised by the death of the first generation of Jesus' followers who had been community founders, see my *AB* commentary, 2. 1142. D. M. Smith ("Johannine Christianity," 232-33, 244) thinks there was a strong component of spirit-inspired prophets in the Johannine community to whom some of the "words of Jesus" in the Fourth Gospel may be attributed.

⁴⁴For this approach to Johannine sacramentalism, see my *AB* commentary, 1. cxiv. O. Cullmann (*Johannine Circle*, 14): "In each individual event of the life of the *incarnate* Jesus the Evangelist seeks to show that *at the same time* the *Christ present in his Church* is already at work."

⁴⁵Barrett (*Gospel of John and Judaism*, 74) writes: "John combines a deep interest in the apostolic foundation of the church with an indifference toward it as an institution dispensing salvation." O'Grady ("Individualism," 254) notes: "It may very well be true that the Johannine community and its spokesman saw its contribution to early Christianity mainly as emphasizing purpose and meaning as the Church found itself in need of structure, organization and ritual expression." See also the balanced treatment by O'Grady, "Johannine Ecclesiology: A Critical Evaluation," *BTB* 7 (1977) 36-44.

V. *The Johannine Christians*

In the four preceding sections I have already delineated much of what was unique about the Johannine Christians. But there remains the question with which I began: Were the Johannine Christians a sect, which had broken *koinōnia* with most other Christians? In answering this, let us recall the Johannine relationships with each of the four groups already discussed. The Johannine Christians were not the only Christians hostile to the synagogue and its leaders (Group I: "The Jews"),⁴⁶ even though the bitterness attested in John may be more acute than in other NT works. The sectarian element in the Johannine picture would be the peculiar sense of estrangement from one's own people (1:11). As for the attitude of the Johannine Christians toward the Crypto-Christians (Group II) and the Jewish Christians (Group III), once more they were not the only NT Christians to condemn other Christians as false.⁴⁷ But, more than others, John's community may have moved toward clearly excluding their opponents from Christian fellowship, e.g., by counting the Crypto-Christians as aligned with "the Jews" (12:42-43) and by charging that the Jewish Christians who were associated with the brothers of the Lord followed Jesus no longer and did not really believe in him (6:66; 7:5).

Besides these specific rejections of Groups I, II, and III there is much that is sectarian in John's sense of alienation and superiority. The Johannine Jesus is a stranger who is not understood by his own people and is not even of this world. The beloved disciple, the hero of the community, is singled out as the peculiar object of Jesus' love and is the only male disciple never to have abandoned Jesus. Implicitly then, the Johannine Christians are those who understand Jesus best, for like him they are rejected, persecuted, and not of this world. Their christology is more profound, and they can be sure that they have the truth because they are guided by the Paraclete. To some extent even the literary style of the Fourth Gospel reflects Johannine peculiarity, with its abstract symbolism (life, light, truth) and its technique of misunderstanding.⁴⁸

⁴⁶Hostility dates from Paul's passing reference to "the Jews" in the first preserved Christian writing (1 Thess 2:14-15). The saying "No one puts new wine into old wineskins" (Mark 2:22 and par.) lays the groundwork for a replacement attitude toward the institutions of Judaism.

⁴⁷The fear in Acts 20:30 is almost typical: "There will arise from among yourselves men who speak perversity to mislead disciples after them."

⁴⁸Yet I find exaggerated the thesis of H. Leroy (*Rätsel und Missverständnis* [BBB 30; Bonn: Hanstein, 1968])—see my review in *Bib* 51 (1970) 152-54—that the language of the Johannine community, as attested in the Fourth Gospel, is a special form of speech, a type of riddle-language, unintelligible to outsiders. Meeks ("Man from Heaven," 57) makes the same point: "Only a reader who is thoroughly familiar with the whole Fourth Gospel or else acquainted by some non-literary means with its symbolism and developing themes . . . can possibly understand its double entendre and its abrupt transitions. For the outsider—even for an interested inquirer (like Nicodemus)—the dialogue is opaque." To the contrary, I would maintain that this gospel is a literary work where the reader is expected to be more intelligent than those dramatis personae who serve as foils of the dialogue of Jesus; it is an ancient example of the Conan Doyle technique where the reader is expected to be more intelligent than Dr. Watson but still amazed at Sherlock Holmes' profundity. The christology of the Fourth Gospel is partially unintelligible and quite unacceptable to Groups I, II, and III, but is not meant to be unintelligible to Christians of Group IV whom it hopes to persuade.

Nevertheless, despite all these tendencies toward sectarianism, I would contend that the Johannine attitude toward the Apostolic Christians (Group IV—probably the “larger church”) proves that the Johannine community, as reflected in the Fourth Gospel, had not really become a sect. They had not followed their exclusivistic tendencies to the point of breaking *koinōnia* with these Christians whose characteristics are found in many NT works of the late first-century. If we can judge from the presence of Simon Peter and the other named disciples at the last supper, the Johannine Christians looked on the Apostolic Christians as belonging to Jesus’ own (13:1) to whom they were bound by the commandment: “As I have loved you, so must you love one another” (13:34). Their hopes for the future may be expressed by 10:16, if that verse is a reference to the Apostolic Christians, as Martyn⁴⁹ has argued: “I have other sheep, too, that do not belong to this fold. These also must I lead, and they will listen to my voice. Then there will be one sheep herd, one shepherd.” Even more probable is the suggestion that at the last supper (where Simon Peter and the beloved disciple are both present), when Jesus prays for those who believe in him through the word of his disciples, “That they all may be one” (17:20-21), he is praying for the oneness of the Apostolic and the Johannine Christians. Here the Johannine attitude is just the opposite of the outlook of a sect.

Ah, one may object, the Johannine prayer for unity with the Apostolic Christians carried a price tag—those other Christians would have to accept the exalted Johannine christology of pre-existence if there was to be one sheep herd, one flock. If this did not happen, one may argue, the Johannine Christians would reject the Apostolic Christians from *koinōnia* even as they had previously rejected the Jewish Christians. Yet we are spared discussing that theoretical possibility, for in fact the larger church did adopt Johannine pre-existence christology. Already in Ignatius of Antioch we hear of Jesus both as the Word coming forth from the silence of God (*Magn.* 8:2) and as born of the virgin Mary (*Eph.* 19:1)—almost a combination of Johannine and Matthean/Lucan christologies.⁵⁰ Some scholars may ponder on the luck of the beloved disciple that his community’s gospel was not recognized for the sectarian tractate that it really was. But other scholars will see this as a recognition by Apostolic Christians that the Johannine language was not really a riddle and the Johannine voice was not alien—a recognition facilitated by strains of pre-existence christology among non-Johannine communities.⁵¹ What the Johannine theologians claimed to have had from the beginning seems to have been accepted by many other Christians as a recognizable and embraceable variant of what they also had from the beginning.

However, if Ignatius and other early church writers bear witness to a wide second-century acceptance of a christology similar to John’s, the same

⁴⁹“Glimpses,” 171-72.

⁵⁰See also Aristides, *Apology* 15.1 and Justin, *Apology* 1.21 and 33.

⁵¹Possible instances are Phil 2:7; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:15; Heb 1:2; but see note 37 above.

documents betray an ecclesiology quite unlike John's—specifically Ignatius stresses ecclesiastical offices and church control over baptism and the eucharist. To explain the success of a christology like John's in the larger church and the simultaneous failure of Johannine ecclesiology, let me discuss briefly the last group in the Johannine purview of Christianity.

VI. *Secessionist Johannine Christians*

I emphasize that my treatment will be brief because the main evidence for this group is within the Johannine Epistles; and elsewhere I shall discuss more fully the church situation in those Epistles.⁵² The First Epistle (2:19) speaks of a group that had withdrawn from the community: "It was from our ranks that they went out." The christology of these Secessionists seems to have been so high that it did not matter for them that Jesus was the Christ come in the flesh (1 John 4:2). A plausible case can be made that these Secessionists were not formal docetists but adherents of Johannine theology who had carried out some aspects of the high christology of the Fourth Gospel to the nth degree.⁵³ If Jesus was not of this world (John 17:16), they might argue, what significance did his earthly actions, including his death,⁵⁴ really have? The only important reality would be that the pre-existent Word of God had come into the world to enlighten his own who were not of the flesh but begotten from above (John 3:3-7); like Jesus they were not of this world (17:16) but were destined to join him in the otherworldly mansions he was preparing for them (14:2-3).⁵⁵ Presumably they emphasized that eternal life consisted in knowing the one whom God had sent (17:3), but not in being cleansed by his blood (1 John 1:7). The indifference to sin ascribed to the Secessionists (1 John 1:8, 10) is explicable as a derivative from their high christology: if Jesus' actions on earth were not of intrinsic salvific value, what import for salvation could be attributed to the actions of his followers? After all, had not the truth set them free (John 8:32)?

In short, through the First Epistle one can detect the existence of two groups of Johannine Christians, each drawing on the kind of Johannine theology known to us in the Fourth Gospel, but interpreting it very

⁵²At the Shaffer Lectures at Yale in February, 1978, and in my *AB* commentary on the Johannine Epistles, projected for 1980.

⁵³R. E. Brown, "The Relationship to the Fourth Gospel Shared by the Author of 1 John and by his Opponents," *Matthew Black Festschrift*, to be published in 1978.

⁵⁴T. Forestell (*The Word of the Cross: Salvation as Revelation in the Fourth Gospel* [AnBib 57; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1974] 191) writes: "The cross of Christ in Jn is evaluated precisely in terms of revelation in harmony with the theology of the entire gospel, rather than in terms of a vicarious and expiatory sacrifice for sin."

⁵⁵E. Käsemann (*The Testament of Jesus* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968] 26) speaks of John's christology of glory as "naïve, unreflected" docetism. (If one must be anachronistic, I would prefer "monophysitism.") I doubt that such was the christology of the evangelist, but his gospel left itself open to this reading; and it was thus interpreted by the Johannine Secessionists. See also J. L. Martyn, "Source Criticism and *Redaktionsgeschichte* in the Fourth Gospel," *Perspective*, 11 (1970) 259.

differently. Opposed as he is to the Secessionist christology and ethics, the author of 1 John still cannot silence or demolish his opponents by appealing to the authority of a church teaching office,⁵⁶ as would have been the case in the Pastorals. True to Johannine tradition, he makes appeal to a teaching Spirit abiding in the Christian through anointing by Christ, a principle that relativizes any human teachers (1 John 2:20, 27). If the Secessionists reply that what they teach flows from an anointing with the Spirit,⁵⁷ the author of the epistle is not free to reject that idea in principle but must demand a testing of the spirits (4:2). In other words, Johannine ecclesiology did not supply an authoritarian solution to such a division within the community. The later church, through canonization of the First Epistle, showed which side of the dispute it thought to be right and true to the gospel, but the author of 1 John hints (4:5) that his opponents were winning over the majority to their cause.

I would judge that these two groups of Johannine Christians continued into the second century. It was in the Secessionists, perhaps the larger group, that the sectarian tendencies of the Johannine tradition came to fruition. Ultimately they became a Gnostic sect, breaking *koinōnia* with the Apostolic Churches (or having it broken); for it was probably their extremely high christology and Spirit-dominated ecclesiology, presented as an interpretation of the Fourth Gospel, which made that gospel so readily acceptable to second-century Gnostics.⁵⁸ A smaller group of Johannine Christians, represented by the author of the First Epistle, seems to have kept *koinōnia* with the Christians of the Apostolic Churches by sufficiently correcting Secessionist (mis)interpretations of the gospel, so that other Christians saw no contradiction between its pre-existence christology and a soteriology based on Jesus' ministry and death. (The work of the redactor of the gospel may have facilitated this "orthodox" reading of the work.) I would conjecture that it was through this branch of Johannine Christians that the gospel found acceptance among second-century traditionalists such as Irenaeus. The very experience of the secession and the alienation of a large (if not the larger) group of their confreres may well have made these Johannine Christians more amenable to the authoritative structures of the Apostolic Christians—they had found to their bitter experience that to preserve their christology from "left-wing" extremism they needed to make a compromise with "right-wing" ecclesiology. (The turmoils of the emergence of authority structures within the Johannine tradition may be echoed in 3 John.)

If this reconstruction of the unity and diversity of Johannine Christianity in the first century has even partial validity, such history represents in microcosm problems which have tortured Christianity ever since.

⁵⁶The "we" of the prologue of 1 John does not refer to a lineage of church officers, but is the author's attempt to show that his interpretation of Johannine tradition is the ancient one implied from the beginning and in harmony with that of previous Johannists, such as the evangelist.

⁵⁷D. M. Smith ("Johannine Christology") thinks that the spirit-inspired prophets had now become a problem. See footnote 43 above.

⁵⁸See note 6 above.