

"WHAT WAS FROM THE BEGINNING" (I JOHN 1:1):
THE PRIORITY OF THE JOHANNINE EPISTLES AND
THE JOHANNINE COMMUNITY

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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**“What was from the Beginning” (I John 1:1):
The Priority of the Johannine Epistles and the Johannine Community**

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to address two principal questions: What is the relative chronology of the Johannine literature? And, how does this affect our understanding of the Johannine community and the origins of Christianity?

It is argued herein that the Epistles of John were written before the final form of the Gospel of John. Evidence of the communal background of the texts is examined in an effort to glean some knowledge of those who stand behind these documents. Arguments in favour of the priority of the Epistles are presented, arguments which cumulatively accentuate the more natural progression of placing the epistolary writings first.

The assertion that the Epistles hold chronological priority over the Gospel leads us to a different reconstruction of the Johannine community from that given in conventional scholarly circles, one which sees the origins of the written Gospel as outside the accepted Christian tradition. In reconstructing the Johannine community's history through an examination of the writings of John, this thesis places the community within the wider historical and sociological context of the origins of Christianity, and concludes that the sources of the modern Christian faith -- as played out in the microcosm of the Johannine fellowship -- are indeed diverse.

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Unless otherwise stated, English quotations of the Bible are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----|
| Abstract | ii |
| Acknowledgments | iii |
| Abbreviations | vi |
| Chapter One: The Question | |
| Stating the Question | 1 |
| The Accepted View: The Theory of Raymond E. Brown | 2 |
| Against the Grain: Support for Epistolary Priority | 10 |
| Chapter Two: The Community Behind the Writings | |
| A Question of Priority | 17 |
| A Johannine Family Tree: How Are the Writings Attributed to John Related? | 19 |
| a. Positing a Johannine Community | 25 |
| Attributing Authorship: The Identity of the Johannine Author(s) | 29 |
| a. The Epistolary <i>Presbyteros</i> | 30 |
| b. The Author of the Gospel of John | 33 |
| c. The Role of the Beloved Disciple | 40 |
| d. The Function of the Beloved Disciple in the Johannine Community | 59 |
| Standing Alone: The Johannine Circle of the Gospel | 61 |
| Orthodoxy and Heresy | 65 |
| Summation | 71 |
| Chapter Three: The Priority of the Epistles | |
| Introduction | 73 |
| ‘Primitive’ Epistles | 74 |
| a. The Johannine Prologues | 74 |
| b. Judaic Motifs | 87 |
| c. The Qumran Scrolls | 91 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Arguments from Silence | 97 |
| a. The Expulsion of the Christians | 97 |
| b. Gospel Quotes | 101 |
| Missing Motifs | 103 |
| a. The Beloved Disciple | 103 |
| b. The Spirit/Paraclete | 106 |
| A Community Divided | 112 |
| A Natural Progression | 114 |

Chapter Four: A Different Horizon

| | |
|--|-----|
| Introduction | 125 |
| Reconstructing a Different History | 125 |
| a. In the Beginning | 126 |
| b. Addressing Outstanding Issues | 134 |
| Looking Upon a Different Horizon | 138 |

| | |
|-------------------------------|------------|
| Bibliography | 146 |
|-------------------------------|------------|

ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-------------|---|
| CBQ | Catholic Biblical Quarterly |
| JBL | Journal of Biblical Literature |
| JSNT | Journal for the Study of the New Testament |
| JTS | Journal of Theological Studies |
| NTS | New Testament Studies |
| ZNW | Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft |

CHAPTER ONE

The Question

Stating the Question

The Gospel of John is almost universally regarded as the climactic document of the Johannine school of thought.¹ Yet the interpretation of this Gospel, and in particular its chronological relationship to the Johannine Epistles and its position in the history of the Johannine community, has spawned enormous debate among Johannine scholars.

The idiosyncrasies of the literature attributed to John² give the writings a distinct flavour, a uniqueness evident both within this body of literature and seen again when the Johannine corpus is contrasted with other texts of the New Testament canon. The ‘Johannine flavour’ of the Gospel and Epistles has introduced a spiral of questions into modern biblical scholarship addressing what scholars have coined ‘the Johannine riddle’, issues which include such questions as the structural integrity of the texts, their

¹That the Johannine writings were the product of a particular and unique school of thought is the generally accepted position today. See chapter 2 of this thesis.

²Through the course of this study the terms ‘Johannine writings’ and ‘Johannine literature’ shall refer exclusively to the Gospel and Epistles of John. The Book of Revelation, also attributed to John the Apostle, shall not be considered in the scope of this examination.

authorship, theology, literary symbolism and community history. One of the more challenging aspects of study in this field has concerned the chronological placing of the Johannine writings within the historical-sociological context of the community widely believed to have produced these texts. It is this issue which shall be addressed in the course of this study, in particular the questions: Did the Johannine Epistles precede the Gospel of John?; What implications does this have for our understanding of the history of the Johannine community and Christian origins? These questions are important for they affect not only our understanding of Johannine history but on Christian history as well. As Adolf von Harnack so eloquently wrote, “the origin of the Johannine writings is, from the stand-point of a history of literature and dogma, the most marvellous enigma which the early history of Christianity presents.”³

The Accepted View: The Theory of Raymond E. Brown

The principal argument of this thesis will be that the Epistles of John were written before the Gospel. It will be argued that the writings were produced by a community -- a school of people sharing a common tradition -- whose uniqueness and individualism are reflected in the documents they produced. This perception, coupled with

³Adolf von Harnack, History of Dogma Vol.1, ET 1894, 96f; quoted in John Ashton, ed., The Interpretation of John (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 2.

the assertion of the chronological priority of the Epistles, should yield a significant re-examination of the history and development of the Johannine community and its place within the larger Christian fold. In asserting the priority of the Epistles, this thesis does not simply provide a comprehensive argument in favour of placing the Epistles before the Gospel narrative in the sequential ordering of the writings attributed to John. Rather, this paper builds on this argument to provide a hypothetical model of the history of the Johannine community, relating this community history to our interpretation of Christian origins in general. What is at stake, then, is not simply our understanding of the origins of the Gospel of John, but how this fits into the larger context of the beginning of the Christian movement.

In tackling the issue of chronological ordering within the writings of the Johannine community, one must immediately recognize that the conventional view of modern biblical scholars concerning this matter runs counter to my argument. The general consensus of contemporary academics in Johannine studies is most notably crystallized in the theories and writings of Raymond E. Brown. Brown and others hold that the Johannine Gospel was written before the Epistles and that these letters provide a 'correct' interpretation of the thoughts and ideas contained in the Gospel narrative.⁴

⁴Raymond E. Brown, The Community of the Beloved Disciple (New York: Paulist Press, 1979).

In assessing the issue of chronological priority, Brown suggests that those who favour an early dating for the Johannine Epistles do so under “the fallacy of dating the composition of a work by its earliest strata of thought and vocabulary,”⁵ insisting that “a date of writing . . . must be judged from the *latest* contents of a work.”⁶ However, Brown’s assertion of the priority of the Gospel becomes somewhat blurred and difficult to discern in that his precise arguments are not specifically stated. That is, his statements on the matter merely attempt to contradict or ‘poke holes’ in the theories of those advocating epistolary priority rather than standing on their own.

As a means of promoting his position in support of the chronological priority of the Gospel, Brown refutes those who claim to detect early Christian elements and theology in the Epistles, suggesting that the higher christology of the Johannine narrative is evident in the Epistles as well, more specifically in the profession of faith with which the opponents of the epistolary author are charged. He contends that the lower christology exhibited in the Epistles is merely “a reaction to an *overemphasis* on high christology, on death as glorification, on the activity of the Paraclete-Spirit as teacher, and on final eschatology.”⁷ In other words, the epistolary author overemphasizes these matters

⁵Brown, Community, 96.

⁶Raymond E. Brown, The Epistles of John (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1982), 34.

⁷Brown, Epistles, 35.

in response to the overemphasis of his opponents so as to swing the pendulum of thought back toward the middle road of the community's tradition.

Brown also notes that while others call attention to the early Jewish elements of the Epistles, the identification of Greco-Roman names in 3 John (i.e., Gaius, Diotrephes, and Demetrius) are suggestive of a strong Gentile presence in the community, circumstances which, likely, would have been a later development in the life of the community.⁸

For Brown, as for others, the true test of the Gospel's chronological priority rests, however, with the conflicts and struggles evident in the documents; i.e., the life situation of the community as reflected in the texts which the school produced. The author of the Epistles is clearly engaged in a struggle against members of his own community (I John 2:19). The essence of his conflict is internal. However, the Gospel exhibits a conflict against outsiders, more particularly against both 'the Jews' and 'the world'. No such struggle is evident in the Epistles.⁹ Indeed, the Epistles state that Jesus came to atone for the sins of both the faithful and the world (I John 2:2).

⁸Brown, Epistles, 34.

⁹The dichotomy of life situations reflected in the two sets of texts is an important facet of Brown's argument. Indeed, one of the central planks of his argument rests with his observation of an apparent silence from the Gospel narrative of an internal schism within the community. This issue is taken up later in this thesis in the section "Addressing Outstanding Issues". Please see pages 134-137 for further discussion.

Brown's question, then, is whether it is reasonable to expect that a community first struggling against and separated by its own members would be capable of combatting a strong external opposition. He writes,

If the Epistles were written before the Gospel, it would have been an already divided and decimated Johannine community that was struggling with the outsiders when the Gospel was written; and we get no indication of that.¹⁰

He also asks,

Could that Community, if it had already lost the larger part of its 'progressive' members to the world . . . have survived the traumatic expulsion from the synagogue . . . ?¹¹

Brown believes this premise to be entirely unlikely. Instead, his theory is that of a community first expelled from the synagogue, an act brought on by the high christology of the Johannine Christians. Their separation from the larger 'parent' community of faith led to a defensive strengthening of their theological outlook, perhaps, as Brown suggests, to the extent that some members "push[ed] their understanding of the group's original position beyond the stance that originally brought about the separation."¹² In so doing, these members created internal strife leading to a division within the group.¹³

¹⁰Brown, Community, 97.

¹¹Brown, Epistles, 34.

¹²Brown, Epistles, 34-35.

¹³Brown, Community, 96-97.

Therefore his conclusion stands that “the Epistles were written after the situation envisaged by the evangelist in the Gospel.”¹⁴

Based upon his hypothesis that the Gospel of John was written before the Epistles, Brown creates a community history of the Johannine school involving a complex web of inter-relationships. He envisions a community drawn together and founded under the leadership of the Beloved Disciple, historically a follower of Jesus (perhaps even an eyewitness to the climactic events of the Christian faith), whose role within the community, as we shall see, became enhanced by the author of the community literature so as to maintain Johannine unity and preserve Johannine tradition. That is, the Beloved Disciple became for the author of the Gospel of John not merely the historical founder of the community, but a lightning rod to attract and maintain a unified community membership and preserve community traditions. This is accomplished through the moulding of the Beloved Disciple in the text as an ideal, authoritative figure embodying the essence of the Johannine Christian tradition. As Brown writes:

The [Beloved] Disciple was idealized, of course; but in my judgement the fact that he was a historical person and a companion of Jesus becomes all the more obvious in the new approaches to Johannine ecclesiology. Later in community history when the Johannine Christians were clearly distinct from groups of Christians who associated themselves with memories of the Twelve . . . the claim to possess the witness of the Beloved Disciple enabled the

¹⁴Brown, Community, 97.

Johannine Christians to defend their peculiar insights in christology and ecclesiology.¹⁵

Into this community entered a group of Jews whose understanding of Jesus precipitated the development of a higher, pre-existence christology. No longer do the terms 'Messiah' and 'Son of God' strictly refer to the Davidic anointed one of God, but rather take on the more theological idea that Jesus had come from above and returned to the Father.¹⁶

This high Johannine christology led the membership to confrontation with the Jewish leadership who had them expelled from the synagogues. Rejection by 'the Jews' and others (possibly difficulties with other Christian churches as well as problems with missions to the Gentiles) sealed the Johannine view that they were not of this world and that the world stood in opposition to them.¹⁷

Later, the community experienced internal strife as lines were drawn within the Johannine circle concerning divergent interpretations of their teachings on eschatology, christology, pneumatology and ethics. Unable to resolve their differences, the community splits with one group going out from the ranks of the general membership and the other

¹⁵Brown, Community, 31.

¹⁶As Brown writes. "For John *Messias* or *Christos* ("Anointed") is not a term with only one meaning." Brown, Community, 43. See also pages 44 and 45 of Brown's text.

¹⁷"If Jesus is "not of this world," the same fate of rejection inevitably greets the Johannine Christians . . . The rejection of the Johannine Gospel by "the Jews" and by the world has produced an increasing sense of alienation, so that now the community itself is a stranger in the world." Brown, Community, 64.

'remaining true' to the teachings and traditions of the community. It is within this camp – as a 'true' defender of the Johannine faith – that the author of the Epistles sees himself. According to Brown's reconstruction, he and his adherents ultimately merged with the larger Petrine Christian churches, bringing to them their unique flavour of Johannine theology, most notably the introduction of a pre-existence christology. As for the secessionists, whom the epistolary author says "went out from us" (I John 2:19), their extremist positions became cemented by the harsh reaction they received from the author of the Epistles and their views placed them on the pathway to true docetism and gnosticism. They, too, carried with them Johannine theology and teachings; specifically they brought with them the foundational 'document' of the community – the Gospel of John. This text received widespread acceptance in gnostic circles due to its commonality of theological teachings.¹⁸ The adherents of the epistolary author also introduced the Gospel into the literature of the larger (Petrine) Christian fold; however, its acceptance was much slower in coming since it "had given rise to error [i.e., gnosticism] and was being used to support error."¹⁹ Indeed, the schism within the community was to mark the "last hour" of Johannine Christianity.

¹⁸As Raymond E. Brown writes, "The fact that these secessionists brought the Johannine Gospel with them offered to the docetists and gnostics, whose thought they now shared, a new basis on which to construct a theology -- indeed, it served as a catalyst in the growth of Christian gnostic thought." Brown, Community, 146.

¹⁹Brown, Community, 147.

Against the Grain: Support for Epistolary Priority

Despite the strong position put forth by Raymond E. Brown, there remains a growing pocket of scholars who argue for the chronological priority of the Epistles of John; among them are Kenneth Grayston, Fernando F. Segovia and Charles H. Talbert.

Kenneth Grayston's The Johannine Epistles directly deals with the arguments for Gospel priority on their own grounds. He outlines the pillars upon which their case is made and then sets about removing their cornerstones so that they fall and crumble. Grayston suggests the priority of the Gospel is based upon three premises:

That a Gospel is a foundation document, and an Epistle must be a successor document . . . that the christological views opposed in the Epistle are of such an advanced gnostic kind that they could have developed only after the Gospel's christology had been worked out; and that the Epistle shows an interest in ecclesiastical matters that was not evident in the Gospel.²⁰

In asserting the priority of the Epistles, Grayston counters each of these points and continues toward his own agenda and argument.

It is an unfounded tenet that a Gospel narrative, simply by the nature of its genre, would necessarily become the first piece that one would choose to compose. Based solely upon literary genre there is no reason to believe that one would be compelled to first

²⁰Kenneth Grayston, The Johannine Epistles (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1984), 11.

write a document outlining the historical ministry of Jesus and then later compose a letter addressing issues of concern to the community. The need for one form of writing over the other, i.e., the sequence of events precipitating the composition of each, may be a less subjective measure of judgement than a canon of literary form and style. While the Gospel narrative may have become the foundational document of the community -- reflecting its earliest days, its traditions and its theology -- there is no reason to believe the Johannine school would necessarily produce such a document first.²¹ Indeed, if one were to envision a community attempting to expand itself and strengthen its faithful, it may become more likely that such a circle would first communicate with its fellow congregations to reinforce the membership in its theological views.

Grayston takes exception to the idea the epistolary opponents may be identified as professing an advanced gnostic christology. He claims, "The problem was not whether the Christ was to be protected from contact with Jesus by a high supernaturalist christology, but whether it was necessary to attach any christology to Jesus at all."²² Such a critical issue, he believes, would likely have been discussed and settled at the outset of the community's development, not as an 'after-thought'.

Scholars are quick to note the distinct absence of an ecclesiastical order in the Gospel of John. In fact, within the narrative a polemic against a hierarchial structure

²¹Grayston, Johannine Epistles, 11.

²²Grayston, Johannine Epistles, 11-12.

has been recognized. As Barnabas Lindars writes, “If John’s spirituality places all the emphasis on the interior response of the believer, it can be argued that he is opposed. . . to the whole paraphernalia of the externals of Church order and worship.”²³ That the Epistles adopt ecclesiastical concerns is, for some readers, evidence of the Gospel’s priority.

However, Grayston provides a different perspective on this issue. While he agrees the Epistles do express concerns about the structure of the community, he believes the Farewell Discourses of the Gospel of John express similar concerns. Grayston writes, “The Epistle presents us with the third stage (first dispute, second secession, third realignment) of an episode within the community which seeks to reassure itself by maximising its separation from the world and drawing a boundary between what is acceptable (*dikaiosynē*) within the community and what is unacceptable (*hamartia*).”²⁴ Grayston sees evidence of this drawing away from the world by the community in the Gospel of John. He identifies the Farewell Discourses of John 13-17 as possibly being a discussion of the internal strife of the community and its relations with the outside world. He ponders, “Has the Epistle adapted the teaching of the Farewell Discourses to solve an ecclesiastical problem? Or has the Gospel, at a more creative theological level,

²³Barnabas Lindars, ed., The Gospel of John (Greenwood: Attic Press, 1972), 58.

²⁴Grayston, Johannine Epistles, 12.

incorporated the stress and distress of the community?"²⁵ For Grayston, the answer is that in exhibiting a concern for the community (in the Farewell Discourses of John 13-17), the Gospel of John expresses another form of ecclesiastical concern.

Grayston's analysis ultimately leads him to accept the priority of the Johannine Epistles over the Gospel. He states, "when the Epistle is placed after the Gospel, it is necessary to explain why so much in the Epistle seems to reproduce ideas that belong to an earlier phase of Christian awareness."²⁶ However, when placed before the Gospel the writings "throw light on parts of the Gospel which have long puzzled exegetes."²⁷

Fernando Segovia has also expressed views related to the priority issue of the Johannine writings. His studies into the Johannine Farewell Discourses reveal parallels of context between these discourses or teachings and the circumstances of the First Epistle of John. Segovia claims that a christological crisis within the community lies at the heart of the problems addressed by both I John and John 15:1-8.²⁸ The command

²⁵Grayston, Johannine Epistles, 12.

²⁶Grayston, Johannine Epistles, 12.

²⁷Grayston, Johannine Epistles, 14.

²⁸Fernando Segovia, "The Theology and Provenance of John 15:1-17," JBL 101 (1982): 115-128. Most notably, at page 120 Segovia sets forth his belief that the problem addressed in the passage is internal to the community; at pages 120-121 he concludes the specific nature of the problem is a question of christology. In his footnotes he contrasts these problems in the Farewell Discourses with the relevant passages in I John.

to love and its related ethical concerns within the community -- a theme central to the Johannine Epistles, especially I John -- become prominent in John 15:9-17.²⁹ As he writes, "the inner-Christian problem that has erupted in the community has strong ethical consequences as well: the disciples are failing in their love for one another."³⁰ The heart of the problem being addressed by this Discourse -- the dual issues of christology and ethics within the Johannine membership -- stands at the core of the Johannine Epistles.³¹ Therefore he concludes that "John 15:1-17 shares the theological concerns and *Sitz im Leben* of I John"³² and that "the discourse was written either by the author of I John or by someone in the same situation and that it was then added on to the gospel after 13:31-14:31."³³

While Segovia does not explicitly state support for epistolary priority, his conclusions may be seen to point the reader in this direction. In a footnote, Segovia writes, "It is impossible to arrive at a final solution concerning authorship. I do

²⁹Segovia, "Theology and Provenance," 115-128. See especially pages 122-125.

³⁰Segovia, "Theology and Provenance," 124.

³¹On this point Segovia writes, "The inner-Christian nature of the problem [represented in John 15:1-17] as well as its christological and ethical connotations immediately remove these verses from the generally accepted theological concerns and *Sitz im Leben* of the gospel . . . and thrusts them directly into the thought-world and *Sitz im Leben* of I John." Segovia, "Theology and Provenance," 126.

³²Segovia, "Theology and Provenance," 127.

³³Segovia, "Theology and Provenance," 127.

presuppose, however, the almost consensus opinion that I John was written by someone other than the evangelist at a later time."³⁴ Thus, by his ordering, these verses of the Farewell Discourse (John 15:1-17) were first written and were later followed by the Epistle known as I John; the verses of the Discourse were then added to the Gospel narrative. While an exact chronology is not discernable, Segovia appears to implicitly support a reading which places the *Sitz im Leben* -- and hence the authorship -- of the Epistles earlier than those circumstances in which the final form of the Gospel of John was written.

Charles Talbert also advocates epistolary priority in his text Reading John. Talbert states from the outset his belief that the Epistles of John were written before the final form of the Gospel³⁵ and that the specific chronological ordering of the Epistles should be 2, 3, 1 John.³⁶ Talbert's test of his theory is to examine the Gospel of John for clues that it too addresses concerns raised in the Johannine Epistles. He writes,

³⁴Segovia, "Theology and Provenance," 127, Footnote 37. It is my reading that when Segovia writes that "I John was written by someone other than the evangelist *at a later time*," his chronology for the writing of the Epistle is relative to John 15:1-17, not to the Gospel as a whole.

³⁵Talbert writes, "This volume . . . contends that the Gospel of John was written either after 1, 2, 3 John or at about the same time as they and is dealing with some of the same problems . . ." Charles Talbert, Reading John (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994), 4.

³⁶"The order assumed in this volume is 2, 3, 1 John . . . with the Fourth Gospel's final form coming either alongside or after I John." Talbert, Reading John, 4.

If the Fourth Gospel was written alongside or after the period of the epistles' composition, then it may be expected to have been produced, at least in part, with an eye to the controversy reflected in 1, 2, and 3 John. Is this the case?³⁷

In response to his own question he deduces,

It seems that most of the controversial issues of the epistles are echoed in the Fourth Gospel at one place or another, although the Gospel's scope is not reduced to the matters of the controversy of the epistles. This would seem to imply that the Gospel of John was written either alongside or after the epistles.³⁸

There appears, then, to be significant support for the position that the Epistles of John were written before the Gospel. Such advocates, while going against the grain of much of modern scholarship, help to throw light on the question of the chronology of the Johannine literature, providing a new angle from which to examine this inquiry and other issues entangled in the web of the Johannine riddle. As well, in asserting a new perspective, these scholars renew interest in building a different model of the history of the Johannine community and Christian origins.

³⁷Talbert, Reading John, 56.

³⁸Talbert, Reading John, 56-57.

CHAPTER TWO

The Community Behind the Writings

A Question of Priority

The issue of the sequential ordering of texts within the Johannine corpus has received and continues to receive much attention in biblical scholarship. Contemporary scholars in particular have brought this question to the forefront of Johannine research. Many scholars perceive the ancient texts of the Bible as a window looking onto the historical circumstances of the writer(s) of the documents, often using them as a guide to re-create the situations reflected in the texts. Thus, the texts become a handbook for reconstructing the trajectory of Christian origins and thought.

This certainly has been true of the Johannine literature. In his introductory remarks, R. Alan Culpepper states, “it is clear that John has been used as a “window” through which the critic can catch “glimpses” of the history of the Johannine community.”³⁹ Raymond Brown also endorses such a methodology in his text The Community of the Beloved Disciple, stating from the outset that he shall employ this means of reading the Gospel on different levels “so that it tells us the story both of Jesus

³⁹R. Alan Culpepper, Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 3.

and of the community that believed in him."⁴⁰ This understanding of the Gospel narrative as a two-tiered drama revealing both the community or life circumstances of the writer as well as the ministry of Jesus has been especially important to and fruitful for those seeking to re-create the Johannine community and its place within the larger Christian fold.⁴¹ If scholars wish to determine how the theology and teachings of the Johannine community developed, and if the texts produced from this community are taken to be reflective of that development, then determining the chronological priority of those texts becomes a crucial point. It is upon this cornerstone that scholars have built their historical reconstructions.

In taking the position that the Johannine Epistles were written before the emergence of the Gospel of John's final form, this thesis shall remove that cornerstone of consensus opinion, putting in its place a substitute around which to construct a new Johannine community history. To do so, the priority of the Epistles of John must be shown. However, before such a line of inquiry is undertaken, we must first examine a number of preliminary issues regarding the Johannine texts.

⁴⁰Brown, Community, 17.

⁴¹With respect to this two-tiered presentation of the Gospel, the classic text, on which Brown himself builds, is J. Louis Martyn, History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel (New York: Harper & Row, 1968; reprint, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979).

A Johannine Family Tree: How Are the Writings Attributed to John Related?

Before embarking upon an examination of the evidence in favour of epistolary priority, one must first ask: What exactly is the relationship between the Gospel and the Epistles of John?

The relationship between the Johannine Gospel and Epistles has long been disputed among academics. Similarities and dissimilarities of vocabulary, grammatical style, themes and theology have permitted a continuing debate. Scholars such as C.H. Dodd (who is credited with initiating the discussion in modern times)⁴² have undertaken exhaustive studies of the linguistic tendencies of the Gospel and Epistles.⁴³ Dodd's conclusion that the dramatic differences in style and language between the two sets of documents could only be explained by their being produced by different authors does hold a degree of merit; however, it is not the conclusive argument some may expect. Re-examination of the evidence by W.F. Howard revealed that while Dodd's statements are legitimate, he did not take into account the different purposes and perspectives of the writings nor the possibility that they were redacted in different manners.⁴⁴ Rudolf

⁴²Grayston, Johannine Epistles, 7.

⁴³C.H. Dodd, "The First Epistle of John and the Fourth Gospel," The Bulletin of the John Rylands Library 21 (1937): 129-156.

⁴⁴W.F. Howard, "The Common Authorship of the Johannine Gospel and Epistles," Journal of Theological Studies 48 (1947): 12-25.

Schnackenburg writes of this discussion, “we must take into consideration the different perspective of the two writings as well as the way in which they have been edited.”⁴⁵ Kenneth Grayston deduces, “The results [of such analyses] are inconclusive especially when account is taken of differences which are likely to arise in writing such diverse documents as an epistle . . . and a narrative gospel.”⁴⁶ Later studies showed that when considered against the backdrop of the entire New Testament, “the differences in language between GJohn [the Gospel of John] and I John are minimal.”⁴⁷ The similarities in vocabulary, grammatical constructions, and overall style between the Gospel and Epistles of John are overwhelming. As Raymond Brown notes, there exists between the two sets of writings a distinct “similarity in content and vocabulary . . . parallels in *structure* . . . especially in the beginning of the two works [the two Prologues are really unique in the NT] and in the ending [John 20:31 and I John 5:13 state the purpose of the writing].”⁴⁸ On this point he writes, “it is difficult to find two works more similar in expression than GJohn and I John.”⁴⁹ Indeed, as Rudolf Schnackenburg states:

⁴⁵Rudolf Schnackenburg, The Johannine Epistles, trans. Reginald and Ilse Fuller (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992), 35.

⁴⁶Grayston, Johannine Epistles, 7.

⁴⁷Schnackenburg, Johannine Epistles, 35.

⁴⁸Brown, Epistles, 21.

⁴⁹Brown, Epistles, 21.

Contrary to those differences which the critics have pointed out, the agreements in both writings regarding vocabulary, phraseology, and style are so marked that there is nothing to rule out the possibility of a common author so far as these considerations are concerned.⁵⁰

In addition to the similarities in vocabulary and language noted above, there are other considerations to be factored into the question of a shared tradition for the Johannine literature. Of prominent concern to this debate are the differences in theology/christology which have been observed in the writings.

Rudolf Schnackenburg has identified theological areas common to both the Johannine Gospel and Epistles.⁵¹ These include:

- (1) a distinct sense of dualism shared by the texts and expressed through dualistic images and terminology; for example, the images of 'light' and 'darkness' found throughout the writings;
- (2) common use of christological titles and statements;
- (3) a strong emphasis on the commandment to love; and,
- (4) emphasis on the incarnation of Christ in both prologues (John 1:14 and I John 1:2, 4:2).

As Schnackenburg notes, these commonalities have led scholars to "recognize the close affinity between the epistle and GJohn."⁵²

⁵⁰Schnackenburg, Johannine Epistles, 35.

⁵¹Schnackenburg, Johannine Epistles, 38.

⁵²Schnackenburg, Johannine Epistles, 38.

Despite these similarities, there are distinct theological differences for which scholars must account. In his commentary on the Epistles of John⁵³, Raymond Brown outlines these differences as follows:

(1) The Epistle ascribes many important attributes to God rather than to Jesus. For example, John 1:4 and 1:9 state Jesus is the light whereas I John 1:5 states God is light.

(2) The Johannine Epistles are void of any direct reference to or quotation from the Old Testament whereas the Gospel narrative contains many scriptural references from Judaism.

(3) The Gospel of John is far more heavily flavoured by direct references to the Spirit. As Brown points out, the only reference to the Spirit Paraclete in the Epistle is to apply this term to Jesus⁵⁴, whereas this term or image is a particular motif of the Gospel of John.

(4) There are differences in the manner in which the death of Jesus is perceived in the two sets of writings. In the Epistles, Jesus dies to atone for humanity's sins (I John 2:2). In the Gospel, however, Jesus' death is seen to be His "triumph and glorification"⁵⁵ (12:27-32; 16:33-17:1).

(5) Each writing places a different emphasis on their respective eschatological teachings. The Gospel narrative stresses a realized eschatology -- that the kingdom of God already exists in the followers of Christ. The Epistles look

⁵³Brown, Epistles, 25-28.

⁵⁴Brown, Epistles, 26-7.

⁵⁵Brown, Epistles, 26.

to the future, to Jesus' second coming and revelation of God (I John 2:18, 28; 3:2).⁵⁶

(6) There are noted differences in christology between the Gospel and Epistles. As Brown states, "I John stresses aspects of a lower christology in instances where GJohn stresses a higher christology."⁵⁷ For the Gospel writer Jesus is the divine *logos* – the incarnation of God sent from above to reveal His glory (John 1:14, 6:38). This notion is not even a tenet of the Johannine Epistles. "The glory of Jesus is never mentioned in the Epistles."⁵⁸ Here, Jesus is our "advocate with the Father . . . the atoning sacrifice for our sins" (I John 2:1b-2a).

If, as we have seen, the Gospel and Epistles exhibit evidence both for and against the hypothesis that the writings are related, how, then, are the similarities and differences noted above to be reconciled into one explanation? How can these documents be both so remarkably alike and yet also possess such distinct differences?

Many scholars dismiss the weight of the documents' commonalities, claiming that the differences between the two sets of writings are far greater than any similarities between them. They would suggest the writings to be the work of two

⁵⁶Of the Gospel's teachings on the end times Brown states, "there is no doubt that the major emphasis in GJohn is on realized eschatology, e.g., the children of God already possess divine life, and both judgement and seeing God in Jesus are present privileges." Of the Epistles he writes, "Without denying the present reality of divine life, I John looks forward to a future judgement as the moment when we shall be like God and see Him as He is." Brown, Epistles, 27.

⁵⁷Brown, Epistles, 26.

⁵⁸Brown, Epistles, 26.

different authors. Others maintain that the particular similarities of the texts ultimately bind them so that the idea of a common authorship cannot be so easily negated.⁵⁹ Indeed, as B.H. Streeter writes, “the three Epistles and the Gospel of John are so closely allied in diction, style, and general outlook that the burden of proof lies with the person who would deny their common authorship.”⁶⁰

One possible explanation which would tie together the most important aspects of the arguments raised above is that the Gospel and Epistles of John were not written by a single author working alone, but by a group of writers working in community and guided by an established set of theological premises. Such an hypothesis would account for both the similarities between the writings and the differences evident among the documents.

In pondering such an hypothesis one must immediately ask if there is any evidence to suggest that such a possibility would hold merit and credibility. More particularly, is there anything within the texts to suggest that more than one mind was at work in creating the documents? Is there any evidence to suggest such a communal tradition was not uncommon in the context of the ancient world in which these texts were written? To examine these questions we must look internally to the evidence provided

⁵⁹For a list of scholars who have engaged this debate, see Brown, Epistles, 20.

⁶⁰Burnett H. Streeter, The Four Gospels (London: Macmillan & Company Ltd., 1964), 458.

within the Johannine writings regarding their authorship and also look externally to other authorities to see if indeed documents produced through a communal thought or process would have had a place in the ancient world of the New Testament.

a. Positing a Johannine Community

By far the most significant evidence that a communal tradition forms the backdrop to the Johannine writings comes from the writings themselves. Both the Gospel of John and the Johannine Epistles give reference to a society of believers lying behind these texts and from which these writings were produced. In John 21:24 the Gospel's writer/recorder, in speaking of the foregoing testimony of the witness and validating its truth, employs the first person plural "we": "This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and who has caused them to be written [καὶ γράψας ταῦτα], and we know that his testimony is true" (John 21:24). In so doing, the writer/recorder of the text implies the presence of multiple persons standing behind the document -- a communal mind or tradition which has not merely accepted but has affirmed the witness of the originator of the Gospel narrative, and a community to which the writer apparently belongs and with which he identifies.⁶¹

⁶¹A discussion of the authorship of Johannine writings and other associated issues shall follow in the course of this chapter.

Comments about an apparent Johannine community are also found in the letters attributed to John. I John 1:1 states, “We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life” In 2 John 1 the writer (identifying himself as the ‘elder’) addresses his letter “to the elect lady and her children” indicating that the receiver is not a single individual but many persons who stand in association. That this elder refers to the addressee as “the elect lady” implies she was a person of some prominence and stature who held charge over her followers whom he refers to as her “children”.

Other indications of a possible Johannine society are found in the Third Epistle to John. In 3 John 9 the elder speaks of having written to “the church” (“Ἐγραψά τι τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ”). He later employs plural forms in writing “we also testify for him [Demetrius], and you know that our testimony is true.” Further, he speaks of “the friends” who give testimony to the faithfulness of the addressee, presumably a loyalty and adherence to the community’s standards of faith and belief.

External evidence may also be mustered in support of a Johannine community hypothesis. In discussing the authorship of the Johannine Gospel, Raymond Brown comments that “the ancient evidence does not attribute to John the undivided authorship of the Gospel, for almost every account of the composition associates others

with John.”⁶² Brown cites various ancient sources (including the Muratorian Fragment and Clement of Alexandria) as making reference to a group of followers surrounding John the Apostle.⁶³ While this evidence does not speak directly to a Johannine community, it does point one in the direction of an ancient society of believers sharing a Johannine association.

In all, each of these remarks and references seems to indicate the existence of a community or society behind the texts attributed to John. While the character of such a society has not yet been delineated in this examination, others have poured much effort into investigating the possible existence of a distinct Johannine community and the nature of such a gathering of Christian believers. In particular, R. Alan Culpepper has spent much time developing the notion that this society was not merely a community of the faithful but a particular school of thought which lies in the background of these documents.⁶⁴ He concludes that the writings give clear indication of the existence of a circle of disciples living in community, a hypothesis which he supports with three principal arguments:

- (1) the linguistic and theological similarities and dissimilarities among the Johannine writings can be

⁶²Raymond E. Brown, The Gospel According to John (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1966), xcix.

⁶³Brown, Gospel, xcix.

⁶⁴R. Alan Culpepper, The Johannine School (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1974).

explained best by assuming that they were written by several writers working in one community -- hence probably a school;

(2) the patristic writings which refer to John and his disciples suggest that there was a 'Johannine' school; and,

(3) John's use of the Old Testament suggests that the Gospel was composed in a school (similar to the school of Matthew).⁶⁵

Culpepper expands on this argument to show that this community shared characteristics common to the ancient philosophical schools and could therefore justifiably be referred to as a 'school' rather than merely as a community. Among the characteristics to which he draws attention are the following:

(1) The Johannine community was a fellowship of disciples;

(2) The community gathered around, and traced its origins to a founder -- the BD [Beloved Disciple];

(3) The community valued the teachings of its founder and the traditions about him;

(4) Members of the community were disciples or students of the founder -- the BD;

(5) Teaching, learning, studying, and writing were common activities in the community; and,

(6) The community maintained some distance from the rest of society.⁶⁶

⁶⁵Culpepper, Johannine School, 261.

⁶⁶Culpepper, Johannine School, 287-289.

Culpepper's fifth tenet is particularly important for this study in that he attributes the community to be not merely a gathering of faithful membership but a group who sought to preserve their traditions and promulgate their teachings through the written word.

Attributing Authorship: The Identity of the Johannine Author(s)

From the outset of this study, it has been the stated position that the 'Johannine writings' refer to those texts of the New Testament attributed to John, most specifically, the Gospel and three Epistles.⁶⁷ Traditionally, the Christian church has appealed to claims of apostolic origins to firmly ground these writings within the New Testament canon.⁶⁸ However, there exists considerable skepticism concerning the

⁶⁷See Footnote 2.

⁶⁸For example, J.N. Sanders writes, "From the third century A.D. until the beginning of the modern period in New Testament criticism the Gospel, three Epistles, and Revelation of John have been ascribed to the apostle John, the son of Zebedee." J.N. Sanders, The Gospel According to St. John (London: Adam & Charles Black Ltd., 1968), 24. See also Robert A. Spivey and D. Moody Smith who note, "According to the ancient tradition of the church, the Fourth Gospel, as well as the Johannine Epistles and Revelation, are the work of the apostle John (presumably the son of Zebedee, although this is not always clearly stated in the early sources), who lived to a ripe old age in the city of Ephesus and composed the Gospel while residing there." R.A. Spivey and D.M. Smith, Anatomy of the New Testament (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1989), 160.

authenticity of this claim.⁶⁹ If apostolic authorship is to be negated, then one must ask to whom we may attribute authorship.⁷⁰ What clues lie within the texts attributed to ‘John’? What do the documents say about their author(s) and what significance does this hold?

a. The Epistolary Presbyteros

Very little evidence exists to support an accurate historical identification of the author of the Johannine Epistles. Indeed, the Epistles themselves are virtually silent in attributing authorship to any one named person. I John, for example, states nothing of the document’s origin while 2 and 3 John claim only to have been penned by ‘the elder’ or ‘the presbyter’ (2 John 1 and 3 John 1). Many scholars support the hypothesis that the

⁶⁹While most modern biblical critics do not generally subscribe to this theory, there are quarters in which the idea of apostolic authorship is prominently upheld. Barnabas Lindars refers to this when he writes, “The traditional view is that the evangelist was John the son of Zebedee, and that he is the person referred to in the Gospel itself as ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved’. This view still has its supporters.” Lindars, ed., Gospel of John, 28.

⁷⁰Raymond E. Brown makes a clear distinction between the terms ‘author’ and . He notes that in the New Testament period such distinctions were not readily made causing a blurring in the function between those responsible for producing the ideas documented in the text (i.e., the author) and those whose role was to transcribe these ideas (i.e., the writer), stating that “sometimes the ‘author’ of a book is simply a designation for the *authority* behind it.” Brown, Gospel, lxxxvii-lxxxviii. For the purposes of this examination, when speaking of the authorship of the Johannine writings, reference is being made to that person(s) responsible for the ideas and notions expressed within the text.

three Epistles originated from the same source or writer. As Raymond Brown indicates, such an hypothesis simplifies the issue of a common tradition between the Gospel and Epistles but it is not entirely unlikely. As Brown notes, the overlapping concerns and circumstances of the three writings bind them together, making a common tradition not only possible but probable.⁷¹ Who, then, is this presbyter from whom the Epistles are said to have come?

The question of the historical identity of the presbyter is indeed difficult to answer. Although traditional accounts equate the author of the Johannine Gospel and Epistles with the Apostle John, there is mention in texts from antiquity of another prominent church official in Asia Minor, John the Presbyter (or John the Elder).⁷² While early historians often fastened theories of authorship to one of these two suggestions (causing much debate even in early church times) most modern scholars believe the answer is to be found elsewhere.⁷³ Indeed, academics have largely abandoned this pursuit in

⁷¹Brown, Community, 94.

⁷²Schnackenburg, Johannine Epistles, 40-41.

⁷³While it has been suggested that the presbyter may in fact be the Beloved Disciple, this thesis has found little support. As Brown points out, it would be unnatural for the Beloved Disciple to refer to himself as 'the elder' or 'the presbyter'. Furthermore, he argues one would expect the Beloved Disciple, as leader of the community, to be able to command more respect and obedience from those who follow him than that exhibited in the Epistles. See Brown, Community, 95.

favour of a more fruitful and promising venture: gaining knowledge of the source of the Epistles by examining the role of the presbyter.

Raymond Brown notes two general uses of the term *presbyteros* in early Christianity. The first was that of a designation used to mark those responsible for the administrative duties and pastoral ministry of the church hierarchy. While the Elder writes of issues related to the ministry of the church (in particular moral issues and questions of confirming one's faith), it is unlikely this served as the principal function of the writer as there is little evidence to support the necessary corollary thesis that a highly structured church organization had been established by the end of the first century.⁷⁴

The second use of the term *presbyteros* is employed to denote "the generation of teachers *after* the eyewitnesses -- people who could teach in a chain of authority because they had seen and heard others who, in turn, had seen and heard Jesus."⁷⁵ Thus, like the Beloved Disciple of the Johannine Gospel, the presbyter was likely an authoritative figure within the community who could rightly claim, through a chain of tradition, to possess the 'correct' and 'proper' interpretation of theology and issues of concern facing the community. Such appeals to tradition would be necessary to

⁷⁴Brown, Community, 99-100.

⁷⁵Brown, Community, 100.

combat the elder's opponents who appear to have professed an alternative understanding of Johannine teachings.⁷⁶

Of interest is the apparent unspoken view that there lies behind these texts a community bound by a basic shared theology. Their interpretations have obviously diverged on some points causing strife within the community (as is evident in the presbyter's words that some members have departed from their fold [I John 2:19]). Despite an apparent split in the membership, a community of believers remains in the background of these writings. This is witnessed in the presbyter's greeting and closing of his second letter ("to the elect lady and her children" [2 John 1]; and "The children of your elect sister send you their greetings." [2 John 13]), and in his third letter to Gaius that he has communicated to "the church" of Diotrephes (3 John 9a).

In all it may be said that the Johannine Epistles were likely written to congregations of a shared faith by a leader of the community to assert the accepted view of the circle concerning matters of morality and issues of theology.

b. The Author of the Gospel of John

The Johannine Gospel appears to speak most directly of the person responsible for this document, shedding a flickering light on the issue of authorship. It

⁷⁶See, for example, I John 2:9-11.

provides two references to the identity of its author. The first is a rather vague identification found in John 19:35. Referring to Jesus' crucifixion the writer inserts, "He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth." Interestingly, the writer attributes authorship of the text to an eyewitness to the crucifixion without providing a specific name or title to this person. However, in reading the Gospel's account of those present at the foot of the cross, the 'disciple whom Jesus loved' is named as having attended with Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene and Mary the wife of Clopas (John 19:25). Therefore, it may be deduced that this oblique allusion to the author of the Gospel is indeed referring to the Beloved Disciple.

Further implications may be surmised from the passage. The writer declares that the eyewitness/Johannine author (i.e., Beloved Disciple) has given this evidence so that his knowledge will be perpetuated in the written word for the missionary purpose of sharing his faith with the readers of the text. He has already achieved one convert -- the writer of the document -- who attests to the validity of the events depicted by the eyewitness and who affirms the witness's own belief in that to which he has testified. For the writer of the text, the eyewitness is an authoritative teacher of the events in the ministry of Jesus and the source of this written word.

John 21:24 makes a more direct identification: "This [i.e., the Beloved Disciple] is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we

know that his testimony is true.” Several interesting remarks may be made about this passage. First, the writer/recorder of the Gospel narrative again identifies the Beloved Disciple as the source for the text. It is the testimony of *this* disciple which is recorded in the Gospel account. Second, the writer specifically identifies the Beloved Disciple as the author of the narrative. Recalling Raymond Brown’s remarks that the New Testament period did not distinguish between those responsible for the ideas contained in a text and those whose role was to transcribe such ideas onto parchment,⁷⁷ it becomes unclear whether the words of the writer/recorder are meant to be understood as the Beloved Disciple having physically written the Gospel text or whether in fact he simply stood behind the document as a source for its ideas (with some other person acting as scribe).⁷⁸ R. Alan Culpepper notes that the writer/recorder of the narrative “attributed a prior and formative role to the Beloved Disciple. What stands written in the Gospel owes its origin, definition, and authority to the Beloved Disciple.”⁷⁹ Indeed, given that the writer/recorder of the narrative distinguishes himself from the testimony and witness of the Beloved

⁷⁷Brown, Gospel, lxxxvi-lxxxviii. See also Footnote 70 above.

⁷⁸On this point Brown writes, “It is not certain from this verse [John 21:24] whether the disciple in question physically wrote these things or caused them to be written.” However, Brown later adds, “It will be noted that the statement in xxi 24 clearly distinguishes the disciple from the writer of ch. xxi (the “we”).” Brown, Gospel, xciii.

⁷⁹R. Alan Culpepper, John, the Son of Zebedee (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 71.

Disciple, to whom he attributes authorship of the text, it would appear that this Beloved Disciple is in fact the authority behind the Gospel account. He is the witness to the events depicted within the text and the guardian of tradition for the community.⁸⁰

With respect to the latter portion of verse 24 (John 21:24b), the writer/recorder's use of the first person plural 'we' indicates that the testimony of the Beloved Disciple appears to have been preserved by a group of followers. The statement by the writer/recorder that this group of followers accepted the testimony of the Beloved Disciple implies that the Beloved Disciple held a position of authority among those who produced the text (i.e., the Johannine community). R. Alan Culpepper writes,

The reference "we know" signals that there was a community which attested to the truth of the Beloved Disciple's witness and, by implication, to the truth of the Gospel. There is no need, nor any evidence, to maintain that this group had some official standing, as a group of apostles or presbyters. To the contrary, the pronoun is adequately explained as a reference to a community of believers who had gathered around the Beloved Disciple. They had heard his witness, and they knew it was true. The writer who later speaks in first person (21:25), of course, counted himself as a member of this community. The community knew that their disciple's witness was true, and they spoke of him as "the Beloved Disciple."⁸¹

⁸⁰D. Moody Smith and Robert A. Spivey note, "The Gospel of John does . . . assert that the Beloved Disciple is the witness who stands behind the Gospel and caused it to be written." Spivey and Smith, Anatomy of the New Testament, 186-187.

⁸¹Culpepper, Son of Zebedee, 71.

Indeed, as the writer/recorder of the Johannine Gospel states in John 21:25, the events narrated in the document are not an exhaustive account of the activities of Jesus, a statement leading to the possible hypothesis that other accounts dissimilar from this text may have been in circulation at the same time. That this band of Christians had chosen to accept the word of the Beloved Disciple is testimony to his leadership role in the community.

If the Beloved Disciple is the stated author of the Gospel of John, one must question the identity of this figure and the role he/she played within the Johannine community. Various academics have attempted to reconstruct the historical identity of the Beloved Disciple. However, most accounts appear to weaken under the sheer weight of the task since little internal and external evidence exists to support an accurate naming of this literary figure of the Gospel narrative.⁸² Indeed, as Barnabas Lindars notes, given the mystique surrounding this figure it is justifiable to question “whether he [the Beloved Disciple] can rightly be regarded as an historically identifiable character at all.”⁸³

On this point scholarship has generally conceded that the Beloved Disciple is certainly an idealization of Jesus’ followers – the perfect disciple who is witness to the

⁸²Suggestions as to the historical identity and name of the Beloved Disciple range from the rather obvious hypothesis of John the Apostle, to Lazarus (the follower of Jesus who is referred to at John 11:33 as “he whom you [Jesus] love”), to John Mark, an early Jerusalem Christian leader, even to suggestions of St. Paul. See Sanders, Gospel According to St. John, 31; and Lindars, ed., Gospel of John, 33.

⁸³Lindars, ed., Gospel of John, 34.

crucial events of the Christian experience. Yet, many scholars contend that behind this shadowy literary persona stands an historical person who lived during the New Testament period. As R. Alan Culpepper writes,

Insofar as there is a consensus among Johannine scholars, it is that there was a real person, who may have been an eyewitness to events in Jesus' ministry, and who was later the authoritative source of tradition for the Johannine community.⁸⁴

He later remarks,

We can recognize that the figure of the Beloved Disciple is both individual and representational. Solutions that seek merely to identify an individual fail to take seriously the idealized nature of the scenes in which he appears and the way in which they are appended to earlier traditions. Solutions that interpret the Beloved Disciple solely as a symbolic figure do not satisfactorily explain the concern in John 21:20-23 over the death of the Beloved Disciple. As has often been remarked, symbolic figures do not die. What we have then is a historical figure who has been given an idealized role in the crucial scenes of the farewell discourse, trial, death, and resurrection of Jesus.⁸⁵

Culpepper's conclusion that "the BD probably represents the idealization of a historical person"⁸⁶ is supported by biblical references in the Gospel of John, especially John 21:21-23 which makes reference to the apparent death of the Beloved

⁸⁴Culpepper, Anatomy, 47.

⁸⁵Culpepper, Son of Zebedee, 84.

⁸⁶Culpepper, Johannine School, 265.

Disciple. Verse 23a in particular refers to a rumour commonplace in the community that the Beloved Disciple was not to die but to remain on earth until Jesus' second coming or *parousia* ("So the rumour spread in the community that this disciple would not die" [John 21:23a]). However, the Gospel writer is quick to correct this rumour, making clear that those were not the words of Jesus ("Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die." [John 21:23b]). In so doing, the writer indirectly implies that the Beloved Disciple has in fact died and, through this indirect obituary, acknowledges the validity of the Beloved Disciple as an historical person. As Culpepper explains, "If the BD had been an ideal form only, the question of his death, which is real enough, would never have arisen."⁸⁷

Perhaps Barnabas Lindars provides a more succinct explanation. He states,

The [Beloved] Disciple certainly has a *symbolic* function as the ideal disciple, who remains true where Peter fails But this does not mean that he is not intended to be an actual historical person: he is definitely one of the Twelve. But John has felt the need of representing one of them as the perfect disciple. He has taken advantage of the facelessness of most of them in the tradition to impose on one of them the features which are needed for his purpose.⁸⁸

Lindars' sentiment that the Beloved Disciple represents a dramatization of the ideal disciple for a specific purpose is echoed in the words of David Hawkin. Hawkin suggests it is not the historical identity of the Beloved Disciple which is primary to the

⁸⁷Culpepper, *Johannine School*, 265.

⁸⁸Lindars, ed., *Gospel of John*, 34.

Johannine riddle but the “significance [of the Beloved Disciple] . . . as an authenticator and guarantor of tradition.”⁸⁹ Such a focus should prompt more fruitful studies, for in examining the role of the Beloved Disciple in the Gospel narrative we harvest information about the community from which the Gospel was penned. This prompts the question: What does the Gospel of John say about the Beloved Disciple? And what does this reflect of the community from which it came and the role of the Disciple within that community?

c. The Role of the Beloved Disciple

The figure of the Beloved Disciple is a central facet for unravelling the multi-dimensions and complexities of the Gospel of John. The author has designed a narrative which is more than a flat, objective account of historical events; he has created an account charged with theological lessons and significance. In recognizing this, one acknowledges that characters and events may be multi-purposed. That is, people and occurrences referred to in the Gospel may be more than historical figures; they may be placed in the Gospel to serve the purposes of the author rather than the purposes of history. That being said, one must recognize that the Gospel’s figure of the Beloved Disciple is more than an historical personage: he serves a particular role for the author of

⁸⁹David J. Hawkin, “The Function of the Beloved Disciple Motif in the Johannine Redaction,” Laval Theologique et Philosophique 23 (1977): 136.

the text and fulfills a particular function for the community from which the text came. On the point of the literary purpose of characters in the Gospel of John, R. Alan Culpepper writes:

The evangelist is not a novelist whose great concern is full-blown development of his characters. Most of the characters appear on the literary stage only long enough to fulfill their role in the evangelist's representation of Jesus and the response to him. As a result, one is almost forced to consider the characters in terms of their commissions, plot functions, and representational value.⁹⁰

What function, then, does the Beloved Disciple fulfill in the Gospel of John?

David Hawkin recognizes that a critical reading of the Gospel of John reveals two important observations regarding the role of the Beloved Disciple⁹¹:

(1) The Gospel narrative is an ordered and structured document indicating the author undertook the construction of the text with careful consideration, apparently doing so with a particular logic and purpose in mind.

(2) The character of the Beloved Disciple appears in the narrative at specific dramatic intervals in the course of the unfolding Gospel story, revealing the importance of this figure from the view of the author and indicating that the author held a specific reason for doing so; that is, the placement of the Beloved Disciple in the structure of the Johannine Gospel is not mere coincidence -- he holds a

⁹⁰Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 102.

⁹¹Hawkin, "Beloved Disciple Motif," 140.

particular theological value for the writer of the author of the text.⁹²

The Gospel of John makes three principal and specific references to the ‘disciple whom Jesus loved’.⁹³ The appearance of this literary figure of the Beloved Disciple is marked at three crucial junctures in the Gospel narrative, namely: 13:21-26; 19:25-27; and 20:2-10. To emphasize the importance of the role of this character to the Gospel story (and to the community behind the text) each of these scenes shall be examined.

ἦν ἀνακείμενος εἰς ἓκ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ κόλπῳ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, ὃν ἠγάπα ὁ Ἰησοῦς· νεύει οὖν τούτῳ Σίμων Πέτρος πυθέσθαι τίς ἂν εἴη περὶ οὗ λέγει· ἀναπεσῶν οὖν ἐκεῖνος οὕτως ἐπὶ τὸ στήθος τοῦ Ἰησοῦ λέγει αὐτῷ, Κύριε, τίς ἐστιν; ἀποκρίνεται [ὁ] Ἰησοῦς, Ἐκεῖνός ἐστιν ᾧ ἐγὼ βάψω τὸ ψωμίον καὶ δώσω αὐτῷ. βάψας οὖν τὸ ψωμίον [λαμβάνει καὶ] δίδωσιν Τούδᾳ Σίμωνος Ἰσκαριώτου.

Κατὰ Ἰωάννην 13: 23-26

One of his disciples -- the one whom Jesus loved -- was reclining next to him; Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, “Lord, who is it?” Jesus answered, “It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.” So when he had dipped

⁹²Hawkin, “Beloved Disciple Motif,” 140.

⁹³Note that there are additional direct references to the character of the Beloved Disciple found in Chapter 21 of the Gospel narrative. However, since this chapter is generally regarded as a later supplement to the original text, these are not considered in this present discussion.

*the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon
Iscariot.*

John 13:23-26

This first reference to the Beloved Disciple occurs during the Last Supper scene when Jesus addresses his own followers. The text indicates that the Beloved Disciple “was reclining next to him” (verse 23b) and was asked by Peter to question Jesus as to the identity of the one who was to betray him. Jesus responds to the question but the response is not communicated to the original questioner, Simon Peter, but is told solely to the Beloved Disciple.

Several interesting points arise from this passage. First, there is a physical closeness between Jesus and the Beloved Disciple. The Beloved Disciple is said to be “reclining next to him” (NRSV translation) or, as other translators describe, the Beloved Disciple is “in the bosom of Jesus” or “lying close to the breast of Jesus” (ἐν τῷ κόλπῳ). This physical closeness between the Beloved Disciple and Jesus is a strong indicator of the closeness of their relationship. The Beloved Disciple is positioned in a place of honour and prestige among the disciples who share in the table of the Last Supper scene.⁹⁴

Second, the phrasing of this passage is reminiscent of the Gospel’s prologue. John 1:18 states, “No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart (ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς), who has made him

⁹⁴Ulrich Busse, “The Beloved Disciple,” *Skrif en Kerk* 15 (1994): 221.

known.⁷ The similar phrasing of these two passages (John 1:18 and 13:23-26) establishes a parallel between them: just as Jesus lies close to the Father's heart, so too does the Beloved Disciple lie close to the heart of Jesus; just as Jesus has a special relationship with the Father, so too does the Beloved Disciple have a special relationship with Jesus; and just as Jesus shall reveal the Father, so too shall the Beloved Disciple reveal Jesus and make him known. (This is particularly expressed in this latter passage wherein the Beloved Disciple acts as an intermediary between Jesus and Peter, for the Beloved Disciple alone can make known to Peter the words of Jesus.)

Third, the Beloved Disciple is portrayed as being closer to Jesus than Simon Peter. It is the Beloved Disciple, not Peter, who sits in the position of honour, reclining next to Jesus. Further, Peter's physical distance from Jesus obliges him to go through the Beloved Disciple to communicate his inquiry to Jesus. Thus, the Beloved Disciple acts as an intermediary between Simon Peter and Jesus. As well, Peter's question is presented to Jesus (by the Beloved Disciple) but Jesus' response is not communicated back to Peter. Only the Beloved Disciple is privy to the knowledge of the identity of Jesus' betrayer. This, too, is a sign of the close relationship between these two characters and a measure of the trust Jesus placed in the Beloved Disciple.⁹⁵ Indeed, the author's portrayal of the uniquely Johannine Beloved Disciple as being closer to Jesus than Simon Peter (the

⁹⁵The question has been raised as to the degree of knowledge the Beloved Disciple truly possessed regarding the identity of Jesus' betrayer. [See, for example, Culpepper, Son of Zebedee, 60-61.] Ultimately, this line of inquiry remains unresolved.

recognized leader of the Christian church) could be seen to reflect the political undercurrents of the faith community.

εἰσπήκεισαν δὲ παρὰ τῷ σταυρῷ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἡ ἀδελφὴ τῆς μητρὸς αὐτοῦ, Μαρία ἡ τοῦ Κλωπᾶ καὶ Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ. Ἰησοῦς οὖν ἰδὼν τὴν μητέρα καὶ τὸν μαθητὴν παρεστῶτα ὃν ἠγάπα, λέγει τῇ μητρὶ, Γύναι, ἴδε ὁ υἱός σου. εἶτα λέγει τῷ μαθητῇ, Ἴδε ἡ μήτηρ σου. καὶ ἀπ' ἐκείνης τῆς ὥρας ἔλαβεν ὁ μαθητὴς αὐτῆς εἰς τὰ ἴδια.

Κατὰ Ἰωάννην 19:25-27

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

John 19:25-27

The second reference to the Beloved Disciple is located in the narrative's Passion account where both Mary the mother of Jesus and the Beloved Disciple are found keeping vigil at the foot of the cross. Seeing them, Jesus gives his mother over into the care of his most trusted confidant, the Beloved Disciple and, as the text relates, from then on the Disciple cared for Mary in his home. Of importance to this passage are two key observations: (1) that the wording chosen by Jesus in this passage, indeed the particular phrasing of the sentences, are actual adoption formulas from Roman legal codes:⁹⁶ and, (2) that the Beloved Disciple is said to have taken Mary into his home and cared for her.

⁹⁶Hawkin, "Beloved Disciple Motif," 144.

For many scholars the significance of this passage is intricately related to the family of Jesus. It will be recalled from John 7:5 that the siblings of Jesus did not possess faith in him. As well, it should be noted that, even from the outset of the Gospel, those who did believe and did possess faith in Jesus are identified as “children of God” (John 1:12-13). Interestingly, in reciting the Roman (legal) adoption formula in his last earthly moments, Jesus’ final dramatic act is to replace his position as first born son with the Beloved Disciple who, in accepting this honour, also accepts the accompanying responsibilities and duties as leader of the family. “By this ceremonial act [the giving over of Jesus’ mother to the Beloved Disciple], a new relationship is formed; a new family is created.”⁹⁷ Indeed, in his dying hour Jesus has rejected his blood brothers who had rejected his divinity in favour of his most trusted confidant and follower -- the Beloved Disciple. Through the acceptance of Mary as his mother and his invitation to care for her in his home, the Beloved Disciple and Mary forge a new relationship and, in so doing, create a new family of believers, the Christian church who are true children of God.⁹⁸

The sorrowful scene at the foot of the cross represents the birth pangs by which the spirit of salvation is brought forth (Isa xxvi 17-18) and handed over (John xix 30). In becoming the mother of the Beloved Disciple (the Christian), Mary is symbolically evocative of Lady Zion who, after the birth pangs, brings forth a new people in joy

⁹⁷Culpepper, Son of Zebedee, 63.

⁹⁸“She [Mary] is given to the Beloved Disciple, and together they become the nucleus of the new community.” Culpepper, Son of Zebedee, 64.

(John xvi 21; Isa xlix 20-22, liv 1, lxvi 7-11) Her natural son is the firstborn of the dead (Col I 18), the one who has the keys of death (Rev I 18); and those who believe in him are born anew in his image. As his brothers, they have her as mother.⁹⁹

In keeping with the notion of the importance of family in this scene, Brown observes that Mary's adoption of the Beloved Disciple is reminiscent of the scriptural references to creationism -- the relationship between the two (Mary and the Beloved Disciple) has brought forth a new faithful membership which are re-born in the crucified Jesus, a membership bound by the commandment of love. The Christian church which comes forth from this union bears Mary as its mother and life force and the Beloved Disciple as its leader and head and stands steadfast in its commitment to its most primary rule -- mutual love. In forging such a community on his 'death bed'. Jesus provides for his followers and fulfills scripture before his death.¹⁰⁰

Ulrich Busse adds an interesting angle of interpretation to this passage. Busse's examination of the self-identity of the Johannine community leads him to conclude that the Johannine Christians understood themselves through the character of the Beloved Disciple who was the embodiment of Jesus' commandment to love. For Busse, the Beloved Disciple's acceptance of Mary as his adopted mother exemplifies brotherly

⁹⁹Brown, Gospel, 925-926.

¹⁰⁰Brown, Gospel, 925-926.

love.¹⁰¹ He contends that even the very words spoken by Jesus to cement the bond between ‘mother’ and ‘son’ are reminiscent of his commandment to love and, in preparing his own for their future without him, Jesus too loves his own to the end. Busse writes,

The crucified Jesus used well-considered formulas in constructing a relationship between his mother and the disciple, namely, “Mother there is your son, and to the disciple, there is your mother”. This choice of words immediately reminds the reader of the command of Jesus to love one another in chapter 13 and in the farewell speeches. In this way Jesus is finishing his earthly work of love in 19:25-27 as it was anticipated in 13:1.¹⁰²

Busse reminds us that Jesus has not simply entrusted the care of his mother – perhaps his most devoted follower and believer – to just anyone. No, she has been given over to the care of the Beloved Disciple, in Busse’s understanding the very personification of brotherly love. In this way one may extrapolate to understand that the Beloved Disciple has been empowered with the leadership of and charged to care for the flock of the crucified Jesus, a community founded on the tenet of Jesus’ greatest commandment: love one another as I have loved you (John 13:34). “Thus she [Mary] is

¹⁰¹“The Beloved Disciple willingly accepted the responsibility laid on him to care for Jesus’ mother and could thus be seen as an example of brotherly love.” Busse, “The Beloved Disciple,” 222.

¹⁰²Busse, “The Beloved Disciple,” 223.

taken up into a new community . . . based on mutual love, as the title Beloved Disciple indicates.”¹⁰³

A further dimension may be added to this commentary when one considers this scene in the context of the struggle for acceptance played out in the first century C.E. between Gentile-Christians and Jewish-Christians. R. Alan Culpepper remarks that “The New Testament reflects a struggle among various Christian communities for the right to claim that they were authorized by Jesus’ family.”¹⁰⁴ Hawkin reminds us that Mary may be viewed as the symbolic representative of Jewish-Christianity, the ‘mother religion’ which has given birth to the Christian movement. In embracing Mary and caring for her, the Beloved Disciple, as the characterized representation of Johannine Christianity, is seen to accept Mary into his home -- an especially profound gesture in light of the thesis advocated by many scholars that the Johannine followers had broken away from other religious groups, in particular mainstream Judaism, a thesis supported by the negative characterization of ‘the Jews’ in the Gospel.¹⁰⁵ Further, the Beloved Disciple, as a

¹⁰³Busse, “The Beloved Disciple,” 223.

¹⁰⁴Culpepper, Son of Zebedee, 64.

¹⁰⁵Culpepper, Johannine School, 277. It may be suggested that this expression of familial care and brotherly love between (Gentile) Johannine Christianity and Jewish Christianity may be an implicit desire on the part of the author for reconciliation among the Christian churches. In placing the Beloved Disciple in a scene and characterization wherein he is charged by Jesus to care for the Jewish mother of Christianity, the author may be encouraging his Johannine readership to make peace with their Jewish Christian brothers and sisters and lend to them the caring hand outstretched by the Beloved

possible symbol of Gentile-Christianity, is shown to be a true son of Mary and a full member of the faith community. Just as the Beloved Disciple must care for Mary in his house, so too must the Gentile-Christian Johannine community care for the Jewish-Christian community and welcome them among their own, for both are full and equal members of the faithful. As Hawkin writes, “Mary is representative of the woman, the woman who is mother of the faithful, for it is of the faithful that the Beloved Disciple is representative.”¹⁰⁶ As well, this act of acceptance also “confers on the Beloved Disciple – and, by implication, on the Johannine community – the authority of succession.”¹⁰⁷

In caring for his own who were to remain behind after his death, Jesus’ final earthly act has forged a new community with Mary the mother of Jesus and the Beloved Disciple at its nucleus.¹⁰⁸ In making the Beloved Disciple his brother and placing him at the head of this new community, Jesus establishes a new line of succession and a new chain of authority, based not on family ties but based on selection and choice and a grant of authority given to the Beloved Disciple by Jesus himself. The Johannine community, in identifying itself with the Beloved Disciple – the leader of their community

Disciple to Mary.

¹⁰⁶Hawkin, “Beloved Disciple Motif,” 144.

¹⁰⁷Culpepper, Son of Zebedee, 64.

¹⁰⁸Culpepper, Son of Zebedee, 64.

– is charged with the authority of Jesus, the founder of the Christian movement. In such a way the Johannine Christians are granted the acceptance they seek.

τρέχει οὖν καὶ ἔρχεται πρὸς Σίμωνα Πέτρον καὶ πρὸς τὸν ἄλλον μαθητὴν ὃν ἐφίλει ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς, Ἦραν τὸν κύριον ἐκ τοῦ μνημείου καὶ οὐκ οἶδαμεν ποῦ ἔθηκαν αὐτόν. Ἐξήλθεν οὖν ὁ Πέτρος καὶ ὁ ἄλλος μαθητὴς καὶ ἦρχοντο εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον. ἔτρεχον δὲ οἱ δύο ὁμοῦ· καὶ ὁ ἄλλος μαθητὴς προέδραμεν τάχιον τοῦ Πέτρου καὶ ἦλθεν πρῶτος εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον, καὶ παρακύψας βλέπει κείμενα τὰ ὀθόνια, οὐ μέντοι εἰσῆλθεν. ἔρχεται οὖν καὶ Σίμων Πέτρος ἀκολουθῶν αὐτῷ καὶ εἰσῆλθον εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον, καὶ θεωρεῖ τὰ ὀθόνια κείμενα, καὶ τὸ σουδάριον, ὃ ἦν ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτοῦ, οὐ μετὰ τῶν ὀθονίων κείμενον ἀλλὰ χωρὶς ἐντετυλιγμένον εἰς ἓνα τόπον. τότε οὖν εἰσῆλθεν καὶ ὁ ἄλλος μαθητὴς ὁ ἐλθὼν πρῶτος εἰς τὸ μνημεῖον καὶ εἶδεν καὶ ἐπίστευσεν· οὐδέπω γὰρ ᾔδεισαν τὴν γραφὴν ὅτι δεῖ αὐτόν ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀναστῆναι. ἀπῆλθον οὖν πάλιν πρὸς αὐτούς οἱ μαθηταί.

Κατὰ Ἰωάννην 20:2-10

So she [Mary Magdalene] ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the

scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

John 20:2-10

The third reference to the Beloved Disciple is located at John 20:2-10 wherein both Peter and the Beloved Disciple race to the grave site of the Risen Jesus. The Gospel account indicates it was the Beloved Disciple who first reached the grave but did not enter the tomb. Peter, arriving second, enters the tomb followed by the Beloved Disciple who then believes.

Various scholars have offered opinions as to the significance and ‘correct’ interpretation of this scene. Most, however, contend that the key to understanding this passage is found in understanding the relationship between Peter and the Beloved Disciple.

R. Alan Culpepper’s understanding of the significance of this passage derives from his placing of this scene in the context of other empty tomb/resurrection appearance stories. Culpepper believes that these two stories were originally two separate and distinct traditions in the early church, citing the Gospels of Mark and Matthew as indicators of same.¹⁰⁹ However, Luke’s Gospel connects these two stories by having the disciple Peter visit the tomb.¹¹⁰ The Gospel of John continues a further step: not only does

¹⁰⁹“Mark and Matthew suggest that the empty tomb tradition and the appearance traditions were originally separate and distinct.” Culpepper, Son of Zebedee, 67.

¹¹⁰“Whereas Matthew includes an appearance to the women at the tomb, Luke shows that there was the counter tendency to join the empty tomb and appearance traditions by bringing the disciple to the empty tomb.” Culpepper, Son of Zebedee, 68.

Peter travel to the empty tomb, but so too does the Beloved Disciple. In adding the Beloved Disciple to the story found in the Lukan account the Gospel's author adds distinct Johannine characteristics to the story.¹¹¹ Culpepper determines that "the result of these alterations to the tradition is that the Beloved Disciple becomes the first of the disciples to arrive at the empty tomb and the only one to see and believe."¹¹²

Culpepper defines the stories of Peter visiting the grave site as serving two purposes: (1) to link the empty tomb stories with resurrection appearance stories; and (2) to demonstrate Peter's authority in the early church¹¹³ – his authority as leader of the Christians is partly grounded in his having seen for himself the empty tomb of Jesus. Thus, in Culpepper's view, the author of the Gospel of John, in altering the Lukan empty tomb narrative through the addition of the Beloved Disciple, not only adds a distinct Johannine element to the text (in the figure of the Beloved Disciple) but does much to discredit the authority of Peter. Culpepper views the scene as expressing not simply an elevation of status for the Beloved Disciple but rather an elevation that supercedes that of Peter. The Beloved Disciple, like Peter, is a witness to the empty tomb. However, unlike

¹¹¹"With exception of the final clause, "amazed at what had happened," each element of Luke 24:12 appears in John 20:2-10. The differences in the Gospel of John reveal a distinctive Johannine interest." Culpepper, Son of Zebedee, 68.

¹¹²Culpepper, Son of Zebedee, 68.

¹¹³Culpepper, Son of Zebedee, 68.

Peter, the Beloved Disciple's witness causes him to believe, a statement which is not made of Peter in the text.¹¹⁴ As Culpepper writes,

The authority of Peter is subordinated to that of the Beloved Disciple, who not only beat Peter to the empty tomb but then "saw and believed." By implication, Peter saw but did not understand the significance of what he saw. The Beloved Disciple, therefore, becomes the only figure in the New Testament of whom it is said that he believed in the resurrection because of what he saw at the empty tomb.¹¹⁵

David Hawkin's analysis of this passage agrees with Culpepper's in assigning central importance to the relationship between the Beloved Disciple and Peter and, as well, in supporting the notion that the figure of the Beloved Disciple serves to elevate the status and authority of the Disciple and his followers. However, Hawkin's conclusions differ from Culpepper's in a number of respects.

¹¹⁴For Culpepper, the silence of the text on the matter of Peter's call to faith at the empty tomb is an indication that the experience did not necessarily stir him to believe, or at the very least such belief is not recorded in the text. Culpepper, *Son of Zebedee*, 68.

¹¹⁵Culpepper, *Son of Zebedee*, 68-69. While Culpepper's reading of this passage does hold merit, the reading proposed herein is somewhat different. I propose that the scene at the empty tomb does not in any way discredit the authority of Peter. I agree that while the status of the Beloved Disciple is elevated in this passage by being presented with the great apostle Peter, I believe that the Johannine author does not elevate the Disciple's status at the expense of Peter's. Rather, the author presents the Beloved Disciple and Peter together as a means of placing them on equal footing. Peter and the Beloved Disciple are equal counterparts to this most important of Christian experiences for both are witnesses to the resurrection; they are not adversaries to their faith in the resurrection of Jesus.

It must first be noted that Hawkin's analysis is undertaken in a different fashion. He does not attempt to place this scene in the context of other empty tomb/resurrection appearance stories found in the New Testament. Rather, he examines the importance of the scene only in relation to the structure of the Gospel narrative. As well, Hawkin notes that the characters of the Beloved Disciple and Peter are clearly and intentionally juxtaposed.¹¹⁶ However, in this juxtaposition Hawkin, unlike Culpepper, sees no sense of rivalry between Peter and the Beloved Disciple being expressed in this scene. Indeed, both Peter and the Beloved Disciple attend the empty tomb. Although the Beloved Disciple outraces Peter to the grave site (an act which some interpret as an implicit expression of the Beloved Disciple's superiority over Peter), it is Peter who first enters the tomb to fully view the crypt (a description which others argue defuses or negates any alleged expression of superiority in favour of the Beloved Disciple). Culpepper contends that the text's description of the Beloved Disciple -- not Peter -- as being the first to see and believe is an assertion of superiority over Peter. Hawkin expresses skepticism on this point, instead asserting Rudolf Bultmann's interpretation that the text would have borne some indication if Peter had not been moved to faith by this shared experience. As Hawkin quotes of Bultmann,

Clearly, it is presupposed that Peter before him was likewise brought to faith through the sight of the empty grave; for if the writer had meant otherwise, and if the two disciples

¹¹⁶Hawkin, "Beloved Disciple Motif," 145.

were set over against each other with respect to their πιστεῦσαι, it would have had to be expressly stated that Peter did not believe.¹¹⁷

Hawkin's understanding of the relationship between the Beloved Disciple and Peter as bearing no sense of rivalry agrees with Schnackenburg's who writes,

It is possible to distinguish a certain competition between the two disciples [Peter and the Beloved Disciple] in 20:2-8; 21:7, 20-22, but not to the detriment of Peter and his position (cf. 6:68f; 21:15-17). The intention is rather to give prominence to the other disciple by reinforcing Peter's acknowledged authority and his intimacy and closeness to Jesus.¹¹⁸

Hawkin's understanding of the significance of the passage also coincides with Bultmann's on the point of the relationship between Peter and the Beloved Disciple: namely, that while the author of the text has juxtaposed the two disciples, they are not in opposition with or rivals to one another. Bultmann's interpretation of Peter as representative of Jewish-Christianity and the Beloved Disciple as representative of Gentile-Christianity goes further than Hawkin's analysis. Hawkin's investigation has led him to

¹¹⁷Hawkin, "Beloved Disciple Motif," 145. Quote taken from Rudolf Bultmann. The Gospel of John, trans. G.R. Beasley-Murray (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 684.

¹¹⁸Rudolf Schnackenburg, The Gospel According to St. John Vol. 3, trans. David Smith and G.A. Kon (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1982), 30.

internalize the question of meaning and interpretation; that is, he asks. “in what sense the Johannine readership would understand the representation of Peter.”¹¹⁹

Having framed the question of interpretation in this context, Hawkin determines that the juxtaposition between Peter and the Beloved Disciple is analogous to the juxtaposition between the larger Christian church and the smaller Johannine-Christian communities. That the text exhibits no real sense of rivalry between them assures that “each can claim precedence over the other.”¹²⁰ Peter is not slighted in any way by the author of the Gospel narrative. Rather, his position as a principal figure in the early Christian churches is maintained throughout the text. Indeed, it may have been important to the author to emphasize Peter’s prominence in early Christianity, for in establishing the Beloved Disciple as an equal of Peter the author elevates the status of the Beloved Disciple and of the Johannine community as a whole.

Unlike Bultmann, Hawkin does not interpret Peter as being representative of Jewish-Christianity. Rather, his query has led him to suggest that the figure of Peter more accurately represents the larger Christian community. As he writes,

It seems justified to see him [Peter] not as a representative of Jewish Christianity, but in a wider context: he is representative of the *Gesamtkirche*. That is, Peter

¹¹⁹Hawkin, “Beloved Disciple Motif,” 145.

¹²⁰Hawkin, “Beloved Disciple Motif,” 145.

represents the whole Church, while the Beloved Disciple is representative of the local Johannine *Einzelkirche*.¹²¹

Thus, in equating the figures of the Beloved Disciple and Peter, the author of the Gospel equates the faith experiences of the smaller Johannine community to the larger Christian movement. This is especially emphasized by his placement of the Beloved Disciple at the critical moments of the Christian experience – at Jesus’ final discourse to his chosen band of followers, at the Crucifixion and at the Resurrection. Thus, the Beloved Disciple is seen to be a confidant to and revealer of Jesus’ intention and a direct witness to the monumental events in Christian history. As Culpepper writes,

The BD [Beloved Disciple] is . . . the authoritative exegete of Jesus’ teachings and is able to guide the community in interpreting them. . . . [He] is present at the crucifixion . . . and is the one who perceives . . . the meaning of the empty tomb. . . . Moreover, to the extent that the Gospel represents the work of the community, the latter must be understood to be guided by the BD because he directed the community’s interpretation of the words and signs of Jesus.¹²²

What does this analysis of the Beloved Disciple motif suggest about the followers of the Disciple and the community which grew up around him?

¹²¹Hawkin, “Beloved Disciple Motif,” 146.

¹²²Culpepper, *Johannine School*, 266-267.

d. The Function of the Beloved Disciple in the Johannine Community

It must first be recognized that a circle of followers had gathered around this figure known as the Beloved Disciple.¹²³ Both the Gospel of John and the Johannine Epistles give reference to a society of believers lying behind these texts and from which the writings were apparently produced (John 21:24; 2 John:1,13; 3 John 15).

Through a close reading of the text, especially chapter 21 of the Gospel narrative, it becomes apparent that this Beloved Disciple held a position of prominence and authority within this circle of believers (as inferred from their acceptance of the Disciple's testimony). Indeed, many scholars support the idea that the Beloved Disciple was actually the founder of this community.¹²⁴ Further, it is generally acknowledged that the figure of the Beloved Disciple does represent or reflect, to varying degrees, the (historical) circumstances of the Johannine community.¹²⁵ Thus, as Culpepper explains, "If we can

¹²³"In John, the first person plural seems to refer to a group or community which gathered around the Beloved Disciple (21:24-25)." Culpepper, Anatomy, 27.

¹²⁴Raymond E. Brown refers to the Beloved Disciple as the "hero of the [Johannine] community." Brown, Community, 89. Culpepper advocates, "The actual founder of the Johannine community is more likely to be found in the figure of the Beloved Disciple." Culpepper, Johannine School, 265.

¹²⁵David J. Hawkin notes that through the course of the Gospel of John the author clearly intends for his readers to identify with the Beloved Disciple. Hawkin, "Beloved Disciple Motif," 150. R. Alan Culpepper states that "the BD may also have been regarded as the representative of the community . . ." Culpepper, Johannine School, 265.

perceive more clearly how the Johannine community understood the role of the BD, we will be in a much better position to grasp the community's self-understanding and hence to understand more fully the nature of the community."¹²⁶

It is apparent this group of believers looked to the Beloved Disciple as an authoritative figure (as discussed above) and, in all probability, as the leader of their community. He was for them an eyewitness to the historical validity of the Christian experience and a guarantor and authenticator of their tradition.¹²⁷ He was their intermediary and mediator, making known to them the words and actions of Jesus and interpreting his signs and symbols so that they might have an accurate and proper understanding of their meaning. His witness to Christ's death and resurrection permitted him the authority to guide the community's understanding.¹²⁸ Culpepper takes this trajectory of thought a step further to suggest that the role of the Beloved Disciple within the community was analogous to that of the Paraclete.

He [the Beloved Disciple] functioned in the Johannine community precisely as the Gospel's Paraclete sayings predict that the Paraclete would function. The Paraclete will

¹²⁶Culpepper, Johannine School, 265-266.

¹²⁷On this issue of the significance of the Beloved Disciple, R. Alan Culpepper writes, "the community regarded the BD as its head in much the same way as ancient schools regarded their founders." Culpepper, Johannine School, 265. Further, he states that the writer of the Gospel of John "looked upon the BD as the guarantor of his traditions" Culpepper, Johannine School, 266.

¹²⁸Culpepper, Johannine School, 267.

teach the disciples all things and remind them of all that Jesus said (14:26b); the BD has borne witness (19:35; 21:24) and made known what Jesus said (13:23; 1:18).¹²⁹

Culpepper therefore concludes that the Beloved Disciple “functioned as founder of the Johannine community, source of its traditions, and authority for its interpretation of the traditions.”¹³⁰

Standing Alone: The Johannine Circle of the Gospel

To the extent that the Gospel of John is a window to the community from which it was produced, further implications may be extracted from the text regarding the nature of that community. That the Johannine circle looked to its leader as the Paraclete sent from Jesus (a figure or motif found only in the Johannine narrative) grants a strong sense of the uniqueness of this society within the larger Christian congregation. Such distinctiveness is seen in the advanced theology and high christology found in the Johannine Gospel. Whereas the Synoptics speak of Jesus as the Davidic messiah come to bring salvation, the Gospel of John speaks of Jesus as the revealer, one not from this world (8:23) but sent from above to reveal the Father’s glory (6:38).

¹²⁹Culpepper, Johannine School, 267.

¹³⁰Culpepper, Johannine School, 270.

This distinctiveness has led scholars to suggest the Johannine circle was an isolated community separated both from the larger Christian fold and the mainstream Jewish faith. That this group of Christians found themselves in conflict with the established Jewish leadership is evident in the negative portrayal of 'the Jews' in the Gospel of John. Such a portrayal of the Jews as not having recognized Jesus as the Son of God is clear even from the opening of the text. 1:11 of the prologue states, "He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him." This characterization is carried through the course of the narrative where the Jewish authorities are shown plotting against Jesus, persecuting both him and his followers.¹³¹ It is generally accepted among scholars that this group had itself been dismissed from the synagogues by the Jewish faithful. Three biblical references are typically cited in support of this hypothesis: 9:22, 12:42 and 16:2, where each passage makes some reference to the confessors of Christ being removed from the synagogues for their faith.¹³²

Further evidence of the isolated nature of the community is reflected in the group's own self-awareness. Recall, the Beloved Disciple is the representative figure of

¹³¹For example, John 5:16 states, "therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the sabbath." 7:13 says that "no one would speak openly about him [Jesus] for fear of the Jews." Furthermore, 9:22 indicates the Jewish leadership had threatened that those who professed faith in Jesus as messiah would be excommunicated from the synagogue.

¹³²Culpepper maintains, "The community found itself in debate with Jews, and its members were being excluded from the synagogue" Culpepper, *Johannine School*, 277.

the Johannine circle. It is with him that the community identifies and associates, particularly in reading the Gospel narrative. As the mediator and interpreter of Jesus, the Beloved Disciple (and hence the community) possesses a special relationship with him [Jesus]. Only he [the Beloved Disciple] holds the credentials to correctly interpret the words of Jesus, an authority heightened by Jesus' sending of the Paraclete to his followers. Thus, in identifying with the Beloved Disciple the community is brought into a close relationship with Jesus, a relationship which they believe enables them to more accurately identify with and understand Jesus.¹³³ As Jesus was rejected by his own (John 1:11), so too are they rejected by their 'own' (i.e., the Jews). As Jesus was not recognized by 'the world' (John 1:10), so too are they unrecognized by 'the world'.

Culpepper advocates that the Gospel of John was written "to strengthen the community and clarify its beliefs, but also to encourage those who were in danger of denying . . . the faith and those who were on the verge of confessing"¹³⁴ However

¹³³On this point Raymond Brown writes, "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." Brown, *Community*, 88.

¹³⁴Culpepper, *Johannine School*, 278.

others, such as Ernst Käsemann and David Hawkin¹³⁵, go beyond this and suggest there is considerable evidence to place the Gospel of John within the wider context of the debate about orthodoxy and heresy in early Christianity. Indeed, there is merit to the hypothesis that the Gospel of John bears an underlying political current of a quest for recognition of authority and a search for legitimization by the Johannine community from the larger Christian membership. As Hawkin notes (and as discussed above), this is revealed in the function of the Beloved Disciple motif in the Gospel narrative.

It is reasonable to suggest that, given the Johannine society's apparent separation from the Jewish community, the circle may also have been separated from other Christian churches. Certainly the community's higher christology would have distinguished it from among the Christian congregations.

With respect to the Beloved Disciple, the placement of this figure at the momentous occasions in the ministry of Jesus cements his standing as a witness and authoritative interpreter to the Christian faith. The assertion of the Beloved Disciple as a true son of Mary enforces the view of the community that they share in a full and equal status as members of the Christian fold. However, as members of Christ's flock they look to Jesus as their shepherd and to the Beloved Disciple (not Peter) as the one sent to

¹³⁵Ernst Käsemann, "Ketzer und Zeuge. Zum johanneischen Verfasserproblem," Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche 48 (1951): 292-311; The Testament of Jesus, trans. Gerhard Krodel (London: SCM Press, 1968). See also Hawkin, "Beloved Disciple Motif," 135-136.

continue his ministry. Nonetheless, they do not diminish the role of Peter as leader of the Apostolic Churches.¹³⁶ In equating the Beloved Disciple with Peter, the Beloved Disciple and hence the Johannine community are granted legitimization and prominence within the Christian fold.

The author of the Gospel of John has crystallized the authority of the Disciple as a leader of orthodoxy. Surely no one would question the legitimacy of one so closely associated with Jesus and placed on an equal footing with the great apostle Peter? The Johannine community, as symbolized and represented in the figure of the Beloved Disciple, must therefore be afforded a place within the mainstream Christian tradition.

Orthodoxy & Heresy

As noted above, the Gospel of John is a carefully woven text with a particular structure revealing a construction which is well-planned and precisely ordered. This is especially evident in the manner with which the author deals with such uniquely

¹³⁶Recall, this is not the view of R. Alan Culpepper who sees the elevation of the Beloved Disciple at the empty tomb scene of the Gospel of John as coming at the expense of Peter. [See discussion earlier in this chapter. See also Culpepper, *Son of Zebedee*, 68ff.] Note that while the views presented herein regarding this particular issue are in keeping with those of David J. Hawkin, Hawkin's analysis is ultimately built on the presupposition of the priority of the Gospel of John. However, it is argued in this thesis that this presupposition is incorrect and that a more fruitful understanding of the Johannine community is achieved when the Epistles are placed prior to the Gospel text.

Johannine motifs as the Beloved Disciple. Thus, one can say with some measure of certainty that the efforts of the author to legitimate the community for which he stands by equating its pre-eminent figure of the Beloved Disciple with the great Christian shepherd Peter is by no means accidental or coincidental. Rather, the author has done so with great care to make a more subtle statement: the Beloved Disciple stands with equal authority to Peter and, therefore, the Johannine community (as represented by the Beloved Disciple) stands with equal authority and legitimacy to the larger Christian movement (as represented by Peter). In seeking legitimacy for his membership from the larger Christian fold, the Johannine author implicitly expresses a notion that his congregation is not immediately recognized by mainstream Christianity, but is struggling for their acceptance, thereby carefully interjecting the Johannine community into the wider debate of orthodoxy and heresy in early Christianity. In this way, the question of the history of the Johannine community takes on many shades of the debate on orthodoxy and heresy in earliest Christianity. The question of the origins of earliest Christianity and the blurring of beliefs represented in the continuum between orthodox and heterodox are perhaps best represented by and crystallized in the debate between Walter Bauer and H.E.W. Turner.

The earliest perspectives offered on the development of Christian origins are described in the so called 'classical view' of early Christianity as set forth by the great adherents to the faith, Irenaeus and Eusebius. This classical view purports that Christianity originated in a pure state, void of erroneous teachings. The Christian

movement began, as it were, as a uniform development from pure doctrine. As only the true teachings of Jesus were transmitted among believers, heresy, by definition, was derived from orthodoxy. If only 'right thinking' exists, then 'wrong thinking' must be a reaction to it rather than presupposing it.¹³⁷ This classical view of Christian development may therefore be best understood as evolving in the following manner: (1) Jesus instructs the disciples in the true and pure teachings; (2) following Jesus' final departure from the corporeal realm, his disciples travel among the (known) world spreading the unadulterated 'good news' of Jesus Christ, thereby providing a direct and living link with the actual teachings of Jesus; (3) the death of the disciples severs this bond with the true teachings of Jesus and various obstacles arise to counter the spread of the true faith. These obstacles, instigated by Satan, encourage followers to a different path which is contrary to the accepted teaching. Ultimately, those choosing a heterodox path break from mainstream Christian thinking to become offshoots of the Christian movement; and, (4) despite these obstacles and heresies, the true, pure teachings of Jesus prevail.¹³⁸

Modern scholarship, in reaction to this providential view of history, contested the classical view. In his book, Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity, Walter Bauer denounces the classical theory supporting, instead, a perspective that

¹³⁷Walter Bauer, Orthodoxy & Heresy in Earliest Christianity, trans. by a team from the Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins; ed. Robert A. Kraft and Gerhard Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), xxiii.

¹³⁸Bauer, Orthodoxy and Heresy, xxiii-xxiv.

recognized the many diversities of the early Christian congregations and suggesting that Christianity, rather than emerging as a uniform religion (a view expressed in the classical theory), evolved from differences into uniformity.

In accepting a more 'scientific' methodology, Bauer believed that the terms 'orthodoxy' and 'heresy' were inappropriate for use with reference to Christian origins. Bauer's examination led him to believe that, in many cases, what were originally minority views later gained prominence to become beliefs accepted by the majority. Thus, "in earliest Christianity, orthodoxy and heresy do not stand in relation to one another as primary to secondary, but in many regions heresy is the original manifestation of Christianity."¹³⁹ Further, Bauer suggested that that which came to be accepted as 'orthodox' was largely due to 'politics' namely through the power and influence of the Roman church which could well afford, in many respects, to assert its favour in support of a particular party and idea.

Bauer recognized that even in the earliest years of the Christian movement there were differences within various Christian groups -- simply not all Christians held exactly the same beliefs. However, as the church developed there was a real attempt to become more unified and to develop a singular theology to which it could profess and proclaim. Bauer's evidence in support of this theory was two-fold. First, were the (ecumenical) councils of the early church which were convened to discuss, debate and

¹³⁹Bauer, Orthodoxy & Heresy, xi.

determine various theological and philosophical questions affecting the church at that time. The second were the scriptural writings themselves which, upon analysis, reflect both a desire to address issues of concern and questions that arose in the early congregations as well as indicating a lack of unity on the part of the Christian leadership. For example, Paul's writings reveal a variety of theological disputes the apostle held with the Christian leadership in Jerusalem. Nonetheless, in both circumstances the evidence, by implication, suggests there were disagreements among the Christian congregations regarding matters of theology and practice which, in turn, supports Bauer's contention that Christianity emerged from diversity into unity.

The position supported by H.E.W. Turner regarding the orthodoxy/heresy question is characterized by an attitude which is far more 'middle of the road' than those views expressed by either Eusebius or Bauer. Simply put, their arguments are too extreme, too delineated and too simplistic for Turner. Christianity, in Turner's view, was neither as static as Eusebius suggested, nor as fluid as Bauer proposed. Rather, it was an interaction between these two extremes. As Turner writes,

The development of Christian theology as a whole . . . may be perhaps better interpreted as the interaction of fixed and flexible elements, both of which are equally necessary for the determination of Christian truth in the setting of a particular age.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰H.E.W. Turner, The Pattern of Christian Truth (London: Mowbray, 1954), 33.

Turner suggested that the fixed elements of early Christianity involved a core set of fundamental beliefs woven through Christianity of what it meant to be Christian, what he refers to as “the religious facts themselves, without which there would be no grounds for its existence.”¹⁴¹ He refers to “the relatively full and fixed experiential grasp of what was involved in being a Christian”¹⁴² as *lex orandi*, an understanding of the nature of Christian faith which may have pre-dated the church’s attempts to work out in a more systematic fashion the fundamental beliefs of the Christian experience.

The flexible elements of Christianity which Turner recognized included the individual characteristics of various theologians and of various cultures who partook of the Christian faith, elements which are intrinsically bound to the temporal limits of time and place. Thus, for Turner, while the perspectives of a twentieth century North American Christian and a first century Christian from Jerusalem are vastly different (due to elements of time, place, culture, history, etc.), their Christian beliefs would unite them through the fundamental essence of what it means to be Christian. Turner’s position, therefore, “argues for a dynamic unity to Christianity.”¹⁴³

¹⁴¹Turner, Pattern, 26.

¹⁴²Turner, Pattern, 28.

¹⁴³David J. Hawkin, The Johannine World (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 12.

Summation

Thus far, this thesis has examined a number of preliminary issues related to the question of the chronology of the Johannine texts. It has been shown that the writings attributed to John bear marks of both similarities and differences, a situation which may be best reconciled by envisioning a community or school of believers lying behind the texts and producing this literature. Further, while the Epistles claim to have been penned by the *presybteros* and the Gospel attributes its authorship and authority to the character of the Beloved Disciple, the historical identity of this individual(s) remains concretely unknown. Instead of providing a name to this Beloved Disciple, one can only truly know the importance this person held and the function he/she fulfilled for the community as a witness to the key elements of the Christian movement, an authenticator of the traditions retained by the community and a mediator to understanding and continuing the ministry of Jesus.

In many respects, the peculiarities of the Johannine literature mirror the peculiarities of the Johannine community – that they were a community of followers of Jesus who were somewhat removed from both the larger Christian membership and the Judaic faith of their ancestors; that, as a faith membership, they identified themselves with the characterization of the Beloved Disciple as portrayed in the Gospel narrative; and that

they developed a theology, christology and tradition which divorced them from other forms of the Christian faith.

We have seen that inquiries into the history of the Johannine community are coloured by the debate on the nature of Christian origins: Did Christianity emerge as a unified testimony to the pure doctrine taught by Jesus? Was Christianity more largely diverse in its origins and later united its beliefs to form a more uniform doctrine? Or, perhaps, were the earliest days of Christianity a melding of these two more extreme ideas to be seen as a “dynamic unity”¹⁴⁴ embracing both fixed and flexible elements of the Christian faith? Indeed, the writings of John reveal that the community may serve as a microcosm for the plurality of ideas which may be found in Christianity’s infancy.

Having addressed these preliminary questions and armed with the understanding their answers provide, we can now begin to address in a more focused manner the primary questions of this inquiry: To which set of documents do we grant chronological priority -- the Gospel of John or the Johannine Epistles? And, what evidence exists to support the hypothesis of epistolary priority within the Johannine corpus?

¹⁴⁴Hawkin, Johannine World, 12.

CHAPTER THREE

The Priority of the Epistles

Introduction

Strategies of argument, in general, are typically formulated around two principals of debate: (1) exhibit the flaws of the opposing position, and (2) assert positive evidence in favour of one's own stance. In constructing a case for the chronological priority of the Epistles of John – the focus of this chapter – this thesis shall illuminate the weak links in the chain of reason put forth by the general consensus of contemporary biblical scholarship and establish in its place another plausible theory of Johannine chronology; namely, that the Epistles of John were written first.

To make a case for epistolary priority one must examine the evidence and recognize that the growing support for the priority of the Johannine Epistles draws upon a number of issues plaguing Johannine research, including apparent epistolary omission of such important notions as the expulsion of the Christians from the Jewish synagogues, the absence of a single quotation from the Gospel of John and a noticeable lack of reference to the prominent Johannine motif of the Beloved Disciple. Further, the primitive nature of various epistolary passages, coupled with a rather unsophisticated theological outlook (in comparison to that presented in the Gospel of John), give rise to concerns

about the accepted trajectory of development in Johannine theology. The chronological placement of the Johannine Epistles before the Gospel of John establishes a trajectory of thought which, as we shall see, appears to be a more natural progression, thereby helping to propel the endeavour to establish the priority of the Epistles of John from the realm of possibility into the sphere of probability.

'Primitive' Epistles

a. The Johannine Prologues

One of the more striking characterizations which have been made of the Johannine Epistles is that they are 'primitive'; in particular, that various epistolary passages are less sophisticated and less developed than their Gospel counterparts. In examining these texts, scholars have tended to focus their attention and efforts on the prologues of these two documents (a literary structure common to both the Gospel and First Epistle of John) and have been especially curious as to the nature of the prologue of I John and how it compares with its counterpart in the Johannine Gospel.

The epistolary prologue of I John reads as follows:

ὁ ἦν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, ὃ ἀκηκόαμεν, ὃ ἐώρακάμεν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἡμῶν, ὃ ἐθεασάμεθα καὶ αἱ χεῖρες ἡμῶν ἐψηλάφησαν περὶ τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς - καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἐφανερώθη, καὶ ἐώρακάμεν καὶ μαρτυροῦμεν καὶ

ἀπαγγέλλομεν ὑμῖν τὴν ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον ἣτις ἦν
 πρὸς τὸν πατέρα καὶ ἐφανερώθη ἡμῖν - ὃ ἐωράκαμεν
 καὶ ἀκηκόαμεν, ἀπαγγέλλομεν καὶ ὑμῖν, ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς
 κοινωνίαν ἔχητε μεθ' ἡμῶν. καὶ ἡ κοινωνία δὲ ἡ
 ἡμετέρα μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ
 Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. καὶ ταῦτα γράφομεν ἡμεῖς, ἵνα ἡ
 χαρὰ ἡμῶν ἧ πεπληρωμένη.

Ἰωάννου α' 1:1-4

*We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we
 have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have
 looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word
 of life - this life was revealed, and we have seen it and
 testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with
 the Father and was revealed to us - we declare to you what
 we have seen and heard so that you also may have
 fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the
 Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these
 things so that our joy may be complete.*

I John 1:1-4

The pervading tangibility of the Epistle's prologue is perhaps its most noteworthy feature. From its outset it strongly appeals to the human faculties; the epistolary author speaks of testimony which has been heard, seen and touched. The author especially emphasizes and embellishes the senses of sight and touch: "what we have *seen* with our eyes . . . and *touched* with our hands . . ." (I John 1:1). The sense of touch is said to be the strongest of human sensory perceptions and both sight and touch are among the most concrete means of proving to oneself and to others that something is real. There is no question on the part of the epistolary author that his/her membership has seen and touched Jesus ("the word of life"). The author writes that "this life [Jesus] was revealed, and we have *seen* it and testify to it . . ." (I John 1:2). Whether or not the author

physically saw Jesus is questionable (given that none of the New Testament writings are presently dated to the time of Jesus). The 'sight' of the revealed Jesus to which the author refers may be that of an ecstatic religious experience or a manifestation of the revealed Jesus in the words and actions of his disciples and Christian elders of the early church. Perhaps most likely, however, is the possibility that the author, in citing a communal experience ("we have seen it"), is merely referring to the tradition of the membership and the eyewitness accounts which may comprise its source. Nonetheless, the effect of the author's words remains the same: in claiming to have seen, heard and touched "the word of life", the author makes Jesus very real. The reader does not discern Jesus in an intangible manner; rather, the author has created a perception of Jesus which may be experienced in a concrete, almost tactile, way. As Charles Talbert writes, "That the word of life was seen and touched guarantees that it is a person."¹⁴⁵

This pervading tangibility does not limit itself to mere mentions of the human faculties but permeates the entire setting of the prologue. Indeed, the author's references to the senses do much to carry this perception of tangibility. At no point is the reader distracted from the concreteness of the prologue. Even when speaking of such mystical and elusive themes as revelation and eternal life, the author repeatedly returns the reader to a solid footing. For example, the author states that Jesus, the word of life, "was revealed" and immediately follows with a statement of affirmation, "we have seen it and

¹⁴⁵Talbert, Reading John, 15.

testify to it” (I John 1:2), that brings the reader back from the mystical to the concrete. This more tangible and ‘earthly’ setting is quite different from the prologue of the Johannine Gospel, firmly grounding both the epistolary prologue and the Epistle as a totality in the corporeal realm.

In contrast to the epistolary prologue is the prologue found in the Gospel of John. It should be noted that, for the purposes of this examination, the verses contained in the prefatory unit of the Johannine Gospel (vv. 1-18) which make reference to John the Baptist (i.e., vv. 6-9, 15) have been excluded from this discussion. Scholarly opinion is divided on the relative value of these verses. The general consensus among biblical scholars is that verses 1 to 18 comprise a particular literary unit within the Gospel narrative. Most scholars recognize, however, that the form of the prologue may belong to an earlier hymn or song (sometimes referred to as the ‘*logos* hymn’) which the author included in the narrative, perhaps to introduce the Gospel and set the stage for the drama that is to unfold.

In his commentary on the Johannine Gospel, Rudolf Schnackenburg outlines the principal reasons cited in support of the theory of the *logos* hymn. These include the use of particular “terminology and concepts” unique to the prologue; interruptions and “sudden switches” in the flow of ideas and structure of the unit; a particular rhythm being exhibited in the prologue; and, finally, that an examination of the style employed by the author in this unit reveals “in several verses or portions of verses the absence of typical

criteria of Johannine style, and their frequent presence elsewhere [in the Gospel narrative].”¹⁴⁶ Schnackenburg concludes the most reasonable answer by which to explain these discrepancies between the prologue and the remainder of the Gospel narrative is to suggest that “the evangelist took up a hymn whose theology and outlook was close to his own, and made this poem, once an independent entity, the opening of his Gospel.”¹⁴⁷

Further, while some scholars continue to include the verses relating to John the Baptist in their discussions of the prologue, I have chosen to exclude these verses as they appear to offer no constructive insight into the particular question at hand (namely, the relationship between the prologues of the Gospel and First Epistle of John). The inclusion of these verses in the prologue interrupts the flow and continuum of the hymn and appears to most appropriately correspond with the verses immediately following the prefatory unit (i.e., vv. 19-36) which discuss John the Baptist and his ministry. Thus, verses 6-9 and 15 of John 1:1-18 have been excluded from this examination of the Gospel’s prologue. In so doing, it is hoped an effort has been made not only to narrow the focus of this particular discussion and question but, also, to make some small step in seeking the original *logos* hymn of the Johannine community.

The Gospel prologue which is employed in this discussion reads as follows:

¹⁴⁶Schnackenburg, Gospel According to St. John, 225-226.

¹⁴⁷Schnackenburg, Gospel According to St. John, 226.

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος. οὗτος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν. πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν. ὃ γέγονεν ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν, καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων· καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει, καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν. . . . ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ἦν, καὶ ὁ κόσμος δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ ὁ κόσμος αὐτὸν οὐκ ἔγνω. εἰς τὰ ἴδια ἦλθεν, καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι αὐτὸν οὐ παρέλαβον. ὅσοι δὲ ἔλαβον αὐτόν, ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἐξουσίαν τέκνα θεοῦ γενέσθαι, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ, οἱ οὐκ ἐξ αἱμάτων οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος σαρκὸς οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος ἀνδρὸς ἀλλ' ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν. Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός, πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας. ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ πληρώματος αὐτοῦ ἡμεῖς πάντες ἐλάβομεν καὶ χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος· ὅτι ὁ νόμος διὰ Μωϋσέως ἐδόθη, ἡ ἀλήθεια διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐγένετο. θεὸν οὐδεὶς ἑώρακεν πώποτε· μονογενὴς θεὸς ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο.

Κατὰ Ἰωάννην 1:1-5, 10-14, 16-18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. . . . He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word 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. . . . From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came

through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

John 1: 1-5, 10-14, 16-18

The prologue of the Gospel of John has a remarkably different tone and setting from that of the Epistles. Whereas the epistolary prologue may be described as 'tangible' or 'earthly', the Gospel prologue is most decidedly cosmic. Indeed, the cosmic setting of the prologue may be said to be the hallmark of this prologue and one of the distinguishing features of the narrative. Rudolf Bultmann understands that the prologue of the Gospel narrative is not a typical introductory unit which one would expect would indicate what is to follow in the narrative and be intricately linked to the forthcoming story. Instead, the preface is silent on these points and stands alone as a unit unto itself. Yet, as Bultmann writes, it remains an important introductory element to the Gospel "in the sense of being an *overture*, leading the reader out of the commonplace into a new and strange world of sounds and figures, and singling out particular motifs from the action that is now to be unfolded."¹⁴⁸ Thus, from its outset the reader is transported from the corporeal realm into the cosmos of creation. Further indications of the cosmic nature of the Gospel prologue may be found in the references to "the beginning". While both the Epistle and Gospel prologues harken back to "the beginning", this reference in the Epistle appears to allude to the beginning of Jesus' ministry, whereas in the Gospel the phrase is

¹⁴⁸Bultmann, Gospel of John, 13.

clearly pointing not to a temporal sphere but to the more abstract and eternal sphere of the beginning of creation.

The intangibility of the Gospel prologue is also evident in the sparse references to the human senses. The prologue of I John contains many references to the human faculties, references which ground the prologue unit in the corporeal realm. In the Gospel's preface, however, allusions to the human senses are limited and, indeed, quite rare, numbering only two for the entire unit. The first reference, John 1:14, states, "and we have *seen* his glory". This reference to sight is eclipsed by the word 'glory' which forms the nucleus and emphasis of this phrase. In alluding to Jesus, this reference to sight does not convey to the reader an image of having seen an earthly Jesus, but rather, of having borne witness to a divine Jesus on earth. It is not the 'seeing' in this passage which is most important but the 'glory'. Similarly with the second mention to the human faculties found in the Gospel preface, John 1:18, which again cites the sense of sight, "No one has ever *seen* God." It is not the sense of sight which is given prominence in this sentence. Indeed, it is the negative intonation of this verse -- that *no one* [human] has ever seen God -- which serves to heighten the cosmic effect of the prologue and remind the reader of the distinction between God and humans, between the cosmic and corporeal realms. This unworldly effect is further emphasized by the references to the 'cosmic birth' of the children of God. The allusions in the prologue to the corporeal act of giving birth are not conveyed in a human or corporeal connotation. That is to say, when the prologue

speaks of the birth of the children of God, it emphatically states such believers are not brought forth through human or corporeal means but through the divine. “But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, *not of blood, or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God*” (John 1: 12-13). This ‘cosmic birth’, with its removal of human procreation from the children of God and its insistence upon divine procreation for believers, strongly enhances the ethereal quality of the Gospel prologue.

The tone of the Gospel prologue reveals darker connotations and tensions which are not evident in I John. The epistolary preface holds a more inviting tone, appealing to readers to believe the testimony being offered and join in their fellowship. However, in the Gospel prologue there is a detectable tension between the dualistic images of light and darkness. This is most clearly expressed in John 1:5. “The light shines in the darkness, *and the darkness did not overcome it.*” These tensions are again evident in verses 10-13 of the prefatory unit, particularly verse 11 discussing Jesus’ rejection by ‘his own’. The dualism of rejection and acceptance – rejection by those to whom Jesus came and acceptance by his believers – reinforces the tensions earlier exhibited in the prologue.

In all, the Gospel prologue may be described as being more dramatic, more abstract and more unworldly. Placed side-by-side, the two prologues present very different pictures, despite their common literary structure. The Gospel preface is cosmic and ethereal, while the epistolary prologue is concrete and tangible; the narrative’s

prefatory unit is dramatic and theocentric, presenting the glorification and divinity of Jesus, whereas the prologue to I John is direct and simple with slightly less emphasis on the divinity of Jesus and providing a better sense of the earthly nature of Jesus.

Recalling the discussion above of the possible existence of a *logos* hymn in the Johannine tradition, Raymond Brown concurs in writing that “the GJohn Prologue is a hymn that once circulated independently [of the Gospel] and thus antedated the evangelist’s appropriation of it to preface GJohn.”¹⁴⁹ With this in mind Brown cautions that chronologically ordering these texts based solely on their prologues becomes quite tenuous. While this may be true to the extent that an oral tradition lying behind the hymn complicates a relative dating process, in and of itself it does not make the priority of the Johannine Epistles any less possible. Indeed, if an oral tradition of the Gospel prologue/*logos* hymn were in existence prior to the final writing of the Gospel of John, it may very well be that this hymn was less sophisticated than that recorded in the Gospel text.

Given that a reasonable trajectory of development exists in moving from the realm of tangible and concrete to abstract and ethereal, it may be that the more tangible and ‘earthly’ epistolary prologue was a primitive form of the prologue/*logos* hymn of the Gospel of John. At the very least one may fathom that the epistolary prologue is a ‘hymn’

¹⁴⁹Brown, Epistles, 33, Footnote 80.

or statement of declaration and affirmation in Jesus which represents an earlier Johannine theology than that represented in the more cosmic Gospel prologue.

Other comments on the nature of the Johannine prologues appear to lend support for the priority of the Epistles. On the nature of the epistolary prologue Raymond Brown writes:

I suggest that it [the prologue of I John] is a reinterpretation of the GJohn Prologue, done in order to refute adversaries who are distorting the meaning of the GJohn Prologue. In that way the Prologue is an essential part of I John, written to refute the same adversaries who are distorting the meaning of the Johannine tradition as a whole.¹⁵⁰

Recall, Brown accepts the premise that the Gospel was written before the Epistles. Indeed, Brown believes that the author of the Epistles knew of some written form of the Johannine Gospel.¹⁵¹ Further, as this quote states, Brown believes that the epistolary prologue is more than an introductory unit to the Johannine letter. Rather, he accepts it to be a deliberate means by which the epistolary author reinterprets the prologue of the Gospel so as to refute the claims being made by the secessionists and emphasize the true meaning of the Gospel passage. The author of the Epistles, according to Brown, is asserting the true meaning of the Johannine tradition.

¹⁵⁰Brown, Epistles, 178.

¹⁵¹On this point Brown writes, "although I could be content in showing that the author of I John knew the kind of tradition contained in GJohn, I think it more likely that he knew some form of GJohn itself, even if he wrote before the final redaction of GJohn." Brown, Epistles, 86.

Brown further writes of the similarity between the two prefatory units.

Precisely because there is so much similarity between the two Prologues, the differences are all the more startling. It is hardly conceivable that the author who wrote the GJohn Prologue with its careful staircase parallelism and clear line of thought would later write the more awkward I John Prologue.¹⁵²

Such a comment curiously appears, on the surface, to contradict Brown's own view that the Gospel narrative was written prior to the epistolary letters. However, Brown's point here is not related to the chronological ordering of the Johannine literature, but relates to his focus on the relationship between the two prologues. Brown asserts that the remarkable similarities between the two units highlight their differences which he explains by attributing the writing of the prologues to two different authors. He suggests that the epistolary author counters the attacks of his opponents and their possible (mis)use of the Gospel prologue by reinterpreting the unit and stressing the antithetical points raised by the opponents. Thus, the "awkwardness of the I John Prologue . . . stems from an attempt to give familiar wording a different emphasis."¹⁵³

Interestingly, taken at face value, Brown's comment may be interpreted to convey an entirely different meaning than that which he defines, for without Brown's

¹⁵²Brown, Epistles, 179.

¹⁵³Brown, Epistles, 181.

explanation of same, his comment appears to champion the cause of epistolary priority.¹⁵⁴ And indeed this quote does much to forward this cause. Brown's characterization of the literary style of the epistolary prologue as 'awkward' is most accurate in comparison to the more eloquent introduction of the Gospel (though this, too, is not without its obstacles, as evidenced in the verses relating to John the Baptist which interrupt the flow of the Gospel prologue). It is difficult to believe that a community whose thought was expressed with such precision, which uses such vivid dualistic imagery and which is, for the most part, of such an advanced nature would later regress to envision its beliefs and depict them with the more stark, concrete phrasing and imagery of the epistolary prologue. This contravenes the more natural route of development to move toward progress and make advancements in a pro-active manner. Having attained such a sophisticated level of intellectual and philosophical understanding of Christian theology, to retreat to a more basic formula of thought appears extraordinary.

¹⁵⁴In a footnote Brown writes, "the thesis was defended that I John was written after GJohn, and I see no reason to exempt the Prologues from this sequence (although I acknowledge that, as a hymn, the GJohn Prologue once traveled separately in the tradition from the rest of GJohn)." Brown, *Epistles*, 180, Footnote 13.

b. Judaic Motifs

A further epistolary characteristic often cited in favour of the priority of the Johannine Epistles are the distinct and rather strong elements of Judaism evident in these texts, elements which are not necessarily found in other texts of the Johannine corpus.

In his article, "The Destination and Purpose of the Johannine Epistles", J.A.T. Robinson cites much evidence of the Jewish flavour of the Epistles, arguing that these documents are intended to combat "a gnosticizing movement within Greek-speaking Diaspora Judaism"¹⁵⁵ and that the tone and atmosphere of the Epistles exhibit a "Jewish milieu."¹⁵⁶ Indeed, Robinson builds on the work of C.H. Dodd who sought to discriminate between the Gospel and Epistles by highlighting their differences. In discussing the divergent theologies of the two writings, Dodd declares that "the [First Johannine] Epistle represents a theological outlook nearer than that of the Gospel to primitive, or popular, Christianity."¹⁵⁷ Robinson, however, reinterprets Dodd's work to fall more reasonably into the category of Judaism than early Christianity. He writes, "the

¹⁵⁵J.A.T. Robinson, "The Destination and Purpose of the Johannine Epistles," in Twelve New Testament Studies (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1965), 138.

¹⁵⁶Robinson, "Destination and Purpose," 137.

¹⁵⁷C.H. Dodd, The Johannine Epistles (London: Hodder & Stroughton Ltd., 1946), liii.

differences in doctrinal expression which Dr. C.H. Dodd seizes on . . . are all on the side of giving the Epistles more rather than less of a Jewish ring.”¹⁵⁸

Robinson’s assertion that Dodd’s evidence may more accurately be pinpointed in the Judaism of the period is, in fact, a natural deduction given the extensive overlap between the two systems of belief during Christianity’s infancy. Thus, whereas Dodd holds the Epistles to exhibit an unsophisticated form of Christian eschatology¹⁵⁹. Robinson understands this eschatology to be “more apocalyptic - and *ipso facto* more Jewish”¹⁶⁰, employing such apocalyptic Jewish terms as ‘parousia’ and ‘antichrist’: while Dodd believes the epistolary teachings of Christ’s death as being of an atoning nature “scarcely go beyond the terms of the primitive apostolic Preaching”¹⁶¹, Robinson views these same teachings to be “formulated . . . much more explicitly in terms of the Jewish sacrificial system”¹⁶²; and, finally, whereas Dodd states that the more primitive epistolary

¹⁵⁸Robinson, “Destination and Purpose.” 132.

¹⁵⁹Dodd, Johannine Epistles, liii.

¹⁶⁰Robinson, “Destination and Purpose.” 132.

¹⁶¹Dodd, Johannine Epistles, liv.

¹⁶²Robinson, “Destination and Purpose.” 132. On this point Robinson writes, “Phrases like ‘The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin’ (I John 1.7), ‘We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the expiation for our sins’ (2.1f), and ‘God sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins’ (4.10), are all more distinctively Jewish than the dominant soteriology of the Gospels, of the Son of man who descends in order to be lifted up and draw all men to himself.” Robinson, “Destination and Purpose,” 132.

understanding of the Spirit “remains within the limits of primitive or popular belief”¹⁶³. Robinson declares them to “stand nearer to Judaism.”¹⁶⁴

But Robinson does not rest his argument solely on fine-tuning Dodd’s earlier observations. Indeed, he offers much evidence of his own. Robinson concedes the First Epistle of John does not contain a single quotation from the Hebrew Bible, a fact which distinguishes it “not only from all the other writings in the New Testament but from the fourth Gospel itself.”¹⁶⁵ However, he does not come to the same conclusion as other scholars that the epistolary author and his audience were disengaged from the Old Testament and its traditions. Rather, he focuses on the allusion to the Old Testament story of Cain and Abel at I John 3:12, a brief mention which assists Robinson’s argument that the intended audience was of Jewish background. As he writes. “Only a community grounded in the Old Testament would take such a reference.”¹⁶⁶

Further, Robinson observes a strong familiarity with Jewish “categories” and moral codes, additional evidence in favour of the Jewish background of the intended audience. He notes in particular that the grounds on which the epistolary opponents are challenged and condemned are all of a Jewish nature and that the “[moral] strictures

¹⁶³Dodd, *Johannine Epistles*, liv.

¹⁶⁴Robinson, “Destination and Purpose,” 132.

¹⁶⁵Robinson, “Destination and Purpose,” 130.

¹⁶⁶Robinson, “Destination and Purpose,” 131.

passed presuppose that the readers acknowledge Jewish standards.”¹⁶⁷ As well, Robinson holds that the glaring omission of a (direct) reference to the Gentiles in I John is significant in that it spotlights that, at the time of writing, the Gentiles did not hold “any place or promise within the Church.”¹⁶⁸

Other authors have also remarked on the Jewish nature of the Johannine Epistles. Schnackenburg’s commentary, for example, has assessed that the Jewish influences on the Epistles appear to center on the areas of language and theology. On the aspect of language Schnackenburg writes, “Many terms and phrases can be understood only in the mouth of a Jew familiar with the Old Testament and in touch with rabbinic thought.”¹⁶⁹ Indeed such firm comments may also be made of the influence of Judaism on the thought and theology of the Epistles of John. Schnackenburg, too, recognizes that the terminology and ideas found in the text are of a peculiar Jewish origin. Although Christian theology has advanced many of these ideas (for example, with respect to the Christian notion of the antichrist), their Jewish roots remain obvious. As Schnackenburg writes, “the acceptance and continuation of these ideas from Judaism is taken for granted.

¹⁶⁷Robinson, “Destination and Purpose,” 131.

¹⁶⁸Robinson, “Destination and Purpose,” 132.

¹⁶⁹Schnackenburg, Johannine Epistles, 26-27.

There is no attempt to hide their Jewish origin, thus suggesting an author who had been at home in a Jewish milieu from the cradle.”¹⁷⁰

The strong ties between Christians and Jews speak of the early days of the Christian movement when the followers of Jesus did not necessarily think of themselves as a group or faith movement distinct from Judaism. Indeed, in proclaiming Jesus to be the messiah, these early Christians believed themselves to be merely fulfilling their Jewish beliefs. It is in these earliest days of the Christian movement that we find much interaction between Christians and Jews and much influence from Judaism on Christian thought. The strong Jewish elements evident in the Epistles are testimony to their early writing. Indeed, the animosity with which the Gospel of John speaks of ‘the Jews’ is further evidence of its later (relative) chronology. In placing the Epistles of John closer to the world of Judaism, we date them earlier than the Gospel text.

c. The Qumran Scrolls

The Judaic motifs evident in the Johannine Epistles are not simply reflective of the terminology, theology and morality of mainstream Judaism during the early years of the Christian movement. Just as the umbrella of Christianity embraced many individual churches of singular dispositions testifying to a basic common faith (namely, in the person

¹⁷⁰Schnackenburg, Johannine Epistles, 27.

and teachings of Jesus), so too did the Judaism of the period include a number of streams of understanding and practice. Of interest to this study are the writings found at Qumran of a particular group of Jews (largely believed to have been the Essenes¹⁷¹) whose thought and theology may share linkages with the writings of the Johannine community.

Since their discovery at Qumran in 1947, the so-called 'Dead Sea' Scrolls have spurred much controversy and fascinated academics and lay people alike. The seemingly enigmatic aura surrounding the Scrolls -- beginning with their adventure-filled introduction to the twentieth century -- has sparked the imagination of the general public and captured the interest of biblical scholars keen to explore the riches of the Qumran find. However, the glimmer of insight which these texts illuminate is tarnished by a number of scholarly controversies which have spilled-over into the public arena. The monopolistic manner and secrecy by which the official editing team assigned to the Scrolls has conducted its work and the considerable time it has taken to have their work published has

¹⁷¹On this point Frank Moore Cross writes, "The scholar who would "exercise caution" in identifying the sect of Qumran with the Essenes places himself in an astonishing position: He must suggest seriously that *two* major parties formed communalistic religious communities in the same district of the desert of the Dead Sea and lived together in effect for two centuries, holding similar bizarre views, performing similar or rather identical lustrations, ritual meals, and ceremonies. He must suppose that one, carefully described by classical authors, disappeared without leaving building remains or even potsherd behind; the other, systematically ignored by the classical sources, left extensive ruins, and indeed a great library. I prefer to be reckless and flatly identify the men of Qumran with their perennial house guests, the Essenes." Frank Moore Cross, "The Historical Context of the Scrolls," in Understanding the Dead Sea Scrolls, ed. Hershel Shanks (New York: Random House, 1992), 25.

heightened public suspicion that the Scrolls may hold information detrimental to Christianity and Judaism. While such misperceptions and those who propagate them have been taken to task, the image of the Scrolls as possibly undermining the uniqueness of the Christian faith has remained. Indeed, the current dating of the Scrolls to between (approximately) 250 B.C.E. and 68 C.E. places it in the time frame of the events of the New Testament -- the life and times of Jesus, John the Baptist, Paul and Second Temple Judaism -- and provides perhaps its greatest value: the Scrolls are quite rare in being Hebrew and Aramaic texts salvaged from this historical period. As James C. Vanderkam writes,

We must appreciate the insights provided by the Qumran literature in light of the paucity of any other Hebrew or Aramaic literature contemporary with the beginnings of Christianity. The books of the Hebrew Bible are, in almost all cases, considerably earlier. The vast corpus of rabbinic texts was written centuries later. Before the Qumran discoveries, most of the first-century comparative material for studying early Christianity came from Greek and Latin sources. The sudden availability of an entire library of Hebrew and Aramaic texts dating from approximately the time of the New Testament events has naturally, and rightfully, captured the attention of New Testament scholars.¹⁷²

Indeed, there are many points of contact between the community of Qumran and early Christianity. The most significant of these is that both were branches of Jewish

¹⁷²James C. Vanderkam, "The Dead Sea Scrolls and Christianity," in Understanding the Dead Sea Scrolls, ed. Hershel Shanks (New York: Random House, 1992), 185-186.

roots which embraced an apocalyptic eschatology that looked forward to the imminent dawning of a new messianic age. Investigation into the Dead Sea Scrolls provides insight into the Jewish milieu and atmosphere in which Jesus was a contemporary and from which the Christian movement was born.

Possible linkages with the Johannine community and with Johannine thought stem from this shared Judaic background. Indeed, the Johannine and Qumranic communities share a number of common characteristics. First, both communities viewed themselves as being distinct from the world. Second, the texts which these communities produced reflect a development of thought and theology, thereby indicating both groups may have had a long history. Third, in their texts, neither the Qumran covenanters nor the Johannine followers refer to their leaders/founders by their personal names but by their titles: the leader/founder of the Qumran community is known as the Teacher of Righteousness and the Johannine leader/founder is known as the Beloved Disciple.¹⁷³ While it is most likely the historical identities of these individuals were known to their memberships, the titles by which they were known reveal the leaders took on specific importance and significance for their followers. The leaders' titles reveal they were seen to embody the particular values and beliefs to which the memberships of the communities

¹⁷³While some have argued these figures are not historical persons, most scholars agree they are historical persons whose role among their memberships took on a symbolic reverence and significance. See the discussion of the role of the Beloved Disciple in the preceding chapter.

adhered and testified. Fourth, both the Qumran covenanters and the Johannine followers expressed their particular theology in terms of dualism, often using similar images and terminology. James Charlesworth defines 'dualism' as "a pattern of thought, an antithesis, which is bifurcated into two mutually exclusive categories (e.g. two spirits or two worlds), each of which is qualified by a set of properties and ethical characteristics which are contrary to those under the other antithetic category (e.g. light and good *versus* darkness and evil)."¹⁷⁴ The Qumran and Johannine literature are both reflective of this mode of thought. Fifth, both the Qumran and Johannine communities looked forward to the imminent end of the world. Both communities appear to have possessed a strong apocalyptic strain in their theologies. The Essenes, the community largely believed to have occupied the Qumran site and to have produced the library of texts found there, went out into the desert to await the coming of the messiah. The Johannine community, in similar fashion, awaited the imminent return of its messiah, Jesus.

Much scholarly effort has been expended in investigating a possible relationship(s) between early Christianity and the Qumranic movement of Judaism. Scholars have attempted to forge linkages between early Christians and the followers at Qumran as well as, more precisely, possible connections between the Johannine and

¹⁷⁴James H. Charlesworth, "A Critical Comparison of the Dualism in 1QS 3:13-4:26 and the 'Dualism' Contained in the Gospel of John," in John and the Dead Sea Scrolls, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991), 76, Footnote 1.

Qumranic communities and the writings which they produced. One strong linkage which scholars have detected is that the Johannine Epistles exhibit “close parallels in terminology to the Dead Sea Scrolls.”¹⁷⁵ Indeed, the phrases and images employed in the separate texts are quite similar, revealing that many peculiar Johannine phrases were not quite so peculiar in the historical circumstances of their time. As James H. Charlesworth remarks, “Many terms once seen as unique to John, and other Christian literature, were discovered in the Dead Sea Scrolls.”¹⁷⁶ The close contacts and parallels in terminology are most obvious in the dualistic imagery and thought used by the two groups. The dualistic imagery of the Johannine literature, both the Gospel and Epistles, is one of the more distinguishing characteristics of these texts, and so too it is with the Qumran scrolls.

Given the various points of contact between the Johannine and Qumranic communities, as especially reflected in the texts which they produced, it seems reasonable to suggest that these linkages represent an earlier rather than later era in the Johannine community’s history. Recalling that the removal of the Christians from the synagogues (to be discussed in the next section of this thesis) marked a severing of ties between Judaism and Christianity and a movement toward the propagation of the Christian faith among the Gentiles, one can assert that the ties evident between the more peripheral

¹⁷⁵Brown, Epistles, 34.

¹⁷⁶James H. Charlesworth, ed., John and the Dead Sea Scrolls, with a Foreword by James H. Charlesworth (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991). xiii.

Jewish group of the Essenes and the Johannine Christians reflect an earlier period in the community's history when Jewish influences upon Christianity were more welcomed.¹⁷⁷ As the Johannine Epistles bear stronger evidence of contact with the Scrolls (as remarked above in the observation of the "close parallels in terminology" between the Scrolls and Epistles), one may suggest an earlier comparative dating for the Epistles with respect to the Gospel text.

Arguments from Silence

a. The Expulsion of the Christians

One of the more interesting observations which may be made of the Johannine Epistles is their apparent omission of references to various important events, texts and uniquely Johannine characters and motifs. For example, the Epistles do not make reference to the expulsion of the Christians from the synagogues, a key event in the early history of Christianity and its development as an individual faith movement.

Until approximately the end of the first century C.E., first generation *Christians* (a term which was not yet applied to them) principally practised their new faith amongst the Jews, praying and worshipping in the Temple and synagogues. Indeed, the

¹⁷⁷Brown, Epistles, 34.

first followers of Jesus – and Jesus himself – were Jews who did not abandon the faith of their ancestry but who continued as practising Jews, though with one significant difference: whereas the Jews still awaited the coming of their messiah, the followers of Jesus proclaimed him to be the messiah sent from God for their redemption. For many years, there were few external means by which to distinguish Jews and Jewish-Christians. As Robert A. Spivey and D. Moody Smith explain, “They [the earliest Christians] belonged to a new religious movement that was conscious of its Jewish origins, that took the scriptures of Judaism to be authoritative, and that was often confused with its parent in the variegated religious scene of the first-century Mediterranean world.”¹⁷⁸ Given the close ties and strong linkages between Judaism and the early followers of Jesus, the expelling of the Christians from the Jewish place of prayer and worship must have struck a heavy blow. Certainly it marked a turning point in the emerging history of early Christianity. The severing of relations with Judaism forced the adherents of Jesus to forge an individual faith identity within the pluralistic religious atmosphere of the Greco-Roman world.

Despite the importance of this landmark event, the Epistles attributed to John are strangely quiet, making no reference to this occurrence. Yet, the Gospel narrative reflects glimmers of this event and the resultant tensions, particularly in the disdain and negativism with which the author of the text refers to “the Jews”. Throughout

¹⁷⁸Spivey and Smith, Anatomy of the New Testament, 48.

the Gospel, contemporaries of Jesus, especially members of the Jewish religious and social hierarchy, are often collectively referred to as “the Jews”. characterized by the Gospel as continually challenging the validity of Jesus’ claims. Raymond Brown makes a more precise definition when he says, “the Fourth Gospel uses “the Jews” as almost a technical title for *the religious authorities, particularly those in Jerusalem, who are hostile to Jesus.*”¹⁷⁹

Brown perceives an apologetic purpose to the Gospel of John, that it may possibly have been destined for an audience for whom it was necessary to defend the tenets of Christian belief. Brown remarks on the “polemic attitude”¹⁸⁰ of the Gospel, a sense that the author is using his pen to defend Christianity against those Jews who reject its claims. As he writes, “Thus, in an era when there were ill feelings between the Church and the Synagogue, “the Jews” was a term used with a connotation of hostility to Christians.”¹⁸¹

It is obvious that Christians and Jews were in open conflict at the time of the writing of the Gospel. Indeed, the Gospel of John sets in Jesus’ own mouth the very heart of the conflict -- Christian claims that Jesus is the long-awaited messiah. Whereas other Gospels quietly reveal Jesus’ messianic role, the Gospel of John boldly declares Jesus’ messiahship. It is these bold declarations which bring the early Christians into

¹⁷⁹Brown. Gospel, lxx.

¹⁸⁰Brown. Gospel, lxx.

¹⁸¹Brown. Gospel, lxxii.

conflict with Judaic thought (ultimately leading to their expulsion from the synagogues), and it is these claims of messiahship in Jesus which the author must defend. In so doing, the author reveals the historical conflict between the two communities (Jewish and Christian) which forms a backdrop to this narrative. For example, the Gospel lays blame with the Jews for Jesus' persecution (John 5:16-18), reflecting the persecution the early Christians endured at the hands of devout Jews. John 12:42 speaks of a fear among the followers of Jesus that they would be put out of the synagogue, a veiled reference to the removal of the Christians from the Jewish synagogues.

The animosity between Christians and Jews, the references to Jewish persecution of Jesus and the fear of being removed from the Jewish place of worship are all indicative of the historical circumstances in which the narrative's author wrote his Gospel. If the Johannine texts are to be a window onto the historical events of the community from which they came, then in reading the Gospel of John one sees the strife Jewish-Christians endured and the conflict in which they found themselves with the Jews. That the Johannine Epistles are silent on this point is most curious. This silence requires a plausible explanation and enables one to posit a new theory: *there is no mention of the expulsion of the Christians from the synagogues because it is an event which has not yet occurred.* At the time of the writing of the Johannine Epistles, Christians and Jews still co-existed and co-practised in the synagogues. However, by the time of the Gospel's (later) writing, the expulsion was an event in Christianity's youthful past and so is alluded

to in the Gospel story but not in the Epistles. Indeed, that the Gospel pays special attention to this event can be used as evidence of its (the Gospel's) later chronology.

b. Gospel Quotes

It is strikingly obvious that the Epistles of John do not contain a direct quote from the Gospel narrative, a curious fact if one accepts the consensus opinion of contemporary biblical scholarship regarding the chronology of the Johannine writings. If indeed the Gospel of John was completed prior to the writing of the Epistles, one would expect that this document, as a (presumably) foundational text for the community, would be quoted or at least referenced by the epistolary author. That the Gospel is not quoted in the Epistles is a contributing factor to the continuing debate over the priority of the Johannine literature.

Furthermore, inclusion by the epistolary author of a quote from the Gospel narrative in his writings would likely have been exceptionally important given the circumstances in which the Epistles were penned. Recall, the Epistles reveal an internal struggle within the Johannine community, a struggle which Raymond Brown believes had more to do with different emphases on a common theology than with differing theological

opinions.¹⁸² If indeed this holds true – that both parties accepted a shared, common theology but disagreed as to which aspects of this theology should receive priority and emphasis – then it would become even more important for the epistolary author, in writing to combat the ‘heresy’ of his opponents, to appeal to a reasoning and tradition which both groups shared; i.e., the tradition preserved in the Johannine Gospel. Under such conditions, the onus would rest with the epistolary author to employ his every weapon to call the opponents back into the fold. Certainly his greatest weapon would have been a quote from the Gospel of John, a Gospel which preserves the common tradition of the Johannine community, and which unites Johannine-Christians to a common identity against “the world”. That the Epistles do not voice a prior knowledge of the Gospel of John lends credence and support to the hypothesis contained herein that the Epistles of John were written before the Gospel. Indeed, the Epistles could not possibly reference a work which had not yet been completed.

¹⁸²Brown writes, “In my judgement the hypothesis that best explains the positions both of the author of the Epistles and of the secessionists is this: *Both parties knew the proclamation of Christianity available to us through the Fourth Gospel, but they interpreted it differently.*” Brown, *Community*, 106. Note, Brown does not say either party actually possessed a written Gospel text; rather, he simply states that the parties knew of the proclamation which the narrative held, leaving the door open to assert the sequential priority of the Johannine Epistles.

Missing Motifs

a. The Beloved Disciple

As discussed in the previous chapter, one of the more outstanding features of the Gospel of John is its character identified in the text only by the title 'the disciple whom Jesus loved', to whom scholars refer as 'the Beloved Disciple'. It has been shown that this Beloved Disciple is more than a mere historical personage who was a contemporary and follower of Jesus. Rather, as represented in the Gospel narrative, the Beloved Disciple serves a literary function for the author of the narrative and a leadership role for the Johannine membership. Indeed, to a great extent the literary and 'historical' functions postulated about the character of the Beloved Disciple overlap. As we have seen, in the Gospel of John, the Beloved Disciple is seen to have many roles and wear many inter-related hats: he is the confidant of Jesus, an intermediary between Jesus and the others who makes Jesus known; he is a care-giver to Mary, the mother of Jesus, who accepts the responsibilities of looking after her as they forge a new family relationship; he is a compatriot of Peter who first reaches the empty tomb and believes; he is said to be an eyewitness to the events depicted in the Gospel and a true source of their authority. In short, the literary function of the Beloved Disciple is to serve as an ideal, and perhaps an idealized, disciple.

In many ways the attributes embodied in the character of the Beloved Disciple parallel the role which he is seen to have fulfilled for the Johannine community. As in the Gospel of John, the Beloved Disciple makes Jesus known to the (other) disciples (John 13:23-26), so too does the Beloved Disciple reveal Jesus to the Johannine community; as the Beloved Disciple (with Mary) is a life force to the emerging Christian faith (John 19:25-27), so too is the Beloved Disciple a life force for the membership which surrounded him; as the Gospel shows the Beloved Disciple to be an equal to Peter (John 20:2-10), so too does the Johannine community look to the Beloved Disciple as its leader, the founder and source of its traditions. He is an authoritative representative of its unique theology, history and ethical outlook. He is their role-model who personifies their ideals and who authenticates their tradition.

Given the singular importance assigned to this figure in the Gospel of John, it is interesting that no reference is made to the Beloved Disciple in the Epistles of John. If the Beloved Disciple is the authenticator and source of the unique Johannine experience, why, then, is there no mention of him or his authority in the Johannine Epistles? Certainly if the author of the Epistles were combatting a heresy from within his own membership (as is accepted to be the historical circumstances in which these texts were written), he would have appealed to a person whose authority was paramount in the community -- the Beloved Disciple. How, then, is this apparent discrepancy to be explained?

That there is no mention of the *Beloved Disciple* in the *Johannine Epistles* is a curious and important facet of these documents. Given the atmosphere and purpose of their writing, one would expect an appeal to the authority embodied by their founder and leader. Indeed, the epistolary author repeatedly calls upon tradition to legitimize his interpretations and teachings, appealing to “what was from the beginning” (I John 1:1). One would expect the author to appeal directly to the teachings of the founder of the community, the *Beloved Disciple*, especially if these teachings were recorded in a written text. That none was forthcoming from the epistolary texts could be explained by the Gospel having been written after the Epistles. That no mention was made in the Epistles of the *Beloved Disciple* is a glaring omission if one places the writing of the Gospel before the writing of the Epistles. However, if one holds that the Epistles were written first and the Gospel was a later document, then it is more easy to postulate the emergence of the *Beloved Disciple* as a literary figure in the *Johannine* writings as a later development of their communal thought.¹⁸³

¹⁸³Further discussion of the significance of the *Beloved Disciple* as a ‘missing motif’ in the *Johannine Epistles* is found in chapter four of this thesis.

b. The Spirit/Paraclete

Another principal figure of the Johannine writings is the character known as the Paraclete (in Greek, παράκλητος). The παράκλητος of the Johannine literature is a key to understanding the community behind the texts. Yet, for all of its apparent prominence within the Johannine membership, the true meaning of παράκλητος remains somewhat uncertain. What is certain is that this particular form of Greek is not found in other writings.¹⁸⁴ Indeed, the only biblical references to παράκλητος are located in the writings attributed to John. Externally, related words to the form παράκλητος lead many scholars to translate this word (παράκλητος) as referring to a sponsor, patron, or supporter, a helper or advocate sometimes, though not always, used in a legal context.¹⁸⁵ Given these circumstances, and bearing in mind the guidance derived from these external interpretations of related Greek word forms, it is a more pertinent issue to examine the meaning of παράκλητος as evidenced in the Johannine writings themselves.

The Gospel of John contains four references to the παράκλητος: 14:15-17; 14:26; 15:26-27; and 16:7-11, all found within the Farewell Discourses of the Gospel

¹⁸⁴Kenneth Grayston, "The Meaning of PARAKLĒTOS," *JSNT* 13 (1981): 67.

¹⁸⁵The debate of whether the meaning of παράκλητος is derived from a legal context or whether it is a general term adopted into the legal arena is discussed in Grayston, "PARAKLĒTOS," 67-82. For a discussion of various alternative translations of παράκλητος consult Raymond E. Brown's "The Paraclete in the Fourth Gospel," *NTS* 13 (1967): 113-132.

narrative. This alone provides a key to the importance of the παράκλητος, for it is in these discourses that Jesus exclusively addresses his followers, giving them final instructions before his imminent death. The first reference to παράκλητος reads:

Ἐὰν ἀγαπάτε με, τὰς ἐντολὰς τὰς ἐμὰς τηρήσετε
 κἀγὼ ἐρωτήσω τὸν πατέρα καὶ ἄλλον παράκλητον
 δώσει ὑμῖν ἵνα ἦ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, τὸ πνεῦμα
 τῆς ἀληθείας, ὃ ὁ κόσμος οὐ δύναται λαβεῖν, ὅτι οὐ
 θεωρεῖ αὐτὸ οὐδὲ γινώσκει· ὑμεῖς γινώσκετε αὐτό, ὅτι
 παρ' ὑμῖν μένει καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν ἐστίν.

Κατὰ Ἰωάννην 14:15-17

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate (παράκλητος), to be with you forever. 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.

John 14:15-17

The first point of interest is that the Paraclete will be sent to Jesus' followers from the Father but through the request of Jesus. Second, Jesus identifies the Paraclete as the 'Spirit of truth', an image (truth) which is often identified with Jesus in the Gospel narrative.¹⁸⁶ Third, Jesus states that the Paraclete comes not to the world (because it does not recognize him) but to these believers. Thus, just as Jesus was sent to be truth to the world and the world did not recognize him (John 1:10 & 17b), so too is the Paraclete sent to be truth to a world that will not know him. In this way, the narrative

¹⁸⁶See, for example, John 1:17b; and John 14:6-7.

establishes a parallel between Jesus and the Paraclete, for both came to serve the same functions -- to be truth -- and to address the same group of believers -- the Johannine community.

The second passage making reference to παράκλητος is found at John 14:26 which reads:

ὁ δὲ παράκλητος, τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ὃ πέμψει ὁ πατὴρ ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί μου ἐκεῖνος ὑμᾶς διδάξει πάντα καὶ ὑπομνήσει ὑμᾶς πάντα ἃ εἶπον ὑμῖν [ἐγώ].

But the Advocate (παράκλητος), the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.

Again, Jesus identifies the Paraclete for his followers¹⁸⁷ and defines the functions of this character for his believers. According to this passage, the Paraclete is being sent by the Father to teach the believers and to remind them of Jesus' instructions to them. Thus, Jesus' ministry does not die with his death, but rather lives on in the community through the leadership of the Paraclete. Further, in being sent to the community from the Father "in my [Jesus'] name," the Paraclete brings with him the authority of Jesus to his leadership and to the community.

The third passage making reference to παράκλητος states:

Ὅταν ἔλθῃ ὁ παράκλητος ὃν ἐγὼ πέμψω ὑμῖν παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς, τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας ὃ παρὰ τοῦ

¹⁸⁷Note, the identification of the Paraclete as the 'Holy Spirit' is regarded by many scholars as a later addition. See Hawkin, Johannine World, 140, Footnote 81.

πατρός ἐκπορεύεται, ἐκεῖνος μαρτηρήσει περὶ ἐμοῦ· καὶ ὑμεῖς δὲ μαρτηρήετε, ὅτι ἀπ' ἀρχῆς μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐστε.

Κατὰ Ἰωάννην 15:26-27

When the Advocate (παράκλητος) comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.
John 15:26-27

This passage again repeats many of the statements made earlier about the Paraclete -- that he will be sent from the Father through Jesus; the Paraclete is the Spirit of truth; the Paraclete will bear witness to Jesus and continue his ministry. Not only is the parallel between Jesus and the Paraclete reinforced in this passage, but the followers of Jesus are brought into this continuum when Jesus states that they too must testify to him. Thus, in this passage Jesus is not only addressing his own, but in some sense is singling them out with his authority, for just as the Paraclete bears his authority to be a witness to his ministry, so too are the followers of Jesus called upon to testify to what they know to be true.

The final passage featuring the character of the Paraclete is found at John 16:7-11 which reads:

ἀλλ' ἐγὼ τὴν ἀλήθειαν λέγω ὑμῖν, συμφέρει ὑμῖν ἵνα ἐγὼ ἀπέλθω. ἐὰν γὰρ μὴ ἀπέλθω, ὁ παράκλητος οὐκ ἐλεύσεται πρὸς ὑμᾶς· ἐὰν δὲ πορευθῶ, πέμψω αὐτὸν πρὸς ὑμᾶς. καὶ ἐλθὼν ἐκεῖνος ἐλέγξει τὸν κόσμον περὶ ἁμαρτίας καὶ περὶ δικαιοσύνης καὶ περὶ κρίσεως· περὶ ἁμαρτίας μὲν, ὅτι οὐ πιστεύουσιν εἰς ἐμέ· περὶ δικαιοσύνης δέ, ὅτι πρὸς τὸν πατέρα ὑπάγω καὶ

οὐκέτι θεωρεῖτέ με· περὶ δὲ κρίσεως, ὅτι ὁ ἄρχων τοῦ κόσμου τούτου κέκριται.

Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate (παράκλητος) will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgement, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

With respect to the Paraclete, this passage again reiterates what has been earlier said of this character. However, this passage is underscored by the immediacy of Jesus' death and his reassurance to the community that his leadership will not be lost simply because he is no longer with them. Rather, his death is a catalyst for the coming of the παράκλητος who will continue the ministry. Interestingly, the passage seems to imply that the παράκλητος, who specifically comes to instruct Jesus' followers (i.e., the Johannine community) because they alone recognize him and recognized Jesus, will nonetheless ultimately instruct the world in their wrongdoing because they did not believe in Jesus.

Thus, the Gospel passages referring to the Paraclete paint a picture of a character who is promised to the community as a vehicle of continuum, an authoritative leader bridging the gap between Jesus (who is no longer present in the community) and his followers, who continues the ministry of Jesus, deepening the understanding the community has of what it has been told and authenticating the validity of its truth.

With such a well-defined role being created for the Paraclete in the Gospel, it is curious that the sole epistolary reference to παράκλητος does not present such a picture. The only reference made to the Paraclete in the epistolary writings is found at I John 2:1b-2 which states:

Τεκνιά μου. ταῦτα γράφω ὑμῖν ἵνα μὴ ἀμάρτητε. καὶ ἔάν τις ἀμάρτη, παράκλητον ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν δίκαιον·

But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate (παράκλητος) with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

This representation of the παράκλητος is quite different from that of the Gospel narrative. Whereas in the Gospel the Paraclete is an independent entity unto itself with a particular role and function for the Johannine followers, the Paraclete of the I John is singularly identified with Jesus. Moreover, Jesus is described by the writer as “the atoning sacrifice for our sins,” a theology which is more consistent with a low christology than with a higher one.¹⁸⁸ The personification of the Paraclete with a single person and the identification of this person as Jesus is a more tangible discussion of the παράκλητος than that depicted in the Gospel whose ideas of the Paraclete are somewhat more conceptual than concrete. As well, given the circumstances under which the Epistle was apparently written, namely an internal struggle among the Johannine followers of Jesus,

¹⁸⁸The development of christological ideas is discussed in more detail later in this chapter. See pages 114ff, especially pages 118-124.

the noticeable lack of reference to the independent, more abstract παράκλητος of the Gospel is remarkable. An epistolary writer concerned with denouncing those who had gone out from their ranks would most certainly have appealed to the authority vested in the new leader, the παράκλητος, whose own authority and leadership was declared from Jesus himself (John 14:26). That no such appeal is forthcoming in the Epistle is indeed curious if the Gospel was written before the Epistles.

A Community Divided

As texts revealing the historical circumstances of the Johannine community, the Gospel and Epistles of John shed light on two disrupting incidents in the history of the congregation. One measure of the commonality between the texts is that they both appear to have been written during periods of strife for the community's membership. In both cases, the documents were penned with an apologetic flavour: the Epistles defend themselves against attack from the opponents who share their tradition, whereas the Gospel speaks to concerns from outside their circle. For scholars such as Raymond E. Brown, understanding and ordering the tensions, conflicts and struggles referenced in the texts is a "decisive issue in the question of dating."¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁹Brown, Community, 97.

The author of the Epistles is engaged in a struggle against members of his own community (I John 2:19), the essence of which is internal. However, the Gospel exhibits a conflict against outsiders, specifically both “the Jews” and “the world”. No such struggle is evident in the Epistles. Indeed, the Epistles state that Jesus came to atone for the sins of both the faithful and the world (I John 2:2). Brown’s question, then, is whether it is reasonable to expect that a community first struggling against and separated by its own would be capable of combatting a strong external opposition.¹⁹⁰ He believes this to be entirely unlikely. Brown envisions a community first expelled from the synagogue, an act precipitated by the high christology of the Johannine Christians. Their separation from the larger ‘parent’ community of faith led to a defensive strengthening of their theological outlook, perhaps, as Brown suggests, to the extent that some members “push[ed] their understanding of the group’s original position beyond the stance that originally brought about the separation.”¹⁹¹ In so doing, these members created internal

¹⁹⁰Brown states, “If the Epistles were written before the Gospel, it would have been an already divided and decimated Johannine community that was struggling with the outsiders when the Gospel was written; and we get no indication of that.” [Brown, Community, 97.] He also writes, “Could that Community, if it had already lost the larger part of its ‘progressive’ members to the world . . . have then survived the traumatic expulsion from the synagogue” [Brown, Epistles, 34.] See also pages 5-6 of this thesis.

¹⁹¹Brown, Epistles, 34-35. See earlier discussion at page 6 of this thesis.

strife leading to a division in the group.¹⁹² Brown's conclusion therefore is that "the Epistles were written after the situation envisaged by the evangelist in the Gospel."¹⁹³

Brown's assertion that a divided Johannine membership could not withstand the force of opposition struck from an outside party appears tenuous when one considers there is no evidence to suggest an alternative claim would not have equal merit. Though Brown suspects it unlikely, it is certainly plausible that, having suffered internal conflict (as evidenced in the Epistles), the Johannine membership looked inward to strengthen itself and affirm its faith. In so doing, it may have further developed its theological teachings, recording them in the text we know to be the Gospel of John. *Indeed, one might even envision that those who 'went out from' the community sought to legitimize themselves in the eyes of their former brethren by producing a Gospel narrative.*

A Natural Progression

It is a fair statement that the infancy of Christianity was not a simplistic development in the sense of there having been only one understanding of the teachings of

¹⁹²This theory is put forth by Raymond Brown in his texts Epistles, 34-35 and Community, 96-97.

¹⁹³Brown, Community, 97.

Jesus and the significance of the events in his life.¹⁹⁴ Rather, in expanding its boundaries and spreading the 'good news', Christianity came into contact with many people of diverse backgrounds and ideologies, leading to a plurality of interpretations from which to view the Christian experience. While this is also true of individual teachings in the emerging Christian movement – that different groups or persons may have held differing ideas and perspectives on the same theological teaching – one may still extrapolate an understanding of the issue which, relative to other ideas of that time, may claim to be dominant. Thus, we may expect that the texts of the New Testament canon do not reveal a strictly unified theological outlook from book to book or even within groupings of texts: rather, they reflect a plurality of theological perspectives with some ideas being more prominent than others. In tracking these ideas in the New Testament corpus we may trace the development of Christian history as it is recorded in its scriptural texts.

The Johannine writings may serve as a microcosm of the plurality of ideas present in Christianity's infancy. Just as Christianity developed and altered its views and teachings, so too did this particular community grow and advance, changing their theology and teachings as necessary. These changes are evident in the writings preserved in the New Testament which are attributed to them, namely the Gospel and Epistles of John.

¹⁹⁴See the earlier discussion in Chapter 2 of this thesis (pages 65-70) concerning the debate between Walter Bauer and H.E.W. Turner regarding the nature of the development of Christian history.

The notion of a natural trajectory of thought, in relation to the Johannine corpus, encompasses a number of areas of Johannine study; most importantly for this inquiry, the christology and eschatology exhibited by the Gospel and Epistles and the audiences and life circumstances which they address.

For the most part, the question of eschatology in the New Testament is a question of the form in which the teaching is expressed; i.e, Did the Christians of that era believe in a final judgement which was to come (future eschatology)? Or, did they accept that their judgement had already passed and they now lived in a new era of righteousness (realized eschatology)? The writings of the New Testament, and indeed the writings of the Johannine literature, exhibit both forms of eschatological teaching.

The eschatological teachings of the Epistles of John betray a sense of longing on the part of the Johannine community for the new life and new age which was promised by Jesus. Passages such as I John 2:17 and 25 highlight the “passing away” of this world and the desire on the part of the community to possess the promised new, eternal life. Other verses speak of a more imminent return of Jesus (I John 2:18) and reflect an urgency within the community, that they are standing on the cusp of the end of the world. While there is a hint of a realized eschatology in the Epistles (I John 3:14), the predominant mode of thought concerning eschatological teachings is futuristic. They speak principally of a future coming of Jesus (I John 2:28) and a future judgement before God (I John 3:2, 4:17).

The eschatological references in the Gospel of John, however, are more decidedly realized than those of the epistolary literature. Remarks made by Jesus about the end of the world and the final judgement are spoken with less of a sense of preparation for these things to come and more of a sense that these things have arrived. At various points in the Gospel Jesus says, “the hour is coming and is now here” (for example, at John 4:23, 5:25 and 16:32), implying that the new kingdom is not to be awaited for but has already come. A more specific reference to the realized eschatology of the Gospel narrative is found at 5:24 when Jesus says, “Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgement, but has passed from death to life.” Here we see most clearly the eschatological understanding of the Gospel’s author: those who believe in Jesus need not fear the judgement of the world for they have already passed into the new life.

Scholars generally agree that in the early days of the Christian movement, immediately after the death of Jesus, Christians looked forward to the imminent victorious return of the glorified Christ, an event often referred to as the *parousia*. However, as much time passed and this *parousia* did not occur, Christians began to adapt their eschatological understanding, moving from an expectation that Jesus would return immediately to an ultimate understanding that the new age promised by Jesus had been

ushered in with his death and resurrection.¹⁹⁵ Thus, Christian understanding of the end of the world moved from a future eschatology to a realized eschatology.

Such a progression is evident in the Johannine literature wherein the epistolary writings of the Johannine community tend to exhibit a future eschatology while the Gospel appears to speak of a realized eschatology. In keeping with the general understanding of biblical scholarship regarding the progression of Christian eschatological teachings, these differences between the two sets of texts are best understood by asserting the priority of the epistolary literature.

In a similar fashion, the christological teachings of the Gospel and Epistles offer very different understandings of the nature of Jesus. The Epistles of John speak at great length of the humanity of Jesus, often making reference to the human faculties; for example, I John 1:7 and I John 5:6a both speak of the blood of Jesus. Moreover, I John

¹⁹⁵"Part of early Christian apocalyptic was the expectation that Jesus would return as Son of Man or Lord to judge the evil and redeem the good. Several New Testament writers used the Greek term *parousia* . . . for the expected return of Jesus. However, months and years passed by and the parousia did not take place. The hope for his return surfaced again with the fall of Jerusalem . . . and when the Christians of Asia Minor felt threatened by persecution . . . Still, Jesus did not return. Much early Christian literature had to come to terms with the 'delay of the parousia.' Broadly speaking, the early Christians took three alternatives. First, the hope was intensified Second, the expectation was maintained but pushed into the more distant future and combined with the attempt to make sense of the extended interim period or present Third, the claim was made that the parousia had already taken place, that the Cross and resurrection of Jesus were the final ("eschatological") events, and that the new life was already being experienced by Christians in the present" Dennis C. Duling and Norman Perrin, The New Testament: Proclamation and Parenthesis, Myth and History 3rd edition (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994), 114.

4:2 and 2 John 7 emphasize that Jesus was human. I John 4:2 states, “By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God”; 2 John 7 reads, “Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who did not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh; any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist!” Such strong language not only bears witness to the human condition of Jesus – that Jesus was, in fact, a human being with a human composition of blood and water – but appears to champion it, referring to those who profess contrary understandings as the antichrist and not being from God.

The christological teachings of the Epistles go beyond a mere appreciation of Jesus as human; rather, they understand that Jesus’ humanity was in fulfilment of another purpose: to offer salvation through his death. In the Epistles, Jesus’ death is not simply a measure of his humanity, but also a measure of our salvation. I John 1:7 writes, “and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin”; I John 2:2 more specifically states, “and he [Jesus] is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.” Other epistolary passages speak of this christological understanding of Jesus as the sacrificial lamb sent to atone for humanity’s transgressions; for example, I John 3:5 (“You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin”), I John 3:16a (“We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us”), and I John 4:10 (“In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins”).

The Gospel of John offers a different and far more advanced christological picture of Jesus. Whereas the Epistles speak of Jesus as the atoning sacrifice for our sins and highlight the human condition of Jesus, the Gospel narrative speaks of Jesus as the divine Son of God sent from the Father, the messiah who will return to the Father above. Unlike the Epistles, the Gospel does not depict a human Jesus in his earthly ministry. Indeed, Jesus is hardly presented in human terms. Whereas the Synoptics tell of Jesus partaking in normal human activities such as eating and expressing emotion, there is only one such human presentation of Jesus in the Gospel of John: John 11:35, "Jesus wept." The Jesus of the Johannine narrative is decidedly more 'otherworldly'. In fact, great effort has been taken in the Gospel to distinguish Jesus from mere humans.¹⁹⁶

In John the Baptist's proclamation of Jesus (John 3:31-36) he sets Jesus apart, declaring him to be "from above" and "above all". He says, "The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about

¹⁹⁶This issue is discussed at great length in Ernst Käsemann's The Testament of Jesus, particularly in Chapter II, 'The Glory of Christ'. Käsemann writes, "In what sense is he [Jesus] flesh, who walks on water and through closed doors, who cannot be captured by his enemies, who at the well of Samaria is tired and desires a drink, yet has no need of drink and has food different from that which his disciples seek? . . . How does this all agree with the understanding of a realistic incarnation? . . . I am not interested in completely denying features of the lowliness of the earthly Jesus in the Fourth Gospel. But do they characterize John's christology in such a manner that through them the 'true man' of later incarnational theology becomes believable? Or do not those features of his lowliness rather represent the absolute minimum of the costume designed for the one who dwelt for a little while among men, appearing to be one of them, yet without himself being subjected to earthly conditions?" Ernst Käsemann, The Testament of Jesus, trans. Gerhard Krodel (London: SCM Press, 1968), 9-10.

earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is above all.” In John 4:31-34 Jesus does not eat even though he is encouraged to do so by the disciples. His response to his followers is that his ministry is his sustenance. At John 5:41 Jesus distinguishes himself from humans by saying, “I do not accept glory from human beings.” And at John 6:5-6 Jesus is depicted as knowing all things (“When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, ‘Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?’ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do”). In this passage, the reader is shown a glimmer of humanity at the outset of this verse when Jesus expresses concern about how to feed the people. Curiously, though, this presentation changes when the text clarifies that Jesus had actually known what he would do.

Other passages of the Gospel reiterate this presentation of Jesus. For example, John 2:24-25 depicts Jesus as being omnipotent; in John 4:25-26, Jesus identifies himself as the messiah; and at John 5:19-23, Jesus refers to himself in the third person as “the Son”, a statement which is not typical of human speech.

At other places in the text Jesus’ humanity is more than downplayed; it is completely overshadowed by his divinity. From the outset of the narrative, the glorification of Jesus forms a strong and lasting current through the course of the story, a central theme woven through the tale.¹⁹⁷ The Gospel’s prologue, with its cosmic setting,

¹⁹⁷“Does the statement ‘The Word became flesh’ really mean more than that he descended into the world of man and there came into contact with earthly existence, so that an encounter with him became possible? Is not this statement totally overshadowed

sets the stage for a primary character and lead figure who will live up to his billing, and the Gospel story does not disappoint. From the litany of titles at the opening of the text (John 1:29-51) to the raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11:41-44) and finally overcoming death himself at his own resurrection (John 20:1-18), the Jesus of the Gospel of John is truly divine. He is not of this world and has come, in his own words, 'from above' ("for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me" [John 6:38]). He is truly the Son of God who has descended from above to do the work of the Father on earth and who will ascend and return to the Father in heaven.

This depiction of Jesus as the descending and ascending Son of God is a far more advanced understanding of Jesus than that presented in the Johannine Epistles where Jesus is more humbly depicted as the sacrificial lamb of humanity. In the Epistles, Jesus' death is the atoning sacrifice for humanity's sins; in the Gospel, Jesus' death and resurrection are the glorification of the one who has come from above.

The community's christological teachings are more abstract and more complex in the Gospel than they are in the Epistles. Placing the Epistles before the final writing of the Gospel shows a progression of thought, a development and an advancement on the part of the community, as reflected in the eschatological and christological teachings

by the confession 'We beheld his glory', so that it receives its meaning from it?" Käsemann, Testament of Jesus, 9-10.

of the community. Moving from a future eschatology to a realized eschatology, from a low christology to a higher christology is simply a more reasonable and natural progression on the part of the Johannine community.

As noted above, the authors of the Johannine Gospel and Epistles are similarly engaged in different conflicts involving their community: the Gospel with outsiders (i.e., “the Jews” and “the world”) and the Epistles with a struggle from within (i.e., “the opponents”). Further, as noted, neither set of texts makes reference to the difficulties depicted in the other text(s), leading one to believe the occurrences were not concurrent but happened in a more consecutive manner, evolving one after the other. That the Epistles are silent on the struggle with the outsiders and make reference to a theology which is more inclusive of the world¹⁹⁸ is a telling sign.

The Gospel of John is very much a text written for its community. The Farewell Discourses, for example, depict Jesus instructing and particularly addressing only his own followers. To accept that the Gospel of John was written before the Johannine Epistles, one must accept that the Johannine community had isolated itself from the world whom it despised and who had rejected them, only to later turn around and develop a theology which was inclusive of this very group. The dualistic images so prominent in Johannine thought and the negative light in which the outsiders are cast in the Gospel are

¹⁹⁸I John 2:2 states, “and he [Jesus Christ] is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”

inconsistent with these later ideas of acceptance. Given the more conciliatory nature of the Johannine Epistles with respect to outsiders, it seems more logical to believe the Epistles reflect an earlier stage in the development of the community.

The Epistles of John reveal a community which was slightly more inclusive of others¹⁹⁹, possessing a theology which believed Jesus' saving death atoned for the sins of the world, not merely redeemed the sins of believers. It is more natural to hypothesize the community may have once held ties with the Jews and with outsiders (as reflected in the circumstances of the Epistles) only to be rejected by them (i.e., the expulsion of the Christians from the synagogues) causing the Johannine membership to close ranks unto itself and become even more isolationist and further removed from the world (as depicted in the Gospel narrative). Under these circumstances, the community would be more likely to entrench its views and become more extreme given that they had been rejected by those with whom they once held ties. This certainly appears to be a more natural progression of events than other theories would suggest.

¹⁹⁹This is not to say that the Johannine community was an inclusive membership. To the contrary, the Johannine community had a large separatist faction; however, it may be argued -- and is herewith suggested -- that at this earlier stage in their history the community held more ties with outside groups. An analogy might be found in Canada today: the Quebec separatists want to leave Canada but are also anxious to keep their ties with Canada and the rest of the world.

CHAPTER FOUR

A Different Horizon

Introduction

A strong case for epistolary priority, as exhibited in the previous chapter, allows the reader of John to use this solid foundation to ask new questions and venture forth in new directions for Johannine research. Two principal questions of interest are: (1) If the Johannine Epistles did precede the Gospel of John, in what ways would our understanding of the Johannine community be affected? and, (2) How is this significant for biblical scholarship? In response to the first inquiry, this new hypothesis allows one to envision a different history for the Johannine community. With respect to the second inquiry, as we shall see, the significance of this hypothesis is that it draws us back into the debate of orthodoxy and heresy in the earliest days of the Christian movement. It is these two questions which form the nuclei of this chapter.

Reconstructing a Different History

The strong case for epistolary priority and the perceptions upon which this hypothesis is constructed bring the reader to a new window offering a different perspective

on the history of the Johannine community. This view is quite different from that typically accepted to be the 'norm' or standard in Johannine research -- as in, for example, the theories of Raymond E. Brown -- and uses as one of its central facets the belief that the Johannine letters were indeed written before the final form of the Gospel of John was produced. It should be noted that any reconstruction of the history of the Johannine community is, by its very nature, merely a theory. History has not afforded researchers many extant remnants of the community -- either in literature or other artifacts -- on which to build an undisputable picture of the Johannine fellowship. Instead, we must base our views of the community and its history on those fragments which history has preserved, the most important being the written words of the community: the Gospel and Epistles of John. Thus, the reconstruction offered herein is a bold and speculative history presented to counterbalance Raymond Brown's equally bold and speculative history. What, then, is this new and unique Johannine history?

a. In the Beginning

The quintessential moment of the Christian experience lies in the crucifixion of Jesus. It is in the death and resurrection of Jesus that Christianity finds its true meaning and its birth. With the death of their founder, the followers of Jesus look to his disciples, who were closest to him, for leadership and guidance. Emerging from among this group

of trusted friends is a figure known to moderns only by his title, the Beloved Disciple. According to the Gospel of John, this Beloved Disciple is the trusted confidant of Jesus and an eyewitness to the events depicted in the narrative: in particular, and most especially, the crucial and formative events in the birth of Christianity – the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. As a measure of his authority, the Gospel tells us that the Beloved Disciple is present during the Farewell Discourses of Jesus when he speaks solely to his disciples to provide them with his final and lasting instructions; the Beloved Disciple accepts from Jesus the responsibility of caring for Mary, assuming the role of ‘son’ as Jesus dies on the cross; and that the Beloved Disciple, with Peter, races to the tomb to discover that Jesus has risen.

Ultimately, a community of believers develops around this figure, and the Beloved Disciple becomes, in effect, the founder of the Johannine community. For this community, the Beloved Disciple assumes many roles. He is more than merely their founder; he is a role model – an example of what it means to be an ideal disciple of Jesus. He is also the guarantor of the community’s traditions and beliefs. The community could accept the (historical) validity of the Christian faith because their leader had been present at these fundamental events and they could accept the practices and beliefs which had grown up around them because the Beloved Disciple proclaimed them as truth. Moreover, because the Beloved Disciple held a special relationship with Jesus (a relationship which

cemented his authority within the community), the community derived its authority from his leadership.

The nature of the Johannine community goes beyond that of a society of believers who accept Jesus to be their messiah. They are a community who record and preserve their particular traditions and beliefs in written texts. In this way the community is more than a society of believers; it is a school which developed a unique theology and perspective and which recorded its beliefs in the written word.²⁰⁰ Among the extant literature which this community or school produced are the texts known to us as the Gospel of John and the First, Second and Third Epistles of John.²⁰¹ As a school, this community likely bore many of the trademarks of other ancient schools including that “teaching, learning, studying, and writing were common activities of the community.”²⁰² It is most probable that while the Beloved Disciple, as founder of the community, would have served as its first and chief teacher, a group of second generation instructors would have been in place to guide the community, preserve its traditions and promulgate its beliefs upon the death of their founder. Indeed, the death of the Beloved Disciple is

²⁰⁰The idea of a Johannine community as a particular school of thought is discussed in chapter 2 of this paper. For further discussion see Culpepper, Johannine School.

²⁰¹Recall, the Book of Revelation, though also attributed to John, is not considered in this study. See Footnote 2 of this paper.

²⁰²Culpepper, Johannine School, 288.

implicit in John 21:23 which reads, “So the rumor spread in the community that this disciple [the Beloved Disciple] would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?” The use of the first person plural ‘we’ in John 21:24 underscores the involvement of a community in the production of these texts and that a communal rather than singular mind stood behind this literature. That many hands may have played a part in scribing and/or editing these texts is evidenced by the similarities and dissimilarities the writings simultaneously bear.²⁰³

This Johannine community likely existed for some time (as John 21:24 indicates with its implication that the text was physically written after the death of the Beloved Disciple²⁰⁴, therefore implying a second generation of followers) and had a long history. As in any group of this nature, the various beliefs, traditions and theologies to which the community held were developed, grew and altered over time. Initially, their stories and traditions were preserved in spoken language, circulating throughout the community in an oral form. It was not until some time later, perhaps with the death of the

²⁰³See discussion in chapter 2 of this paper.

²⁰⁴Although some translate *ὁ γράψας ταῦτα* as “has written them,” it seems more appropriate to translate it as “has caused them to be written.” After all, the historical personage of the Beloved Disciple could not physically write the text of the Gospel if he were dead as John 21:23 implies. Thus, at the very least, this interjection at John 21:24 was added by a later scribe or editor, attesting to the fact the Gospel was, until that point, incomplete.

Beloved Disciple (an event which may have introduced a sense of urgency among the membership to record its traditions), that their stories and beliefs were written down.

The leadership of the community first set out corresponding with other congregations of the Johannine fold. During this time of writing the community finds itself involved in a deep internal conflict. There is much disagreement among the membership concerning such issues as eschatology, christology and ethics. In particular, one segment within the Johannine membership developed its christological teachings further than the remaining Johannine followers. They have placed their emphasis on the divinity of Jesus, downplaying Jesus' humanity. As the struggle continues within the community, so too does its letter writing which bears much evidence of the internal strife plaguing the members, and which becomes, in essence, a campaign for the hearts and minds of members of the Johannine fellowship. The group of Johannine Christians whose christological beliefs were less extreme and who did not emphasize Jesus' divinity take pen in hand and write to their sister churches, arguing against the positions of their opponents (and former brethren) and arguing for unity. Ultimately, the rather divergent beliefs of these two groups -- which cut to the core of the Christian faith -- intensify the dispute and, being unable to resolve their differences, the community becomes divided with many members of the fellowship leaving the Johannine fold. The division of the community is remarked upon in I John 2:19, "They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. But by going out they

made it plain that none of them belongs to us.” This comment not only tells of the split within the community, but gives strong indication of the deep wounds and bitterness left by the conflict. This group of ‘loyal’ Johannine followers has completely disowned their former brethren.

With the dissolution of the Johannine fellowship, the remaining group of Johannine Christians finds itself alone within a sea of multi-religious forces including Judaism, paganism, gnosticism, as well as other forms of Christianity. As their beliefs are more balanced and largely more in keeping with the views of other Christian churches, this remnant band of followers of the Beloved Disciple flows into and merges with the wider Christian congregations who derive their authority and apostolic tradition from Peter. As they enter the mainstream Christian family, the Johannine Christians bring with them an oral narrative of their traditions and stories, the ‘Johannine tradition’.

Meanwhile, the seceding group of the Johannine membership, whose higher christology brought them to separation from the community (a group whom scholars refer to as the ‘secessionists’), retained their distinctive christological beliefs. Devoid of the moderating voice of their former Johannine brothers, they developed their views further to become fully docetic and finally gnostic. This is the logical end to their thought progression – that they would move from emphasizing Jesus’ divinity and downplaying his humanity, to believing Jesus to hold merely the appearance of being human, to accepting Jesus as being fully and only divine, a process which finds the secessionists at

home first in the world of docetism and then in the realm of gnosticism. During the course of their movement away from the Johannine fold and their progression toward docetism and gnosticism, the secessionists' higher christology brings them into conflict with other groups who had earlier been more tolerant of their views, groups which included the Jews. Staunchly adamant about their beliefs on the nature of Jesus, the secessionists are eventually expelled from the synagogues and no longer welcomed by Judaism, an external conflict which is revealed in the Gospel narrative.

This seceding group of Johannine followers also records their experiences; however, it is this form of Johannine Christianity which ultimately finds its way into the written form of the Gospel of John. *It is these secessionists which produce the final form of the written text of the Johannine Gospel* and it is their brand of Johannine Christianity which demarcates the narrative text. Whereas both the secessionists and the remaining group of Johannine followers accepted an oral tradition of the Gospel narrative, it was only in the hands of the secessionists that the final form of the Gospel was recorded and penned. As a means of legitimizing themselves, the secessionists highlight and emphasize the importance of their founder, the Beloved Disciple, when writing the Gospel. It is they who stress his authority, who emphasize the parallels between the relationship of the Disciple to Jesus and the relationship Jesus held with the Father, and who recognize the Disciple -- and implicitly his followers -- as the true successor of Jesus.

It is typically believed among scholars that a unified Johannine community produced the Gospel of John and used the motif of the Beloved Disciple to seek legitimization for their form of the Christian tradition by equating the Disciple with Peter, the head of the mainstream Christian churches; by exemplifying the idealized nature of the Disciple as a true follower of Jesus; and by exhibiting the authority of the Disciple as an eyewitness to the principal events of the Christian experience, as a confidant of Jesus who is charged by him to lead and care for the church, and as one who can guarantee and validate the traditions of their membership. However, in accepting that the final form of the Gospel was recorded by the secessionists, a new light breaks upon old understandings. In using the Beloved Disciple motif as a means of legitimization, the secessionists are not merely positioning themselves against the mainstream Christian churches; rather, they are positioning themselves against their former brothers who have now aligned themselves with and joined the larger Christian fold, a group which may be referred to as the Johannine-Petrine Christians for they include Christians having both a Johannine and Petrine apostolic tradition as their background. Thus, the 'world' which did not recognize Jesus and does not recognize them has now come to include their own disowned brethren.

b. Addressing Outstanding Issues

The hypothesis that the Epistles of John were written before the final form of the Gospel of John and the above reconstruction of the history of the Johannine community based on this hypothesis is indeed quite radically different from typically accepted theories. However, it does do much to explain a variety of questions in Johannine scholarship. For example, if the Epistles were written after the Gospel (as most scholars contend), then why are the letters silent about the conflict with the Jews? One would expect that such a cornerstone event as the expulsion of the Christians from the Jewish synagogues would, at the very least, be mentioned in the Johannine letters and that some residue from this external conflict would be evident. None exists. However, if one accepts that the Epistles precede the Gospel in chronological priority, then the answer to this question is quite clear: there is no mention of an external conflict with the Jews because this has not yet occurred.

In a similar fashion, it may be asked why the Gospel, if written after the Epistles, does not make mention of the internal conflict within the Johannine community? According to the analysis of Fernando Segovia, internal debates concerning christology and ethics are central to the Farewell Discourses of John 15:1-17.²⁰⁵ These concerns, which are shared in I John, lead Segovia to believe that the Discourse and Epistle share

²⁰⁵See above, pages 13-15.

a common *Sitz im Leben*.²⁰⁶ Thus, by Segovia's analysis, the internal conflicts of the Johannine community are evident in the final form of the Gospel. However, in placing the chronology of the Epistles prior to that of the Gospel narrative, and noting that the Epistles and Discourse share common circumstances of writing, one must place the writing of the Discourse unit in an earlier time frame with the Epistles. Thus, this unit of the Farewell Discourses was a later addition to the Gospel, thereby testifying that, to that point, the Gospel of John was unfinished.

Further, one may envision that by the time the Gospel was recorded the secessionists would have united among themselves and would have had a more immediate conflict to contend with, namely their expulsion from the synagogues. But they did not simply ignore their earlier struggle to attend to a more recent one. Rather, in asserting their authority within the wider Christian context and seeking some form of legitimization from the mainstream Christian congregations, the secessionists are taking issue with their former community members and affirming their equal stature and authority.

Another issue frequently raised in Johannine scholarship is why the Gospel of John was used by both gnostic leaders and 'orthodox' Christian writers and leaders of the time? The theory put forth above contends that an oral tradition of the Gospel narrative pre-existed the written form of the text and circulated within the community

²⁰⁶Segovia, "Theology and Provenance," 126-128. See the earlier discussion in Chapter 1 of this thesis, pages 13-15.

before its dissolution. Thus, both the secessionists and those who would later join mainstream Christianity knew of this oral form of the Gospel. Indeed, those Johannine Christians who later merged with the churches of the Petrine apostolic tradition carried with them this oral form of the Gospel and introduced these stories into the mainstream Christian practices. As the theologies and christology of the Johannine Christians gained acceptance in the larger Christian communities, so too did their stories. Therefore, although the secessionists actually recorded the text of the Gospel narrative, both sides were aware of the traditions, stories and beliefs embodied in the Gospel story and both sides would have been accepting of its word. Simply put, the Gospel of John gained acceptance in both camps because both parties knew its traditions and accepted their validity.

A related question is why the Gospel of John “is cited earlier and more frequently by heterodox writers than by orthodox writers.”²⁰⁷ Raymond Brown attributes this to differing paces of progression between the secessionists and the Johannine Christians who entered the larger Christian fold. Brown believes that the secessionists probably moved in their natural disposition toward docetism and gnosticism at a faster pace than the other Johannine followers whose acceptance into the larger Christian church, he believes, would have been more gradual.²⁰⁸ This is certainly possible; however, it also

²⁰⁷Brown, Community, 24.

²⁰⁸Brown, Community, 24.

stands to reason that if the secessionists actually physically wrote and recorded the Gospel text, then it would only be natural that their followers and those with whom they associated and shared common beliefs would be the first to employ this text. Thus, since the secessionists had the written form of the Gospel before the mainstream Christian churches, they would have been the first to make use of it. As well, some of the more unique characteristics of the Gospel of John, such as its high christology, would likely have been more palatable and easier to accept among the secessionists and related 'heterodox' congregations than to mainstream Christian leaders.

Finally, granting chronological priority to the epistolary writings does much toward expressing a more logical progression of thought in the development of the Johannine community. It is simply more reasonable to accept that a group of believers who so carefully constructed a unique theology and who created such well-structured written texts as those represented in the Johannine corpus would move from a more natural progression of low christology to higher christology, from future eschatology to realized eschatology. It is simply easier to accept that their development would move in a progressive rather than a regressive manner. If one accepts the chronology presented in this hypothesis, then the theology of the Johannine followers moves in a more natural order from lower to higher, from concrete interpretations to more abstract understandings.

Looking Upon a Different Horizon

It is a fair statement in critical analysis that the question determines the answer. However, it is an equally fair statement that the answers that are deduced initiate new and different questions. Questions lead to answers; answers lead to questions. Yet this should not be looked upon as a 'vicious little circle', but more as a spiral, for with each kernel of knowledge that we attain from our inquiries, we gain a new understanding, a new perspective which allows us to envision new questions. Knowledge reaps two rewards: it changes our horizon and allows us to spiral into new areas of thought.

This certainly is true of this inquiry. In questioning the chronological priority of the Johannine literature, this thesis has presented a strong case for the priority of the epistolary writings. Evidence in favour of the priority of the Epistles leads one to question how this different interpretation affects the theorized history of the Johannine community. This question has been answered with a hypothesis of the community's history and development which is a departure from accepted theorized norms. And so this new hypothesis leads us to another new horizon and another new question: How is this understanding of the Gospel of John as originating from outside mainstream Christianity significant for our understanding of earliest Christianity?

In establishing the chronological priority of the Johannine literature, we have achieved a more accurate picture of the history of the Johannine community,

particularly with respect to the development of its theology and the progression of its thought and ideas. A more precise knowledge of the community's history is significant for biblical scholarship in that it enables scholars to construct a more exact history of Christianity's origins. As noted at the outset of this examination, the Johannine writings contain many unique and peculiar characteristics which become magnified when placed in contrast to other canonical writings, particularly the Synoptic Gospels. To be able to place this individual church with its independence of thought and theology within the context of Christianity's development assists in giving a more complete perspective to the emergence of a diverse and variegated Christian movement. In unraveling the development of the Johannine community through an investigation and chronological ordering of its writings, we unfold the development of Christianity through the placement of the Johannine texts within the emerging Christian canon. How, then, does the Johannine literature fit into the larger context of early Christian history?

As discussed earlier²⁰⁹, the debate over the orthodox/heterodox origins of Christianity initiated by Walter Bauer and H.E.W. Turner continues in many scholarly circles. In asserting the diversity of Christian origins, Bauer contradicted the Eusebian view of Christian history; in defending his idea of the *lex orandi* and fixed and flexible elements of the Christian faith, Turner sought to correct Bauer's theory. If their studies reveal anything it is that Christian origins were by no means static. Christianity was a

²⁰⁹For further discussion, see chapter 2 of this thesis, pages 65-70.

movement -- dynamic, changing, evolving and progressing as it grew. So too did its theology and philosophy develop over time. Thus, if we can accept as a modern readership that Christian origins were dynamic, then we can accept that some amount of fluctuation may have occurred with respect to what were the accepted norms of early Christian beliefs; and if we accept fluctuations in the accepted norms of faith, then we can move from this point of departure to accept that a text which may have originated outside mainstream Christian circles -- outside the accepted norms of one particular place and time in Christian history -- would later gain acceptance within the mainstream movement to become a standard text for the faithful.

Our inquiry has lead us to embrace such a possible trajectory of thought with respect to the Johannine literature. From our understanding of the chronology of the Johannine writings (that the epistolary texts bear the mark of priority) we have offered a new and different reconstruction of the history of the Johannine community, a history which allows us to hypothesize that perhaps the Gospel of John originated as a heretical document, that the Gospel text began its journey into the canon of the New Testament from a position and heritage which history would deem heterodox. That the Gospel of John began its course as a heretical Gospel is precisely the position of Walter Bauer, although he thinks that I John, written after the Gospel, rehabilitated it for orthodoxy.²¹⁰

²¹⁰Bauer, Orthodoxy & Heresy, 228.

This understanding of the origins of the Gospel of John is in keeping with the views of Ernst Käsemann. In his now famous lecture "Ketzer und Zeuge. Zum johanneischen Verfasserproblem."²¹¹ Käsemann applies the discussion of orthodoxy and heresy in Christianity's beginnings to his discussion of the Johannine literature. Käsemann begins by assuming that the Gospel and Third Epistle were written by the same author such that what may be said of one text may also be said of the other. He thus focuses his attention on the Third Epistle of John, arguing that the Diotrophes of 3 John 9 is not a dissident or rebel as was typically accepted. In Käsemann's view, Diotrophes is not the troublemaker who clashes with the hierarchy of the congregation. Rather, Käsemann asserts that those whom Diotrophes expelled from the congregation (3 John 10) were actually excommunicated and that Diotrophes, therefore, must have been a person of authority and prominence. Thus, Käsemann envisions a church under the leadership, authority and control of Diotrophes.

The Third Epistle of John reveals a marked division of positions between the author of the Epistles and Diotrophes. It appears one area of dispute lay in the fact that Diotrophes refuses to acknowledge the authority of the author (3 John 9b). This, Käsemann suggests, is evidence that the author of the Epistle is an outsider to the congregation. Thus, if the author of the Epistles is considered to be an outsider to the

²¹¹Käsemann, "Ketzer und Zeuge," 292-311.

community – i.e., a heretic – then other literary expressions of this same author must also be considered heretical, namely the Gospel of John.

Käsemann's views have completely inverted the traditional understanding of the origins of the Johannine literature. It was traditionally accepted that the writings attributed to John must have had a heritage of apostolic origins and have been written by a person of authority within the church, an assumption which is most often used to explain why these writings have been preserved. Käsemann's assertions reverse this traditional belief. In showing that the author of the Epistle – and by implication of the Gospel – was an outsider to the community, Käsemann most decidedly finds the origins of the Johannine literature outside the mainstream Christian movement.

Käsemann is quite clear on this point. In his text, The Testament of Jesus, Käsemann discusses this at great length, building on his earlier observations and assertions. He speaks of the Gospel narrative as exhibiting a "naïve docetism"²¹², a process of thought which he believes is a danger unrecognized by either the community or, indeed, by the author of the narrative.²¹³ He exerts a view which staunchly places the Gospel of John on the periphery of the Church, repeatedly reiterating his point through the course of his text. He boldly writes,

²¹²Käsemann, Testament of Jesus, 26.

²¹³Käsemann, Testament of Jesus, 26.

If it [the historical situation in which the Gospel was written] more or less clearly presupposes the conditions and trends at the end of the first century . . . then the Gospel would fit best into a side tributary apart from the general stream yet connected with it Does the key to the problem of the seeming lack of a historical context and of the other-worldly quality of this Gospel . . . actually lie in the explanation that the Fourth Gospel did not grow up within the realm of the Church known to us through the New Testament . . . ? If the Fourth Gospel fits least well into this development [of the New Testament canon] and is first discovered by the gnostics, then the reason for this may be that John is the relic of a Christian conventicle existing on, or being pushed to, the Church's periphery.²¹⁴

Moreover, Käsemann declares that in receiving the Gospel of John into the canon, mainstream Christianity has made a judgement not on the Johannine community but on the validity of the Johannine texts. Unwittingly, the mainstream Church has inducted a text which bears witness to the diversity of the Christian faith thereby acknowledging the dynamic nature of Christianity's past.²¹⁵ He writes,

The reception of the Fourth Gospel into the canon is but the most lucid and most significant example of the integration of originally opposing ideas and traditions into the ecclesiastical tradition By affirming the canon we also acknowledge its divergent trends and even its contradictions.²¹⁶

²¹⁴Käsemann, Testament of Jesus, 39.

²¹⁵"Sectarians also participated in the formation of the early Catholic Church and they were more influential than orthodoxy was at any time willing to admit. Admission to the canon means the acknowledgment of a writing, not of the atmosphere and environment in which it grew up." Käsemann, Testament of Jesus, 40.

²¹⁶Käsemann, Testament of Jesus, 76.

Käsemann concludes with a strong proclamation of his ideas and beliefs:

“From the historical viewpoint, the Church committed an error when it declared the Gospel to be orthodox.”²¹⁷

The views cultivated in this thesis understand the origins of the Johannine literature in a different manner from Ernst Käsemann and, indeed, from most other readers of the Johannine texts. While the end result of this inquiry is in keeping with Käsemann’s ideas -- namely, that both see the Gospel of John as having heterodox origins -- the means by which such conclusions are reached are quite different. This thesis has shown that much evidence exists to support the notion that the Epistles of John were written before the final form of the Gospel of John. While such a position goes against the grain of much of modern Johannine scholarship, it presents us with a window through which to see other horizons and perspectives.

In asserting epistolary priority -- a position which is not held by the majority of Johannine scholars -- this thesis leads the reader to see that new territory awaits those who are daring enough to venture forth. This thesis boldly goes where few have gone before in proposing a different, more speculative and perhaps more radical history for the Johannine community. It is a thesis which is primarily a contribution to Rudolf Bultmann’s first ‘great riddle’, “the riddle of where John’s Gospel stands in

²¹⁷Käsemann, Testament of Jesus, 76.

relation to the development of early Christianity”²¹⁸; however, it also holds implications for our understanding of the christology of John. In taking the premise of the priority of the Johannine Epistles and using it as a building block to construct a different history of the Johannine community, this thesis has uncovered a heterodox origin for the Gospel of John; heterodox in both where it places the origins of the Gospel -- outside mainstream Christianity -- and in its assertion of these origins, an assertion which is not typically accepted among Johannine researchers. In so doing, this thesis aligns itself with the views of Walter Bauer and Ernst Käsemann who also believe the Gospel of John began its course into the canon of the New Testament from a place which history would not deem orthodox. In this way, the theory presented herein has suggested a wider context for the discussion of a resolution to Bultmann’s riddle, and a new horizon from which to view the whole complex of issues which constitute the Johannine enigma.

²¹⁸Rudolf Bultmann, “Die Bedeutung der neuerschlossenen mandäischen und manichäischen Quellen für das Verständnis des Johannesevangeliums,” *ZNW* 24 (1925): 100-146. Translation taken from Ashton, ed., *Interpretation*, 1-2.

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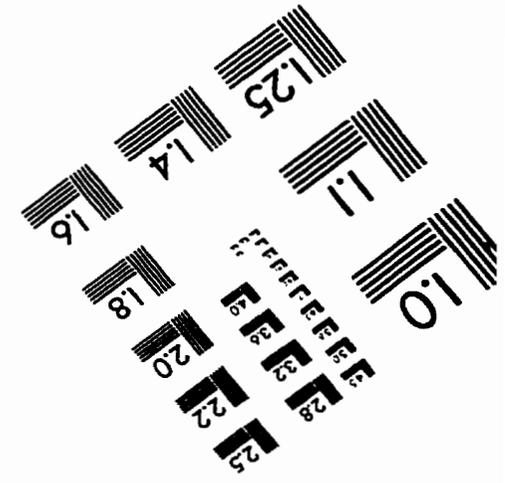
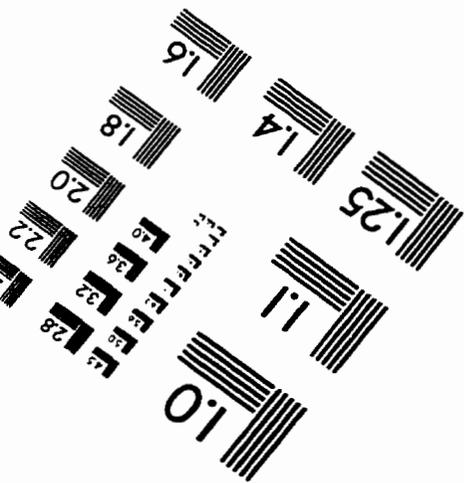
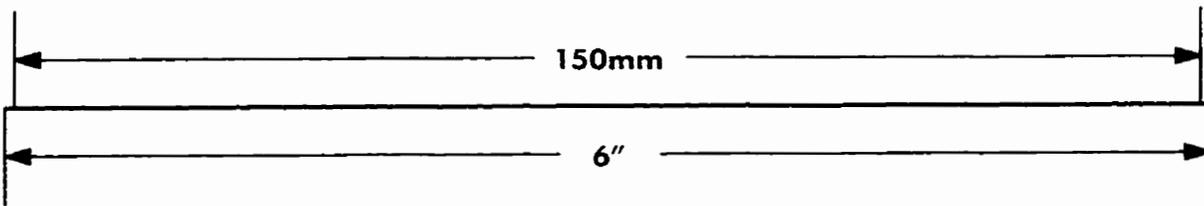
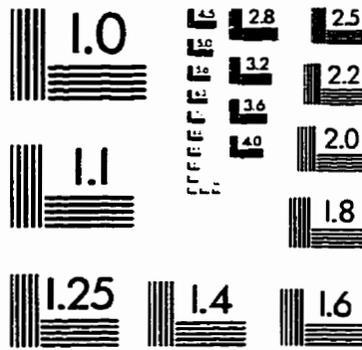
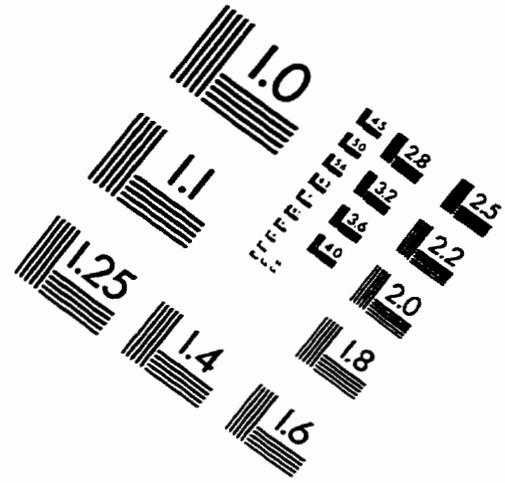
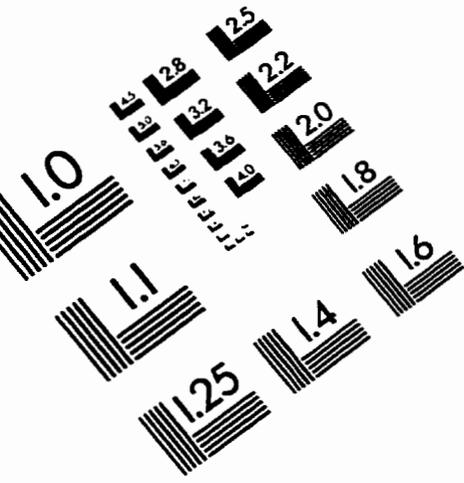
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