THE ART OF HERMES:
I JOHN'S DEFENCE OF THE JOHANNINE TRADITION

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I John's Defence of the Johannine Tradition

by

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A thesis submitted to the

School of Graduate Studies

in partial fulfillment of the

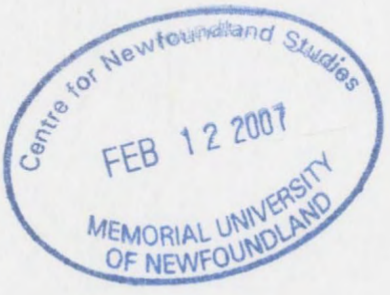
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Religious Studies
Memorial University of Newfoundland

February 2005

St. John's Newfoundland



ABSTRACT

The uniqueness of the Fourth Gospel has prompted questions concerning the tradition from which it emerged. Is the Johannine Gospel a heterodox construction that was mistakenly accepted by the Church or can its tradition be interpreted as fitting into mainstream, orthodox Christianity? The purpose of this thesis is to show how the First Epistle (I John) answers this question through its interpretation of the Johannine tradition.

Taking an historical-critical approach, the thesis examines scholarship regarding the alleged heterodox nature of the Johannine tradition, beginning with the divergent perspectives of Ernst Käsemann and Raymond Brown. This discussion is set within the general framework of the so-called orthodoxy/heterodoxy debate which was initiated by Walter Bauer. It is argued that H.E.W. Turner, who takes issue with Bauer, has a much more fruitful theory concerning Christian origins, and that his ideas are very illuminating when looking at the general context for the discussion of the heterodox nature of the Fourth Gospel.

The thesis focuses on Raymond Brown's reconstruction of the history of the Johannine tradition. In particular, attention is given to Brown's reconstruction of the Johannine schism and his understanding of the hermeneutical function of I John relative to the Johannine tradition. The perspectives of both Brown and Käsemann are then brought into dialogue. It is argued that Brown makes a more convincing case than Käsemann, especially when considered against the background of Turner and the orthodoxy/heterodoxy debate. The Fourth Gospel is not in the canon "by accident", as Käsemann affirmed, but rather because, when perceived through the interpretative lens of I John, it can be seen as presenting an interpretation of the Christian faith which stands firmly within the tradition of mainstream Christianity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank my advisor, Dr. David Hawkin, for his guidance in navigating the deep waters of Johannine scholarship. The integrity and depth of his scholarship has been a valuable resource. I am particularly grateful for his patience and encouragement as I sought to complete this thesis around the demands of a full time vocation.

Gratitude must also be extended to my colleagues and students at The Salvation Army College For Officer Training, who have supported and encouraged me in many ways throughout this endeavor. Their generosity, especially demonstrated by allowing a degree of flexibility in my use of time, has helped to bring this project to a conclusion.

Finally, heartfelt thanks must be expressed to my family and friends, especially Dad, who have listened sensitively and have understood the discipline required to complete this task. Their love and understanding have allowed me to make this journey in my professional development with grace.

Quotations from the Biblical text are taken from the New International Version of the Bible.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Both the spoken and written word are open to interpretation by those who hear or read them. Whether or not that interpretation is, in fact, an accurate reflection of the meaning intended by an author[1] will be affected by factors such as the interpreter's familiarity with the author's way of thinking and any personal agenda the interpreter may bring to the task of interpretation. Twenty-first century western culture is quite familiar with the work of "spin doctors" whose skill with language can be used to re-define medical errors as "adverse incidents" or represent a political statement as either a gross blunder or a courageous act, depending on the point of view for which support is being sought.

In his book, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative*, Frank Kermode reflects on the philological origin of the word "hermeneutics" by drawing attention to both its power and its pitfalls. He observes,

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[1] That the intention of the author should be determinative of all subsequent meaning has been conventional wisdom in biblical studies for two centuries. In recent times, however, this view has been challenged. As Christopher Rowland and Mark Corner, *Liberating Exegesis: The Challenge of Liberation Theology to Biblical Studies,* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), p. 36, say: "There is a deep divide among contemporary interpreters of Scripture. On the one hand there are those who think that the original meaning of the text is not only retrievable but also clearly recognizable, and that it should be the criterion by which all interpretations should be judged. On the other hand there are those who argue either that the quest for the original meaning of the text is a waste of time or that, even if it is possible to ascertain what the original author intended, this should not be determinative of the way in which we read the text." The methodology of this thesis is historical critical, and makes the assumption that one should begin with the intention of the author. For the classic defence of this position, see E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).

> The god Hermes is the patron saint of thieves, merchants, and travellers; of heralds and what heralds pronounce, their *kerygma*. . . . Hermes is cunning, and occasionally violent: a trickster, a robber. So it is not surprising that he is also the patron of interpreters. Sometimes they proclaim an evident sense, like a herald; but they also use cunning, and may claim the right to be violent, and glory in it. The rules of their art, and its philosophy, are called "hermeneutics."[2]

Kermode is calling our attention to an important fact: the art of interpretation is, at the very least, a slippery art. Disagreements over the meaning of texts lie at the very heart of the hermeneutical enterprise. Nowhere is this more evident than when interpreting the Christian Scriptures, and there is no better example than the Gospel of John.

It is generally agreed that the inclusion of the Gospel of John into the canon of the New Testament was a matter of some debate in the early church. Its significant differences from the tradition reflected in the Synoptic Gospels coupled with its widespread use by heterodox Christians caused the orthodoxy of its content to be disputed. The Gospel was ultimately deemed acceptable at the end of the second century C.E. This acceptance did not completely silence the "canon question," however, and in the modern era scholars such as Ernst Käsemann have re-introduced it. In his influential study, *The Testament of Jesus*, Käsemann offers the considered opinion that "From a historical viewpoint, the Church committed an error when it declared the Gospel [of John] to be orthodox."[3] If, as will be demonstrated, there are grounds for excluding the Fourth Gospel from the canon, how did it come to be included? What specific and deliberate factors are involved in its acceptance into the canon? What were the

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[2] Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979), 1.

[3] Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus,* trans. Gerhard Krodel (London: SCM Press, 1968), 76.

conditions in existence prior to the establishment of the New Testament canon that intentionally facilitated the acceptance of the Fourth Gospel as both orthodox and canonical?

In *The Community of the Beloved Disciple,* Raymond Brown suggests that this Gospel, and the tradition it represents, was preserved for the Church through the hermeneutical skill of the author of I John. He sees this epistle as a demonstration that there is an orthodox way to read the Gospel.[4] Given the previous discussion about the nature of hermeneutics, the question is therefore raised: Is I John's interpretation of the Johannine tradition a valid interpretation arrived at by an "insider"[5] or is it an eloquent piece of trickery? Has the first Epistle misled the Church into accepting the Gospel into the canon, or has it served to demonstrate the Gospel's orthodoxy? It is the aim of this study to show how I John's interpretation of the Fourth Gospel defends the orthodoxy of the Johannine tradition, and how this defence fits into the developmental scheme of Christian history as enunciated by H.E.W. Turner.

The discussion of the validity of I John's interpretation of the Johannine tradition can not take place in a vacuum, however. In order to explore the ramifications of this thesis the present study will seek to elaborate upon Brown's theory of the hermeneutical function of I John with reference to three factors: Turner's concept of fixed and flexible elements in the definition of orthodoxy, Brown's reconstruction of the schism within the Johannine community, and an exploration of how he sees I John as providing a

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[4] Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple. The Life, Loves, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 135.

[5] Kermode, 3.

hermeneutical defence of the Johannine tradition. Throughout, the work of Käsemann will serve in a sense as a foil representing, as he does, a significantly different viewpoint from Brown.

Working from Turner's concept of fixed and flexible elements, parameters that allow for the legitimate inclusion of a variety of expressions of Christian belief within orthodoxy will be established. This opens up the possibility for acceptance of a Gospel that appears to be derived from a tradition significantly different from the Synoptic tradition into the canon.

With the recognition that apparently divergent traditions were eventually incorporated into the notion of "orthodoxy", discussion will focus on specific issues related to the orthodoxy of the Johannine tradition as defended by I John. Following the historical-critical method, and taking Brown's reconstruction of the Johannine community as a starting point, the nature of the schism within the community will be examined, with reference to Brown's assertion that I John successfully defends the inclusion of the Johannine tradition within the "Greater Church."

The discussion will be situated within the context of the art of hermeneutics. As previously noted, Frank Kermode has suggested that, by virtue of its association with the multifaceted Hermes, the art of interpretation may involve an aspect of cunning or trickery, and so the question will be asked as to how this may apply to the Epistle's interpretation of the Johannine Gospel tradition. The resulting discussion will assist in determining whether Brown's point is sound or whether the Church has been misled by I John and Käsemann is, in fact, correct.

Following the pattern set by the Gospel and First Epistle, this study will begin at the beginning. This beginning is located in the uniqueness of the Fourth Gospel in relation to those of the Synoptic tradition and the place that was occupied by the Johannine tradition in earliest Christianity.

CHAPTER 1

THE JOHANNINE TRADITION AND EARLY CHRISTIANITY

The Synoptic Tradition and the Johannine Tradition

The traditions represented by the four canonical gospels find their genesis in the life and teachings of Jesus and in the recollections of his followers. One might, therefore, expect that there would be numerous and significant similarities in their accounts about Jesus. Yet while even a cursory reading of the texts shows remarkable, sometimes verbatim, agreement between the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, the Gospel of John evidences a startling amount of variance from the other three. These variances include but are not limited to what is recorded concerning the content of Jesus' teaching, the itinerary of his movements throughout Palestine, and the duration of his teaching ministry. Agreement between the four is confined to some of the larger issues concerning Jesus' identity, his engagement in teaching activity, his performance of miraculous deeds (which John prefers to call σημεια, or 'signs'), and the facts of his passion and resurrection, the details of which vary from Gospel to Gospel. This indicates that there is a significantly different approach to the Christian kerygma between the Synoptic tradition as expressed in the first three gospels and the Johannine tradition as found in the Fourth Gospel.

The presence of such variety in the presentation of the Christian kerygma may be taken as a form of mutual enrichment among the traditions. Each gospel records specific points of the story of Jesus, providing additional dimensions to the others. The existence of such variety, however, may also have a negative effect leading to the questioning and even rejection of the apparently dissenting voice so that its very uniqueness may be used as a basis from which to argue against its acceptance in the canon of Christian scripture.

> In all probability the problem of John and the Synoptics lurks somewhere behind the emergence of the Fourth Gospel on the stage of church history. The evidence is less than explicit, but there was during the second century a kind of reticence or obscurity about the Fourth Gospel. We cannot be sure that this reticence was due to John's differences from the Synoptics. Certainly such differences were not the sole factor affecting the acceptance of the Fourth Gospel in the church. On the other hand, it is clear that serious questions about the relationship were raised, so that answers had to be given, and the problem of John and the Synoptics was perceived as such by the end of the second century.[6]

While its dissimilarity to the Synoptic Gospels may be one factor leading to the questioning of its suitability for inclusion in the canon, Smith is quick to comment that a closer look must be taken at the way in which the Fourth Gospel was used in the early church. Specifically, he suggests that there may have been considerable discomfort within the church concerning this Gospel "because it was popular and widely used among gnostic Christians and others deemed heretical."[7] It is on this issue of the essential orthodoxy of the Johannine tradition as expressed in the Fourth Gospel that the

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[6] D. Moody Smith, *John Among the Gospels. The Relationship in Twentieth Century Research* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 6.

[7] Ibid., 7.

present discussion will focus, with specific reference to the question of the Gospel's canonicity.

The Johannine Tradition in Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy

Numerous studies have referenced the employment of the Gospel of John by both orthodox and heterodox Christians in the earliest centuries of Christianity. It must, however, be noted that orthodox writers appear to have made little explicit use of the Gospel until well into the second century. While concepts and language that echo the Gospel have been identified in the writings of Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch it is difficult to determine whether this reflects their exposure to and acceptance of the Gospel as an authoritative document, or simply an awareness of the Johannine tradition. This leads scholars to acknowledge that the arguments attributing references to the Fourth Gospel to such early Christian documents are inconclusive.[8] J. L. Houlden comments that the Gospel "was uniformly neglected until near the end of the [second] century by the pillars of main-stream Christianity, even by some who might have been expected to be glad to use it in their writings - in particular, Papias, Polycarp and Justin."[9] The earliest

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[8] Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, The Anchor Bible, 29 (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1966), lxxxi.

[9] J. L. Houlden, *A Commentary on the Johannine Epistles* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1973), 11.

undisputed citation from the Gospel by an orthodox writer occurs rather late in the second century in the *Apology to Autolycus* of Theophilus of Antioch, dated c. 181.[10]

It has been observed that some segments of the Church recognized the Gospel more readily than others and that Roman Christianity does not seem to have formally accepted it until the establishment of the Muratorian Canon early in the third century. This is balanced by evidence that some Western theologians, including Irenaeus, valued the authority of the Gospel from about 180 C.E.[11] This, however, reinforces Houlden's concept that the Gospel was treated with reticence by orthodox Christians until rather late in the second century.

In contrast, it can be demonstrated that heterodox Christianity appears to have made significant appeal to the authority of the Fourth Gospel. Montanism, with its emphasis on prophetic activity, particularly favoured the Johannine writings, making considerable reference to both the Apocalypse and to Gospel's teaching concerning the Paraclete.[12] Its encouragement of female prophets may also be a reflection of the Fourth Gospel's portrayal of women as proclaimers of revealed truth.[13] Yet the Montanist controversy can be understood as an inter-church disagreement, with some debate as to whether it was a heresy or a schism, and has been described as "rather a heresy in

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[10] D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 26.

[11] Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity,* trans. and ed. Robert A. Kraft and Gerhard Krodel (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1971), 208.

[12] H.E.W. Turner, *The Pattern of Christian Truth* (London: A. R. Mowbray and Co. Ltd. 1954), 125.

[13] Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John,* The Anchor Bible, 30 (New York: Doubleday, 1982), 105.

perspective than in substance."[14]. While its frequent appeals to the Johannine tradition are somewhat problematic when considering the orthodoxy of that tradition, a more serious factor is the use made of the Fourth Gospel by Gnostic Christianity.

There is a significant history of gnostic appeals to the authority of the Fourth Gospel. As an in-depth examination of gnosticism's use of the Gospel falls outside the parameters of this study, three examples will serve as demonstrations of its pervasive use by that movement. Based upon the witness of Hyppolytus in his *Refutation of Heresies* (vii.22.4), it is generally agreed that the earliest documented direct quotation from the Gospel, in any written source, is found in the work of the gnostic Basilides, c. 130 C.E.[15] Martin Hengel, referencing the work of Werner Foerster, enumerates the instances of references to the Gospel in gnostic literature at 104, thus demonstrating that it was a preferred authority among them.[16] The earliest known commentary on the Gospel was produced by Heracleon, a student of Valentinus, c. 160-180 C.E.[17] The attention to the Gospel illustrated by these examples indicates something of its importance within early gnosticism.

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[14] Turner, 125, 132.

[15] Carson, 24.

[16] Martin Hengel, *The Johannine Question,* trans. John Bowden (London: S.C.M. Press Ltd., 1989), 9f. It should be noted, however, that the Gospel of Matthew is also cited frequently in gnostic literature. Foerster identifies 102 incidences of citation, only 2 less than John, but considerably more than Mark (6) or Luke (32).

[17] G. S. Sloyan, "The Gnostic Adoption of John's Gospel and Its Canonization by the Catholic Church," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 26, no. 5 (1996): 125.

Käsemann's Conclusion

The connections between gnosticism and the Gospel of John strongly influenced Ernst Käsemann in his estimate of the Gospel's orthodoxy. While he acknowledges the difficulty in determining whether the Gospel derived from Christian gnosticism or contributed to its development,[18] he nevertheless sees the presence of material that is easily identified as reflective of gnostic thinking to be problematic for the acceptance of its orthodoxy.

> If historically the Gospel reflects that development which led from the enthusiasts of Corinth and of II Tim. 2.18 to Christian gnosticism, then its acceptance into the Church's canon took place through man's error and God's providence. Against all its own intentions, and misled by the picture of Jesus as God walking on the face of the earth, the Church assigned to the apostles the voice of those whom it otherwise ignored, and one generation later condemned as heretics.[19]

In Käsemann's considered opinion, then, the inclusion of the Gospel of John in the New Testament canon was an error based on misinformation. He suggests that the church had lost a sense of the original intent of the Gospel and "could no longer localize what had originated apart from or had run against the current of the broad stream which led to early Catholicism."[20] For him, the canon represents a number of divergent perspectives that can not be systematized into a single, harmonious theology and inclusion in which can not be taken to imply equal authority for all documents placed

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[18] Käsemann, 66 and 73.

[19] Ibid., 75.

[20] Ibid., 76.

therein. In the matter of the authority that may be attributed to the Fourth Gospel he emphatically states that

> [t]he inclusion of this book in the canon does not answer the question once and for all, especially since the Fourth Gospel itself has no conception of closed revelation, but rather advocates, even against itself, the ongoing operation of the Spirit's witness. From the historical viewpoint, the Church committed an error when it declared the Gospel to be orthodox.[21]

This statement of Käsemann raises the question of how the concepts or orthodoxy and heterodoxy are to be understood. How are they best defined? Before further discussion of the orthodoxy of the Johannine tradition as expressed in the Fourth Gospel can proceed, it is necessary to attempt an examination of these two key concepts.

The Classical Theory Concerning Orthodoxy and Heresy

According to the ecclesiastical or "classical" theory, the development of heterodox movements follows the basic pattern of unbelief, right belief and deviations into wrong belief.[22] Initially individuals were in a mindset of unbelief regarding the truth as presented in Christian teaching. This truth, revealed through Jesus and faithfully preserved by his disciples, was proclaimed and unbelievers accepted it, engaging in a process of conversion to right belief. The proclamation and conversion processes continued after the deaths of the disciples, with the added dimension of disunity arising within the church in reference to what constitutes a correct or faithful understanding of

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[21] Ibid., 76.

[22] Bauer, xxiii.

the truth. Traditionally this dissention was attributed to the influence of the devil, who through it seeks to bring Christians into an expression of wrong belief. Bauer is careful to point out that in this schema there is little, if any, room for direct movement from unbelief to wrong belief.[23]

The assumption of the classical theory is that orthodoxy precedes heresy. This assumption appears to reflect the work of early authorities such as Hegesippus, Irenaeus and Tertullian who agree on the fundamental principle that doctrinal error did not develop in isolation from the accepted teaching of the church. Rather, it evolved through deviations from that accepted teaching, starting with an orthodox foundation but moving beyond it. Evidence that this understanding of the relationship between orthodoxy and heresy was present in the early church can be found in Irenaeus, who underscores the concept that heretical teachers began with an orthodox base upon which they built their own movements:

> Tatian was originally the pupil of Justin. After the martyrdom of his teacher he broke away from the Church, and formed a school with a distinctive character of its own. Before Valentinus there were no Valentinians, nor Marcionites before Marcion, nor in a word did the rest of the evil-intentioned men whom we have mentioned above exist before the initiators and inventors of their perversity came into being.[24]

It is also seen in Tertullian's opposition to Marcion who, he states, "lost the God Whom he had found by the extinction of the light of his own faith. He was a deserter before he was a heretic."[25] He elsewhere elaborates on this theme, giving emphasis to the principle

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[23] Ibid., xxiii.

[24] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* quoted in Turner, 4.

[25] Tertullian, *Against Marcion,* quoted in Turner, 5.

that heresy is subsequent rather than prior or parallel to orthodoxy: "Were Christians found before Christ? Or heresy before true doctrine? But in everything truth precedes its counterfeit. It would be absurd to regard heresy as the prior since it is prophesied that heresy should arise."[26]

Furthermore, it should be mentioned that while, as noted above, the "credit" for the origin of heretical teaching is ascribed to the influence of the devil, the classical theory does not absolve heresiarchs from personal responsibility. The implication is that these, who once knew the truth, made a conscious decision to move away from the accepted teachings of the church and to invite others to follow their path. In support of this, Turner summarizes the perception of Tertullian that "[t]he root of heresy is personal choice exercised in matters where it does not apply. The personal systems of the heresiarchs are contrasted with the teaching of the Apostles who had 'no faith of their own' and did not choose what they believed."[27]

The implication is that heresiarchs deliberately rejected the accepted teachings of the church, that is the church's interpretation of the kerygma, either because they had opened themselves to the influence of the devil or because they valued their own interpretations over those of the church. In response, the church fathers vigorously attacked both their teaching and the motivation behind it, taking as their weapon images found in the Jesus tradition and the writings of the apostles.[28] There is no "grey area" in

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[26] Tertullian, *Prescription Against Heretics,* quoted in Turner, 5.

[27] Turner, 6.

[28] Ibid., 5.

the classical concept of heterodoxy. One either adheres to the truth or one is in error. There are no shadings of interpretation; there is no room for debate.

The classical theory provides an inflexible approach to the concepts of heterodoxy and orthodoxy. How might it relate to Käsemann's statement that the Fourth Gospel was accepted into the canon by human error? Clearly the inflexibility of the classical theory does not permit Käsemann and the Gospel of John to peacefully co-exist. If Käsemann is correct, the classical approach would not allow for the possibility of any defence being made for the Johannine tradition as it is expressed in the Gospel. A heretical Gospel would be an error in the canon. Yet, the Gospel was accepted into the canon at a time when the key elements of the classical approach were in evidence among church leaders. This may lead to the conclusion that Käsemann's suggestion is erroneous, or it may point to the possibility that while classical elements were strongly influential at the end of the second century, there are other dimensions within the church at that time that must also be taken into account. Bringing these into dialogue with the classical theory may help to explain how a "heretical" gospel could have been integrated into the canon. Walter Bauer provides an alternate interpretation of early church history that may assist in reaching a solution to this question.

Orthodoxy and Heresy According to Walter Bauer

Bauer, in his landmark volume, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, takes issue with the classical theory. For him the principles upon which it is based are not self-evident, thus the validity of its approach is open for re-examination. Addressing the issue from an historical perspective, he seeks to offer a more developmental approach to answering the question of what is orthodox and what is heterodox. He emphasizes the importance of looking at the early centuries of the church with fresh eyes. Bauer believes it is important to discover how the variant expressions of Christianity co-existed from a more objective stance than the history recorded by the church is able to provide. He sees the first two hundred years as a time of fluidity of thought, recognizing that as the church sought to establish its identity various interpretations of its key beliefs were being practiced and were eventually brought into dialogue with each other. Where the classical theory has orthodoxy pre-existing heresy, Bauer favours the view that concepts that were later categorized as either orthodox or heretical may initially have existed together as variant forms of Christianity. The distinction between them became sharpened as the church's identity became more defined. He observes that

> [w]hat constitutes "truth" in one generation can be out of date in the next - through progress, but also through retrogression into an earlier position. . . . *perhaps* - certain manifestations of Christian life that the authors of the church renounce as "heresies" originally had not been such at all, but, at least here and there, were the only form of the new religion - that is, for those regions they were simply "Christianity."[29]

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[29] Bauer, xxii.

According to Bauer it is quite possible, therefore, to move directly from unbelief to wrong belief without ever having embraced right belief, if that wrong belief was the only form of Christianity present in an area. In his view, heterodoxy does not presuppose orthodoxy. This allows him a much freer perspective than that afforded by the classical theory. It permits him to paint an image of early church history that is highly fluid, containing a plethora of interpretations which over time and as the result of earnest debate and not a little power-brokering were eventually delineated as either orthodox or heretical.[30] He sees the variety of theological viewpoints that were later labeled as heterodox, not as the result of "impure motives,"[31] but as part of the growth and development of Christian doctrine.

In support of this, Bauer highlights several cases where heretical movements were initially located within the church and doctrinal disputes were essentially treated as internal matters. He comments that in the second century "[i]t was by no means the rule . . . that heretics were located 'outside'".[32] He also references Ignatius' letter to Philadelphia as an example, stating that it "allows us to take a look at the clash of opinions within the company of Christians at the beginning of the second century, when there is no clearly defined community boundary between opposing circles, but when all the baptized still remain, at least externally, bound together as a unity."[33] Similarly, the

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[30] See the treatment of Bauer's view on the influence of the Roman Church in David J. Hawkin, *The Johannine World: Reflections on the Theology of the Fourth Gospel and Contemporary Society* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 5.

[31] Bauer, xxiii.

[32] Ibid., 131.

[33] Ibid., 131.

Marcionite controversy is portrayed as initially an internal matter in which clarity was being sought concerning Christian doctrine. He notes that, at the beginning, "it was not thought of as a struggle for the souls of Roman Christians fought from already well established positions, but as an effort to ascertain what the true meaning and content of the Christian religion really is, and to that extent it was somewhat comparable to the apostolic council (Acts 15)."[34] This demonstrates that Bauer attributes value to heresy as a necessary part of the church's theological development. Its presence and the questions it posed forced the church to work towards a clear enunciation of its faith thus, in a sense, facilitating the establishment of a definition of orthodox belief.

It should not be implied, however, that Bauer sees the established categories of orthodox and heterodox as inviolable. The idea that "right will prevail" is more representative of the classical theory than of Bauer's thought. He considers viable the possibility that that which is now called orthodox is not necessarily any more "right" than what is labeled heterodox. It is simply the variant form of Christian belief which "won out" in the doctrine wars that consumed so much of the early church's energy. Thus he seeks to encourage recognition of the possibility that the attribution of orthodoxy has less to do with presenting the definitively correct interpretation of the kerygma, than with the ability and power to emerge victoriously from a debate. If an historical re-examination of heterodoxy is to be attempted, he advises that it is best done without much appeal to the church fathers who represent the established viewpoint and are therefore likely to be lacking in objectivity. He asks,

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[34] Ibid., 132.

> if we . . . simply agree with the judgment of the anti-heretical fathers for the post-New Testament period, do we not all too quickly become dependent upon the vote of but *one* party - that party which perhaps as much through favourable circumstances as by its own merit eventually was thrust into the fore-ground, and which possibly has at its disposal today the more powerful, and thus more prevalent voice, only because the chorus of others has been muted? . . . When one side cannot, because of anxiety, confusion, or clumsiness, gain proper recognition, is it not the obligation . . . of the historian - to assist it, as best he can, to unfold its case instead of simply submitting to the mental agility and firmness, the sagacity and loquacity of the other?[35]

Bauer, then, provides an approach to the concepts of orthodoxy and heresy that seeks to establish a level field wherein all the players, the variant forms of Christianity, scrimmaged together with the victors becoming the orthodox team and the others being awarded the title of heterodox. Bauer's pattern for the development of Christian belief could thus be summarized as unbelief, a variety of beliefs, and the institutional establishment of right belief.

This pattern is of assistance in seeking a response to Käsemann's statement concerning the orthodoxy of the Fourth Gospel. Bauer clearly indicates his agreement with the theory that it was essentially a heretical document.[36] He presents a detailed discussion regarding the Roman Church's discomfort with the Gospel and of its infrequent use by the apostolic fathers, noting in particular its lack of use by those who might have been expected to champion its authority.[37] The Gospel is presented as an example of a variant form of Christianity that became integrated into the canon not

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[35] Ibid., xxi.

[36] Ibid., 224.

[37] Ibid., 205-212. On this matter, Bauer follows a similar strategy as outlined at the beginning of this chapter. His in depth analysis is located in the section noted.

because its content was in any was "redeemed" by the demonstration of its orthodoxy but because times and powers had changed.

> When the gospel canon was defined, which was to be valid for the entire church, Rome found itself overruled, to put it rather crudely. The resistance offered previously, and, perhaps more instinctively than consciously, was abandoned all the more willingly since the reasons which had caused Rome to view the Fourth Gospel in a suspicious light no longer retained their old force around the year 200. At that earlier time the danger of heresy was a burden to Rome, but now the gospel of John could perform a valuable service in the construction and establishment of the ecclesiastical proclamation of Christ, as it had developed, without fear of undesirable side effects.[38]

The indication here is that the acceptance of the Gospel into the canon was a function of history rather than of its essential orthodoxy. Its place in the canon is linked to the shifting of circumstances more than to a vindication of its teaching. In this sense, then, Bauer's thesis may be seen as foundational to Käsemann's statement that this heretical document "made the cut" due to movements within history (the human factor) rather than its representation of accepted tradition.

Bauer's concept that orthodoxy depends, not on the content of belief, but upon the ability to persuade others and enforce a specific interpretation of the tradition leads to an understanding that seems excessively fluid and capricious. History shows that there were distinct "givens" in Christian belief, that there were non-negotiables in the discussion of doctrine. Bauer's approach appears not to emphasize this, providing instead a sense of extreme fluidity with respect to the content of Christian faith.

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[38] Ibid., 212.

The two approaches to the orthodoxy/heresy debate that have been discussed thus far represent two extremes in understanding. The classical approach with its insistence that orthodoxy precedes heresy and that heresy is in some way a deliberate distortion of truth has proven to be too rigid in its assessment of early church history. It leaves no room for the existence of divergent yet equally valid interpretations of Christian belief. Rather, orthodoxy is portrayed as that which, by means of exclusion, defines heresy; heresy *is* whatever orthodoxy is *not*. Bauer, on the other hand, presents a highly flexible concept of early Christianity, in which there was a variety of equally valid expressions of Christian belief that were not initially judged by the Church according to an established standard of orthodoxy. He sees the orthodoxy/heresy debate as an historical process in which these co-existing forms of Christianity gradually entered into a dialogue that led to the rejection of some and the approval of others. The content of Christian faith became more narrowly defined through this process. Heresy, then, is portrayed as that which, by being excluded, becomes the means by which orthodoxy is defined. Orthodoxy is *not* whatever heresy *is*.

Neither of these approaches offers a helpful means by which to examine Käsemann's charge that the gospel of John is a heretical document. The classical theory would define the orthodoxy of the Gospel on the basis of its place in the canon and end the debate there. Bauer appears to be content with the notion that the Gospel is heretical in origin and that its inclusion in the canon serves as an example of his thesis concerning the changeable nature of the circumstances that determine what constitutes orthodoxy. Is there a middle ground between these two extremes? A median point exists in the work of H. E. W. Turner.

Orthodoxy and Heresy in the Work of H. E. W. Turner

In the lectures reproduced in *The Pattern of Christian Truth* Turner seeks to provide an alternative to the inflexibility of the classical theory and the excessive fluidity of modern alternatives, especially as represented by Bauer. While he respects some of the strengths found in both approaches, to adhere solely to either of them would in his estimation serve to diminish the richness and reality of the expressions of Christianity found in the first two centuries. In his view, the classical theory is too limiting, failing to acknowledge the validity of the diverse expressions of Christian belief represented in the New Testament canon and the early church.[39] It possesses an inflexibility that he does not perceive as consistent with the history of the period. His response to Bauer focuses on Bauer's premise that the lines of demarcation between orthodoxy and heresy were not clearly drawn in the early church. He suggests that Bauer's understanding orthodoxy may be too limiting, that he may not appreciate the dimensions it can embrace, and that there is another alternative that allows for the existence of both a rule of faith and a variety of expressions. Turner comments, "For the nature of orthodoxy is richer and more varied than Bauer himself allows. Its underlying basis lies in the religious facts of Christianity itself. It can therefore find without the loss of its essential unity different expressions as its data pass through the crucible of varied Christian minds."[40] It may be helpful to examine this concept more closely.

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[39] Turner, 9.

[40] Ibid., 80.

Turner's proposal integrates the existence of fixed elements of Christian belief with the exercise of a degree of flexibility in the means by which those facts are communicated. The fixed elements form the confessional basis to which, if they are to be defined as (orthodox) Christians, believers give assent. They have to do with the *content* of Christian faith. The flexible elements permit variety in the means by which that content is experienced and communicated. They have to do with the *expression* of Christian faith. Both types of elements are present in the early church and both, he submits, have value in the church's efforts to formulate its belief. He suggests that "The development of Christian theology as a whole (and not merely in the Patristic period) may perhaps better be 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."[41]

Turner describes three fixed elements within the Christian tradition. These are non-negotiable elements upon which all those desiring to be known as Christians must agree. They are hallmarks of orthodoxy.

The discussion of these fixed elements begins by addressing what he calls "the religious facts themselves."[42] As previously indicated, this refers to the content of the Christian tradition, that upon which the Christian faith is built. While Turner does not attempt an exhaustive review of all that this entails he names the concept of God as a Sovereign Creator Father and belief in Christ as a historical Redeemer figure as two

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[41] Ibid., 26.

[42] Ibid., 26.

aspects of what these religious facts involve. The religious facts were accepted by Christians and formed the essence of the Christian faith even before the church had worked their theological implications into a systematized theology.[43] They provided the core Christian beliefs, and guided the way in which that belief was integrated into human life and experience. Turner cites several specific examples of this from the early centuries of the church and then comments that,

> Such evidence suggests a relatively full and fixed experimental grasp of what was involved religiously in being a Christian. To this may be given the name *lex orandi* . . . it formed the instinctive basis for that exercise of Christian common sense which enabled the Church to reject interpretations of her faith and dilution of her life even before she possessed formal standards of belief. Such instinctive spiritual discrimination . . . went on side by side with and even antedated an exclusion of heresy based upon hard thought and backed by the application of theological defence mechanisms.[44]

These religious facts, then, were the accepted content of the Christian faith that was integrated into the lives of Christians and formed an instinctual basis for their response to the world around them.

The second fixed element identified by Turner is biblical revelation. By this, he refers to the concept that the Christian tradition contains divine revelation, and that this revelation relates strongly to that found in the Hebrew scriptures. He points out that the church fathers made extensive use of these scriptures, which at that time constituted the only canon of scripture, in addition to their appeals to the authority of the words of Jesus

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[43] Ibid., 27.

[44] Ibid., 28.

and the writings of the apostles.[45] The content of scripture as established in both the Old and New Testament canons is among the fixed elements of Christian faith, and is considered to be "the sources of revealed truth."[46]

Turner's third and final fixed element is the Creed and the Rule of Faith.[47] These represent the fundamental beliefs of Christianity. Developing towards the end of the second century, the Rule of Faith appears to have been significant for its use in the instruction of catecheumens to ensure their comprehension of the faith they sought to profess.[48] The Creeds contain a distillation of Christian belief into specifically defined formulae that were further developed as the church engaged in a sorting out of its doctrinal disputes. Both are considered fixed elements in that their content focuses on what is understood to be essentially Christian. Although they were created, at least in part, as instructional aids, their encapsulation of the Christian faith made them useful authorities for employment in debates between orthodox and heterodox Christians.[49]

In proposing these areas of fixity Turner acknowledges that a basic standard for Christian faith existed in the early church and that adherence to or departure from this standard can be used to determine orthodoxy. He does not intend this fixity to imply that there was no room for variety, however. While recognizing the fixed content of Christian faith he allows for significant flexibility in the way it is expressed.

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[45] Ibid., 28.

[46] Ibid., 306.

[47] Ibid., 29.

[48] Ibid., 357.

[49] Ibid., 377.

Turner begins his elaboration on the flexible elements by identifying the importance of variety in Christian idiom. For him, idiom is not limited to types of literary genre used to convey content although he does include it in his discussion. Idiom in a wider sense, he says, includes theological idioms that can be employed as interpretive lenses through which the religious facts are perceived and explained. He refers to

> differences at a deeper level such as between an eschatological and metaphysical interpretation of Christianity. . . . it could be maintained that the Christian deposit of faith is not wedded irrevocably to either idiom but is capable of expression both ontologically and eschatologically. . . . The selection of a distinctive theological idiom, whether it be eschatology, ontology, or even in more recent times existentialism, illustrates one possible element of flexibility in Christian thinking. The primacy of Christ can be expressed no less decisively in any of the three, but it will invariably assume a different appearance in each case.[50]

Linked to these differences of idiom is what Turner describes as "a change in the background of thought."[51] This refers to the movement away from a Hebraic framework and toward the application of Greek metaphysical categories of thought in order to facilitate a more philosophical method of communication. As an example, he refers to challenges faced by the church as it sought to agree upon suitable philosophical equivalents to express Hebraic types of theological terminology.[52]

Finally, Turner draws attention to the fact that idioms, background of thought, and choice of terminology are all subject to the personalities and preferences of the theologians. He understands their individuality to be a factor intentionally introduced

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[50] Ibid., 31.

[51] Ibid., 32.

[52] Ibid., 32.

into the dynamic of the developing church by God. He comments that their characteristics are to be valued for the diversity they bring. "Not the least of the gifts which the Ascended Lord bestowed upon His Church was the succession of widely different, though splendidly endowed minds dedicated to her service."[53]

In summary, Turner's fixed elements related to the content of faith; the flexible elements to the expression of that content. The challenge, which neither the classical theory nor the work of Bauer satisfactorily address, is to avoid confusing content with expression when attempting to determine the orthodoxy of a perspective such as the Johannine tradition as voiced in the Fourth Gospel. Turner appears to meet this challenge, as will be demonstrated in the use of his theory as a framework for the discussion in the next Chapter.

[53] Ibid., 34.

CHAPTER 2

I JOHN AND THE DEFENCE OF THE JOHANNINE TRADITION

Establishing the Parameters

Having established that the orthodoxy of the Johannine tradition as expressed in the Gospel of John was a point of concern within the early church, the question remains how a document that was apparently a source of discomfort for some church fathers and cautiously appealed to by others was eventually accepted as orthodox. Was Käsemann correct in suggesting that its inclusion in the canon was due to human error? Or, does Turner provide a solution that removes the shadow of heterodoxy from the Johannine Gospel and, by extension, from the tradition it represents? What factor leads to the attribution of orthodoxy to the Johannine tradition? In order to respond to these questions it is helpful to look outside the Gospel to discover a second perspective on the Johannine tradition. As it has been demonstrated by numerous scholars that I John stands with the Gospel as representative of the tradition,[54] it is to I John that the focus now turns.

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[54] Representatives of this view include Wendy Sproston, "Witnesses to What Was απ αρχης: 1 John's Contribution to our Knowledge of Tradition in the Fourth Gospel," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 48 (1992): 43-65, reprinted in *The Johannine Writings,* Stanley E. Porter and Craig A. Evans (eds.), The Biblical Seminar, 32 (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1995), 143; David Wenham, "A Historical View of John's Gospel," *Themelios* 23, no. 2 (1998): 15; and J. H. Houlden, *A Commentary on the Johannine Epistles* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1973), 18.

The large number of critical issues surrounding I John necessitates the establishment of parameters for the present study. After consideration of a variety of approaches to these issues, but without including a prolonged presentation of the complexities of each, the following conclusions will be accepted as forming a framework within which to proceed with the larger questions concerning I John and the Johannine tradition.

1. Concerning the authorship of I John, the majority position among scholars will be accepted,[55] that I John was a product of the Johannine community. While arguments have been made in support of common authorship of both the Gospel and the first Epistle,[56] these have proven to be inconclusive. The position adopted in this study, therefore, is that the individual(s) responsible for the production of the Gospel and I John had a familiarity with the Johannine tradition that was derived from membership in the Johannine community, that there may have been some participation by one of the redactors of the Gospel in the composition of I John, but that this is by no means certain.[57]
2. Chronological priority is assigned to the Gospel, followed by I John. While the lack of direct references to the Gospel, coupled with indications of an apparently earlier theology in I John have been cited among the factors in

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[55] This is reflected in works such as Brown, *Community*,102f., Rudolph Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to John, vol. 1* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 100ff., and Stephen S. Smalley, *John - Evangelist and Theologian* (Guernsey: The Paternoster Press, 1978), 81f.

[56] For example, the discussion contained in I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, The New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), 31-42.

[57] Brown, *Community*, 95f.

support of the priority of I John,[58] these concerns have been answered by other considerations. For example, Brown indicates that the author's desire to bring balance to a high christological interpretation of the Gospel may have caused the christology of the Epistle to appear less advanced.[59]

3. There has been a diversity of proposals regarding the literary genre of I John. It has been categorized variously as an instructive tract,[60] a paper,[61] an epilogue to the Gospel,[62] a homily,[63] and an exposition of the Gospel.[64] It is true that I John lacks elements of epistolary form; it bears no customary identification of the sender or addressee and includes no traditional farewell wishes or greetings, for example. Yet, it is clearly aimed at a specific situation concerning specific people,[65] and it contains the elements of instruction and exhortation often found in other New Testament epistles. Its content is directed at issues pertaining to community life, doctrine and behavior, and is intended to be shared with a group - a church or several churches. On the basis

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[58] Brown, *Epistles*, 33f.

[59] Ibid., 35.

[60] Pheme Perkins, *The Johannine Epistles* (Wilmington: William Glazier, Inc.), 1979, xvi.

[61] Stephen S. Smalley, *1,2,3 John* (Waco: Word Books, 1984), xxvii.

[62] Lightfoot documented in Smalley, xxvii.

of these attributes it can be classified as an epistle, though the classification, admittedly, may be somewhat loose. For ease of reference, therefore, I John will be considered to be an epistle.

4. I John addresses issues pertinent to an intra-community conflict but it is unclear whether the author of the Epistle intended his words to be a polemic against the secessionists. Some scholars, represented by Colin G. Kruse, consider the Epistle not to be primarily polemical in character, with the emphasis being rather on encouraging those who have chosen to remain in the Johannine church it addresses.[66] Others argue that it is deliberately polemical, written specifically to address heterodox members of the community.[67] Whether it was directed primarily at those who remained within the fellowship or at those who had left it, the Epistle does speak to the issues raised by those commonly known as the secessionists. When reference is made to the Epistle as addressing the secessionists' issues all that the present study intends is to acknowledge the source of the issues, not that the author was seeking to respond directly to the secessionists themselves.

In summary, it is accepted that I John emerged from the Johannine community and represents that community's tradition, that it was written later than the Gospel, that it

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[66] Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 7. See also Lieu, *Theology of the Johannine Epistles,* 15, and M. M. Thompson, *1-3 John,* IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992.), 18f.

[67] Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John,* Word Biblical Commentary (Waco Texas: Word Books, 1984), xxvii.

functions similarly to the other New Testament epistles in spite of its lack of conformity to traditional epistolary structure, and that it addresses issues related to a schism in the Johannine community. Having set these boundaries, it is now possible to proceed with an examination of the Epistle in its role as a defender of the Johannine tradition. This will be accomplished through a consideration of the situation that precipitated its composition (the schism), how the Gospel may have been used as a base for the schismatics' stance, and the Epistle's re-interpretation of the Johannine tradition in response to the schismatics' interpretation. The results of this examination will be discussed with reference to Turner's theory and Brown's conclusions, to demonstrate how I John illustrates that an orthodox interpretation of the Johannine tradition (and the Gospel) is possible.

Scholarly opinion is virtually unanimous in the perception that at the root of the situation underlying I John is an "intra-Johannine schism."[68] The evidence within the Epistle itself indicates the existence of a strong conflict among the members of the church being addressed, a conflict so virulent that fellowship between some members of the church has been severed. The writer describes it in terms of the actual termination of association on the part of some individuals, expressing it in a manner that suggests an acrimonious parting: εξ ημων εξηλθαν, αλλ ουκ ησαν εξ ημων ει γαρ εξ. ημων ησαν, μεμενηκεισαν αν μεθ ημων αλλ ινα φανερωθωσιν οτι ουκ εισιν παντες εξ ημων. ("They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of

[68] R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 48.

them belonged to us" - I John 2:19.) Those who left the church are viewed as if their former association with it lacked a dimension that "true" members of the community possessed. The implication is that if these persons had accepted the Johannine tradition as understood by the writer of the epistle, they would have remained within the community.

Further discussion of this schism will show that those who εξηλθαν (went out) departed over matters related to faith and behaviour. The writer views their exodus as something more significant than a simple difference of opinion. He portrays it as indicating that they had adopted an erroneous interpretation of the tradition. In I John 2:18 he refers to them as αντιχριστοι (antichrists), thus expressing his judgment that in removing themselves from the community they are acting against Christ. The comment of M. M. Thompson is instructive here, as she notes that the term "antichrist" applies to one who

> opposes Christ, but not so much by open hostility as with deceit and falsehood ... The *antichrists* of 1 John are those who deceive others through false teaching about the person of Christ and the nature of the Christian life (2:22-23; 4:2). ... It is impossible not to sense his [the writer's] distress and anger over the actual departure of these people as well. The breaking of fellowship is in itself judged quite severely, and seems to have taken a greater toll on the church ... The sin is as bad as, if not worse than, the actual doctrinal error, because in leaving the fellowship these secessionists have disregarded the cardinal and foundational command of Jesus to "love each other." In fact, the author's ultimate judgment on the heretics is due as much to their secession as to their doctrinal aberrations.[69]

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[69] Thompson, 75f. see also Houlden, 78.

The secessionists, it seems, were so convinced of their interpretation of the tradition that they refused to remain in community with those who took a different view. I John's statement is that they "went out," they took the initiative to sever ties with other Johannine Christians; nowhere does he indicate that the church initiated their separation from the fellowship.

The fact of a schism is readily deduced from the internal evidence of the Epistle, but it is more difficult to arrive at a specific identification of the secessionists. Who, precisely, were they? A variety of well argued conclusions exists including identification of the secessionists as docetics, second-century Gnostics, Cerinthians, or others who have been singled out in the New Testament as standing in opposition to the accepted tradition of the church, such as the Nicolaitans of Revelation 6.[70] No argument has proved conclusive, however, and many contemporary scholars prefer to engage in a description of the secessionists' beliefs rather than attempting to link them with any known heterodox movement.[71] If it is not possible to arrive at a definitive identification of the secessionists, what *can* be known about them and how their beliefs brought the Johannine church to a place of schism? Of the numerous theories that have been presented concerning the nature of the schism three will be outlined as presented in the work of Perkins, Smalley, and von Wahlde. Following this, Brown's reconstruction of the schism will be presented and form the basis for an examination of the interpretations of the

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[70] Brown, *Epistles*, 56-68.

[71] For examples of this approach see Kruse, 15-27; Culpepper, 48-54; and D. Moody Smith, *First, Second, and Third John,* Interpretation A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991), 18-21.

tradition offered by the secessionists and by the Johannine community as represented in 1 John.

Three Theories of the Schism: Perkins, Smalley and von Wahlde

Pheme Perkins evaluates the focus of 1 John in terms of ethical concerns. For her, the primary issue is one of behaviour that manifests itself in the severing of the fellowship among Christians. While she acknowledges the presence of theological considerations, she sees these as secondary to the behavioural issues.[72] This is based on the statistical indicators that assign a greater percentage of the Epistle's emphasis to orthopraxy than to questions of doctrine, an observation also noted by Brown.[73] "Ethics, not christology, is the author's concern throughout," [74] Perkins claims. She also suggests that the secessionists may have promulgated an interpretation of perfection that differed substantially from that found within the rest of the community and thus became a focus for the schism. She relates this to their use of the Gospel and the writer's subsequent need to re-define Johannine ethics, commenting that

> The gospel presents the sum total of Jesus' ethical teaching in the command to "love one another" - a tradition continued in the paraenesis of 1 Jn. If the opponents held up as the only true standard of perfection either a Christian *halachah* on the analogy with Judaism or an ascetic perfection of a "passionless" soul on the analogy with gnosticism and the pagan philosophical praxis from which gnostics derived their view, then the Johannine Christians could well have become anxious about their status in

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[72] Perkins, 4f.

[73] Brown, *Epistles*, 79.

[74] Perkins, 5.

> the judgment because they lacked any standard for measurement to hold up against these other claims. 1 Jn seeks to deal with their concern by explaining that the love of God shown in Jesus is the true foundation of their community and source of Christian sinlessness. He continues to hold up the love commandment as the one norm of behaviour and relationship to God.[75]

The emphasis on the love command in I John can thus be seen as a corrective to the secessionists' un-Johannine relationship of disunity with their fellow Christians. It also seeks to re-establish love as the basis for Christian behaviour, if one accepts Perkins' suggestion that the secessionists engaged in an "ethical one-upmanship" against other members of the community, that ultimately led to the schism. Her viewpoint can be expressed as *one group (of opponents), one problem (ethics).*

Stephen Smalley posits two distinct groups within this Johannine congregation. He projects one group consisting of Jewish Christians who emphasized the law, but who experienced difficulty in exalting Jesus to the role of Messiah, and a second group composed of Hellenistic Christians who were somewhat influenced by Hellenistic belief systems through which they filtered Christian teaching. The difficulty of the Hellenistic Christian group came in accepting the humanity of Jesus, a difficulty that may have been exacerbated by the dualism that characterized many forms of Hellenistic religion.[76] Smalley envisions the crisis in this Johannine community resulting primarily from a clash between high and low christology. He suggests that by the time I John was written,

> The friction has increased and a polarization of christological views was in progress, so that those with a "low" christology had moved further toward a Jewish (Ebionitic) position, and those whose christology was "high" had

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[75] Perkins, 7.

[76] Smalley, xxiii.

> become more clearly gnostic (docetic) by inclination; secession from the community had begun; and ethical implications in both cases had emerged, with an emphasis on law as the mark of the Jewish sector... and an indifference to right conduct (including love) as a characteristic of the Hellenistic adherents...[77]

His approach can be summarized as *two groups (Jewish Christians, Hellenistic Christians), one problem (christology).*

Urban C. von Wahlde proposes one group of opponents with one over-riding theological concern: pneumatology. While he acknowledges that other issues are addressed in the epistle, he sees them as implications of the secessionists' understanding of the Spirit. For him, their concepts of Christ, salvation, and Christian behaviour are all affected by their perspective about the Spirit.[78] The essence of his approach is *one group (of opponents), one problem (pneumatology).*

In summarizing his position on this issue he comments,

> The conviction of the opponents that they possessed the Spirit in its eschatological fullness, based on their interpretation of various elements of Jewish eschatological hopes, had conditioned them to expect certain benefits from that reception of the Spirit. In addition, because they understood themselves to have the same life as Jesus and because they too had been "anointed" and were now "children of God," their claims could be brought to rival the claims made for Jesus. If the opponents possessed the Spirit (and therefore eternal life), they had the same sinlessness as Jesus; and that sinlessness and eternal life meant that there would be no future possession of eternal life that would be superior to their present state. They were perfect now and so they escaped judgment. But that sinlessness came about through their reception of the Spirit, rather than through some "material" act like an atoning death by Jesus.[79]

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[77] Ibid., xxiii.

[78] Urban C. Von Wahlde, *The Johannine Commandments: I John and the Struggle for the Johannine Tradition,* Theological Inquiries (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 138.

[79] Ibid., 181f.

Here von Wahlde identifies a number of the key concerns that are frequently addressed in attempts to describe the position ascribed to the secessionists. Although he places them within the overarching concern of pneumatology, each issue can be discussed in its own right. These issues will be examined in greater depth in the next section of this study.

Raymond Brown's Reconstruction of the Johannine Schism

While each of these three proposals offers a helpful interpretive framework within which to dissect the Johannine schism and I John's interpretation of the tradition, it is the approach taken by Raymond E. Brown that has received widespread acknowledgment by and inclusion in the work of other scholars. His thesis on the nature of the Johannine schism is detailed in his influential study, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (1979), and is also elaborated upon in his unparalleled commentary on *The Epistles of John* (1982) for the Anchor Bible Series. In these volumes he offers a useful outline for understanding the form and nature of the schism that occurred within the Johannine church.

Brown begins sketching his picture of the Johannine schism by setting out a geographical context for it. He posits the existence of a number of Johannine churches, some of which may have been located in the same major center. He supports this by noting that during this time Christians met primarily in house churches, thus the size of each church would have been limited by the number of members that could be accommodated by the host home. This premise allows Brown to envision a number of Johannine Christian churches, some located in proximity to each other within the

boundaries of a larger center, and others lying at a greater distance, but close enough to the major center that travel (and thus communication) was possible between them all.[80]

With this backdrop in place, Brown situates the players before it. He outlines a situation in which a group of opponents, whom he refers to as secessionists, has developed an interpretation of the Johannine Gospel that diverges from the tradition as the author understands it to have been received by the Johannine community. The ensuing drama is that of a congregational split as members leave one church and seek to gain acceptance from members of other Johannine churches for both themselves and their teaching, effectively endangering the unity that was emphasized among Johannine Christians. In response to this, the writer of the epistle identifies and corrects the secessionists' interpretation of Johannine theology and ethics.[81] Brown places the actual schism in a church of the major center, proposing that I John was intended primarily for the Johannine Christians in that place and that II and III John were written to house churches in outlying locations that may have been approached by the secessionists.[82] The critical issue in the schism, for Brown, is the question of what constitutes a faithful interpretation of the Johannine tradition. He theorizes that

> *Both parties knew the proclamation of Christianity available to us through the Fourth Gospel, but they interpreted it differently.* The adversaries were not detectably outsiders to the Johannine community but the offspring of Johannine thought itself, justifying their positions by the Johannine Gospel and its implications. I am not saying that inevitably the Johannine Gospel led either to their position or to the position of the author; nor is it clear

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[80] Brown, *Community*, 98.

[81] Ibid., 94.

[82] Ibid., 98.

> that either position is a total distortion of the Johannine Gospel. ... Nevertheless, I suspect that the Johannine Gospel, as it came to both the author and to the secessionists, was relatively "neutral" on some of the points that were now coming into dispute ... In the tradition there were texts on both sides of the issue; so each of the disputing parties was making the claim that its interpretation of the Gospel was correct. ... My hypothesis is also consonant with the author's almost frustrated appeal to *what was from the beginning* (1:4; 2:7; etc.). His opponents may sound as if they know the Johannine Gospel, but in his judgment they are distorting it precisely because they are ignorant of the tradition underlying it. [italics his] [83]

Brown also notes that the very designation of the opponents in I John as secessionists is a matter of one's perspective on the overall situation it addresses. He reminds his readers that the term "secessionists" reflects the perspective of the writer of I John, but that the secessionists may have claimed that it was the writer and his adherents who had departed from the fellowship.[84]

In attempting to define the secessionists more specifically Brown is careful to issue a word of caution concerning the scholar's ability to make authoritative statements about their beliefs and behaviour. He points out that any reconstruction of the secessionists' position has to be based on a mirror reading of I John, as there are no known extant documents from the secessionists themselves. The scholar is left with the working assumption that the secessionists' position can be extrapolated from those views against which the epistle argues, yet "it is uncertain that every idea that the author opposes in the epistle is accepted by the secessionists."[85] In his attempt to reconstruct the

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[83] Ibid., 106ff.

[84] Ibid., 103.

[85] Ibid., 104.

Johannine schism, however, Brown chooses to deal with all the major issues in I John as if they comprise the content of the secessionists' belief.

According to Brown, I John indicates evidence of four significant areas of dispute between the secessionists and the Johannine Christianity of the author. Three of these areas are theological and one is behavioural. It can thus be said that for Brown the essence of the schism can be expressed as *one group (secessionists), two problems (theology and ethics).*[86]

Brown Identifies the theological issues as christology, eschatology and pneumatology; while the issue of ethics is treated as a whole with three facets: sinlessness, obedience, and brotherly love.[87] The strong connection between theology and ethics is acknowledged, however whereas scholars such as Perkins[88] place the ethical concerns in priority over the theological issues, Brown tends towards the view that the ethical concerns serve as symptoms of a theological dilemma. A survey of the disputed areas, presenting the secessionists' interpretation and the response of I John, will help to clarify this.

In addressing the theological and ethical concerns of the schism Brown, while acknowledging and even to an extent exploring some of the commonly proposed concepts, avoids settling on a definitive conclusion regarding their identity. In this, he reflects the approach that is increasingly adopted by late twentieth century scholars, as

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[86] Brown, *Epistles*, 50. For a similar approach see Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Johannine Epistles* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 18.

[87] Brown, *Community*, 109ff.

[88] Perkins, 4.

previously indicated. For Brown, attempting to interpret the position of the secessionists through a pre-supposition of identity with known heterodox movements is an anachronistic endeavor, as the connections most often suggested reflect a later stage of development than would be coherent with Brown's proposed date of ca. 100 A.D. for the writing of the Epistle.[89] This is particularly evident in his reconstruction of the secessionists' christology.

Theological Issues I: Christology

Brown argues that christological considerations were fundamental to the self-perception of the Johannine Christians. He comments that "A very high christology was the central issue in the historical struggles of the Johannine community with the Jews and with other Christians."[90] In particular, he notes that a key element is the Johannine belief in the pre-existence of God's Son and that the community's struggle to safeguard this belief could have led to an over-emphasis on the divinity of Jesus (remembering that in the first century the humanity of Jesus was not the contentious issue his deity was). He also suggests that it may have contributed to an intolerance of those who regarded themselves as Johannine Christians but did not adhere strictly to the beliefs for which some of their comrades had suffered persecution and exclusion from Judaism.[91] In other words, these Johannine Christians were not inclined to accede to a concept of Christ that

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[89] Brown, *Epistles*, 101.

[90] Brown, *Community*, 109.

[91] Ibid., 110.

was contrary to that by which they defined themselves as Christians and for which they had already suffered. The christology of the secessionists appears to have been viewed as a threat within the community that, by virtue of its interpretation of this critical belief, required a strong response.

In reflecting on what can be deduced about the secessionists' christology from a mirror-reading of the Epistle, Brown summarizes their belief as a denial "that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, come in the flesh, and come by water and blood."[92] How could such a christology be derived from a tradition that places the kind of emphasis upon the humanity of Jesus as found, for example, in the resurrection accounts of John 20? An answer may be found by exploring how, precisely, the secessionists interpreted the humanity of Jesus.

Within the Johannine tradition there had developed an exalted concept of Christ, with an emphasis on his deity. The secessionists apparently embraced this high christology, which was expressed in the concept of the pre-existent Logos of the Gospel. Such a christology, embedded as it was in the Johannine tradition, was not an issue for the Epistle's writer. It came, however, to be reinterpreted by the secessionists as meaning something far different than the author understood. As a result, he is placed in a delicate position for in christology, as in other disputed areas, he is called upon to correct beliefs with which, at the most essential level, he agrees.[93]

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[92] Brown, *Epistles,* 51.

[93] Hawkin, 94.

The difficulty arose in the manner by which the secessionists' understanding of the pre-existence and deity of Christ affected their concept of his humanity. Their particular emphasis on Jesus' deity, suggests Brown, led them to an interpretation of his humanity that devalued it. Their denial of the humanity of Jesus, then, was not as much a denial of its reality as of its importance. He states, "the secessionists believed that *the human existence of Jesus, while real, was not salvifically significant*" [italics his].[94] For them, the emphasis lies in the fact that the Son came into the world; what the Son did while he was in the world is of little account. He comments that,

> For the secessionists the human experience was only a stage in the career of the divine Word and not an intrinsic component in redemption. What Jesus did in Palestine was not truly important for them nor the fact that he died on the cross; salvation would not be different if the Word had become incarnate in a totally different human representative ... The only important thing for them was that eternal life had been brought down to men and women through a divine Son who passed through this world. In short, theirs was an incarnational theology pushed to exclusivity.[95]

How can such a view of the nature of Christ be derived from the Johannine tradition as presented in the Gospel? Brown isolates two elements that could contribute to the secessionists' christology. He points first of all to passages in the Gospel that may be read in a manner that relativizes Jesus' humanity. As an example, he cites 1:14, which is traditionally associated with the concept of incarnation, and demonstrates that in light of the Gospel's emphasis on the theme of "glory" this verse can be read with a focus on the deity rather than the humanity of Jesus.

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[94] Brown, *Community*, 113.

[95] Ibid., 114.

> There is no doubt from 1:14 that the Johannine Jesus has a real humanity but the stress is on the glory of God which shines through this humanity. ...for John the very first miracle that Jesus performed "revealed his glory and his disciples believed in him' (2:11). One may say that for John the whole life of Jesus was a transfiguration."[96]

To further illustrate the possibility of a relativizing reading of the Gospel, Brown addresses instances in the Gospel where, for Jesus, physical considerations are replaced by spiritual interpretations. He cites Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman in John 4 where water, the initial focus of their conversation, quickly takes on a symbolic role, representing a response to humanity's spiritual need. The same reinterpretation of a physical reality into a spiritual concept is seen in his discourse in John 6. Jesus' deity may also be interpreted as outbalancing John's portrayal of Jesus' knowledge; in John 6:5 Jesus' question to Philip is accompanied by the explanation that Jesus knew what he was going to do and that his question to Philip (6:6) was more a test of Philip than a request for information. As a final illustration, Brown notes that the Johannine Jesus prays in a manner quite different from the Synoptic Jesus. In John Jesus' prayers reflect the oneness of mind between Father and Son rather than a seeking to change the Father's will.[97] Finally, Brown links the potential for a relativizing of Jesus' humanity to Käsemann's thesis that the Gospel of John presents "a naïve, unreflected docetism,"[98] commenting that Käsemann

> shows how the Gospel *can* be read, and he may well have approximated in the twentieth century the way in which the opponents of I John interpreted

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[96] Ibid., 114.

[97] Ibid., 115f.

[98] Ibid., 116.

> the Johannine tradition in the first century, namely, in terms of an earthly career that did not really involve an appropriation by Jesus of the human condition.[99]

In addition to recognizing the potential for a reading of the Gospel that can downplay the importance of Jesus' humanity by relativizing it, Brown also acknowledges the existence of "elements in John that lessen the salvific import of the public ministry of Jesus."[100] He cites the theme of "sending" that characterizes the relationship between the Father and the Son (17:3, 8). He also notes the absence of a baptism narrative, per se, suggesting that the Baptist's reference to the baptism of Jesus is uttered to stress the revelation of the pre-existent Son to the world, rather than the repentance-for-forgiveness baptism of the Synoptics. Finally, Brown points to the differences in the Gospels' portrayal of the passion events, noting that whereas the Synoptists' portraits of the passion emphasize Jesus as sacrificial victim, John's picture is of Jesus as sovereign and victor.

> If John stresses the baptism and the passion as moments of revelation, the secessionists seem to have interpreted that in an exclusive way. The baptism is now only a public reminder that the Son has come into the world. The death is only the essential return of the Son to the Father...[101]

For the secessionists, then, the incarnation in John has importance primarily as a revelatory act. It simply serves as the means by which the Son reveals himself to the world. Belief in the Son leads to eternal life, but for the secessionists this belief focuses on the coming of the Son into the world, not on any salvific effect of his actions while in

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[99] Ibid., 116.

[100] Ibid., 116.

[101] Ibid., 119.

the world. The stress is on belief in the Son as one who came at the Father's sending. What he did when he came appears to have been irrelevant to them.

> ...the secessionists may have thought that this eternal life was made available simply through the presence of the Word in the world and not through dependence on what the Word did while present. The really important factor for them would be that the Word became flesh, not the kind of life he lived or death he died... such statements center salvation in the sending by God rather than in any actions of the Son on earth.[102]

Following Brown's argument, it can be clearly seen that the secessionists may not have denied the physicality of Jesus, as has frequently been suggested.[103] Rather, their interpretation of the Gospel allowed them to relativize Jesus' humanity and dissociate it from any salvific effect that might otherwise be attributed to it. In this way, the secessionists may be seen to have diminished the significance of Jesus' humanity and thus, in a sense, to have denied it.

How, then, does the author of I John seek to correct this interpretation of the Johannine Gospel, while adhering to the essence of the Johannine tradition that he shares with the secessionists? The elements of the Son's pre-existence, his coming into the world and his sending by the Father are all concepts to which he gives assent, as is the deity of the Son and the revelation that comes through the Son. While he can not take issue with these essential christological elements, he can and does argue against the way in which they are interpreted, by seeking to provide a counterweight in areas where he judges the secessionists' christology to have lost its delicate balance.

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[102] Ibid., 117.

[103] See, for example, Marshall, 206.

To respond to their interpretations I John accompanies "statements implying pre-existence with other statements stressing the career of the Word-made-flesh - a stress more formal and explicit than what is found in the Fourth Gospel."[104] The first area Brown addresses is the writer's response to the secessionists' understanding of pre-existence. Brown identifies the Prologue of the Epistle as providing a balance to the Prologue of the Gospel. He isolates three key concepts from the Gospel Prologue - the beginning, word, and life - and demonstrates how in the Epistle Prologue the author uses the same terms, re-interpreting them in a way that is both faithful to their usage elsewhere in the Gospel, and compatible with an emphasis on the human activity of Jesus.[105]

Secondly, Brown shows how the secessionists' reticence to attribute salvific importance to the actions of Jesus, specifically to his death, is addressed in the Epistle's interpretation of Gospel themes. This can be seen in I John 1:7 which, Brown suggests, is the writer's interpretation of John 1:29 and thus presents a salvific understanding of Jesus' death rather than a symbolic one. He draws similar comparisons between John 11:51,52 and I John 2:2, and between John 10:15 and I John 3:16, noting the emphasis on the expiatory aspect of the death of Jesus in I John 4:10 and 5:6, commenting that

> A truly human Jesus who was baptized and shed his blood is the one whom the author characterizes as "the true God and eternal life" (5:21). Much more clearly, then, than in the Gospel, the Jesus of I John is a redeemer, even if as a true Johannine the author never forgets the role of Jesus as revealer. ... The author and his opponents could agree that eternal life consists in knowing that Jesus Christ is the one who was sent by God (John 17 3), but the author is trying to weed out his opponents by insisting on a public *confession* that this sending or coming was in human

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[104] Brown, *Community*, 120.

[105] Ibid., 121.

> flesh (I John 4:2; II John 7). Without that human modality, he maintains, eternal life would not have been revealed to us (1:1-2).[106]

Brown thus demonstrates that the Gospel and the Johannine tradition may be interpreted as having a carefully balanced christology.

Theological Issues II: Eschatology

The secessionists' particular brand of christology appears to have extended its influence to their understanding of eschatology. While I John does not contain overt references to a specific eschatological form of thought, it does contain implications that the secessionists possessed an over-realized eschatology that will re-appear in a later discussion of secessionist ethics. As with their christology, there is an identifiable basis in the Gospel from which their over-realized eschatological stance can be seen to have derived. Essentially, it relates to their interpretation of the Gospel's christology. It has been shown that the secessionists chose to focus on Jesus' role as revealer and on the concept of his sending by the Father, as well as on his coming rather than on his actions as the keystone of his mission. It follows, therefore, that their understanding of what it means to believe in the Son would carry a stronger emphasis on believing in the *person* of the Son rather than believing in the salvific efficacy of his actions while on earth. Believing on the Son becomes the criteria upon which people would be judged (John 3:17-21), and with this the author of the Epistle would agree.

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[106] Ibid., 123.

The difference, for the author, arises in their concept of belief in the Son. From their perspective, the passage previously cited from the Gospel means that those who believe have already been judged, therefore there is no future judgment awaiting them. Gospel references to the believers' relationship to the light (8:12), their status as children of God (1:13), their unity with the Father and the Son (14:23), their knowledge of God (17:3), and their possession of eternal life (6:54, see also 5:24) would all have been interpreted in this context. Eschatology is realized in the present for the secessionists. The Word came into the world, they believed and thus have passed through judgment and into eternal life. Also, as the deeds of the Word in the world are de-emphasized, so the deeds of Christians in the world are of no account. In this, a link between secessionist christology, eschatology, and ethics can be traced. Brown posits that from the secessionists' perspective, the Gospel themes cited above would have been read

> as harmonious with their christology and ethics: all this realized salvation was accomplished by the descent of the Word into the world, and Christians who have received such privileges need not worry about what they do in the world. Presumably there would have been no place in secessionist theology for future eschatology. Through knowing Jesus they already had eternal life, and they would take literally John 11:26: "Everyone who has life and believes in me shall never die at all" - they would simply pass from this world to which they had never really belonged (17:14) to join Jesus in the mansions which he had prepared for them (14:2-3).[107]

As an adherent to the Johannine tradition, the writer of the Epistle demonstrates possession of a realized eschatology. This can be seen in his references to such concepts as believers' relationship to the light (1:7), their status as children of God (3:1), their

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[107] Ibid., 135f.

unity with the Father and the Son (1:3), their knowledge of God (4:6,7), and their possession of eternal life (5:11-13), themes that have been noted previously with reference to the Gospel. He cannot, however, agree that the Christian's behaviour during this life is irrelevant. Rather he seeks to answer the secessionists' development of an over-realized eschatology by putting two safeguards into effect.

Brown identifies these safeguards in terms of ethics and future eschatology. He observes that the writer appends an ethical condition to realized eschatology, so that an over-realized interpretation of Johannine eschatology is countered by the insistence that possession of eternal life will be reflected in specific ethical behaviours such as obedience to God's word (2:5) and love of one's brother (3:10).[108] In addition, he demonstrates that in verses such as 3:2 the author makes strong appeals to future eschatology, thus bringing to the forefront a concept that was unobtrusively present in the Gospel. The insistence on a future time of blessing stresses the ethical requirement he has already attached to realized eschatology. If those future blessings are to be experienced, they must be understood in their relationship to present behaviour. Future eschatology thus becomes a corrective to over-realized eschatology. In summary, Brown comments,

> For the author of the Epistles, the gifts acclaimed in Johannine realized eschatology are not an end in themselves (as they are for his opponents) but the source of confidence for the future, provided that those who are already God's children continue to life a life worthy of the Father whom they shall one day see face to face.[109]

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[108] Ibid., 136.

[109] Ibid., 137.

Brown also suggests that the secessionists themselves become an integral aspect of the author's eschatology. He identifies the author's application of apocalyptic language to them in 2;18-22 and 4:1-3, referring to them in categories that are elsewhere in the New Testament portrayed as indicators of the last times and coming judgment.[110] In a sense, then, the secessionists' eschatology, while derived from the Gospel, is corrected in the Epistle writer's appeal to the Johannine tradition and their eschatology by virtue of its very existence becomes part of his argument against those who promulgate it.

Theological Issues III: Pneumatology

"Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (I John 4:1). The Johannine tradition as reflected in John 14-16 possesses a characteristic emphasis on the instructional role of the Spirit-Paraclete. The Paraclete is assigned a revelatory and didactic role within the community (14:26), becoming the authority by which the life and witness of the community is regulated (15:26-27; 16:7-15). Brown suggests that the secessionists took this view of the Paraclete's role beyond what was intended by the tradition, re-interpreting it in a manner that allowed them to refute attempts to correct their teaching with the claim that their teaching came under the direction of the Spirit. The Spirit, then, became the implement that the secessionists used to defend other

[110] Ibid., 138.

elements of their teaching. Brown proposes that, "the opponents may have designated themselves as teachers and prophets and have claimed to speak under the guidance of the Spirit."[111] He further elaborates on the ramifications of this upon their apologetic for their christological perspective, offering the idea that "[p]resumably the secessionist prophet or teacher would justify his christological proclamation in terms of such Spirit guided witness that is very much a part if the Johannine tradition."[112] The secessionists may thus have thought their perspective on the role of the Spirit-Paraclete to render the whole of their teaching unassailable. Their appeal to the authority of the Spirit-Paraclete was weighty and required a careful response for the writer of the Epistle.

In seeking to correct their interpretation of the Spirit-Paraclete's function, the author appears to use the tool of omission in two key areas. That is, he makes his point to a great extent by what he does not say rather than by what he does say. Brown notes this in reference to two specific matters. With respect to the relative frequency with which the Epistle makes reference to the Spirit, he observes that specific mentions of the Spirit are infrequent; there are only two sections where the role of the Spirit is discussed, and these focus on discernment of the Spirit of God from other spirits (3:24-4:6, 13) and to the Spirit's role as witness to Jesus (5:6-8).[113] The Spirit is thus described as providing the means for detecting truth. Beyond that, the Epistle simply does not explore the role of the Spirit. Brown also assigns significance to the absence in the Epistle of any insistence by

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[111] Ibid., 138.

[112] Ibid., 139.

[113] Ibid., 140.

the author on his authority within the community. He does not claim positional authority as a basis upon which his instruction is to be heeded. Unlike Paul, who often appealed to his apostolic authority when seeking to gain a positive response to his corrective teaching, the author refrains from arguing the weight of his role within the community. The rationale for this is clear: the secessionists contended for their position on the basis of their possession of the Spirit. For him to debate from the same position would be counterproductive as well as in defiance of the larger principle of the unity of the Johannine community - a unity based on their common experience of the Spirit.

> in the Johannine tradition the position of the Paraclete as the authoritative teacher and the gift of the Paraclete to every believer would have relativized the teaching office of any church official. . . . this situation explains the inability of the author of the Epistles to correct his opponents in function of his office ... He must rather appeal to that inner guidance of the Christian which is in conformity with the Johannine tradition: "Your anointing is from the Holy One, so all of you have knowledge" (I John 2:20). ... if the opponents are claiming to be Spirit-guided teachers, the author is reminding his audience that every Johannine Christian is a teacher through and in the Paraclete-Spirit . . . The secessionists are wrong, not because of an authoritative "I say you are wrong" on the part of the author, but because they have broken communion (*koinonia*) with believers who are all anointed by the Word and the Spirit, and who therefore instinctively recognize the truth when those writers and preachers who have been intimately associated with the Beloved Disciple speak and say, "We proclaim to you the Gospel we have had from the beginning.[114]

The author's encouragement to his readers to "test the spirits" (4:1) thus allows members of the community to discern the truth of the situation by availing of their own anointing by the Spirit. Yet, Brown acknowledges, this line of reasoning may have carried little influence with the secessionists themselves, who could hold out their

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[114] Ibid., 141f.

apparent success (4:5) as vindicating the correctness of their teaching.[115] He looks, then, to the Gospel to provide an argument against their apparent success. Beginning with the world's rejection of the Spirit (14:17) and the Spirit's condemnation of the world (16:8-10), the Epistle writer declares that their success in the world is a sign of their error rather than of the truth of their doctrine. Brown summarizes: "Success is a sign that the opponents do not belong to Christ; it is a sign adding to the author's pessimistic conviction that "the last hour" is at hand (I John 2:18).[116] While the refutation of the secessionists' position with respect to pneumatology does not appear to have as strong a basis as has been seen in reference to, say, their eschatology, Brown does demonstrate that there is more than one way to interpret the pneumatology of the tradition. Neither the tradition nor the Gospel that emerged from it irrevocably send believers down the secessionist path.

The Issue of Ethics

In Brown's examination of the three key theological concerns, an inter-relatedness between them has become evident. In addition, it has not been possible to outline the theological concerns without acknowledging that the secessionists' eschatology, pneumatology, and especially their christology each appear to contribute to their interpretation of Johannine ethics. With the theological framework in place, Brown's concept of secessionist ethics and the writer's response to it may now be addressed. From

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[115] Ibid., 144.

[116] Ibid., 144.

his mirror reading of the Epistle he identifies three facets of the ethics issue: perfectionism/sinlessness, the attitude toward keeping God's commandments, and the concept and practice of brotherly love.

Perfectionism/Sinlessness

Brown connects the secessionists' claim to sinlessness with their understanding of their relationship with God. For him, a key descriptive phrase of this facet of the ethical concern is "intimacy with God and sinlessness."[117] He notes that I John 1:6, 8 and 10 present a series of boasts leading to the possibility of the conclusion that those who know God are sinless, and demonstrate that participation in a relationship with God is a fundamental aspect of the Johannine Gospel's presentation of the teaching of Jesus. It is only a small interpretive step from the claim to know God to a claim to sinless perfectionism based on texts such as John 8:31-36, where the phrase "slave to sin" is understood as referring to those who do not believe. Brown comments, "Since, by contrast with the non-believer, the believer is freed from sin, the secessionists are really only rephrasing slightly when they claim to be free from the guilt of sin."[118]

A larger leap on the secessionists' part is found in their further claim not to have sinned (I John 1:8, 10). Some of the difficulty here lies in discerning the meaning of the phrase "we have not sinned" in vs. 10. Are they claiming to have never sinned, or only to have not sinned since becoming believers? Brown suggests that the latter

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[117] Ibid., 124.

[118] Ibid., 125.

interpretation may be more readily derived from the Gospel. He outlines how an argument could have been developed as follows: Jesus is the Son of God (John 1:34), Jesus is sinless (8:46), those who believe in Jesus become God's children (1:12, 13), those who believe in Jesus will not be judged guilty (3:18). The implication follows that in becoming children of God (like Jesus) believers are free from guilt and therefore sinless. He continues his examination of this subject by highlighting specific similarities between the secessionist view and that of the author as reflected in the Epistle (I John 3:5-6, 9) but points out that there is, nevertheless, an essential difference between their understandings of what sinlessness means.

> The author sees sinlessness as the proper implication of divine begetting and therefore as an *obligation* incumbent on a Christian. I understand his "cannot be a sinner" to mean cannot *consistently* be a sinner, for elsewhere he recognizes that Christians may fall short of the "should." . . . The opponents, on the other hand, in their perfectionism see sinlessness as a realized truth and not simply as an obligation. For them, the believer is sinless, and they cannot allow the possibility of the exception, "If anyone does sin."[119]

This fundamental difference in the definition of sinlessness provides a basis upon which the author seeks to bring balance to the secessionist view. It permits him to make the statement in I John 2:1, "but if anybody does sin" which, though unacceptable to the secessionists, recognizes the reality with which believers have to contend. In contradiction to the secessionists the author can thus insist upon the concept that sinlessness is not a passive state for the believer, but a goal for which to aim and which may sometimes be missed.

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[119] Ibid., 126f.

Obedience to God's Commandments

A second facet of the ethical concern addressed by the author is obedience to the commandments of God. Brown commences his discussion of "keeping the commandments"[120] by noting the challenge faced by the modern scholar who attempts to determine whether the secessionists' failure in this regard was primarily practical or essentially theoretical.[121] To illustrate this difficulty he points out that I John lacks the kind of specific polemic against particular vices that was prevalent in other Christian writings of the time. He references texts such as Galatians 5:19-21, commenting that the only passage in the Epistle that approximates this kind of listing, I John 2:15-17, is not clearly directed at the secessionists and may not fulfill the same function as the specific lists of vices found elsewhere in the New Testament.

As no definitive concept regarding the secessionists' practice of Christian ethics can be identified, Brown suggests that the answer to this aspect of the ethical concern can be traced to the secessionists' christology. He posits a transference of their attitude towards the salvific efficacy of Jesus' deeds (that there is none) to their attitude towards the deeds of the Christian. "If they did not attribute salvific importance to the earthly career of Jesus, to the way he lived and died, why should the earthly life of the Christian be pertinent to salvation?"[122] Such an attitude may have been derived from the Gospel

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[120] Ibid., 128.

[121] Ibid., 128.

[122] Ibid., 129.

accounts of Jesus' teaching concerning the believer's relationship with the world (John 15:19 and 17:16) and regarding the link between knowing the Father and having eternal life (John 17:3). He also points out that in the Gospel the kind of "precise moral teaching"[123] found in the Synoptic Gospels is replaced by the exhortation that doing the work of God is accomplished through the exercise of faith in Jesus (John 6:28-29). This emphasis on adherence to Jesus rather than on obedience to a specified moral code may have led to a somewhat esoteric view of what is meant by "keeping God's commandments." He suggests that "the secessionist lack of interest in commandments may have been shaped by the dominance of christology and the lack of specific ethical directions in the Johannine tradition."[124]

To combat the secessionists' apparent de-emphasis on obedience to God's commandments, Brown again appeals to Johannine christology. He demonstrates that the author references the life of Jesus as an example for Christians to emulate. As the secessionists may have used their understanding of Johannine christology to validate their lack of stress on adherence to specific ethical guidelines, so the author implements his understanding of Johannine christology to support a strong standard of ethical behaviour for Christians. Whereas the secessionists' accented the concept of abiding in Christ, the author pairs this state of abiding with a specific consequence of abiding: "Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did" (I John 2:6). In fact, the importance of living in conformity with the example of Jesus is also linked with eschatological hope (I

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[123] Ibid., 129.

[124] Ibid., 130.

John 3:3) and with the believer's "belonging" to God rather than to the devil (I John 3:7-10). Yet, Brown notes, there is a sense in which the author's refutation of the secessionists' position is not as strong as might be wished as the tradition itself does not present specific ethical criteria from which a rebuttal could be framed.[125]

Brotherly Love

Although definitive catalogues of ethical behaviour appear to be absent from the Johannine tradition, Brown reminds his readers that the Gospel does contain repeated injunctions to obey the commandments of God. Although the Gospel does not describe precisely what those commandments entail, they are stated in terms of the believer's love for God (14;15, 21; 15;10) and love for others (13:34-35; 15:12, 17). If, according to the Johannine tradition, love is the primary expression of one's obedience to the commandments of God, then it can be argued that the specific ethical failure of the secessionists is a failure to love (I John 4:20).

It might seem that such a glaring departure from the tradition would be difficult for the secessionists to defend. A critical element of their defence, for Brown, lies in how the secessionists interpreted the concept of "love of brothers"[126]. He suggests that they may only have regarded those who agreed with their interpretation of the tradition as brothers. Those who held to a contrary interpretation demonstrated a lack of love by

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[125] Ibid., 130.

[126] Brown acknowledges the implication that "brothers" encompasses both male and female members of the community in note 257 of *Community*, 131.

leaving the fellowship. The secessionists continued to love those who abided by their own ideology, thus they would have seen themselves as complying with the commandment to love. The same argument is made by the author: His community was living in obedience to the love commandment and those who seceded from their fellowship were responsible for fragmenting the unity of the community and thus demonstrated their lack of love for other Christians.[127] Both groups used the same argument to demonstrate their compliance with Jesus' command to love and their opponents' lack of compliance with it.

Brown further draws attention to the interpretation of "one another" as "other Christians" based upon John 15:13-15. He proposes a principle that the Synoptic (and Johannine Gospel) dualism of "the church versus the world" is re-defined in the Epistle in terms of the intra-community conflict, commenting that "the ethical battle in the Epistle is fought with the same terminological weapons employed in the Gospel."[128] In his illustration of this principle he includes reference to the concepts of darkness and justice, the condition of being children of the devil and the application of Isaiah 6:10, as indicated in the following chart[129]:

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[127] Ibid., 132.

[128] Ibid., 134.

[129] Information in this chart is based upon *Community*, 134.

CONCEPT	USAGE IN THE GOSPEL	USAGE IN THE EPISTLE
darkness	John 3: 19-21 - those who walk in darkness are those who *do not accept Jesus*	I John 2:9-11 those who are in darkness are *Christians* who do not love their brothers
justice	John 16: 8,10 - the Paraclete corrects the *world* in regard to justice	I John 3:7-8 justice is linked to the behaviour of those claiming to be *Christians*
children of the devil	John 8:44 - the phrase is used of *certain Jewish believers*	I John 3:8-15 it is applied to the *secessionists*
the use of Isaiah 6:10	John 12:39-40 - applies it to the *Jews*	I John 2;11 applies it to the *secessionists*

Finally, Brown observes that this re-interpretation of certain aspects of Johannine dualism against other Christians presents a potential and ongoing danger for the Church in its response to the dissenting interpretations that arise within it from time to time. For this reason, for the sake of the perils to which it can alert the Church, he concludes that "the author of the Epistles did the church a great service in preserving for it the Fourth Gospel; he did this by showing that the Gospel did not have to be read the way the secessionists were reading it."[130]

While Brown makes this statement in reference to the ethical issue, it also serves to summarize his conclusion regarding the significant role played by the Epistle in defending the orthodoxy of both the Gospel and the Johannine tradition with reference to both the ethical issue and the theological issues of christology, eschatology and pneumatology. The next step of this study is to discuss the results of his examination in

[130] Ibid., 135.

the context of Turner's theory. This will show how Brown's conclusions fit within Turner's concept of fixed and flexible elements showing, in response to Käsemann, that I John confirms the possibility of an orthodox interpretation of the Johannine Gospel and tradition.

CHAPTER 3

BROWN AND KÄSEMANN: A DIALOGUE OF DISSONANCE

In an effort to address the issue of the orthodoxy of the Johannine tradition and by extension the canonicity of the Fourth Gospel, two representative perspectives have been identified and the battle lines have been clarified between the theses of two highly respected scholars. An attempt will now be made to bring the divergent views of Käsemann and Brown into dialogue in order to attempt to determine whether Käsemann is inarguably correct or if, as Brown suggests, there is an interpretation of the Johannine tradition that allows its Gospel a place in the New Testament canon.

With reference to the theoretical framework within which Käsemann's and Brown's approaches can comfortably be situated one is compelled to return to the groundwork laid by Bauer and Turner. Käsemann's statement that the Fourth Gospel was included in the canon "through man's error and God's providence"[131] reflects the influence of Walter Bauer, an influence that was shared with Käsemann by his teacher Rudolf Bultmann. Brown, on the other hand, while making no direct reference to the theories of H.E.W. Turner displays an understanding of the possibilities that lay within early Christianity that is in harmony with Turner's approach. Käsemann views the Fourth Gospel's inclusion in the canon as an act in which the providence of God utilized a fault

[131] Käsemann, 75.

in the judgment of human agents. The error they made in their own era permitted the acceptance of a Gospel that was only more fully appreciated by later generations of Christian thinkers. Brown contends that the human factor contributing to its selection was positive in nature, consisting of the deliberate action of an agent (the writer of I John) whose interpretation of the Gospel intentionally demonstrated that an orthodox reading of it was possible.

The question of the orthodoxy of this Gospel thus receives two conflicting responses. Käsemann's summary statement implies a link between the Gospel and heretical movements within the church, in the classical definition of heresy. He connects it with a branch of Christian thought that is, at best, peripheral to the mainstream Church,[132] viewing it as representing a form of Christianity that had failed to find wider acceptance at the time the canon was being formed. Brown projects the image of a Gospel deriving from an alternate but essentially orthodox (in Turner's sense) school of Christian thought, the misinterpretation of which was corrected by the first Epistle in an effort to emphasize the orthodoxy of both the Gospel and the tradition out of which it emerged. It is now appropriate to bring the theses of Käsemann and Brown into more deliberate interaction, appealing for assistance to those who have sought to evaluate the results of their studies.

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[132] Hawkin, 32.

Käsemann's Case

Like Bauer, Käsemann appears to favour a view of early Christianity that allows it to encompass a variety of belief. Only gradually, and as a function of unfolding history, was this diversity reduced to what is traditionally regarded as orthodox. He echoes Bauer's perspective when he comments that

> 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 . . . the canon did not originate without the influence of those trends which, since the end of the first century, were already considered by many as being heretical and thus were rejected.[133]

Reflecting Bauer's position, Käsemann is careful not to apply the label of heterodoxy to the "trends" himself, preferring a more objective term by which to indicate the varieties of belief present in early Christianity. His tendency is to regard the designation of heresy as a developmental process within Christianity. This can be detected in his description of the New Testament canon which, he suggests, "exists only as a diverse entity with many theological contradictions in which the complicated history of primitive Christianity is reflected. By affirming the canon we also acknowledge its divergent trends and even its contradictions."[134] That Käsemann's understanding of the role of the Fourth Gospel in the canon can be viewed as an extension of Bauer's thought is evident in Käsemann's frequently referenced statement that its inclusion demonstrates

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[133] Käsemann, 76.

[134] Ibid., 76.

the variety of belief that was located in early Christianity. "Against all its own intentions, and misled by the picture of Jesus as God walking on the face of the earth, the Church assigned to the apostles the voice of those whom it otherwise ignored and one generation later condemned as heretics."[135] The influence of Bauer is clear: the Gospel of John was included in the canon at a convenient moment in the Church's development, although its orthodoxy had been questioned both before and following that moment. "From the historical viewpoint, the Church committed an error when it declared the gospel to be orthodox," Käsemann concludes.[136]

An illustration of Bauer's thesis at work in Käsemann's thought can be found in Käsemann's reconstruction of the Johannine schism. While the results of his reconstruction conflict with Bauer's, he reaches them by an application of Bauer's principle of the essential diversity of early Christianity. He thus makes a case for the orthodoxy of the opponents and the heterodoxy of the Johannine Christians that naturally leads to his proposal that the Gospel's place in the canon is dubious. He assigns the writer of III John, whom he also identifies as the writer of the Gospel, the heterodox role, Diotrephes becomes the defender of orthodoxy, and the orthodoxy of the Gospel is thus cast into doubt.[137]

A helpful response to Käsemann's position as expressed in *The Testament of Jesus* is framed by Günther Bornkamm's article, "Towards the Interpretation of John's

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[135] Ibid., 75.

[136] Ibid., 76.

[137] Hawkin, 29f.

Gospel". While he seeks to address a number of issues arising from *The Testament*, the current discussion will focus on matters that relate to the orthodoxy of the Gospel.

In *The Testament* Käsemann's description of the Johannine Jesus as "God walking on the face of the earth" demonstrates his contention that the Gospel possesses a naïvely docetic christology in which the death of Jesus functions as the means by which the Son returns to the Father.[138] The emphasis is on Jesus' departure from the earth, not on any salvific effect ensuing from his death - a position similar to that of the secessionists posited by Brown in the previous chapter. In his response, Bornkamm inquires, "can one really agree with Käsemann that the one who is speaking here is not the one who is about to die? ... the one who is about to die does indeed speak in the farewell discourses insofar as his words reveal to the faithful the benefits of his death."[139] He further comments on Käsemann's contention that the crucifixion is in disharmony with the image of "God walking on the face of the earth."

> I cannot understand Käsemann's assertion that the passion narrative must have been in some sense an embarrassment to the evangelist because it does not accord with the picture of a God striding over the earth. According to Käsemann, John made things easier for himself by more or less forcibly stamping his narrative with the seal of victory. But John . . . makes perfectly clear the significance for him of a theology of the cross. The actual concept of glory itself, anchored as it is in this Gospel to the paradox of the crucifixion, is in my view sufficient proof of this. . . . [Käsemann] fails to bring out that the faith that lies behind the Johannine picture of Christ is not in the first place grounded in the earthly Jesus but upon him who died on the cross. If this is right then it means the collapse

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[138] Käsemann, 5.

[139] Günther Bornkamm, "Towards the Interpretation of John's Gospel," Reprinted in John Ashton, *The Interpretation of John*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1997), 107.

> of the only level on which, according to Käsemann, John presents the story of Jesus, namely as a mythical account of God striding over the earth.[140]

Bornkamm places additional emphasis on his perspective by referencing repeated allusions to the approaching death of Jesus that permeate the Gospel. The death of Jesus, in word and fulfillment, is included by Bornkamm in the body of material of which the Paraclete will remind believers in subsequent days.[141] In contrast to Käsemann, Bornkamm views the death of Jesus as a significant theme throughout the Gospel, a theme that serves to illustrate the orthodoxy of the tradition it represents.

Bornkamm further addresses Käsemann's conclusion that the Gospel displays a naïve docetism with reference to Käsemann's interpretation of John 1:14, a verse that Käsemann suggests should be understood as stressing the glory of the Son rather than the concept of incarnation.[142] Käsemann's interpretation of this verse is but one example of his divergence from the thought of his teacher, Bultmann, with whom he developed a strong difference of opinion regarding the implementation of Bauer's thesis. Where Bultmann saw "the Word became flesh" as a major theme of the Gospel[143] Käsemann's emphasis on "glory" brings him to a very different understanding of the meaning of the Gospel, an interpretation that re-emphasizes the divergent nature of Johannine Christianity and strengthens the argument that it serves as an example of Bauer's concept of early Christianity. As has been noted previously, this demonstrates that

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[140] Ibid., 107f.

[141] Ibid., 108.

[142] Käsemann, 9ff.

[143] Hawkin, 103, footnote 93.

> Käsemann is then the true heir of Bauer. Bauer attempted to show the theological diversity of early Christianity. Käsemann sees theological diversity as present in the New Testament itself. . . . The Gospel of John is *the example* in the New Testament which shows that one cannot unite New Testament theology under one theological rubric.[144]

In short, for Käsemann the inclusion of the Gospel of John in the canon serves as an example that the diversity of belief in early Christianity was such a strong element that it is reflected in the canon that emerged from it.

In responding to Käsemann's interpretation of this verse Bornkamm suggests that laying exclusive emphasis on either incarnation or glory can lead to an unbalanced understanding of the meaning of both the verse and the Gospel. He perceives the evangelist's intent in 1:14 to consist of an insistence that the Logos/God was manifested by incarnation in the human person Jesus. Bornkamm clearly understands the incarnation of God in Jesus to mean a real incarnation rather than the appearance of one. He offers the verdict that

> If one follows Käsemann in interpreting John's version of the story of Jesus undialectically as a simple, straightforward story of God striding over the face of the earth, a story infected with docetism and robbed of the reality of the crucifixion, then what is encountered is not John but the pre-Johannine tradition . . . the thesis that the Christology of John is naïvely docetic seems to me to be false.[145]

Bornkamm similarly responds to Käsemann's attempt to link the Gospel of John with gnosticism, suggesting that gnostic elements found in the Gospel indicate both an awareness of and response to that thought world. He is definite in his premise that the Gospel is anti-gnostic, and that the manner in which the evangelist employs gnostic

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[144] Ibid., 33.

[145] Bornkamm in Ashton, 111.

terminology provides a means by which to distinguish the evangelist's thought from the gnostic perspective.[146] Käsemann's view of creation as stage dressing for revelation also fails to find agreement from Bornkamm, who views the proposal as discontinuous with the relationship that exists between creation and revelation. Again, Bornkamm's response is characterized by his perception of an anti-gnostic stance within the Gospel, summarized in his statement that

> even the Gospel's undeniably "gnostic" traits . . . are not, properly understood, gnostic at all. What they do assert . . . is that purely *as* world the world is impure and that the only road to salvation is a union with God and Jesus disclosed in the word and seized on by faith. . . . the world is and continues to be affected and concerned by what happens to them.[147]

Where Käsemann attempts to make strong identifications between the Gospel and the heterodox beliefs of docetism and gnosticism Bornkamm, in the space of a few pages, suggests that any connections between them proposed by Käsemann form an insufficient foundation upon which to build a case for the heterodoxy of the Gospel. While acknowledging the strengths of Käsemann's work, in the final analysis Bornkamm finds it unsatisfactory grounds upon which to base a definitive statement against the orthodoxy of the Gospel and its tradition. Bornkamm does not stand alone in his analysis of Käsemann's thesis, for Brown has a strong contribution to make on the subject.

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[146] Ibid., 112.

[147] Ibid., 113.

Brown's Response

In his response to Käsemann Brown takes issue with what is, at the core, a "Baueresque" understanding of early Christianity that underlines diversity of belief rather than diversity in the *expression* of belief. He further identifies Käsemann's charge that the nature of the Gospel's christology is naïvely docetic in terms that reflect upon Käsemann's views on the history of the period. In Brown's analysis, "Käsemann has mistakenly gone against the evidence in judging this to be the christology of the Gospel itself, and he is anachronistic in applying the term docetism to the Gospel."[148] Käsemann, in Brown's assessment, takes a step or two forward into the history of early Christianity, locates the heterodox movements of gnosticism and docetism and, based upon elements of the Gospel that could be attributed to any one the plethora of possible influences, "reads back" these essentially second century perspectives into the Gospel. This somewhat flawed perspective on the Gospel is extended by Käsemann to include the Johannine tradition as well,[149] thus opening up a discussion to which Brown seeks to contribute an alternative favouring the tradition's orthodoxy.

Although he makes no specific reference to Turner's theoretical model in his major works on the subject, Brown's reconstruction of the issues surrounding the Epistle sits comfortably within the framework of Turner's approach to the orthodoxy/heresy debate. What seems clear from the preceding examination of that reconstruction is that the Epistle seeks to place in more precise language concepts which in the Gospel are

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[148] Brown, *Community*, 116.

[149] Hawkin, 90.

phrased in a manner that leaves them open to multiple and even contradictory interpretations. The difficulty lies not in the content but in the potential for misinterpretation that derives from the manner by which the content was expressed. The essence of belief located in the Gospel can now be seen to fit within the parameters set by Turner's fixed elements. The challenge faced by the writer of the Epistle lay not in the content of faith, but in the flexible element within the Gospel - the means through which that content was expressed. By establishing what he understood to be a more faithful understanding of the Johannine tradition through the presentation of a specific interpretation of it, he lifts the tradition out of the muddy waters surrounding it, allowing its adherence to the "religious facts" of Christianity to be clearly seen.

Brown's reconstruction and thesis concerning the interpretation that the Epistle offers for the Johannine tradition shows that its theology conforms with the fixed elements described by Turner. The explanations he provides for the key theological issues of christology, eschatology and pneumatology are consistent with Turner's "religious facts,"[150] his concept of biblical revelation,[151] and the content of the Creed and Rule of Faith.[152] Furthermore, his premise that the writer of the Epistle recognized the need to provide an interpretation for the Johannine tradition can be seen as a demonstration of a reality posited by Turner. In other words, in the same way that the beliefs identified as the "religious facts" pre-existed the formulation of those beliefs into

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[150] Turner, 26.

[151] Ibid., 28f.

[152] Ibid., 29, 348ff.

a systematized Christian theology, so the Epistle provides a response to questions that arose among Christians subsequent to the formulation of the Johannine tradition.[153] In both cases the importance of working through the implications of belief becomes an integral part of the developmental process.[154]

The history of the Johannine documents can, therefore, be summarized in the following manner: Among the early expressions of the Christian kerygma there was a strand that is now identified as the Johannine tradition. Within an unspecified period of time but likely quite early in the life of this distinctive tradition questions arose concerning the meaning of certain aspects of its content, questions that were not foreseen by the Gospel writer. Because of the complexity of the thought world out of and into which it emerged, definitive responses to these questions could not always be provided. The result was that variant and diverse interpretations of the Johannine tradition evolved. In an effort to respond faithfully to both the questions and the diverse interpretations from the perspective of the Johannine tradition, the Epistle was written.[155] The Epistle can thus be seen as a response to developments within early Christianity as it sought to establish its theology.

In contrast to Käsemann, this proposal presents the Epistle as a demonstration of the orthodoxy of both the Gospel and its tradition, rather than a proof of their heterodoxy. Where Käsemann sees the Johannine Gospel and tradition as clear evidence of doctrinal

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[153] This is consistent with the principle employed by Turner in pages 26-35.

[154] Hawkin, 13.

[155] Ibid., 91.

diversity and disunity within the New Testament, Brown portrays them as indicators of a diversity of expression that yet voices a unity of belief. The contents are fixed; the expression is flexible.

> Käsemann emphasizes the diversity within the New Testament itself, and the Fourth Gospel furnishes him with his best example. But if there is no uniformity of belief in early Christianity, this does not mean that there is no unity. The theology of the Fourth Gospel may be distinctive, but it is not entirely set apart from the rest of early Christianity. . . . What is true, however, is that he [the Fourth Evangelist] has recast the Christian message in a novel and original way. Once again we should recall what Turner said about fixed and flexible elements. In the Fourth Gospel the basic elements of Christian belief are still there, but they have been reformulated by a highly original mind. The Fourth Gospel is, in other words, a good example of what Turner is talking about.[156]

An example of how this restating may have taken place is put forth by David Wenham in the article "A Historical View of John's Gospel". In addressing the question of the Gospel's *literal* historicity he makes a proposal that appears to reflect Turner's concept of fixed and flexible elements, although he does not reference Turner's work. Wenham invites his reader to consider the possibility that in the Fourth Gospel the evangelist takes up the role of interpreter rather than historical chronicler. That is, the evangelist's concern is to communicate specific "religious facts" about Jesus, but he conveys them in essence rather than verbatim.

To illustrate this principle Wenham draws attention to several of the "I am" sayings, noting that where John portrays Jesus as identifying himself with the images of way, good shepherd, door, bread, and vine, the Synoptists have him utilizing the related

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[156] Ibid., 99.

images of path, searching shepherd, gate, body and vineyard.[157] The literary device is not a precise repetition of the Johannine "I am" formula, yet a similarity of content is conveyed through the employment of related idioms. Wenham outlines the principle thus: "... it may be that John is more the interpreter and less the exact chronicler than the Synoptics, even if it is only a matter of degree. To say that is not an oblique way of admitting that John is not historical after all: not at all. It is a matter of considering *how* John writes history, not a matter of questioning *whether* John writes history."[158]

While Wenham's article focuses on the literal historicity of the Gospel, it also treats issues related to the harmony of the Johannine tradition with the other traditions represented in the New Testament. His conclusion demonstrates the perspective that while there may be freedom in the manner in which the "religious facts" are articulated, that is through a variety of idioms or variations on the same image, the element of flexibility does not extend to the essential content that is being communicated. In this, he echoes Turner, and lends a supportive voice to Hawkin's observation that it is the mode of articulation not the content of the Christian kerygma that is subject to the efforts of the evangelist's "highly original mind." Wenham's proposal therefore is seen to affirm Brown's proposition that there exists a fundamental harmony in the Fourth Gospel's adherence to the "fixed elements" of Christian belief.

Käsemann, as has been previously noted takes exception to Brown's concept of a Fourth Gospel that accords with much of what is expressed elsewhere in the New

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[157] David Wenham, "A Historical View of John's Gospel," *Themelios* 23, no. 2, (1998): 18.

[158] Ibid., 17.

Testament. Brown, while acknowledging diversity of expression within the New Testament, expresses the thought that in many ways this diversity is located in the articulation of belief rather than in its content. He supports this premise with reference to specific epistles outside the Johannine corpus and emphasizes that the Evangelist, although an innovative thinker, was by no means as radically different theologically from mainstream Christianity as has been suggested.[159] Käsemann puts forward the considered opinion that Brown's championing of the Johannine tradition's connection to the rest of New Testament Christianity is flawed. He does not see the diversity within the New Testament from a perspective of unity in diversity as much as in a sense of diversity and disunity.[160] Their positions are clearly opposed to each other; there appears to be no ground for agreement between them on this issue. But is Brown's effort to salvage the orthodoxy of the Johannine Gospel as mistaken as Käsemann seems to suggest?

Through his attempt to reconstruct the situation out of which the Gospel and Epistle were both born, Brown seeks an understanding of the Johannine tradition that takes into account the context in which the documents were written,[161] and were initially read. The context he establishes through careful exploration allows him to demonstrate that there is a thread weaving through each successive development of the tradition, a thread that remains tied to Turner's "religious facts" thus ensuring "an integrity to the

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[159] Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII,* cxxvi f.

[160] Käsemann, 2, footnote 2. According to Hawkin (33), the main point of harmony Käsemann identifies within the New Testament is the Lordship of Christ which becomes for him the thread by which a hermeneutical link may be made.

[161] Craig R. Koester, "R. E. Brown and J. L. Martyn: Johannine Studies in Retrospect," *Biblical Theology Bulletin,* 21 (1991): 52.

final form of the text."[162] This integrity, it could be suggested, provides the link between the Johannine texts and the theology of mainstream Christianity. While he acknowledges the tension that exists between the variously articulated theologies of the New Testament, Brown prefers to view these as offsetting each other, thus contributing to a more balanced Christianity. He comments that

> I have referred to the theology of the Fourth Gospel as challengingly different, volatile, dangerous, and as the most adventuresome in the NT. The history of the Johannine secessionists who laid claim to the Gospel should explain those adjectives . . . [At this point he outlines something of the variety of Christian expressions that have been connected to the Gospel.]
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> The ultimate check upon what Kysar calls the "maverick Gospel" has been the church's hermeneutical decision to place it in the same canon as Mark, Matthew, and Luke, Gospels which implicitly advocate the side opposite to many Johannine positions. This means that the Great Church, "the church catholic" . . . has chosen to live with tension. It has chosen not a Jesus who is either God or man but both; . . . because of the church decisions about the canon, attempts at simple resolutions of these theological tensions into a static position on one side or the other are unfaithful to the whole NT.[163]

Brown's description of the tensions that exist within the New Testament canon recognize the presence of theological pluriformity within early Christianity, but without insisting that this pluriformity requires mutual exclusion. The diverse expressions of the kerygma found among the canonical Gospels serves, rather, to provide a mutual enrichment in the composition of the portrait painted of Jesus in the New Testament. When taken together these Gospel descriptions, while raising significant questions (or perhaps because of these questions), co-operate together to prevent the production of a

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[162] Ibid., 52.

[163] Brown, *Community*, 163f.

skewed image of Jesus. The diversity within the canon is thus seen in terms of a necessity of its design: in order to faithfully preserve something of the complexity of their subject it became important to incorporate a variety of perspectives on Jesus' life and teaching. When any one Gospel is removed from the context of the canon a distorted image may result.

Michael Cleary, in his commentary on Brown's contribution to Johannine studies, makes the point that while the canonical gospels may balance each other's christology, the option of appealing to a deliberately crafted canon was not available to the writer of I John. Without an established canon within which to take refuge, the writer was compelled to defend the orthodoxy of his tradition by creating a document that would balance the high christology found in the Gospel from within the Johannine tradition rather than by appealing to other traditions, such as the Synoptic, for assistance. That, Cleary states in accord with Brown, becomes a key factor in the inclusion of the Gospel in the canon. He observes that

> it was in this way that the "Gospel According to John" found its way into the canon of Catholic Christianity; in the context of three letters: 1 John offering its definitive interpretation; 2 John emphasizing that interpretation in the form of a sermon and the third, to commend the mailman. No other comparable work appeared with such a battery of defence; no other needed one.[164]

Brown's thesis of the Epistle's critical contribution to the canonicity of the Gospel is discussed by Cleary in terms of the way in which the task was accomplished. He recognizes that it was not simply a matter of reiteration and exposition of critical concepts

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[164] Michael Cleary, "Raymond Brown's View of the Johannine Controversy: Its Relevance for Christology Today," *Irish Theological Quarterly,* 58, no.4 (1992): 299.

from the Gospel, but that something more creative was required if a successful rescue of the Gospel was to be achieved. He therefore emphasizes the writer's need to reinterpret the content of the Gospel tradition in order to ensure that the orthodoxy of its voice is heard. This is reflected in his excavation of Brown's statement that the first Epistle saved the Gospel for the Church, wherein Cleary suggests that

> the salvage operation went further than restatement and explanation. It also entailed a certain revisionist hermeneutic. Perspectives peripheralized by the Gospel's high Christology were to be identified as of central importance. It was in this way that the Fourth Gospel found its way into the Christian canon of scripture. The Johannine epistolary literature represents a certain call to the forgotten dimensions of Christianity. For, now it really is a matter of insisting on the humanity of the Son of Man.[165]

By this statement, Cleary brings the present study full circle as he reasserts the pivotal role of hermeneutics in the consideration of the canonicity of the Fourth Gospel and, therefore, the orthodoxy of its tradition. The writer of the Epistle is positioned in the interpreter's role, as Brown proposed, and is shown to have fulfilled a vital function in the preservation of the Johannine Gospel for later generations of Christians. Cleary's evaluation affirms the value and validity of Brown's contribution to the study of Johannine Christology.

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[165] Ibid., 296f.

Summary

In this chapter, an attempt has been made to bring the approaches of Käsemann and Brown into dialogue. Käsemann remains a proponent of Bauer, having adopted his approach to early Christianity with its emphasis on the variegated nature of Christian belief, a nature that became more focused and exclusive only as the history of the church unfolded. His assumption of Bauer's principles has placed him in the firing line for accusations that he exhibits an anachronistic response to issues surrounding the question of Johannine orthodoxy.

Brown's thesis that the author of the Epistle functions as an interpreter of the Johannine tradition who preserves the Gospel for Christianity also remains, and has been seen as a vivid, though perhaps unintentional, illustration of Turner's approach to the orthodoxy/heresy debate in early Christianity. It reflects Turner's more balanced approach to Christian history, an approach that allows for the delineation of a definite standard regarding the content of belief while permitting considerable latitude in the manner through which that content is articulated.

It should be acknowledged, however, that the argument on both sides is vigorous. What remains, then, is to investigate some implications of this dialogue with respect to the orthodoxy of the Johannine Gospel and its tradition in an attempt to arrive at a resolution of the question that initiated this study.

CONCLUSION: THE ART OF HERMES AND THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE JOHANNINE GOSPEL INTO THE CANON

This study began with the question of the hermeneutical role played by I John in preserving the orthodoxy of the Fourth Gospel and, on a wider scale, of the Johannine tradition. The question focussed on was whether I John could be seen as a legitimate defence of the Johannine tradition, or whether it was an elaborate piece of misdirection. To put it in Kermode's starker terms, does I John show the reverse side of Hermes' art, that is, is it no more than a sophisticated piece of rhetorical trickery? Has the Church been misled, or has a valuable and faithful tradition been protected? A brief examination of the implications of each option as represented in the foregoing discussion by Käsemann and Brown may assist in arriving at a response to this question.

The previous chapter formed an attempt to bring into dialogue the dissonant perspectives of Käsemann and Brown regarding the orthodoxy and canonicity of the Fourth Gospel. The historical framework within which each best resonates has been established: Bauer for Käsemann and Turner for Brown. Both Käsemann and Brown have emerged from this dialogue with the coherence of their original theses retaining their integrity. Käsemann's convictions that the Gospel's "acceptance into the Church's canon took place through man's error and God's providence,"[166] and that "the Church

[166] Käsemann, 75.

committed an error when it declared the Gospel to be orthodox"[167] remain. Brown's commitment to the thesis that the Gospel, while representing an orthodox tradition, was in need of rescuing from the misinterpretations laid upon it by the heterodox also holds. He thus maintains his position that "the ultimate contribution of the author of I John to Johannine history may have been that of saving the Fourth Gospel for the church."[168] Each position holds specific implications for the orthodoxy of the Johannine tradition and for the ongoing evolution of Christianity.

By virtue of his conviction that the inclusion of the Fourth Gospel was a mistake, Käsemann effectively refutes the tradition's orthodoxy. He is quite clear in recognizing that this Gospel did, historically, come to be beneficial for the church but he views that as a positive outcome from a fundamentally negative event, as indicated above. He retains his alignment to Bauer, and vigorously defends the methodology they both favoured in direct reply to his critics. *The Testament* contains a particularly expressive statement to this effect.

> The criticism by the church historian of my times is well known to me, and I am ever more aware of the uneasiness about my exegetical methodology. But are … all the other opponents of Bauer's basic approach aware of the difficult situation in which the New Testament exegete, in distinction from other exegetes and historians, finds himself? …The historian who has a bird's eye view of two thousand years of history will, even if he analyses individual texts, be able to see other perspectives … is also confronted not only by the spirit in history, but also by every-day existence, which is usually more or less confusing and contradictory. Finally, for us who have learned from Bauer and Bultmann to be told by someone within the academic community that earlier exegetes of the New Testament had a closer relationship to the Church than we seem to have is a bit much! We

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[167] Ibid., 76.

[168] Brown, *Community*, 150.

> spent half a lifetime in the pastorate and were formed by it. ...Can we not postulate at least as a possible working hypothesis that the every-day life of primitive Christianity was determined by similar realities which also produced a 'wild mish-mash'? We do not operate completely without practical experience, even if some no longer remember and others do not want to know.[169]

Käsemann's reaction may be perceived to reveal a level of defensiveness at the questioning of his methodology. Indeed his response, like his approach to the issue of Johannine orthodoxy, seems to display a degree of anachronistic reasoning when he assumes a similarity between every-day life in primitive Christianity and the daily experience of twentieth century Christians. While it is acknowledged that much in human nature may have remained unchanged throughout the centuries, there are no doubt sufficient cultural, social and even political differences to call the kind of parallel he suggests into question. The scope of this study, however, does not permit an in depth examination of these differences. Yet the methodological concern continues. One is caused to wonder if Käsemann has become so enamoured of Bauer's approach that he has failed to see the dubious nature of at least some of the assumptions upon which it rests. The result in his work has been to cast the canonicity of the Johannine Gospel into doubt, with the implication that if the Church had been a little more vigilant when forming the canon this Gospel would have been excluded. The present debate would then be unnecessary.

Käsemann's position also raises questions regarding the overall reliability of the canon. He indicates that canonicity is not a guarantee of orthodoxy,[170] if his estimate of

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[169] Käsemann, 75, footnote 1.

[170] Ibid., 76.

the Johannine Gospel is correct. This elicits a query regarding the purpose of the canon. If the documents contained within it do not reflect a standard of belief, as its name implies, then to what end does it serve the interests of Christianity? Is it simply to provide a collection of historical references for the early days of the Christian religion? It may be useful to recall that the historical reliability of the New Testament documents is a frequent topic of discussion, the ongoing nature of which serves to illustrate the difficulty in arriving at a definitive refutation of the canon that was established in the third century.

Still, the issue can not be denied - Käsemann's stance regarding the Johannine Gospel presents the possibility of a complete re-evaluation of the composition of the New Testament canon. Such an endeavor could result in one of three basic outcomes. The canon could be re-accepted in its present form, requiring a rebuttal to Käsemann's thesis as part of the evaluative process. A revised canon could be produced, one that would exclude the Gospel of John and other works deemed to contain heretical influences. Or, the canon could be dissolved completely in favour, perhaps, of a list of recommended readings that would reflect Käsemann's (and Bauer's) preference for a variegated approach to the content of Christian belief. This final alternative, however, might serve to complicate the already challenging task of defining what precisely is entailed in being Christian. Käsemann himself does not advocate engaging in such an enterprise, offering instead a simple invitation to take an innovative approach to the art of biblical hermeneutics.

> While we have little right to reduce the canon within the Old or New Testament, because of its inner differences and divergences we are continually compelled to engage in new interpretations, decisions born out

> of our own hearing of the texts. The authority of the canon is never greater than the authority of the Gospel which should be heard from it.[171]

In the light of this statement, it would seem that calling the composition of the canon into question was not Käsemann's ultimate goal but a byproduct of his primary concern. To confine an interpretation of his work in *The Testament* to the issue of canon would be to do the same kind of disservice to his thought that one might suggest his statement on the Fourth Gospel does to the Johannine tradition. As was outlined in the introduction of this study, the danger of subjectivity is inherent in interpretative activity and some insight into the mind of the author is required if his intended meaning is to be drawn from a text.

For Käsemann the fundamental issue is not as much the composition of the New Testament canon as it is the nature of Christian history. While he states that the acceptance of the Fourth Gospel into the canon may at the time of its inclusion have been erroneous, he does not mean to suggest that it is therefore without value to the development of Christian thought. It is helpful, rather, to recall that his statement attributed the Gospel's inclusion to two influences: man's error balanced by God's providence. In other words, the defective human decision can be seen to hold benefits for Christianity. The supplementation of the Synoptic picture of Jesus acknowledged in Chapter 1 of this study, could be identified as one such benefit. For Käsemann's purpose, however, the greater advantage is located in the Gospel's distinctiveness among the New Testament writings. The inclusion of John alongside such diverse works as those emerging from the Synoptic tradition and the Pauline school, serves to demonstrate the

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[171] Ibid., 76.

multiform nature of early Christianity, reflecting "the dynamic nature of early Christian development."[172]

Käsemann's approach allows him to apply Bauer's method in reference to the Johannine tradition and, at the same time, to appeal to the early history of the Fourth Gospel as evidence supporting the validity of Bauer's thesis. The Gospel thus becomes for Käsemann a test case for the diversity that Bauer sees in early Christianity. More than emphasizing the faultiness of the canon, Käsemann's perspective on the Fourth Gospel can be seen to demonstrate the viability of Bauer's work.

If Käsemann's pronouncement on the Fourth Gospel is to be assessed, the assessment must rest on historical rather than theological considerations, in order to be consistent with his chosen method. This being so, the assumptions contained within Bauer's thesis and the previously noted anachronistic appeals to docetic and gnostic influences in *The Testament* in combination with the somewhat dubious parallels he draws between first and twentieth century Christian dynamics may provide sufficient cause to query the definitiveness of his findings. While this line of reasoning may not offer conclusive argumentation upon which to refute his stance, it is adequate to demonstrate that his statements about the orthodoxy and canonicity of the Gospel are neither inarguable nor inescapable. While, as Brown has noted, Käsemann's work demonstrates "how the Gospel *can* be read,"[173] another option does exist.

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[172] Hawkin, 120.

[173] Brown, *Community*, 116.

Brown's attempt to place the Fourth Gospel and First Epistle in a specific setting, extrapolated from his exhaustive study, proposes a historical environment that presents both as orthodox documents deriving from an orthodox tradition. In so doing, his approach illustrates the principles of Turner, acknowledging the uniqueness of the Johannine tradition as well as its points of consistency with the traditions represented elsewhere in the New Testament. For Brown and for Turner it is historically plausible to conceive of a primitive Christianity in which diverse expressions of the Christian religion shared specific fundamental beliefs or non-negotiable concepts. These expressions co-existed and entered into energetic dialogue with each other as Christians endeavoured to systematize their beliefs into formal doctrinal statements. The fixed elements remained fixed even as the Church began to move through the developmental stages that would help to define its content more precisely.

> although there was considerable diversity of belief in earliest Christianity, there was also some sense of a "center," a sense of common ground, an appeal to a common tradition. This is especially apparent in 1 John, where the author takes issue with positions he thinks do not cohere with the basic Christian tradition. The New Testament itself, by virtue of the fact that it contains such documents as I John, reflects this concern. But this concern for unity is not turned into an insistence on uniformity. . . . a Christianity based in the New Testament must recognize that the New Testament itself implies a unity in diversity.[174]

What follows from this is a recognition that the presence in the New Testament of documents emerging from the Johannine tradition serves to indicate the viability of Turner's posited fixed and flexible elements, the content being fixed even as its expression was evolving through the developmental process in which the Church

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[174] Hawkin, 99.

engaged. Rather than portraying the diversity of early Christianity as a kind of theological eclecticism, as might be read from Bauer and Käsemann, Brown's (and Turner's) perspective suggests an evolving belief system that was necessarily and deliberately engaging in clarification of its self-definition. In doing so, Brown and Turner offer a picture of early Christianity that is consistent with the picture presented throughout the Christian canon as religious belief moves through a series of stages from inception in an experience of God through to the formalization of that experience in terms of a detailed documentation of the content of faith.[175]

Whereas Käsemann may be read either as discrediting the authority and existence of the canon or as verifying Bauer's concept of a primitive Christianity that was chaotic in terms of its content (or from other points along that spectrum), Brown moves in a different direction. He suggests that Christianity was engaged in a developmental process as it sought to order itself into a cohesive movement.[176] Herein can be seen a basic hermeneutical divergence between these two conceptions of early Christianity: one of a Christianity that was essentially disordered and undefined and another of a Christianity that was one fundamentally defined but responsive to the task of clarification as questions about its content arose.[177]

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[175] This can be seen, for example, in the movement from the early faith experiences located in Genesis to the formalization of codes of religious belief and behaviour expressed in Exodus and Deuteronomy.

[176] See the outline proposed in Brown, *Community*, 166-167.

[177] Turner, 27, 28.

History and hermeneutics have intersected as these interpretations of early Christianity have become frameworks for the interpretation of the New Testament documents. For Käsemann, the adherence to Bauer's historical concepts leads to a view of the New Testament documents in which canonicity and orthodoxy come under scrutiny. The results of this scrutiny are somewhat predetermined by the view of Christian history that has become the interpretive lens. Brown offers a more organic approach to the development of Christianity that tends to legitimize and validate elements that Käsemann calls into question. The identifiable differences between New Testament documents that have been identified by Bauer and Käsemann as indicative of a syncretistic Christianity have, in the hands of Turner and Brown, become evidence of its unity in diversity and its engagement in a necessary process of self-expression.

> The acceptance of the New Testament canon implies a considerable breadth in Christian belief; it endorses many different expressions, but some (e.g. gnosticism) it does not tolerate. . . . It is here that perhaps we see clearly one of the major issues at stake in the discussion initiated by Käsemann. If he were right, and the Fourth Gospel were "naively docetic," its inclusion in the New Testament canon would imply a diversity of belief so broad that Christianity could at best be described as a syncretism - an ongoing multiplicity of interpretations with only family resemblances. There would be no intrinsic substantial identity to it. But . . . Käsemann is not correct . . . Turner's idea that Christianity is an interaction between fixed and flexible elements best describes what is going on as early Christianity develops. This would imply that there was room in Christianity for diversity, but that nevertheless there were proscribed limits.[178]

Hermeneutics, then, lies at the heart of the debate around the Johannine tradition. Brown, in harmony with Kermode, arrives at an interpretation of the Fourth Gospel that

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[178] Hawkin, 100.

attempts to take into account the role of intention in the formation of the Johannine tradition.[179] Viewing the Gospel as a product of the Johannine tradition he proposes to use the tradition to interpret it and finds an appropriate companion document in I John. In essence, he uses the tradition to interpret the tradition, the First Epistle as a hermeneutical device for understanding the Gospel, and in doing so corroborates his contention that "the ultimate contribution of the author of I John to Johannine history may have been that of saving the Fourth Gospel for the Church."[180] Further, Brown's work in *Community* demonstrates that rather than being the product of a first century "spin doctor" the Epistle's interpretation of the Gospel is both grounded in and faithful to the Johannine tradition. It is an interpretation that seeks to clarify the tradition's orthodoxy rather than attempting to legitimize it despite its heterodoxy; to correct misinterpretation of it rather than to engineer the acceptance of an unfaithful tradition. Brown presents this in terms of a defence of the truth rather than the deception of the Church.

While Brown places I John in the hermeneutical role, he also engages in the hermeneutical task. By interpreting I John in a way that emphasizes its adherence to the fixed elements expressed in the kergyma, Brown himself demonstrates how it provides a corrective to those who propose a heterodox interpretation for the Johannine tradition as

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[179] Kermode, 2f. Here Kermode comments that "Only insiders can have access to the true sense of these stories. . . . To divine the true, the latent sense, you need to be of the elect, of the institution." And "Only those who already know the mysteries - what the stories really mean - can discover what the stories really mean." While these statements are made with reference to the interpretation of the Gospel parables, they express a more broadly applicable principle that seems to be reflected in Brown's approach.

[180] Brown, *Community*, 150.

voiced in the Gospel. The Gospel, then, is shown not to be inseparably linked to its heterodox proponents, as Käsemann seems to suggest.

If, as Brown proposes, the author of the First Epistle "saved" the Gospel for inclusion in the canon, given the volumes of debate that have focused on its uniqueness among the Gospels did the author of I John really do the church a service? What benefits are derived for the Church in incorporating this distinct expression of Christian kerygma into its canon? While their reasons for suggesting so would differ, both Brown and Käsemann agree that the presence of the Gospel of John in the canon demonstrates something of the rich diversity that existed in early Christianity. Käsemann's picture focuses more on diversity as disunity and a lack of clear definition, while Brown's leans toward diversity as enrichment - a complimentary rather than contradictory relationship with the Synoptics. Yet the underlying concept remains: that early Christianity displayed a sense of dynamism and diversity.

A second benefit lies in arriving at an understanding of the process by which Christianity began to evolve. Käsemann and Bauer present a somewhat capricious system of development in contrast to Brown, who posits a more deliberate process of development through responsiveness to the unfolding quest for clarity of understanding. Both Käsemann and Brown draw their readers into the investigative endeavor as they heighten awareness of how the Fourth Gospel may fit into or even contribute to the overall development of Christianity.

In the final analysis, though, one further benefit deriving from Brown's approach requires mention. The inclusion of the Fourth Gospel preserves a balance in the preservation of the kerygma that as human history unfolds and as human beings encounter

change of various kinds, ensures that one of the four Gospels will resonate with their constantly changing experience. As has been stated,

> certain New Testament books will speak more directly to some ages than to others. . . . The diversity of the New Testament is its greatest strength. It does not imply that the New Testament embraces any and every belief, but rather it implies that its very diversity allows it to speak anew to each age.[181]

Brown's approach has been demonstrated to be historically and hermeneutically sound. Yet, if Christianity is the dynamic movement that, in their varying usages of the word, Bauer, Käsemann, Turner and Brown all portray it to be then any assessment of Brown's thesis must regard the future as well as the past. Hawkin has demonstrated that there is a continuing application for the Gospel of the Johannine tradition, as well as those of the Synoptic tradition, as human experience evolves. Humanity continues to look to the canon of scripture for a response to the eternally presenting questions of life and spirituality. For its affirmation for the role of this Gospel in the ongoing revelation of God to humankind, Brown's statement is found to present the stronger perspective. The writer of I John did provide a stellar service for Christianity in "saving the Fourth Gospel for the Church."

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[181] Hawkin, 121.

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