

CHAPTER 2

The Embarrassment of History: Reflections on the Problem of "Anti-Judaism" in the Fourth Gospel

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The present hermeneutical debate regarding how the New Testament should be used and read is particularly contentious when it focuses on John's Gospel. The range of views on the subject forms a kind of spectrum: from those at one end who see the document primarily, if not solely, as a witness to a particular stage in the historical development of earliest Christianity, to those at the other end who see it primarily, if not solely, as a document of Christian faith to be heard through the tradition of the Christian church and within the liturgy of Christian worship. Most views that seek to take account of or to give some place to both of these emphases, in differing measures, could position themselves at various points along such a spectrum. In principle, there need be no tension between the two ends or emphases of the spectrum. But in the event, there is. Among the topics increasing such tension over the past century have been the issues of Johannine "mysticism," sacraments, dualism, and Christology. But in the continuing reaction to the Holocaust, and particularly in the last twenty-five years,¹ it is the issue of John's "anti-Semitism," or more accurately, as most now agree, of John's "anti-Judaism,"² that has heightened the tension to, at times, an almost unbearable extent. The issue came home to me some years ago, when, after a week in which I had been reflecting on the question of anti-Semitism in the New Testament, I heard a sermon in Durham Cathedral in which John 8 (the Gospel reading for the day) was expounded straightforwardly as denouncing the Jews and Judaism, with little or no qualification.

1. The publication of R. R. Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York, 1974), marked an increasing sensitivity on the part of Christian scholarship and recognition of the seriousness of the issue for students of the NT.

2. I discuss the problem of definition in J. D. G. Dunn, "The Question of Anti-Semitism in the New Testament Writings of the Period," in J. D. G. Dunn, ed., *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways AD 70 to 135* (WUNT 66; Tübingen, 1992), pp. 177-211.

In my own view, it is simply impossible to do John's Gospel justice unless it is recognized to be a historical writing. By that I mean a writing that emerged at a particular period of history and that cannot properly be understood without reference to that period of history. This is not at all to deny that the Gospel has functioned from within a concept of the fourfold gospel since about the end of the second century, and from within the canon of the New Testament from some decades later. Nor is it to ignore the *Wirkungsgeschichte*³ that has determined the Gospel's use within Christian history, which is certainly a major part of its continuing meaning and which inevitably influences our own reading of it today. My point is simply, in the first place, that as a document written (most probably) in the late first century, and written in the Greek of that time, we cannot begin to understand that document properly unless we recognize the language and idiom and imagery of the Greek of that time. New Testament scholars cannot go back, as it were, to a time before Erasmus and the first Greek New Testament (1516). We cannot deny or ignore the Renaissance fruits of critical philology. But that inevitably involves reading/hearing the Gospel, as far as is possible, within the context of that period of history. And it also involves giving at least some degree of priority to the findings of that "historical reading." Speaking philologically, we have to recognize that there is such a thing as a poor or a bad or even a wrong translation. And even if, should it prove to be the case, such a bad translation has been very influential through church history, it still has to be recognized as a misrendering of what the earliest retrievable text actually said. Should anyone respond that so to argue is to privilege a "historical reading" of the text inadmissably, whereas in principle all readings of the text should be accorded equal rights to be heard, I simply reply that the text has rights too, and that the primary right of a historical text such as John's Gospel is to be heard within the context in which and for which it was written.

The point could obviously be developed into a case for at least some degree of normativity to be accorded to a reading of the text within the historical context within which it originated, not simply the linguistic context but the ideological and sociological contexts as well. But this is not an essay in biblical hermeneutics, and it is unnecessary to pursue the point further here.⁴ For one of the questions that cannot be ignored is whether the

3. I allude, of course, to H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London, 1975).

4. See further J. D. G. Dunn, "Historical Text as Historical Text: Some Basic Hermeneutical Reflections in Relation to the New Testament," in J. Davies, H. G. Harvey, and W. G. E. Watson, eds., *Words Remembered, Texts Renewed*, FS John F. A. Sawyer (JSOTSup 195; Sheffield, 1995), pp. 340–59.

straightforward translation of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι as "the Jews" has proved to be a misleading translation over the centuries and particularly in the twentieth century. I therefore begin by restating my view of what the Fourth Evangelist was saying, and why he was saying it, within the historical context in which he was writing. In my conclusion, I take up the question of how such a historical reading should be correlated with the use of John's Gospel as Christian scripture.

John's Gospel in Historical Context

There is a large consensus in favor of the view that John's Gospel was written in the last decade of the first century, give or take a few years on either side. Where it was written and to whom is less clear but in the event less important, since the social setting of the Gospel can be largely deduced from the Gospel itself, even if particulars of locations of writer and recipients remain obscure. That some kind of dissension with Jews, or Jewish authorities, is reflected in the Gospel is also widely accepted.⁵ In my own view, there are three important factors to be taken into account in any attempt to illuminate that dissension.

The Factionalism of First-Century "Judaism"

John wrote from within a movement that believed Jesus, crucified by Israel's Roman rulers with the approval of Israel's own priestly ruling class but raised by God, was Messiah. He wrote to persuade or confirm his readers in that belief (John 20:31). This messianic movement, focusing on this Jesus, emerged from within late Second Temple Judaism in the thirty years before the first Jewish revolt. In the course of that period, its opening to the Gentiles, particularly associated with the name of Paul, had begun to raise questions about the movement's continuing identity as part of Second Temple Judaism. In the years after the first Jewish revolt, these questions became more insistent, and the prospect of a "parting of the ways" between nascent Christianity and reconstituted Judaism became more and more of a real prospect—some would say, already a reality. It is precisely at this point of shifting and questioning identities that John wrote. To grasp the significance of this we need to fill out some more details.

5. J. L. Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Nashville, 1968; 2d ed., 1979) has proved particularly influential here, even if the details of his reconstruction of the contemporary situation confronting John have been questioned.

There was a considerable degree of factionalism within Second Temple Judaism, particularly from the Maccabean crisis on.⁶ We know of Pharisees and Sadducees from the New Testament texts themselves. Philo and Josephus have told us of Essenes, and Josephus later of Zealots, as well as of different figures who attracted followings in protest against Roman rule. Add the Old Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, and we become aware of further dimensions of Second Temple Judaism in the Diaspora and of circles who cherished wisdom traditions and apocalyptic writings. But it is the Dead Sea Scrolls, firsthand evidence of the nearest thing to a Jewish "sect" in the modern sense, that have brought home to us how disparate were the emphases and priorities of different groups and factions within Judaism. This has helped us recognize that a movement that claimed a Jewish teacher from Nazareth was actually the Messiah would not have been so strange to the majority of Jews living near the eastern Mediterranean seaboard. Even the fact that this Jesus had been crucified, while off-putting for most Jews (1 Cor. 1:23), evidently did not disqualify such messianic Jews from functioning within Jerusalem and various Judaeian towns and villages, if the witness of Acts is to be believed. Here we should also note that the ministry of Jesus himself, as recorded in the Synoptic Gospels, has been widely recognized in recent discussion between Christian and Jew as Jewish through and through. The arguments and conflicts that the Gospels refer to can be seen as similar to and even consistent with the kind and range of arguments and conflicts that characterized so much of the Judaism of Jesus' time.⁷

These observations help highlight one of our problems in talking about "the Judaism of Jesus' time." The problem is that the term *Judaism* suggests a homogeneous entity; all Jews practiced "Judaism." Until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls there was the tendency, in both Jewish and Christian scholarship on the period, to assume that the Judaism of rabbinic tradition (e.g., the Mishnah) was simply "Judaism" (including Second Temple Judaism), that there was a concept and practice of what might be called rabbinic orthodoxy already operative in Second Temple Judaism. But to use *Judaism* in such an undifferentiated way does little or no justice to the factional picture indicated above. That major factors united all Jews, particularly what I have called elsewhere "the four pillars of Sec-

6. I have discussed this question and its ramifications in J. D. G. Dunn, "Pharisees, Sinners and Jesus," in *Jesus, Paul and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (London, 1990), pp. 61–88; also J. D. G. Dunn, "Judaism in the Land of Israel in the First Century," in J. Neusner, ed., *Judaism in Late Antiquity*, part 2: *Historical Syntheses* (Leiden, 1995), pp. 229–61.

7. Particularly E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London, 1985).

ond Temple Judaism"⁸ or what E. P. Sanders designated as "Common Judaism,"⁹ need hardly be argued for. The point is that there were several, competing interpretations of what these common factors amounted to and how they should be lived out. And whether the term *Judaism*, hardly a common term itself at this stage,¹⁰ was used to refer to the commonalities or, in effect, to refer to one or other of the competing interpretations¹¹ is by no means clear. Jesus and the earliest Christian congregations were, in effect, part of that ongoing debate over what it meant to be a Jew, what was involved in being Israel. Within the spectrum that was Second Temple Judaism, the Christian belief in Messiah Jesus, initially at least, was not much more than another element in the range of options that individual Jews might follow in practicing (their) "Judaism." The question, once again, for us is: Where and how do John and his Gospel stand within or in relation to this in-house debate, a debate in effect on what is Judaism and who belongs to it?

These reflections raise, in turn, the question as to how we should understand the key phrase in our discussion—*anti-Judaism*. At the very least, we should not assume that it means hostility to Judaism as a whole or to all Jews. At this stage we have to ask, "Which Judaism?" "Whose Judaism?" The question, it should be noted, arises not (simply) from any analysis of the term Ἰουδαϊσμός in John's Gospel. It arises from a historical recognition, in summary: (1) that the term *Judaism* was not much used, as far as we can tell, by Jews speaking of their religion; (2) that Second Temple "Judaism" was a more complex phenomenon than the single name implies, and that it may indeed be more accurate from a historical perspective to speak of multiple Judaisms for the period;¹² and (3) that there is a danger of superimposing our own twentieth-century, sociologically informed definition of Judaism onto our evidence. If, then, it should be concluded that there is "anti-Judaism" in John's Gospel, we still have to ask, "What Judaism?" "Which Judaism?" And even if later readings of John have encouraged an anti-Judaism on the way to anti-Semitism, it is only fair to the Fourth Evangelist to ask who the Fourth Evangelist thought he was attacking and why.

8. J. D. G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways between Christianity and Judaism* (London, 1991), chapter 2.

9. E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE–66 CE* (London, 1992).

10. The term occurs only seven times in the literature of the period prior to John (2 Macc. 2:21; 8:1; 14:38 [twice]; 4 Macc. 4:26; Gal. 1:13–14 [twice]).

11. As I believe to be the case with Gal. 1:13–14; see J. D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (London, 1993), pp. 56–57.

12. See, e.g., those cited in Dunn, "Judaism," p. 230 n. 8.

If the situation within Second Temple Judaism—that is, properly speaking, up to 70 C.E.—was so complex in terms of factionalism, the failure of the Jewish revolt and the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. both simplified the picture and made it more complex. It simplified the picture in that several of the known factions seem to have lost power or influence, or indeed, virtually to have disappeared in the wake of the 70 C.E. disaster. I refer to the Zealots and the Sadducees but also to the Qumran community and probably the Essenes. Presumably this did not happen overnight, but the lack of any clear evidence that these groups remained major players in the subsequent shaping of Judaism is probably sufficient proof of their effective demise. At the same time, the successors to the Pharisees were evidently able to establish themselves as the chief custodians of the Pharisaic heritage and, more important, as the only effective political force in the land. Again, it did not happen overnight; on the contrary, it took many decades and even centuries for the rabbis to establish their interpretation of Judaism as the only authentic form of Judaism, to establish, that is to say, rabbinic Judaism as “Judaism.”¹³ In the meantime, other heirs of Second Temple Judaism, particularly in the Diaspora, and those with Jewish apocalyptic and mystical tendencies seem to have survived and flourished for some time at least, without making much, if any, impact on emerging rabbinic orthodoxy. The fact that their writings have been preserved within Christian rather than Jewish circles is probably enough to confirm that they influenced emerging Christianity more than they did emerging rabbinic Judaism.

This overview is, of course, far too brief and sketchy, and to make good the various conclusions on which it depends would require a much fuller essay than this. But I hope the overview will command sufficient consensus for the key corollary that emerges from it to be taken with due seriousness. The corollary I refer to is this: John’s Gospel appeared from within the factionalism of Second Temple Judaism, and at a time when that factionalism had been completely disrupted by the disaster of 70 C.E.—disrupted but not dissolved or resolved. It appeared at a time when, with the benefit of hindsight, we can see only two substantive contenders for the heritage of Second Temple Judaism beginning to emerge from the pre-70 factionalism—Christianity and rabbinic Judaism. It is within this larger context that the question of John’s “anti-Judaism” must be viewed.

13. See further P. S. Alexander, “The Parting of the Ways’ from the Perspective of Rabbinic Judaism,” and M. Goodman, “Diaspora Reactions to the Destruction of the Temple,” in Dunn, ed., *Jews and Christians*, pp. 1–25 and 27–38, respectively.

The Claim to Definitive Revelation

The second factor that illuminates the dissension with “the Jews” in a historical reading of John’s Gospel is recognition that the key issue of dispute with “the Jews” was the claim, embodied in John’s Jesus, to definitive *revelation*. Here we need to recall that a passionate concern regarding divine revelation was, as far back as we can see, a defining characteristic of Jewish religion, characterized as it was by the central importance accorded to Torah, priest/Temple, and prophet. With the effective elimination of priest and Temple in 70 C.E., the interest in revelation seems to have been, if anything, intensified. The classic Jewish apocalypses (*4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*) emerged in that period, not to mention the Apocalypse of John (Revelation). Ascents to heaven to acquire heavenly knowledge became almost commonplace—not just in the already long established speculation about Enoch but also concerning Adam and Abel, Abraham and Levi, Baruch and Isaiah.¹⁴ *Merkabah* mysticism, inspired particularly by the chariot vision of Ezekiel 1, seems to have flourished. Yohanan ben Zakkai, who played the leading role in establishing the rabbis as the main power brokers within Israel and began the process of reconstituting Second Temple Judaism as rabbinic Judaism, was himself apparently very interested in the chariot chapter of Ezekiel 1 and probably practiced meditation on it (*t. Hagigah* 2.1ff. pars.).¹⁵ And the “two powers heresy” is traced back to four sages (including rabbi Akiba) practicing *merkabah* mysticism in the period of John’s Gospel or soon after, when one of them (Elisha ben Abuyah) mistook the glorious figure sitting on a heavenly throne as a second divine power, in some sense rivaling God (*m. Hagigah* 2.1; *m. Megillah* 4:10).¹⁶ Wider speculation about heavenly wisdom and its source had already been resolved within Second Temple Judaism by identifying the figure of divine Wisdom with the Torah (Sir. 24:23; Bar. 4:1), no doubt to the satisfaction of Pharisees. This would have been still more satisfactory to the post-70 rabbis, since the Temple was gone and the various would-be prophets of the pre-70 years could inspire no confidence whatsoever.

It is precisely against this background that the emphasis on divine revelation in John’s Gospel becomes so luminous. The central message of the Gospel is loud and clear and repeated in variation after variation. The Word, not the Baptist, is the light that enlightens every man (John 1:6–9); the polemical assertion sets the tone of many of the revelatory claims made for

14. Dunn, *Partings*, pp. 320–21 n. 49.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 321 n. 57.

16. See particularly A. F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden, 1977).

Jesus. The Word, God's self-revealing word, became flesh in Jesus (1:14). Grace and truth came through this Jesus, more effectively, it is clearly implied, than through Moses and the Torah (1:17). "No one has ever seen God . . . the only Son . . . has made him known [ἐξηγήσατο]" (1:18). The vision of Jacob, of a ladder stretching to heaven (Gen. 28:12), which could have afforded the means of access to heaven, refers to Jesus the Son of Man, as the one who opens heaven to human gaze (John 1:51). The Pharisee, Nicodemus, comes to Jesus by night but has no idea how one can "see the kingdom of God," how it is possible to enter the heavenly realm (3:3, 5); he is unable to appreciate the "earthly things" that Jesus tells him, how much less the "heavenly things" (3:12); he has to be told, "No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man" (3:13). Only "the one who comes from above" (3:31–36), not Moses, not John the Baptist, is able to bear witness of the things of heaven (3:31–32). In John 6, the antithesis is extended: Jesus is not simply the prophet (6:14) but the Son of Man (6:27); Moses gave their fathers manna in the wilderness, and they died, but Jesus is the bread of God come down from heaven, and whoever eats of him will never die (6:30–58). The passage includes a further explicit claim that Jesus is the definitive revealer of God (6:45–46):

It is written in the prophets, "And they shall all be taught by God." Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father.

We could continue, but that sample should be sufficient for present purposes.

To sum up: Probably the most consistent feature of John's Gospel is the emphasis on Jesus as the bearer of divine revelation. What he says has the stamp of heavenly authority, because as Son of God, sent by the Father, he speaks what he has seen and heard from the Father; as the Son of Man, he speaks with the authority of one who has descended from heaven; as one who is from above, his message outweighs in kind and quality anything said by him who is from below.¹⁷ This feature is the basis of R. Bultmann's famous remark "Jesus as the revealer of God reveals nothing but that he is the revealer."¹⁸

But not only does Jesus bring revelation; he *is* revelation; he embodies revelation. This is where Bultmann mistakes the emphasis. It is not true that Jesus reveals nothing. On the contrary, it is precisely the point that he

17. John 1:17–18, 49–51; 3:10–13, 32; 7:16–18; 8:14, 28, 38; 12:49–50; 14:10; 15:15; 17:14.

18. R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 2 vols. (London, 1955), vol. 2, p. 66.

reveals *God*. He is God's own self-utterance in flesh (1:14); he "exegetes" God (1:18); he is the divine self-revealing "I am" (8:58), echoing God's self-revelation in the figure of divine Wisdom (6:51–58; 10:14; 12:8);¹⁹ he who sees Jesus sees the one who sent him (12:45); he who has seen him has seen the Father (14:9). It is this testimony that is "heard" by Jesus' Jewish opponents in the Gospel as Jesus making himself to be equal with God (5:18), making himself God (10:33). For John, this is not a false assessment of Jesus but simply recognizes that Jesus' revelation of God is definitive.

The polemical note already observed in some of the texts referred to above also needs some emphasis. Jesus transforms the water of purification rites into the wine of rejoicing (2:1–11). The risen Jesus in effect replaces the Temple (2:19–22). The water he gives is far superior to the water from Jacob's well (4:10–14). He is greater than Moses or the prophet or the Baptist: Moses wrote of him (5:46); Isaiah saw his glory (12:41); and the Baptist bore witness to him (1:8, 20; 3:27–36; 5:33–35; 10:41). Of the Jews, the Pharisees are particularly picked out for criticism: Nicodemus, the teacher of Israel, is unable to appreciate heavenly things (3:10–12); those who honor Moses are accused by Moses because they do not believe his writings (5:45–46); the Pharisees profess to be able to see but are blind (9:40–41); they are the ones particularly in view when Jesus quotes the famous Isaiah passages about Israel's refusal to believe and hardness of heart (12:37–43).

Set against the background sketched above, it becomes hard to resist the conclusion that the Gospel was composed with a view to the post-70 concerns among Jews regarding revelation: how to understand God's will, how to understand God in the light of the failure of the first revolt, and where the authority now lay to speak in God's name, with God's voice. The Fourth Evangelist shared that concern and sought to answer these questions. And his answer focuses entirely on Jesus. In the face of traditional answers, and in forceful dialogue with, it would appear, the Pharisaic custodians and promoters of the rabbinic Judaism beginning to emerge at Yabneh, John had no hesitation in finding the answer in Jesus, the Word made flesh, the Son from the Father, the Son of Man now reascended to heaven—and exclusively in Jesus: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (14:6). As his wisdom predecessors had directed all those concerned to know the wisdom from God to the Torah, so now John directs all those concerned to know the wisdom of God and to know God to Jesus.

19. See further Dunn, *Partings*, p. 227.

These observations can be correlated with another feature of John's Gospel too little taken into consideration in discussion of John's "anti-Judaism." This is the fact that the key phrase, *the Jews*, is not at all so consistently negative in use as is sometimes suggested. In fact, about one-half of all the references are more accurately described as neutral. Most notable in this case are the references where *the Jews* clearly denotes the common people, the crowd.²⁰ Their function in the narrative is to represent the ambivalent middle ground in a process of sifting²¹ and division²² that John represents as taking place within the Jewish community throughout the middle period of Jesus' ministry. The motif is particularly prominent in chapters 7–12. Throughout chapter 7, "the Jews"/"the crowd"²³ debate back and forth the significance of Jesus, with many believing or responding positively (7:31, 40) but others skeptical (7:35); the end result is "a division [*σχίσμα*] among the people" (7:43). In chapter 8, the debate among "the Jews" continues, some believing (8:31) and others rejecting (8:48). Through chapters 9–10, the sifting process continues, causing some further "division among the Jews" (9:16; 10:19–21), with, once again, some rejecting (10:31–39) and many believing (10:41–42). And in 12:31–43, the sifting (*κρίσις*) process reaches its climax, between Jews who believe and bear witness to Jesus (12:11, 17–19) and those who refuse (12:37–40).²⁴

Here, too, in the light of what has already been said, it is hard not to hear the Gospel as John's attempt to state his case, to preach his good news, within the context of a late-first-century Judaism uncertain of what God's will was for them and uncertain as to who could speak authoritatively for God. Many of "the Jews," particularly those endeavoring to establish themselves as the authoritative voice in continuing Judaism, evidently had already decided against John's message and were opposing the claims made for this Jesus; they are no doubt referred to in the famous *ἀποσυνάγωγος* texts (9:22; 12:42; 16:2). Moreover, the dualism and other features in John suggest something of the attitude of the "sectarian" who feels his group to be marginalized in relation to the larger body or in danger of being excluded by the parent body.²⁵ But equally evident, if we observe the pro-

20. John 6:41, 52; 7:11(?), 15, 35(?); 8:22, 31; 10:19, 24(?); 11:19, 31, 33, 36, 45, 54; 12:9, 11; 13:33(?); 18:20; 19:20–21.

21. *κρίσις*—"separation, judgment"—3:19; 5:22, 24, 27, 29, 30; 7:24; 8:16; 12:31.

22. *σχίσμα*—"schism, division"—7:43; 9:16; 10:19.

23. "The Jews"—7:11, 15, 35; "the crowd"—7:12, 20, 31, 32, 40, 43.

24. See more fully Dunn, *Partings*, pp. 156–57.

25. Cf. particularly the influential article of W. A. Meeks, "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism," *JBL* 91 (1972): 44–72.

portion of negative/neutral uses of "the Jews," is that many Jews were not yet clear on the answers to their questions regarding revelation and authority; these were the Jews, including Nicodemus and the blind man of chapter 9, who had to be persuaded to come and take their stand fully within the light of the revelation of Jesus. If that is indeed the case, then here again we are reminded that the issue of "anti-Judaism" within John's Gospel needs to be much more carefully nuanced than a simple reference to John 8:31–59 would suggest.

The Language of Fortright Argument

One other factor should be taken into consideration. It is the brief reminder that the language of polemic and denunciation used by John in regard to "the Jews" should be heard initially with first-century ears before being condemned by twentieth-century sensitivities. We who would hesitate to start an action for heresy against a contemporary, and who would not even consider the possibility of burning someone at the stake for their beliefs, should hesitate for a long time before reacting to the fierceness of the vituperation evident in a chapter such as John 8. Times have changed, even in respect to interfactional political polemic, more than we sometimes care to admit. The temperate nature of most twentieth-century ecumenical or interfaith dialogue leaves us horrified by the outspokenness and crudity of, say, Reformation and Counter-Reformation polemic.

To hear John's polemic with first-century ears requires us to compare it with the factional polemic within Second Temple Judaism, or indeed the factional polemic within earliest Christianity. In the first case, we may instance the readiness, say, of the Psalms of Solomon to condemn other Jews as "sinners," bearing in mind just how serious a condemnation that was: sinners had no place within the covenant people, no acceptance by God, no hope of a place in the world to come.²⁶ Alternatively, we could cite the curses invoked in the covenant initiation ceremony into the Qumran community against "the men of the lot of Belial" (other Jews) and against those who make a false commitment to the community (1QS 2.4–18). Or in Christian factional polemic, we should bear in mind Paul's curses pronounced against the other (Christian) missionaries in Gal. 1:8–9 or equivalent denunciation of other missionaries as "false apostles, deceitful workers," and ministers of Satan (2 Cor. 11:13–15). Even Jesus is

26. See J. D. G. Dunn, "Jesus and Factionalism in Early Judaism: How Serious Was the Factionalism of Late Second Temple Judaism?" in J. H. Charlesworth and L. L. Johns, eds., *Hillel and Jesus: Comparative Studies of Two Major Religious Leaders* (Minneapolis, 1997), pp. 156–75.

recalled as rebuking Peter as Satan (Mark 8:33 / Matt. 16:23). Such identification with Satan of those with opposing views seems to have been characteristic of both Jewish and Christian polemic of the time. The "diabolizing" of "the Jews" in John 8 (8.44—"You are from your father the devil"), which we quite properly find so offensive when judged by today's standards of disagreement and polemic, was evidently a standard topos in the ancient Jewish/Christian rhetoric of vilification. What the real equivalent would be in the more consciously restrained and well-mannered exchanges within Western intellectual circles or within today's more mutually respectful ecumenical and ecclesiastical circles is once again a question too seldom posed, let alone answered.

The position is well summed up by the observations of two contemporary New Testament scholars who have taken seriously the issue of anti-Jewish rhetoric in the New Testament. The Roman Catholic Luke Johnson concludes his analysis of "The New Testament's Anti-Jewish Slander and the Conventions of Ancient Polemic" with these words: "By the measure of contemporary Jewish polemic, the NT's slander against fellow Jews is remarkably mild."²⁷ And the Jewish scholar David Flusser, commenting on Matthew 23, notes: "All the motifs of Jesus' famous invective against the Pharisees in Matthew 23 are also found in rabbinical literature."²⁸

Here again, then, the character of John's "anti-Judaism" needs careful analysis and statement before it is straightforwardly described and denounced as anti-Judaism. John's language is more the language of *intra*-Jewish polemic than of *anti*-Jewish polemic. He seeks by it to warn fellow Jews not to follow what was emerging as the dominant view of "the Jews." By his portrayal of Jesus as the definitive revealer of God and of God's will, in continuity with Israel's earlier claims to divine revelation but in opposition to other contemporary claimants within the Judaism of his day, John still hoped to persuade the doubters and waverers to stand with the believers, still mostly fellow Jews, in Messiah Jesus.²⁹ This is indeed "anti-Jewishness" of a sort. But it is not "anti-Judaism" as we understand it today.

27. L. T. Johnson, "The New Testament's Anti-Jewish Slander and the Conventions of Ancient Polemic," *JBL* 108 (1989): 419–41, p. 441.

28. Cited by J. Koenig, *Jews and Christians in Dialogue: New Testament Foundations* (Philadelphia, 1979), p. 24.

29. It will be evident from this that I do not agree with the thesis of M. Casey, initially stated in his *From Jewish Prophet to Gentile God: The Origins and Development of New Testament Christology* (Cambridge, 1991), that John belonged to "a group who had Gentile self-identification" (p. 27); see further J. D. G. Dunn, "The Making of Christology: Evolution or Unfolding?" in *The Christ and the Spirit*, vol. 1: *Christology* (Grand Rapids, 1998), pp. 388–404. The brief references to "certain Greeks" (7:35; 12:20) are probably included to remind his predominantly Jewish (or Jewish-oriented) readers that Christianity had opened up to the Gentiles in a significant way.

It does not presuppose two monoliths, Judaism and Christianity, clearly distinct and clearly separate in identity, denouncing each other in anathemas and open hostility. Rather, it would be closer to historical reality to think of the situation presupposed in John's Gospel as reflecting the approaching breakdown of "ecumenical relations" between the two main bodies within post-Second Temple Judaism, the late phase of a forthright dialogue that was coming close to failure and not to be fully resumed until the Jewish-Christian dialogue of the twentieth century.

John's Gospel as Christian Scripture

What difference do the findings of this chapter make to the use of John's Gospel as Christian scripture? What difference *should* these findings make to the use of John's gospel as Christian scripture? If, in principle, a historical reading should be accorded at least some priority over other readings, what might or should that mean for the liturgical reading of John's Gospel? Can one respond with "Thanks be to God" without reservation when John 8 is read? What might or should it mean for John's status as *scripture*? Can one "hear the word of God" in such a passage without qualification? And how should such scriptures "play" in Jewish-Christian dialogue? Are they simply part of the problem and no part of its solution?

"Dynamic Translation"?

Part of the problem of using historical writings for modern purposes is that terms may have changed their meaning or scope of reference in the interval. In English versions of the New Testament, the decision by the King James translators to use *charity* (instead of Tyndale's *love*) in rendering 1 Corinthians 13 has been a matter of regret throughout most of the twentieth century. And the issue of whether γυνή should be translated "woman" or "wife" in several Pauline contexts has become a matter of major concern in the later decades of the twentieth century. Among the issues facing this book, the undifferentiated translation of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι as "the Jews" has become unacceptable to many. How to deal with such issues?

One solution is the concept of "dynamic equivalence." John's text speaks consistently of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι. As already noted, about half the uses are negative in character: for example, "The Jews were looking for an opportunity to kill him" (7:1); "The Jews said to him, 'Now we know that you have a demon'" (8:52); "the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should

confess him to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue" (9:22 J.D.G.D.); "The Jews took up stones again to stone him" (10:31); "the retainers [ὑπηρέται] of the Jews arrested Jesus" (18:12); "The Jews answered him, 'We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God'" (19:7). But a strong case can be made for seeing many of these references as directed against the Jewish *authorities* at the time of the Gospel's writing.³⁰ Should we then translate οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι in such instances as its dynamic equivalent, "the Jewish authorities," rather than as "the Jews"? This is the policy followed by the American Bible Society in their production of the Contemporary English Version (1995). For example, the CEV renders οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι in the cases cited above, in sequence, as "the leaders of the people," "the people," "the leaders," "the people," "the temple police," and "the crowd." Alternatively, or in addition, it can be argued that Ἰουδαῖος in these and other instances retains its original geographical reference and should be translated more accurately as "Judean."³¹ This is the policy of *The New Testament: Judaeans and Authorized Version*,³² which translates οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι as "Judaeans" or "Hebrews" and "law" as "Bible." Alternatively, the more offensive passages (offensive to Christian as well as Jewish sensitivities) could simply be excluded from church lectionaries. N. A. Beck defends such policies as follows:³³

Under the guidance of the Spirit of God in translations of the New Testament intended for popular use, we will "prune" into footnote status its most viciously defamatory particles. In other instances, in which the polemic is less virulent, we will use circumlocution and translations according to the sense of the text in order to reduce emphasis upon the Jews, Judaism, and the Pharisees. Third, we will be more selective in our choice of lectionary texts, providing readings that are less blatantly anti-Jewish.

What the particular "particles" in view are is not specified at this point, but in a footnote Beck defends the policy by referring to "the New Testament material that has already been 'pruned' to footnote status in translations . . . as a result of text-critical studies during the past three centuries."³⁴ In other words, Beck puts the offensive "particles," whose textual authenticity is not

30. Particularly U. C. von Wahlde, "The Johannine 'Jews': A Critical Survey," *NTS* 28 (1982): 33–60. The matter is debated elsewhere in this book.

31. See particularly M. Lowe, "Who Were the Ἰουδαῖοι? *NovT* 18 (1976): 101–30 and the new American edition of Bauer's lexicon (*BAGD*).

32. *The New Testament: Judaeans and Authorized Version* (Jerusalem, n.d.).

33. N. A. Beck, *Mature Christianity: The Recognition and Repudiation of the Anti-Jewish Polemic of the New Testament* (London and Toronto, 1985), p. 285.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 286 n. 3.

in question, in the same category as the ending added to the Lord's Prayer in Matt. 6:13, the shorter and longer endings of Mark's Gospel, and the "Johannine comma" in 1 John 5:7–8. The boundaries of the canon become still more convoluted. And in lectionaries, the anti-Jewish passages will be excluded or at least bracketed to indicate that the read lection should omit these words or phrases or verses. The anti-Jewish passages of the New Testament should at best be treated like the imprecatory psalm passages of the Old Testament.

I confess that I am not at all happy with the first of these solutions. To extend the possibilities of textual emendation beyond that validated by text-critical considerations is essentially a retrograde step. Nor am I particularly happy with the third solution. The thought of thus "hiding" the character of the sacred text from the eyes or ears of the populace (Beck is talking about translations "intended for popular use") seems to reinforce the clergy-laity or professional-laity divide and has uncomfortable overtones of keeping the Bible from the people. As for the to date more popular second of Beck's solutions (translation by dynamic equivalent), I have serious reservations here too. Apart from anything else, such a policy makes it impossible for anyone working from such a modern translation to mount a coherent study of a motif in the New Testament documents having to do with "Jews."³⁵

Here, too, I believe, we must fully respect the text, working from the eclectic Greek text provided for us by the consensus of text-critical scholars. We should therefore continue to translate οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι as "the Jews"; but we should always add or refer to a footnote explaining the historical context within which John was writing. Nor should we exclude difficult or disturbing passages from lections and liturgical readings; but no such reading should be without at least some explanatory comment. Only so can we preserve our status as both servants of the word and its interpreters.

The Necessity for Historical Criticism

More reflection is necessary on the need for better correlation among historical, canonical, and liturgical readings. In the present case in particular, we dare not forget Christianity's own sorry tradition of anti-Semitism. The extent to which this tradition has been inspired by or built upon anti-Jewish material in the New Testament is here not the issue. The point is that,

35. I have complained about the equivalent policies applied to Paul's concept of "flesh" in J. D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids and Edinburgh, 1998), p. 70.

throughout the history of the church, the New Testament, or at least certain New Testament passages, has been read and heard as justifying, authorizing, even requiring anti-Jewish and subsequently anti-Semitic policies. Those who insist that the New Testament can be read only through the tradition or liturgy or properly heard only within the church need to remember that the virulent anti-Jewish polemics of John Chrysostom and Martin Luther are also part of the tradition,³⁶ bearing in mind both that the Eastern Orthodox still celebrate the liturgy of St. John Chrysostom and the incalculable influence of Martin Luther on Western Christianity.

Here again, I press for a fuller recognition of the priority that, within the range of possible readings, should be given to reading a historical text within its historical context. Such a reading, informed by knowledge of ancient philology and related texts, of the history and sociology, the philosophies and religions of the period, will by no means exclude debates about the text's meaning; but it will indicate the parameters within which meaning may legitimately be heard in the text and outside which any meanings heard may be faulted as illegitimate. This is also to affirm that that range of legitimate meaning should function as some sort of check on readings subsequently read from the text. The canonical normativeness of the text depends to a degree not sufficiently appreciated on reading a text such as John's Gospel first and foremost within its historical context.

One of the too little appreciated benefits of the history of Western Christianity stretching from Renaissance through Enlightenment is the recognition that the developments of the developing tradition had not always been for the best; that the canon has a corrective function within the tradition, *norma normans*; and that historical criticism is necessary if the scriptural text is to be heard in its historical meaning. Of course, the appropriation of this tripartite benefit has had a very checkered history. But at least we can see its outcome in the Western church's confession and criticism of its own anti-Jewish history. The critical perspective on tradition made possible or facilitated by recognition of the need to read the New Testament texts over against the tradition, to read them as historical texts, has played a significant part in awakening the Western churches to their anti-Semitic past. Vatican II's pronouncement on the Jews³⁷ well illustrates my point; that it came after the papal encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1944) and the 1964

36. Chrysostom's *Homily against the Jews* is conveniently accessible in translation in W. A. Meeks and R. L. Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch in the First Four Centuries of the Common Era* (Mishoul, Mont., 1978), pp. 85ff. For Luther's *On the Jews and Their Lies*, see, e.g., M. Saperstein, *Moments of Crisis in Jewish-Christian Relations* (London, 1989), pp. 33–35.

37. In *Nostra Aetate* (Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions), in W. M. Abbott, *The Documents of Vatican II* (London, 1966), pp. 666–67.

statement by the Pontifical Biblical Commission, validating a properly critical evaluation of the character of the biblical witness,³⁸ is no coincidence. And what Lutheran in the tradition of the Confessing Church would not be critical of Luther's diatribe against the Jews? Contrast the Orthodox churches of the East. In this case, it would appear that hearing the New Testament through the church and within the liturgy has not enabled a similarly critical and painful repudiation of the anti-Jewish elements in Christian history.

In short, the fact that anti-Semitism was able to grow and even to flourish within Christianity's living liturgical communities is a warning to us that historical exegesis is an important tool in the churches' equipment, a tool quite well fitted to provide some corrective or caution against ahistorical readings of the scriptural text that validated beliefs and acts of which the churches are now rightly ashamed. *Sachkritik* is most effective when it is also historical criticism.

Revelation in History

There is a further and important theological point to be made here. Properly to recognize the historical character of our texts is to recognize also the historical conditionedness of these texts. And to recognize the historical conditionedness of a scriptural text is to recognize also the historical conditionedness of the revelation that text embodies. This includes all the relativities and ambiguities of historical existence and language. If Jesus was a Jew living and working in the midst of Jews, then his actions and his teaching, the revelation he brought and embodied, were tied into the particularities of the history of that period. It could not be otherwise. The revelation was first and foremost to Second Temple Jews, and in terms adapted to their historical circumstances. This is precisely why a historical reading critically alert to these circumstances is so necessary. If we do not hear the revelation through and in Jesus first and foremost in its historical particularity, we are in serious danger of not hearing it at all. For the revelation cannot be separated from its historically conditioned form; it is not a timeless kernel that can be somehow extricated from a time-conditioned husk. There is no such thing as "pure" revelation. As the Word had to become "flesh" (cf. 1:13; 3:6; 6:63!) in order to reveal so fully the character of God's glory (1:14), so the revelation in Jesus had to become history for it to be heard.

38. See R. E. Brown, *Biblical Exegesis and Church Doctrines* (London, 1985), chapter 1.

In other words, the problem of "the Jews" in John is the problem of a "warts and all" portrayal of Christianity. We cannot solve the problem by simply excising the anti-Jewish passages from John; otherwise we may not hear the revelation conveyed through John in its givenness as revelation. We cannot disown the anti-Jewish passages in John without disfiguring the revelation he records. We must instead seek to hear the revelation through and in the light of the particularities of history within which and to which the word of Jesus came as revelation of the Word. Only so do we acknowledge the character of revelation in history. The ugliness of some of these particularities, as judged by twentieth-century standards, should not be thought to disqualify the revelatory significance that John claims for Jesus. To those who are all too conscious of the historical particularities and ambiguities of their own and their church's historical existence, such a recognition has liberating potential, even if it does not make any easier the task of interpreting the revelation that is the Fourth Gospel's Jesus to their own time.

The same point can be put in "canonical" terms. If certain texts continue to function as canonical, it is as historically conditioned texts that they do so. To declare a text canonical was certainly to indicate the (further) contexts (canon and church) within which Christians should read that text. But canonizing a text should not be seen as dehistoricizing that text; rather, the process of canonization served to identify those historical texts that were acknowledged from earliest days to represent and define Christianity.

In our present case, the inclusion of John's Gospel in the canon means that the dialogue between emerging Christianity and emerging rabbinic Judaism evident in John's Gospel was also included in the canonization process and in the resulting canon. The intra-Jewish debate about what belief in Messiah Jesus might/should mean in regard to Jesus and for those who believe in him is itself part of Christianity's canonical self-definition. Nascent Christianity's wrestling with its Jewish siblings in the attempt fully to appreciate their common Jewish heritage is a fundamental feature of Christianity's own identity. We could hardly have a starker reminder that Christianity cannot adequately understand itself except in relation to and in dialogue with its fellow heirs of Second Temple Judaism. "The Jews" of John still have a part in helping mark out Christianity's own heritage and boundaries.

In short, the problem of John's "anti-Judaism" will not go away, and Christian scholars should avoid attempting to solve the problem lightly, by disowning or denying it, by excising or hiding it, by ignoring or marginalizing it. On the contrary, the challenge that John's "anti-Jewishness" poses

for the concept and use of Christian scripture should be taken up and worked through, partly because it reminds us of the still more virulent anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism of subsequent Christian tradition, and because a historical reading of John's Gospel (including his "anti-Jewish" passages) provides a check on and counter to that later anti-Judaism; and partly because it reminds us that revelation comes through dirty hands and inadequate human language, and that the all-too-vigorous altercations of the first century were an integral part of Christianity's emerging identity and remain fundamental to its continuing self-understanding.

Conclusion

The reaffirmation of John's Gospel as a historical text that must be read first and foremost in its historical context is strengthened by our ability to gain a surprisingly clear grasp of the historical circumstances in which John's "anti-Judaism" was articulated. In particular, we can recognize the historical relativities behind the composition of John, that is, the factionalism of late Second Temple Judaism, the mode of the divine revelation claimed, and the language of forthright argument. This historical contextualization of John's "anti-Jewishness" goes a long way to soften the problem of John's so-called anti-Judaism.

The reaffirmation of John's Gospel as primarily a historical text applies also to its role as scripture. Given John's status as Christian scripture, the problem of John's "anti-Jewishness" is not to be solved simply by eliminating the problem, through excision or translation by "dynamic equivalence." On the contrary, the historical text read historically can serve as a counter and rebuke to the anti-Judaism of later Christian tradition that was mounted upon John's anti-Jewish texts. Moreover, the recognition of the historical conditionedness of the revelation claimed by John provides a stark reminder of the unavoidably historical conditionedness of all revelation and claims to revelatory significance of historical individuals and words. More to the case in point here, the historical particularity of John's portrayal of the confrontations between "the Jews" and believers in Messiah Jesus is an indication of how fundamental to Christianity's own emerging identity was the dialogue with emerging rabbinic Judaism.

As a final thought, it is also important to recognize that the argument can be extended *mutatis mutandis* to the modern Jewish-Christian debate. This includes the recognition that even John's account of the insults and hurtful exchanges between "Jews" and believers in Messiah Jesus, as well as

language that, when taken out of context, is easily heard as anti-Jewish in a later sense, is part of our common "warts and all" history. For in intra-Christian ecumenical experience, we have learned that we cannot ignore or lightly discard the wounding exchanges of earlier centuries, and that it is only by confronting them together in a deeper commitment to our common heritage that their point can be clarified and their poison counteracted. Perhaps the same lesson could be applied to the Jewish-Christian dialogue, ecumenical in a more profound way. In which case, John's Gospel, rather than being a stumbling block in the way of such dialogue, could actually provide a common agenda for Jews and Christians to study together, to explore and where possible to affirm what is the real extent of our common heritage, and to discover what common lessons, both positive and negative, we can both learn from the earliest stages of that dialogue.