

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Even a cursory comparison of the Fourth Gospel to the synoptic gospels reveals that Jesus' relationship to his Jewish contemporaries is presented in a singular way in this gospel. In the synoptics, Jesus meets a wide variety of groups in Jewish society, including the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the scribes, priests and chief priests, the elders, tax collectors, sinners and the common crowd. Some of these groups also appear in John, but those who speak with Jesus are generally called 'the Jews' (οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι). The difference is striking since this word is used in John seventy-one times but only sixteen times in the synoptics and only five times outside the epithet 'the king of the Jews' that appears in the passion narratives. But the difference is not only statistical. The conflict between Jesus and those called the Jews is more consistent and hostile than the conflict between Jesus and his opponents in the synoptics. The term οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι may sometimes refer to groups that are not openly hostile to Jesus (e.g. 11:19, 31), but the Jews are mostly presented as fierce opponents of Jesus.

In this study I challenge current scholarly consensus concerning John's references to the Jews in two ways. First, I suggest that John's portrayal of the Jews and Jewishness cannot be understood as a response to the violent policy of Jewish leaders in John's environment. While many scholars suggest that John reflects a conflict between the Johannine group and emerging rabbinic Judaism, recent studies on rabbinic Judaism do not support this view. Second, I claim that John's portrayal of Jewishness is much more ambivalent than is often claimed today. Recent views on John reflect the current situation in New Testament studies where early Christian writings are understood more and more as variations of diverse first century Judaism. As to John, it is not exceptional to speak of "the thoroughgoing Jewishness of this first century work."¹ While I do not deny that John originates from a Jewish world, I will argue that it

¹ De Boer 2001, 264.

also signals a breaking away from many central Jewish practices and beliefs that were integral to different forms of Jewish identity.

These two issues are not separate from each other. While many scholars emphasize John's Jewishness, they have not been able to shut their eyes to features reflecting an outsider's position in relation to Jewishness. However, they hasten to add that this "is due to expulsion; it is an outsider position which is not willingly outsider."² It is emphasized time and time again that the Johannine Christians did not reject the synagogue

voluntarily nor for theological reasons. They did not assert that the faith of the Fathers no longer agreed with the teaching of the revealer and that an alternative religious practice would have to be established.³

In this work I call into question this position and claim that it was not external pressure that made the evangelist and his group view some basics of Jewishness as outsiders. Alternatively, they themselves saw their faith in Jesus not only in continuity with earlier Jewish tradition but also in contrast with that tradition. I try to show this in my readings of those passages in John that deal with such central aspects of Jewish identity as the temple and worship (John 2:13-22; 4:20-24), the Sabbath and circumcision (5:1-18; 7:19-24), the revelation at Sinai, Moses and the law (5:37-47; 6:26-59) and Abraham (8:31-59).

There are many other issues that are involved in the two main criticisms that I make in this book. One such issue is the use of the term οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι in John. Because John is more and more understood as a Jewish writing, it is denied that the hostile use of this word in John would refer to Jews in general. Many scholars instead suggest that the word refers in a distinctive Johannine sense to some particular group, the Judaeans or the Jewish leaders. This is also the reason why scholars very often put the word *the Jews* in quotation marks when discussing John. Urban C. von Wahlde has recently explained this common practice by saying that the quotation marks indicate that the use of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι in John is "a literary phenomenon," and it is "this usage and the meanings associated with this phenomenon in the gospel that are being discussed and not the Jewish

² Von Wahlde 2000, 53.

³ Zumstein 2001, 469-470.

people in their entire historical reality."⁴ But when von Wahlde later refers to the exclusion from the synagogue as an explanation for this usage (cf. above), it becomes clear that the Johannine use of this term is not solely a literary phenomenon for him; von Wahlde and many other scholars connect this usage to the alleged conflict between the Johannine Christians and the Jewish leaders. If the evidence for such a conflict is meager, as I claim, this also has important consequences for our understanding of John's references to οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι.

Von Wahlde's discussion of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι shows that views of John's Jewishness have important theological or hermeneutical implications. Von Wahlde says that

the discussion of the meaning of the term 'Jews' is not simply academic; it has broad implications for the question whether the gospel is anti-Jewish and, if it is anti-Jewish, for the question of scripture as normative for the believing community.⁵

Von Wahlde argues that "the term was intended to refer to the hostility of authoritative 'Jewish' synagogue officials."⁶ Therefore, John's anti-Jewish use in a later "history of hostility" is "the result of the failure to adequately interpret" the rhetoric of the gospel.⁷ Von Wahlde here proves correct Adele Reinhartz's suspicion that "the effect of dressing the Johannine Jews in quotation marks is to white-wash this text and absolve it of responsibility for the anti-Jewish emotions and attitudes it conveys."⁸ A crucial part of this attempt is the reconstruction of a bitter conflict that is reflected in the gospel. For example, Jean Zumstein admits that John "undoubtedly contributed" to the history of anti-Judaism in the history of the church but excuses John's anti-Judaism by saying that "it is still necessary to recognise that at the time the Fourth Gospel was edited it was the Christians who were victims and the synagogue that was the persecutor."⁹

The views quoted above show how closely historical questions concerning John's attitudes towards the Jews and Jewishness are intertwined with other issues that have far-reaching implications. The discussion of John's Jewishness should not be kept apart from the

⁴ Von Wahlde 2000, 30 n. 1.

⁵ Von Wahlde 2000, 51.

⁶ Von Wahlde 2000, 54.

⁷ Von Wahlde 2000, 55.

⁸ Reinhartz 2001b, 356.

⁹ Zumstein 2001, 470.

ongoing discussion concerning first century Judaism. It has become quite common to state that

there was not one ruling, all-powerful group in Early Judaism; many groups claimed to possess the normative interpretation of the Torah. . . . We should not think in terms of a monolithic first-century Palestinian Judaism.¹⁰

Thus we can no longer assess John's Jewishness with some pre-fixed ideas of orthodox Judaism in mind. Although we cannot compare the Johannine community with any normative Judaism whatsoever, we can compare this group and its faith to some individual Jewish groups that made up the diverse phenomenon called Judaism at the beginning of the Common Era. I think this comparison enables us to see not only what the Johannine Christians have in common with various Jewish groups of the time, but also how they differ from these groups. Through this kind of comparison, I hope to be able to put John in its proper place among various forms of Judaism and early Christianity as a writing that has deep roots in diverse Jewish traditions but that also anticipates and contributes to the development of an independent early Christian religion.

My approach to the above-mentioned issues emerges from my dissatisfaction with two aspects that are prevailing in many recent Johannine studies: the unfounded assumption of a violent conflict between the Johannine group and a Jewish establishment and the quite unspecified appraisal of John as a completely Jewish writing. But before I proceed to describe more exactly my approach to these questions, I will discuss briefly how John's relationship to the Jews and Jewishness has been understood in the earlier history of scholarship. This survey helps to better understand how contemporary scholarly consensus has emerged.¹¹

¹⁰ Charlesworth 1990, 37.

¹¹ The following sketch is not meant as a complete history of the study of John's relationship to Jews and Judaism. I can call on some earlier surveys of the matter. These include the monographs by Schram (1974), Leistner (1974), and Ashton (1991, 3-117). I have also learned much from the articles by Meeks (1975) and von Wahlde (1982 and 2000). For the views on general developments in 20th New Testament scholarship, I am indebted to W. D. Davies 1999, 1-12.

1.1. *From the Most Hellenistic Gospel to the Most Jewish*

The pioneers of the emerging historical-critical study of the Bible clearly recognized how greatly John's portrayal of the conflict between Jesus and his opponents differs from the synoptics. At the beginning of the 19th century, the Johannine portrayal of the Jews and Judaism was understood to show that John is not a reliable source of the teaching of the historical Jesus.¹² By the time of F. C. Baur and the Tübingen school, this position had won wide acceptance. For Baur, John reflects a time when earlier conflicts between Hellenistic Christians and Jewish Christians were left behind and the separation of Christianity from Judaism was complete.¹³

Later scholarship has expressed a variety of views concerning John's relationship to Judaism, but it still has one thing in common with these pioneering views. It is commonly accepted—there are, as always, some exceptions—that the way Jesus' relationship to the Jews is portrayed in John does not correspond to the way in which the historical Jesus related to his Jewish contemporaries. This assumption is also a point of departure for Martyn's influential attempt to locate John in a historical context that would explain John's singular features better than the context of Palestinian society in Jesus' lifetime (see below p. 16).

The view that placed John—and other New Testament writings as well—in the context of Hellenistic ideas dominated the scholarly stage still at the beginning of the twentieth century. The History-of-Religions school sought to understand the New Testament in light of religious parallels, and more often than not these parallels were traced back to Hellenistic mystery religions or to other currents influenced by Hellenistic religious and philosophical thinking. This resulted in

¹² One of the first to notice this was Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider in his *Probabilia de evangelii et epistolarum Joannis, apostoli, indole et origine eruditorum judicii modeste subiecit* (Leipzig, 1820). For Bretschneider, see Kümmel 1972, 85–86; Ashton 1991, 10–11. This view was put forward in detail by a scholar named Fischer in an article "Ueber den Ausdruck: οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι im Evangelium Johannis. Ein Beitrag zur Charakteristik desselben," *Tübinger Zeitschrift für Theologie* (Zweites Heft, 1840), 93–133. This article is cited at length by Schram 1974, 151–155. Schram notes that the article does not contain any initials or any other information on the author. According to Schram, Fischer's view influenced, for example, the views of F. C. Baur and F. Overbeck.

¹³ For Baur's views on John, see Kümmel 1972, 137–138; Leistner 1974, 17–18; Schram 1974, 155.

Jesus being platonized and Paul and John being hellenized.¹⁴ Even though the likes of Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer made bold attempts to interpret Jesus and early Christianity in the context of Jewish apocalyptic thinking, the Hellenistic approach to the New Testament still prevailed in the first decades of the twentieth century. W. D. Davies has provided a personal testimony of the state of scholarship in the 1930's:

In short, most biblical scholars looked at the New Testament through Greek-colored spectacles and, of course, what they tended to see was Greek. Many found parallels to the teaching of Jesus in the Greek philosophers; they regarded Paul as a devotee of the Hellenistic Mystery religions and viewed the Fourth Gospel (John) and the Epistle to the Hebrews as imbued with something like the Hellenistic philosophy of Philo of Alexandria. . . . For Greek-trained New Testament scholars, almost everything in the New Testament was suffused with a Greek light.¹⁵

The attempts to interpret early Christianity and also the Fourth Gospel in relation to first century Judaism never faded away completely, but these attempts remained in the shadows of the keen interest in the Hellenistic background of the New Testament. In the field of Johannine studies, Adolf Schlatter (1903) and Hugo Odeberg (1929) drew heavily on Jewish sources, but in this period their attempts made little impact on the general course of scholarship.¹⁶

The two great names in twentieth century Johannine scholarship, C. H. Dodd and Rudolf Bultmann, are both linked to the main scholarly tendency of their time. W. D. Davies describes Dodd's influential *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (1953) as "the full flowering of the emphasis on Hellenism in New Testament study."¹⁷ Even though Dodd also drew on Jewish sources in his presentation of John's theology, he believed that John had drifted far from Jewish concerns. From the point of view of later Johannine studies, it is amazing how little attention Dodd pays to the problematic use of the expression οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι in his monumental works on John. In his *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* Dodd dismisses this problem in

¹⁴ Cf. W. D. Davies 1999, 5.

¹⁵ W. D. Davies 1999, 4.

¹⁶ See Ashton 1991, 24–26. It is noteworthy that Odeberg's commentary went through a sort of revival, but not until it was reprinted in the late 60's, in a scholarly atmosphere that was totally changed from that of the 30's.

¹⁷ W. D. Davies 1999, 188.

a footnote, in which he says that "this writer uses the term οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι imprecisely."¹⁸ For Dodd, the use of the term shows that the finished gospel stems from a predominantly non-Jewish environment: "That a Christian writer of the late first century should speak in this way of 'the Jews,' especially if he wrote in a gentile environment, is intelligible enough."

Bultmann was in his earlier days primarily a member of the History-of-Religions school, and he sought to place John in the syncretistic religious world of the Hellenistic era; he traced the origin of John's presentation of Jesus to the gnostic myth that he found in sources that are significantly later than John.¹⁹ This made his proposal an easy target for critics.²⁰ However, Bultmann never gave up his idea that John stems from a form of Hellenistic syncretism which the evangelist attacks by demythologizing the myth he was using. But in his later writings, including his influential commentary on John, Bultmann turned more and more away from History-of-Religions' interests, moving towards an existential interpretation. Bultmann tried to show how, in John, humanity is presented with an existential challenge to make a decision of faith. In this existential drama, the function of the Jews is to represent the unbelieving world as seen from the point of view of Christian faith.²¹ The evangelist uses Judaism as an example of how people have distorted the knowledge of God by making God's demands and promises into possessions.²² The conflict between Jesus and the Jews is thus elevated above occasional historical circumstances and seen as a timeless expression of humanity confronted by God's revelation.

Erich Gräßer has perhaps taken Bultmann's idea to its most logical conclusion, even though he also acknowledges that the gospel may reflect a real conflict with flesh and blood Jews.²³ Gräßer says that the conflict between the Torah and Christ in John is only "a

¹⁸ Dodd 1963, 242 n. 2.

¹⁹ Bultmann's articles dealing with John's gnostic background originally appeared in 1923 and 1925. See now Bultmann 1967, 10-35 and 55-104.

²⁰ For the problems in Bultmann's proposal, see Ashton 1991, 60-62.

²¹ Bultmann's commentary does not have an introduction, and so this view is developed in connection with the exposition of individual passages. See, for example, p. 59 and p. 243. For a more complete presentation, see Bultmann 1984 (1948), 378-385.

²² Bultmann 1984, 380.

²³ Gräßer's two articles dealing with the Jews in John originally appeared in 1964 and 1967. See Gräßer 1973, 50-83, esp. pp. 59, 67-68.

feature of style" with the help of which John describes a much more profound crisis. The conflict between Jesus and the Jews becomes a "paradigm of the revelation as crisis" and the polemics against the Jews are a part of the Johannine dualism which serves Christianity's own struggle against secularization.

The opinion that the Jews symbolize the unbelieving world has some support in the gospel where the connection between the Jews and the world (*ὁ κόσμος*) is a close one (cf. 1:9–11; 15:18–25). This view may also be appealing as a theological actualization of the message of the gospel or as an attempt to circumvent the problems connected with John's polemic against the Jews—this latter purpose is quite evident in Gräßer's discussion of the matter. However, it is very unlikely that John's original audience ever understood the references to the Jews and to their religion only as symbolic expressions of the timeless situation of humankind. As John Ashton notes, this interpretation "is curiously timeless" and "has virtually no social dimension."²⁴ In a similar way, Alan Segal, while admitting that the Jews are often used in a typological way in John, remarks that it is important to note the obvious fact that

it is the Jews and not some other group who have been chosen for this onerous symbol. The Johannine group is not using symbols arbitrarily. Some social reality must be reflected in the symbolic statement.²⁵

The reason that mainstream Johannine scholarship did not follow Bultmann's lead may not have been some obvious shortcomings in his approach. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the late 40's changed previous ways of understanding Judaism and Christianity. The scrolls made evident that there was not just one way of being a Jew, but that Judaism was divided into many different groups having singular beliefs of their own. The scrolls also contained many beliefs that had formerly been regarded as alien to Judaism and characteristic of Hellenistic or gnostic thinking. For example, scholars soon found some obvious points in common with John's dualism and the dualism evident in the Community Rule, and there emerged a lively discussion about these common features.²⁶ This discussion was

²⁴ Ashton 1991, 101–102.

²⁵ Segal 1981, 252.

²⁶ See my discussion in ch. 6 pp. 197–210.

a part of the larger, ongoing process that meant a thorough reversal in the search for the context of early Christianity. Early Christianity was increasingly placed in the context of diverse first century Judaism, and early Christians were essentially seen as Jews among other Jews. This development finally led W. D. Davies—in the footsteps of David Daube—to speak of “New Testament Judaism.”²⁷ The pendulum of study also swung, to use Wayne Meeks’ words, “from regarding the Fourth Gospel as the most Hellenistic of the gospels to assessing it as the most Jewish.”²⁸

However provocative the term “New Testament Judaism” may have once sounded, it seems that this approach to early Christianity has today become all but commonplace. In a popular work, James A. Sanders writes:

What has become quite clear is that all early Christians were Jews, whether by birth or by conversion. If non-Jews joined ‘the Way,’ they joined a Jewish sect, that is they became Jews even though of a particular sort. But all forms of Judaism at the time were of a particular sort, no matter the later history of rabbinic Judaism. Jesus and his followers were all Jews. We were all Jews, so to speak. It was not until the last third or quarter of the century that Christian Jewish synagogues began to break away from any Jewish identity at all.²⁹

In this current climate of New Testament study, it would probably be unwise to use such terms as Christians or Christianity at all because this is seen as an “anachronistic and misleading” usage.³⁰ It is very much this state of New Testament scholarship which also explains the intense discussion that has emerged about John’s use of the term οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι. This is not to say that the question of who the Johannine Jews were had not been asked before, but the amount of attention this question has received in recent Johannine studies clearly shows how notably the scholarly climate has changed from the days of C. H. Dodd. Dodd was still able to address the question in a footnote because he interpreted the gospel mainly as a product

²⁷ W. D. Davies 1999, 78.

²⁸ Meeks 1975, 163.

²⁹ J. A. Sanders 1998, 52–53.

³⁰ Cf. de Boer 2001, 273 n. 46. Though I have not abandoned these terms, I do not suggest that Judaism and Christianity could be identified as totally independent religions in the first century. But I believe it may be equally anachronistic and misleading to depict all parts of first century Christianity simply as another variation of Judaism.

of the Hellenistic world and saw the sweeping use of the term οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι as reflecting this non-Jewish setting of the gospel. But if all early Christians are set in a Jewish context and regarded as Jews, as is nowadays so often done, it is clear that the use of this term in John must be quite unparalleled.

1.2. *Who Are οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι in John?*

C. E. Luthardt already proposed, in his two volume commentary on John in 1875–76, that the term οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι especially refers to those who live in Judaea and in Jerusalem, in contrast to the Galileans. He saw that the Jews in John are often the leaders of the people, and as such they act as the representatives of the people.³¹ Malcolm Lowe in particular has suggested that the term means ‘the Judaeans’ who are separated in the narrative from the Galileans.³² Lowe is able to refer to some texts outside the gospel where this geographical meaning of the term is clear, and it is also probable that this geographical sense was the earliest one in antiquity. But Shaye Cohen has recently suggested that the term underwent “a semantic shift” beginning in the Maccabean period when

the ethnic-geographic self-definition was supplemented by religious (or “cultural”) and political definitions because it was only in this period that the Judaeans *ethnos* opened itself to the incorporation of outsiders.³³

In the Hasmonean period, such nations as the Idumeans and Ituraeans were incorporated into “the Judaeans *ethnos*” which meant both a change in how Jewish identity was understood and in the way the term οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι was understood. Cohen says that

even if “Judaeans” always retained its ethnic meaning, in the Hasmonean period common mode of worship and common way of life became very much more important in the new definition of Judaeans/Jew.³⁴

The change from Judaeans to Jew reflects the development in which Jewishness was increasingly construed in ethnic and religious terms, not just in an ethnic-geographical sense as earlier. This means, accord-

³¹ For Luthardt’s view, see Schram 1974, 168–169.

³² Lowe 1976, 101–130.

³³ Cohen 1999c, 70.

³⁴ Cohen 1999c, 133.

ing to Cohen, that "for most *Ioudaioi* in antiquity, the ethnic definition was supplemented, not replaced, by the religious definition. Jewishness became an ethno-religious identity."³⁵ But Cohen also insists that "we should not be too consistent in separating 'religion' from 'ethnicity' in antiquity, when the ancients had a much more organic conception of these matters than we do."³⁶

Thus the term *οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι* was primarily used in a religious-ethnic sense in the first century C.E. and it referred to all those who followed the religious practices that were essential to Jewish identity, no matter whether they lived in Judaea or whether they were ethnically from there.³⁷ Heikki Solin has also emphasized that it is misleading to separate the geographical meaning of the term from its religious meaning because, in the ancient world, the Jews were seen both as an *ethnos* originating from Judaea and as a distinctive religious group. These two aspects overlap to a great extent, both in archaeological material and in written sources where the term appears.³⁸ There is also no reason to make a clear cultural or religious distinction between the first century Judaeans and the Galileans, which Jonathan Freed has recently shown most convincingly as arguing against those who support the distinction:

The term *Jewish* is thoroughly appropriate for the inhabitants of Galilee in the first century. . . . Galilean Jews had a different social, economic, and political matrix than Jews living in Judaea or the Diaspora . . . but they were what we should call Jewish.³⁹

The narrative of the gospel does not support a neat distinction between Judaeans and Galileans, even though this has often been suggested.⁴⁰ The Galileans are also called *οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι* (ch. 6) and they follow the customs of *οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι* (2:6). This is quite logical because the meaning of the term was ethnic-religious and not geographical by the time the gospel was written.

³⁵ Cohen 1999c, 137.

³⁶ Cohen 1999c, 138.

³⁷ Thus also Reinhartz 2001, 347.

³⁸ Solin 1983, 647–651, esp. p. 647 n. 150.

³⁹ Reed 1999b, 104. In a similar vein, Freyne 2000, 126–127: "Thus, to restrict *Ἰουδαῖος* to a geographical-political meaning, without attending to the very definite associations of the term with worship in the Jerusalem temple and acceptance of the customs, rituals and practices associated with that worship, is to ignore the powerful impetus that religious belief and practice can give in transcending intolerable social and economical factors."

⁴⁰ Pace Bassler 1981, 243–257; Meeks 1985, 96–97.

Most scholars today think that the term οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι in John refers to hostile Jewish authorities. In 1922 W. Lütgert already regarded the Johannine Jews as the Pharisees who represented that part of the Jewish nation who most consistently observed the law.⁴¹ In a similar vein, K. Bornhäuser in 1928 defined the Jews in John as "Torah fanatics who are at the same time inquisitors whose job it is to watch over the law and to rectify and punish any infringement."⁴² This view is remarkably close to recent understandings of the Johannine Jews, and it is no wonder then that John Ashton approves it with slight modifications.⁴³ Urban C. von Wahlde is the most well-known supporter of the view that sees the Johannine Jews primarily as Jewish authorities, and he has collected the arguments for this view. The point of departure is the separation of different usages of the term in John: many scholars note that sometimes it refers to the authorities in a hostile way, sometimes to the crowd in a more neutral way, and sometimes to different Jewish customs and festivals.⁴⁴ Neutral usage and references to Jewish traditions are in line with the way the term is used elsewhere, and so they are not taken as the typical Johannine usage. Only the negative and overtly hostile use of the term is Johannine in the fullest sense, and it is claimed that, in this sense, the term is used only for the authorities:

If we speak of the meaning intended by the original author, we are most probably correct to say that he saw them as the religious authorities exclusively.⁴⁵

James Dunn has observed some methodological problems in this reasoning. According to Dunn, the result that the hostile mentions of the Jews refer always to the Jewish authorities "follows directly from the methodological decision to distinguish the hostile references from the rest."⁴⁶ But if we ignore the prejudicial distinction between hostile and neutral references,

⁴¹ See Schram 1974, 180-182.

⁴² As quoted by Ashton 1991, 13.

⁴³ Ashton 1991, 158.

⁴⁴ Already Belser (1902, 168-222) distinguished different ways the term is used in John.

⁴⁵ Von Wahlde 1982, 45.

⁴⁶ Dunn 1992, 197.

the motif focusing on 'the Jews' is a good deal more complex than some have allowed, and the references to the hostile Jewish authorities have to be seen as only part of a larger plot.⁴⁷

What is singular about the Johannine way of using the term is not that it is used (presumably) for the authorities only in a hostile sense, but the fact that *the very same term* is used both in an extremely hostile sense and in a way familiar from other sources. The combination of both these aspects is what makes the distinctive Johannine usage.⁴⁸

It has been common to argue that the term οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι would refer to some kind of outside point of view from the Jews while some other terms, such as Israel or Israelites, would refer to the self-understanding of the Jews. This suggestion was made especially by Karl Georg Kuhn in 1938 in an often-cited article in the standard reference work *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, and it has been repeated ever since.⁴⁹ However, Maurice Casey has recently shown that Kuhn's article reflects an anti-Semitic bias also evident in some other articles in the dictionary that were written in the 1930's. Casey shows that Kuhn's—himself a member of the Nazi party—views reflect the anti-Semitic usage of the German *Jude* more than ancient sources.⁵⁰ Most recently, Peter Tomson has suggested in a detailed comparison of John's usage with the Palestinian Talmud, the Synoptics and some New Testament Apocrypha that

the dual usage typical of Judaism in the Graeco-Roman period involves semantic equivalence but social differentiation of the two names, 'Israel' being the self-appellation Jews use in inner-Jewish situations, and 'Jews' when including non-Jews among the intended audience.⁵¹

I doubt whether people were so consistent in the way they used different terms that we could make this kind of clear distinction in all ancient literature. Graham Harvey has noted, for example, that, in the writings of the Qumran community, יְהוּדָא is used as self-appellation

⁴⁷ Dunn 1992, 199.

⁴⁸ This is why I think that von Wahlde's reply to Dunn misses the point. Cf. von Wahlde 2000, 43–44 n. 66. Von Wahlde says that "the point of distinguishing a 'Johannine' usage is that one of the ways the term Ἰουδαῖοι is used appears nowhere else in precisely the same way. This usage is 'Johannine' in a way the others are not!"

⁴⁹ Kuhn 1938, 360–370.

⁵⁰ Casey 1999, 280–291.

⁵¹ Tomson 2001, 301–340.

and sometimes synonymously with 'Israel'.⁵² There is no sign of the use of the term οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι in a negative sense in other pre-Christian Jewish sources.⁵³ Therefore, although a detailed analysis of John would lead us to conclude that this gospel reflects in some respect an outsider's stance on Jewishness, this cannot be deduced on the basis of the use of the term οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι alone.

Those who argue that the term οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι refers exclusively to the Jewish authorities claim that John's use of the term is "distinctive and cannot be understood immediately and simply in terms of its use elsewhere in the ancient world."⁵⁴ But if John's use is so distinctive, how could the Johannine writer be sure that his readers understood the term in this distinctive sense and did not confuse this distinctive sense with other meanings prevalent in other ancient literature and which also appear in John? Johannes Beutler has recently raised this question when he compares the Johannine usage to other writings in the New Testament. Beutler concludes that "the typical 'Johannine' usage which speaks of the 'Jews' as the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem as opposed to the claims of Jesus seems to be restricted to the Gospel of John."⁵⁵ For Beutler, this makes it unlikely that, as John was connected to other New Testament writings, the references to οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι would have been understood in a specific sense as referring to the authorities. But Beutler considers it

at least thinkable that the first readers of the Gospel of John who read it still as an isolated document of their community were still able to grasp the particular meaning of the expression 'the Jews' as the opponents of Jesus in Jerusalem.

I think, however, that the way the term οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι is used in John gives reasons for believing that not even the Johannine writer had this particular meaning in mind, a meaning modern scholars have found in the gospel.

It is not at all clear that the term οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι always refers in a hostile sense to the authorities. The crux of the interpretation is John

⁵² Harvey 1996, 21–42 and 99–103.

⁵³ Cf. Cohen 1999c, 71 n. 5: "It is often stated in the scholarly literature that *Ioudaios* bears a negative valence, but this assertion reflects the valence of *Jew*, *juif*, and *Jude* in modern times, which in turn was influenced by Christianity's assessments of Judaism. A negative valence is nowhere in evidence in any of the texts surveyed here."

⁵⁴ Von Wahlde 2002, 30 n. 1.

⁵⁵ Beutler 2001, 234.

6:41 and 52 where the term is clearly used for the Galilean crowd in a hostile sense—according to von Wahlde, these are only instances of the seventy-one in the gospel where the term is used in this way.⁵⁶ But John 6:41 and 52 may not represent unique usage. At least in John 7:35, it is probable that οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι are some of the crowd and not the leaders who do not seem to be present when the discussion takes place in 7:33–36. In 7:32 the Pharisees and the chief priests send the temple police to arrest Jesus. The return of the police is not mentioned until 7:45. It seems inevitable that the Jews in 7:35 are some of the common crowd; this is suggested by the fact that both the previous discussions in 7:25–31 and the following discussion in 7:37–44 deal with the crowd whereas only in 7:45–52 does the focus of the story change to the Pharisees and the chief priests.⁵⁷ The attempts to argue that 7:33–36 deal with the Jewish authorities are based on an *a priori* assumption that the Jews are exclusively the Jewish leaders for the Johannine writer, and this assumption has made it difficult to accept the most natural reading of this passage.⁵⁸

I think we should not fix beforehand what the term οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι means. The meaning of the word should not be assessed only by listing those different passages where it appears and by isolating the distinctive Johannine usage. The basic mistake of earlier attempts to restrict the term to some particular group is that they separate the question of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι from what John says concerning basic matters related to Jewish identity. We should answer the following questions: What are the characteristic actions and beliefs of those who

⁵⁶ Von Wahlde 1982, 45 and 2000, 45. I discuss in detail the use of the term οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι in 6:41, 52 in my reading of John 6:26–59, see ch. 5 pp. 160–162.

⁵⁷ Pace R. F. Collins (2001, 293 n. 36) who says the Jews in 7:35 are the chief priests and the Pharisees.

⁵⁸ Cf. Von Wahlde 1982, 44–45. Von Wahlde argues that the passage in 7:33–36 lacks clear references to time and place and that the sequence in John 7 as a whole is theological rather than historical: “The purpose seems rather to provide a ‘typical’ response to Jesus and the ‘typical’ reaction of Jesus rather than specific scenes.” Thus the response of the Jews in 7:35–36 is not that of the common people, although the narrative context suggests this. It is problematic, however, that von Wahlde admits that there is confusion concerning the historical settings of some scenes in the gospel, but, at the same time, insists that the writer makes a clear distinction between the Jews as the authorities and the common people. To be sure, von Wahlde admits that the Johannine use of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι is not “mechanically consistent” (p. 47). I think that the imprecise settings of some scenes in John correspond with how the narrator sometimes refers to Jesus’ interlocutors without making a clear distinction between different groups.

are called οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι? Is the term reserved for some particular group who has its own distinctive features in the narrative? I will return to these questions as I pull together my own conclusions in the synthesis of this work.

1.3. *John As a Two-Level Drama*

One of the main reasons why it has been so standard in recent decades to take οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι in John as the Jewish authorities is that scholars have read John with a quite specific historical context in mind. It has become an almost undisputed paradigm to maintain that John reflects a conflict between the Johannine group and the leading Jewish establishment. Therefore, οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι in John are not only the Judaeans leaders in Jerusalem in Jesus' story, but they symbolize the opponents of the Johannine community who are quite often identified with the leaders of emerging rabbinic Judaism. This influential view was put forward especially by John Louis Martyn in his *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, which first appeared in 1968.⁵⁹

Martyn was not the first to claim that the gospel reflects a conflict between the Johannine group and its opponents. Many elements in Martyn's reconstruction were already quite common among New Testament scholars. Both Rudolf Bultmann and Erich Gräßer, who understood the Johannine Jews mainly as theological symbols, made observations pointing to this direction.⁶⁰ In fact, the outlines of Martyn's solution date back to the 19th century.⁶¹ Yet Martyn was the first to connect this view to a detailed analysis of the gospel's narrative—or at least of some passages in the gospel. He thus estab-

⁵⁹ My references are to the revised and enlarged second edition that appeared in 1979.

⁶⁰ Cf. Bultmann's references to the conflict stories in John 5 and 9 in Bultmann 178. See also Gräßer 1973 [1964], 63. Gräßer mentions that Johannine scholars are quite unanimous that John's anti-Jewish polemic must be explained in reference to the *Zeitgeschichte* of the evangelist. Gräßer mentions here all the central elements of Martyn's theory: the expulsion from the synagoge, the *birkat ha-minim*, R. Gamaliel II as the main force among the Yavnean rabbis. In a note, Gräßer lists scholars supporting this view: W. Schrage (1960), J. Jozs (1953), K. L. Carroll (1957), L. Goppelt (1954), G. Baum (1963). He mentions even a standard introduction to the NT representing this view (Feine-Behm-Kümmel, 1964). This shows that Martyn's view was to a great extent already present in previous scholarship, in particular in German-speaking scholarship.

⁶¹ Cf. Ashton 1991, 11. Ashton mentions an article by M. von Aberle (1861) who already referred to the *Birkat ha-Minim*.

lished it as a standard way to read the Johannine narrative.⁶² Martyn proposes that the gospel of John should be read as a two-level drama that tells not only of Jesus' life, which Martyn calls the *einmalig* level of the story, but also of the contemporary situation of the Johannine Christians. The point of departure for Martyn is John 9 which he actually presents in the form of a drama and then proceeds to reveal what this drama demonstrates of the history of the community.⁶³ Martyn connects the passages that tell of the exclusion from the synagogue (9:22; 12:42; 16:2) to the *Birkat ha-Minim*, a Jewish prayer against the heretics, and maintains that this prayer played a crucial role in the process that led to the separation of the Johannine Christians from their fellow Jews.⁶⁴ The bitterness of this process is reflected in the gospel's portrayal of the Jews as Jesus' enemies. If the gospel is read in this way, it appears that different Jewish groups in the narrative represent real Jewish groups at the time the gospel was written.⁶⁵

Martyn suggested that John belongs not only to a Jewish context in some general sense but to a quite specific Jewish context. Martyn placed the gospel in the context of emerging rabbinic Judaism and claimed that the principal enemies of the Johannine Christians were the early rabbis in Yavneh. For Martyn, the expulsion from the synagogue was not a unique event but part of the larger scene where the rabbinic leaders became the main persecutors of the Johannine Christians, even to the extent that they executed many believers.⁶⁶

Some details in Martyn's reconstruction, such as references to the *Birkat ha-Minim*, have been much discussed and mainly abandoned by most Johannine scholars, but his general picture still dominates the stage in Johannine studies. As D. Moody Smith writes:

In setting John against a Jewish, rather than a Christian, background, Martyn had predecessors. But he rightly gets credit for a sea-change in Johannine studies for somewhat the same reason that the Wright brothers got credit for the airplane. Others may have gotten off the ground, but Martyn—like the Wright brothers—achieved sustained flight. To extend the metaphor, his vehicle may not have been perfect, but it has proven good enough to maintain itself and stand correction.⁶⁷

⁶² For Martyn's contribution to Johannine studies, see D. M. Smith 1990, 275–294.

⁶³ Martyn 1979, 24–36.

⁶⁴ Martyn 1979, 50–62.

⁶⁵ Martyn 1979, 84–89.

⁶⁶ Martyn 1979, 64–81.

⁶⁷ D. M. Smith 1990, 279.

These words aptly reflect the influence of Martyn's work on Johannine studies in the last three decades. David Rensberger says that Martyn's work "has become the cornerstone of much current Johannine research."⁶⁸ John Ashton even claims that in Martyn's work the question concerning John's audience and situation "has been roughly mapped out. What remains is a matter of adjusting a few details and filling in some gaps."⁶⁹ These appraisals were made a decade ago, but Martyn's influence has not waned. Most contributors to the collection *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel*, which appeared in 2001, refer to Martyn's work, and most do so approvingly.⁷⁰ R. Alan Culpepper expresses the attitude of many by saying that

specific points [in Martyn's model] continue to be debated, [but] it is widely agreed that the Fourth Gospel reflects an intense and apparently violent conflict between Jews and Johannine Christians.⁷¹

As Adele Reinhartz says: "[The two-level reading] strategy, like the expulsion theory which it supports, has become all but axiomatic in Johannine studies."⁷²

Martyn's theory also has been criticized. Most discussions, as Culpepper's words make clear, have dealt with some specific points, while insisting that it is basically correct. I will return to these singular points in my detailed presentation and critique of the theory in the chapter 2. It is surprising, however, that there have not been very many scholars who have had doubts about Martyn's methodological presuppositions. After all, Martyn takes quite a bold leap from the narrative of the gospel to the historical reality behind it. Martyn does not hesitate to take not only the narrative in general but also its minor details as a direct reflection of the social reality of the Johannine Christians.

The venturesome nature of Martyn's proposal has not altogether gone unnoticed by scholars. Marinus de Jonge had some opinions of Martyn and Wayne Meeks especially in mind when he wrote that

the way from a literary document like the Gospel of John to a reconstruction of the actual situation in which it was written is much longer and much more difficult than some authors seem to realize.⁷³

⁶⁸ Rensberger 1989, 22.

⁶⁹ Ashton 1991, 109.

⁷⁰ Bieringer et al. 2001a.

⁷¹ Culpepper 2001, 69.

⁷² Reinhartz 1998, 117.

⁷³ De Jonge 1977, 114 n. 70.

This basic methodological problem also caught the eye of Joachim Kügler in an important and—unfortunately—mostly neglected article.⁷⁴ Kügler points out that there is no evidence in Jewish sources for the kind of situation Martyn's theory presupposes. This leads him to ask whether everything in a text reflects current problems in the social reality behind it or whether there could also be some features that are only historical reminiscences of the past. Kügler notes that there is not much methodological discussion in current Johannine scholarship about how we can use texts to gain information about social contexts. This gives a reason for Kügler to compare the state of Johannine scholarship to the 19th century *Leben-Jesu-Forschung*, only that now it is the life of a community which scholars think they can trace in its details in the gospel.⁷⁵ Kügler ends his article with the plea that historical methods should be subjected to critical evaluation, or Johannine scholarship will turn into a new literary genre, "Isagogic Science Fiction."⁷⁶

Margaret Davies has also noticed the problems in the current consensus view based on Martyn's two-level reading in her *Rhetoric and Reference in the Fourth Gospel*. Davies notes that although many scholars

recognize that the Gospel's portrait of Judaism is inaccurate for the time of Jesus, they assert that it is accurate for the time when the Gospel was written. But what we know of Judaism during the first two centuries CE from its own sources suggests, on the contrary, that the Fourth Gospel's portrait, taken at face value, is a gross caricature.⁷⁷

For Davies, the gospel is not formed out of real disputes between Jews and Christians. In contrast,

it suggests that what knowledge of Judaism it contains is derived from Scripture or from traditions about Jesus, not from first-hand evidence. There is no attempt to enter into the world of Jews in order to convince them of Jesus' importance but rather an attempt to convince Christians about the characteristics of their own separate identity.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Kügler 1984, 48–61. Kügler's article is especially a response to Klaus Wengst's study (originally in 1981, my references are to the fourth edition, Wengst 1992) but Kügler also mentions Martyn's work. It is revealing of the reception of Kügler's article that it is not mentioned by D. Moody Smith, even though Smith also traces Martyn's influence on German scholarship. Smith mentions only Wengst who is heavily criticized by Kügler. Cf. D. M. Smith 1990, 287–288.

⁷⁵ Kügler 1984, 61.

⁷⁶ Kügler 1984, 62.

⁷⁷ M. Davies 1992, 17.

⁷⁸ M. Davies 1992, 303.

It is unfortunate that Margaret Davies chose just to give her "own constructive account" and "eschewed quoting other peoples' writings just to point out prejudices or errors."⁷⁹ Therefore, her criticism of the current consensus remains general and unspecified which perhaps explains why it was not able to challenge the course of mainstream Johannine scholarship in the 1990's.

A more detailed and substantial criticism against prevailing consensus is presented in a series of works by Adele Reinhartz.⁸⁰ Reinhartz approaches John from a Jewish perspective and acknowledges that her background makes her feel discomfort with current scholarly opinion.⁸¹ Reinhartz provides a resistant reading of the gospel and opposes the way it negates many basics of Jewish identity.⁸² Reinhartz does not only engage in an ideological criticism of the Fourth Gospel from a Jewish point of view, but she also challenges the historical presuppositions behind the two-level reading strategy. First, following some earlier critics who have challenged Martyn's references to certain rabbinic passages, Reinhartz notes that this strategy cannot be supported by external evidence.⁸³ Second, the two-level reading is based one-sidedly on John 9 while there are other models for interaction between Jesus' followers and the Jews in John. If read as a reflection of the social reality behind the gospel, John 11 speaks of ongoing and peaceful communication between Johannine Christians and other Jews.⁸⁴ The third point in Reinhartz's criticism is that it is unlikely that the intended audience ever read the gospel as a direct reflection of their own history, but rather as a story of Jesus.⁸⁵ On the basis of her criticism, Reinhartz proposes an alternative way of reading John:

The Gospel reflects the complex social situation of the Johannine community but not the specific historical circumstances which gave rise to

⁷⁹ M. Davies 1992, 7.

⁸⁰ See Reinhartz 1997, 1998, 2001a, 2001b.

⁸¹ See especially Reinhartz 1997, 177-193.

⁸² Reinhartz 2001a, 81-98.

⁸³ Reinhartz 1998, 115-118; 2001a, 37-40.

⁸⁴ Reinhartz 1998, 121-130; 2001a, 40-48.

⁸⁵ Reinhartz 1998, 137. However, this is a point that Martyn himself seems to admit to some extent. Cf. Martyn 1979, 89: "One may be confident that he [the evangelist] did not intend his readers to analyze the *dramatis personae* in the way in which we have done it. Indeed, I doubt that he was himself analytically conscious of what I have termed the two-level drama, for his major concern in this regard was to bear witness to the essential integrity of the *einmalig* drama of Jesus' earthly life and the contemporary drama in which the Risen Lord acts through his servants."

that situation. The largely negative portrayal of the Jews and Judaism within the Gospel must therefore be grounded not in a specific experience but in the ongoing process of self-definition and the rhetoric which accompanies it.⁸⁶

Reinhartz here joins Wayne McCready who has read John 9 as a reflection of Johannine self-understanding rather than as a direct history of the community.⁸⁷ This notion of self-understanding is important because it suggests that we cannot understand religious texts only as a reflection of historical reality but also and perhaps primarily as a reflection of how writers understand themselves in relation to that reality. It is remarkable how little attention this aspect has received in Johannine scholarship during recent decades although it is quite common in the sociological or anthropological study of religion. For example, Mary Douglas notes in her classic *Natural Symbols* that "small competitive communities tend to believe themselves in a dangerous universe, threatened by sinister powers operated by fellow human beings."⁸⁸ Thus, it is hazardous to take what is said of an outside world in a religious writing as direct reflection of that world.⁸⁹ When speaking of heresy and apostasy in rabbinic writings, William Scott Green emphasizes how important it is to observe that 'others' are presented in religious literature in light of the self-understanding of a religious community:

In so constructing 'otherness,' religions do not see the outsiders whole. Rather, a religion mistakes some part of the outsider for outsider and a piece of itself for itself, and it construes each in terms of the other. Each negation of the 'other' is simultaneously an affirmation of self, in terms of some particular trait. This means that 'otherness' is as much about the naming religion as it is about outsiders named. . . . 'Otherness', therefore, is at least as much a reflection of the religious community's self-understanding as it is a response to actual conflicts with the real other.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Reinhartz 1998, 137.

⁸⁷ McCready 1990, 147–166.

⁸⁸ Douglas 1973, 137.

⁸⁹ There are some signs that the supporters of the two-level reading strategy are aware of this problem, cf. Rensberger 1989, 110–111. Rensberger discusses what is meant by "oppression" in John's case and concludes that, "at any rate, there is no question that the Johannine group *saw themselves* as oppressed" (*italics original*). However, in the case of such a religious group as the Johannine community, it is two different things to feel oppressed and to be actually oppressed.

⁹⁰ Green 2000b, 366.

I agree with the earlier critics of the two-level reading strategy that it is not just minor details that are wrong in this reading. The careless leap from the narrative of the gospel to the historical reality behind it has resulted in distorted views of the early rabbinic movement, and these views cannot be sustained in light of recent studies. I will argue this in detail in my following criticism of current scholarly consensus in chapter 2. I claim that John's portrayal of the Jews and Jewishness cannot be explained as a response to some external pressure; this portrayal rather reflects the self-understanding of the Johannine Christians who saw their faith in Jesus as the culmination of Jewish tradition but who also saw a clear contrast between the revelation they believed to have in Jesus and God's earlier revelations to such leading figures in Jewish tradition as Moses and Abraham. I think this ambivalence is the main characteristic of John's portrayal of Jewishness even though current New Testament scholarship tends to one-sidedly emphasize the Jewishness of all early Christianity.

1.4. *Early Christians and the Diversity of First Century Judaism*

In some respect, the current climate in New Testament studies seems similar to the state of scholarship in the 1930's described by W. D. Davies in a quotation that I cited above (p. 6). In the 30's "almost everything in the New Testament was suffused with a Greek light," whereas today everything is seen in a Jewish light—with the notable difference that the classics of Greek tradition are many centuries older than early Christian sources whereas a large part of Jewish material used by scholars is quite as many centuries newer than early Christian literature. But is there also a similar danger that the one-sided interest results in superficial readings of some parts of the New Testament? Has the emphasis on the Jewishness of early Christianity gone too far in making scholars blind to the features that already mark a detachment from many basics of Jewish identity in some parts of the New Testament? The development that has led to the current state of scholarship started as a protest against the earlier emphasis on the alleged Hellenistic and non-Jewish character of early Christianity, but maybe what has happened here, so typical of these kinds of protests, is that opinions have moved from one extreme to another.

The more the Jewishness of the New Testament is emphasized, the more imprecise and stereotyped the general descriptions of the

situation of first century Christians have become. As Stephen G. Wilson notes, the same tendency has made it almost impossible to use the term Jewish Christianity in a specific sense because all early Christians are regarded as some sort of Jewish Christians:

It has recently become commonplace to assign a dramatically more important role to Jewish Christianity. The claims may vary, but they all point in the same direction (and the more they have been repeated, the looser and more sweeping they have become): that all early Christians were in some sense Jewish Christians; that they were the dominant force throughout the first century; and that they thrived in some areas for many centuries, often remaining the dominant form of Christianity to be found in any particular locale.⁹¹

Even some cursory observations suggest that it is quite problematic to describe all first century Christians as Jewish or even as Jewish Christians. Paul's letter to the Galatians shows how deeply Paul struggled to defend his view that the Galatians of gentile origin (Gal 4:8) should not have to be circumcised. Paul's opponents were presumably Jewish Christians who insisted that all those who received Christ should also be circumcised. It is not evident that these opponents would have regarded uncircumcised gentiles as Jews. And it is far from self-evident that those gentiles who remained uncircumcised ever understood that, by joining an early Christian community, they joined a Jewish sect. Because Paul elsewhere makes a clear distinction between Jews and gentiles (e.g. 1 Cor 9:20–21), it is not clear that he regarded the gentile Christians in Galatia as Jews. The very fact that these questions arise shows that matters connected to early Christian identity in relation to basic matters of Jewish identity became already highly problematic and controversial in the 50's and not just at the end of the first century.⁹² It seems that some of Paul's basic convictions made his view of Jewishness highly ambivalent.⁹³

It is not manifest that early Christians were a Jewish group which remained inseparable from other Jewish groups in the eyes of outsiders the most of the first century. The history of an early Christian

⁹¹ Wilson 1995, 144.

⁹² Cf. Charlesworth 1990, 48. Although Charlesworth emphasizes Paul's Jewishness, even he admits that "Paul is often exasperatingly unclear, unrepresentative of many aspects of Early Judaism, and even selfcontradictory."

⁹³ For Paul's problematic stance on the Torah in Galatians, see now Kuula 1999.

community in the city of Rome shows this. The emperor Claudius issued an edict in 49 c.e. which

in effect drove a wedge between [Jews and Christians] by dramatically communicating—especially to non-Christian Jews—that it would be in their best interests to go their separate ways. By reducing interactions between Christians and non-Christians Jews and by altering the context in which those interactions took place, the edict affected the evolution of Christian self-definition in the capital.⁹⁴

Some fifteen years later Nero initiated a persecution against some early Christians in Rome; James Walters has recently emphasized that these events indicate the extent of the break between non-Christians Jews and Christians in this locale:

The ancient materials are silent how Christians were identified and prosecuted in 64 c.e.; nonetheless, they were identified and prosecuted, and the implications of that datum for the existence of features which distinguished Christians from non-Christian Jews, and Christian communities from Jewish communities, should not be underplayed.⁹⁵

These incidents suggest that early Christians in Rome were a group distinct from other Jews at the *social* level, no matter whether they saw themselves as the true Israel (cf. Rom. 9:24–29), or no matter how greatly they drew on Jewish traditions in their faith. The circumstances in Rome, of course, were quite special and relate to this early Christian community alone. But these events show that it is quite possible to imagine some early Christian groups as distinct from other Jews already before the last quarter of the first century. The early history of Christians in Rome suggests that it is not sufficient to determine the Jewishness of early Christian groups only in relation to their own self-understanding or the traditions they use.

It seems that the seeds for the development that finally led to the break between mainstream Christianity and most Jewish communities were sown, at least to some extent, in the first century c.e. There

⁹⁴ Walters 1998, 178. In a similar vein Brändle & Stegemann 1998, 126; Lane 1998, 206. It is to some extent unclear whether the edict had to do with a schism between some early Christians and non-Christian Jews. Suetonius says in a famous passage (*Claud.* 25.4) that the Jews were expelled because “they constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus” (*impulsore Chresto*). This passage has most often taken as a reference to a conflict evoked by early Christian preaching, but this interpretation is not without problems. See Rutgers 1998, 105–106.

⁹⁵ Walters 1998, 179–180.

is no way to return to the thinking that we could pinpoint a specific date in history, 70 C.E. or 135 C.E., when the split between early Christianity and Judaism became complete.⁹⁶ But the current emphasis on the Jewishness of all first century Christianity is not able to give a proper answer to the question as to why most forms of Christianity eventually grew apart from most forms of Judaism. This problem is evident in James Dunn's approach to the problem. Dunn shares the view of many when he says that

as we move into the second century not only certain Christian sects can be described as 'Jewish-Christian,' but Christianity as a whole can still properly be described as 'Jewish Christianity' in a justifiable sense.⁹⁷

However, a little later Dunn notes that

by the time of Pliny [about 112 C.E.] the issue was clear: Christians are not Jews. By then the perception from outside reinforces the impression that *the partings of the ways had already become effective*, in Asia Minor and in the view from Rome at any rate.⁹⁸

But how can we understand this change, if it was not already going on in the first century? Dunn himself refers to the emerging rabbinic Judaism as "the first real or really effective form of orthodox or normative Judaism" that began "to draw boundaries more tightly round 'Judaism.'"⁹⁹ But if this view is no longer tenable, as I argue in detail in the second chapter of this work, then we should not look for some external reasons for Christianity's emergence as a religion of its own. Rather, we should recognize those features in early Christian writings that suggest the ambivalent attitudes some Christian groups had towards some aspects of Jewish tradition. I do not deny in my followings readings that John stems from a Jewish environment, but I claim that due attention should also be paid to those traits that reflect a departure from or even a conflict with central aspects of Jewishness.

The opinion that emphasizes the diversity of first century Judaism and sees Christianity as another variation of Judaism, has led to the

⁹⁶ Daniel Boyarin has even suggested that we should not speak of Judaism and Christianity as independent religions at all in the context of late Antiquity. See Boyarin 1999, 1–21. I try to assess this view with regard to John's views on Jewishness in my synthesis, ch. 7.4 p. 237.

⁹⁷ Dunn 1991, 234.

⁹⁸ Dunn 1991, 241 (*italics original*).

⁹⁹ Dunn 1991, 221–222, 238.

conclusion that we cannot speak of Judaism in the singular but should use the plural *Judaisms*.¹⁰⁰ But if all groups of Jews—including early Christians or Samaritans—had a Judaism of their own, it is not possible to understand why some groups went their own way and formed what should be regarded in any meaningful sense of the word as a religion of its own.

The notion that we should speak of *Judaisms* in the first century context is problematic. First, it is based to a great extent on the self-understanding of different texts that make the claim that one group or another is the true Israel.¹⁰¹ This leads to clear problems in the case of Church Fathers, for example, who also make this claim. But it is problematic not only in case of some early Christian groups to make the self-understanding of a community the point of departure for the assessment of Jewishness in a given writing. Most religious groups, at least sectarian groups, define themselves in sharp contrast to the surrounding society in order to underline their excellence as compared to other groups. Thus they see themselves as unique and isolated from the rest of society. But this self-understanding does not prove that these groups are in real life that isolated and unique in the eyes of outsiders. Jutta Jokiranta has recently remarked that, while “the model of sectarianism may help us in describing the self-understandings” of such groups as the Qumran community, this model “cannot describe the objective socio-historical situations of the groups.”¹⁰² A good case can be made for non-Jews not regarding different Jewish groups as representing different religions, but rather as different Jewish schools, resembling those philosophical schools known in the Hellenistic world.¹⁰³ When it comes to other Jews, it is not at all clear that they would have regarded sectarians as representing completely different religious systems. Regarding such groups as the Qumran community, Albert Baumgarten suggests that other Jews

might have respected the devotion of sectarians, but also resented their exclusivist attitudes somewhat, regarding them with at least some disdain and believing (1) that sectarian ideas were new-fangled inventions of the minds of their devotees, and (2) that if traditional practice had been good enough for generations past there was no need to change it.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Chilton & Neusner 1995, 1–18.

¹⁰¹ For these problems, see Myllykoski & Luomanen 1999, 330–331; Luomanen 2002, 114–119.

¹⁰² Jokiranta 2001, 234.

¹⁰³ See Baumgarten 1997, 58–60.

¹⁰⁴ Baumgarten 1997, 62.

The second problem in the notion which considers different Jewish groups as Judaisms of their own is that it presupposes that each ancient writing "speaks of a single, coherent community of Jews" that has a "religious system" of its own.¹⁰⁵ Built into this view is a harmonizing tendency that discards the fact that many ancient writings contain quite conflicting views that do not yield a coherent religious system. The exclusive concentration on independent religious systems tends to detach ancient writings from their social contexts, a point made by John Barclay in his study on the Diaspora Judaism. Barclay traces different forms of Jewish identity in the Diaspora, but although he finds much local diversity, he refuses to speak of many Diaspora Judaisms:

Such varying Jewish profiles do not necessarily represent different 'Judaisms;' one and the same socio-religious phenomenon can wear many masks. . . . If Judaism is defined—as it should be—as a *social* and not just as an *intellectual* phenomenon, it is hard to see how the plural 'Judaisms' could apply to the Diaspora. In identifying the bonds which held Diaspora Jews together, we will find ourselves most confident at those points where the perceptions of 'outsiders' match those of 'insiders.' If non-Jews repeatedly commented on Jewish characteristics which were also held by Jews to be essential to their way of life, we can be sure that such items were indeed integral to the identity.¹⁰⁶

Barclay notes that, although Jews in the Diaspora—and I think that the same could be applied to the Palestinian Jews also—held various and divergent beliefs, different groups were united on a social level because they held to distinct convictions and practices that marked the Jews off from other people, even in the eyes of outsiders.¹⁰⁷ In

¹⁰⁵ Chilton & Neusner 1995, 7. For the application of this approach on the Qumran study, see Neusner & Avery-Peck & Chilton 2001, vii–xii. The concentration "on a single corpus of evidence, the writings found in the library of Qumran" that speak of "the system as a whole" goes against the prevailing trend in Qumran studies which emphasize the fact that there are many different systems reflected in the scrolls. It is also not at all clear that different systems in the scrolls would always reflect different social contexts and different groups who hold these divergent views. See Metso 1998 and 2000.

¹⁰⁶ Barclay 1996, 401.

¹⁰⁷ The same is emphasized by E. P. Sanders 1999a, 5: "Both Jews and Gentiles regarded the Jews in the Diaspora as intimately linked to the Jews in Palestine. There was, in other words, something that we may call 'common Judaism.' It was based on general acceptance of the Bible, especially the law of Moses, and on a common self-perception: The Jews knew themselves to be Jews and not Gentiles, and to some degree or other they stood apart from other people. We have noted

his detailed discussion of these common denominators of Jewish identity in the Diaspora, Barclay mentions the following things: the ethnic bond, festivals, fasts and Sabbath gatherings in local communities, links with Jerusalem and the temple (e.g., collections of temple dues), the law/Jewish scriptures, the figure of Moses, rejection of iconic cults, food regulations, male circumcision, and Sabbath observance.¹⁰⁸

Barclay concludes that there is "much diversity in Diaspora interpretations of Judaism, and it appears that hermeneutical unanimity was unnecessary so long as the web of custom was preserved intact."¹⁰⁹

In another connection Barclay has studied those examples of individuals or groups who were regarded as apostates in the Diaspora. The sparse evidence concerning these apostates suggests that the reasons why some Jews became suspect in the eyes of their fellow Jews had not so much to do with particular beliefs than with withdrawal from the Jewish community through assimilation; this assimilation became evident in the abandonment of such practices as food regulations or Sabbath laws and in involvement with gentile religion.¹¹⁰ For example, when Philo refers to some 'allegorizers,' he seems to share their symbolical interpretation of the laws concerning the Sabbath, festivals and circumcision; he laments that these people have ceased

in particular monotheism, abhorrence of idols, circumcision, Sabbath, food laws, and a few other points." For a discussion of how it was possible to know who was a Jew in Antiquity, see Cohen 1999c, 25-68. Cohen concludes that it may have been impossible to tell an individual Jew from those gentiles who observed Jewish rituals and practices. But even Cohen admits—responding to an earlier criticism made by John Barclay—that he does not "deny that Jewish communities will have been distinctive, clearly marked off as a group from non-Jewish groups" (p. 67 n. 175).

¹⁰⁸ Barclay 1996, 402-442.

¹⁰⁹ Barclay 1996, 443. A different picture of Diaspora Judaism is given by J. J. Collins 2000, 273-275. Collins says that 'covenantal nomism,' proposed by E. P. Sanders as the basic pattern of Judaism both in Palestine and in the Diaspora is not the only or dominant factor in the religion of Hellenistic Judaism (cf. also pp. 21-24). Collins says that "the Jewish tradition could also be construed as the story of a glorious past which fostered ethnic pride, with little regard for religious laws or for anything that could be called nomism" (p. 273). This kind of Judaism would not place much emphasis on the observance of commandments. For the discussion of the role of circumcision in the first century Judaism, see also Collins 1985, 164-186. However, Collins may play down the significance of religious practices for Jewish identity in the Diaspora. Cf. Barclay 1996, 439. Barclay argues against Collins, that the insignificance of circumcision in the Diaspora cannot be deduced from the fact that all Diaspora authors do not mention it; circumcision "was not a topic that naturally arose in the genre in which many of them wrote." The references of many non-Jewish authors to this practice show that it was regarded as a major characteristic of the Jews. See also Cohen 1999c, 158.

¹¹⁰ See Barclay 1998, 92.

to observe these laws on the basis of their theology (*Migration* 89–93). Philo is worried because the ‘allegorizers’ have ceased to observe the practices which mark a Jew off from a gentile, not because they have their own religious system.¹¹¹ The presence of the apostates in the Diaspora is a clear sign that, on a *social* level, the borders of Jewishness were not open to every kind of Jewish identity. A deviation from central Jewish practices would not have gone unnoticed but would have resulted in a confrontation between those Jews who continued to observe these practices and those who abandoned them.

Different Jewish groups emerged not because they had their own distinctive religious systems but because they had conflicting views on some basics of Jewish identity. An example of this could be taken from what little we know of the origins of the Qumran community. It seems that the issues related to the calendar and/or to the temple, the cult and priesthood were fundamental in the process that led to the separation of the community from the main body of the Jews.¹¹² Although the Dead Sea Scrolls contain many theological concepts that may have been rather obscure in the eyes of the rest of the Jews, it is not probable that these ideas played a central role in the formation of the community. The dualistic world view evident in some of the scrolls, for example, may be a result of the alienation of the group rather than its cause.

There may be a difference in the emergence of different deviant groups in Judaism and in Christianity. When discussing the origin of Samaritanism, Ferdinand Dexinger points out that in Christianity sects often “originate from deviating teaching while in Judaism they arise from deviating actions.”¹¹³ Dexinger also makes an important observation concerning the rise of Samaritanism. The original process which led to the formation of the recognizable religious community of the Samaritans was probably a long development that was dependent on several factors, religious (e.g., mixed marriages, cult centralization, the priesthood), political and economic (e.g., rivalry between Samaria and Jerusalem, a gentile ruling class in Samaria). Dexinger

¹¹¹ For this passage in Philo, see Räisänen 1987, 35–36.

¹¹² For a recent presentation of different theories about the history of the Qumran community, see García Martínez 1998, 194–216. Jokiranta (2001, 234) aptly notes that not all reasons for the emergence of difference groups were religious but included different political, social and cultural factors.

¹¹³ Dexinger 1981, 111. For the discussion of the concepts of Torah and dogma in Judaism and Christianity, cf. also W. D. Davies 1999, 58–78.

notes that "these basic factors which were actually decisive for the separation should be differentiated from later theologizing of the differences."¹¹⁴ According to Dexinger, theological controversy concerning the question of which side, the Samaritans or the Jews, had the right to be the true Israel was secondary in the process of alienation; this theologizing finally completed the break but was not its original cause.¹¹⁵

I believe that if we wish to understand how early Christian writings participated in the development of a growing alienation of many Christian groups from the things that were common to different Jewish groups, we should not be satisfied with unspecified assurances about the Jewishness of all early Christianity. We should also take seriously those features that show tensions and ambiguities in early Christian references to basic matters of Jewishness. Despite the great diversity in first century Judaism, the different groups had a common bond.¹¹⁶ There was no orthodoxy among the Jews in the first century, but both the Jews in general and the outsiders had similar ideas of what were the things that make a Jew. These things were not written in any credo and their observance was not controlled by any leading body, but these things were connected to Jewishness in the minds of people, as is suggested by Shaye Cohen:

Most of those in antiquity who identified themselves as *Jews* and were known as *Jews* to their neighbors shared certain important beliefs and practices. For example, they believed in a supreme God who created the world, chose the Israelites/Jews to be his people, revealed his Torah to his servant Moses, and rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked. They also practised the laws of the Torah of Moses, most conspicuously circumcision, Sabbath and abstention from certain foods. Jews interpreted these beliefs and practices in numerous and diverse ways, but it is not for the historian to determine which of these ways is right or 'orthodox.' The appropriate term for this regimen of belief and practice, and the social structures created by its adherents, is not 'orthodox Judaism' but simply 'Judaism.'¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Dexinger 1981, 113.

¹¹⁵ Dexinger 1981, 114.

¹¹⁶ My views on first century Judaism owe much to E. P. Sanders' discussions in various writings, most notably in Sanders 1992. I have avoided quite consciously, however, the use of Sanders' key terms 'common Judaism' and 'covenantal nomism' knowing how controversial they are. For criticism of Sanders, see Chilton & Neusner 1995, 11–18. For a perceptive response to this criticism, see Luomanen 2002, 114–119.

¹¹⁷ Cohen 1990, 58.

1.5. *The Outline of the Study*

Even though there was much diversity among Jews and there was no group that could control the life of other groups, certain matters connected Jews to each other on a social level. Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate John's Jewishness in light of these basic matters of Jewish identity as they are presented in the gospel.¹¹⁸ The evangelist does not provide any systematic description of different aspects of Jewish identity and does not mention at all, for example, Jewish food regulations which many Hellenistic writers regarded as distinctive. However, many other aspects of Jewishness are mentioned in the gospel and some of them become main issues in the controversy between Jesus and his Jewish opponents.

Before I analyze the passages dealing with essential matters of Jewishness, I argue in a detailed criticism on scholarly consensus that John's references to these matters do not emerge from the fierce conflict with a Jewish leadership class (ch. 2). After this criticism, I proceed to analyze the narrative of the gospel focusing on some main symbols of Jewish identity. In John 2:13–22 and 4:20–24, Jesus' relationship to the Jerusalem temple and the worship of the Jews is the main topic (ch. 3). In John 5:1–18, Jesus' action on the Sabbath leads him into a controversy with his opponents; this controversy continues in 7:19–24 where the Johannine Jesus refers to the Sabbath and circumcision (ch. 4).¹¹⁹ In John 5:37–47, the Johannine Jesus refers implicitly to a basic tenet of Jewish identity, the revelation at Sinai. Jesus also here presents Moses and the scriptures as his witnesses, but the discussion in 6:26–59 reveals how ambivalent is the relationship between the Johannine Jesus and Moses (ch. 5). My last close reading of the narrative focuses on John 8:31–59 where Jesus discusses Abraham with the believing Jews; in this chapter is also

¹¹⁸ Also Casey (1991, 23–40) has analyzed John's references to basics of Jewishness. In many cases we come to similar conclusions, but I think that John's portrayal of Jewishness is at times more complex and ambivalent than Casey's reading suggests. Furthermore, I do not share Casey's view of the Johannine Christology as the main expression of the gentile identity reflected in the gospel. See my synthesis, ch. 7.4 p. 233.

¹¹⁹ I do not offer a detailed discussion of the story in John 9. There are two reasons for this. First, I discuss in detail theories that take this story as their point of departure for the reconstruction of John's historical context in ch. 2. Second, I do not think that a close reading of this story would radically change the conclusions I draw on the basis of my readings of John 5:1–18 and 7:19–24. Cf. the conclusions from these readings, in ch. 4.3 p. 142.

the notorious charge that the Jews are of the devil, a charge which opens up a perspective on the dualistic framework of the narrative. This saying makes it necessary to address the question of John's supposed anti-Judaism (ch. 6). After these readings, I pull together the results of my studies and develop them further in the synthesis (ch. 7). In this synthesis, I try to show how the Fourth Gospel that has its origins so deep in diverse Jewish traditions contributed to the development of a non-Jewish Christian identity.

Following Shaye Cohen's lead in his *The Beginnings Of Jewishness*, I have spoken above of Jewishness and not of Judaism. This corresponds to the way the matters discussed in this work were markers of a certain manner of life or identity rather than any fixed theological dogmas.¹²⁰ Judith Lieu aptly notes that words like Judaic or Judaism speak more of a system whereas words like Jewish and Jewishness "more of a people, culture, and set of ideas."¹²¹ As Shaye Cohen says,

Jewishness, like most—perhaps all—identities, is imagined; it has no empirical, objective, verifiable reality to which we can point and over which we can exclaim, 'This is it!' Jewishness is in the mind.¹²²

But even though it is difficult to get a grasp of identities and define them neatly, identities also change. And I believe that this is what is going on in John. I am looking for some traces of this change of identity, but I do not claim to offer a systematic description of all what John says of matters connected to Jewishness.¹²³ Before I proceed to present my detailed criticism of scholarly consensus and my own readings of John's individual passages, I explain my methodological approach to these passages.

¹²⁰ Interestingly, the subtitle of Martin de Boer's recent article discusses also "matters of behavior and identity." Cf. de Boer 2001. But in the course of my work and following discussions with de Boer, it comes clear that we mean completely different things. Following his teacher J. Louis Martyn, de Boer concentrates on a group of Jewish authorities who allegedly arbitrated the matters of Jewish identity after 70 C.E. I do not find much evidence of this kind of definition of Jewish identity in rabbinic sources, and so I have turned my attention to how this particular group of early Christians defined their identity in relation to their Jewish background.

¹²¹ Lieu 2001, 129.

¹²² Cohen 1999c, 5.

¹²³ I have not included in my work, for example, detailed readings of some brief references to Jewish rites of purification (2:6; 3:25). It is not at all clear what the role of these rites was in different Jewish groups. Were they a characteristic of a distinct group only (priestly circles, the Pharisees?) or were they commonly practiced among the Jewish people? These rites do not seem to have been such a common mark of Jewishness as some other matters that I discuss in detail.

1.6. *Methodological Considerations*

In the following readings of John's narrative, I rely on the three-world model presented in a number of writings by Kari Syreeni.¹²⁴ The three-world model is an attempt to create a holistic context which makes it possible to utilize and combine different methodological approaches that are mostly kept apart in the study of the New Testament. The model is not a new special method among other methods, but more a heuristic reading strategy that aims at understanding different aspects of a literary work in its social and historical context. As Petri Merenlahti notes, the model

may not necessarily seem to be offering much that is radically new. Rather it systematizes in general terms what has traditionally been the task of modern biblical criticism: to study the text's linguistic form, theology and historical situation.¹²⁵

The three-world model is based on a distinction among a literary work's *text world*, *symbolic world* and the *real world* behind the text. All of these aspects are more or less familiar to everyone working in Biblical scholarship. During recent decades, literary criticism has paid special attention to the New Testament writings as literary artefacts. In gospel studies, this interest has led to the formation of narrative criticism which, especially in its beginnings, challenged the traditional historical-critical way of reading the gospels.¹²⁶ This literary dimension is an important part of the three-world model, but this model also challenges the way literary approaches tend to play down the ideological dimension of texts by concentrating exclusively on their aesthetic form.¹²⁷ Much of the narrative-critical work done in the past two decades has analyzed the gospels as autonomous narrative worlds, as Petri Merenlahti and I have shown elsewhere.¹²⁸ The gospels as narratives thus became detached from their authors' ideological interests and from their historical contexts. In the case of

¹²⁴ Syreeni 1990, 1994, 1995, 1999. Cf. also Syreeni & Myllykoski *forthcoming*. Petri Luomanen (Luomanen 1998, 32–38) has applied the model to Matthew's view of salvation. For the evaluation of this model, see Merenlahti 2002, 119–124. Merenlahti also compares Syreeni's model to Vernon Robbins' socio-rhetorical theory which, in some respects, resembles Syreeni's model.

¹²⁵ Merenlahti 2002, 123.

¹²⁶ For narrative criticism, see Merenlahti & Hakola 1999, 13–48; Merenlahti 2002.

¹²⁷ Syreeni 1999, 108–112.

¹²⁸ See Merenlahti & Hakola 1999, 13–23.

purely fictional texts, this text-centered approach has its merits, even though interest in the author's ideological commitments and socio-cultural context has had a much more prominent role in general literature theory than could be deduced from the manner in which literary theory has been applied to the New Testament. But especially

in argumentative texts, the text world is very close to the symbolic world, reflecting rather transparently (but never immediately) the author's intentions, judgments, set of values, cultural background, and so on.¹²⁹

This means that the values of the narrator in such non-fictional narratives as the gospels reflect the values of the flesh and blood author.

As a matter of fact, this view is not totally foreign to formalistic narrative theory. Narratological theories in the background of narrative criticism have emphasized the need to separate the act of writing from the act of narrating, and this has resulted in the theories that make a distinction between the real author, the implied author, and the narrator. While urging the need to make this distinction, some narratologists note that in 'factual' narratives, to which the gospels undoubtedly belong, this distinction is not at all clear. One of the leading narratologists, Gérard Genette, concludes that "the rigorous identification" of the author with the narrator defines factual narratives; in these narratives "the author assumes a full responsibility for the assertions of his narrative and, consequently, does not grant autonomy to any narrator."¹³⁰ In a similar vein, another narrative theorist, Dorrit Cohn, says that "the reader of a non-fictional narrative understands it to have a stable uni-vocal origin, that its narrator is identical to a real person."¹³¹ This means that these narratives are more transparent concerning the aims of the author than purely fictional texts. They thus need to be seen as products of the historical and social context from which they emerged.¹³²

The three-world model thus emphasizes that the text world is not all that the reader encounters in a text:

Entering the deep levels of the text world, the reader approaches the entrance of the text's symbolic world. There is a grey zone where the text ceases to be a text, or where the interpreter lets the text go as

¹²⁹ Syreeni & Myllykoski *forthcoming*.

¹³⁰ Genette 1990, 764.

¹³¹ Cohn 1990, 792.

¹³² For the full discussion, see Merenlahti & Hakola 1999, 33-48.

an individual artefact and views it as an exponent of ideological concerns. The structures of the text world are literary; tied with language in general, the particular text type (genre) and the particular text. The symbolic world, as seen from the literary viewpoint, is a textual meta-level, but from a sociology-of-knowledge point of view it is a meta-textual level. The structures of the symbolic world/universe are not (or not only) linguistic but cognitive, emotional, social and behavioural.¹³³

As this citation shows, the three-world model draws on the sociology-of-knowledge approach developed by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann.¹³⁴ The fact that the writer's values and convictions are called 'symbolic universe' and not 'theology' underscores the significance of these values in how people and groups construct their social identity. In the field of Johannine studies, Wayne Meeks in particular has helped to understand the christology of the gospel not only in theological terms but also in terms of sociology-of-knowledge. In his classic article, Meeks argued that the faith in Jesus was a crucial part of the Johannine believers' symbolic universe, which gave legitimation for the group's actual isolation from the society at large.¹³⁵ In a similar way, it is possible to take what the narrator says of the Jews as a reflection of the symbolic universe of the writer and his community; hence we can ask how the references to Jewishness contribute to the self-understanding of this community.

In the light of post-modern reading strategies 'the interdependence of the three worlds' may be a problem in the three-world model, as Petri Merenlahti notes:

This interdependence allows none of the three worlds to have an immediate, observable autonomy—which, ultimately, puts the entire model in danger of collapse. For 'reality' can only be spoken of as *a social construct in terms of language*, which means (in Derridean terms) that 'There is nothing outside the text.' Alternatively, to view the same thing the other way round, as material phenomena, textual features are beyond our unlimited access and can only be conceived of as ideological constructs so that 'There are no texts, only readings.'¹³⁶

¹³³ Syreeni & Myllykoski *forthcoming*. For a similar emphasis in the field of literature studies, see Suleiman 1976, 163 and especially 1993 (originally 1983). Suleiman speaks especially of a certain kind of authoritarian fiction, but her discussion could also be applied to the gospels. She considers these narratives from a formalistic point of view, but soon recognizes that formalistic analysis of these narratives involves different ideological aspects too.

¹³⁴ Berger & Luckmann 1967.

¹³⁵ Meeks 1972, 70.

¹³⁶ Merenlahti 2002, 122.

But although Merenlahti is aware of these theoretical problems, he says that the model is useful in practice because it shows that if a distinction between textuality, ideology and physical reality is not made, "confusion is almost certain to follow." Thus

the real edge of Syreeni's program lies in the critical question whether current interpretative practices actually succeed in observing the paradigm that is *already* supposed to be in force. As we have seen, this has not been the case either with the traditional historical-critical methods (that are insensitive to aspects of textuality and narrativity, and have only partially grasped the implications of viewing historical reality as a social construct), or with the more recent 'literary approaches' (that flirt with ahistorical models and fail properly to recognize aspects of ideology in texts).¹³⁷

The three-world model, I believe, makes the shortcomings of earlier approaches to John's views on the Jews and Jewishness clearer. On the one hand, Bultmann and Gräßer operated on the level of just two of the three worlds, the text world and the symbolic world, when they took the Johannine Jews primarily as a theological symbol. They thus ignored the level of the real world reflected in the text. On the other hand, Martyn's two-level reading strategy presupposes that because certain elements in the text do not match with what we know of the historical Jesus and his time, they must match with the historical reality at the time John was written. This position does not take into account that all historical reality in John is mediated only through the creative imagination of the writer and his community, i.e. through their symbolic universe. It is telling that the name of Martyn's book, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, suggests that Martyn approaches the presentation of John's Jews both from the point of view of historical reality and the theology of the writer. But in his reading of the narrative, Martyn soon forgets the theological point of view and operates on the levels of the text world and the real world only.

From the point of view of the three-world model,

interpretations that are methodologically limited to one or two of these worlds are in fact making more or less hidden—thus uncontrolled—statements about them all.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Merenlahti 2002, 124.

¹³⁸ Syreeni & Myllykoski *forthcoming*.

This is especially the case when literary-oriented approaches present what should be seen as an expression of the author's symbolic world as just another part of the rhetoric of a text.¹³⁹ In these readings, the level of ideology is replaced with a blind spot. This is the case when the polemics against some Jewish groups in the gospels are seen only as a literary feature that does not have anything to do with any real-life Jewish groups.¹⁴⁰ The three-world model, however, consciously underlines that we should not ignore "the ideological aspect and pay no or insufficient attention to the *mediated* nature of the link between reality and texts, and between texts and their readers."¹⁴¹

The emphasis on the ideological aspect of the New Testament narratives calls forth the question concerning our own relationship to the ideology so clearly discernible in these texts. In my opinion, the New Testament gospels as literature come quite close to what Susan Suleiman calls ideological novels, where the author's ideological interests are so penetrating that they, by their very nature, call for a critical response from any reader who does not totally share these interests. In the same way, I suggest in my readings that the way the Johannine writer engages in the negation of Jewishness and urges his readers to share his polemic actually begs for a critical response to this polemic:

The didactic orientation of the story as a series of events leading to an univocal meaning is here doubled by an interpretative discourse which, through its choice of metaphors or epithets, betrays (or reveals) its prejudices, hoping (or perhaps feigning to assume) that those prejudices will be shared by the reader. This is a risky game, to be sure, for a discourse that is too obviously prejudiced can provoke an actual reader (especially one who does not share the prejudices) into contesting the narrator's right to narrate and into rejecting the story itself as 'unfairly loaded.'¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Cf. Syreeni 1995, 321–38.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Merenlahti & Hakola 1999, 40–42. We present some critical remarks against what Mark Allan Powell says of Matthew's presentation of Jewish leaders, cf. Powell 1993, 66 and 88. For Powell's response, see Powell 2001, 119–120 and 219. Powell kindly allowed us to provide a short response to his criticism in his book, see Powell 2001, 237. We still insist in these remarks that Powell has missed the point of our argument, which was based on a heuristic distinction between fictional and non-fictional narratives. Cf. also Petri Merenlahti's response to Powell in Merenlahti 2002, 123 n. 10.

¹⁴¹ Merenlahti 2002, 124.

¹⁴² Suleiman 1993, 144.

When urging that we should take seriously the ideological aspect of the New Testament and confront it critically, the three-world model is again echoing the general state of scholarship. It is hardly a new invention to combine ideological-critical interests with readings of even sacred texts. At the level of hermeneutical theory, Paul Ricoeur has joined critical concerns based on suspicion to a hermeneutical interest in understanding; he has thus shown that critical attitude and understanding are both essential parts of the larger hermeneutical enterprise.¹⁴³ In the field of New Testament studies, feminist readings and—as the most recent newcomer—postcolonialistic readings have combined critical awareness with the interpretation of the New Testament.¹⁴⁴ But such undertakings should not be regarded as something totally new in the history of the field; rather, they can be seen to continue the best traditions of historical-critical study of the Bible, as is argued by Heikki Räisänen.¹⁴⁵

I do not think that we should see an ideological-critical reading of the New Testament as detrimental to the Christian faith.¹⁴⁶ It is a great and even a dangerous mistake for Christians to leave the critical evaluation of their tradition to outsiders. It could always be argued that we should tone down those features in our readings that point to the detachment from Jewishness because these features could be taken out of their critical context and used for some unwarranted

¹⁴³ Ricoeur 1981, 63–100. For Ricoeur's contribution, see also Jeanrond 1991, 70–77. For ideological criticism as a part of New Testament hermeneutics, see Schneiders 1999, 120–121 and 174–175. Even though Schneiders admits the relevance of ideological criticism as a part of her interpretational enterprise, she seems to eschew this critical attitude when it comes to anti-Judaism in the New Testament. Echoing many she says that the passage in John 8:39–47 and the saying concerning the devil and the Jews in 8:44 is not universal in meaning and thus not anti-Jewish. Schneiders says that Jesus debates here with some Jewish leaders and speaks to some particular Jews and “not in terms of their Jewish identity” (p. 164). Unfortunately, this view does not provide a critical evaluation of the passage, as I will show in my close analysis of it (pp. 177–214).

¹⁴⁴ For a reading of John 4:1–42 from the perspective of postcolonialism, see Dube 1996, 37–59.

¹⁴⁵ Räisänen 2000, 9–28.

¹⁴⁶ For a different view, see von Wahlde 2000, 35: “The notion of a resistant reader necessarily involves the view of those who find fault with the text of the gospel at face value and who feel that it cannot be accepted as an expression of truth. The type of resistant reading proposed by Reinhartz is one that a priori a Christian would not engage in. Because the gospel of John focuses so exclusively on the understanding of Jesus, it has less to say to one who does not share those convictions.”

anti-Jewish purposes.¹⁴⁷ But I believe that, in the present state of scholarship, a much more obvious danger is that the presence of these features in our texts is denied and thus their critical—or better *self*-critical—evaluation as well. Thus in the following readings I try to reveal the way in which John negates some basic aspects of Jewish identity so that we might become more aware of this dark side of this writing. I join here Colleen M. Conway, who has John's references to the Jews particularly in mind when she makes a plea for such readings of canonical literature that "implicate the values which are not ours but which can . . . be made to reveal themselves and can become contestable."¹⁴⁸ Conway also notes that, while such readings may challenge John's authority as the source of dogmatic truths, this challenge should be taken "in the interests of keeping the text socially relevant." I hope to be able to suggest this in my readings where I search for signs of a struggle for self-understanding that may not be all that different from our struggles to understand the Christian tradition in new ways in changing contexts.¹⁴⁹

My following readings depart from many recent narrative-critical readings because I suggest that the close reading of the narrative makes it possible to see some obvious tensions and contradictions in John's portrayal of the Jews and Jewishness. Many recent narrative readings have gone in quite the opposite direction by emphasizing the narrative unity of the gospels, an emphasis that is understandable in light of the history of narrative criticism.¹⁵⁰ The emphasis on unity is not, of course, just a characteristic of many narrative-critical studies. Traditional scholarship has often had a harmonizing tendency when tracing the unified theology of the evangelist. This tendency is clearly evident in the most complete presentation of John's relationship with Judaism, Severino Pancaro's *The Law in the Fourth Gospel* (1975).¹⁵¹ I try to show this in detail in my analysis where I suggest that some tensions and conflicting views in John's portrayal of Jewishness may be quite interesting because they give us a glimpse of the two worlds

¹⁴⁷ This possibility is raised by Bieringer & Pollefeyt & Vandecasteele-Vanneuville 2001b, 16–17.

¹⁴⁸ Conway 2002, 494–495.

¹⁴⁹ See my concluding remarks (pp. 238–242).

¹⁵⁰ For the full discussion, see Merenlahti & Hakola 1999, 23–33.

¹⁵¹ For criticism of Pancaro, see also Kotila 1988, 5–6. In his work, Kotila presents a source- and redaction-historical analysis of the passages dealing with the law in John, and he succeeds in showing many tensions in John's view on the law.

behind the text.¹⁵² I take the tensions in the narrative as suggestive of a discrepancy between the symbolic universe of the Johannine writer and his community and their situation in the real world. In this way, I try to take seriously the ambivalence in John's portrayal of the Jews and Jewishness.

¹⁵² I do not explain the tensions in John's references to Jewishness by referring to the pre-history of the text, as many source- and redaction-critical studies have done. I do not in any way deny in my synchronic reading of the narrative that there are some marks of earlier traditions or later redactions in John, but I share the growing skepticism that we cannot separate with certainty the tradition from the redaction in the present gospel.