

## JOHN: A SOURCE FOR JESUS RESEARCH?

D. Moody Smith

From antiquity, John the Evangelist has been known as the theologian. Back then, however, John's being a theologian did not imply that he did not recount history, things that happened. Over the past century we have, of course, learned that all the Evangelists were theologians. Yet at the same time the Synoptic Gospels continued to be regarded as principal sources for Jesus research, while John fell into eclipse. Perhaps not surprisingly, many beginning students, when questioned about the nature of the Gospels, would volunteer that the Synoptics are historical, while John is theological.

### THE ABSENCE OF JOHN IN JESUS RESEARCH

John is now coming back into play in Jesus research, after an absence of a century, and neither its absence nor its return is hard to understand. Ernst Käsemann characterized the Johannine Jesus as "God going about on the earth."<sup>1</sup> How could such a Jesus be historical? The posing of the mutually exclusive alternatives—the Gospel of John or the Synoptics—appears in Albert Schweitzer's *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (the German original was titled *Von Reimarus zu Wrede*) but goes back to David Friedrich Strauss, to whom Schweitzer attributes the demonstration of the superiority of the Synoptics, and indeed the ahistorical character of John.<sup>2</sup> Since Schweitzer, critical Jesus research has focused on the Synoptics, not John. One might say this has happened, "von Schweitzer zu Sanders." Put suc-

1. Ernst Käsemann (1968, 9); the German original reads, "den über die Erde schreitenden Gott," in *Jesu letzter Wille nach Johannes 17* (3rd ed; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck; 1971, 26). Käsemann's footnote at this point refers back to F. C. Baur (1847, 87 and 313), but Baur does not use this exact formulation.

2. Albert Schweitzer (2001, 85–91, 98, 118–120). There were giants in the land in those days (cf. Gen 6:4 KJV). Schweitzer published the first edition of *Von Reimarus zu Wrede* when he was thirty-one. The first volume of Strauss's *Life of Jesus Critically Examined* appeared in 1835, when he was twenty-seven. The second followed a year later.

cinctly, the justification of this concentration on the Synoptics is the judgment that John's portrayal of Jesus as God striding across the earth is not historical.

This is a judgment with which I agree, with a single qualification, namely, that this characterization fits only the high side of Johannine Christology: "My Lord and my God," as Thomas says (20:29). There is also a low side: "The Jews" protest, "Is this not Jesus the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say 'I have come down from heaven?'" (6:42). This same Jesus also gets tired at midday, sits down by a well in Samaria, and strikes up a conversation with a Samaritan who happens to be a woman (4:1-42), much to the astonishment of his disciples (4:27). God is talking to a woman? Maybe it is God, because the disciples are afraid to ask!

John poses the paradox of what came to be called the doctrine of the incarnation. Here is the point of contention between Käsemann and his teacher Rudolf Bultmann, in which Bultmann has, I think, the better side of the argument. We cannot go there now, except to note one thing: Bultmann recognized in John a kindred theological sophistication that must be taken into account in any assessment of John, Jesus, and history. Yet Bultmann could not conceive of such a sophisticated theologian embracing a crude sacramentalism, a naïve apocalyptic eschatology, and the theologically contradictory notion that salvation is of the Jews (4:22). These and similar ideas reach the text in the ecclesiastical redaction.

To our question, "John a Source for Jesus Research?" Bultmann would have given a negative answer, except that for John the historicity of Jesus, the bare *dass*, was historically true and of fundamental theological importance. Yet in spite of himself, Bultmann saw historical dimensions in John extending back to the time of Jesus. The Evangelist's depiction of John the Baptist sending his disciples to Jesus (1:35-36) implies that Jesus drew disciples from the Baptist. Perhaps the Evangelist himself belonged to such Baptist circles (Bultmann 1971, 108).

#### THE RETURN OF JOHN TO JESUS RESEARCH

Recent Jesus research has turned again to the Gospel of John, but not with a view to affirming that the christological teaching goes back to Jesus directly or that "the Jews" who are Jesus' opponents were his actual contemporaries—much less that Jesus espoused a realized eschatology. Jesus' relation to John the Baptist, which Bultmann noticed, has become an important point in John P. Meier's appropriation of the Gospel of John in the second volume of *A Marginal Jew*. Meier asks whether Jesus was a disciple of John, and in his subsequent discussion, which justifies the presentation of John the Baptist as Jesus' mentor, he turns to the Gospel of John: "Without Chapters 1 and 3 of the Fourth Gospel, I doubt that the idea would have struck anyone that these Q and Markan traditions [just cited, e.g., Mark 2:18; Matt 11:2-19] indicate that Jesus had been a disciple of John" (Meier 1994, 116). Meier observes that in the Markan story line there is a demarcation between the time of the Baptist and that of Jesus, with no time left in between in

which Jesus might have been a member of the Baptist's following. The demarcation is theologically inspired, and this is not the case in John's Gospel. The Baptist (never called that in this Gospel) is dealt with more extensively in John than in the Synoptics, particularly with an eye to making clear his inferior status vis-à-vis Jesus: "He must increase; I must decrease" (3:30). Nevertheless, Jesus of Nazareth makes his debut in the Fourth Gospel not in Galilee, but in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John is baptizing (1:28). There John sees Jesus (1:29) and ultimately sends his disciples to him (1:35-37). Certainly Andrew and Philip, probably also Simon Peter and Nathanael, are to be regarded as former Baptist disciples who go over to Jesus. The call narratives of the Fourth Gospel seem to presume Jesus' presence with, or in the neighborhood of, John the Baptist.

Even more surprising statements implying Jesus' relationship with John appear in John 3:22-4:2. Jesus is now said to baptize (3:22), as did John (3:23). John's disciples acknowledge that Jesus is "baptizing, and all are going to him" (3:27). Then the Pharisees hear that Jesus "was making and baptizing more disciples than John" (4:1). At this point the narrator corrects these statements, saying that not Jesus but his disciples baptized (4:2). But the damage has already been done. Moreover, there is no account in the other Gospels of Jesus' disciples baptizing. Meier, like many commentators, takes 4:2 to be a later editorial addition.

The basic historicity of this scene, in which Jesus and John appear as baptizing rivals, is supported by the criterion of embarrassment. Jesus' baptism by John was likely an embarrassment to many Christians. The Fourth Gospel omits explicit mention of it, while Matthew has John the Baptist offer a solution that relieves the embarrassment (Matt 3:14). Several apocryphal Gospels (the Gospel of the Nazarenes and the Gospel of the Ebionites) reflect the same or similar embarrassment. Is it likely that John would have deliberately created a scene that actually works against his (mildly) anti-Baptist apologetic?

Schweitzer's rejection of John in favor of the Synoptics was grounded in the recognition of the way John's presentation of Jesus is thoroughly permeated with Christian theology, as Jesus presents himself as the Son of God. At the same time, it involves a judgment about the viability of John's narrative, in which John is judged inferior historically to the Synoptics. (For Schweitzer this means inferior to Mark, as supplemented by the judicious use of Matthew.) Schweitzer's unmasking of the liberal Jesus scholarship of the nineteenth century was accompanied by his own effort to do better than his predecessors and rivals in explaining the Synoptic narrative as historical by showing how it both conceals and, with the eschatological key, reveals the purpose and intention of Jesus in his ministry. Thus he offers his theory as an alternative to Wrede's view of Mark (and the other Synoptics following Mark; Wrede 1971). Schweitzer presents his "thoroughgoing eschatology" and Wrede's "thoroughgoing skepticism" as mutually exclusive alternatives. For Wrede, of course, the Markan narrative was not explicable historically because it was based on a theological and literary premise and purpose. In principle it is not superior to John historically, although it may

be narratologically. (These are not Wrede's terms.) Subsequently, Wrede's view has prevailed.

In her recent work *Jesus of Nazareth: King of the Jews*, Paula Fredriksen, like Meier, makes significant use of the Gospel of John. Basic to her use of John is the simple but telling observation that we are not faced with an option of one (John) versus three (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), but one (John) versus one (Mark), because the Matthean and Lukan narratives are based on Mark: "The decision gets down to an even split: Mark or John" (Fredriksen 1999, 34).

Moreover, as I have just observed, Mark's narrative, compelling as it may be, is not governed by historical chronological considerations, despite Schweitzer's effort to read it that way by combining Mark 6:7–13 with Matt 10 (esp. 10:23). (Jesus sends out his disciples telling them that before their mission is complete the Son of Man, i.e., the kingdom, will come. It does not happen, and Jesus, rethinking his eschatological program, decides he must go to Jerusalem and personally endure the messianic woes so that God will send his kingdom.) Schweitzer's eschatological interpretation of Jesus lives on in scholars such as Bart Ehrman (1999), Dale Allison (1998), and E. P. Sanders (1985, in modified form), but not his attempt to explain the course of Jesus' ministry with reference to it. Fredriksen is no longer in dialogue with Schweitzer, referring to his classic work only at the beginning and the end of her book (1999, 4, 270).

Fredriksen maintains that both the Johannine chronology and the Johannine geography of Jesus' ministry are intrinsically more plausible than the Synoptic versions, according to which Jesus' ministry seems to have lasted less than a year, concluding with a week, and only one week, in Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup> This passion week ("Holy Week") is Jesus' only visit to Jerusalem in Mark or the Synoptics (except for Luke 2:41–52; the boy Jesus in the temple), although even Mark suggests that Jesus had been there previously. Fredriksen cites the advance preparation for his entry in Mark 11:1–2 and for the last meal in 14:12–14, as well as Jesus' statement at his arrest (14:49) about how long he has taught in the temple (2000b, 238, 244).

Basic to Fredriksen's position is the importance of time and place in the historical development of knowledge about, and opposition to, Jesus. The Gospels, the Synoptics included, assume Caiaphas and Pilate are dealing with someone about whom they have some advance knowledge. Pilate executes Jesus, but does not pursue his disciples, because he knows that Jesus and his movement are not a political threat (Fredriksen 1999, 244, 254). Likely Caiaphas also knew that Jesus was not a dangerous political revolutionary but that his kingdom preaching might well incite many Passover pilgrims to some action that would lead to Roman intervention and to bloodshed. John gets this right when he has Caiaphas

say to his colleagues "that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed" (John 11:50).

John's portrayal of Jesus' ministry as taking place over a period of as much as three years and including more than one visit to Jerusalem, although not historically motivated, is historically much more plausible than the competing Synoptic account. It allows for development not only in Jesus' ministry but also on the part of his opponents and their knowledge of Jesus, which makes his execution understandable on both sides, that is, the Roman and the high priestly.

Moreover, as Fredriksen points out, most scholars who have undertaken to explain what took place after Jesus' arrest prefer the Johannine account to the Synoptic, particularly the Markan-Matthean (1999, 223–24). According to Mark, there was a full meeting of the Sanhedrin on Passover eve in order to try Jesus. As has often been observed, this in itself would have been irregular or even illegal, along with several steps in the proceedings. As Fredriksen also cleverly points out, such a meeting would have been virtually impossible to organize on this particular occasion. (Matthew follows Mark, although, interestingly enough, Luke deviates in the direction of John's account in not portraying a formal trial.) That such a meeting as Mark depicts actually took place is unlikely. Much more likely is the Johannine account, in which after questioning by Annas, Jesus is taken by way of Caiaphas's house to Pilate for trial. In John's account the Jews (who alternate with the "chief priests") urge Jesus' condemnation, but there is no formal trial before Pilate. (This is the case also in the Synoptics, and both probably reflect what would have been normal practice in such cases.) In Mark, of course, there are witnesses, accusations, and a guilty verdict leading to Jesus' condemnation to death (Mark 14:64). In Fredriksen's assessment, John better accounts for the motivations (11:45–52) and procedures leading to Jesus' execution than do Mark and the other Synoptics.

On the question of the date of Jesus' execution, whether Nisan 14 (John) or Nisan 15 (the Synoptics), John seems to go out of his way to emphasize that Jesus died before Passover eve, not on the first day of the feast (13:1; 18:28; 19:14, 31). Here Fredriksen apparently leaves the matter open (2000b, 235, 241). A number of others, however, have decided for the Johannine dating. Prominent among them is John P. Meier. His definitive treatment of Jesus' passion will appear in his fourth and final volume of *A Marginal Jew*, but in the first volume he sets out a chronology of Jesus' life. In this treatment Meier decides that in the case of Jesus' arrest, trial, and death a stronger case can be made for the Johannine chronology than for the Synoptic (1991, 390–401). In my judgment the lynchpin of his argument is the same as Fredriksen's: it is inconceivable that the events of Jesus' arrest, trial, and death should have occurred on the first day of Passover:

Despite Jeremias' deft handling of the material, he cannot really establish the likelihood that, at the time of Jesus, the supreme Jewish authorities in Jerusalem would arrest a person suspected of a capital crime, immediately convene a meet-

3. Mark's chronology is vague, but five days, or six, if Good Friday is included, suffice; see Morna D. Hooker 1991, 255–56 notes.

ing of the Sanhedrin to hear the case (a case involving the death penalty), hold a formal trial with witnesses, reach a verdict that the criminal deserved to die, and hand over the criminal with a request for execution on the same day—all within the night and early hours of Passover day, the fifteenth of Nisan! Yet this is what the Synoptic passion chronology and presentation of the Jewish 'process' basically demand. (Meier 1991, 396)

Meier goes on to observe that the Johannine account is far more plausible historically. Moreover, the Markan account does not demand a Passover setting if two notices are removed, namely, 14:1 and especially 14:12–16, which specifically indicates the Last Supper will be a Passover meal (Meier 1991, 396–97). Even Jeremias, who staunchly defends the position that it was a Passover meal, assigns 14:12–16 to the latest of four stages of the development of the Markan passion narrative. It is also frequently noted that the caution of Mark 14:2 ("Not during the feast, lest there be a tumult of the people") actually agrees with the Johannine chronology that places the arrest, trial, and execution before the beginning of Passover. Interestingly, long ago Günther Bornkamm (1960, 161–62), who in effect adopted the Johannine chronology, noted that in Paul's references to the Last Supper there is no indication that he knew it to be a Passover meal. Moreover, when Paul speaks of the Last Supper in connection with Old Testament texts, he does not recall the Passover specifically. Furthermore, Paul's statement that "Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed" (1 Cor 5:7) seems on the face of it to support the Johannine chronology.<sup>4</sup> Meier notes that in his commentary Brown supports the Johannine chronology (as he would continue to do in *The Death of the Messiah*, Brown 1994).

Supporters of the Synoptic chronology argue that John produced a chronology that has Jesus die when the Passover lambs are slain (cf. John 1:29 and the scripture quotation in 19:36, which refers to the Passover lamb). Of course, the fact that John (both the Evangelist and the Baptist) describes Jesus as "the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (1:29; cf. 1:36) and applies paschal biblical texts to him (Exod 12:10, 46; Ps 34:20; Num 9:12) does not prove that John has changed the chronology. It is equally possible that he is assuming such a chronology as factual and interpreting it. Moreover, the acceptance of the Markan chronology poses serious historical problems, as we have seen.

Be that as it may, it is indeed the case that Jesus' death in the Gospel of John is a vicarious death (John 10), but it is not otherwise presented as analogous with the death of sacrificial animals. Such cultic terminology and conceptuality is more characteristic of Paul, Hebrews, Revelation, and even 1 John (1:7, 9; 2:2). It is sometimes assumed that this is the background of the Fourth Gospel. But is it?

4. So also Meier 1991, 428–29, n. 108.

Thus far I have discussed several instances in which John differs from the Synoptics but may actually be closer to historical accuracy: Jesus' relationship to the Baptist; the length and venues of Jesus' ministry; the trial(s); and the date of Jesus' crucifixion according to the Jewish calendar. Before moving to other matters, it will be worthwhile to give some further attention to reasons for preferring the Johannine version of the trial scenes.

The difficulties of the Markan scene were already suggested in the quotation from Meier (above). Beyond that, it is a striking fact that the charge of blasphemy, on which Jesus is convicted and condemned to death, is based on his claim to messianic sonship (Mark 14:61–64). Precisely such a claim is the basis for the mortal opposition of "the Jews" to Jesus in the Fourth Gospel: "The Jews answered him, 'It is not for a good work that we stone you but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God'" (10:33, NRSV), or "because you, being a man, make yourself God" (RSV). Because ἀνθρώπος stands in the Greek, the NRSV translation "human being" is preferable, although "only" (NRSV) is supplied in translation. John makes explicit the blasphemy referred to in Mark. Also, already in John 5:18 "the Jews" seek to kill Jesus because in calling God his own Father Jesus is making himself equal to God—a charge that Jesus does little enough to allay (5:19–23).

It is striking, then, that John omits the Markan trial scene, which dramatizes in a climatic way the Jews' accusations about Jesus' blasphemy, which are pervasive in John, although not in Mark. We find in John only the notice that Annas sent Jesus bound to the high priest, Caiaphas (18:24). Did John intend the reader to supply the Markan trial scene? That is putting a very heavy burden on the reader. Does John not know Mark? Alternatively, does John believe the Markan trial scene never occurred in the form Mark presents it? Is John 18:24 a later editorial insertion to allow for the Markan trial scene? In any event, the Johannine presentation, which recounts only a brief hearing before a member of the high-priestly family, after which Jesus is brought before Pilate, is much more likely to represent what would have actually happened, not on Passover eve, but the evening before. The Markan account presents chronological as well as other difficulties that are obviated if we follow John at this point.

Moreover, Luke, having Mark before him, tailors the scene before the Jewish authorities so that it is no longer a nocturnal trial. Witnesses and their accusations are eliminated, as is the explicit charge of blasphemy and the condemnation to death. These are remarkable omissions, since they bring Luke's account of Jesus' appearance before the Jewish authorities into much closer alignment with what stands in John. In each Gospel the arraignment before some representation of Jewish authority is associated with Peter's denial. In Luke, however, it comes in the morning, rather than on the evening of Jesus' arrest. Nevertheless, Luke's departures from Mark and similarities to John are striking. Does Luke at this point know John or some Johannine-like version of a passion narrative (see Mark A. Matson 2001)? Again, we cannot pursue this matter here. Fredriksen

(1999, 221) has observed that many scholars prefer John's account of the Jewish trial or arraignment as closer to the historical reality than the Synoptics, and for good reason.

#### JOHN'S PURPORTEDLY FACTUAL KNOWLEDGE

There are a number of other points at which John seems to possess accurate historical information that goes beyond what we find in Mark or the Synoptics. It will probably be worthwhile to name some of them, although we cannot make a case for them here.

John also conveys factual knowledge about Judaism, whether in Jesus' day or his own, and about the land of Israel, specifically about Jerusalem. He knows that Nazareth was a humble village about which no great expectations could be entertained: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (1:46). Jesus himself has just been introduced by Philip to Nathanael as "Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" (1:45). The arresting party seeks Jesus of Nazareth (18:5; only in John) and Pilate's sign on the cross reads "Jesus of Nazareth..." (19:19; only in John). Jesus' origin in Nazareth, not Bethlehem, is emphasized (cf. 7:42). John mentions other places not found in the Synoptics: Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John baptized (1:28; cf. 10:40); Aenon near Salim, another place where John baptized (3:23); the city of Sychar (4:5-6); a mountain of Samaria, presumably Gerizim (4:20); the city of Ephraim (11:54). That most such places can no longer be located with certainty does not necessarily mean that they did not exist. In Jerusalem, John knows the Sheep Gate Pool (5:2) and the Pool of Siloam (9:7), which can still be identified. He knows that Jesus was crucified near the city (19:20; also Heb 13:12: "outside the city gate"). The traditional site of Golgotha, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, is outside the city wall of Jesus' day. (The other Gospels show no explicit knowledge of this.) John also indicates that he has specific knowledge of the temple. For example, in Jesus' day it had been under (re)construction for forty-six years (2:20). He anticipates the destruction of the temple by the Romans (11:48), which had probably already occurred. There seems to be some knowledge of the layout of the temple, including the treasury (8:20) and Solomon's Porch (10:23). Also, he asserts that Jesus frequently taught there (John 7; 8; 10; 19:20; cf. Mark 14:49).

John tells us that "Rabbi" meant "teacher," as it would have in Jesus' day (1:38). John the Baptist is also called "Rabbi" by his disciples (3:26). He knows that the Pharisees were the leading teachers (3:1, 10) in his own day, if not in Jesus'. John knows Jewish feasts other than Passover (5:1; 7:2; 10:22), and he knows that Jesus went up to Jerusalem for other feasts. He knows exodus traditions (6:31-53). He knows that stone jars were used in rites of purification (2:6). Perhaps most important, John is familiar with the God of Israel, whom no one has seen (1:18), although Jesus, who can be seen, is also called *θεός* (1:18; 20:29). Thus John understands that Jesus and the claims made for him can easily be seen

as a threat to biblical Jewish monotheism (5:18; 10:33). Yet Jesus is called a Jew by the woman of Samaria (4:9), as well as by Pilate (19:19), and Jesus can say that "salvation is of the Jews" (4:22).

We know other interesting items from John. John tells us that Jesus spends time in Galilee, although the Johannine narrative is set largely in Jerusalem. Jesus is in Capernaum, the site of much of his Galilean ministry, although little happens there (cf. 2:12), except his long discourse in the synagogue (6:59). Cana, not mentioned in the Synoptics, seems more significant (2:1, 11; 4:46-54; 21:2). The disciple whom Jesus loved (13:23) is not mentioned in Galilee but may be the other disciple, known to the high priest, who gains access to the high priest's courtyard for Simon Peter (18:15-16).

Judas is denigrated more in John than in any other Gospel, as indeed he is mentioned more frequently. Jesus accuses him, as one of the twelve, of being a devil (*διάβολος*, 6:70; cf. 8:44, where Jesus says that the devil is the father of the Jews who have not believed in him), and he is presented as the one who would betray Jesus. Judas' name is given more fully than elsewhere in 6:71 as "Judas son of Simon Iscariot," although Iscariot may indicate the place or village of Judas' origin (e.g., Kerieth-hezron in Josh 15:25). Judas becomes the person who objects when a woman (in John, it is Mary of Bethany) uses expensive ointment to anoint Jesus' feet (12:5), and he is named as the keeper of the moneybox (12:7). His motivation is his own greed (12:6; cf. Matt 26:14-15; Luke 22:3-6), or so John indicates. But later Judas is called the treasurer (13:29), with no negative insinuation. Although John may put Judas in the treasurer's role in order to denigrate him further, it seems as likely that the accusation of his thievery is inserted in order to deal with an awkward fact, that he was known to have been the treasurer of the group.

Finally, John narrates a resurrection appearance to a group of disciples, Simon Peter in particular, on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias (i.e., Galilee) at the beginning of what may be called the second ending of John (21:1-14). Commentators have noted that precisely such a resurrection appearance to Peter and others is anticipated in Mark (14:28; 16:7) but not narrated (e.g., Bultmann 1971, 705 n. 5). Otherwise, we do not read about the resurrection appearance to Peter, named by Paul as the first (1 Cor 15:5; cf. Luke 24:34). That the Gospel of Peter fragment breaks off just where Peter is declaring that he was about to resume his work as a fisherman (cf. John 21:3) is tantalizing. Apparently this apocryphal Gospel would next report as a first resurrection appearance something like what we now read in John 21:1-14.

#### HISTORICAL TRADITION IN NARRATIVES AND SAYINGS

As Meier once commented (1991, 45; also 3 n. 22), historically viable information in John is much more likely to be found in the narratives than in the discourses. Perhaps it is also worth noting that in his detailed examination of the Johannine

miracle tradition, Meier concludes that most of John's stories have a traditional basis and therefore might also have a historical basis. In fact, the only ones that do not, in Meier's view, are the wine miracle at Cana (2:1–11) and Jesus' coming to the disciples walking on the sea (6:16–21). The latter, of course, has a traditional basis, although Meier does not think John got his version of it from Mark (1994, 908–24); Meier infers that John might well have composed the wine miracle himself (1994, 934–50). In connection with the healing of the man born blind, Meier speaks of "the tendency of the Gospel of John to heighten the miraculous element in miracle stories" (1994, 698). He also concedes that the raising of Lazarus may have grown out of a story about Jesus' healing of a mortally ill Lazarus; he does not think it is derivable from the Lazarus parable in Luke 16:19–31 (1994, 822–31). That Jesus was thought to have raised the dead is reflected in the corresponding Q saying (Luke 7:22//Matt 11:5), which is not derivable from scripture (as some of the healings mentioned are). It may actually have originated with Jesus himself, although again Meier recognizes the possibility that John has heightened the miraculous element (1994, 832–37). Surprisingly, I find no reference in Meier's lengthy discussion of the raising of Lazarus to the similar story in the alleged Secret Mark presented by Morton Smith (1973). If genuine, it would appear to be an earlier stage in the development of this story. Meier thinks that the names of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha were originally linked to this traditional story, although, of course, they do not appear in Secret Mark.

As Meier and Brown observe, the Johannine discourses are highly developed theologically. Much of what we find there is distinctly Johannine, both in its extended, sometimes conversational, form and its theological content. In my view, this state of affairs is related to the promise of the Paraclete, whose words will continue and extend the revelation of Jesus. In so doing the content of the presentation of the earthly Jesus' message is deeply affected.

However, a number of Jesus' sayings in John that have Synoptic parallels do not seem to be derived directly from the Synoptics. Sometimes nearly identical sayings appear at the same point in parallel stories, as one would expect. For example, Jesus' prediction, "Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me" (13:21), is found in almost the same place and form in Matthew (26:21) and Mark (14:18), although Luke (22:21) differs somewhat. Whether one judges these to be derived from, or influenced by, the Synoptics is related to the broader judgment about the relationship of the entire episode to the Synoptics.

On the other hand, in a number of cases such similar Johannine sayings of Jesus are not as closely tied to a narrative and these appear in different contexts in John and the Synoptics. One example is John 4:44, the saying about a prophet having no honor in his own country (cf. Mark 6:4; Matt 13:57; Luke 4:24). In the Synoptics Jesus says this in his own country, even in Nazareth (explicitly so in Luke 4:16–30, who evidently understood Mark to mean Nazareth). In John, Jesus utters it as he heads for Galilee, yet "his own country" is apparently Judea (Jerusalem). The saying also appears in different form in the Gospel of Thomas (31).

The saying about saving one's life or losing it (Mark 8:35 and par.) appears with typically Johannine vocabulary and in a different context in John: "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (12:25). In the Synoptics, this saying follows soon after Peter's confession and immediately after Jesus' first passion prediction. In John it comes at the close of Jesus' public ministry. If we had only the Johannine form, we might never suspect that it was based on a widely attested saying of Jesus found also in Mark and Q (Matt 10:39; Luke 17:33).

Another intriguing saying has to do with Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the temple. I think Sanders (1985, 61–90) has convincingly argued that Jesus prophesied the destruction of the temple and expected God to send a new one. In the Synoptics and Acts this prediction is mainly cast in terms of an accusation that Jesus threatened the destruction of the temple (Mark 14:58; 15:29; Acts 6:14; but cf. the vague statement of Jesus in Mark 13:2). In John, in the so-called "temple cleansing" scene (2:13–22), Jesus ominously attributes the destruction of the temple to the Jews as he says: "Destroy [λύσατε, aor. impv.] this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (2:19). Then the narrator applies this saying to Jesus' own resurrection: "He was speaking of the temple of his body" (2:22). John has made explicit what is suggested in the Markan (Synoptic) version: "I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands" (Mark 14:58). The three days already suggests Jesus' resurrection. John has done several other interesting things with the tradition. In putting this "prediction" on Jesus' lips, he has also placed it in the context of the temple event, which—as is now widely agreed—is, and was historically, really an assault on the temple signifying its end. Moreover, it is addressed to "the Jews," who will later have an important role in condemning Jesus to death. The narrator then makes explicit the interpretation of the temple as Jesus' body. This fits John's Christology, in which Jesus displaces the temple as the place of God's definitive revelation: "The word became flesh and tabernacled among us" (1:14). Unfortunately, the translation "lived among us" (NRSV) loses this apparent allusion to the wilderness tent, or tabernacle, and therefore to the temple ("dwelt," KJV, followed by RSV, is better). John "christologizes" the word of Jesus and fits it into his later perspective on the relationship of "the Jews" to Jesus.

It may be that John knows the Synoptic tradition (or even the Gospels) and adapts the accusation for his purposes. As it stands, he produces not the accusation but a version of Jesus' saying about the destruction of the temple from which the accusation might have arisen. It perplexes his hearers, who understand it in terms of this world (2:22). The narrator then reveals its true, christological, meaning and goes on to suggest that the disciples themselves only understood properly what had been said (and done) after Jesus had been raised from the dead. Not insignificantly, the Evangelist has made this event Jesus' first public act, in which, with his as yet uncomprehending disciples, he encounters "the Jews" (2:18, 20). This pericope, as well as its placement, illustrate John's *modus operandi* very well.

## JOHN AND THE SYNOPTICS AGAIN?

Our focus has been on Jesus research and how the Gospel of John is playing an increasing role. I have also brought together a number of items that might be characterized as possibly factual or historical, including some in which John does not contradict the Synoptics but seems to be presenting additional information. So far, the question of John and the Synoptics as an overall issue has been left on one side. If John is regarded as independent of the Synoptics, the stock of all these items as potentially historical presumably goes up. If John is regarded as dependent on Mark and the other Synoptics, it goes down.

I prefer to speak of John's independence without committing myself to the unprovable hypothesis that John did not know, or even know of, the Synoptic (or other) Gospels. John 20:30 suggests only that John knew of the existence of other Jesus traditions, but John 21:25 implies the existence of other Gospels. So I would agree with Bultmann and Boismard that the published, canonical form of the Gospel reflects some knowledge of the Synoptics (perhaps reflected also in 4:2 and 18:24).<sup>5</sup>

That John knew no Jesus tradition except what he had read in Mark (Matthew or Luke) seems unlikely, since Paul, Hebrews, and James also know some Jesus tradition without knowing the canonical Gospels. Moreover, I find it difficult to understand John's editorial and compositional procedures if one presumes his use of any of the Synoptic Gospels, in contrast to the relative ease with which we can understand Matthew's or Luke's use of Mark.

In any event, John's departures from the Synoptics, if he knew them, imply his reservations about them, whether with respect to their usefulness, appropriateness, or historical accuracy.<sup>6</sup> That John did not find the Synoptics useful or appropriate, whether to combat Judaism or Gnosticism, has not been found difficult to imagine. Modern exegetes have found it more difficult to imagine John correcting the Synoptics historically, perhaps because John elsewhere seems to have given his imagination free reign, whether in constructing Jesus' theological dialogues or "expanding" Jesus' miracles.

I do, however, think it conceivable that John knew or knew about other Gospels, but that because of his unique setting (vis-à-vis Judaism as "the other") and theological purpose (in light of that setting), he went his own way. That he knew Jesus tradition apart from the Synoptics, material that stemmed from his own circle or school, would then also be likely. In particular, he knew an alternative passion narrative (alternative to Mark and the Synoptics). Meier has made a strong case that he knew alternative miracle traditions, without committing himself on the matter of a Signs Source or a Signs Gospel. The proposals of Rob-

5. See M.-E. Boismard and A. Lamouille 1977.

6. This is developed in Windisch 1926.

ert T. Fortna (1988), and later Urban C. von Wahlde (1989), of a Signs Gospel are attractive to those of us who find the position that John used Mark (or the Synoptics) and the assumption that Mark invented the gospel genre *ex nihilo*, so to speak, questionable. Given the historical dimension of Christian claims about Jesus and the narrative spine of (Old Testament) scripture, telling the story of Jesus would have been a natural step.

We are not accustomed to taking Luke's preface literally, but he does in fact say that "many [πολλοί] have attempted to produce in proper order a narrative of the events that have come about among us" (Luke 1:1). If this is not a reference to written Gospels—the term was not used in that sense for at least a century more—then what is it? Mark wrote the most compelling narrative. Who would suggest rearranging Mark's dramatic narrative? I am not equally certain that he wrote the first Gospel, only the first *extant* Gospel.

Whether or not John knew Mark or knew the Markan (Synoptic) "canon," he departed from it and yet still produced a recognizably parallel account. In this respect John stands with the so-called apocryphal Gospels, over against the Markan canon. Was John the first apocryphal Gospel? Yes and no. No, in that John was accepted into the developing Christian canon, although not without opposition. We simply do not know the narrative apocryphal Gospels well enough to say more than that they too did not follow Mark. Dating them will remain problematic, although they are probably later than John. As far as we can tell, they are also inferior to John in theological intensity and literary quality. If John is the first apocryphal Gospel, it is the best. Does that involve a value judgment? Indeed it does!

## CONCLUSIONS

Is John a source for Jesus? Certainly John has come back into the picture as a source for Jesus research, not only in the passion narratives, as Raymond Brown's work showed, but also for the public ministry.

We noted two points at which John's narrative seems to work against his theological interests: his portrayal of the baptizing rivalry between Jesus and John the Baptist; and his omission of a Sanhedrin trial. Two other points are significant, if more ambiguous: his longer chronology of the ministry of Jesus, which he situates so largely in Judea and Jerusalem; and his different chronology or calendar of the passion, in which Jesus dies just before Passover eve. These may serve certain Johannine theological interests. Nevertheless, they are also plausible historically.

We were able to note only in part the host of topographical and other details that John alone presents (e.g., the Pool of Siloam and the pool at the Sheep Gate). It seems more likely that these represent data or traditions John knew rather than an effort to lend more verisimilitude to the narrative, although each instance must be examined individually. In John the devil, or the historical issue, is in the details.

Does John alongside (or rather than) the Synoptics produce a credible picture of the historical figure of Jesus? Yes and no. No, the Jesus who talks Christology is not the Jesus of Nazareth. Despite all the historical difficulties they may present, as well as their narrative and christological bias, the Synoptics nevertheless more faithfully represent the historical figure of Jesus as he was. John's Jesus is first of all the Jesus of the Johannine community, who continues to speak through the medium of the Paraclete (14:26; 16:12). To that community and to countless Christians since he has been very real! Yet precisely the Markan/ Synoptic portrayal of Jesus' ministry, keyed to the repeated *εὐθύς* ("immediately") of his movement and the *δεῖ* ("must") of his purpose, is a theological construct. Schweitzer thought it went back to Jesus himself. Wrede presented reasons for doubting that it did. John's less organized narrative, quite possibly in part the product of a literary process never brought to completion by the original author, may nevertheless better represent the confusion of history. Historical processes tend to be confusing. They become clearer when someone writes about them.