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DISCOVERING JOHN
Content, interpretation, reception

Second edition

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may stand for future believers. Theirs is not a perfect faith that comprehends instantly (though the 'beloved disciple' sometimes seems to do this), but one needing correction and nurture. It is doubtful whether John's characters are deliberately designed to reflect specific groups within the Church, e.g. Jewish Christians, Gentiles, 'crypto-Christians' or active female leaders; but in certain situations their behaviour can serve to encourage (or warn) future generations.

Does John portray women and men differently? His basic methods seem to be the same for both: he shows both men and women misunderstanding Jesus (e.g. Nicodemus; the Samaritan woman), and both failing initially to recognize him (Mary Magdalene; Peter). He shows both as loved by Jesus (11.5), both as making faith confessions and helping bring others to him. No woman denies Jesus, as Peter does, and no woman is depicted as completely 'bad' like Judas. The women are neither stereotyped as 'sex objects', nor presented as weakly subservient to men (though Fiorenza, 1995, pp. 95f, finds Mary of Bethany represented in 'kyriocentric' terms).

Christian interpreters have often attempted to draw inferences about the proper roles for men and women in ministry from their portrayals in the Gospels. Methodologically this is a dangerous exercise, as that is not the purpose of these writings. John depicts women as sharing the faith, as seeing the risen Christ, and as devoted and theologically perceptive. But he should not be taken as offering specific support to the *ordination* of either women or men, since he does not think in these terms (cf. Edwards, 1989, 1996b, pp. 140f.).

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'Anti-Semitism'/'Anti-Judaism' in John's Gospel?

This chapter tackles a question which has come to the fore in recent Johannine studies. Is John's Gospel 'anti-Jewish' in the sense that it is ideologically opposed to Jewish religion and its adherents, or even 'anti-Semitic', displaying hatred against Jews simply because they are Jews? This must seem a strange question to those who were brought up to respect, and even venerate, John's Gospel. Yet since the Holocaust many scholars have condemned John's Gospel as 'anti-Semitic' or 'anti-Jewish'.¹ A landmark was Ruether's *Faith and Fratricide* (1974), which argued that John uses 'the Jews' to symbolize 'a fallen universe of darkness' and as 'the very incarnation of the false, apostate principle of the fallen world, alienated from its true being in God' (1997, pp. 111–13). Lowry (1977, p. 229) found a direct line of development from John's portrayal of the Jews as 'spawn of the devil' to a Nazi picture-book for children, whose first page is headed '*Der Vater der Juden ist der Teufel*'. ('The father of the Jews is the devil'). Beck (1994, esp. p. 295) saw John as 'a message of condemnation' for Jews. Cohn-Sherbok called it 'a diatribe against the Jews and the Jewish faith' (1992, p. 24). Casey (1996, pp. 224–9) criticized it not only as 'inaccurate', and 'profoundly untrue', but also as 'anti-Jewish', initiating 'the baleful charge of deicide' [killing God], part of the deplorable history of Christian anti-Semitism, at once 'horrifyingly wicked' and 'centrally deceitful' (further literature in Kierspel, 2006, ch. 1; Bauckham and Mosser, eds (2008), pp. 143–208).

Are these scholars right? The criticisms fall under three main heads: (a) John's use of 'the Jews' for Jesus' opponents and to symbolize 'alienated' humanity; (b) his apparent depiction of 'the Jews' as those responsible for crucifying Jesus; (c) their 'hostile' portrayal in John's dialogues and their association with the devil. These topics will form this chapter's main theme. Some scholars see John as also anti-Jewish in his 'replacement theology' and in his 'breach' of Jewish monotheism. These aspects will be discussed in Chapter 12.

John's use of 'the Jews'

Greek has three words for a Jew: *Israēlītēs* (plural -*ai*), 'Israelite'; *Ioudaios* (pl. -*oi*) – traditionally translated 'Jew' – and *Hebraios* (pl. -*oi*), 'Hebrew'. *Israēlītai* was the Jews' preferred term for themselves when speaking with fellow-Jews. *Ioudaioi* was used by Gentiles, and by Jews communicating with Gentiles, to denote both the inhabitants of Judaea and those of Jewish faith more generally. *Hebraios* was an elevated synonym for either term, and also used for language and script. John conforms to this basic pattern: he uses *Hebraisiti*, 'in Hebrew', of language (e.g. 5.2; 19.13); *Israēlītēs* and *Israēl* in intra-Jewish situations (1.47, 49; 3.10; 12.13), and *Ioudaios* on the lips of outsiders (4.9; 18.33, 35). In this respect his usage parallels the Synoptics. They use 'the Jews' on the lips of the Gentile magi (Matt. 2.2), Pilate (e.g. Mark 15.2 par.), Roman soldiers (e.g. Mark 15.18; Matt. 27.29), and King of the Jews in the Roman superscription on the cross (Mark 15.26 par.; cf. John 19.19–22), but 'king of Israel' on the lips of Jewish leaders who deride Jesus (Mark 15.32; Matt. 27.41f.). But even in the Synoptics there are other uses. Mark 7.3 uses the phrase 'of the Jews' to explain Jewish hand-washing customs; Luke 23.51 describes Arimathea as 'a town of the Jews', and the Roman centurion who wants his servant healed sends 'elders of the Jews' to Jesus (Luke 7.3). In these cases *ton Ioudaion*, 'of the Jews', explains details of the narrative for Gentiles. A slightly different usage is Matthew 28.15, where it is reported that the rumour went round 'among the Jews until this day' that Jesus' disciples had stolen his body from the tomb. Here *hoi Ioudaioi* is used, possibly pejoratively, to distinguish Jews from Christians.²

In John *hoi Ioudaioi* occurs some 67 times, much more frequently than in the Synoptics (Mark, 6 times; Matt, 5; Luke, 5).³ Some examples are on the lips of non-Jews, such as Pilate, but many come from the narrator. A good few occur in explanations of Jewish feasts and customs, rather like Mark's explanation of Jewish hand-washing (e.g. John 2.6, 13; 5.1; 11.55). Some (e.g. 7.1; 11.19, 31) appear to be geographical, referring to inhabitants of 'Judaea'.⁴ Such uses account for more than half the examples. There remain around 27 instances where *hoi Ioudaioi* appears to be a shorthand way of describing Jesus' opponents. 'The Jews' misunderstand Jesus' actions and sayings (2.18, 20; 6.41, 52; 7.35; 8.22, 57); quibble over his Sabbath healing of the lame man (5.10); disbelieve his restoration of the blind man's sight (9.18). They show themselves ignorant of Jesus' heavenly origin (6.42); they 'persecute' him (5.16), and agree to expel from the Synagogue those who confess him as Christ (9.22); people go in fear of them (7.13;

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19.38; 20.19). They accuse Jesus of demon-possession (8.48, 52) and of blasphemy (10.33); they plot to kill him (5.18; 7.1), and attempt to stone him (10.31; cf. 11.8). They choose Barabbas to be released instead of him (18.38b–40); they call for his death (19.7). As well as being associated with the devil (8.44), they are said to be 'from below' and 'of this world', while Jesus is 'from above' and 'not of this world' (8.23). A further contrast may be implied with the disciples, who, like Jesus, are described as 'not of this world' (17.14); hence the suggestion that references to 'the world' as hating the disciples (15.18f.; 17.14) may denote 'the Jews' – though this is never made explicit.

Do such uses constitute sufficient warrant for finding John 'anti-Semitic' or 'anti-Jewish'? Much depends on precisely whom John intended when he spoke of 'the Jews' in this way. Did he mean all ethnic Jews, regardless of whether they practised their religion (which would make him 'anti-Semitic'), or religious Jews as a whole (which would make him 'anti-Jewish')? The problem is that John often uses *hoi Ioudaioi* ambiguously, without distinguishing whether he intends the Jewish religious authorities (or one group among them), a crowd of Jewish people, or even Jews generally. It is rather like a modern writer or speaker referring to 'the British' without defining whether the British government, the British army or the British public as a whole is intended. In a detailed study von Wahlde (1982) has shown that out of 31 examples, agreed by ten scholars as constituting John's special use of 'the Jews' (mostly 'hostile'), 17 must denote the Jewish religious leadership. These include the places where people, themselves Jews, are described as afraid of 'the Jews' (7.13; 9.22; etc.) and places where 'the Jews' investigate religious matters, when they sometimes seem to be interchangeable with 'the Pharisees' (1.19; 9.18, 22, beside 1.24; 9.13, 15, 40). Compare also 18.14, which states that Caiaphas had counselled 'the Jews' that one man must die for the people, whereas in fact he had given this advice to the Pharisees and Chief Priests (11.47–52). Von Wahlde therefore proposes that the 14 remaining texts where 'the Jews' are stereotypically hostile to Jesus may also denote the religious authorities. His careful and balanced study demonstrates that John did not intend to denote the whole Jewish people as opponents of Jesus, which must surely clear him of the charge of 'anti-Semitism' (as defined above). It does, however, leave open the question of whether John might still be deemed 'anti-Jewish'.

Other scholars have offered different proposals. Lowe (1976) saw the problem as 'mistranslation', arguing that by *hoi Ioudaioi* John intended the Judeans rather than 'the Jews' as a whole. But there is no way in which 'the Judeans' can be substituted wholesale for 'the Jews' in John,⁵ and

some instances where this translation would be misleading (e.g. 6.41, 52, where 'the Jews' refers to a Galilean crowd). The same applies to Charlesworth's insistence (2001, pp. 489f.) that *hoi Ioudaioi* is properly rendered 'some Judaeans leaders/authorities', leading to some bizarre translations (e.g. of 11.54). Others rely on Martyr's 'two-level' reading to suggest that John was targeting not Jews (or Jewish leaders) at the time of Jesus, but specific groups contemporary with the Evangelist. Thus de Jonge (2001) proposes that 'the Jews' refers to Jewish *Christians* of John's own day who could not accept his Christology; but his arguments are unconvincing. Others suggest that John intended the 'Torah-fanatic' rabbis of Jamnia, to whom they attribute the expulsion of Christians from synagogues (Thyen, 1980, pp. 179f.; Ashton, 1991, p. 158; cf. Bornhäuser, 1928, p. 141); but we have already seen problems with this view. All these theories depend very much on conjecture, and it may be doubted how many of John's readers could be expected to perceive the allusions (see further Hakola, 2005, esp. pp. 223–31).

The theory that causes particular difficulty (and which seems to be accepted by Ruether, Cohn-Sherbok, and others who condemn John as 'anti-Jewish') is that of Bultmann (1971, pp. 86f.), who interpreted 'the Jews' in John as 'representatives of unbelief'.⁶ Supporters cite John's association of 'the Jews' with ignorance, lies and failure to believe (esp. 8.19, 23, 27, 43f.) and allegedly with 'the world' used negatively (especially in Jesus' 'Farewell'). But John nowhere simply equates 'the Jews' with 'the world', which has a much broader meaning (cf. above, p. 113). Lars Kiersegaard, who recently investigated this issue in detail, concluded that, while there is some functional parallelism between John's use of 'the Jews' and 'the world', to regard 'the *kosmos*' as a symbol or metaphor for the Jews is 'to deprive the term of its lexical and conceptual content' (2006, p. 213).

It must be stressed that John does not depict all Jews as ignorant, deceitful and unbelieving. Nathanael is described as 'truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit' (1.47). John accepts totally Jews who believe in Jesus (Pryor, 1992, p. 182); all the disciples are Jews, though they are not labelled as such. Additionally many groups of 'Jews', who are so named, come to faith (e.g. 10.42; 11.45; 12.11, 42). John does not associate all Jews with 'the fallen universe (or world) of darkness' (*pace* Ruether, 1974, p. 111; Cohn-Sherbok, 1992, p. 23); he shows no knowledge of 'the Fall' as a doctrine, and Judas alone is associated with 'night' viewed negatively (on Nicodemus, see above, pp. 122–4). Jesus does tell *some* Jews that they are 'from below' and 'of this world' when he warns them that they will die in their sins if they do not believe in him (8.23f.). But he also says to the same group,

'When I am lifted up, then you will know that I am [he]; whereupon many believed in him' (8.30).

Sometimes the Prologue's words, 'He came to his own and his own did not accept him' (1.11), are seen as pointing to Jesus' rejection by the Jews (so Keener, 2003, p. 398; Lincoln, 2005, p. 102). But these words are ambiguous. The first 'his own' (neuter plural) could denote either Israel as Jesus' historic homeland, or the human world as the *logos*' domain, and the second (masculine plural) Jesus' own nation, or humanity in general as belonging to the *logos*; Schnackenburg (1968, pp. 258–61) argues that 'there is no compelling reason' to believe the author had Israel in mind. Even if the second 'his own' in 1.11 is taken as referring obliquely to Israel, it is followed immediately by the words, 'but to as many as received him he gave authority to become children of God'. There can be no one-to-one equation of 'the Jews' with those who reject Jesus; they are among 'his own in the world' whom he loved to the end (13.1).⁷

John's Passion Narrative

Since John's Passion Narrative has often been stereotyped as 'anti-Jewish', the role of 'the Jews' here requires close scrutiny. Their officers are among those who arrest Jesus (18.12); Pilate tells Jesus that his 'own nation and the Chief Priests' have handed him over (18.35). 'The Jews' choose Barabbas rather than Jesus (18.38b–40), and when Pilate finds Jesus innocent, they respond that he ought to die because he made himself 'Son of God' (19.7). When Pilate asks, 'Shall I crucify your king?' (19.15), the Chief Priests respond, 'We have no king but Caesar' – a profession of loyalty to the emperor infringing their loyalty to God as King – while acquiescing in Jesus' condemnation for claiming a kingship 'not of this world'. The Chief Priests even attempt to change the inscription on the cross (19.21f.). 'The Jews' request Jesus' legs to be broken to hasten his death on the cross, not from pity but so that his body should not remain there on the Sabbath (a 'great day', i.e. solemn feast; 19.31). A similar concern for ritual nicety is reflected in their earlier refusal to enter the Praetorium lest they incur defilement (18.28), a scrupulosity all the more ironical in that they are attempting to have an innocent man condemned.

One should, however, note that some of these negative features are attributed to the 'Chief Priests' rather than 'the Jews'. Ruether claims that John goes furthest of all the Gospels in depicting Jesus 'as actually being crucified by the Jews' (1974, p. 114, *her italics*); but is this the case? John's account of the procedures leading to Jesus' execution is in some ways less

'anti-Jewish' than Mark's and Matthew's. He has Roman soldiers involved in Jesus' arrest (18.12), while they portray the Jewish leaders as sending the arresting party (Mark 14.43; Matt. 26.47). He describes an informal investigation in the High Priest's house (cf. Luke 22.54), while they have him condemned by the Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish judicial body (Mark 14.55–64; Matt. 26.59–66; cf. Luke 22.66). John makes no mention of jealousy as a motive of Jewish leaders in delivering Jesus to Pilate (contrast Mark 15.10; Matt. 27.18). Whereas Mark (15.13f.) has the (Jewish) crowd shout twice, 'Crucify [him]!', John attributes these words to the 'Chief Priests and officers', though he later has 'the Jews' cry out, 'Away, away [with him]; crucify [him]!' (19.6, 15). John has nothing corresponding to Matthew's dreadful self-curse (27.25), attributed to 'the people' (*laos*). 'His blood be on us and on our children', which opened the way for *descendants* of Jesus' fellow-Jews to be blamed for his death. Unlike some New Testament writers John nowhere accuses Jews not involved in Jesus' crucifixion of being responsible for it (contrast 1 Thess. 2.14f. and Acts 2.22f., where Peter tells those gathered from all over the Jewish world for Pentecost that they crucified Jesus; cf. Acts 2.36; 3.14f.; 4.10).

The problem of 'anti-Semitism' or 'anti-Judaism' is not unique to John, but affects many New Testament texts (cf. Sanders, 1987, on Luke–Acts; Beck, 1994; Keith, 1997; Farmer, 1999; Fredrickson and Reinhartz, eds, 2002). With the Gospels the situation is complicated by questions about the accuracy of their accounts of Jesus' trial(s). It cannot be 'anti-Jewish' to criticize Jewish leaders for what is genuinely believed to be a miscarriage of justice; but it would be 'anti-Jewish' if such criticisms were invented out of spite, to vilify the Jewish people as a whole. Historical evidence is lacking to confirm (or refute) the details of the Passion Narratives. It is generally recognized that the Jewish priesthood of Jesus' day was corrupt, and that Jesus' appearance before the Sanhedrin transgresses procedures laid down in the Mishnah. But it is also agreed that all four Passion Narratives have been shaped by the desire to find Scripture fulfilment, and that all contain elements of imaginative reconstruction, probably based on hearsay rather than factual information. Jesus' radical teaching, his miracles and his ability to attract crowds must have disturbed the Jewish religious leadership. There is no hard evidence that he was an insurrectionist. The Jewish leaders were surely involved in engineering his trial by Pilate on a charge of treason (*Latin maiestas*). John's account of their role in Jesus' trial and death is neither an arraignment of the whole Jewish people, nor a covert, malicious depiction of the *Iamnia rabbis*. Like the Synoptic accounts it is an attempt to explain, in the form of a narrative,

how the person Christians believed to be the messiah – who went about doing good – came to be condemned as a criminal.

The confrontational dialogues

John's 'hostile' depiction of Jews is not confined to the Passion Narrative. Substantial parts of chapters 5 and 7–10 consist of controversies (confrontational dialogues) between Jesus and 'the Jews', with 8.12–59 being cited more frequently than any other part of the Gospel in arguments about John's 'anti-Jewishness'. In this, first Jesus reproaches the Pharisees for not knowing him or the Father (8.19); next 'the Jews' are said to be from below and of this world (8.23). Then Jesus tells 'the Jews who have believed' (perfect participle) that if they continue in his word, they are truly his disciples; they will know the truth and it will make them free (8.31f.). This precipitates a debate in which they claim to be descended from Abraham and need no freeing, and he accuses them of being slaves to sin because they do what they have heard from their 'father', seeking to kill him (8.33–41). God cannot be their 'father' because they do not love Jesus: they are of their father, the devil, 'a murderer from the beginning' (8.44). They accuse him of demon-possession (8.48; cf. Mark 3.22–27 par.), and the confrontation ends with Jesus claiming, 'Before Abraham was, I am', and his interlocutors taking up stones to throw at him (8.59).

This passage contains the harshest words that Jesus says anywhere to 'the Jews'. Yet they are, apparently, addressed to Jews who have put their faith in him (8.31). Why should believers be so strongly condemned? Stibbe (1994, p. 124) argues that 'the Jews' here have professed the Christian faith and then fallen away. John, he claims, is satirizing apostasy. But there is nothing in the text to suggest this. These Jews are described as having 'believed' in him, using the verb *pisteuō*, commonly associated with full faith (cf. 2.11; 11.27). There is no qualifying comment (as in 2.24), and no reference to any falling away. Stibbe's identification of this passage as 'satire' is also unsatisfactory, since it shows no signs of belonging to such a genre. Nor is there any reason to see the phrase *hous pisteuēnkōtas autō(i)*, 'those who have believed in him', as a gloss (cf. Barrett, 1978, p. 344). John drifts from having Jesus speak to believing Jews into having him confront Jewish opponents more generally, just as John alternates confusingly between 'the Jews' and 'the Pharisees', and has Pilate address a question to 'the Jews' and the response come from 'the Chief Priests' (19.14f.).

So how do we interpret John's confrontational dialogues? Scholars reading his narrative at two levels find in them echoes of bitter debates

in the later first century CE between Christians and Jews. Menken (2001) argues that 9.13–17, 24–34 depict the themes of 'false prophet' and 'prophet like Moses' known to be of interest to Jews at this date (and later). This may be so; but the theme of lying or 'false' prophets is embedded in the Hebrew Bible itself (e.g. Deut. 13.1–3; Jer. 14.14; 23.9–40; cf. 1 Kings 22.19–23), featuring also in the Synoptics (e.g. Mark 13.22; Matt. 7.15; Luke 6.26). Lively interest in the 'prophet like Moses' is also attested at Qumran well before this date (e.g. 4Q175; Vermes, 1998, p. 495; cf. also 4Q339; Vermes, 1998, p. 590, on false prophets). The Synoptic writers regularly depict Jesus in conflict with Jewish religious authorities (e.g. Mark 2.6–12 par.; 3.1–6 par.; 7.1–13 par.). In his confrontational dialogues, especially in those arising out of miracles (John 5; 9), John seems to be doing the same sort of thing, but in a more sophisticated and developed manner.

In these John apparently imitates a Jewish literary motif, known as the *ṭib*, 'case at law' or 'juridical controversy' (Asiedu-Peprah, 2001), in which YHWH accuses his people (cf. Motyer, 1997, esp. pp. 145–8; Lincoln, 2000). The prophets who use this do not mince their words: Hosea says that God has an 'accusation' (*ṭib*; Septuagint, *krisis*, literally 'judgement') against Israel, denouncing both priests and people for their whoring and idolatry (4.1–19; cf. 2.1–23). In Isaiah 1.2f, God accuses Israel of injustice and unfaithfulness, speaking of its people as 'rebellious sons' (a very serious offence in Jewish Law, punishable by death), and claiming that they neither know nor understand him. In Jeremiah, God says that he will contend (*ṭib*) with the houses of Jacob and Israel and their children's children for forsaking him (2.4–37, esp. 2.9). Micah has God plead with his people to act justly, reminding them of his kindness to them (6.1–8). While the literary forms vary, such passages regularly mention God's accusation of his people, threaten punishment, and, sometimes, promise salvation. The similarities with Jesus' controversies with 'the Jews' are noticeable, including the hyperbole whereby, for example, YHWH says that there is no faithfulness or kindness in the land (Hos. 4.1), and Jesus tells 'the Jews' that they do not have God's love in them (5.42). If Hebrew prophets can accuse their own people in the Scriptures, is it 'anti-Jewish' for John, if he was a Jew (as all the evidence suggests), to use the 'controversy' motif to promote what he believes to be true and right?

This brings us to John 8.44, where Jesus tells some Jews that they are 'of [their] father the devil', a comment which has provoked the most serious criticisms. Tina Pippin felt so strongly about the passage that she wrote, 'to translate John 8 at all is to betray the Jews' (1996, p. 94). Lowry

saw it as leading directly to Nazi propaganda against Jews (cf. above, p. 131). This section (8.37–47) reflects a regular pattern of Jewish polemic in which those on the side of truth and right are set against those on the side of evil and deceit, with each group having the source of its actions in supernatural powers. Thus in the Qumran *Community Rule* (? c.100 BCE), humanity is seen as falling into two opposing camps – the 'sons of light' and the 'sons of deceit'. The former are ruled by the 'Prince of Light', but the latter by the 'Angel of Darkness' or 'Spirit of Falsehood', to whom belong lies, pride, lust and other faults, such as 'blindness of eye' and 'dullness of ear' (1QS III.18–IV.26; Vermes, 1998, pp. 101f.). *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* similarly contrast the 'Spirit of Truth' and the 'Spirit of Error' (T. Jud. 20.1–5). These two 'spirits' are mentioned again in 1 John 4.6 (and the Spirit of Truth alone in John 14.17 etc.). Such texts usually have a strong ethical thrust, urging readers to choose between good and evil, or 'the law of the Lord' and 'the deeds of Beliar' (Satan) (e.g. T. Levi 19.1). Von Wahlde (2001) considers that they constitute a definite *topos*, or structured literary form, but he presses his case too far. Nevertheless they vividly illustrate the climate of thought that gives rise to such dualistic oppositions as we see in John 8.42–44, where the murderous desires of Jesus' Jewish interlocutors are attributed to their devilish 'origin', while Jesus' ability to speak the truth results from his 'coming forth' from God. It should be noted that these Jews are not actually called 'offspring' or 'children of the devil' (far less 'spawn', an emotive word, with contemptuous overtones). Jesus says, 'You are *ek* [of or from] the devil [your] father.'¹⁰ Motyer (1997, pp. 185–97) cites further examples from Jewish literature where a sharp contrast between God and the Evil One/Beliar/devil is used to urge ethical conduct and religious loyalty, insisting that 'of the devil' in John 8.44 has ethical rather than ontological force, i.e. that Jesus' interlocutors are being criticized for their conduct rather than their inherent nature.

In all this the motivation is vital. Does John depict Jesus as accusing 'the Jews' to vilify them and stir up hatred, or to urge them to repent and make a fresh start, as both Motyer (1997) and Asiedu-Peprah (2001) argue? John 8.12–59 is, in fact, a combination of appeal and warning. Jesus promises those who follow him that they will have 'the light of life' (8.12); he tells 'the Jews' who believed in him that if they continue in his word the truth will liberate them (8.31). But he also expresses frustration at the apparent obstinacy of his audience: 'If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?' (8.46). The final response of 'the Jews' to his words – the accusation that he is a Samaritan and demon-possessed (8.48; cf. 8.52)

and their attempt to stone him – constitute a terrible warning to any who reject or oppose Jesus. The episode is analogous to stories in Acts where those who deceive or oppose the apostles meet horrible punishment. Compare Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5.1–11) and Elymas, whom Paul, 'full of the Holy Spirit', physically blinds, calling him 'Son of the devil, full of all deceit and all villainy, enemy of all uprightness' (Acts 13.10).

The depiction of Jesus' Jewish interlocutors in John 8 is likewise unattractive, and unlikely to correspond to historical reality; but ancient standards of what was rhetorically acceptable were very different from today's 'political correctness' (cf. Johnson, 1989). Amos could call Samaritan women 'cows' (4.1) without being accused of sexual harassment; James could address the recipients of his letter as 'adulteresses' (4.4), without fear of dismissal from his pastoral charge. The author of 1 John identified his Christian opponents as 'antichrists' (2.18, 22; 4.3) and still had his epistle accepted into the Christian canon. In Matthew (23.33) Jesus calls the scribes and Pharisees 'Snakes, offspring of vipers'; in both Mark and Matthew Jesus addresses Peter as 'Satan' when he tries to dissuade him from the path of the cross (Mark 8.33; Matt. 16.23), just as in John he calls Judas 'a devil' (6.70). It is unlikely that John's Jewish contemporaries would have perceived John 8 as constituting uniquely bitter invective.

This episode must also be seen in the light of the Synoptic stories where Jesus comes into conflict with different religious groups – scribes and Pharisees,¹¹ Sadducees and Herodians, elders and priestly hierarchy. John oversimplifies the Jewish leadership by omitting all reference to the scribes, Sadducees and Herodians, and using 'the Pharisees', 'the Chief Priests' or just 'the Jews' as Jesus' opponents. He steps up the polemical tone of Jesus' controversies, possibly influenced by Jewish literary forms like the *rib* and dualistic ethical parenesis, using them to illustrate the *krisis*, 'judgement' (3.19), caused by Jesus' coming which divides humanity into those who accept his revelation and those who do not. At times 'the Jews' stand for the latter. How far this is 'anti-Jewish' readers must judge for themselves.

Conclusions

There is no simple answer to the question, 'Is John's Gospel anti-Semitic/anti-Jewish?' It is not 'anti-Semitic' in the sense of inciting hatred against Jewish people simply because they are Jews. NOR is it 'anti-Jewish', since where John portrays Jews negatively, this is not because of their religion in itself, but because of attitudes and actions that he deems wrong, especially

those of the Jerusalem religious authorities. Such depictions are, to some extent, balanced by references to Jews who believe or become disciples, and his sympathetic treatment of 'the Jews' who come to condole with Martha and Mary on their bereavement (11.19, 31, 33–37, 45). Significantly salvation is said to come from (*ek*) 'the Jews' (4.22);¹² there are also many positive references to things Jewish, including Moses and the Jewish Scriptures. Nevertheless one is left with the general impression that 'the Jews' as a group are treated with hostility, even if less than half the examples of *hoi Ioudaioi* are actually negative.¹³

John follows the Synoptic writers in giving a prominent role to Jewish religious leaders in precipitating Jesus' Roman trial and condemnation; but he nowhere attributes 'decide' to them or to descendants of those present. In this respect he may be less 'anti-Semitic' (or 'anti-Jewish') than Matthew or some parts of Acts. Nor does he attach blame for Jesus' death to the Jewish people as a whole, except insofar as his use of *hoi Ioudaioi* is ambiguous. By his use of this term, through his stereotyping of 'the Jews' as Jesus' opponents, and through their role in his Passion Narrative, John – like Paul, the Synoptics, and other New Testament writers – unwittingly contributed to 'anti-Judaism' among those who ignored his teaching on love and Christian obedience. But it goes too far to describe his treatment as 'vitriolic' (Casey, 1996, p. 225), or a 'diatribe' against Jews (Cohn-Sherbok, 1992, p. 24). While acknowledging the deep horror rightly felt by sensitive and caring individuals at the appalling history of Christian anti-Judaism, one cannot help observing that some of the literature denouncing John is less scholarly than that defending him. Very few writers on anti-Semitism explore issues of literary form, parenetic purposes, and the feelings of early Christians living close to the time of Jesus' cruel death and wrestling with the problem (as they saw it) of why so many Jews had failed to recognize Jesus as their 'messiah'.

Modern readers, living in a different age, are mostly unaccustomed to earlier forms of religious polemic – though one still hears violent rhetoric in politics and in time of war – which makes writers like John, Paul, Irenaeus and Luther seem uncharitable. The literary function of 'the Jews' in John's confrontational dialogues should be frankly recognized, and seen in the context of biblical and other polemic by Hebrews/Jews against fellow-Hebrews/Jews. Even John's linking of 'the Jews' with the devil, so misused by Church Fathers, Luther, Nazis and neo-Nazis, follows a literary convention widespread in John's time. By today's standards this is unacceptable and repulsive, but is it fair to condemn a first-century writer by these?

- (2006, p. 73). John's Nicodemus, though often assumed to be a literary fiction, may be based on a real person: Bauckham (1996) argues that he was a member of a rich and prominent Jerusalem family, and related to Naqdimon ben Gurion (known from independent Jewish sources).
- 8 Full text in Fogle (1965, pp. 323–5). Kernode (1986, pp. 33f.) cites this poem as an example of acceptable misinterpretation.
- 9 In fact, most of the major commentators are quite cautious. Barrett (1978) makes no judgement; Brown (1966, p. 175) quotes Lagrange's odd characterization of the Samaritan as 'mincing and coy, with a certain light grace', but he also recognizes her role as a missionary and her 'quasi-apostolic function' (1979, pp. 188f.). Schnackenburg (1968, pp. 432f.) refers to her 'sinful way of life' and 'guilt' (in connection with her sexual history), but he also sees her as having 'religious questings and yearnings'.
- 10 As noted by Bernard (1928, vol. 1, p. 144); the allegorical interpretation is likewise rejected by Bultmann, Brown, Schnackenburg, Beasley-Murray and Haenchen.
- 11 Neyrey (2007, pp. 95–7) sees the Samaritan woman as an example of the 'gossip network' and, unlike the 'apostles', having no 'formal' role in mission, but this exaggerates the difference between their roles in John; he also appears to understand only *men* as coming to faith through her word, but John surely pictured her to talking to women as well as men (*anthrōpoi*, v. 27, and *pollōi*, v. 39, could easily include women).
- 12 So Schnackenburg (1980, pp. 332f.); Fiorenza (1983, p. 329); Edwards (1989, p. 45); Scott (1992, pp. 202–6).
- 13 The difference is that Mary falls 'at his feet', whereas those arresting Jesus fall 'to the ground'.
- 14 Or three if Klopas is the same person as Jesus' mother's sister: the Greek is ambiguous.
- 15 The only grounds for understanding Mary symbolically as the Church are Jesus' address to her as 'woman' (2.4; 19.26; cf. Rev. 12.1–6), John's failure to name her, and a long tradition of Catholic exegesis. But none of these arguments is compelling; see Beasley-Murray (1987, pp. 349f.); Aune (1997–8, vol. 2, p. 680). On Mary in the New Testament, see further McHugh (1975, pp. 361–432); Brown *et al.*, eds (1978); Culpepper (1983, pp. 133f.); Carson (1991, pp. 616–18).
- 16 Citing Rom. 11.25, 28–31 and 2 Cor. 3.12–18 for the image of Israel as 'temporarily blind' and 'veiled in mind', but eventually receiving mercy. Rom. 11.25, however, refers to Israel's *porōsis*, 'hardening', not blindness (which appears in the Vulgate).
- 17 *pros haiousaious*; the Greek is difficult: see Lindars (1972, p. 603); Barrett (1978, p. 564); Fitzmyer (1985, p. 1548) on Luke 24.13.
- 18 E.g. Fitzmyer (1981, p. 688); Thompson (1995, esp. pp. 4f.). See also de Boer (1997, pp. 2–9) on changes in the Roman Missal effectively acknowledging

- the scholarly consensus. The identification was accepted by Bernard (1928, p. 412), and still influences some interpretations of Mary (e.g. Fehrbach, 1998, pp. 144–67). On Mary Magdalene in patristic exegesis, see Elowsky (2007, vol. 2, pp. 338–40), and in Christian art, see M. Edwards (2004, p. 195); Wheeler (2012, pp. 224–35, with illustrations).
- 19 Many interpret Pilate as representing the State or the power of Rome (cf. Rensberger, 1988, p. 98, 'a cruel advocate' of Caesar's kingship). Brown (1966, p. 864) sees him as typical of 'the many honest, well-disposed men that would try to adopt a middle position in a struggle that is total'. On the historical Pilate, see Bond (1998, esp. pp. 174–93); on Pilate in later literature, M. Edwards (2004, pp. 172f.). On Caiaphas see further Bond (2002, 2004); Reinhartz (2013).
- 20 On 'functional' and 'mimetic' roles see Conway (1999, pp. 50–8), with some conclusions on John's characters. Current scholarship tends to favour more elaborate theoretical frameworks, including the placing of characters on a 'spectrum' of complexity or ambiguity (see Skinner, ed., 2013, esp. ch. 3, by Benvenia).
- 11 'Anti-Semitism'/'Anti-Judaism' in John's Gospel?
- 1 On these terms, see Keith (1997, pp. 2–4); Rensberger (1999, p. 120); Schoon (2001, p. 145).
- 2 The term *Ioudaioi* is very common in Acts, occurring over 70 times: see Guthrod in von Rad (1965, pp. 379f.); Gasque (1982); in more detail, Sanders (1987, esp. ch. 7).
- 3 These figures exclude the masculine singular *Ioudaios* (3.25; 18.35), and the feminine singular *Ioudaia*, 'Judea', as a geographical term with or without *gē/chōra*, 'land' (3.22; 4.3, 47, 54; 7.1, 3; 11.7).
- 4 The Gospel writers generally distinguish Judea in the south (the territory round Jerusalem, comprising what was once 'Judah') from Samaria and Galilee in the north; but the term is sometimes used in a wider sense to include Samaria and even Galilee (e.g. Luke 4.44).
- 5 'Judeans' has become increasingly used to avoid the term 'Jews'; but it is open to serious objection (see Kierspel, 2006, pp. 22–4, 220).
- 6 Cf. Lindars (1990, p. 16); Smith (1995, p. 56); Kelber (1996, p. 132).
- 7 Sometimes 'his own' in 13.1 is interpreted exclusively of the disciples; but Lindars (1972, p. 448) is surely right to identify them as Jesus' 'own sheep' (10.3f.), i.e. all believers, whom the disciples represent at the Last Supper.
- 8 There was only one *archiereus*, 'Chief' or 'High Priest'. But the term was used also for former High Priests, like the deposed Annas, and, in the plural, for senior members of the Jewish establishment, who were prominent members of the Sanhedrin, over which the High Priest presided (Jeremias, 1969, pp. 147–81).
- 9 Also translated 'lawsuit', 'charge', 'accusation'; the root means 'strive' or 'contend'.
- 10 The text is obscure: there is no word for 'your'; grammatically the phrase could mean 'the devil's father', as some Gnostics took it (assuming a reference

- to the Demirge). See further Bultmann (1971, pp. 318–20); Beasley-Murray (1987, p. 135); Motyer (1997, p. 184f).
- 11 Many scholars consider the Synoptic depiction of these groups to be distorted: see Beare (1981, pp. 447–61) on Matt. 23; on Pharisees, see further Jeremias (1969, pp. 246–67); Sanders (1992, pp. 380–451); Westerholm (1992).
- 12 The Nazis sought to suppress 4.22b as pro-Jewish: see van Belle in Bieringer *et al.* (2001, esp. pp. 394–8).
- 13 It is sometimes hard to determine when uses are 'positive', 'neutral' or 'negative', as study of scholarly discussions shows.
- 12 'Replacement theology' and Jewish monotheism
- 1 On the definition of 'Jewishness', see Casey (1991), who draws up eight 'identity-markers' (mostly ritual-based, but including monotheism), with Dunn's critique (1994, pp. 439–52); Wright (1992, pp. 244–79), based mostly on beliefs; Sanders (1992), covering both practice and belief.
- 2 Akiba: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself; this is the greatest principle in Torah'; Hillel: 'What is hateful to yourself, do not do to your neighbour: this is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary' (see Taylor, 1966, p. 487; Hooker, 1991, p. 288).
- 3 It is sometimes argued that Jesus has a 'Gentile' perspective when he refers to 'your Law' rather than 'our Law' (8.17; 10.34; cf. 15.25, 'their Law'). But the usage may be dictated by literary context: Jesus distances himself from religious leaders who made much of the Law's prescriptions but failed to keep its more radical demands. It is in any case paralleled within Jewish Scriptures (Blomberg, 2001, p. 142).
- 4 Contrast the word-play in Phil. 3.2f, paralleling it with *katatomé*, 'mutilation'.
- 5 Attendance was officially obligatory for Jewish males, but it was impossible for all to attend every year: John does not say that Jesus failed to attend, but only that he was in Galilee when the Passover feast was 'near' (*engus*).
- 6 Commemorating Judas Maccabaeus' re-dedication of the Temple in 164 BCs after its desecration by Antiochus Epiphanes (1 Macc. 4.52–59).
- 7 Moreover, John says nothing about Pentecost, a 'feast of obligation' for men, or the Day of Atonement (with its possibilities for Christian reinterpretation).
- 8 Some (e.g. the Qumran covenants) were unhappy about the contemporary hierarchy. Casey does not include 'Temple' among his eight criteria for Jewishness (1991, ch. 2; 1996, ch. 7).
- 9 Compare Tobias' hopes for a rebuilt Temple to which the nations will come, truly 'fearing' God, and all who love God will rejoice 'in truth and righteousness' (Tob. 14.5–7).
- 10 Or, 'I am what [or that] I am' or 'I shall be who [or what or that] I shall be'.
- 11 There are also significant 'background' materials in the Ta'gums: see Ronning (2010, pp. 194, 222f), highlighting Tg. Neof. Deut. 32.39 which links the phrase 'I am he' with God 'in his Word'.

- 12 Lincoln finds here unmistakable evidence that Jesus is claiming to be the self-revelation of the one true God (2005, p. 276).
- 13 When Exod. 3.14b refers back to the Name revealed to Moses, it uses the formula *ho ʾn*, not *egō eimi*. The Mishnah confines 'blasphemy' to uttering the Divine Name (*m. Sanh.* 7.5); but before this it seems to have been understood more widely (Williams, 2000, pp. 247f.).
- 14 This is probably not for purely grammatical reasons following 'Colwell's law' (Colwell, 1933) that, in the New Testament, complements preceding verbs usually drop the article: see Harris (1992, pp. 59–70).
- 15 Thomas' affirmation may also be an encouragement to Christians to affirm their strong faith in Jesus in the face of Roman imperial claims to lordship and deity (so Keener, 2003, p. 1212; Lincoln, 2005, p. 503).
- 16 In the *Prayer of Joseph*, fr. A (known from Origen), the angel Israel is said by Uriel to have descended to earth and tabernacled (*kataskenōō*) among human beings; but the text is obscure, almost certainly later than John, and may be anti-Christian polemic.
- 17 On Jewish and early Christian monotheism, see further Hayman (1991); Gnuse (1997); Horbury (1998a); Hurtado (2003, esp. chs 1, 6); McGrath (2009); Bauckham (2009a); Dunn (2010, esp. pp. 141–4 criticizing Bauckham on divine 'identity').
- 13 Conclusions: the value of John's Gospel today
- 1 See Excursus 2, n. 1. Other authors who freely adapt and create in their writings are Plato and Xenophon in their presentations of Socrates; Roman historians like Livy; and the biographers Diogenes Laertius, Plutarch and Suetonius.
- 2 E.g. Mark 13.12f; Matt. 10.16–23; 24.9; Luke 21.12–17; cf. Matt. 5.10f; Luke 6.22f. Recent scholarship (e.g. Kierspel, 2006, pp. 184f.) has stressed tensions felt by Christians living under Roman rule; John 21.18f. alludes to the martyrdom of Peter.
- 3 Cf. the Synoptic ('Q') images of the 'narrow gate' and 'broad path to destruction' (Matt. 7.13f. par.), and the two house-builders (Matt. 7.24–27 par.), and similar stark choices in James, the *Didache*, Paul's teaching and Stoic ethics.
- 4 Cf. the negative uses of 'the/this world' in 1 Cor. 1.21; Jas. 1.27; 2 Pet. 2.20; 1 John 2.15–17; 4.4f.; 5.19, etc.; also 'this generation' (Mark 8.12 par., 38; Matt. 12.42; etc.) and 'this age' (Rom. 12.2; 1 Cor. 1.20; etc.).
- 5 E.g. Ford (1997, esp. p. 111); Ringe (1999); Esler and Piper (2006, pp. 82–4); Culy (2010).
- 6 See Mainwright (1962, pp. 260–7); Gruenler (1986); Bruner (2012, pp. 268–70, etc.). In Greek *pneuma* is neuter, and the Synoptic Gospels tend to speak of the Spirit impersonally, as does John for the most part. But in the Supper Discourses (14.26b; 15.26b; 16.13f.) he uses masculine pronouns with reference to *paraklētos*