

CHAPTER FOUR

Judaism and the Gospel of John

D. Moody Smith

Introduction

The *Gospel of John* seems on the face of it a poor basis for Jewish-Christian dialogue. The Protestant New Testament scholar Eldon Jay Epp in 1975 advanced the thesis that

the attitude toward the Jews that finds expression in . . . the Gospel of John coacted with the extraordinary popularity of that gospel so as to encourage and to buttress anti-Semitic sentiments among Christians from the second century C.E. until the present time. This leads to the conclusion that the Fourth Gospel, more than any other book in the canonical body of Christian writings, is responsible for the frequent anti-Semitic expressions by Christians during the past eighteen or nineteen centuries, and particularly for the unfortunate and still existent characterization of the Jewish people by some Christians as 'Christ-killers.'¹

Similarly, the Roman Catholic theologian Rosemary Ruether characterized *John* as the gospel in which the Jews "are the very incarnation of the false, apostate principles of the fallen world, alienated from its true being in God." Moreover, "because they belong essentially to the world and its hostile, alienated principle of existence, their instinctive reaction to the revelation of the spiritual Son of God is murderousness" (Jn 8:40, 44).² If modern exegesis deemphasizes "the Jews" so as to understand the term to mean the unbelieving—as contrasted with the believing—made of . . .

significance, well and good. "This indeed is . . . the only authentic way to read the antithesis between the 'believer' and 'the world' (qua 'the Jews') in *John*."³ Theologically speaking, it is a proper reading. Nevertheless, Christians, historically, have not read *John* in this way, says Ruether, because the gospel does not, in fact, demythologize the Jews. Rather, it mythologizes the distinction between two modes of existence, the believing and authentic over against unbelieving and unauthentic, by identifying them with two historically and empirically distinct communities, the Christian and the Jewish.

Whatever may be said about *John* on this score, modern exegetes agree that it does not represent the views of Jesus or his original disciples. "Jesus was a Jew, and so were his first disciples. In fact, the earliest Christians did not think of themselves as members of a new religion separate from Judaism. Yet from the beginning Jesus and his disciples represented something new."⁴ That "something new," however, was not conceived of as the end of Judaism and the beginning of something called Christianity. As to the Law, Jesus did not reject it, but set about interpreting it anew for a new day. The famous statement in *Matthew* 5:17 ("Do not think that I have come to destroy the law and the prophets; I have come not to destroy but to fulfill.") may not actually have originated with Jesus. It can reasonably be argued that on Jesus' lips such a statement would have been superfluous. He and his followers, as well as his hearers, would have assumed as much. However that may be, Jesus certainly reckoned most seriously with the Jewish belief that God had spoken, that his will was concretized in Law, and that the Hebrew Scriptures were a faithful account of his speaking.

¹E. J. Epp, "Anti-Semitism and the Popularity of the Fourth Gospel in Christianity," *Journal of the Central Conference of American Rabbis* 22 (1975) 35. "Anti-Semitism," which has distinctly racial overtones, is inappropriate to describe the attitude of the Fourth Gospel, where the roots of conflict were theological and in all probability lay within the synagogue, between Jews who believed in Jesus and the majority, who did not. Nevertheless, the reading of *John* has contributed to the growth of anti-Semitism among Christians and others. See the excellent discussion of this matter and the entire question in R. A. Culpepper, "The Gospel of John and the Jews," *Review and Expositor* 84 (1987) 273-88, esp. pp. 282-85. Culpepper's citation of the literature is a useful bibliographical aid. Note particularly the important article by J. Ashton, "The Identity and Function of the *Ioudaioi* in the Fourth Gospel," *Novum Testamentum* 27 (1985) 40-75.

²R. R. Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York, 1974) p. 113.

³*Ibid.*, p. 116.

The new thing that Jesus proclaimed was the realization of the Rule of God, certainly no novel concept. But Jesus believed that its time had come and that his mission was to proclaim that the ancient faith in God as king was becoming reality in his own mission and message. Such an expectation and faith did not, of course, negate the Law and the prophets; rather, it was understood as their proper fulfillment. The Rule of God, expressed already in his Law, was to find effectual and final fulfillment. The question of exactly how Jesus conceived this fulfillment is one that has motivated and stimulated much New Testament scholarship, but probably admits of no final conclusion. In the Synoptic Gospels and tradition the kingdom impinges upon the present and is enormously relevant to decisions people make here and now. Yet at the same time it is not an inner spiritual experience or dimension, but the reality that everyone will have to reckon with ultimately, for it will impose itself upon us.

The revival of scholarly historical interest in Jesus of Nazareth has for good reason centered upon his Jewishness, that is, upon his rootedness in the traditions of Israel. Apart from that rootedness he cannot be understood. There is, of course, a sense in which "Jewish" is an anachronistic term, and one imposed from without. It is a term that does not appear on the lips of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels. Ancient Jews did not ordinarily understand or refer to themselves as such, except when assuming an outsider's perspective. (For example, the ancient lintel inscription from Corinth reads "Synagogue of the Hebrews.") Although the term "Jew" and the conceptualization of Judaism and Jewishness were certainly antecedent to the rise of Christianity, they have taken on a new and somewhat different significance as the two religions have separated from and interacted with one another. Nevertheless, it is not incorrect or misleading to speak of the Jewishness of Jesus as a way of indicating where he belongs historically and theologically. In one important sense, Bultmann was correct to see Jesus as a "presupposition" of New Testament theology and to place him within Judaism.⁵ Insofar as Jesus may become the

subject matter of New Testament theology, however, scholars must take seriously that theology's Jewishness. (Possibly because of Bultmann's own modern, existentialist, and Lutheran presuppositions, he was unable to accomplish this adequately.)

The Meaning of "the Jews" in the Gospel of John

The Jewishness of Jesus shines through the Synoptic Gospels, even though they are all distinctly Christian documents, because it is enshrined in the traditions on which they draw. Those traditions, however much they may reflect—in their selection, arrangement, and editing or formulation—the interests of the early church, nevertheless enshrine the attitudes and emphases of Jesus. This fact becomes particularly clear in light of certain data of vocabulary and terminology, and especially when those data are compared with evidence from the *Gospel of John*.

In the Synoptic Gospels, there are only sixteen occurrences of the term *Ioudaios* (pl., *Ioudaioi*), "Jew(s)." They are found mostly in the passion narratives, where the Roman authorities are interested in the question of whether Jesus is the king of the Jews. Otherwise, the term rarely appears, and where it does it also, as in the passion narratives, betrays an extra-Jewish (whether Christian or Gentile) perspective (e.g., Mt 2:2; Mk 7:3). In the Synoptic Gospels' narrative of Jesus' ministry, the term "Jews" is superfluous because everyone is a Jew, unless otherwise designated, and the perspective of the narrator lies within the Judaism of first-century Palestine, or so it seems. Although modern redaction criticism has rightly emphasized the underlying, and sometimes explicit, Christian perspective of the authors, a critically innocent or naive reading of the texts sees in them a narrative of events transpiring within the world of Judaism and of the historical Jesus, as problematic as direct historical inferences from the narrative may be. It has often been observed that parties to discussion with Jesus are not called Jews, but are Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, scribes, disciples of John the Baptist, and chief priests. Jesus may even have had a Zealot among his disciples (Lk 6:15; Acts 1:13). Of these the Sadducees, Herodians, scribes, and Zealots do not appear at all in *John*.

⁵R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 1, trans., K. Groebel (New York, 1951) p. 1: "The message of Jesus is a presupposition for the theology of the New Testament rather than a part of that theology itself."

On turning to *John*, we notice immediately that in contrast to synoptic usage, the Jews are spoken of quite frequently. There are seventy-one occurrences of the term in *John*, surpassed only by the eighty-odd occurrences in the *Acts of the Apostles*. (In the remainder of the New Testament, "the Jews" appears fewer than thirty times.) The preponderance of the term in *John* and *Acts* is interesting and significant. In both, disciples of Jesus (i.e., Christians) are clearly differentiated from Jews. This is not the case in the Synoptic Gospels, and not for the most part in the letters of Paul, who contrasts Jews and Greeks, not Jews and Christians. The situation in *John* and *Acts* seems almost prescient of later usage and determines the traditional Christian reading of the New Testament and understanding of the apostolic generation in ways that are not always historically felicitous.

It is fair to say that in *John* the Jews stand over against Jesus and his disciples, who are distinguished from them. Yet the Evangelist obviously knows that Jesus is a Jew (4:9) from Nazareth, the son of Joseph (1:45). His disciples, some of whom were followers of John the Baptist (1:35), were Jews as well (cf. 18:15). Despite his knowledge of the historical facts, John insists on characterizing the Jews as somehow clearly different and distinguishable from the band of Jesus and his disciples. Understandably, when Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that "salvation is of the Jews" (4:22), modern exegetes ask whether the Evangelist could have written such a thing and suggest it may be a later editorial insertion. (Just what purpose it might have served, however, is not immediately clear.) By and large, "the Jews" in *John* are the opponents of Jesus.

As such, they are quite often identified with the Pharisees (e.g., *John* 9), who appear frequently in the synoptic narratives as well. In the synoptics the Pharisees are, of course, a group within Judaism, whereas in *John* they sometimes seem to be identical with Judaism, or at least with its essence. We shall later consider the possible historical reasons for this significant difference. For the moment it is sufficient to note it and to observe that it may be significant in coming to terms with the nature and identity of "the Jews" in the *Gospel of John*. In *John* the Pharisees seem to be taking over Judaism. It is quite interesting and typical that the familiar synoptic linkage of the Pharisees to the Scribes is entirely missing from *John*. Instead, more than

once the Pharisees are in league with the chief priests (7:45; 11:47). Probably they were unlikely political or religious bedfellows in the time of Jesus. Such a linkage occurs also in *Matthew* (21:45; 27:62), where a historical setting similar to *John*'s, but different from Jesus' own, may be in view. It is not found in *Mark* and *Luke*, and when Pharisees and chief priests (or Sadducees) appear together in *Acts*, they are more often than not at odds with each other (*Acts* 5:34; 23:6-9).

In view of the prominence of the Pharisees, and their apparent identification with "the Jews," in John's Gospel it is all the more striking that they do not appear prominently in the passion narrative. True, only in *John* do the Pharisees appear in the party that goes out to arrest Jesus just before his trial and crucifixion (18:3). Yet thereafter they disappear completely (although there are Jews aplenty in the trial narratives). In this respect *John* agrees with the other gospels: despite the prominence of the Pharisees as Jesus' opponents throughout his public ministry, they do not figure in the events leading up to his execution. This striking fact is more likely a reflection of history and tradition than of the author's mentality, however, for he tends to identify the Pharisees with the Jews, who are already presented as the mortal enemies of Jesus. (Christians have long felt that "Pharisaic legalism" opposed Jesus and essentially did him in. This questionable view is encouraged by the presentation of them in *John*, but even there at the crucial point the Pharisees disappear from the scene. Jesus falls victim to Temple or priestly authorities.)

Who are these Jews? We address this question first of all from the standpoint of the phenomenology of the text. They are clearly Jewish people, but they are not all Jewish people. To begin with, Jesus and his disciples are not among "the Jews," although they are plainly Jewish. Moreover, no Galilean or Samaritan is called a Jew, except in chapter 6. That "the Jews" are residents of Judea is probably the case in most instances, but simply to translate *Ioudaioi* as "Judeans" will not do. They are both more and less than "Judeans." From *John* 9:22 one may infer that they are religious leaders exercising authority in the synagogues to which at least some followers of Jesus belonged. From *John* 12:42 the same inference may be made, except in this case the most authoritative figures are called "Pharisees." They are powerful or influential enough to exercise authority over

other Jews, who are called "rulers" or "officials" of these synagogues. Particularly in view of the fact that both *John* 9:22 and 12:42 deal with expulsion from the synagogues, it is likely that the "Jews" in the one case and the "Pharisees" in the other are the same authorities. It is important to notice that they are authorities who exercise significant power over other Jewish people. At least in these contexts, "Jews" may be "Pharisees," but they are not to be identified or confused with the totality of the Jewish people.

Thus Jesus, his followers, Galileans, and perhaps Samaritans are Jewish, but they are not "the Jews." There are also people explicitly called "Jews" who are not enemies of Jesus. Prominent among them is Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews (3:1), who keeps coming back to Jesus, speaks for him (7:50), and helps bury him (19:39). We never read that he believed in Jesus, though some Jews (or Pharisees) do (9:16; cf., 8:31). The people who mourn Lazarus with Mary and Martha are said to be Jews, although they also are not hostile to Jesus. Moreover, throughout John's Gospel "Israel" and "Israelite" are used in a positive sense. Thus Nathanael can be called "truly an Israelite in whom there is no guile" (1:47) and Jesus is hailed as "king of Israel" (1:49), a title whose entirely positive connotations contrast with "king of the Jews," which has a negative and sarcastic ring on the lips of Romans (e.g., 19:3).

"The Jews" is, then, a term used of a group of Jewish leaders who exercise great authority among their compatriots and are especially hostile to Jesus and his disciples. A recent study of the gospels' use of *Ioudaioi* confirms the view that when it is used in a peculiarly Johannine sense, that is, not with reference to Judeans or to Jewish customs, feasts, and so forth, it refers to certain authorities rather than to the people as a whole.⁶ It is these authorities, not Jewish people generally, who are portrayed as hostile to Jesus throughout *John* and make that gospel appear anti-Jewish. This being the case, it is reasonable—and probably correct—to contend that the anti-Jewish aura of the Fourth Gospel is a misreading of the text and, presumably, of the intention of its author(s). Nevertheless, it is a misreading that has all too easily and understandably arisen in the his-

tory of Christian exegesis, and it may be well-nigh impossible to put it to rest in all the circles in which the gospel is read and treasured.

Before dealing with this larger issue, however, it will be useful to inquire further into the historical setting and, putative purpose of the portrayal of "the Jews" in the *Gospel of John*. We proceed on the assumption that only a setting different from the immediate historical setting and purpose of Jesus himself will explain the statements and perspective of the Fourth Gospel. Jesus of Nazareth did not distinguish himself from the Jews in the way the Johannine Jesus does. Nor did he dwell upon his messianic role. If he ever acknowledged the claim that he was the messiah (cf., Mk 8:27-30), he did not give it the emphasis it receives in the Fourth Gospel.

Expulsion from the Synagogue

The absence of Zealots, Sadducees, and Herodians in the *Gospel of John* and the tendency for Jews to be equated with Pharisees suggests that *John* appeared after the Roman War, that is, after 70 C.E. Following the war, the so-called Council of Jamnia began the process of retrenching and redefining Jewish life and collecting and codifying traditions that would eventuate in the emergence of Rabbinic Judaism as the heir of Pharisaism. The language of John's Gospel apparently reflects this state of affairs when the Pharisees are equated with the Jewish authorities, precisely the authorities who are able to say who belongs within the synagogue and who must be excluded. They are in the Fourth Gospel, as in broader Jewish history, defining what Judaism shall be. In putting Johannine Christianity beyond the pale, the Pharisees of the Fourth Gospel affirmed a religion of law and absolute monotheism. They rejected a sectarianism based on charismatic inspiration and seemingly limitless transference of divine prerogatives and attributes to a crucified messianic claimant whose followers believed had risen from the dead. Almost certainly John's Gospel reflects this post-70 situation in Judaism, as well as in what we might call Jewish-Christian relations.

Can the setting and purpose of the Fourth Gospel be defined more precisely? Nearly two decades ago, J. Louis Martyn made an attempt at a historical setting based primarily on the three instances

⁶U. C. von Walde, "The Johannine Jews: A Critical Survey," *New Testament Studies* 10 (1963) 77-78.

in the Fourth Gospel in which the threat of expulsion from the synagogue is reflected or predicted (9:22; 12:42; 16:2).⁷ If such a threat was not made and was scarcely even conceivable in Jesus' own day, Martyn asks when and under what circumstances it may have been found. His underlying assumption is that the statements in *John* mirror an actual historical situation and set of circumstances. In this respect the *Gospel of John* affords primary testimony for the circumstances under which it was written (as argued by many, esp. Bultmann, Wellhausen). These in turn have been retrojected into the time of Jesus and his disciples. (It is thus only secondarily testimony for the times and events it purports to narrate.) This process took place without deliberate design and forethought over a period of years.

Martyn thought it likely that a primitive narrative gospel consisting of a collection of miracle stories and probably also a rudimentary passion narrative was used by Jewish followers of Jesus to attract adherents to their movement within the synagogue. Such a gospel had been analyzed from the canonical text by Martyn's student Robert T. Fortna on other, chiefly unrelated, grounds.⁸ It was a missionary gospel, and its original conclusion (now found in Jn 20:30–31) reflects this fact. As Christian missionaries using such narratives, or such a primitive gospel, attained success in persuading their fellow Jews that their Jesus was, in fact, the Messiah of Israel, a backlash or reaction among the majority who were not convinced set in. In

⁷J. L. Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, rev. ed. (Nashville, 1979). The book was first published in 1968. See R. E. Brown, *The Gospel of John* (Anchor Bible 29; Garden City, N.Y., 1966) vol. 1, pp. LXX–LXXV, LXXXV, who also linked the origin of the Fourth Gospel to a similarly conceived synagogue controversy. Although their proposals were made independently, Martyn and Brown have subsequently carried on a mutually fruitfully discussion. Brown's own position is set out most fully in *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York, 1979).

⁸Cf. R. T. Fortna, *The Gospel of Signs: A Reconstruction of the Narrative Source Underlying the Fourth Gospel* (SNTS MS 11; Cambridge, 1970), originally a dissertation with Martyn at Union Theological Seminary.

⁹The form of the benediction, as reformulated, accepted by Martyn (*History*, p. 56) is as follows:

For the apostate let there be no hope
And let the arrogant government
be speedily uprooted in our days.

Let the Nazarenes (*notzrim* = Christians) and the *Minim*
(heretics) be destroyed in a moment
And let them be blotted out of the Book of Life and not
be inscribed together with the righteous.

Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who humbles the proud!

The malediction against the Nazarenes and *Minim* is thought to be the work of Samuel the Small (80–90 C.E.).

this connection the Twelfth Benediction of the *Shemoneh Esreh* was reformulated, in such a way as to condemn sectarians (*minim*) and Nazarenes (*notzrim*).⁹ Presumably its purpose was to smoke out Christ-confessors within the synagogue, who could not pronounce this benediction, or malediction, against themselves. This reformulation of the Twelfth Benediction took place in the Rabbinic Academy at Jamnia. According to tradition, it was done by a sage called Samuel the Small under the auspices of Rabbi Gamaliel II, and it has been dated in the ninth decade of the first century. The status of the synagogue ban as a general edict or decree of Jamnia is inferred from the statement of *John* 9:22, that "the Jews had already agreed. . . ."

There is actually no direct evidence that the Twelfth Benediction was reformulated or originally used for the purpose of identifying Christ-confessors specifically and expelling them from the synagogue. If a dating in the 80s is correct, it would antedate the publication of the Fourth Gospel by about a decade (just the right amount of time) if that gospel were composed—as is usually thought—between 90 and 110. Before Martyn's book appeared, W. D. Davies had already proposed such a date and use of the Twelfth Benediction in his work on Matthew.¹⁰ Davies also cited the several places in Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho* that can be construed as allusions to the use of the Twelfth Benediction to drive Christians out of the synagogue. The evidence is indirect and circumstantial, but impressive, particularly when it is correlated with the fears and predictions of expulsion from the synagogue found in the *Gospel of John*. As we have noted, this state of affairs scarcely corresponds to a setting in the ministry of Jesus, and one is impelled by its prominence in the Fourth Gospel, together with other evidence bearing on Jewish-Christian conflict, to seek a plausible setting for it. Martyn's proposal is then a logical—as well as a brilliant—intuition of the historical imagination.

Nevertheless, it is a proposal and not a demonstration, as subsequent discussion has revealed, and, indeed, as Martyn had recognized from the beginning. Between the initial publication of Martyn's work and the appearance of the second, revised edition a decade later, he had entertained, in conversation and correspondence, the objections and reservations of

¹⁰W. D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge, 1964) pp. 275–79.

other Jews, who are called "rulers" or "officials" of these synagogues. Particularly in view of the fact that both *John* 9:22 and 12:42 deal with expulsion from the synagogues, it is likely that the "Jews" in the one case and the "Pharisees" in the other are the same authorities. It is important to notice that they are authorities who exercise significant power over other Jewish people. At least in these contexts, "Jews" may be "Pharisees," but they are not to be identified or confused with the totality of the Jewish people.

Thus Jesus, his followers, Galileans, and perhaps Samaritans are Jewish, but they are not "the Jews." There are also people explicitly called "Jews" who are not enemies of Jesus. Prominent among them is Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews (3:1), who keeps coming back to Jesus, speaks for him (7:50), and helps bury him (19:39). We never read that he believed in Jesus, though some Jews (or Pharisees) do (9:16; cf. 8:31). The people who mourn Lazarus with Mary and Martha are said to be Jews, although they also are not hostile to Jesus. Moreover, throughout *John's* Gospel "Israel" and "Israelite" are used in a positive sense. Thus Nathanael can be called "truly an Israelite in whom there is no guile" (1:47) and Jesus is hailed as "king of Israel" (1:49), a title whose entirely positive connotations contrast with "king of the Jews," which has a negative and sarcastic ring on the lips of Romans (e.g., 19:3).

"The Jews" is, then, a term used of a group of Jewish leaders who exercise great authority among their compatriots and are especially hostile to Jesus and his disciples. A recent study of the gospels' use of *Ioudaioi* confirms the view that when it is used in a peculiarly Johannine sense, that is, not with reference to Judeans or to Jewish customs, feasts, and so forth, it refers to certain authorities rather than to the people as a whole.⁶ It is these authorities, not Jewish people generally, who are portrayed as hostile to Jesus throughout *John* and make that gospel appear anti-Jewish. This being the case, it is reasonable—and probably correct—to contend that the anti-Jewish aura of the Fourth Gospel is a misreading of the text and, presumably, of the intention of its author(s). Nevertheless, it is a misreading that has all too easily and understandably arisen in the his-

tory of Christian exegesis, and it may be well-nigh impossible to put it to rest in all the circles in which the gospel is read and treasured.

Before dealing with this larger issue, however, it will be useful to inquire further into the historical setting and putative purpose of the portrayal of "the Jews" in the *Gospel of John*. We proceed on the assumption that only a setting different from the immediate historical setting and purpose of Jesus himself will explain the statements and perspective of the Fourth Gospel. Jesus of Nazareth did not distinguish himself from the Jews in the way the Johannine Jesus does. Nor did he dwell upon his messianic role. If he ever acknowledged the claim that he was the messiah (cf., Mk 8:27-30), he did not give it the emphasis it receives in the Fourth Gospel.

Expulsion from the Synagogue

The absence of Zealots, Sadducees, and Herodians in the *Gospel of John* and the tendency for Jews to be equated with Pharisees suggests that *John* appeared after the Roman War, that is, after 70 C.E. Following the war, the so-called Council of Jamnia began the process of retrenching and redefining Jewish life and collecting and codifying traditions that would eventuate in the emergence of Rabbinic Judaism as the heir of Pharisaism. The language of *John's* Gospel apparently reflects this state of affairs when the Pharisees are equated with the Jewish authorities, precisely the authorities who are able to say who belongs within the synagogue and who must be excluded. They are in the Fourth Gospel, as in broader Jewish history, defining what Judaism shall be. In putting Johannine Christianity beyond the pale, the Pharisees of the Fourth Gospel affirmed a religion of law and absolute monotheism. They rejected a sectarianism based on charismatic inspiration and seemingly limitless transferral of divine prerogatives and attributes to a crucified messianic claimant whose followers believed had risen from the dead. Almost certainly *John's* Gospel reflects this post-70 situation in Judaism, as well as in what we might call Jewish-Christian relations.

Can the setting and purpose of the Fourth Gospel be defined more precisely? Nearly two decades ago, J. Louis Martyn made

Wayne A. Meeks and Morton Smith.¹¹ Meeks and Smith were unwilling to assign the reformulation of the Twelfth Benediction as early a date as Martyn had proposed. Hence they raise questions about a direct connection between the Benediction and passages such as *John* 9:22 that Martyn had made. (Nevertheless, Meeks and Smith agree with Martyn that the Twelfth Benediction and the Johannine *apostynagōi* are manifestations of the same or related historical developments.) Subsequently, others have more sharply questioned the early dating of the reformulated Twelfth Benediction that Martyn had accepted, its relation to the Fourth Gospel, and its possible reflection in patristic texts such as Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho*.¹² The authority of Iamnia to promulgate what in effect was a decree against Jewish Christians has also been challenged. Later Rabbinic sources afford precious little evidence of its use in this way. On the contrary, the evidence of the fourth-century bishop John Chrysostom indicates that Christians were then welcome in synagogues and, in Chrysostom's view, had to be warned away from them. Moreover, even the question of when Samuel the Small altered the text of the Twelfth Benediction may presuppose a textual stability that did not exist at that time.¹³ It can reasonably be argued that at most the evidence suggests local rather than universal measures against Christ-confessors in the synagogue and that these were, moreover, a passing phase. One sadly notes that Christian-Jewish conflict has apparently left bolder evidence than Christian-Jewish harmony or tolerance, which may have been as common in the pre-Constantinian era.

Martyn and others involved in the scholarly discussion are working on a problem of ancient historiography, and their hon-

¹¹ Cited by Martyn, *History*, nn. 69 and 75; cf. also no. 81, in which he responds to D. R. A. Hare.

¹² For example, R. Kimmelman, "Birkat ha-Minim and the Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Jewish Prayer in Late Antiquity," in E. P. Sanders et al., eds., *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, (Philadelphia, 1981) vol. 2, pp. 226-44; also S. T. Katz, "Issues in the Separation of Judaism and Christianity after 70 C.E.: A Reconsideration," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103 (1984) 43-76. The near consensus at the end of the 1970s was stated well by J. T. Townsend, "The Gospel of John and the Jews: The Story of Religious Divorce," in A. Davies, ed., *Antisemitism and the Foundations of Christianity* (New York, 1979) pp. 72-97.

¹³ According to the assessment of most recent scholarship by A. L. Nations, "Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel of John" (unpublished paper read before the Fourth Gospel Section of the Society of Biblical Literature national meeting, Atlanta, November 1982).

esty and integrity as historians can only be honored and admired. The possible bearing of this attempted historical reconstruction and objections to it upon modern Jewish-Christian dialogue is, however, interesting. The implication of Martyn's thesis is that the *Gospel of John* is not, as might first appear, a generally and vehemently anti-Semitic (more accurately, anti-Jewish) document, but a response to a specific crisis in Jewish-Christian relations that had been initiated, or at least exacerbated, by the promulgation of the revised Twelfth Benediction. (Of course, according to Martyn's thesis, the controversy began within the synagogue, among Jews, and that intramural status still pertained at the point of the reformulation of the Benediction.

Ironically, the objections by Jewish scholars such as Kimmelman and Katz, which are substantial, in distancing the Fourth Gospel from the Twelfth Benediction and its postulated function, tend to push it back in the direction of a generally anti-Semitic or anti-Jewish writing. Obviously, a scholarly historical issue cannot be decided on the basis of the needs of contemporary Jewish-Christian dialogue. Nor is it helpful, and it is probably not accurate, to say that the truth lies somewhere in between. It would perhaps be more accurate to say that the sources available to us do not permit us to say exactly what transpired to produce the tension between Johannine Christianity and Judaism that is evident in the Fourth Gospel. If the problem with the Martyn thesis is the lack of positive and explicit, as opposed to suggestive, evidence in the rabbinic sources particularly, the problem with simply dismissing it is the evidence—in *John*, and elsewhere in the New Testament and early Christian sources—of strong tension between Jews and Christians, and occasional persecution.

However that may be, it is unnecessary and hazardous hurriedly to draw parallels or relations between this ancient situation and the present, or between it and instances of Jewish-Christian tension and persecution in intervening centuries. If, in fact, Johannine Christians were persecuted by some Jews or Jewish authorities, as Saul at first persecuted the Christian sectarians, this is obviously no justification for Christians' persecuting Jews subsequently. Such persecution, or threat thereof, makes historically understandable certain statements in the *Gospel of John* that otherwise appear to be the product of a