

The Gospel of John and the Jews

Michael J. Cook

The specific subject of the "The Gospel of John and the Jews" invites a different kind of focus from that applied in most contemporary analyses of the Fourth Gospel. I applaud the increasing interest in treating the Gospel as a *literary* work, in discouraging preoccupation only with the historicity of the events reported or reflected, in directing attention instead "to the integrity of the whole, the way [the Gospel's] component parts interrelate, its effects upon the reader . . . the way it achieves its effects."¹ Yet I question whether the promise of this approach is either commensurate with (or even applicable to) the enormity of the very particular problem I am called to treat in this essay: the Fourth Gospel's influence on Christian-Jewish relations.

To begin with, the Gospel's general *Christian* readership is unlikely to achieve recognition of the subtleties and nuances of the Evangelist's style and message, or of the literary integrity of the Gospel as a whole. Rather, the surface impression yielded by the Gospel's portrayal of the Jews will inevitably be taken literally by the vast majority of Christianity's lay constituency. In the present day, the perceived overpowering anti-Judaism of John seems axiomatic to the nonspecialist churchgoer; and, particularly because of the overwhelming popularity of the Fourth Gospel throughout history, we may very well have to deal more with the *legacy* of John than with the Gospel itself.

Moreover, insofar as the Gospel commands any attention of *Jewish* readership, the prognosis is even more discouraging. Jewish readers are unlikely to give John any sustained serious attention, or even to read much in the Gospel which does not specifically concern them. Stating the reality perhaps too starkly, I submit that most Jews simply are not interested in what John's message actually is but rather only in what John seems to be saying about the Jews. A Jewish reading of John would most likely consist of a skimming of the text, lingering only on those passages mentioning, describing, or impinging upon Jews or Jewish concerns, and evoking from Jewish readers such questions as: Why does John use the term "the Jews," and why so antipathetically? Are these traditions of Jesus' controversies with "the Jews" true to historical reality? Why does John often seem to give the impression that Jesus was outside the Jewish people, such that many Christian readers of John do not realize that Jesus was Jewish? Is it true that John is the "father of anti-Semitism"?

I am, of course, *not* faulting either the non-scholar generally or the Jewish reader particularly, not to mention those Jews who have never read John, cursorily or otherwise. I do urge Christians, however, to recognize that in the Jewish view the Gospel of John, together with the Christian Testament as a whole, is not Scripture. There is, accordingly, no theological warrant for Jews even to read John, let alone with any pretensions of sophistication! The prevailing attitude in our ancient Rabbinic sources discourages Jews from any exposure whatsoever to the Gospels,² thus further diminishing the likelihood that Jews would attain any informed opinions concerning this or any of the other Gospels. No doubt Jews in the current day have achieved some casual familiarity with what the New Testament contains if only from exposure to Christians referring to it, citing it, preaching from it (especially through television and radio broadcasting). Yet insofar as some Christians do not fully understand their own Scripture, Jews may become heir to their inexactitudes of interpretation. Since John is the most resistant of all the Gospels to easy comprehension, presumably Jews themselves will likewise achieve less proficiency in grasping the subtleties of John than in grasping the message of the synoptic Gospels.

Anticipating its potential helpfulness, I have prepared a list of Johannine passages which, I would submit, catch the Jewish eye and evoke most of the negative reaction Jewish readers have expressed toward the Gospel:

- 1:11-12 He came to his own home, and *his own people received him not*. But to all who received him. . . he gave power to become children of God. . . .
- 1:17 For the *law* was given through *Moses*; *grace and truth* came through *Jesus Christ*.
- 3:3 Truly, truly I say to you, *unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God*.
- 3:16-18 For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. He who believes in him is not condemned; *he who does not believe is condemned already*, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.
- 3:36 He who believes in the Son has eternal life; *he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him*.
- 5:16-18 And this was why *the Jews persecuted Jesus*, because he did this on the sabbath. But Jesus answered them, "My Father is working still, and I am working." This was why *the Jews sought all the more to kill him*, because he not only broke the sabbath but also called God his Father, making himself equal with God.
- 5:23 He who does not honor the Son *does not honor the Father* who sent him.
- 5:42 But I know that you [*Jews*] *have not the love of God within you*.

- 5:45-46 . . . it is *Moses who accuses you* [to the Father]. . . If you believed in Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me. . . .
- 6:53 . . . *unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.*
- 7:1 . . . he would not go about in Judea, because *the Jews sought to kill him.*
- 7:13 Yet for fear of the Jews no one spoke openly of him.
- 8:23-24 He said to them [the Jews], “. . . I told you that *you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he.*”
- 8:31, 37-38, 44-47 Jesus then said to the Jews who had believed in him [!] . . . “You seek to kill me, because my word finds no place in you. I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father. . . *You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. . . . He who is of God hears the words of God; the reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.*”
- 9:22 His [the man born blind] parents said that because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess him to be Christ, *he was to be put out of the synagogue.*
- 12:42-43 . . . for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it lest they should be put out of the synagogue.
- 14:6 I am the way, and the truth, and the life; *no one comes to the Father, but by me.*
- 15:25 It is to fulfill the word that is written in *their law*, “*They hated me without a cause*” [Ps. 35:19; 69:4].
- 16:2-3 *They* [the Jews] *will put you out of the synagogues*; indeed, the hour is coming when *whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do this because they have not known the Father, nor me.*
- 18:36 . . . if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, *that I might not be handed over to the Jews*; but my kingship is not from the world.
- 19:38 After this Joseph of Arimathea . . . but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus.
- 20:19 On the evening of that day . . . the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews. . . .

It goes without saying that, while such selective reading may adequately convey a sense of how Jews react to the Gospel, it may also impede any fair determination of what John is actually saying. Preconceptions that John is

anti-Jewish may preclude a dispassionate assessment of whether the Fourth Gospel, if studied as a whole rather than through such excerpting, would emerge as anti-Jewish *to the same degree* as Jewish readers usually assume. Passages in John which may be outgrowths of a particular historical context may be read by Jews without recourse to that historical *time* frame. Similarly, Johannine statements reflecting a limited *geographical* frame of reference (perhaps only one community) may be construed as universal in their intended application. Misunderstanding may also eventuate from what is characteristic of the Jewish *reader's* context (in addition to the misunderstanding forthcoming from the reader's unfamiliarity with the *author's* context). A Jewish reader who has lived through a period of anti-Semitism or who is cognizant of the consequences of anti-Semitism for Jews may elicit from relatively neutral or defensive Johannine sentiments undercurrents of virulent antipathy not necessarily present even implicitly.

Am I denying, then, that John is anti-Jewish? Hardly! The twenty-two passages I have cited are genuinely problematic and their impact on Christians, and their consequences for Jews, are incalculable. Yet I do feel that the superficiality of Jewish acquaintance with John has resulted in an inadequacy of comprehension and a consequent imputing to John of a greater *intensity* of anti-Judaism than is warranted. It becomes incumbent upon us, therefore, to evaluate key elements of John so fundamental in shaping Jewish reactions to this Gospel.

The Problem of John's Usage of "the Jews"

For Jews, the nub of the problem, of course, lies preeminently with one expression in John, namely, "the Jews." John's usage of this term is widely recognized as being characteristically different from the manner in which the synoptic Gospels customarily refer to the opponents of Jesus. To be sure, the term *Ioudaios*¹ does appear in all three Synoptics, but merely a total of sixteen times (six in Mark; five in Matthew, and five in Luke), and indeed even this number is inflated. Given the phenomenon of parallel passages in the triple and double traditions, not all of the sixteen appearances of "Jews" in the Synoptics are actually usages independent of one another. Further, the term often occurs within the phrase "King of *the Jews*"—i.e., not standing by itself but rather as part of a larger formula fashioned, it would seem, from the perspective of non-Jews. Only four of the sixteen references appear to reflect the Synoptists' own usage.² Thus it is that, when the Fourth Gospel is compared with the Synoptics, John's seventy-one usages of "the Jews" emerge as dramatic (especially since they reflect his independent usage rather than derivatives from synoptic traditions). Correspondingly, in John there is a reduction in the appearance of the terms the Synoptics employ in designating Jesus' opponents. Of the synoptic terms "Pharisees," "scribes," "Sadducees," "chief priests," etc., only "Phari-

sees" and "chief priests" occur in John,⁵ and less prominently than they do in the Synoptics.

Since the appearance of the term "the Jews" is so striking in John, and since Jewish readers sense animosity by the writer in his very employment of the term (not to mention in the tenor attendant to its utilization), certain questions unavoidably surface and demand our attention: Is John's usage of "the Jews" particularly unusual relative to that found in works *other than the synoptic Gospels*? Must the manner in which the term is employed in John in itself be construed as pejorative? And is it likely that John, in using the term, intended to convey by it something other than, or in addition to, the obvious?

It is important to realize that, at face value at least, John's application of "the Jews" is neither alarming nor even unusual. Our problem here is occasioned by our tendency to compare John only with the Synoptics, and therefore to consider John's usage idiosyncratic, to invest it with power and intensity, and then ultimately to conclude it to be distortive and poisonous to Christian-Jewish relations.

The reality, however, is that Jews *are* referred to in other ancient writings,⁶ and particularly in the Diaspora the specific term "the Jews" or "Jews" was a standard manner of alluding to the Jewish people. To begin with, non-Jews during the intertestamental period commonly referred to Jews by that very term. Moreover, *Jews* in the Diaspora also often adopted this non-Jewish usage in referring to themselves. We see this phenomenon clearly in 2 and 3 Maccabees, and in Philo as well as Josephus. To be sure, *Jews in Palestine* generally referred to themselves through the term "Israel." In Hellenistic Judaism, however, "Israel" was reserved mainly for liturgical contexts; "Jews" was the normal mode of reference, especially in contexts when Jews are speaking of themselves to Gentiles. Accordingly, were the Evangelist John to have been writing in the Diaspora or writing for an audience predominantly gentile (whether or not he himself were to any degree Jewish in background), his utilization of "the Jews" would have been neither unusual nor idiosyncratic, let alone necessarily denigrating.

Among the most absorbing illustrations of this usage is 1 Maccabees, itself most likely originally written in Palestine and modeled on the Hebraic biblical style. Here the author uses "Israel" when referring to his fellow people but "Jews" when his people are being referred to by Gentiles, especially in the context of official documents (whether genuinely historical or not) wherein the language of diplomacy would naturally adopt the gentile usage. While Josephus and Philo use "Israel" when referring to Jews of biblical times, they use "Jews" in presenting times contemporaneous with their Diaspora audience.

In the synoptic Gospels, meanwhile, when "Jews" does appear it is almost always on non-Jewish lips or used by Jews in their interaction with non-Jews. "King of the Jews" is gentile usage, not wordage of Jesus or commentary by the

Synoptists themselves, and when Palestinian Jews are said to mock Jesus it is as “King of *Israel*” rather than “King of *the Jews*”! In Acts, the same pattern is evident—non-Jews, Jews speaking with them, and Hellenistic Jews use the term “Jews,” while Palestinian Jews speaking with other Palestinian Jews generally use “Israel.” There is no warrant to search out and seek to explain away exceptions, should they exist; it is sufficient simply to recognize a widely-attested pattern against which John’s usage emerges as seemingly unremarkable. John follows Hellenistic usage (whether Gentile or Jewish), while the Synoptists generally reflect Palestinian usage.

This, then, answers the first question: John’s utilization of “the Jews” does fall within the confines of what we would expect and hardly justifies overreaction. Nor does his usage of the term *in and of itself* signify any specifically *pejorative* intent since, in other works employing the term, the intent is not necessarily denigrating of Jews. To be sure, anti-Judaism existed in John’s day, and John may very well have put the term to anti-Jewish use (as most readers and many scholars would agree), but such a determination must depend on more than his mere appropriation of the term “the Jews.”

Of course, it may be argued that what *John* means by “the Jews” is unique in itself, and hence the intention of other writers using the term is beside the point. Yet a case can be advanced that John uses the term naturally—that is, in what would have been its readily-understood sense.⁷ Not only does *Ioudaios* easily correspond with our sense of “Jew,” but we must presuppose that John was interested in being comprehended by his audience. Surely John’s use of “the Jews” must have meant what John’s audience would have commonly construed the term to mean rather than bearing some unconventional, obscure meaning privately accorded it by the Evangelist personally, and challenging the reader to its discovery, uncovering, or recovery. Only by recourse to implausible conjecture—such as that John wrote for an audience limited to those who had previously heard him preach and who were thus privy to the special meanings he conveyed by his terminology⁸—could we become reconciled to the idea that what John intended by using “the Jews” was something quite removed from the obvious!

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that the variety of contexts in John wherein “the Jews” appears does create confusion. For the *scope* of the group referred to does seem inconstant — contracting and expanding, shrinking down in applicability to only a representative subgroup of the Jewish people active in the story line, or enlarging to the point of encompassing not only the whole of the Jewish people but seemingly the world-at-large. No wonder we encounter so broad a spectrum of identifications, with the term being vicariously explained as: the Jews as a whole, the world-at-large, the Jewish authorities alone, the Pharisees alone, the residents of Judea alone, the descendants of Judah alone, the Jews faithful to the Law, the adherents of the synagogue,⁹ even the Yavneh academy.¹⁰

Since it stands to reason that John would have accommodated his usage to what his audience would have understood by the term, some of these suggested meanings seem distinctly inadequate. Perhaps we are demanding of John an unwarranted degree of precision. The terms of identification utilized by the Synoptists may themselves likewise be seen as amorphous (e.g., "chief priests," "elders," "Herodians," "scribes"),¹¹ albeit displaying a greater consistency of meaning.

The Evangelist John: Historian, Polemicist, or Theologian?

Faced with this impasse, we may seek out other avenues of assistance in determining what John intended by his use of "the Jews" and how high anti-Judaism ranked on his scale of priorities. Along these lines, one may follow the suggestion to determine under which rubric the Evangelist John may be most appropriately subsumed: primarily that of the *historian*, primarily that of the *polemicist*, or primarily that of the *theologian*?¹² To ask these questions is to compartmentalize John into modern categories perhaps inappropriate for a first-century writer, but since we are grappling with the impression John makes on *modern* readership there may be value in proceeding with this kind of discussion.

Is it apt for us to term John a *historian*? One must reckon, of course, with the lack of exactitude in John's presentation of the Jews particularly and of the panorama of first-century Palestine generally; yet some would argue against too readily dismissing John's interest in presenting historical narrative. Inexactitude could easily be considered a function of John's lack of adequate information, given his historical distance from the time of Jesus' ministry and his possible geographical distance from Palestine, not to mention his theological distance from the synagogue Judaism of his day.¹³ Moreover, is it not plausible to assume that the Gospel was written for gentile readers so that, even while John was committed to writing an accurate historical account, he accommodated his audience by speaking of the Jewish leaders and many of the individuals opposing Jesus simply as "the Jews"?¹⁴ The extent to which John felt he had to explain Jewish holidays and customs evinces how unacquainted he assumed his readers were with the Jews; for an audience more conversant, John would of course have been more definitive in delineating those Jews opposing Jesus.

Nevertheless, a number of factors counsel caution in our either accepting John as a historian or in our assuming John's predilection for the role. For example, mentioning "the Jews" amorphously may be excusable in some instances but hardly in others. While allusions to the festivals of "the Jews" are understandable even if stilted, arguing that no one in a crowd itself composed of Jews dared to speak openly "for fear of the Jews" seems odd to say the least, as do statements that Jesus, himself a Jew, spoke with "the Jews."¹⁵

Moreover, the dialogues in John convey no impression of verisimilitude — people simply do not talk in common parlance the way John forces Jesus and the Jews to engage one another! The subtleties, nuances, double-entendre would be mind-boggling in actual conversation, nor would Jesus emerge as in any degree a reasonable historical figure were he genuinely to have expected persons to respond affirmatively or congenially to his trickily-contrived questions.¹⁶

Further still, there are significant discrepancies between John's ordering of events in Jesus' ministry, on the one hand, and that characteristic of the synoptic Gospels, on the other. I have in mind not simply Jesus' repeated trips to Judea and Galilee (in John, as opposed to the Synoptics), but also the advancing of the cleansing of the Temple from what is chapter 11 in Mark to what is chapter 2 in John, together with the substitution of the raising of Lazarus as the critical event prompting Jesus' arrest (in contrast to the cleansing of the Temple, which serves this role in the synoptic Gospels). While the sequence in the synoptic Gospels may itself not be reliable,¹⁷ it appears that John is responsible, in a masterful way, for determining the sequence of events in his own Gospel. This impression is particularly underscored by those convinced that John was familiar with the sequence advanced by the synoptic Gospels¹⁸ and thus displays a conscious departure from them. It seems evident that John does not consider the determination of the *correct* order of the events in Jesus' ministry to be a matter of consequence. Rather, whatever order he does establish derives not from a concern or even a pretense to historical accuracy, and we might conclude that he is no more preoccupied with conveying actual history in his presentation of the Jews than he is in his Gospel taken as a whole.

Would it then be appropriate to consider John — in his treatment of the Jews — more a *polemicist* than a historian? Certainly, this would appear consistent with the seeming castigation the Jews receive in the Gospel. While Christianity was understandably intent on justifying and legitimizing its own departure from Judaism, and while to do so it inevitably was drawn into challenging the sufficiency of the mother religion,¹⁹ the argument could be advanced that John's critique of the Jews and Judaism *exceeds* what is necessary.²⁰ The sharpness of the words he attributes to Jesus resulting in Jesus' relentless vilification of the Jews seems at variance with the forgiving nature often elsewhere associated with Jesus' character, occasioning our recognition of the extent of the Evangelist's personal polemical investment in his Gospel.

Factors potentially accountable for such an intensity of denigration readily suggest themselves: The overarching struggle between Jews and Christians had become increasingly heated by John's day, as Hellenistic Judaism entered into exacerbated friction with Christian missionary activity. Jewish authorities in John's day, possibly rabbinic, had allegedly expelled Jewish Christians from

the synagogue, either in John's community alone or throughout a wider geographical area. Moreover, John's predilection for dualistic imagery, depicting all aspects of life in terms of good or evil, light or darkness, above or below, also required the counterbalancing of Jesus, who is goodness, with the Jews, who represent evil.

Regardless of the precise factors which furnished the critical impetus for John's polemic, John is alleged by many scholars to have appropriated, accommodated, and rendered subservient the circumstances of controversy during Jesus' own ministry to John's personal vendetta against contemporary Jewish opponents. To be sure, however, John may have attempted *honestly* to portray Jesus' own experiences with opponents, albeit through the filter of John's own later situation.

The essential question before us, however, is not whether the Evangelist was himself a polemicist but rather the *priority* we should assign to polemic in his Gospel. The Gospel is assuredly anti-Jewish, but anti-Judaism was hardly foremost on John's agenda. For the Jews in John do not seem *formidable* enough for a polemic against them to be considered John's uppermost concern.²¹ Certainly there is no promise of their effectively competing with Jesus — there is little literary tension regarding who will emerge victorious, Jesus or the Jews! Indeed, if truth be told, the Jewish leaders in the *synoptic Gospels* emerge as more powerful vis-à-vis Jesus than do the Jews in John, where Jesus is presented as thoroughly in control and giving stage cues whenever it is necessary for virtually lethargic combatants to take action against him. Not only does he have to give Judas his cue to set the betrayal process in motion (John 13:27), but the Jewish arresting party is so lacking in formidability that they wilt upon finally encountering their "captive" (John 18:6). Not only are the Jews in John simply too weak to constitute an obstacle for Jesus, they are incapable of even formulating a cohesive strategy for responding to him. It is the Pharisees more-so than "the Jews" who constitute the opposition.²² At times in John it seems as if Jesus struggles *for* the Jews as well as against them²³ and when they fail it is of their own accord, not because Jesus has crushed them. Indeed, *some Jews do* manage to believe in Jesus, while others at least remain uncommitted even after their questionings of him (e.g., John 7:31, 40, 43, 50; 8:31).

It is thus not because the Jews brought Jesus to execution that John describes them at such length and with such frequency for indeed the Jews did not cause anything to happen to Jesus. Rather, it is Jesus, whose actions are determined by God the Father, who directs all action within the Gospel. Instead, the literary function of the Jews is to symbolize or personify *unbelief*. To the extent that this observation commands our recognition, the emphasis on polemic is set in a wider perspective and diminished accordingly.

Of our three options, therefore, most adequate is the determination that John is primarily a *theologian* rather than a historian or even a polemicist and

that it is within the context of this overarching conceptual structure that we are to interpret his presentation of "the Jews." In John's theology, a nationality term, "the Jews," is co-opted as a symbol of unbelief or disbelief in the platform John is espousing.²⁴ On the one hand, the conclusion that the Jewish people were unbelievers would reflect, of course, the late gentile-Christian perspective from which the Gospel was written; on the other hand, insofar as others besides the Jews also fail to believe, the term "the Jews" lends itself to an expansive application, descriptive of them as well.

It is in this regard that the sometimes suggested typological antecedents derived from the Exodus narrative emerge as particularly compelling:²⁵ Should the seven signs in John be deliberate echoing of Moses' signs to Pharaoh in Exodus 7-16, then "the Jews" become the counterparts of Pharaoh. Both act in opposition to the deity by being obtuse, by disbelieving in addition to disregarding the signs which the deity performs. John exploits this imagery so as to reveal to his gentile-Christian audience the stubbornness of those who disbelieve.

It is important to recognize that the Jews are not the only major structural component other than Jesus; there is also the *disciples*.²⁶ Because the role of the disciples is often not sufficiently discerned, the specifically triangular structure of John does not receive its due. Accordingly, attention is divided only between Jesus and the Jews, occasioning an exaggerated sense of the importance of the conflict motif and thus a disposition to elevate to prominence the judgment that John is primarily a polemicist.

John's purpose was to advance a theological proposition about the Christ. In so doing, he required role models to be emulated by the audience, for while the readers may be able to achieve belief in Jesus, they themselves cannot approach being like Jesus. It is the *disciples* whom John advances as realistic role models. The fundamental structure of his work in this regard, accordingly, is not a struggle between Jesus and the Jews but rather a contrast between how the disciples, imperfect human beings such as they are, slowly but nevertheless surely learn to believe, and the Jews who, while ordinarily expected to accept the Christ figure, nevertheless repeatedly fail to live up to our anticipation.

Proposals for Addressing Anti-Judaism in John

Even though I do consider John anti-Jewish, I have advanced considerations suggestive of the view that anti-Judaism was subsidiary to other Johanne concerns. Yet whatever the degree of John's intended anti-Judaism in terms of John's readership over the centuries, the Fourth Gospel's anti-Judaism has seemingly fermented, such that today it surfaces as a dominating impression, evoking much concern among parties interested in ameliorating Christian-Jewish relations. Such concern has elicited, in turn, proposals regarding how the Fourth Gospel might be purged of its apparent hate and thereby brought

into closer conformity with the demeanor of the historical Jesus (a goal of course which, to be achieved, would first require the delineation of a convincing procedure for determining what that demeanor actually was!).

The resultant suggestions generally resolve themselves into at least three categories: (1) proposals for limiting the utilization of John; (2) proposals for altering the form in which the printed Gospel appears; and (3) proposals for implementing actual changes in the translations of the Johannine text.²⁷

The proposals to limit the actual *utilization* of John would mandate greater discretion in the lectionary selection of Johannine passages as well as a more extensive recourse to the epistles of Paul and to the synoptic Gospels in lieu of lectionary choices from John. Worthy of special mention is the creation of new forms of congregational liturgy.²⁸

The implementation of changes in the *form* of the printed Gospel would include the possible "pruning into footnotes. . . of the more vicious invectives"²⁹ and the incorporation of a commentary outlining the historical tensions productive of John's anti-Jewish statements and explaining as well John's proclivity for dualistic language (which has prompted his linkage of the Jews with the *devil*, with this world *below*, etc.³⁰). the overall intent of such a commentary would of course be to "remove the edge from the anti-Jewish polemic."³¹

It is in response to the idea of emending the *translation* process, however, that the greatest variety of suggestions has emerged, tempered by the criterion that the resultant changes should render the translation *closer* to John's original intent—or at the very least not stray from it! Thus, for example, one might argue that no harm to John's intent would eventuate from our reducing wherever possible the seventy-one total appearances of the term "the Jews" in the Gospel, since many such deletions could be accomplished from contexts where the abiding presence of the Jews would continue to be inferred even in the absence of the term. Moreover, in statements concerning holidays "of the Jews," the phrase "of the Jews" could easily be relinquished with nothing sacrificed (since the *Jewish* identity of the festivals is self-evident). Often the word *they* could be used in lieu of "the Jews" with no change of sense eventuating. Similarly, the expression "Jesus' own people" could frequently serve as the equivalent of the term "the Jews," simultaneously accomplishing a considerable softening in the anti-Jewish tenor. In Jesus' personal allusions to "the Jews," his words could be rendered by references to "my own people" or (when he is speaking to the disciples) "our own people" (since of course the Jews *are* Jesus' own people). Similarly, "in your law" could become "in our law." Such legitimate changes in translation would have the not incidental impact of restoring the impression of Jesus' *Jewish* identity, which traditional translations of John have customarily had the effect of stripping from him.³² Stating the matter most soberingly, since Jesus is Jewish, our retention of the term "the Jews" wherever that term ordinarily occasions inferences of Jesus' not himself

being Jewish emerges as an invalid, factually incorrect translation.

Somewhat more ambitious are other proposed substitutions. Since not all the Jews could possibly have been looking for Jesus at any one time, translations should specify a smaller number of Jews, with the resultant renderings possibly becoming "the authorities" or "those opposing him." Similarly, "religious leaders" could be substituted for "Pharisees." Given the automatic association of the word *synagogue* with modern Jews and Judaism, the words "exclude you from the synagogue" could be replaced by the expression "exclude you from places where they gather for worship and study," a rendering actually more precise in its description even than the word *synagogue* itself.

All such proposals, however, are properly speaking more in the domain of Christian scholarship than Jewish. The Fourth Gospel is not part of the Jewish Bible, and is therefore in a sense off-limits to Jewish thinkers. It is to be hoped that we all realize, however, that by virtue of John's literary license he has imputed to Jesus the Johannine theology and, insofar as Jesus is presented as the Christ and insofar as in John the Christ and the Father are one, John has imputed his personal theology to God personally. John thus in effect *makes God anti-Jewish!*

John makes Jesus the only way to God, establishing for Christianity a monopoly on the truth, and excluding Judaism from access to God. To be sure, any religion should be expected to express confidence in the truth of its own convictions. Indeed, any religion is entitled to express its self-confidence through assertions of its monopoly on the truth. But Judaism, whether or not it shares such views of monopoly for itself, is assuredly entitled to object—and object strongly—to John's exclusivism, and particularly to John's appropriation of Jesus *the Jew* as the critical fulcrum in the exclusionary process whereby the Jews are barred from access to God through the avenues of their own determination. At the very least, Jews would wish for a de-emphasizing of the Johannine view that "no one comes to the Father but by me" (John 14:6) in favor of the judgment that "in my Father's house are many mansions" (John 14:2)!

¹ R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), p. 3.

² Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:1; Tosephta Shabbat 13:5; Shabbat 116a; cf. Tosephta Yadayim 2:13.

³ I call attention to the study on this term by Terry L. Schram, *The Use of "Ioudaios" in the Fourth Gospel* (Ph.D. diss., Utrecht, 1973), to which I am frequently indebted in this essay.

⁴ Mark 7:3; Matt. 28:15; Luke 7:3; 23:50f. See the evaluation of these passages by Walter Gutbrod in Gerhard von Rad, Karl G. Kuhn, and Walter Gutbrod, "Israel... Ioudaios... Hebraios...," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1965), p. 376.

⁵ The added episode of the woman caught in adultery includes a mention of "scribe."

⁶ On the data now following, cf. the studies by Kuhn and Gutbrod, "Israel... Ioudaios...," pp. 356-391.

⁷ Cf. Schram, *Use*, p. 33.

⁸ J. Belser, "Der Ausdruck *hoi Ioudaioi* im Johannesevangelium," *Theologische Quartalschrift*, 84 (1902), 222.

⁹ Cf. among many others the listing by Karl Bornhäuser, *Das Johannesevangelium: Eine Missionschrift für Israel in Beiträge zur Förderung Christlicher Theologie* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1928), pp. 139-141.

¹⁰ John 9:22; cf. J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 40.

¹¹ Cf. my volume, *Mark's Treatment of the Jewish Leaders* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), pp. 15-28, 89-92.

¹² In what I feel is an overly complicated treatment, Schram, *Use*, attempts to compartmentalize all scholarship on John into four categories: those viewing John as neither a polemicist nor a historian those viewing him as both a polemicist and a historian, those viewing him as a historian without polemic, and those viewing him as a polemicist without historical interest. I find his personal argumentation persuasive (and draw upon it), but this rigid compartmentalization of the scholarship I find forced.

¹³ Schram, *Use*, p. 149

¹⁴ Cf. among others Wilhelm Oehler, *Das Johannesevangelium: Eine Missionschrift für die Welt* (Gütersloh, 1936), p. ix.

¹⁵ Cf. among others William Wrede, *Charackter und Tendenz des Johannesevangeliums* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1903), pp. 24ff.

¹⁶ See Culpepper, *Anatomy*, pp. 86ff.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Suggested particularly in the dovetailing of the episodes of Peter's denial and the Sanhedrin trial in both the Synoptics and John.

¹⁹ See especially Norman A. Beck, *Mature Christianity: The Recognition and Repudiation of the Anti-Jewish Polemic of the New Testament* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1985), pp. 11ff., 21ff.

²⁰ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, Anchor Bible, vol. 29 (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1966), p. lxx; cf. also Eldon J. Epp, "Anti-Semitism and the Popularity of the Fourth Gospel in Christianity," *Central Conference of American Rabbis Journal*, 22 (1975), 35-37; John Knox, *Criticism and Faith* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1952), pp. 74ff.

²¹ See Schram, *Use*, pp. 201f.

²² John Bowker, "The Origin and Purpose of St. John's Gospel," *New Testament Studies*, 11 (1964-1965), 400.

²³ Cf. Bornhäuser, *Johannesevangelium*, p. 152.

²⁴ See especially Culpepper, *Anatomy*, pp. 126-131.

²⁵ Robert H. Smith, "Exodus Typology in the Fourth Gospel," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 81 (1962), 329-342.

²⁶ Schram, *Use*, pp. 132ff.

²⁷ To my knowledge, the most extensively worked out presentation of such proposals is that by Beck, *Mature*, pp. 248-274, from whom many of the forthcoming suggestions are drawn.

²⁸ See especially John T. Townsend, *A Liturgical Interpretation in Narrative Form of the Passion of Jesus Christ, with a Dramatic Arrangement for Congregational Use* (New York: The National Conference of Christian and Jews, 1985).

²⁹ Beck, *Mature*, p. 251.

³⁰ Cf. Brown, *Gospel*, p. lxxii.

³¹ Beck, *Mature*, p. 259.

³² Cf. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), pp. 40-41: "Most Gentile readers of today do not notice the strangeness of John's having Jesus and the Jews around him refer to other Jews simply as 'the Jews'. . . (and often they think of Jesus more as a Christian than as a Jew!)." Knox, *Criticism*, p. 74, argues that the Fourth Gospel takes Jesus the Jew, who was put to death by Gentiles, and makes him a non-Jew put to death by Jews!

Copyright and Use:

As an ATLAS user, you may print, download, or send articles for individual use according to fair use as defined by U.S. and international copyright law and as otherwise authorized under your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement.

No content may be copied or emailed to multiple sites or publicly posted without the copyright holder(s)' express written permission. Any use, decompiling, reproduction, or distribution of this journal in excess of fair use provisions may be a violation of copyright law.

This journal is made available to you through the ATLAS collection with permission from the copyright holder(s). The copyright holder for an entire issue of a journal typically is the journal owner, who also may own the copyright in each article. However, for certain articles, the author of the article may maintain the copyright in the article. Please contact the copyright holder(s) to request permission to use an article or specific work for any use not covered by the fair use provisions of the copyright laws or covered by your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement. For information regarding the copyright holder(s), please refer to the copyright information in the journal, if available, or contact ATLA to request contact information for the copyright holder(s).

About ATLAS:

The ATLA Serials (ATLAS®) collection contains electronic versions of previously published religion and theology journals reproduced with permission. The ATLAS collection is owned and managed by the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) and received initial funding from Lilly Endowment Inc.

The design and final form of this electronic document is the property of the American Theological Library Association.