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Antichristic Crises: Proselytization Back into Jewish Religious Certainty--The Threat of Schismatic Abandonment

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Introduction

Errors of antichristic interpretation are best corrected by gaining a clearer understanding of the particular errors of the Johannine adversaries, literally and historically, within the late first-century Johannine Situation. If the three Antichrist passages in the Bible are to be taken seriously (1 Jn 2.18-25; 4.1-3; 2 Jn 7), these threats addressed by the Johannine Elder appear to have been from at least two sets of adversaries known to his contemporary audiences. They also had at one time seen themselves or were perceived by others as being fellow Christians; that is why the polemics were so intense. The pejorative label, *Antichristos*, however, was probably not an appellation used by these figures; rather, it was used against them by the Johannine Elder as a means of retarding their corruptive influence. Within this especially Christ-centered part of the early Christian movement, to be numbered among 'the party of the Antichrists' would have been a daunting penalty. As such, such a pejorative weapon may have been wielded in more than one direction, just as 'the Beast' was used with reference to more than one Roman leader in Revelation 13. In terms of faith and praxis, noting the particular errors of the Johannine Antichrists clarifies what the threats were in the original biblical settings, with special relevance for later generations.

The First Antichristic Crisis: Proselytization Back into Jewish Religious Certainty—The Threat of Schismatic Abandonment

The dialectical relationship between Johannine Christianity and Judaism has long been considered part of the background within the Johannine Situation, and the first antichristic threat appears to have represented a later phase within the history of Johannine engagements with Judaism.[1] Tensions with

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1. It is with good reason that C.K. Barrett argues that the Gospel of John is the most Jewish of all the Gospels, and that it must be read within its contemporary Jewish setting,

Judaism, however, were neither monolithic nor mono-faceted; they reflect many types of engagement *within* the larger Jewish movement. During the ministry of Jesus, northern–southern tensions between the Galilean Prophet and the Jerusalem-centered *Ioudaioi* are still preserved in the Johannine narrative rendered in written form some five decades later. Tensions with fellow Jewish followers of John the Baptist are also preserved in the earlier Johannine material. Within the first phase of Johannine Christianity—the Palestinian phase, between 30 and 70 CE—these were the first two of the seven crises discernable within the longitudinal Johannine Situation. Of course, all dates are approximate, but there are good reasons for seeing these as the general parameters.[2]

Continuing Development of Johannine Christianity

For the present study, however, the second and third phases of Johannine Christianity are of primary interest, dating between 70–85 and 85–100 CE respectively. The reconfiguration of Judaism after the fall of Jerusalem is the backdrop during this period, and it is likely that the Johannine evangelist moved to one of the mission-church settings. Here Johannine relations with local Jewish populations also entered a new phase. While alternative locations, such as Alexandria, trans-Jordan, and Antioch have been suggested as the likely center of what may properly be called 'the Johannine Situation'— that region from which the Johannine writings were produced—none is better suited than Ephesus and its surrounding regions in Asia Minor.[3]

as well as other ones. His book, *The Gospel of John and Judaism* (trans. D. Moody Smith; London: SPCK, 1975), sketches the Johannine setting within its Jewish context helpfully.

   2.   For instance, while it is impossible to know exactly when the Johannine leadership moved from Palestine to one of the mission churches, it probably followed the primary ministry of Paul (therefore, an earliest date would be between 55 and 65 CE), and the latest time would have been the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE (as much of the archaeological details in Jerusalem assume a pre-destruction state). Eusebius even makes mention of John's being assigned to Ephesus after the destruction of Jerusalem, either for conjectural or for historical reasons (*Hist. Eccles.* 3.1), so such a move is not unheard of. On an overlooked first-century clue to Johannine authorship, see P.N. Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), pp. 274-77.

   3.   In his new Johannine introductory monograph, Raymond E. Brown (*An Introduction to the Gospel of John* [ed. Francis J. Moloney; New York: Doubleday, 2003], pp. 204-206) reaffirms his judgment that Ephesus is the best of possible choices for the Johannine Situation. Virtually all challenges to Ephesus appear to be factors of wanting to demonstrate an alternative hypothesis such as the sites mentioned above. While the particular site cannot be known, the second-century unanimous (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccles.* 3.1, 18, 21, 23, 29, 31, 39; 4.14; 5.18, 24) connecting of the Johannine leadership with Ephesus has not been overturned by substantives objections.

Despite recent challenges against the constructs of Raymond Brown, J. Louis Martyn, and David Rensberger, however, their basic thesis still stands.[4] At the very least, Johannine Christians and local Jewish communities were engaged in a set of dialectical relationships between 70 and 100 CE.

While the *Birkat ha-Minim* probably functioned less as a universal or even a regional edict of excommunication for all open Jesus-adherents, and more as a *codification of emerging tendencies*,[5] it cannot be claimed that there were *no* pressures against the Jesus movement within middle-to-late first-century Judaism. Tensions between Jesus followers and other parts of the Jewish movement were acute before the destruction of Jerusalem, but following that cataclysmic event, Judaism itself was changed. With the demise of Jerusalem-based Judaism, Jewish faith and practice moved from a cult-centered religion to more of a text-centered one. The ascendancy of the Pharisaic movement and the shift toward Torah-adherence as the basis of normative Judaism heightened the emphasis on several Jewish commitments, including monotheism and separation from the Gentiles. It was within this sort of climate that the Jesus movement and the outreach to the Gentiles caused considerable consternation within orthodox Jewish communities. Where some might have seen this as gathering in the Diaspora (Jn 12.20-26), other Jewish leaders probably saw it as cavorting with the pagans.

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4.   While the thesis that Johannine Christians were expelled, or at least marginalized, within a local synagogal setting was argued powerfully by J. Louis Martyn (*History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* [Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 3rd edn, 2003]), Raymond E. Brown (*The Community of the Beloved Disciple* [New York: Paulist Press, 1982]), and David Rensberger (*Johannine Faith and Liberating Community* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1989]), some scholars have objected that relations between Jewish and Christian populations at this time were actually quite affable and that nothing like a widespread synagogue expulsion of Jesus-adherents is likely to have occurred. Variants of this objection are argued by Reuven Kimelman, '*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*, II (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), pp. 226-44; Steven Katz, 'Issues in the Separation of Judaism and Christianity after 70 C.E.: A Reconsideration', *JBL* 103 (1984), pp. 43-76; and William Horbury, 'The Benediction of the *Minim* and Early Jewish–Christian Controversy', *JTS* 33 (1982), pp. 19-61. While these objections may serve to add nuance to the thesis, they do not overturn it. This is Moody Smith's judgment ('What Have I Learned about the Gospel of John?', in Fernando Segovia [ed.], *'What is John?' Readers and Readings of the Fourth Gospel* [SBLSS, 3; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996], pp. 217-35), and it is with good reason. Familiarity and closeness of relationship may itself have been a *contributor* to tension, not an alleviator of it. Territoriality only exists within the *same* species of animal.

5.   See my *Christology*, pp. 120-27, 211-20, 241-49, and 'The *Sitz im Leben* of the Johannine Bread of Life Discourse and its Evolving Context', in Alan Culpepper (ed.), *Critical Readings of John 6* (BIS, 22; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), pp. 1-59 (32-40).

The *Birkat ha-Minim* reflects one of several attempts to retard Jesus-adherence within Judaism, and this is what is reflected not only in Jn 9.22; 12.42; and 16.2, but also in several other Johannine passages.

With the move to Asia Minor, or wherever the second phase of the Johannine Situation developed, the Johannine leadership (at least the Beloved Disciple and a few others) probably joined groups of believers that were already straddling Jewish and Christian communities. Some Gentile Christians might have been meeting apart from the synagogue, but a likely conjecture is that a significant number of Jesus-adherents were caught in between Jewish and non-Jewish communities of faith. Rather than envisioning this phase of Johannine Christianity as *ever* involving a circle totally within a larger Jewish circle, a more likely inference is one of overlapping circles between the synagogue and the Jesus movement, which the Johannine leadership plausibly joined. In the Jamnia era (especially during its establishment between 70–90 CE), open belief in Jesus as the Messiah was probably discouraged within many Jewish communities, but complete expulsions of any population segment are never entirely possible. Nor was this necessarily the goal of the Twelfth Benediction. A more realistic inference is that the *Birkat* against the 'Nazarenes' was used to motivate a more balanced form of monotheism, with the result that some Jewish admirers of Jesus softened their public interests in Jesus. More devout followers of Jesus, however, left the synagogue and became *aposunagōgos*, for confessing Jesus as the Christ (Jn 9.22; 1 Jn 2.22). The Johannine leadership thus settled squarely in the extra-synagogal Christian movement in the process of individuating away from its parental Jewish community.

Table 1. *An Imaginary Dialogue between Johannine*
and Jewish Leaders in Asia Minor

- *Johannine Leaders*: We have come from the Palestinian homeland with good news: Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Jewish Messiah! He has become the means by which God is offering eternal life to the world and gathering together the scattered children of God among the nations.

- *Jewish Leaders*: Yes, thank you, that may be fine, but how do you know Jesus was the Messiah? We have heard of this message before, and all it has brought us is the headache of welcoming Gentiles into our midst, causing some of our membership to split off and join mixed groups of Jesus-adherents. What evidence do you have of Jesus' being the authentic Messiah instead of a false prophet? No prophet comes from backwater Galilee, only from royal Bethlehem, King David's city.

- *Johannine Leaders*: He did many signs—the same sort as were done by Elijah and the Prophets of old. The great images of Israel—the Vine and the vineyard, the Light of the world, the Shepherd of the flock, the Bread of life, the Way, the Truth, and the Life—all of these were fulfilled in Jesus. Moses wrote of him, and Scriptures point to him as the Son of the Father.

- *Jewish Leaders*: Calling God his 'Father' is a bit much! Indeed, God is the Father of us all, but the claim of a special relationship such as that is to make himself *equal to God*—that is blasphemous! He must be a false prophet if he spoke of himself in such presumptuous ways.

- *Johannine Leaders*: Actually, Jesus is the authentic Prophet because he speaks only what the Father has commanded him to say. That is why he and the Father are one—if you have seen the Son you have seen the Father. His being the one prophesied by Moses is further clarified by his proleptic word coming true; he even declared things ahead of time so that when they came true it would be evident that he was sent by God.

- *Jewish Leaders*: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is *One* God!' Anyone who professes to follow this Nazarene 'prophet' must be put *out of the synagogue*! Curses rest upon all who forsake the oneness of God and move in such heretical and ditheistic directions.

- *Johannine Leaders*: We cannot help but testify to *what we have seen and heard*, and therefore we must abide in the truth as far as we know it. God's Light has been shown to you, but why do you reject it? Do you really know the Father to begin with; are you wishing to stay in the dark lest it be exposed that your religious platforms are rooted in creaturely origins rather than in God's authentic workings? In your rejecting the Revealer, you are exposing your own slavery to sin and darkness.

- *Jewish Leaders*: We have never been slaves of anyone; we are the very children of Abraham and followers of Moses! Apart from the true people of God, you have no part in the *Way* of Moses, the *Truth* of the Torah, and the *Life* of the children of Abraham. Not only was your hero unlearned and ignorant, but he broke Sabbath Law, and his messianic claims are false.

- *Johannine Leaders*: But if you really were authentic followers of Moses you would recognize the one about whom he wrote and do his works. While Moses brought the Law, Jesus Christ brought Grace and Truth. He came as the Light of the world in order to deliver the world from all darkness.

With the Johannine separation from direct synagogal fellowship, the process of individuation was furthered. Additional Gentile converts were probably added to the community, and a more global and universalistic interpretation of the Jewish faith and promise to the nations emerged. The gathering of 'sheep not of this fold' (Jn 10.16) probably becomes a reality during this time, and the fear of Jewish authorities for those who confessed Jesus openly must have borne existential resonance within the larger Johannine family. Likewise, the coming to belief in Jesus by Jewish people in the narrative (Jn 6.14; 7.40; 9.38; 10.21; 11.45; 12.11; 19.38-39) must have been crafted as an encouragement to believers and an enticement for others.[6]

6. Note the rhetorical function of misunderstanding within dialogical narrative: see my earlier studies, *Christology*, pp. 222-23, and 'The *Sitz im Leben*', pp. 17-24. In

Complete breaks with synagogue members, however, would have been unlikely, and the Johannine leadership probably continued to appeal to Jewish family and friends that Jesus really was an authentic agent from God. Within those discussions, the 'Sonship' of Jesus as one who was sent by the Father as the Mosaic Prophet (Deut. 18.15-22) appears to have continued as an ongoing debate.[7] Thus, Jesus' Elijah-type signs, his fulfilling of the Scriptures, his embodying of the typologies of Israel in the I-Am sayings, and his fulfilled proleptic words were all designed to convince Jewish family and friends that Jesus was indeed the Jewish Messiah, worthy of belief and adherence. The first edition of John was probably finalized at this time as an attempt to bring hearers and readers to belief in Jesus as the Jewish Messiah (Jn 20.31).[8] Likewise, Jesus' debates with the Jewish leaders (chs. 5; 7–10) would have had great relevance for Johannine believers. In all of them, the refusal of religious leaders to receive Jesus and his testimony—loving the praise of religious peers over the glory of God—must have reflected the perceptions of Johannine Christians with respect to their disappointing evangelistic endeavors.

Nonetheless, some Jesus-adherents stayed within the synagogue and refused to come out openly as his followers. Brown's inference of 'crypto-Christians' describes these conflicted individuals suitably.[9] However, other Jewish family and friends probably appealed to their former community members, calling them *back* to the biblical way of Moses and the familial heritage of Abraham (Jn 7–8). Central within their appeal was likely the unity of God and the relegation of Jesus to the status of a human leader, but nothing near the Sonship and Messianic references to which Johannine Christians had become accustomed to using in their meetings for worship and apologetic rhetoric. These Jewish proselytizers may even have emphasized Jesus' having been a good man (Jn 7.12), or even a prophet (Jn 7.40), but they would have also insisted that one cannot confess him as the

addition to Tables 1–3 in the present essay, see the alternative sketching of these dialogues and others in 'The *Sitz im Leben*', pp. 32-57 (esp. Tables 8 and 10).

7. See my 'The Having-Sent-Me Father: Aspects of Agency, Irony, and Encounter in the Johannine Father–Son Relationship', *Semeia* 85 (1999), pp. 33-57, for earlier and later disputations over the agency of Jesus and the rhetorical origin and function of Father–Son associations.

8. In my rhetorical analysis of John's narrative, *Navigating the Living Waters of the Gospel of John: On Wading with Children and Swimming with Elephants* (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Press, 2000), three rhetorical strategies in John are developed: witnesses to Jesus, the signs of Jesus, and the fulfilled word.

9. See Brown's *Introduction*, pp. 172-75, where he develops further his inference that Johannine Christianity faced increasing tension over those who claimed to be Jesus-adherents privately, but refused to do so publicly for fear of Jewish ostracizing, criticism, or at least marginalization.

Messiah/Christ or the Son of the Father and still claim to be a monotheistic Jew. Therefore, in appealing to Jesus-adherents to give up their misdirected beliefs in exchange for the privileges of synagogue faith and life, they exhorted Johannine Christians to *return to the synagogue* and the religious security pertaining thereto. To 'love the world' thus could have involved attachment to religious community and its privileges as well as to pagan Hellenistic society (Jn 3.17-21; 17.6-19; 1 Jn 2.15-17; 5.1-5).

This is where the antichristic schism of 1 Jn 2.18-25 comes into play. Apparently, Johannine community members had defected by the time the first Johannine Epistle was written, and the writer sought to explain the community loss on the basis that they *never really were sincere in their apparent belief in Jesus as the Christ*. Plausibly, their commitments to Jesus as the Christ waned in comparison to the appeal of religious certainty back within the Jewish community of faith. It was more established sociologically, more rooted in Jewish tradition and customs, apparently more biblical with reference to monotheism and other aspects of faith and practice, and the promise of blessing to the children of Abraham and the followers of Moses must have held considerable sway. Respect for Jesus might have continued, but accommodations similar to Ebionism allowed a return to the synagogue, and they probably functioned in similar ways within contemporary Matthean Christianity, as well. These religious defections, however, were experienced by the Johannine remnant as the rejection of God's saving-revealing agency in exchange for that which is of human origin.

Table 2: *An Imaginary Dialogue between Johannine Leaders and Jewish Defectors*

- *Johannine Leaders*: How could you leave us and go back into the unbelieving world? This departure just goes to show that you never really were a part of us; we thought you were sincere in your loyalty to Christ, but your defection shows you never were grounded in the truth!

- *Jewish Defectors*: Okay, but knowing Jesus was really the Messiah/Christ is a bit of a gamble. Were his signs really authentic? We heard about them, but we never really saw any of them. Likewise, it never was clear to us where he was from or where he was going.

- *Johannine Leaders*: But Jesus told us where he was from; he was sent as the prophetic agent from the Father, and he also returned to the Father. His works and words signified his divine commission; blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believe!

- *Jewish Defectors*: Jesus might be acceptable as an exemplary man, but your worship material––confessing him to be the only begotten Son of the Father and the creative Word of God—is just too much for our monotheistic sensibilities! If we had to choose between the Father and 'the Son', we go with *the Father*. You cannot have it both ways! You either worship *one God*, or you don't.

- *Johannine Leaders*: But that's the whole point! The Father and the Son are one; to reject the Son is to forfeit the Father. But if you receive the Son, you also receive the Father. Jesus is one with the Father precisely because he did only what the Father instructed. To see and hear him is to see and hear the Father.

- *Jewish Defectors*: We prefer the Jewish community of faith, complete with its emphasis on certainty of Scripture and customary Jewish ways of living. Your fledgling community, along with the presence of non-Jewish members, is not exactly an improvement over the more established religious society that we have rejoined; it is our birthright as children of Abraham!

- *Johannine Leaders*: Love not the world and the things of the world! You are teachers of Israel, and yet you do not know these things? You must be born *from above*; otherwise you cannot enter the Kingdom of God. You love the praise of men rather than the Glory of God; but to believe in the Son is to receive the eternal life availed by the heavenly Father.

The departure of Jewish members of Johannine Christianity back into Judaism must have been experienced as betrayal, and the resulting conjecture was that they must never have been rooted in God's revelation to begin with. Therefore, co-opting the very coin used to proselytize Jesus-adherents back into the synagogue—*adherence to the Father*—this value was used by the Elder as an appeal to stave off further defections. To reject the one the Father has sent—the Son—is to forfeit the very thing one had hoped to gain: the pleasure of the Father. Indeed, the center of the Father–Son relationship in the Johannine Gospel is the agency of the Son and his direct representation of the Father, based upon Jesus' fulfillment of the Prophet-like-Moses typology of Deuteronomy 18. Jewish leaders' accusations that Jesus was the presumptuous prophet who speaks only of himself are countered by the Johannine Jesus, and his authenticity is emphasized repeatedly in John as having been testified to by the Father, his works, the Holy Spirit, and his fulfilled words. In so doing, the equating of the Son with the agency of the Father functioned to diminish recent defections back into Judaism and to counter such propensities in the future.

It is to counter the appeals of religious certainty and the appeal of synagogue community life that the first use of antichristic rhetoric is employed within 1 John. The yoking of Anti-Messiah mythology to the ultimate betrayal of community values was an especially powerful ploy for confronting Jewish-Christian defectors. Not only was their error a factor of rejecting the Messiah/Christ, thereby working against the promise of Israel's blessing to the nations, but in denying the Son they were also forfeiting the pleasure of the Father, the very one who had sent the Son to begin with. Further, in denying the Son that was sent by the Father, they were warned that rejecting Jesus as the Jewish Messiah/Christ would result in their forfeiting *the*

Father, thus thwarting their primary religious goal. Such rhetoric exposed the *antichristic errors* of the defectors, and it worked to offset the likelihood of further defections by others.

The Second Antichristic Crisis: Docetizing Advocacy of Worldly Assimilation—The Threat of Invasionist Seduction

An additional complication followed the distancing of Johannine Christians from local Jewish faith communities. With the rising expectation of emperor worship as the primary expression of loyalty to Rome under the reign of Domitian (81–96 CE), those who could not claim to be participants in Jewish faith and life were exempt from the synagogue dispensation excusing Jews from having to worship Caesar as an expression of loyalty. Instead, a Jewish tax of two drachmas was levied against the Jews after the revolt, and this was precisely the same amount that was expected as a tithe to be paid to the Temple system in Jerusalem. In effect, Jews were given a stiffer penalty—a monetary one—due to their revolt against the 'provision' of Rome.[10]

For followers of Jesus who had withdrawn from the synagogue, however, they were expected to offer incense, to reverence Caesar's statue, to declare 'Caesar is Lord', or to perform any combination of the three as a public demonstration of their compliance with Rome. Gentile Christians might not have been troubled by such expectations—they had always worshipped the king or the emperor. Jewish Christians, however, were troubled by such blasphemies, and they called for the willingness to suffer for one's faith rather than forsaking loyalty to Christ at the behest of local Roman officials. This led to the second antichristic threat, although it was the third crisis during the Asia-Minor setting of the new Johannine Situation.[11] This led to a significant development in the process of further individuation from the synagogue—the shift from being *Christian Jews* to becoming *Jewish Christians*. Therefore, where the early period was a Palestinian one (30–70 CE), the move to Asia Minor led to a middle period wherein the Johannine 'community' was established (70–85 CE), which led to a later period in which the focus appears to have shifted from a primary community to several (85–100 CE).[12]

10. See Richard Cassidy's discussion of 'The Jewish Tax and the Cult of Rome's Emperors', in his *John's Gospel in New Perspective: Christology and the Realities of Roman Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), pp. 6-16.

11. See the outlining of all seven crises within the Johannine situation over a 70-year period in Appendix II, below.

12. Martyn's noting of this transition is highly significant (*History and Theology*, pp. 145-67). In my view, what separates the third phase of Johannine Christianity from the second involved: (a) individuation from Judaism, (b) the addition of Gentile members to

Within this situation, Gentile newcomers to faith in Jesus as the Jewish Messiah were probably able to reconcile many aspects of faith and practice into a better life, but old habits die hard. It is doubtful that a preponderance of Jewish customs was adopted, and as was the case in all the missionary churches, followers of Jesus faced the challenge of distinguishing upstanding moral and religious practices from their alternatives. As a means of legitimating assimilation, Gentile-Christian preachers/teachers probably taught a less sectarian gospel message, easing requirements for discipleship on the basis that Jesus did not suffer, nor would he have expected his followers to do so. On some matters this may have been acceptable, but with reference to the public offering of emperor worship, this was beyond the pale for most Jewish-Christian leaders, including Johannine ones. Here the correspondence between Pliny and Trajan (around 110 CE, some two decades later)[13] casts valuable light.

Table 3. *Governor Pliny's Concerns Expressed*
to Emperor Trajan about Christians

- Governor Pliny confesses that he did not have much experience at dealing with Christians, and that he wonders how to deal with them. He wonders if they should be pardoned if they recant, but he also wonders if recanting would really make a difference and ponders punishing them anyway simply for bearing the name, 'Christian'.

- He then declares his practice of interviewing those accused of being 'Christians', and where they did not recant, he summarily had them executed as obstinate sorts. If they were Roman citizens, he had them sent to Rome for trial there.

- The means by which these suspects could be cleared of their charges included any of the following: they could deny they were or had ever been Christians; they could invoke the names of other gods; they could offer prayer with wine and incense to Caesar's image (which the governor says he had placed there, alongside other idols for that *explicit* purpose); and finally they could curse Christ. None who would do *any* of these things could be suspected of *ever* having been a Christian, and they were dismissed at no penalty.

- Others named by informants acknowledged they had been followers of Christ in the past (three years ago or twenty-five years ago), but they denied being Christians presently. They all worshiped Caesar's image, along with other idols, and cursed Christ.

the community of faith, (c) the development of multiple Christian communities in the region, (d) ongoing dialogue with extramural issues precipitated by Jewish and Roman partners in dialogue, and (e) the emergence of a set of intramural dialogues within and between emerging Christian congregations.

13.   These tables are constructed upon inferences from Pliny's letter to Trajan (*Letters of Pliny* 10.96) and Trajan's response to Pliny (*Letters of Pliny* 10.97).

- Some of the accused declared themselves to be 'innocent' of the charge because they had merely gathered together before the dawn, had sung a hymn antiphonally to Christ 'as though he were God', had committed themselves to upstanding virtues and moral practices, and had later come back to partake of ordinary food. They were indeed willing to forsake such meetings when ordered to forsake such associations, so they seemed less than guilty.

- However, Governor Pliny had just tortured to death two young Christian women who were called 'ministers' among the Christians, seeking to get to the bottom of their teachings. While he felt grieved about it, he also feels he found nothing other than religious superstition, which made him question the continuing of such a disciplinary process.[14]

- This is why he is seeking counsel from the emperor; if he is to continue such a program of punishment, he worries that there might be no end in sight. He also reported that some of the Christian influence was waning, and that pagan-religion merchants and traffickers were making a comeback, despite nearly having been put out of business by the buoyancy of the Christian movement.

- So, what should he do? Should he keep trying these Christians, should he hunt them all down, or should he take a more moderate approach over and against the customary procedure?

Notice within these points several things. First, at least some Christians are admitted to have been tortured and killed at the hands of Roman officials seeking to enforce loyalty to the empire, and one of the ways to do this was to require cursing Christ and/or worshiping the emperor. While the persecuting of Christians was probably not a programmatic one, all it takes is a few painful examples for the issue to be a pressing one. Second, the Governor seems to have felt trapped by precedents, probably ones that had been in place since the reign of Domitian. Third, lists are about, and others less favoring of Christians (local cult-trade merchants or others?) might have turned them in to the Romans to allow them to do the dirty work. Fourth, some alleged Christians denied being authentic followers of Jesus despite worshiping with them and meeting with them—even the pagan Governor confesses that any who deny Christ or offer sacrifices to Caesar *cannot* be 'guilty' of being a Christian. Fifth, some had even stopped worshiping with other Christians, thus denying the fellowship of believers, in order to escape punishment. How much more would fellow Christians who had suffered for their faith, or seen loved ones suffer, have felt that denying Christ and his community in *this* life merited the forfeiting of eternal life in the hereafter? To these matters, the Emperor Trajan replies briefly:

14. This is the case that Cassidy argues convincingly in *John's Gospel in New Perspective*.

Table 4. *Trajan's Counsel to Pliny about Christians*

- Pliny is commended for his discerning approach, for a single rule cannot be applied in all cases on such matters.

- Pliny is advised not to pursue Christians actively to persecute them, and not pay attention to anonymous lists of names. That is not in keeping with the civilized times the Roman authorities wished to embody.

- However, if a Christian is put on trial and warned clearly of penalties for not reverencing Caesar, and if he or she does not heed the warning, the penalty must be swift and sure.

- If the accused is willing to worship Roman gods, though, and to show public emperor laud, then they should receive pardon through their repentance.

- Implicitly, in order to maintain the dominator–subject relationship between Rome and inhabitants of Asia Minor, examples must be made of the defiant— especially the likes of these Christians.

Apparently, Pliny does not institute these practices as innovations; they had been standard for some time—probably going back to the reign of Domitian. Imagine, though, what would have happened if supposed Christians would have shown up for worship having publicly confessed Caesar as Lord, offered incense to his idol, or denied Christ and his community. If supposedly authentic members of the community had been publicly duplicitous, however, this would have caused a considerable rift. Christian leadership, including Johannine leaders, would have felt obligated to discipline such compromises as sins of apostasy, and these sorts of assimilations would likely have been the focus of claims to sin and sinlessness in 1 John 1–2. Rather than seeing claiming 'not to have sinned' as insistence on static perfectionism, an equally plausible inference is that some had assimilated with regards to Roman expectations of emperor laud, especially if they could not claim the dispensation of synagogue membership. The last verse of 1 John (5.21) may thus be understood as a blunt declaration of the larger concern: 'Little Children, stay away from [emperor-worship?] *idols*!'

As a means of legitimating their less costly path of discipleship, some Gentile Christians probably took a less rigorous approach to matters of Christian praxis, which bore implications in terms of Christian faith commitments. While aspects of ethical practice may also have been involved, such as boundaries of sexual license as addressed in the Corinthian Correspondence and Revelation 2–3, the issue of public demonstrations of emperor laud must have been a sticking point. When confronted by the Johannine leadership, the Gentile Christian leaders probably declared it was not a problem if one was not sincere in the performance of such rites. Later, in the Martyrdom of Polycarp, the Roman soldier is presented as pleading

with the 86-year-old bishop to offer even a token of emperor laud, even if insincere. He had his job to do, and while he did not want to kill the elderly Christian leader, he was under an obligation to carry out his orders. Many Gentile Christians in Asia Minor probably perceived the issue in ways similar to how Americans might regard pledging allegiance to the flag, or saying the 'Pledge of Allegiance' in school. Yes, they were pledging loyalty, but it did not displace their loyalty to Christ—so they thought. The Jewish-Christian leadership, however, would have thought of it as a real problem and would have called for the rejection of such practices. This would have produced the following sorts of disputations.

Table 5. *An Imaginary Dialogue between Gentile*
and Jewish Christians Regarding Emperor Laud

- *Jewish Christians*: Love not the world, nor the things of the world. To follow Jesus is to be willing to forgo some pleasures and comforts of this life in exchange for eternal life in abundance, which begins in the here and now. If Jesus is our Lord and our God, we should live that way.

- *Gentile Christians*: It is permissible to demonstrate one's loyalty to the Empire if required to do so, especially if one knows Jesus is Lord in one's heart. The Roman soldier even tells us it's no big deal; he has to do his job, and that I've got to do mine.

- *Jewish Christians*: No, you cannot worship Caesar as Lord and still be loyal to Christ. There is only one Lord, and we are accountable to following him and no other. To say Caesar is Lord or to offer incense to his idol is blatant idolatry, and it is sin.

- *Gentile Christians*: This is not a sin, and we are without sin despite having done so. After all, we should not be expected to suffer for our faith; the following of Christ is supposed to bring good results such as eternal life, not suffering and death.

- *Jewish Christians*: Anyone who claims to be without sin makes God a liar, and the truth is not in him. After all, Jesus died on our behalf—are you willing to do any less? Are you willing to forfeit the very gift of his atonement sacrifice?

- *Gentile Christians*: No, Jesus did not suffer; nor did he die. He was God—divine—and the divine is immutable, eternal, and incorruptible. Gotcha! If Jesus was divine he cannot have suffered, and we should not, therefore, be expected to do the same.

- *Jewish Christians*: Wrong! If you do not accept that Jesus has *come in the flesh*, and are unwilling to ingest his flesh-and-bloodness, and are unwilling to risk suffering and death in solidarity with him and his community, do not expect to be raised with him in the afterlife.

Given the likelihood of these sorts of conversations, *Gentile Christians* faced an acute set of issues. As penalties for refusing to offer worship to the emperor became more widespread, Gentile-Christians not only sought to avoid persecution, but advocates of assimilation traveled among the churches, seeking to provide a 'middle way' between the requirements of Caesar and Christ. The issues faced by *Jewish Christians*, however, were slightly different. As this second intramural threat developed, the Johannine Elder brought to bear the pejorative authority of earlier antichristic rhetoric and called for readers/hearers of his first and second Epistle to be wary of teachers who come with an apparently attractive message. If they refuse to believe Jesus came in the flesh, they embody the spirit of the Antichrist and should be rejected on all accounts.

Again, what is likely is that problems of praxis drove definitions of faith. Docetism was not attractive simply because it was better suited to a Greco-Roman cosmology; it was the implications of a non-suffering Jesus that made docetic Christology attractive during the rising expectation of emperor worship. If Jesus did not suffer or die, neither do his followers need to do so. Against these docetizing tendencies, the material in the final edition of the Johannine Gospel can be seen to stave off these developments. The *Word became flesh* and dwelt among us (Jn 1.14). Believers must ingest Jesus' flesh-and-bloodness, and be willing to go with him to the cross if they expect to be raised up on the last day (Jn 6.51-66). The Holy Spirit will keep followers amid persecution from the world (Jn 15–17). Physical water and blood flowed from the side of Jesus, and the testimony of the eyewitness who beheld these things is true (Jn 19.34-35). And finally, just as Peter had suffered and died, the calling of every disciple is to follow Jesus at all costs (Jn 21.18-25).

Therefore, the Johannine Elder yokes the pejorative authority of the former antichristic threat to staving off the impending one. Believers are therefore called to reject any who come to their community teaching false aspects of praxis legitimated by a docetizing Christology. Likewise, any who claim to be 'without sin' regarding assimilation and 'loving the world', and any who are willing to foster division within the community cannot claim to love God whom they have not seen without loving the brothers and sisters within the community that they have seen. Again, offering public emperor worship might not have been the only aspect of assimilative controversy involved, but it was probably one of the most striking of issues. After all, if even a pagan Governor such as Pliny declared later that such persons (including cases between three and twenty-five years earlier!) could not have been authentic Christians, the sentiment would have been all the more acute within the Christian community.

It would also be an overstatement to say that teaching assimilation or a docetic Christology was the *primary* interest of these Gentile preachers and teachers. They may simply have been wanting to bring edifying messages to their audiences with assimilative asides playing a relatively minor role within the overall teaching. These may have been incidental themes rather than central agendas. It is the Johannine Elder, however, who (a) heightens the urgency by posing a litmus test as a means of testing their doctrinal adequacy, and who (b) yokes that measure to the pejorative label, 'Antichrist'. 'Do they confess that Jesus came in the flesh or not?' became the incisive tool of dividing truth from error. If not, they embody the spirit of the earlier Antichrist, which has now come to land in the form of seductively 'good news' preaching and teaching.

The error of the second antichristic threat was thus the unwillingness to stand in the teaching of the community—both on aspects of faith and praxis—wherein the appeal of easy discipleship was advocated over and against the costly price of Christian faithfulness. Between 1 Jn 4.1-6 and 2 John 7–11 the threat appears to have worsened, and these 'progressive' assimilationists are accused of not abiding in the teaching of Christ, but 'going beyond the teaching', thereby forfeiting the faith and promise they had hoped to embrace. Whereas the first antichristic error denied the Messiahship of Christ Jesus in the name of Jewish religious certainty, the second antichristic error denied the human suffering and death of Jesus Christ in the name of contextual accommodation. One was thus a conservative temptation, while the second was a progressive one. In addressing both errors of the Johannine Antichrists, however, the Elder appealed for solidarity with Jesus as the Son of God (1 Jn 5.10) and finalized the testimony of the Beloved Disciple after his death as a means of unifying the larger movement and reminding believers of that which they had heard from the beginning.

Interpretive Results

While these two antichrist threats were acute and real within the first-century Johannine Situation, they were not the only threats faced in the New Testament times. Therefore, several clarifying points deserve here to be made, both about Johannine Christianity in longitudinal perspective, and second, regarding interpretive implications for later generations. Staying with the original context, the following points deserve to be made.

(a) First, the docetizing Antichrists *were not Gnostics*, but as they were marginalized from fellowship with Johannine Christians, they took the Johannine Gospel with them, and this likelihood probably contributed to second-century Johannine-Gnostic developments and connections. They also probably did not call themselves Docetists nor did they think of their faith as being flawed. They may even have thought of themselves as more

theologically orthodox than their counterparts because of their high-christo-logical inclinations. They may even have seen themselves as embodying the spirit of the Johannine dialectical ethos, embodied by the Stage-Five (in James Fowler's Faith Development outline) faith[15] and may have thought of themselves as more advanced than the Jewish-Christian Johannine leadership. This might explain why the Johannine Gospel and ethos can be seen to have been embraced within second-century gnosticizing Christianity. The spurned Gentile-Christian preachers likely took the Johannine Gospel with them and may have set up alternative expressions of the Johannine trajectory. This may have been implied in the tendency to 'run ahead' of the Elder's teaching.

(b) Second, the Johannine leaders *were not the only Christian leaders* to offset the rise of false teachings and schismatic tensions. Ignatius of Antioch demonstrates clearly the function of raising high the boundaries of community inclusion, and he advocates aggressively the appointing of singular bishops in the churches of Asia Minor as an attempt to clarify leadership structures and authority. This also explains the rise of Mt. 16.17-19 within Jewish Christianity as an attempt to preserve apostolic authority within a hierarchical structure. The Johannine tradition was probably involved dialectically with such developments, and in the later Johannine material, Peter is shown to return the Keys of the Kingdom to Jesus (Jn 6.68-69), the Holy Spirit is emphasized as the effective agency of Christocratic ministry (Jn 14–16), and a plurality of leadership is imbued with inspired, apostolic, and priestly authority (Jn 20.21-23). In fact, no fewer than seven parallels to Mt. 16.17-19 can be identified within John, but they are all distinctive, and plausibly corrective, parallels.[16]

(c) Third, in their attempts to stave off the threat of Docetism and other problems among the mission churches, the institution of hierarchical structures of leadership *also was experienced adversely* by some Christians who were not a direct threat. This may be reflected in the presentation of Diotrephes in 3 John. Rather than seeing the Johannine–Matthean dialectic as a direct engagement of a Matthean text, all it takes is one strident application of hierarchical structure for the matter to become an ideological and theological one for the Johannine leadership. Therefore, while the Elder is willing to follow some of the accountability procedures of Mt. 18.15-17—communicating with Diotrephes personally, communicating also with the *ekklēsia* (the source of his legitimation) and promising to confront him

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15. James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981).

16. These arguments and their implications are laid out in *Christology*, pp. 221-51; *The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus*, pp. 119-25; 'Was the Fourth Evangelist a Quaker?', *QRT* 76 (1991), pp. 27-43; and 'Petrine Ministry and Christocracy: A Response to *Ut Unum Sint*', *One in Christ* 40.1 (2005), pp. 3-39.

again—he also deals with the effects of hierarchical innovation practically, historically, and theologically. He first calls for Gaius not to deny the hospitality that Diotrephes and his kin have failed to extend to his community, and he then finalized and circulated the witness of the Beloved Disciple as an appeal to egalitarian and familial ecclesiology in the name of Jesus' original intention for the church.

(d) Fourth, *a variety of dialectical engagements* within the larger Christian movement can be seen to have taken place within the Johannine witness, and while some of these were later, some were also earlier. For instance, various aspects of the first edition of John, probably finalized between 80–85 CE, can be seen to be augmenting and also amending Mark. At least partial familiarity with some of Mark appears evident for readers of the first edition of John, and yet neither is dependent on the other. Rather, interfluence may be inferred, especially during the oral stages of their traditions, and Mark and John deserve to be called 'the *Bi-optic* Gospels'.[17] Theologically, though, John provides an alternative perspective to prevalent Synoptic ones— apparently with intentionality. The valuation of the feeding as 'they ate and were satisfied' *in all five Synoptic feeding narratives* is overturned by the Johannine Jesus in Jn 6.26. To embrace the meaning thusly is to fail to see the revelatory power of the feeding as a *sign*, and this has direct implications for appreciating why miracles were performed by Jesus—especially for those who have not seen (Jn 20.29), either historically or existentially. Likewise, Markan predictions of the return of Christ before the passing of the eyewitness generation (Mk 9.1; 13.30) are contextualized by the Johannine narrator (Jn 21.21-22) as a means of explaining the delay of the *Parousia*. Paraphrastically, 'this never was what Jesus predicted; because of what Jesus said to Peter people got it wrong, and a fallacious rumor was thereby spread. What Jesus actually said was...' Therefore, this dialectical engagement with other Jesus traditions reflects an overall set of *interfluential dialogues* between developing Gospel traditions, but not those alone. Indeed, even the preaching and teaching about Jesus' will for his followers would have affected gospel narratives and epistolary exhortations alike.

(e) Fifth, it is within these larger sets of dialectical relationships that the two antichristic threats deserve to be envisioned. Like real life, one crisis seldom waits for another to rear its ugly head, and this was probably the case in the first-century church. Further, it is often the rising of an additional crisis that diminishes the effect of an earlier one, and rather than getting things resolved, many a problem continued even if it were felt to be less pressing than its competitors. Therefore, when viewed in longitudinal

17. See my 'John and Mark: the *Bi-Optic* Gospels', in Robert Fortna and Tom Thatcher (eds.), *Jesus in Johannine Tradition* (Philadelphia: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001), pp. 175-88.

perspective, Johannine Christianity faced at least seven crises over three basic periods—with two primary crises in each, and the seventh spanning all three periods. Within the first period, the Palestinian Period (30–70 CE), tensions with Jerusalem-centered religious leaders and followers of John the Baptist appear to have been acute. Within the second period, Asia Minor I (70–85 CE), tensions with local Jewish communities and growing pressure by local Roman authorities become acute. Within the third period, Asia Minor II (85–100 CE), tensions with docetizing preachers and institutionalizing proto-Ignatian leaders become acute. Overall, then, ongoing dialogues with other traditions continue—as they had from the beginning—as the Johannine tradition poses an autonomous-yet-not-isolated alternative perspective on Jesus' ministry and its implications for later generations. The two antichristic threats represent the first crises in the second and third Periods of the Johannine Situation.

Some of this backdrop helps clarify who the original Johannine Antichrists might have been—literally and historically—as well as casting light on their particular errors of faith and practice. Such knowledge also poses an improvement over historic errors of antichristic speculation and interpretation. For later generations, though, how does one make *interpretive sense* of the Johannine Antichrists, learning from their errors and the Elder's confrontations of them? Practically and theologically, the following considerations may be of service.

(a) First, the *psychological and sociological* power of these adversarial texts deserves to be appreciated and respected. Especially for one who aspires to be faithful to Christ and the way of Christ, being tagged with an antichristic label can be damaging in the extreme. Indeed, one cannot really be a heretic as long as one is aspiring to be faithful to the truth of Scripture —misguided or wrong, yes, but a heretic, no. On the other hand, where a person or group is seeking with intentionality to set back authentic Christianity—a different enterprise than challenging its insufficiencies—antichristic rhetoric is powerful because of its jarring effect. Sociologically, antichristic rhetoric functions to polarize discussions, to create an 'us-versus-them' dichotomy, which forces a judgment because it draws a line. The danger of such a move, as seen in the case of the Johannine Epistles, is that divisions inevitably happen. One might rightly conclude that the dialectical approach of the Johannine Evangelist was largely more resilient and more effective than the disjunctive workings of the Johannine Elder. Therefore, respect for the power of such pejorative terms should make one extremely cautious in appropriating them. Problem-solving is usually much more effective than employing pejorative labels to make a point—even if it is a good point!

(b) Second, the exegetical fact that the original use of these antichristic slogans were nearly exclusively aimed at *immediate audiences in the late*

first-century situation (as was most of the Johannine Apocalypse—only a small portion of which is essentially futuristic) deserves to temper its use by those who would be close readers of the Bible. Speculation will abound, and futuristically so, but it cannot be called 'conservative' or 'literal' biblical exegesis. This means that the best antidote to the exploitation of these texts' pejorative punch is to go back the biblical text and to privilege better readings of it. Misuses deserve to be challenged and corrected, and flawed exegesis is always best overcome by better exegesis. Staying close to the biblical context will also diminish the generalizing of adversarial texts into a vast cauldron of antichristic stew, into which disparate biblical texts and details are tossed, only to allow the scooping out of the odd detail functioning to expose one's contemporary adversary as a biblically referenced one. Therefore, a sound exegetical reading of the Johannine antichristic passages will liberate the text from speculative readings designed to appropriate their authority in ways that would have surprised the original author and audiences. Especially exegetically, the truth is always liberating.

(c) Third, a more adequate interpretive approach thus becomes possible *existentially and prophetically*. While popularistic interpretations often do not stand up to the test of the best critical readings of Scripture, this is not to say, however, that the demise of antichristic futuristic speculation will diminish these texts' interpretive relevance. Quite the contrary! What a contextual reading of these passages shows is the relevance of the Elder's concerns *within every generation*, not just eschatologically climactic ones. Rather than reduce meanings, a contextual consideration of these texts in their original settings makes them *relevant for every subsequent setting in the history of Christianity*. Just as Jesus confronted the religious authorities and the sinners of his day, with impressive relevance for later generations resulting, the same can be said of the antichristic rhetoric of the Johannine Elder. Rather than focusing on Judaism or emperor worship as the 'real' temptations to worry about—probably not the primary concern of most of today's readers—*existentially and personally* the *lust for religious certainty* and the *temptation to choose the easier path* indeed pose crises of faith within every generation and setting.

(d) Fourth, when applied personally and existentially, today's readers can no longer distance themselves from the rhetorical targets of the antichristic rhetoric. In every case, adherence to the Revealer always constitutes the singular way forward, but lesser alternatives also present themselves *within Christianity*, not just outside of it. Indeed, every aspect of the appeals to Judaism—biblical authority, traditional supremacy, cultic primacy, and religious identity—likewise constitute 'temptations' within the Christian movement. Therefore, the greatest challenge to Christocentric faithfulness might not be alien religious influence, but the lust for religious certainty

within one's own beloved heritage. Therefore, one must be willing to embrace tradition without being traditionalistic, and one must ever remain focused upon the present workings of the Revealer without closing the door on the Revealer's former work. The challenge, thus, of living faith is remaining receptive and responsive to the dynamic leadership of the risen Lord. Thus, claiming to have an orthodox Christology—fully balanced in its humanity–divinity dualities—does not excuse today's hearer/reader from the pointed finger of the Johannine antichristic rhetoric. Indeed, we too face tendencies to compromise faithfulness to Christ for gain—socially, economically, religiously, politically, and personally. Letting one's yes be yes and one's no be no; standing in the truth and being willing to suffer for it; preferring to suffer injury rather than to injure; resorting exclusively to convincement rather than coercion—these are the measures of whether one deserves the pejorative label of the second antichristic threat. And, like the Gentile believers of old, love for self and the world is juxtaposed against the love of sisters/brothers and Christ. Therefore, the rhetorical target of the Johannine antichristic passages, when considered personally and existentially, is not 'the other', but oneself.

(e) Fifth, a *theological* consideration of the Johannine Antichrists, when viewed in historical-critical perspective, challenges and purifies our theological understandings and commitments. Rather than projecting our fears onto speculative antichristic constructs in the name of literalistic interpretation, a more adequate and a closer reading of the biblical antichristic passages shows us that the real dangers are not embodiments of evil, either personally or institutionally. They are most often compromises of the truth, at the expense of its liberating power and its Christomorphic revelations in our experience and in our lives. A theological reading of the Johannine Antichrist texts, rather than reinforcing dogmatism, *deconstructs* it. Likewise, it raises up the power of truth over and against the hegemony of worldly force and gain because such is the character of the Revealer's way. Finally, theology transcends *itself* as it finds its completion in its subject— the restored relationality between the divine, humanity, and ourselves. Therein lies the promise of sound theology, and also its challenge.

Conclusion

In conclusion, interpretations of the Johannine Antichrist passages have largely been fraught with problems. Among popular and critical readings alike, interpreters have struggled to read these passages rightly, but speculation is more the norm than the exception. Antichristic errors of interpretation involving futuristic speculation and projective villainization abound, and popular readers and scholars alike struggle to know how to identify the

clearest meanings of these texts. By considering 1 Jn 2.18-29; 4.1-6; and 2 John 7–11 in their original contexts, however, two antichristic crises become apparent. The passages may clearly be seen to have been addressing the defection of Jewish Christians back into the synagogue and the teaching of assimilation by Gentile Christians within a setting in which expectations of emperor worship were growing. This was especially the case if Christians as subjects of the Roman Empire wished to enjoy its privileges. Therefore, more generally and existentially, *the lust for religious certainty* and *the attraction of worldly assimilation* were the dangers the Johannine Elder sought to challenge and correct.

Lest present readers, however, feel themselves let off the hook by considering the first-century immediate contexts and meanings, they find application within every generation, not just a cataclysmic few. Psychologically, sociologically, and theologically, an adequate reading of the Johannine antichristic passages has great potential for the good. Rather than deflecting the meaning as being aimed at another, it stands the chance of speaking to contemporary hearers and readers existentially and personally as it challenges our less than authentic schemes and scaffoldings, pointing instead to the liberating and purifying work of the Revealer. To modify the familiar dictum of the modern sage, Pogo,[18] 'We have met the Johannine Antichrist...and he is *us*!'

Appendix I. *Two-Edition Theory of Johannine Composition*[19]

The Johannine tradition develops as an independent Jesus tradition in its own right, somewhat in dialogue with the pre-Markan oral tradition. A Palestinian setting is reflected, including northern (Galilean) perspectives on southern (Judean) religious/political practices and familiarity with Jerusalem. Sometime between 55 and 70 CE, the Johannine Evangelist relocates among the mission churches (plausibly Asia Minor, and even Ephesus), delivering the story of Jesus' mission to Jewish and Gentile audiences alike. Both Luke and Q appear to have had access to the Johannine tradition in its oral stages, suggested by Luke's departures from Mark and siding with John and by the 'bolt out of the Johannine Blue' in Matthew and Luke. The Johannine narrator hooks the hearer/reader into an imaginary dialogue with Jesus as a means of engaging later audiences in the original story.

18. In 1970, Walt Kelly adapted an earlier Pogo saying regarding ways people contribute to their own problems for an ecology poster on Earth Day, putting it tersely: 'We have met the enemy and he is us!' It later became the title for a book: *Pogo: We have Met the Enemy and He is Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1972).

19. This outline is an adaptation of Table 1.4 and Appendix I in my *The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus*, pp. 40, 193-95.

(A) *The First Edition of the Johannine Gospel (80–85 CE)*
Following several decades of Johannine preaching (and perhaps some writing), *a first edition of John was completed* by the Evangelist or an amenuensis between 80 and 85 CE, to some degree as an augmentive and corrective response to Mark. This 'second' gospel (chronologically) was not distributed widely, but it began with the ministry of John the Baptist (Jn 1.15, 19-42) and concluded with Jn 20.31, declaring the evangelistic purpose of the Johannine Gospel: inviting hearers/readers to *receive Jesus* as the Jewish Messiah/Christ.

(B) *The Writing of the Johannine Epistles (85–95 CE)*
The teaching/preaching ministry of the Beloved Disciple (and possibly other Johannine leaders) continued over the next decade or two, and during this time (85–100 CE), *the three Johannine Epistles were written* by the Elder (85, 90, 95 CE). What was 'seen and heard' from the beginning is taken further in terms of community implications, and the 'New Commandment' of Jesus, to love one another, has now become the 'Old Commandment'. 1 John was written as a circular to the churches in the region, calling for Christian unity in loving one another; 2 John was written to a particular church and its leadership, the 'Chosen Lady and her children', exhorting them to ward off docetizing preachers; 3 John was written to a particular leader, Gaius, exhorting him to extend hospitality, despite its having been denied him and others by Diotrephes.

(C) *The Finalization of the Johannine Gospel (100 CE)*
After the death of the Beloved Disciple (around 100 CE), who reportedly lived until the reign of Trajan (98 CE), the Elder *compiled the Gospel*, adding to it the worship material of the Prologue (Jn 1.1-18), inserting the feeding and sea-crossing narrative (Jn 6) between chs. 5 and 7, and inserting additional discourse material (Jn 15–17) between Jesus' saying: 'Let us depart' (Jn 14.31) and his arrival with his disciples at the garden (Jn 18.1). He also apparently attached additional appearance narratives (ch. 21) and eyewitness/Beloved Disciple passages, and he crafted a second ending (Jn 21.24-25) in the pattern of the first (Jn 20.30-31). Then, he circulated the finalized witness of the Beloved Disciple—'Whose testimony is true!'—as an encouragement and challenge to the larger Christian movement, inviting hearers/readers to *abide in Jesus* as the Son of God.

After the finalization of the Johannine Gospel, now the fourth among the finalized Gospels, it garnered a new set of hearings and readings. It quickly became a favorite among Gentile Christians, but it also takes root in Jewish and mainstream Christianities. By the end of the second century CE, more Christian citations are connected to the Johannine Gospel than any other piece of Christian literature. The *purposes* of John, both *apologetic* (A) and

pastoral (C), thus appear to have taken effect, despite some breaches in community suggested by the Epistles (B). The Johannine Gospel becomes a pattern for the apologetic work of Justin and others, and the rhetoric against the Johannine Antichrists becomes the stuff of Christian polemics from the second century to the present.

Appendix II. *A Historical Outline of the Johannine Situation*[20]

The Proto-Johannine Situation develops in Palestine, reflecting northern residency (likely in Galilee with Samarian sympathies) and southern familiarity (of Jerusalem and Judea). Within this setting, an autonomous Jesus tradition develops, to some degree in dialogue with Petrine (or other pre-Markan) oral traditions, but also in dialogue with other groups, including political/religious leaders in Judea and followers of John the Baptist. Palestinian archaeological references reflect historical realism, reflecting knowledge of the area before its destruction by the Romans in 70 CE.

Period I: The Palestinian Period, the Developing of an Autonomous Johannine Jesus Tradition (c. 30–70 CE)
Crisis A: Dealing with North–South Tensions (Galileans/Judeans)
Crisis B: Reaching Followers of John the Baptist
        (The oral Johannine tradition develops.)

The Johannine Evangelist and perhaps other associates relocate to one of the mission churches—plausibly Ephesus or another mission setting in Asia Minor—some time before the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. There contacts with the local synagogue eventually become strained (the *Birkat ha-Minim* is a codification of Jewish resistance to the Jesus movement), leading to an individuated Johannine community of Christian Jews and Gentile Christians. While appealing for Jewish family and friends to receive Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, some abandon the new community to rejoin the synagogue, as those Jesus-adherents who never left sought to straddle the two communities discretely. During the reign of Domitian (81–96 CE) the expectation of public emperor worship creates a crisis for followers of Jesus, especially Gentile Christians.

Period II: The First Asia Minor Phase, the Forging of a Johannine Community (c. 70–85 CE)
Crisis A: Engaging Local Jewish Family and Friends
Crisis B: Dealing with the Local Roman Presence
        (The first edition of the Johannine Gospel is prepared.)

20. This outline is an adaptation of Table 2.5 and Appendix II in my *The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus*, pp. 64, 196-99.

The Johannine sector of the early church grows, both by the starting of new communities and by establishing contact with other Christian communities in Asia Minor and beyond, leading to correspondence and intervisitation between the churches. Some Gentile teachers/preachers comfort their audiences with a teaching allowing some worldly assimilation, including softening the stand on forbidding emperor worship, arguing a non-suffering Jesus. Rising institutionalization among neighbor churches as a means of addressing similar issues also becomes a strident matter as expressed by Diotrephes and his kin. Dialogue with Synoptic traditions continues, now with a focus on Matthean–Johannine discussions regarding church leadership and how Christ continues to lead the church.

Period III: The Second Asia Minor Phase, Dialogues between
               Christian Communities (c. 85–100 CE)
   Crisis A: Engaging Docetizing Gentile Christians and their
               Teachings
   Crisis B: Engaging Christian Institutionalizing Tendencies
               (Diotrpehes and his kin)
   Crisis C: Engaging Dialectically Christians' Presentations of
               Jesus and his Ministry (actually reflecting a running
               dialogue over *all three* periods)
               (The Epistles are written by the Johannine Elder, who
               then finalizes and circulates the testimony of the
               Beloved Disciple after his death.)

The Post-Johannine Situation reflects the spurned docetizing preachers' taking the Johannine Gospel with them, leading into what eventually became some parts of second-century Christian Gnosticism (including eventual Johannine influences upon Heracleon, the Gospel of Truth, and the Gospel of Philip). The Johannine Gospel becomes a favorite among orthodox Christians in the broader Mediterranean world, and Montanus and his followers are moved by its influence to seek to restore the pneumatic vitality of the church. John's dialectical Christology becomes a source of debate among Christians, and eventually the Johannine Gospel is employed to combat Gnostic influences (Marcion and Valentinius) and to challenge those who would reject the Johannine Apocalypse (referred to pejoratively as the *Alogoi*). By the turn of the second century CE, the Fourth Gospel has become the 'Spiritual Gospel' written by 'John the Theologian', a great source of debate within Christology studies and Jesus studies until the present day.