1997

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Paul N. Anderson

George Fox University, panderso@georgefox.edu

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Recommended Citation

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The *Sitz im Leben* of the Johannine Bread of Life Discourse and its Evolving Context

Paul N. Anderson

John 6 may well be called “the Grand Central Station of Johannine critical issues.” In no other place does the same confluence of historical, literary, and theological debates come to the fore as they relate to the Gospel of John. From comparison/contrasts with Synoptic corollaries—to inferences of narrative and discourse sources—to redaction analyses—to christology, semeiology and sacramentology debates—to text disruption and rearrangement theories—to form-critical midrashic analysis—to reader-response approaches (just to mention some of the obvious critical issues), John 6 has time and again provided the *locus argumenti* for scholars wishing to make a definitive contribution to Johannine studies.

What one also finds when doing a “field test” in John 6 is that one hypothesis will affect and be affected by other kinds of hypotheses. For instance, one’s view of the evangelist’s christology will affect one’s assessment of the literary origin of the signs material (vv. 1-24), “I am” sayings (vv. 35ff.) and the so-called “eucharistic interpolation” (vv. 51c-58) in John 6. Indeed, the most far-reaching and enduring approaches to Johannine interpretation are ones that address several of these key issues effectively, and there are few better contexts within which to test them critically than John 6.¹

One approach which takes into consideration a variety of these issues is a form-critical analysis of the “Bread of Life Discourse” in John 6. The recent works of P. Borgen, R. E. Brown, B. Lindars and others² have

¹ Exceptions in terms of John and Synoptic comparison/contrasts would of course include the Passion narrative, the Temple-cleansing and various Synoptic-like allusions in John; but none of these sections has a combination of miracle stories, “I AM” sayings, apparent redactional interpolations, homilies and misunderstanding dialogues all within the same context. Likewise, other discourses and signs narratives in John are worthy of investigation, but their parallels in the Synoptics are not as clear as those found in John 6. For these and other reasons one can understand why there has been such an intense interest in John 6—for instance, why the SNTS “Johannine Literature Seminar” has spent three years now discussing John 6, as well as why there has been such a large volume of recent articles and monographs produced on John 6 (see Bibliography II, “John VI” in Paul N. Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unit and Disunit in the Light of John 6*, WUNT II 78 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1996).

² P. Borgen, *Bread From Heaven* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965), believes John 6:31-58 constitutes a unitive homiletical exploration of the Christian meaning of the manna motif in Exodus 16:4. R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* Vol. I (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), believes the Bread of Life Discourse in John 6 actually reflects two delivered homilies within Johannine Christianity—vv. 35-50, which are sapiential, and vv. 51-58 which are a later eucharistic doublet. B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), follows Brown’s division of verses, but he argues that the entire section had been formed and

demonstrated that the Johannine Bread of Life Discourse is indeed a written record of early Christian homily (or homilies) expanding on the meaning of the feeding for later audiences. One's analysis of its dialogues and discourses will thus lend valuable insights into the dialectical situation of the Johannine audience. In other words, if the *Sitz im Leben* and literary form of the material within this chapter is assessed correctly, something of its origin, meaning and implications of its content may be more adequately inferred.

The thesis of this study is that because the Johannine Bread of Life Discourse reflects an exhortative homiletical unit, connecting the ministry of Jesus with ongoing crises affecting the Johannine community of faith, an investigation into the rhetorical thrust of its message will illumine—and be illumined by—one's understanding of the Johannine situation and its evolving context. More specifically, as the central exhortative thrust of the discourse is "Work not for food that is death-producing, but for the food that is life-producing—eternally, which the Son of Man shall give you" (v. 27), the misunderstanding dialogues between Jesus and four groups of discussants actually betray four distinctive crises within the history of Johannine Christianity. These crises are also suggested by the Johannine Epistles, the writings of Ignatius and other historical markers in the contemporary situation. Before launching into such an exploration, however, one's findings regarding critical literary, historical and theological issues should be stated.

A. FINDINGS AS BEGINNINGS

While space will not allow a full discussion of the critical issues mentioned above in the first paragraph,³ condensed ones are offered as preliminary conclusions, whence further investigations have their departures. In that

used previously within the Johannine eucharistic setting and that it is used sapientially by the evangelist on the Gospel-writing level. Whatever theory of composition one espouses, two levels of history accompany the interpretation of John 6: first, the level of the events themselves (and their transmission through traditional and other means); and second, the level of the contemporary audience to whom the message was originally addressed. The latter level of history is the main focus of this study.

³ These can be reviewed more fully in the aforementioned book (Anderson, *Christology*). In it the judgment is made that while Johannine studies have indeed advanced significantly over the last half-century, studies which do not come to full grips with Bultmann's magisterial contribution (R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, trans. by G. R. Beasley-Murray, R. W. N. Hoare and J. K. Riches [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971]) often fail to understand the rationale and the theological implications of his provocative—though at times unconvincing—judgments, to their peril. For this reason, four of my ten chapters deal specifically with Bultmann's treatment of John 6: "The Stylistic Unity and Disunity of John 6" (Ch.4); "The Relationship Between Sign and Discourse in John 6" (Ch.5); "The 'Eucharistic Interpolation'" (Ch.6); and "The Dialectical Character of John 6" (Ch.7). While these findings cannot be argued here in detail, they must be summarized lest the informed reader be inclined to disallow the grounds upon which new constructs are built.

sense, critical findings become the sources of new analytical beginnings. These findings are as follows:

1. *The style of John 6 is basically unitive.*

Upon reviewing Bultmann's literary criteria for distinguishing the *semeia* source, when those measures of style⁴ are applied throughout John 6, they fail the test of statistical significance. Nearly two thirds of all the sentences in John 6 begin with the main verb (within 3% points of the inferred *semeia* source). All the rest of the sentences in John 6 *except two* begin with simple connections such as δὲ and οὖν. And, every time μαθηταί occurs in John 6 it is accompanied by αὐτοῦ. Bultmann has indeed identified the style of the Johannine narrative as representing "Semitising Greek," but so is all of John 6, as is the rest of the Gospel as well.⁵

Regarding the style of the *Offenbarungsreden* source and the supposed contribution of the redactor in John 6, Bultmann confesses that the former is written in "Hellenized Aramaic" and is indistinguishable from the style of the evangelist, while the latter has obviously imitated the style of the evangelist.⁶ Precisely how "Semitising Greek" may be antiseptically

⁴ Bultmann's view, of course, is that the style of the *semeia* source is "clearly distinguishable from the language of the Evangelist or of the discourse-source..." (*The Gospel of John*, p. 113). Says Bultmann about John 6:

Stylistically the source shows the same characteristics as the sections which we have already attributed to the σημεῖα-source. The style is a "Semitising" Greek, but it does not seem possible to discern in the story a transition from a literary Semitic source. The passage is characterised by the placing of the verb at the beginning of the sentence; also by the lack (in vv. 7, 8, 10 where K pl have δε) or very simple form of connection between the sentences (δε and οὖν). Πουήσατε (in Greek we would expect κελεύσατε . . . ἀναπεσεῖν v. 10 corresponds to the Semitic causative (see Rev. 13.13 and Schl.). The constantly repeated αὐτοῦ is not Greek (it corresponds to the Semitic suffix) after the different forms of μαθηταί vv. 3, 8, 12, 16 . . . (p. 211, n. 1).

⁵ Bultmann confesses elsewhere that the style of the evangelist is also "Semitising," as is to a lesser degree that of the *Offenbarungsreden* (p. 204, n. 1).

⁶ "The editor clearly models himself on the Evangelist's technique; but it is easy to see that it is an imitation." (Bultmann, p. 235, n. 4; see also p. 243, n. 4)

In order to identify the presence of *Offenbarungsreden* material in John 6 and its "correct" (original) order, Bultmann identifies strophic/metric couplets that deal with revelation themes and rearranges them into an acceptable progression (see Anderson, *Christology*, Table 5). In doing so, however, he omits vv. 26b, 29b, 32, 37a, 38-40, 46, 50f., 53-58, and 63 etc. One wonders why. One also questions the statistical likelihood that the earlier edition of John 6 could have been disordered ten times (albeit for "external" reasons) precisely between sentences of uneven length (with a mean average of 80 characters per sentence) within the middle of a book. The statistical probability of such an occurrence is 1:80 to the 10th power; or slightly less than 1:10 quintillion!

Bultmann's detection of the style and contribution of the evangelist is convincing, however (see Anderson, *Christology*, Table 6: "Bultmann's Identification of the Evangelist's 'Connective Prose' in John 6"). The question is whether these facts are at all suggestive of multiple sources. Synchronic and diachronic scholars alike all believe that the evangelist

distinguished from “Hellenized Aramaic” is difficult to understand, let alone to do. One may just as easily, and certainly with greater statistical success, amass typical linguistic and stylistic characteristics of Johannine action narrative as well as typical linguistic and stylistic characteristics of Johannine theological discourse, and upon applying such “criteria” throughout the Gospel discover that the former correlates significantly with John’s *semeia* accounts and that the latter correlates significantly with the “I am” (and other) sayings of Jesus in John. The question is whether this would be at all suggestive of stylistic disunity within John, enough to infer anything about the presence of more than one basic literary source in John.⁷

2. “Aporias” are not necessarily indicative of editorial seams in John 6.

Lest it be concluded that the stylistic unity of John 6 “proves” anything about the evangelist’s use or non-use of sources, Bultmann has been quick to point out that contextual and theological kinds of evidence also corroborate his diachronic judgments.⁸ This being the case, Bultmann believes that contextual oddities in transition may reflect “editorial seams” suggesting the evangelist has taken over a source and added to it his own contribution.⁹ The two primary examples of this in John 6 are Jesus’ abrupt

employed a historicizing style of narration and that he added interpretive asides throughout the story line. This kind of data, however, belabors the obvious. John was organized by a narrator of miracle stories, discourses, and events which have special theological implications for a late first-century audience. That much is clear; alien origins of the material is not.

⁷ This is not to say that diachronic scholars who have sought to improve on Bultmann’s work have always followed such procedures (Although, see V. S. Poythress, “Testing for Johannine Authorship by Examining the Use of Conjunctions,” *Westminster Journal of Theology* 46 (1984), 350-69, for a compelling demonstration that the organizing of stylistic data categories by recent Johannine source critics since Bultmann tends to be more demonstrative of typical Johannine narrative versus typical Johannine discourse and narratological connectives—not exactly significant source-critical data!). Nor is it to claim that John did not use sources (Although, see the most extensive evaluation of the *Semeia* source hypothesis yet in Gilbert van Belle’s *The Signs Source in the Fourth Gospel: Historical Survey and Critical Evaluation of the Semeia Hypothesis* [Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1994], who after considering nearly everything written on the most plausible source thought to underlie John, comes to a negative conclusion, pp. 376f.). It is to say that convincing stylistic evidence for written, non-Johannine sources underlying the Fourth Gospel is still lacking, and those who believe in them must do so on some basis other than empirical data (possibly working backwards from the rejection/acceptance of implications). To *de-Johannify* a gospel narrative in order to *re-Markanize* it, despite arranging it into an albeit clever sequence with other cropped units, does not a *semeia* source make.

⁸ D. Moody Smith articulates well this interplay between stylistic, contextual and ideological evidence in Bultmann’s diachronic constructs, *The Composition and Order of the Fourth Gospel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), pp. 9ff., as does R. Fortna, *The Gospel of Signs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 15-22.

⁹ Fortna believes these are the most objective of the three “criteria” for inferring alien sources in John (*The Gospel of Signs*, pp. 19ff.), but not all “aporias” in John are equally problematic. For instance, while the abrupt ending of ch.14, the apparent first conclusion of the Gospel at 20:31 (with its reformulation at 21:24f.) and the seeming continuity between the

answer to the crowd in v. 26 and the redundant request of the crowd for another sign in vv. 30f.¹⁰ What Bultmann has missed is the unitive motif of *testing* throughout this section and the entire chapter, and also the evangelist's employment of local and sustained irony in narrating the events. Indeed, the function of irony is to disturb and dis-locate the focus of the reader in order to re-locate his or her attention along another path. Throughout vv. 6-15 and vv. 25-40 the crowd is tested as to whether it will see beyond the bread which Jesus gives to the "Bread" which Jesus is. In v. 26 Jesus discerns their real question (which would have been obvious to the first-century audience): "When did you arrive . . . and *when's lunch?*" Jesus is portrayed as understanding full well their hidden question, which is still with them in their failure to understand the kind of food Jesus really offers (obviated by their misunderstanding comments: vv. 28, 30f., 34; and declared explicitly by the narrator: vv. 14f., 36). John 6:25-30 does not betray insoluble aporias requiring a diachronic rescue; rather, the passage reflects the evangelist's use of sustained irony in depicting the failure of the crowd to pass the test of bread versus "Bread."

3. The "eucharistic interpolation" in John 6 is neither.

The primary theological tension in John 6, calling for consideration of vv. 51c-58 being the redactor's interpolation, is the fact that the purely christocentric soteriology of the evangelist is absolutely incompatible with instrumentalistic sacramentology, and worse yet, with pagan theophagy. On this point, Bultmann deserves a fresh audience. Recent tendencies to soften Bultmann's penetrating insight here fail to take seriously the profound radicality of Johannine spirituality. Bultmann is absolutely correct to challenge the notion that a saving, pistis response to God's revelation in Jesus can ever be measured or effected on external levels alone.¹¹ It can

events in chs. 5 and 7 do call for a diachronic theory of composition, many of the aporias cited by Bultmann and others are not always as problematic as the sharp relief into which they are cast.

¹⁰ In response to the question, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" Jesus responds, "You seek me not because you saw the signs, but because you ate the loaves and were satisfied." And, it seems odd that the same crowd that had just witnessed a sign the day before now poses the request, "What sign will you do then, that we may see and believe you? What will you do?" Bultmann's method of identifying these "seams," however, is self-contradictory. Between verses 25 and 26 the transition is too rough to assume a unitive source, while between verses 28f. and 30f. the connection is too smooth (implying the crowd understood Jesus' exhortation in v. 27). Either way, Bultmann is happy to solve these "aporias" by offering a diachronic solution (pp. 218-24).

¹¹ See Anderson, *Christology*, Bibliography III, "The Sacraments in John;" and the excursus, "What is Meant by 'Sacrament?'" A growing tendency is to assume that while the member of the Johannine audience is expected to "come to" and believe fully in Jesus, the way this is to be exercised is through cultic participation in the eucharist (see P. Borgen, *Bread from Heaven* [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1965], ad. loc.; G. Burge, *The Anointed Community* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], pp. 178-89; D. Rensberger, *Johannine Faith and Liberating*

only be appropriated existentially by an authentic "yes" to the divine initiative, eschatologically spoken though the Word made flesh. In that sense, the incarnation scandalizes not only the religion of "the Jews," but all religious constructs of human origin (including developing Christian, and certainly Jewish or Hellenistic, expressions), and the Johannine Christian is called to attend the present leadership of the resurrected Lord which is effected through the comforting/convicting/guiding work of the *Parakletos*. To insist upon any externalization of such inward trust (ritual or otherwise), other than the command to love, is to fail to understand the core of Johannine soteriology, which is so radically christocentric. Thus, if vv. 51c-58 really advocated the indispensability of the eucharist for salvation, they would have to be deemed an interpolation. The fact, however, is that they do not.

There is a broad difference between saying one must participate in a eucharistic rite in order to receive eternal life and *using eucharistic imagery to appeal for solidarity with Jesus and his community in the face of persecution*. John 6:51c is not an introductory sentence, but a concluding clause. The bread which Jesus will offer finally is his *sarx*, given for the life of the world. This is a blunt reference to the cross, and it bespeaks the paradoxical cost of discipleship for Jesus' followers. To hope to share with Christ in his resurrection is to be willing to participate in his suffering and death. No wonder the disciples were scandalized (v. 60)! They are portrayed as understanding full well what it means to "ingest" the flesh and blood of Jesus: the willingness to go to the cross. This Bultmann has recognized clearly, as he includes vv. 60-71 in the section entitled "The Way of the Cross" (pp. 443-451). He wrongly, however, places it after John

Community [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988], pp. 64-86; and L. Schenke, *Die wunderbare Brotvermehrung* [Würzburg, 1983]. Such a view, however, has several problems to it which make it unacceptable:

a.) It is *anachronistic*. While Johannine Christianity must have had some sort of fellowship meal (within which the feeding narrative and Bread of Life discourses were probably recounted), this is not to say that it had become a symbolic ritual meal such as is reflected in the transition between 1 Cor. 10 and 11, even by the time of the writing of John 6.

b.) The total lack of sacramental ordinances and institutionalization of sacraments in John suggests a critical view of rising institutionalism within the late first-century church on the part of the evangelist. He may have tolerated some sacramental innovation, but he believed the essence of faith was radically christocentric—an affront to the instrumentality of all religious practice—preliminarily helpful though it might be to the believer. Its origin is human, not divine, and thus can never replace an abiding response of faith to the divine initiative. On this matter, Bultmann is correct.

c.) For the evangelist, the final sacrament is the *incarnation*, and the sacramental *topos* where the human/divine encounter happens most fully is the gathered community of faith. This is the sacramental reality in which true believers (at the time of the writing of John 6) are called to participate, and toward the facilitating of which eucharistic imagery is co-opted. But in the face of escalating Roman hostility under Domitian in Asia Minor, such allegiances undoubtedly involved embracing the cross. That was the difficult and scandalizing message for the Johannine audience contemporary with the final production of John 6.

12:36 and fails to see it as the direct implication of John 6:51c-58. Viewed from this perspective, the passage is powerfully unitive, having the provocative sort of message that would have challenged the contemporary audience with absolute clarity.

While Bultmann is also wrong to assume that vv. 51c-58 reflect the influence of theophagic Mystery Religions (also wrongly claimed to be represented by Ignatius' "medicine of immortality" motif), his allusion to the Ignatian situation indeed sheds light on the Johannine. Both Ignatius and the Fourth Evangelist are challenged to keep their Christian communities together in the face of Roman persecution. In doing so, Ignatius raises the value of adhering to the singular bishop (and thus to Christ), while the Fourth Evangelist raises the value of adhering to the community of faith (and thus to Christ). Neither, however, advocates sacramental instrumentalism as such, or pagan theophagic religion.¹² Thus, the main theological objection to the chapter's disunity fails to convince, as well.

4. *John 6 must be considered a basically unitive composition, and it was probably added to a later edition of the Gospel's composition.*

Of the theories of composition analyzed, the most attractive is that of B. Lindars.¹³ The most convincing justification of the need for reordering the chapters into a 4, 6, 5, 7 sequence is not the connection of water (ch. 4) to bread (ch. 6—the living bread/living water sequence between 6:27-58 and 7:37-39 works perfectly well), but the fact that the Jerusalem debate with

¹² The emphasis of Ignatius' *φάρμακον ἀθανασίας* (Eph. 20:2) is not upon the salvific effect of ingesting the eucharistic loaf, but upon the salutary result of breaking *only one loaf* (instead of breaking off and holding sectarian cultic meals). The final goal of each is communal unity—the indispensability of solidarity with Christ and his community in the face of suffering—not the indispensability of a eucharistic ritual, proper. The failure to notice this theological and ecclesiological distinction has been an unnecessary source of division and pain within the church and beyond.

¹³ See Anderson, *Christology*, Ch.2, "A Survey of Recent Commentaries." B. Lindars' commentary, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 46-54, is most attractive because it addresses most of the genuinely problematic aporias in John within a fairly straightforward and believable history of text composition. Rather than resorting to speculative displacement/rearrangement moves, Lindars addresses many of the same problems with a theory of multiple (at least two) editions. Quite credibly, Lindars selects such units as John 1:1-18; ch.6 (Lazarus material? 11:1-46; 12:9-11); chs.15-17 and ch.21, as well as a few comments by the redactor (the eye-witness and Beloved Disciple motifs, for instance) and suggests that these comprise "supplementary material" that has been added (not necessarily all at once) to an earlier rendition of the Gospel. The interpretive implication for the present study is that the acute situation addressed by the evangelist at the time of finally composing John 6 may have been commensurate with the situation represented by the rhetorical concerns implied by the other supplementary material. The debate with the Synagogue has probably cooled, and the community is now facing a docetizing threat in the face of Roman harassment and persecution, as well as the intramural threat of rising institutionalism within the mainstream church. These will be explored later.

the Jews over the Sabbath in 5:16-47 appears to continue in 7:15-52 and seems interrupted by the Galilean narrative. If the original sequence was something like chs. 4, 5 and 7, there would have been no geographical flip-flop (between Jerusalem and Galilee), and John 6 may be understood as having been inserted where it is as a means of following the ending of ch. 5, "If you would have believed Moses you would have believed me; for Moses wrote of me."¹⁴ The implication is that given the stylistic, contextual and theological unity of John 6, it may rightly be considered a basic unity which was added to an earlier edition of the Gospel.

5. John 6 represents a tradition parallel to, and yet independent from, Mark 6 and 8.

While C. K. Barrett and T. Brodie¹⁵ (among others) believe that John drew at least from Mark, and perhaps from other gospel traditions, the majority of scholars have been more and more impressed with the radical independence of John's tradition. Stemming from the 1938 contribution of P. Gardner-Smith (*Saint John and the Synoptic Gospels*; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), a majority of scholars have been coming to what D. Moody Smith feels is an impressive agreement regarding John's

¹⁴ This is certainly Lindars' view (1972, pp. 234ff.), and Professor Borgen has illuminated the connectedness between John 5 and 6 all the more clearly by showing the ways such themes as Jesus' works, the Father and the Scriptures bear witness to Jesus in John 6 (SNTS paper, 1992, "The Works, the Father, and the Scriptures Bear Witness; Themes from John 5:36-40 being illustrated in John 6"). One is not certain, however, that the clear connections between John 5:36-40 and John 6 imply that any of John 6 was composed as a conscious development of those themes. They certainly are found in much of John's other material as well. The least one must admit is that John 6 follows John 5 extremely well, and if it were added later, either as an excursus related to John 5:46f. or as a narratological following of the second healing miracle (6:2), complex rearrangement theories become unwarranted, as well as unlikely.

¹⁵ Professor Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 2nd edition (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), pp. 42-54, acknowledges that he represents an older position among Gospel critics, agreeing, for instance with B. H. Streeter that the similarities between John and Mark make it easier to suppose John's familiarity with Mark than non-familiarity (p. 42). In doing so, Barrett outlines ten sequential similarities of events between John and Mark (p. 43), at least twelve verbal similarities (pp. 44f.), and several other similarities of detail and theological perspective (pp. 45-54).

T. Brodie's new book, *The Quest for the Origin of John's Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), unhesitatingly explores connections between John and the Synoptics (especially Mark), the Pentateuch, and Ephesians, assuming that nearly all similarities imply Johannine dependence on other sources. Indeed, the Fourth Evangelist probably was an encyclopedic type of a writer (pp. 30ff.), but some connections Brodie over-accentuates, and he fails to account for the possibility that some of the influence may have flowed the other way as well. Given the high degree of orality versus scripturality of first-century Christian traditions, one wonders whether any of John's sources were used as written ones and read by the evangelist before his writing, other than some scripture citations, of course.

being parallel to—yet independent from—the Synoptics.¹⁶ Even Bultmann, for instance, was forced to infer a Passion source underlying John 18–20 (while at the same time admitting that it did not differ from the contribution of the evangelist stylistically, contextually or theologically, pp. 632ff.) simply because John's Passion narrative was so strikingly independent from those of the Synoptics. The independence of John 6 from Mark 6 and 8 is even more compelling.

One of the astounding things discovered when analyzing the parallels between John 6 and Mark 6 and 8 is that we really do have three independent accounts (although in Mark 6 and 8 the interpreted significance of the feeding is similar—Jesus has power over nature to perform miracles if he chooses) representing individuated traditions with their own independent histories. Whereas P. Gardner-Smith discussed four major differences between John 6 and Mark 6, one can actually identify at least 24 *similarities and differences* between John 6 and Mark 6, and 21 *similarities and differences* between John 6 and Mark 8.¹⁷ Despite having some connectedness to Marcan detail, there is *never* a time among forty-five similarities that John aligns with the Marcan tradition verbatim for more than a word or two at a time, and every single convergence is also significantly different! The implications of this fact are hard to overstate. While some connection must have existed between Marcan and Johannine

¹⁶ In his book, *John Among the Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), D. Moody Smith identifies an impressive movement from the view that John was dependent upon the Synoptics (esp. Mark) earlier in the century, and that following the work of P. Gardner-Smith the independence of John rose to the fore as the prominent view. However, within the last decade or two, the tendency has shifted once more toward a Synoptic-dependent view of John, and this movement has undoubtedly been influenced significantly by the 1990 Leuven Colloquium on the study of John and the Synoptics (the essays have been compiled in *John and the Synoptics*, ed. by A. Denaux [Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992]). Building on the earlier work of F. Neirynck, M. Sabbe, and others, one detects a clear resurgence of the view that John either used the Synoptic tradition or at least had some contact with it. After considering the thirty-eight articles in that volume, however, one remains unconvinced that John had access to and/or used any of the written Synoptic Gospels. There are *no* identical contacts between John and the Synoptics, and none that are explained better on the basis of written dependence than on the basis of contact during the oral stages of the traditions. In that sense, Gardner-Smith's hypothesis should be modified somewhat by accentuating the contacts between an independent Johannine tradition and the oral stages of the Synoptic ones, but it does not appear to be overturned.

¹⁷ See Anderson, *Christology*, Tables 7 and 8. What is significant is that while these lists account for nearly all the connections between John 6 and the Marcan tradition (to which John is indeed closest in terms of inclusion and detail), in 0 out of 45 cases is John's tradition ever identical to Mark's. This is highly significant, not only as it relates to John's composition, but as it relates to the historical development and character of gospel traditions, themselves. Could it be that there was *never* a time in which there was one, singular rendition of Jesus' ministry, but that from the early traditional stages there may have been differing views of the significance and implications of Jesus' ambiguous words and deeds? This is especially suggested by a detailed comparison/contrast between the sea-crossing narratives in John and Mark (see Anderson, *Christology*, Ch.8, "Not an Attesting Miracle . . . But a 'Testing' Sign: An Exegesis of John 6:1-24").

traditions, these must have occurred during the oral stages of their development, as such details as the plentiful grass, two hundred denarii, twenty-five or thirty furlongs, δύο ὠψόρια, etc. would likely have been the sort of detail remembered from an oral rendering. It is also highly significant that when one considers Matthew's and Luke's redactions of Mark 6 and 8, the kind of detail they leave out is precisely the sort of detail most prolific in Mark and John. *Non-symbolic, graphic and illustrative detail* (Luke and Matthew often omit names of people and illustrative detail) and *theological asides* are precisely the sort of things Luke and Matthew omit from their written source, Mark. John, on the other hand, has even more of this sort of material than Mark does (the little boy, the testing motif, etc.), and it is indeed odd that Bultmann, Fortna and others believe the Fourth Evangelist has added this detail in order to "historicize" the narrative when the two closest examples in terms of genre (Matthew and Luke—if one believes that John used a narrative source like Mark and a discourse source like Q) demonstrate the *opposite* pattern of redacting a written source. No. Mark's and John's distinctive characteristics reflect their proximity to the oral stages of the gospel traditions, not the written, and their similarities/differences with each other reflect an "interfluent" relationship quite possibly occurring during the oral stages of both traditions.¹⁸

The result of the above findings is that John 6 should indeed be treated as a basic unity, added to the Gospel some time during the late 80's or early 90's, although its oral and written stages of composition must have extended over a generation or more. John's tradition is independent from

¹⁸ It cannot be claimed, for instance, that John only drew from the Marcan or pre-Markan oral tradition. The converse may just as easily have happened, and it is impossible to know which preacher(s) influenced the other(s). Certainly Luke shows signs of following John's lead in departing from Mark and Q (in at least two dozen instances this happens), as does Q (infrequently, but clearly—John 3:35 in Matt. 11:27 and Luke 10:22, for example). Consider, for instance, that facts that like John and contra Mark, Luke has only one feeding and sea crossing, the confession of Peter follows the feeding of the 5,000 and includes the Johannine *tau theou*, the right ear of the servant is severed, the less likely feet of Jesus are anointed by the woman—not his head (as in Mark and Matthew), people with the names of Lazarus, Mary and Martha play significant roles in both gospels, and such themes as the Holy Spirit and special concerns for Samaritans and women appear conspicuously close in Luke and John against Mark and Matthew (see Anderson, *Christology*, Appendix VIII, "The Papias Tradition, John's Authorship and Luke/Acts" for further detail). Scholars have routinely explained such similarities on the basis that John drew from Luke or a pre-Lucan tradition. This, however, does not account for the facts that precisely where Luke diverges from Mark, he converges with John, and where Luke and John converge John does not go on and include otherwise distinctive Lucan material by and large. There is no suitable way to explain these facts except to inquire whether Luke may have at times preferred John's tradition to the Marcan. Has Luke 1:2 got anything to do with the Johannine tradition in its oral stages? If so, it would create tumultuous questions regarding one of the "safest" of critical assumptions: that the Fourth Gospel reflects a late—and only late—interpretation of the significance of Jesus' ministry.

the Synoptics in their written forms but probably had contact with the pre-Markan oral tradition. Luke seems sympathetic to the Johannine rendition of events, nearly always against Mark, and this fact is provocative. John's later material shows affinities with the M tradition in that they both address similar issues: tensions with local Jewish communities and concerns about church governance, for instance, but they deal with them in very different ways. At times John even seems interested in correcting the prevalent view on matters ecclesiological, sacramental and basileiological. These dialogues will be explored later, but for now, the above findings serve as a foundation upon which to construct an effective form-analysis of the Johannine Bread of Life Discourse.

B. MANNA AS A "RHETORICAL TRUMP" IN ANCIENT JUDAISM AND JOHN

One agrees with Professor Painter¹⁹ that Professor Borgen's monograph on the "Bread from Heaven" motif in ancient Jewish literature (1965) is the most significant work on John 6 so far. Major problems with the work, however, are that not only has it failed to identify the correct homiletical structure of John 6, it has also failed to notice that there are actually *two* "homiletical patterns" when the manna theme is employed in ancient Jewish literature. At least eight times in ancient Jewish literature we have record of manna being used as the Proem text, but this is the minority of the cases, and they nearly all occur together in Exodus Rabbah 25:1-8, where Exodus 16:4 is developed midrashically in eight brief essays. In these midrashim alone (and possibly *Tractate Vayassa* III-IV and a few other midrashim) do we find the manna motif interpreted from the front and developed exegetically. In virtually all the other references to manna in ancient Jewish literature, manna serves as a *secondary* text—a rhetorical trump card—played after declaring one's thesis and identifying desirable and undesirable responses to it.²⁰

¹⁹ See Painter's response to Borgen's critique (1992) of his work, "Quest, Rejection and Commendation in John 6: A Response to Peder Borgen" (SNTS Johannine writings Seminar, Madrid, 1992).

²⁰ This is the case in Philo, *Leg. all.* III 162; *Fug.* 137; *Mut.* 259; *Congr.* 158-174; *Mos.* I 196-205; *Mos.* II 258-274; in *Midrash Rabbah*, Genesis XLVIII:10; LI:2; LXVI:3; Exodus V:9; XXIV:3; XXXIII:8; XXXVIII:4; XLI:1; Deuteronomy X:4; and *Exodus Mekilta*, Tractate Beshalla 1:201. The rhetorical use of manna is also found pervasively throughout the canonical corpus in such passages as Numbers 11:6-9; 21:5; Deuteronomy 8:3, 16; Joshua 5:12; Psalm 78:23-25; 105:40; 1 Corinthians 10:3; Revelation 2:17; and John 6:31 (see Anderson, *Christology*, Ch.3, n. 10).

1. *The rhetorical use of manna pattern in Philo and John*

While Borgen believes he has identified a "homiletical pattern" at work in Philo and John,²¹ he sidesteps the fact that none of these passages (except *Exodus Rabbah*, etc.) begins with Exodus 16:4 as the Proem text to be exegeted. In each case other texts are being interpreted, or other points are being made, and the manna motif is brought in to bolster *another* argument or interpretation. This makes it highly doubtful that John 6:32ff. was ever cast in the form of an exegetical exploration in the classical text-centered manner.²² The form of typical manna rhetoric in ancient Jewish midrashim, Philo, Psalm 78 and in John is as follows:²³

Table #1, "The Rhetorical Use of Manna Pattern in Ancient Jewish Literature"

A.) *Main point or text.* A point of argument, exhortation or text to be developed is stated by an author, who calls for a particular action on behalf of his or her audience.

²¹ While he categorizes various references to the manna motif as "exegetical paraphrase," the homiletical pattern identified by Borgen in Philo (*Mut.* 253-63; *Leg. all.* III 162-68) and in John 6, "consists of the following points: (1) The Old Testament quotation. (2) The interpretation. (3) The objection to the interpretation. (4) Point (2), the interpretation, freely repeated and questioned. (5) The answer which can conclude with a reference to point (2), the interpretation." (*Bread from Heaven*, p. 85).

See, however, T. M. Conley, *Philo's Rhetoric: Studies in Style, Composition and Exegesis* (Berkeley: Center for Hermeneutical Studies, 1987), pp. 56-67, for an unconvinced appraisal, and D. T. Runia's "Secondary Texts in Philo's *Quaestiones*," in *Both Literal and Allegorical: Studies in Philo of Alexandria's Questions and Answers on Genesis and Exodus*, ed. D. M. Hay (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), pp. 47-80. Runia's three observations are that 1) Philo characteristically invokes *lemmata* (secondary texts) to illuminate a primary *lemma* text, and vice-versa; 2) Philo often moves from one to the other simply on verbal cues versus thematic interests; and 3) Philo's exegetical explorations develop a "main directive idea" rather than a "tight-knit structural coherence" (p. 48). While Borgen is fully aware that Philo never exegetes Ex. 16:4 as a Proem or *lemma* text directly, my contention is that manna in Philo appears to always demonstrate the veracity of *another* point or interpretation.

²² B. Malina, *The Palestinian Manna Tradition* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), correctly identifies the rhetorical evolution of the manna motif in ancient Israel, "This development becomes from the prosaic aetiological account of the name 'manna,' an account amplified in Num. 11:6, 7-9, and then used as a springboard for homiletic ends. In this process the manna takes on admirable traits, ending up as heavenly food, the food of angels, rained down by God upon Israel to test and teach the desert generation." (p. 41) Nonetheless, he errs in viewing John 6:31ff. (with Borgen) as being a "Christian midrash on the manna tradition, a meditation on this tradition in the light of Jesus." (p. 106) Rather, the section is more accurately a *reflection upon the significance of Jesus' works and words*—in the light of the manna tradition—which it supersedes (see Anderson, *Christology*, Ch. 3, n. 10). These are two very different understandings.

²³ A modification of Anderson, *Christology*, Table I, "The Rhetorical Use of Manna Pattern in Ancient Jewish Literature." For a clear identification of this pattern in Philo, see Anderson, *Christology*, Appendix VII, "Philo's Use of Manna as a Secondary Text."

B.) *Development of main point using dualistic either/or categories.* This point (meaning of the text) is discussed, usually posing two options: one favorable and the other unfavorable.

C.) *Introduction of manna as a rhetorical trump* (secondary proof-text). The manna motif is introduced and associated with the main point being made by the writer, “proving” its superiority (heavenly origin).

D.) *Continued development and implications.* The discussion continues, and alternative responses to the author’s exhortation are associated with earthly bread (or the “flesh”—*sarx*—of quail), in contrast to heavenly “bread,” which is clearly superior in terms of origin *and* effect. The secondary text is at times introduced here (D), or in the discussion (at B), as well as at the more common secondary-text location (C).

E.) *Reiteration of main point.* The original appeal (A) or text is reiterated, often with some reference to the life-producing effect of manna and/or the death-producing effect of earthly (inferior) bread.

One finds this rhetorical use of manna as the secondary text used throughout the midrashic passages cited by Borgen, and even in the Philonic texts upon which he constructs his “homiletical pattern” and which he believes are the closest in form to John 6. Another debatable move made by Borgen is to identify John 6:31 as a citation of Exodus 16:4 rather than Psalm 78:24f. The former passage suits his text-exegesis theory of Johannine midrash better (Psalm 78 is not developed midrashically in ancient Jewish literature, while Exodus 16 is.), but the language and rhetorical function of John 6:31 are closer to the latter passage than the former, despite the formal differences between a narrative and exhortative psalm and the literary form of John 6.²⁴

²⁴ Certainly, ἄρτον ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς φαγεῖν (John 6:31b) is closer to καὶ ἔβρεξεν αὐτοῖς μαννα φαγεῖν, καὶ ἄρτον οὐρανοῦ ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς (Ps.78:24, LXX B) than it is to ἴδου ἐγὼ ὧ ὑμῖν ἄρτους ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ (Ex.16:4 LXX B), even with οὗτος ὁ ἄρτος, ὃν ἔδωκεν κύριος ὑμῖν φαγεῖν (Ex.16:15 LXX B) considered alongside it (see E. D. Freed, *Old Testament Quotations in the Gospel of John* [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965], pp. 11-16). More significant than the semantic similarities, however, is the rhetorical affinity between John 6:27-58 and Psalm 78. Like Psalm 78:24f., the use of manna in John 6 is elevated (“bread from *heaven*”) and used rhetorically to further another argument.

2. *The rhetorical use of manna pattern in Psalm 78.*

Consider, for instance, the formal structure of the rhetorical use of manna pattern in Psalm 78:²⁵

Table #2, "The Rhetorical Use of Manna Pattern in Psalm 78"

A.) *Main point of exhortation*: Put your trust in God, oh my people, and do not be like your forefathers (or members of the Northern Kingdom)—a stubborn and rebellious generation. (vv. 1, 7f.)

B.) *Development of point using either/or categories*: God did many miracles inviting their trust (vv. 11-16), but the sons of Ephraim continued to sin, putting God to the test, demanding the food they craved. (vv. 9f., 17-20) Therefore, God's wrath broke out and he sent fire, but they still did not trust. (v. 21f.)

C.) *Introduction of manna as a rhetorical trump*: God even opened the doors of heaven and rained down manna for people to eat, and he gave them the "grain of heaven." Mortals ate the "bread of angels"—as much as they desired. He also rained down flesh (flying birds as thick as sand on the shore), satisfying all their cravings, but despite all this, they went on sinning. Even as the flesh was between their teeth God's anger rose up against them, putting to death even the strongest of them, and yet they still put God to the test. (vv. 23-41)

D.) *Continued development and implications*: God did miraculous signs in Egypt (vv. 42-51) and delivered them from the oppressor (vv. 52-55), but they still put God to the test. (v. 56) Therefore, God was angered. He consumed their young men with fire, put their priests to death by the sword, and rejected the tribe of Ephraim, choosing *Judah* instead.

E.) *Reiteration of main point (A)*: Therefore, God chose David his servant (and his monarchy) to be a shepherd to his people and to lead them with skillful hands. Implied exhortation (and threat?): be thankful for God's provision though the Davidic monarchy (pay your taxes, perform your civic duties cheerfully, live righteously, etc.) and do not be ungrateful as were your "grumbling" forefathers in the wilderness, who craved something more. You saw what happened to the Northern Kingdom . . . will *you* be next? (vv. 68-72)

²⁵ This table is adapted from Anderson, *Christology*, Table 16, same title.

This is precisely the same rhetorical use of manna pattern used in John 6, but Borgen's thesis must be amended in one more way. The proponent of the manna motif is portrayed as being neither Jesus nor the narrator, but *the unbelieving crowd*. It is *they* who seek to tempt Jesus into producing more loaves, using Palestinian manna rhetoric to bolster their appeal! In that sense, the function of the Psalm 78:24f. quotation is far less like the expository midrashic form of such passages as Exodus Rabbah 25:1-8, and far more like Satan's use of scripture as a proof-text in the Matthean temptation narrative. (Matt. 4:1-11) Here the Matthean rendition is closer than the Lucan (Luke 4:1-12) to the Palestinian proof-text rhetoric of the Johannine crowd. A.) The request for bread is uttered (Matt. 4:3). B.) Jesus refuses, citing scripture (Deut. 8:3—the Deuteronomic application of the manna motif to the superiority of the Torah) to focus upon the core hunger (need) of humanity, which is spiritual rather than physical (Matt. 4:4). C.) Satan tempts Jesus further, citing scripture (Ps. 91:11f.) and promising that he will be rescued supernaturally (Matt. 4:5f.). D.) Jesus cites scripture back (Deut. 6:16), warning him not to put the Lord God to the test (Matt. 4:7). E.) Satan gets to the overall point and promises Jesus wealth and power if he will bow down and worship him (Matt. 4:8). Jesus refuses and passes the time of testing successfully, fully prepared now to begin his ministry. This stylized dialogue is entirely parallel in function to the crowd's request and dialogue with Jesus in John 6. Here we see clearly the crowd's use of manna as a "rhetorical trump."

3. *The crowd's use of manna as a "rhetorical trump" in John 6.*

While the Q temptation narrative couches the purification of Jesus' mission as his being tested (and becoming prepared?) before his public ministry begins, John uses the crowd's "tempting" of Jesus ironically. It is actually *they* (as well as the Jews and the disciples) who are tested, and unfortunately they fail the test. The evangelist's employment of Palestinian manna rhetoric here is entirely in order, either as a narratological tool or as a stylized transmission of an actual debate that may have occurred during the ministry of Jesus.²⁶ The form of the crowd's request is as follows:

Table #3, "The Use of Manna as a 'Rhetorical Trump' by the Crowd in John 6"

A.) *Main point of the crowd's request: "How long have you been here?"* (John 6:25; actually inquiring, "And just how long will it be

²⁶ In Mark 8:11-13 and Matthew 16:1-4 Jewish leaders request another sign from heaven after the feeding, and this is followed by the disciples' debate over loaves given the dearth of bread in the boat, leading to Jesus' interpretation of the feeding (Mark 8:14-21; Matt. 16:5-12). On the basis of multiple attestation, the likelihood of an actual discussion seems plausible. Table #3 here is adapted from Anderson, *Christology*, Table 17, same title.

until we receive *another* feeding?). The ironic character of this odd question is implied by their failure to understand Jesus' mission (v. 14), disclosed by Jesus' knowing response (v. 26), and declared by the evangelist ironically (vv. 32ff.) and explicitly by means of Jesus' assessment of their views (v. 36).

B.) *Development of point using either/or categories*: (In response to Jesus' exhortation to work not for death-producing bread, but the life-producing food which the Son of Man shall give, v. 27) The crowd asks, "What must we do to do (work?) the works of God (and thus receive the life-producing as opposed to death-producing food, v. 28)?" The negotiating implication here is: "We are willing to do *our* part."

C.) *Introduction of manna as a rhetorical trump* (and repetition of main point, A): "Then what sign will *you* show us that we may see and believe you? . . . *Our fathers* ate manna in the desert." (v. 30f.) Clearly the gauntlet is thrown down. They are willing to do their part . . . is Jesus willing to do his? If he is really sent by God (v. 29—like Moses in Deut. 18:15-22), can he match the manna-producing wonders of old?

D.) *Continued development and its implications*: The crowd then marshalls scriptural support for their manna-rhetoric, "As it is written, 'He gave them *bread from heaven to eat*.'" (v. 31) By now, the request has become a threat—"If you are indeed sent by God (as the prophet like Moses, who says and does nothing on his own behalf and only what the Father instructs him), let's see some heavenly provision of food." Two implications follow: 1.) "If you are as great as Moses, feed us in the wilderness once more." 2.) "If so, we will believe in you; if you can't, why should we?"

E.) *Reiteration of main point*: "Therefore, they said to him (regarding the bread which comes down from heaven, D), 'Lord, give us this bread all the time.'" (v. 34) The fact that this is portrayed as an ironic misunderstanding is declared by Jesus in v. 36. The crowd is still after their main interest: another feeding (main point A, above).

This pattern is identical to the most typical use of manna in ancient Jewish literature, which is to use manna as a secondary text—a "rhetorical trump," and it illustrates the extended use of irony throughout John 6, further implying its unity. Against Borgen's view that John 6:31 represents the Proem text of the homiletical pattern he describes, one actually finds quite a different pattern. Rather than correcting the sincere exegesis of the crowd in vv. 32ff., the evangelist portrays Jesus as opposing their distortion of the scriptures by using them as a proof-text and failing to comprehend

the overall truth to which they point. In their wielding of scriptural knowledge (John 5:39; 6:31), using it for their own ends (John 5:44 and 6:27), they neither are indwelt by the Father's "word" (John 5:38 and 6:45), nor are they willing to "come to" Jesus in order to receive life (John 5:40 and 6:44). Therefore, rather than vv. 31-58 being a unitive Christian midrashic development of Exodus 16:4 in the light of Jesus' ministry, the "Proem text" to be developed "midrashically" is the *works and words of Jesus* (vv. 1-25); and unenlightened manna rhetoric must first be overturned in the testing of the crowd, the Jews, the disciples and Peter. Thus, the manna motif plays a secondary role to the overall theme of *testing*, which is the pervasive and unifying motif of John 6.

C. REVELATION AND RHETORIC IN JOHN: TWO DIALOGICAL MODES OF THE JOHANNINE NARRATIVE

John's narrative has two basic dialogical modes: revelation and rhetoric. The former engages the reader in the divine-human dialogue, calling for a believing response to God's saving initiative in Christ Jesus. The signs narratives, the witness motif, Jesus' "I Am" sayings (and most of the other discourses and narrative) drive home this basic message: God's saving initiative in Jesus invites a believing, human response. Even the purpose of the Fourth Gospel itself is articulated in such terms (John 20:30f.). As S. Schneiders says:

The central concern of the Fourth Gospel is the saving revelation which takes place in Jesus. This revelation, however, must be understood as a dialogical process of Jesus' self-manifestation as the one being continuously sent by the Father (7:16-18) who is thereby encountered in Jesus (10:30; 14:9-11) and the response of belief on the part of the disciple (17:8).²⁷

The Johannine narrative also serves a rhetorical function, and nowhere is this rhetorical mode as extended and effective as in the Johannine misunderstanding dialogue. The purpose of this narrative form is to engage the reader in an imaginary dialogue with Jesus, whereby false and shallow notions of faith are identified and corrected by Jesus, thus exposing error and realigning the belief of the reader in more adequate directions. According to the Russian form-critic, Mikhail Bakhtin, misunderstanding in the novel—or any narrative—*always* serves a rhetorical function:

²⁷ S. M. Schneiders, "Women in the Fourth Gospel and the Role of Women in the Contemporary Church," *Biblical Theological Bulletin* 12 (1982), 39.

The device of 'Not understanding'—deliberate on the part of the author, simpleminded and naive on the part of the protagonist—always takes on great organizing potential when an exposure of vulgar conventionality is involved. Conventions thus exposed—in everyday life, mores, politics, art and so on—are usually portrayed from the point of view of a man who neither participates in nor understands them.²⁸

1. *The revelational scenario/discourse as declaration of the divine initiative*

The overall structure of the Johannine narrative moves along in a forward-moving spiral, combining cyclical-repetitive themes with linear-progressive developments. This forward-moving spiral is dialectical on several levels. Most superficially, we see dramatized dialogues between Jesus and his discussants. Then, we read of opposing themes and motifs, placed in juxtaposing tension within the text—obviously a sign of a dialectical (rather than a dogmatic) thinker, seeking to engage his reader in a literary dialogue. Next, we may infer something of the dialectical situation in which the evangelist was writing; but finally and most profoundly, we see in John, articulated more clearly than in any canonical composition, a thoroughgoing development of the human-divine dialectic wherein humanity is called to an existential, believing response to God's eschatological, saving initiative in Christ Jesus. Most scenarios and teachings depict some aspect of God's saving initiative, accompanied by an illustration of, or an invitation to, believing responsiveness to the divine initiative. This comprises the *revelational* structure of plot progression in John. God or God's agent initiates the potentially-saving dialogue with humanity, and the adequacy of human response produces a result in terms of light and life or darkness and death. This cycle of divine initiative and human response may be portrayed graphically as follows:²⁹

²⁸ M. Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel" in *The Dialogic Imagination*, edited by M. Holquist (Austin, Texas, 1981), p. 164. Johannine use of misunderstanding, of course, is closer to Bakhtin's analysis of the classical Greek biography than the modern novel. See also my paper presented in the New Testament and Rhetoric Section of the National SBL Meetings in Chicago, 1994, "Mikhail Bakhtin and the Corrective Rhetoric of the Johannine Misunderstanding Dialogue."

²⁹ Not only does the Johannine revelation scenario/discourse describe the sequence of divine initiative—human response (vv. 6, 27, 29, 32f., 35, 37-40, 44-51, 53-58, 63-65), but the narrative also *models such a sequence* where the human-divine dialectic is the main emphasis of the evangelist (vv. 5, 10-13, 19-21, 67). For a schematic outline of how the revelational pattern is juxtaposed with the rhetorical pattern in John 6, see Anderson, *Christology*, Table 9: "Divine Initiative Versus Human Initiative in the Narration of John 6."

Table #4, "Divine Initiative and the Revelational Scenario/Discourse in John"

This dialectical structure is identical within the narration of Jesus' signs and discourses in John. Both further the kerygmatic interest of the evangelist's understanding of Jesus' mission, and there is no evidence for (or advantage to) assuming that narrative sign and interpretive discourse were *ever* divorced within the Johannine tradition. They both bespeak the human-divine dialectic and call for a believing response to the divine initiative revealed eschatologically in Christ Jesus.

2. The rhetorical function of the Johannine misunderstanding dialogue

On the other hand, where the initiative passes to the discussant and others take the initiative, they often betray a misunderstanding—or a kind of shallow conventionality—and the function of this form will always be corrective and *rhetorical*. Certainly, Professor Painter's outline of the anatomy of the Johannine quest story is helpful here, especially as he

outlines the rhetorical function of the objections.³⁰ As in the structure of the revelational mode of narrative progression, the rhetorical is characterized by its own distinctive pattern:

*Table #5, "The Shift to Human Initiative and the Rhetorical Thrust of the Johannine Misunderstanding Dialogue"*³¹

What we have in John 6 is a shifting back and forth between revelational and rhetorical modes of narrative progression marked clearly by the changes of initiative. Interestingly, when the sequence of initiative changes, so does the rhetorical function in most cases.

³⁰ John Painter's insight is especially helpful where he states, "These difficulties or objections are important because it is by means of them that the story teller may wish to change the audience's attitudes." ("Quest, Rejection and Commendation in John 6: A Response to Peder Borgen" 1992 SNTS Johannine Literature Seminar, p. 1). See also Painter's *The Quest for the Messiah: The History, Literature and Theology of the Johannine Community*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), pp. 33-135, 252-86. Again, to bolster this insight with Bakhtin's judgment, "Stupidity (incomprehension) in the novel is always polemical: it interacts dialogically with an intelligence (a lofty pseudo intelligence) with which it polemicalizes and whose mask it tears away." (M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel" in his *The Dialogical Imagination* [Austin, Texas, 1981], p. 403). While Bakhtin applies this insight to the mimicking function of the misunderstanding protagonist in the modern novel, it works even better where the protagonist's *partners in dialogue* fail to understand—a common rhetorical feature of classical Greek biographical narrative.

³¹ Modified from Anderson, *Christology*, Table 19: "Human Initiative and the Rhetorical Misunderstanding Dialogue in John." See also my 1994 paper mentioned above in note 28.

Table #6, "Transitions Between Revelational and Rhetorical Modes in John 6"

Reversal of Sequence to Rhetorical Mode (human initiative)

Reversal of Sequence to Revelational Mode (divine initiative)

Reversal of Sequence to Rhetorical Mode (human initiative—implied by Jesus' response)

Casting the narrative of John 6 in this kind of schema illustrates the theological *and* reader-response interests of the evangelist.³² They are interwoven into a cyclical-repetitive and a linear-progressive pattern of dialectical narrative, which not only proclaims the divine initiative but models it as well. And, it not only portrays Jesus' correcting his discussants but functions to engage the reader in a saving dialogue with Jesus by assuming him or her into the role of the misunderstanding discussant. It is this latter point that has been under-developed by reader-response analysts.³³ As interesting as many of these studies are, they become most

³² J. D. Crossan, "It Is Written: Structuralist Analysis of John 6" in *Semeia* 26 (1983), 3-21, asks "What would one see if one took John 6 as a unity and officially omitted any historical questioning of the text? What would happen if one attempted by looking at *how* the text means to see *what* the text means?" (p. 3). While Crossan leaves historical/critical discussions out here and simply analyzes the structure of John 6 as it stands, seeking to assess how its earliest audiences may have responded to its content, the above summary of historical/critical findings suggests that this approach *is* warranted. John 6 represents a literary unity which combines signs and discourses in such a way as to "exegete" the meaning of Jesus' works and words for later audiences in the Johannine situation. As the final writing of John 6 probably did not occur until the 80's or 90's, one may also learn something of the history of Johannine Christianity by observing how the "nourishment" which Jesus offers is progressively contrasted to other types of "bread."

³³ On one hand, the works of D. Wead, *The Literary Devices in John's Gospel* (Basel, 1970); R. A. Culpepper, *The Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); P. Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985); J. Staley, *The Print's First Kiss* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1987); G. O'Day, *Revelation in the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), and others do the guild a great service in raising Johannine debates above historical/critical impasses and diachronic/synchronic brawls. They help us look at the text afresh, with new eyes, and avail new possibilities for meaningful interpretation.

On the other hand, John was not written as a fictional drama (dramatic though it be) nor as a novel (novelistic though it be). Neither is John an expressionistic or an impressionistic work of art—simply to be appreciated for its form. Its genre is that of a gospel narrative, and it

fully useful when the valuable insights learned about John's dramatic portrayal of the gospel are applied within its historical and socio-religious context. Again, the thesis of this study is to suggest that this historical context will be illuminated by means of considering the false notions of spiritual reality, as represented by Jesus' discussants and his corrective responses to them.

Another way of putting it is to say that because the literary form of John 6 is a unitive Christian homily, connecting later audiences with the existential significance of the "Bread" which Jesus offers versus less satisfying (death-producing) kinds of "bread," a sequence of acute crises may be inferred from the way the narrative progresses. As the preacher/evangelist tells the story of Jesus' feeding and accompanying events, their various earlier interpretations become the stuff of which later exhortations are made. This is the basic *Sitz im Leben* of the Johannine Bread of Life Discourses. From these exhortations (and at times rhetorical correctives) one may infer specific crises within the evolving historical context of the Johannine audience, and these crises are corroborated by other passages in John, the Johannine Epistles, and the letters of Ignatius.

D. FOUR ACUTE CRISES FACED WITHIN JOHANNINE CHRISTIANITY AS IMPLIED BY JOHN 6

If Bakhtin and Painter are indeed correct, that incomprehension in narrative is always rhetorical (n.30), the failure of Jesus' discussants to understand his deeds and words in John 6 must have been targeted at correcting specific problems in the Johannine audience. Rather than simply telling the story within an abstract setting, the evangelist has specific audiences in mind, whose thinking and actions he desires to correct by means of engaging them in an imaginary dialogue with Jesus. This rhetorical action happens on two levels beyond the *einmalig* level of the events reported. The first represents issues addressed during the oral narration of the events, as

purports real events and messages to be responded to by real people in real settings. Therefore, historical/critical issues cannot wholly be left aside for interpretation—even formal-analytical interpretation—to reach its fullest potential. Context always affects meaning. While I am not convinced of his views on authorship, M. Stibbe's attempt to combine literary analysis with historical/critical interests seems a profitable way forward (*John as Storyteller* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992]; *John* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993]; and *John's Gospel* [London and New York: Routledge, 1994]; also see Stibbe's collection, *The Gospel of John as Literature: An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Perspectives* [Leiden and New York: E.J. Brill, 1993]). Consider also Margaret Davies, *Rhetoric and Reference in the Fourth Gospel*, JSNTSS 69 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), for an interdisciplinary approach to literary analysis. Literary studies that will be the most far-reaching and enduring will probably be ones that address adequately the multiplicity of Johannine issues, not just a few.

represented by the way the narrative eventually becomes fixed. This level reflects specific, acute crises (both intramural and extramural) faced by the Johannine community. On this level one may infer the preacher has specific individuals and groups in mind, whose inadequate notions and actions are portrayed as being corrected by the Johannine Jesus as he narrates the story. The second level is often more general, and it involves attempts to preserve earlier traditions and to reach later audiences by means of the written, rather than the spoken, word. In these ways, those whose non-comprehending views are corrected by the Johannine Jesus are *specific individuals and groups*, whose appreciations of the human-divine dialectic require modification. But, these rhetorical devices are also *universalizing*. They appeal to the "light" within every reader, against the ever-encroaching ploys of darkness that so easily beset one's willingness to respond to the divine initiative, tending to replace it with inauthentic trust in human-initiated strategies, which ironically fail so miserably. John 6:25-70 reflects the evangelist's addressing of four such crises and his christocentric responses to them. As the key exhortative text for this section of v. 27, "Work not for death-producing food, but for the eternally life-producing food, which the Son of Man shall give." We will see that each of the misunderstandings betrays a false notion of "food," which is enacted by a particular group representing a perception to be corrected in the Johannine audience by Jesus. Furthermore, with the change of discussant, one may also detect a change in theme, which in turn implies a new epoch and audience targeted by the evangelist. At every turn, the Johannine Jesus corrects these notions and directs the hearer/reader toward a saving/believing acceptance of the "food" to be availed by the Son of Man. While literarily synchronic, the narration of events is rhetorically diachronic.

One more comment about how this dialectical pattern works in John 6. Each of these corrective dialogues has three central parts to it, often with preparative hints before it and a revisiting of the theme after it. The three central parts include: 1.) an *action or teaching of Jesus*, which may be understood on more than one level; 2.) a *misunderstanding statement, question or action* on the part of a new individual or group; and 3.) the *corrective statement or discourse by Jesus*, defining the true way to perceive or respond to the divine initiative and its implications for discipleship. Such an outline produces various sets of double meanings, as part 3 in one dialogue becomes inevitably part 1—the source of misunderstanding for the next.³⁴ Put in outline form, the four misunderstanding dialogues in John 6 are as follows:

³⁴ This highly interwoven character of the dialectical progression of the Johannine narrative is further evidence of the chapter's unity. Much as Plato has constructed his Socratic dialogues in terms of extended hypothetical syllogisms, for the dual purposes of preserving the teaching of his mentor and refuting his own opponents, the Fourth Evangelist constructs

Table #7, "Discussants, Themes and Audiences in the Four Misunderstanding Dialogues in John 6"

Discussants	Theme/ Issue	Jesus' Preceding Words or Works	Misunderstanding Action or Statement	Jesus' Response or Discourse
the crowd	physical bread	the feeding of the 5,000	four statements requesting more bread	You did not signs... "I am the Bread of life."
the Jews	the bread of the Torah	"I am the Bread coming down from heaven."	"How can he... say 'I have come down from hea- ven'?... give us his flesh to eat?"	"They shall all be taught by God' ... He who eats of this bread shall live eternally."
the disciples	embra- cing the cross	"Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no life."	grumbling, "This is a hard saying! Who can swallow it?"	"The flesh profits nothing... No one can come to me unless the Father draws him."

his dialogues/discourses like a snowball, layer upon layer, drawing in specific notions to be corrected by the ongoing voice of the risen Lord as needed within each epoch of the community's history. The audience probably would have heard much of the whole unit, together, many times over many years, and we probably have relatively few interpolations added to the final written version. The one exception in John 6 may be vv. 16-21, which appears to be earlier (certainly more primitive and less developed) than even the Marcan account. It could be that the contents of John 6 were preached mostly without the sea crossing, and that it has been added by the evangelist to make the written rendition more complete. This need not, however, imply John's dependence on the Synoptics. Verse 71, of course, is a clarifying gloss, probably added by the redactor as he inserted John 6 as a unit between chs. 5 and 7.

Discussants	Theme/ Issue	Jesus' Preceding Words or Works	Misunderstanding Action or Statement	Jesus' Response or Discourse
Peter	the be- trayal of Jesus	"You do not wish to leave too, do you?"	"You are the Holy One of God."	"Have I not chosen you, the Twelve, and one of you is a devil?"

The four crises alluded to within the Johannine audience include the following: a.) the physical bread versus the revelational significance of Jesus' ministry reflects an ongoing dialogue between the Johannine view of Jesus' ministry and the prevalent view of mainstream Christianity as represented by all three Synoptic Gospels. This dialogue may have extended from the days of the pre-Marcian tradition through the influence of the written Matthean Gospel (from the 50's or before through the early 90's). b.) The "bread" of the Torah versus the Bread which Jesus gives and is represents the acute dialogue between Johannine Christianity and the local Synagogue over the source of divine authority precipitated by the success of the Christian mission within Judaism. It was most acute within a decade or two of the destruction of the Temple (from the mid 70's to the mid 80's). c.) The challenge to Jesus' disciples to ingest the flesh and blood of Jesus (to participate with him in embracing the cross, v. 51c) would have been felt most acutely during the persecution of Christians in Asia Minor (and elsewhere) by Domitian (from the mid 80's through the mid 90's). During these years, as those who did not participate in public emperor-laud were punished and sometimes executed, Gentile converts to the faith would have been most scandalized by the cost of their new-found religion. In turn, they adopted docetizing (Hellenic) views of Jesus' sufferings in order to excuse their own attempts to retain their Christian identity without having to suffer for it. d.) The juxtaposition of Peter and the Beloved Disciple would have been targeted most acutely toward reversing the institutionalizing tendencies within the mainstream churches (esp. Antiochine influence from the mid 80's through the late 90's). The ambivalent portrayal of Peter in John must have been targeted against the likes of Diotrophes and his kin—those who abused ecclesial power and were threatened by the the Johannine approach to christocracy, the means by which the risen Lord leads the church. A fuller discussion of these evolving challenges follows below.

1. *Misunderstanding Jesus' miracles: John 6:25-40*

Bultmann, Fortna and others are indeed correct to infer a pointed tension between the evangelist's view of Jesus' miracles and their thaumaturgic valuation within the middle/late first-century church. Their assessments of the Fourth Evangelist's partner in dialogue, however, are far too limited and tame. Rather than presume a backwater Jewish/Christian miracle tract for which there is neither convincing empirical evidence nor compelling theoretical advantage, John must be understood as intending to correct the prevalent Christian view of the significance of Jesus' miracles—as reflected in the *entire Synoptic witness*. Unlike the three other crises, the one reflected most explicitly in John 6:25ff. is not limited to a singular event or epoch. Here Jesus is portrayed as overturning the glorious result of *all five* Synoptic feeding accounts, and the Johannine dialogue with those embracing the mainstream view of miracles as “thaumas” may have extended for decades, or even longer.³⁵

In the three Synoptic accounts of the feeding of the 5,000 (Mark 6:42; Matt. 14:20; Luke 9:17) and in both accounts of the feeding of the 4,000 (Mark 8:8; Matt. 15:37) the nearly identical words are used to describe the felicitous result of the feeding: ἔφαγον καὶ ἐχορτάσθησαν (“they ate . . . and were satisfied”). And, in John 6:26 Jesus declares to the misunderstanding crowd: “You seek me *not* because you saw the signs, but because you *ate*. . . and were satisfied” (ἐφάγετε . . . καὶ ἐχορτάσθητε). This is a direct refutation of the prevalent Christian interpretation of the feeding miracle. Put otherwise, the Johannine Jesus is here portrayed as declaring that those who seek Jesus in hopes of more stomach-satisfying bread have missed the whole point of the soul-reaching miracle. Jesus was not a thaumaturge—Marcan, pre-Marcan, or otherwise.³⁶ He came to reveal,

³⁵ On the earliest end, given the fact that the Johannine and pre-Marcan oral traditions must have enjoyed an “interfluent” relationship, these dialogues could have been as early as the 40’s or 50’s. On the latest end, the “publication” of Matthew must have caused some renewed speculation about the role of the believer’s faith as a facilitator of miracles (as Matthew embellishes this Marcan theme), so this discussion must have continued into the 90’s. Within the dialogue/discourse section of John 6 alone, this debate forms something of an inclusio between vv. 25-34 and 66-70.

³⁶ The Fourth Evangelist need not, and probably did not, have access to written accounts of the Synoptic feeding narratives in order to disagree with their outcomes. Judged by the fact that both Marcan renditions of the feeding portray the *identical* sequence of all sixteen events (Mark 6:30-45; 8:1-10. The crowd gathers, Jesus feels compassion, the disciples inquire about food, Jesus inquires as to the number of loaves they have, and the supply is reported [five loaves and two fish; seven loaves]. Jesus then commands the crowd to sit on the ground, takes the loaves, gives thanks, breaks the loaves and distributes them, doing the same with the fish, and the felicitous result is described [they “ate and were satisfied”]. Jesus finally orders the disciples to gather the left-overs, the number of full baskets is tallied [twelve; seven], the number of the crowd is reported [5,000; 4,000], and Jesus heads off with his disciples in a boat.), it appears that we have one basic set of events that has been reported in slightly different ways. If written when received, it is doubtful that Mark-as-redactor would have

and even to incarnate, the human-divine saving and revealing dialogue, and the physical effect of Jesus' miracles in John is always embellished in order to magnify their revelational value. Semeiology always depletes ontology.

At this point, the difference between the Synoptic and the Johannine views of the relation between miracles and faith is thrown into sharp relief. In the Synoptics, miracles *require* faith. In John, they *lead to it*.³⁷ According to John, Jesus never intended for all the lame to walk, for all the blind to see, for all the dead to be raised, for all storms to be calmed, or for all the hungry and thirsty to be physically satisfied. In Mark 8:14-21, though, the disciples are chided by Jesus for not believing more fully that Jesus can do such wonders any time he pleases. The purveyors of the Marcan tradition

changed the numbers in a text for symbolic or rhetorical reasons, and indeed, the same basic sequence is also corroborated in John's independent account.

The Mark 8 rendition may reflect the way the feeding narrative was preached throughout the seven churches in Asia Minor (Seven baskets matches the seven elders appointed to watch over Hellenistic churches in Acts 6:1-7; see also the seven churches and their candlesticks in Rev. 2-3. Clearly the number twelve symbolized the twelve apostles, associated originally with Jewish Christianity in Acts 1. Was the number 4,000 associated with another gathering in the desert by another messianic prophet—"the Egyptian" in Acts 21:38?), which by the time Mark began his editing process had already acquired an "explanation passage" (Mark 8:14-21) reconciling it with the difference in numbers in the more widely known feeding of the 5,000 narrative as a dovetail form of integration? On this account, Robert Fowler's extensive treatment of the Marcan feeding narratives (*Loaves and Fishes: the Function of the Feeding Stories in the Gospel of Mark*, SBLDS 54 [Chico: Scholars Press, 1981]) does not convince. While Mark 8:1ff. does have some details in it that are more primitive than those in Mark 6, the "dovetail section" (Mark 8:14-21) already has built into itself a justification for being considered along with the feeding of the 5,000. This unit seems to have been part of the tradition, not the Marcan redaction, and the fact that it justifies itself suggests the priority of the *other* feeding narrative in Mark 6. Luke's redaction of Mark corroborates this judgment.

The significant fact is that in both accounts the value of the feeding is remembered identically as a "wonder of satisfaction," and it is this pre-Markan (Petrine?) emphasis with which the Fourth Evangelist disagrees. Then again, this emphasis was not solely early, as the Matthean rendition repeats *both* Marcan accounts not long before John was finalized. Thus, the prevalent interpretation of the value of Jesus' miracles as thaumaturgic would have been rife within the oral (and/or written) traditions of the church for at least a half century—and relatively unchallenged (other than locally) until the circulation of John.

³⁷ For one of the best treatments of this topic, see R. Kysar, "Seeing Is Believing—Johannine Concepts of Faith" in his *John, the Maverick Gospel*, rev. ed. (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1993), pp. 78-96. See also Anderson, *Christology*, Chapter 7, "The Dialectical Character of John 6;" and P. N. Anderson, "The Cognitive Origins of John's Unitive and Disunitive Christology," *Horizons in Biblical Theology*, June, 1995.

It is interesting to note that both traditions deal with the existential problem of why miracles do *not* happen in their interpretations of Jesus' works. The pre-Markan tradition (accentuated even more clearly in the Matthean) explains the dearth of miracles as the result of the lack of human faith. "God did not fail; *you* did not believe fully enough. If you would just have *faith the size of a mustard seed*..." the Synoptic explanation must have gone. The Johannine tradition, perhaps even from its early to middle stages (although exact dates are impossible to establish), dealt with the relative dearth of miracles by symbolizing Jesus' miracles as revelatory *semeia*. In that sense, they occupy a christological function within the Johannine kerygma as testimony to Jesus' being sent from the Father (John 6:32f.; 11:27, etc.)—to be responded to accordingly.

have obviously not reflected upon the existential significance of Jesus' miracles in the same way the Fourth Evangelist has. For whatever reason, he has found the mainstream thaumaturgic interpretation of Jesus' miracles to be inadequate. Their import lay in the existentially nourishing conviction that in the storms and deserts of life Jesus calms his disciples and provides daily "bread" for those who trust and abide in him.

On the other hand, Jesus' miracles are heightened in John as nowhere else in the New Testament. Jesus' ministry begins with a "luxury miracle" (John 2:1-11), and Lazarus has been in the tomb four days (ch.11) before being raised up. Furthermore, Jesus declares that his disciples would do *meizona touton* ("greater things than these," whatever that means; 14:12), and promises that whatever is asked in his name (John 14:13f.) will be done. These motifs suggest a tension between the hope that prayers will be answered—with wonders still continuing to happen within the church—and the experienced reality that suffering and death still continue, even for the believer. John's semeiology is a function of the evangelist's approach to theodicy, suggested also by the representation of *pathos* and grieving within the gospel narrative. At the tomb of Lazarus, for instance, Lazarus' sisters, Jesus, and *even the Jews* weep (John 11:33-35); and *both Martha and Mary* exclaim, "Lord, if you had been here, our brother would not have died!" (John 11:21, 32) Whenever and however the crises underlying these emotions may have happened (and they need not have been singular events alone), the evangelist responds to them by existentializing the signs of Jesus.³⁸ "As wondrous as Jesus' signs must have been, blessed are those who have not seen—and yet believe." (John 20:29) That, for the evangelist, represents the essence of Christian maturity, and he apparently feels called to challenge some of the less reflective approaches to the miraculous ministry of Jesus. Neither are they adequate for faith, in his view, nor does a Christianized form of thaumaturgy represent Jesus' own purpose for performing his signs to begin with. For the Fourth Evangelist, Jesus' signs are functions of his agency christology and basic elements of his kerygma. They confirm that Jesus has been sent from the Father (Deut. 18:15-22), and that through receiving him God's saving initiative is responded to efficaciously, in faith (John 6:35-40).

One more observation here. The narrative means by which the evangelist structures this corrective is to couch it in the crowd's failure to look beyond conventional messianic expectations to the authentic mission

³⁸ At this point, there is little functional difference between the present approach and the excellent essay by R. Fortna in his second monograph ("Signs and Faith" in *The Fourth Gospel and its Predecessor* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988], pp. 235-50). Fortna develops the existentializing way in which the evangelist may have re-worked a hypothetical source that was similar to Mark; the present approach does the same, assuming the "partner in dialogue" was the prevalent Christian interpretation of Jesus miracles—a prevailing mind set—as represented in *all five* gospel feeding accounts.

of Jesus. Just as the misunderstanding crowd wanted to sweep Jesus away and make him a prophet-king like Moses (by force!), they have also misunderstood the significance of the feeding. In doing so, the evangelist co-opts the hearer/reader (Jewish prospect, mainstream Christian, or Johannine community member) into the role of the misunderstanding crowd. While there is ample reason to connect the expectations of the crowd in vv. 14f. with vv. 25-34 historically,³⁹ the evangelist's narrative connection is rhetorical. He portrays the misunderstanding crowd as seeking to coerce Jesus into producing more bread by means of using typical Jewish manna rhetoric. They cite Ps. 78:24f. as their "proof-text" and even challenge his messianic identity in hopes of gaining more bread. The scenario is used ironically by the evangelist to show Jesus as "overturning" their highest trump card. By contrast to the crowd's manipulative exegesis, Jesus expositis the priority of responding to God's present eschatological activity if one truly hopes for redemption. Traditional stories of God's saving work in the past prefigure God's saving work in the present, but clinging to the former may cause one to miss the latter. The evangelist here works by analogy in reaching his audience. Just as those who wanted Jesus to produce more bread missed his central reason for coming, those who go along with the prevalent Christian mind set that Jesus' miracles were primarily thaumaturgical—to be repeated if the believer can only muster enough faith—will fail to be truly nourished existentially by the "Bread" offered by the Son of Man. His "food" is to do the work of the Father, regardless of temporal outcomes. The original

³⁹ W. Meeks, for instance, has demonstrated clearly that Mosaic Prophet-King messologies would have been prevalent in Galilee during the first century CE (*The Prophet-King* [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967]). Thus, John 6:14f. is not necessarily a Johannine fiction but represents predictable responses to Jesus during his actual ministry—the sort of messiology Jesus disowns most intensely in the pre-Markan messianic secret motif—and to which the likes of Theudas, "the Samaritan" and "the Egyptian" catered later. Certainly, the Johannine rendition that Jesus fled (φεύγει, in some early mss.) the crowd because they wanted to enthrone him by force is the earliest. It also seems more historically reliable than the more pietistic Marcan one: Jesus departed into the hills to pray (in agreement with Painter, *Quest*, p. 257-66), a theme which Luke also embellishes.

The way all this connects with the request for more bread is that several ancient Jewish documents connect the second Moses (the new Messiah) with once more raining down bread from heaven. According to *Midrash Rabbah* (*Eccles.* 1:9), for instance, "As the first redeemer caused manna to descend, as it is stated, 'Because I shall cause to rain bread from heaven for you (Ex. 16:4),' so will the latter redeemer cause manna to descend." This connects the feeding and requests for another feeding centrally with conventional Palestinian messianic hopes. At stake originally was not just another meal, but popular hopes for the dawning of the New Age—the overthrow of the Romans and the exaltation of the Jewish nation. The realization that such was not the political agenda of Jesus must have caused even some of his original disciples to "turn away and walk with him no longer." (John 6:66) The evangelist builds on those misunderstandings and defections in his addressing later crises facing the Johannine situation.

hearers/readers of this first misunderstanding dialogue probably would have experienced themselves addressed as follows:

— (Says Jesus) “You seek me not because you perceived the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were satisfied.” (v. 26—To experience my miracles as wonders of satisfaction is to miss the whole point of why they were done. Despite what you hear from the rest of the gospel narrators, I never intended simply to fill people’s stomachs. I came to lead them to a believing response to God’s saving initiative, and the feeding of the 5,000 serves as a symbol of how this new relationship will supply your most basic existential need, which is spiritual.)

— “For the (real) bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” (v. 33—Yes, I know that the manna-provision and the recent feeding were wondrous, but these are only anticipators of the ultimate Bread given incarnationally for the life of the world. People who eat physical bread grow hungry again. But those who partake of this nourishment receive life that lasts forever.)

— “For I have come down not to do my own will, but the will of the one who sent me. And this is the will of the one who sent me: that none of those he has entrusted to me shall be lost, but that I shall raise them up on the last day.” (v. 38f.—What makes me most like Moses is not the producing of wondrous bread, but the fact that I speak and do solely what the Father has instructed [Deut. 18:15-18]. And this mission is to gather all of those who have been entrusted to me—to care for them and to provide them all they need to survive the ordeals of life. The final goal is to facilitate their [your] faithfulness during difficult times in order that they [you] may be raised up on the last day. This is the will of the Father, and this is what my mission is all about.)

2. *The dialogue with the Synagogue: John 6:29-51*

Notice the overlapping of nuance and meaning between the different kinds of “bread” in John 6. While the debate with the crowd explicitly ends at v. 40, the seeds of the dialogue with the Jews are already planted as early as v. 29. Unlike the first crisis and its corrective implied by the debate of physical bread versus heavenly Bread in John 6, however, the next three crises are more specific in terms of epoch and group. Here we have three sets of dialectical relationships between Johannine Christians and other groups, each of which rises and falls in terms of intensity at sequential—though somewhat overlapping—times in the history of Johannine Christianity.⁴⁰ The first of these chronologically, and as presented in the narrative, is the dialogue with leaders of the local Synagogue.

⁴⁰ In this way, the Johannine Bread of Life Discourse serves the social function of calling to present events in the past in such a way as to create what W. Meeks describes as a

Few books have made more of an impression upon Johannine studies over the last quarter of a century than J. Louis Martyn's *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*.⁴¹ In it, Martyn argues successfully that behind the *einmalig* (events reported) level of John's narrative is another level of history—one contemporary with the situation of the evangelist and his audience—suggested by the way the events are narrated. In a nutshell, Martyn reconstructs a scenario which divides the history of Johannine Christianity into three periods. The *Early Period* (from the 60's to the 80's) involved the successful conversion of Jews within a particular Synagogue by means of an evangelist who used a signs gospel to convince Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. Thus, the first Johannine Christians were actually Christian Jews. The *Middle Period* (late 80's-early 90's) saw rising opposition to the Christianizing trend, which led to scriptural debates about the authority of Moses and the Torah (versus Jesus), the devising of the *Birkat ha-Minim* (a curse against "heretics"—specifically "Nazarenes," or Christians), the expulsion of Christians from the Synagogue (they become *aposynagogos*—a technical term for Synagogue excommunication—found in John 9:22; see also 12:42 and 16:2), and the setting up of local councils of Jewish authorities who persecuted (and even executed) some Christian leaders as a disincentive to the movement's growth. Johannine Christians undergo the transition from having been Christian Jews to becoming Jewish Christians. The *Late Period* (inexact—the 90's and later?) saw the transition into an autonomous community. In doing so, broader Christian relations were sought, Gentiles were also evangelized, "Crypto Christians" who stayed in the Synagogue (while maintaining secret identity "for fear of the Jews") were courted by Johannine Christians, and some Johannine Christians were courted back into the Synagogue by the Jews.⁴² Dialogues then begin to accelerate with other Christian groups. According to Martyn, the entirety of John should be read against this Jewish/Christian backdrop. The way the story of Jesus is told in John bespeaks the history of the Johannine Community.

"symbolic universe" ("The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism," *JBL* 91 [1972], 44-72; reprinted in J. Ashton, ed., *The Interpretation of John* [Philadelphia: Fortress, and London: SPCK, 1986], pp. 141-73). Says Meeks, "More precisely, there must have been a continuing dialectic between the group's historical experience and the symbolic world which served both to explain that experience and to motivate and form the reaction of group members to the experience." (Ashton, *Interpretation*, p. 145)

⁴¹ First published in 1968, the book was revised and enlarged in 1979 (Nashville: Abingdon). In his introduction to *The Interpretation of John* (1986), Ashton judges Martyn's book to be "probably the most important monograph on the Gospel since Bultmann's commentary." (p. 5) Given the outpouring of research into the socio-religious situation of the Johannine community over the last two decades or more, especially with reference to local Jewish/Christian relations, Ashton was right.

⁴² See Martyn's "Glimpses into the History of the Johannine Community" (reprinted in his *The Gospel of John in Christian History* [New York: Paulist, 1979]) for his clearest outline of the Johannine Community's history (pp. 90-121).

In his massive commentary on the Johannine Epistles and in his book,⁴³ *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, Martyn's former colleague, R. E. Brown, refined his scenario. Brown contributed possible explanations for why the Jews became so hostile toward the Christians. He believes that the adding of Samaritan converts with a Mosaic christology influenced Johannine christology toward a pre-existent one, and this caused Johannine Christians to be called "di-theists" by their Jewish counterparts and thus expelled as heretics. Brown also believes that the Johannine defense against the Jewish community eventually led to an internal schism whereby the secessionists moved toward docetism (and eventually gnosticism), and the rest of the Johannine Christians eventually merged with the Great Church. While not all scholars agree with the outlines of Martyn's and Brown's historical sketches, most scholars have become increasingly convinced that underlying John's rendition of the gospel narrative lie penetrating glimpses of Jewish/Christian dialogues in the late first century CE.⁴⁴ These sketches are particularly enlightening when interpreting John 6.

According to Martyn,⁴⁵ the manna debate in John 6:31ff. is far more than the reflection of an exegetical debate. Disagreeing with Borgen,⁴⁶ Martyn claims:

⁴³ See R. E. Brown, *The Epistles of John* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1982); and *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979).

⁴⁴ Consider, for instance the critical views of S. Katz, "Issues in the Separation of Judaism and Christianity after 70 C.E.: A Reconsideration," *JBL* 103 (1984), 43-76; and R. Kimelman, "Birkat Ha-Minim and the Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Jewish Prayer in Late Antiquity," in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, Vol. 2, ed. by E. P. Sanders et al. (London: Fortress, 1981), pp. 226-44. On one hand, Christians and Jews enjoyed a great deal of cooperation and mutual support. On the other hand, few developments began to threaten Judaism from the inside as much as Christian claims to Jesus being the Messiah and Son of God. This is spelled out very clearly in F. Manns' *John and Jamnia: How the Break Occurred Between Jews and Christians c. 80-100 A.D.*, E.t. by M. Ducloux and M. Riadi (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1988). Consider also the very creative and insightful book by D. Rensberger, *Johannine Faith and Liberating Community* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988), which develops the historical and theological implications of the Johannine community's understanding of liberation through Christ in the light of assumed oppression by the local Synagogue. Some of this would of course have applied to other sources of persecution, such as Roman oppression under Domitian. One is also taken by N. Petersen's *The Gospel of John & the Sociology of Light* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1993), esp. pp. 80-109, regarding John's anti-structuralism, which would not only have been levied against Jewish pressures, but also eventually as a corrective to rising institutionalism in the late first-century Christian (esp. Antiochene) movement.

⁴⁵ Martyn, *The Gospel of John in Christian History*, pp. 123-28.

⁴⁶ See Martyn's "footnote essay" (*ibid.*, p. 127, n. 188; and also his review of Borgen's book in *JBL* 86 (1967), 44f.) where he argues that Borgen's view that John 6 reflects a countering of Docetists is wrong. Martyn wants to connect John 6 (and the rest of John, for that matter) almost exclusively with the Christian/Synagogue debates in the Johannine dialectical situation but thereby weakens his own case, as ample evidence suggests at least three or four partners in dialogue with the Johannine situation. In doing so, he chides Borgen wrongly for assuming any sort of connection between the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles—a connection that actually clarifies (and delimits) the Jewish/Christian tensions

John is not saying to the synagogue, "you misread the text. You should read it, 'He gives them bread from heaven to eat.'" Rather, he is emphatically saying:

1. "You are wrong in your identification of the type. It was not Moses but rather God who provided the manna." . . .
2. "The correspondence between type and antitype is fixed by God in his sovereign freedom." . . .
3. "The issue is not to be defined as an argument about an ancient text. It is not a midrashic issue. By arguing about texts you seek to evade the present crisis. God is even now giving you the true bread from heaven, and you cannot hide from him in typological speculation or in any other kind of midrashic activity. You must decide now with regard to this present gift of God." (pp.127f.)

In these observations Martyn is correct, and lucidly so. The evangelist is not simply performing a Jewish midrash on the "correct" meaning of the manna narrative. He shows Jesus declaring that a true exegesis of the scriptures must lead one *beyond* the scriptures to the one to whom they point—the "True Bread" given now, in the eschatological present, for the enlivening of the world. In doing so, Jesus overturns their manna rhetoric and perhaps for the first time in the history of Jewish/Christian manna midrash, he refers to heavenly manna as death-producing: ". . . your forefathers ate *and they died*; the one eating *this* bread bread will live eternally." (vv. 49f., 58) Thus, as Jesus' misunderstandings shift from the crowd to "the Jews," one infers a shifting of the issues being corrected by the Johannine Jesus. No longer is the crisis one of physical bread versus existential nourishment, but it becomes one of members of John's audience wishing to cling to the bread of the Torah versus the Bread coming down from heaven in the eschatological present. Alluded to already in Jesus' refutation of their proof-texting work in verses 32ff., the misunderstanding question of the Jews in vv. 41f. makes this question explicit. Their grumbling (ἐγόγγυζον) is clearly reminiscent of the unbelieving Israelites of Numbers 11-14 as they ask, "Is this not Jesus, son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say 'I came down from heaven?'"

The rhetorical target of this question now becomes specific. It intends to co-opt members of John's audience who, amidst dialectical tensions with the local Synagogue, may be questioning whether Jesus is indeed the Messiah—the Prophet like Moses who says nothing on his own, but only

Martyn advocates. The fact is that they confirm a Christian/Synagogue debate *and* a later, docetic schism.

what the Father has instructed—thus, deserving to be treated in all ways like the one who sent him. The rhetoric they get from the Synagogue leaders must have been something like: “We are followers of *Moses*; after all, Moses gave us heavenly manna . . .”; “We obey the *Father* and are *monotheists*. To worship Jesus is to reject the Father and to become ditheists—thus losing your hope for the blessing promised to the children of Abraham”; “We are *scriptural*. After all, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone,’ but by the Torah—that written deposit of words proceeding from the mouth of God. (Deut. 8:3) If you leave the Synagogue you will not only forfeit your fellowship with the blessed faith, but you will be absented from access to God’s instruction. You will move from consolation to desolation. Reject your Christian heresy, or die!”⁴⁷ Indeed, by the time 1 John 2:18-25 was written, Johannine Christians had apparently already been purged from the Synagogue, and some of them had been courted back into the Synagogue, perhaps by family and friends. The explanation for their departure by the Elder obviates an antichristic schism involving defectors who left only to return to the Jewish community whence they came. The outline of his appeal is as follows:

Table #8, “The First Antichristic Schism (1 John 2:18-25)—Jewish Christians Returning to the Synagogue”

— “Little children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now, many Antichrists have arisen.” (v. 18) The Elder explains the threat as the arrival of the eschaton. The predicted Antichrist *has* come, and is even *manifold*, so beware! You too could be misled.

— “They departed from us but were not a part of us—for if they had really been a part of us they would have remained with us; but this just exposes all of them as aliens” (οὐκ εἰσὶν πάντες ἐξ ἡμῶν, v. 19). Obviously, the antichristic schism has occurred by now, and the Elder “explains” this loss to his community as being attributable to the lack of

⁴⁷ Many of Martyn’s observations do seem warranted, for instance: that much of John’s community had Jewish origins; that there was an actual purging whereby followers of Christ were singled out and expelled, becoming *aposynagogos*; that upon expulsion, the Johannine community began to take in more Gentile converts; that some members of the Johannine group either rejoined the Synagogue or became underground Christians; and that the evangelist (and the Elder) sought to stave off further defections and continued to argue that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah, greater than Moses, Abraham and the Torah. On the other hand, the dialogue with Judaism was by no means the only source of dialectical tension within Johannine Christianity. Martyn, for instance, is happy to side with Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus*, E.t. by G. Krodel (London, 1968), in his locating docetizing tendencies within the evangelist’s christology, but he does little with Käsemann’s main thesis that the evangelist was centrally caught up in a dialectical relationship with the institutional church.

sincerity of those who left. Their abandonment reveals their lack of owning the Johannine community's ideals and commitment to Jesus as the Christ. They *never were* fully (inwardly) a part.

— “But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all are in the know” (οἶδατε πάντες, v. 20). They were unenlightened, but you have the Light within you—and among us. We are all taught by God (see v. 27; and John 6:45; Isa. 54:13).

— “I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie can come from the truth. Who is a liar if not the one denying that Jesus is the Christ. *This* is the Antichrist—the one denying the Father and the Son.” (vv. 21f.) Here the Elder affirms the universal character of the gospel. It is not simply a matter of one sect over another; it has to do with minding the Truth, which in his view is Christomorphic. Fugitives from the Truth (liars) deny the Father who sent the Son in their rejection of Christ. Those who adhere to the Truth, however, resist the Antichrist and are firmly grounded in their faith.

— “All who deny the Son forfeit the Father also; but the one confessing the Son gets the Father too.” (v. 23) At this point the Jewish/Christian tension is absolutely clear. Gentile Docetists would not be worried about losing “the Father,” nor would they be reluctant to affirm Jesus as ὁ χριστός. Here we have telling signs of a Jewish-constructed dichotomy: “If you want the Father, you must renounce Jesus as the Christ; if you cling to Christ, *you forfeit the Father!*” To this the Elder responds, “Nonsense! Because Jesus is sent from the Father as his Agent and Son, to receive him is to receive the Father. Conversely, to reject him is to reject/lose the Father who sent him.”

— “If what you have heard from the beginning remains in you, you will both abide in the Father and the Son; and this is the promise which he promised us: life eternal.” (vv. 24f.) To abide with Christ and his fellowship, in the midst of persecution and social alienation from your families and friends, is to receive an inheritance in the world beyond. You will not only receive the Father's approval, but eternal life through the Son.

All of this matches identically with the misunderstanding dialogue between the Jews and Jesus in John 6.⁴⁸ They question *how* he can now

⁴⁸ It also matches the setting implied by other debates between the Johannine Jesus and the Jews. For instance, U. C. von Wahlde (“Literary Structure and Theological Argument in Three Discourses with the Jews in the Fourth Gospel,” *JBL* 103/4 [1984], 575-584; see also his monograph, *The Earliest Version of John's Gospel* [Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1989] identifies significant similarities of structure between John 6:31-59; 8:13-59; and 10:22-39.

claim to have come down from heaven when they know his earthly origin—his parents (πῶς νῦν λέγει, v. 42); and *how* he can give us his flesh to eat (πῶς δύναιται . . . δοῦναι, v. 52). Both of these misunderstandings reflect the scandal of the incarnation and the scandal of the cross. The unbelieving world asks “*how* is it possible?”; the Christian proclamation is *that* it has happened—an eschatological event, calling forth a human response to God’s saving initiative. To the Jewish Christian faced with the pressing decision of whether to rejoin the security and comforts of the Synagogue, the words of Jesus in John 6 would have offered a great deal of support for retaining one’s Christian loyalties. They probably would have experienced themselves addressed by Jesus’ words as follows:

— “This is the work of God: that you *believe* in the one he has sent.” (v. 29—Salvation is not received by keeping the Torah, but by responding to God’s saving initiative in faith.)

— “It was not Moses who gave . . . but my Father who *gives* you the true Bread from heaven. For the Bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” (vv. 32f.—Your Jewish friends have the typology wrong. Neither manna nor the Torah were given to make us Moses’ followers, but to point us to the Source of provision *and* inspiration—God—who has now provided for our needs through the incarnation.)

— “I am the Bread of Life. The one coming to me by no means hungers, and the one believing in me will never thirst.” (v. 35—In Christ, God has acted eschatologically, meeting our true needs. As bread and water meet our physical hunger and thirst needs, so responding to Christ in faith meets our deeper, spiritual needs.)

— “And this is the will of the one who sent me, that I should lose none of those he has given me, but that I should raise them all up on the last

As to who the audience hearing these stylized debates must have been, von Wahlde correctly says, “More likely it is intended to confirm those who already believe and to save those who are in danger of becoming apostate from the Johannine community. These latter are undoubtedly the Jewish Christians undergoing persecution and expulsion from the synagogue.” (pp. 583f.) Martyn, *The Gospel of John in Christian History*, also identifies four contexts in which the discussions of Jesus as the Mosaic Messiah lead to identifying him as the Son of Man. They include John 3:1-13; 6:14-58; 7:31-8:28; and 9:17-35ff. It is significant to note that all of the above passages reflect the concerns of the evangelist around the time the first edition of the Gospel was completed (according to Lindars’ theory), and on this point one takes issue with Manns (*John and Jamnia*) who connects the Synagogue tensions with the final edition of John. This means that around the time the first edition of John was completed, and around the time 1 John was written, Johannine Christians faced an acute crisis (probably in the 80’s, with which Manns *would* concur) with the Synagogue. (This is not to say that the Johannine Gospel and Epistles represent an identical situation—they probably involve parallel ones, however, if not the same one. Whatever the connection, the situations were by no means totally disconnected.) A consideration of the supplementary material added to the final edition suggests that by the time this later material was produced, another crisis was impending, and probably a docetic one.

day." (v. 39—You are individually and corporately called by God to abide with Christ and his fellowship until the end. It is the Father's will that none of you should be lost, lapsing back into "the world," but that you all should stay and be raised up in the eschaton. I will provide you all you need in order to be faithful till the end.)

— "No one can come to me except the Father . . . draws him . . ." (v. 44—Even your apparent initiative is already a response to the Father's drawing in your hearts. It is not a matter of permission—this is not a divine regulation: "No one *may* come . . ."—it is a matter of possibility: "No one *can* come . . ." It is impossible to "discover" the truth of the gospel by means of clever exegesis or religious rigor. Saving faith is counter-conventional. It requires paradoxically the abandonment of our confidence in our own abilities to arrive before we can even begin the journey. No one can come by one's own initiative or ingenuity, religious or otherwise. These must be laid at the cross—and repeatedly so—in order to say "Yes" to the saving initiative of God.)

— "It is written in the Prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.'" (v. 45.; Isa. 54:13—Don't worry about the threats of the Jews that you will absent yourselves from God's instruction. After all, the very manna passage they cite has a clear reference in Numbers 11 to Moses' climactic yearning: "Would that *all* the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!" v. 29. And this yearning, as foretold by Isaiah, has been fulfilled in the coming of Christ and the sending of the *Parakletos*. What is anticipated in the Jewish scriptures is actualized in the Christian community!)

— "No one has seen the Father, except the one being with God . . ." (v. 46; 1:18—This is the reason human initiative cannot suffice, and this is the means by which you are taught by God—his *Logos*—who dwelt among us, and whose glory we beheld (1:14). And, speaking of midrash, this one has "exegeted" the Father to us incarnationally (1:18).

— "I am the living Bread which has come down from heaven; If anyone eats of this bread, he will live eternally; and indeed, this Bread is my flesh which I shall give for the life of the world." (v. 51—Two themes are repeated, but the third one is new. To receive Jesus as God's means of saving initiative in the eschatological present is to be assured of eternal life in the eschatological future. This hope, however, is tempered by the cost of discipleship. Just as Jesus' being the Bread of Life will involve him giving his flesh—on the cross—for the life of the world, so the believer must embrace the cross if he or she wishes to receive this Bread. Paradoxically, to receive the promise of life eternal, one must be willing to undergo suffering and death as did the Lord.)

— "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. . . Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him. . . This is the bread which has come down from

heaven; not like that which our fathers ate, and died; the one eating this bread will live eternally.” (vv. 53, 56, 58—Now using eucharistic imagery, the appeal for corporate solidarity with Jesus and his community in the face of persecution is brought to the center of the stage. If one hopes to be raised with Christ in the resurrection, one must be willing to go with him to the cross. In so doing one remains with Christ and his community, and Christ also abides with the believer, in strengthening and empowering ways. The heavenly manna so triumphantly touted by the leaders of the Synagogue was actually death-producing. Our forefathers ate of it . . . but they died. But this Bread, the flesh of the Son of Man, gives life which is eternal.)

With v. 51c, the theme of suffering is introduced.⁴⁹ Until then, the audience has been hearing about the ways God speaks and should be heeded. But now, the cost of believing—potential suffering and even death—is declared bluntly. Verse 51c is not a veiled reference to the eucharist; it is rather, a scandalizing reference to the cross. This would have been absolutely clear to the audiences of the oral and written renderings of this section. Granted, eucharistic language is being used, but the evangelist is *not* saying “Jesus died on the cross in order to bring us the eucharist.” Neither is he saying, “God gave manna, and then the Torah, and then the miraculous feeding, and then the Christ Events, and now finally a Christian cultic ritual. Enjoy it or be damned!” No. The eschatology of the evangelist has not changed one bit from its christocentric fulcrum. To follow Jesus will always exact a price—the rejection of the world; and yet, true faithfulness will also involve a reward—abiding with Christ in the eschaton. In furthering the goal of corporate solidarity with Jesus in the face of persecution (by the Jewish leaders first, and later by the Romans), eucharistic imagery is employed as a means of making the point graphically. All of this was first targeted (orally) at the Jewish/Christian members of the Johannine audience during the late 70’s and 80’s, in the face of pressure to abandon the Christian community and to rejoin the local Synagogue, but it also becomes centrally relevant for averting the next schismatic threat. For those who remain with Jesus and his community, the promise of eternal life is given, as well as the provision of the existential strength to abide in the truth.

⁴⁹ On this point, Martyn believes that the local Jewish authorities mustered the social and political power to persecute, and even execute, some of the leaders of the Johannine movement as disincentives to their growth (*The Gospel of John in Christian History*, pp. 37-89), and Rensberger’s book certainly develops that theme in the light of John’s appeal to liberation in Jesus Christ (*Johannine Faith*, pp. 37-134). While some of this may indeed have occurred, it is doubtful that the entire history of individuated Johannine Christianity was spent under an exclusively Jewish cloud. At the least, Johannine Jewish Christians would have been faced with “social martyrdom” as they were forced to make difficult decisions about communal loyalties and commitments of faith. See Anderson, *Christology*, Table 21: “Three Acute Intramural Crises Faced by Johannine Christianity.”

3. *The threat of a second schism involving Gentile converts with docetizing tendencies: John 6:51-66*

Notice again the overlapping of meanings with the previous discussants. The third crisis alluded to in John 6 is the temptation of Gentile converts to disassociate themselves with Johannine Christianity, probably in the face of Roman adversity and persecution. As the misunderstanding discussants shift from being the Jews to the disciples, one detects the shift to a situation closer to the immediate audience at the time of the writing of John 6. These disciples are scandalized, not because of the cannibalistic language being used, but because the "Bread" offered them is being served up on a "platter" hewn into the shape of a cross. To ingest Jesus' flesh and blood is to accept the fleshly reality of the incarnation—and its implication—that Jesus' true followers must also be willing to embrace the cross, themselves.

Following the break with the Synagogue, Johannine Christianity began to reach out to Gentiles, and this mission was apparently successful. Then again, there may have been Gentile members of the Johannine movement before that time as well, as the missionary churches of Asia Minor tended to include mixtures of Jewish and Gentile converts. Nonetheless, with the advent of Roman persecution under Domitian, Gentile converts would have been far more scandalized than Jewish ones. From the days of the Maccabeans to the oppositions of Judas the Galilean and the later Zealots, Jews were used to opposing foreign rule and paying a price for their monotheistic commitments. Faced with the challenge to offer emperor-laud or to burn incense in reverence to Caesar, a Jew would commonly have been willing to suffer for refusing such a practice. The average Gentile, however, would have been far more willing to go along with the Roman demand, and far less likely to be willing to undergo suffering for one's faith. This must have been the primary motivating factor underlying their docetizing proclivities. If Jesus did not suffer or corporally die, how could he have expected his followers to suffer corporal persecution—and even martyrdom? Thus, the greatest threat of incipient docetism was not its unorthodox christology—as it related to a system of faith, but its practical implications—as they related to the believer's willingness to undergo suffering and death in the face of Roman persecution. These docetizing Christians also probably sought to legitimize their views by organizing and teaching a docetic rationale for their accommodation to Roman requirements, and leaders such as Cerinthus must have sought to rally support for the emerging party platform. This is precisely what the evangelist is seeking to stave off in John 6:51-66, and what the Elder is seeking to counteract in his antichristic warnings of 1 John 4:1-3 and 2 John 7. Therefore, the history of Johannine Christianity must have been something similar to the following outline:

Table #9, "A Brief Overview of the History of Johannine Christianity"

55-70 CE—Phase 1: *Beginning Chapters*—The gospel comes to Asia Minor. Paul (or another evangelist) "lectures" to "the Jews," and many Jews become followers of "the Way." On the other hand, many are offended and malign "the Way." (Acts 17-19) Apollos, the Fourth Evangelist and others join in the mission, and the evangelist settles down as a local pastoral presence in one of the churches. He brings with him his own independent gospel tradition which has been interfluent with the pre-Marcian (Petrine) tradition.

70-90 CE—Phase 2: *Tensions with the Local Synagogue* (overlapping with Phases 3 and 4)—Following the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, a fundamentalistic form of the scripture-based Judaism of the Pharisees begins to replace the Temple-based establishment of the Sadducees. By the mid-70's, this caused local challenges to the "biblicality" of Christian Judaism, and Christians were forced to decide between Christ and their Jewish loyalties. Some persecution, as well as excommunication and even capital penalties, were used by local Jewish leaders to retard the spread of Christianity within Judaism, and the Jewish "mission to the ditheists" partially succeeded in winning some Jesus-followers back into Judaism. 1 John (the first antichristic schism) and the first edition of the Gospel (debates with "the Jews") reflect some of these developments.

81-96 CE—Phase 3: *The Onset of Roman Persecution and the Departure of Gentile Christians* (overlapping with Phases 2 and 4)—Persecution by Domitian (81-96 CE) caused new problems for Johannine Christianity, especially for Gentile Christians. As they were less willing to suffer for their faith, they found it easier to deny their Christian involvements. This caused the Johannine leadership to emphasize the Lordship of Christ (versus Caesar's), the physicality of his suffering and death (versus the teachings of the Docetists) and the final importance of maintaining solidarity with Christ and his fellowship in the face of persecution. During this time, "false teachers" and "false prophets" also arose, advocating a less rigorous form of Christian commitment, bolstered by docetizing christological tendencies and their lax implications for discipleship. These trends are warned about in 1 John and are countered by the incarnational (and anti-docetic) emphases of John's supplementary material. By the writing of 2 John 7, these "Antichrists" have also departed, and those who wished to remain a part of Johannine Christianity while compromising their faith were excommunicated by its leadership.

85-100 CE—Phase 4: *Tensions with the Mainstream Church* (overlapping with Phases 2 and 3)—As evidenced in the M tradition and in the letters of

Ignatius, the centrifugal challenges of Jewish and Roman persecutions led Antiochine Christianity (at least) to erect institutional structures as centripetal means of maintaining connectedness to Christ (and the apostles) and cohesion within the church. The figure of Peter takes on organizing power and vicarious authority, and those who follow in his wake appeal to it as a means of establishing their own positions locally (as did Ignatius, a bit later). Johannine Christianity, however, advocated a pneumatic and familial mode of christocracy (see esp. John 14–16), and this must have threatened Diotrefes and his kin. In 3 John we read that Diotrefes has refused hospitality to Johannine Christians and has excommunicated those who would take them in. This is the final motivator for the Elder's contacting the *ecclesia*, and the witness of the Beloved Disciple was finally compiled and edited in order to declare Jesus' original intention for the governance of his church. John was thus "published" around 100 CE by the compiler (also the Elder) as a christocratic corrective to rising institutionalism in the late first-century church. "His witness is true." (John 21:25) is as much an ecclesial as an historical claim.

While several scholars have done well to illuminate the anti-docetic thrust of the later Johannine material, few have made enough of the connection between docetism as a proto-heretical faith system and the practical implications of docetism during rising persecution by the Romans.⁵⁰ In his recent book, R. Cassidy has demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that scholars who deny any persecution of Christians by Romans in the late first century and early second century are wrong.⁵¹ While "persecution" proper may not be the best way to describe the reality from a Roman perspective (Christians refused to go along with what Roman understandings of civility: honoring the emperor and showing public reverence for the empire), it is fair to say that Romans tried to influence

⁵⁰ See for instance, P. Borgen (*Bread from Heaven*); B. Lindars, *Behind the Fourth Gospel* (London: SPCK, 1971); U. Schnelle, *Antidoketische Christologie im Johannes-evangelium* (Göttingen, 1987), see Linda Maloney's excellent English translation published by Fortress Press, 1992; and R. E. Brown (*Community*, 1979) have correctly noticed John's antidocetic corrective, but the practical (and more acutely, the ecclesiological) implications of docetising beliefs have been underexplored.

⁵¹ While one is not entirely convinced by Cassidy's exegetical moves (*John's Gospel in New Perspective* [Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993]; see my review in *JBL* 114, 2 [1995]) he offers very convincing evidence that based on Pliny's Letter to Trajan (X.96) and Trajan's Rescript (X.97), Christians were being persecuted, sometimes simply for bearing the name "Christian." Says Pliny, "I have asked them in person if they are Christians, and if they admit it, I repeat the question a second and third time, with a warning of the punishment awaiting them. If they persist, I order them to be led away for execution. . . ."

To this, Trajan responds, "These people must not be hunted out; if they are brought before you and the charge against them is proved, they must be punished, but in the case of anyone who denies that he is a Christian, and makes it clear that he is not by offering prayers to our gods, he is to be pardoned as a result of his repentance however suspect his conduct may be." (pp. 89-91)

Christians, sometimes with force, and this was experienced as persecution by Christians. From the excessive tax of two drachmas (identical to the amount of the Jewish annual contribution to the Temple, levied against Jews and some Christians) instituted after the destruction of Jerusalem, to the trial and execution of men, women and children—simply for bearing the name, “Christian” (who did not deny their faith or malign Christ when given the opportunity to escape punishment), Cassidy shows from the Roman records that such a backdrop of persecution must be considered when reading John. Without operating on the assumption of earlier and later material in John, Cassidy nonetheless infers themes that must have been used to bolster the faith and corporate solidarity of Johannine Christians, which Lindars includes as parts of the “supplementary material” added to an earlier edition of the Gospel.⁵² In these and other ways, Cassidy adds the backdrop of Roman persecution to Martyn’s, Brown’s and Rensberger’s scenarios illuminating the dialectical backdrop of the Jewish/Christian relations. Both of these crises were real, and an assist from Ignatius may clarify some of the issues at stake for Johannine Christianity.

While Ignatius’ seven letters to the churches were probably written a decade or two after John, they nonetheless cast light on the Johannine situation—or at least parallels to it. For instance, the oft-cited “medicine of immortality” reference in Ignatius’ letter to the Ephesians (20:2) betrays not a theophagic proclivity in his sacramentology, but rather, a concern for corporate unity in the face of persecution and schismatic tendencies. The full passage (*Eph.* 20:1-2) is as follows:⁵³

If Jesus Christ counts me worthy through your prayers, and if it be the (divine) will, I will give you in the second document...[a] further explanation of...Jesus Christ, having to do with faith in him and love of him, with his suffering and resurrection; particularly if the Lord reveals anything to me. All of you, severally and in common, continue to come together in grace, as individuals, in one faith and in Jesus Christ, who according to the flesh was of the family of David, the son of a human and son of God, that you may obey the bishop and the presbytery with

⁵² For instance, Cassidy interprets the Farewell Discourses and John 21 as needing to be read against the backdrop of Roman persecution (pp. 54-79; see also L. W. Barnard, “St. Clement of Rome and the Persecution of Domitian,” in his *Studies in the Apostolic Fathers and Their Background* [New York: Schocken Books, 1966], pp. 5-18), and his interpretation of Jesus’ Roman trial and imperial titles applied to Jesus are also well-taken. In doing so, he accentuates the sovereignty and all-sufficiency motifs, as applied to Christ, believing that they functioned to offer a direct counter-balance to Roman claims regarding the deity of the emperor. However, Cassidy does hardly anything with the incarnational—and thus anti-docetic—motifs in John, as they may have helped the believer undergo suffering for one’s Lord. This area would be worth exploring.

⁵³ Cited from W. R. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), p. 95; see also L. W. Barnard, “The Background of St. Ignatius of Antioch,” *ibid.*, pp. 19-30.

undistracted mind, breaking one bread, which is the medicine of immortality, the antidote preventing death, but leading to life in Jesus Christ forever.

From this fuller passage it is obvious that the central issue for Ignatius is the corporate unity of the fellowship. In other words, the emphasis is not on the eucharistic *bread* as the *pharmakon athanasias*, but upon the *one* bread (as opposed to factious groups splitting off and having their own fellowship meals) where corporate solidarity is at stake. Clearly this passage harkens back to *Eph.* 7:1-2, which describes factious leaders who "are rabid dogs, biting without warning, whom you must guard against since they are almost incurable. There is *one physician* . . . Jesus Christ our Lord." The central theme here is *oneness*. In the face of the factious tendencies of "rabid dogs," Ignatius emphasizes *one* physician, *one* bishop and presbytery, *one* worship service and the breaking of *one* loaf—the antidote to such schismatic toxins.

A possible explanation for some of these schisms may be alluded to in his letter to the Smyrneans. Here Ignatius connects the fleshly suffering of Christ with his own suffering and participation in the eucharist: (*Smyrn.* 4:2; 6:2-7:1)

For if those things were done by our Lord (only) in appearance, I too am in bonds (only) in appearance. And why have I given myself up to death, to fire, to sword, to wild beasts? But near the sword, near God; with the beasts, with God; only in the name of Jesus Christ to suffer with him! I endure all things since he, the perfect human being empowers me. . . .

Now observe those who hold erroneous opinions about the grace of Jesus Christ . . . : for love they have no concern, none for the widow, none for the orphan, none for the one distressed, none for one imprisoned or released, none for one hungry or thirsty; they remain aloof from eucharist and prayers because they do not confess that the eucharist is the flesh of our savior Jesus Christ which suffered for our sins, which the Father raised by his goodness.

These passages make it clear that the scandalous result of docetism in Ignatius' view was threefold: first, it made a mockery of Christ's suffering and the martyrdom of contemporary Christians. Ignatius draws the implication into the spotlight: if Jesus did not suffer, then why should we? Precisely the point of the Docetists. Second, this view of cheap grace resulted in the moral failure of its advocates. They failed to hold up their agapeic commitments within the community of faith, and thus the fellowship suffered because of them. Third, they apparently refused to participate fully in the meetings for worship because they did "not confess

that the eucharist is the flesh of our savior Jesus Christ which suffered for our sins.” It is not clear here whether the emphasis is upon the flesh or the suffering of Christ,⁵⁴ but it is clear that their refusal to participate must have divided the community and it disrupted Christian fellowship. The Johannine situation was entirely parallel to these. In the face of Roman harassment and persecution, Gentile Christians (or prospects) found it all too easy to deny the humanity and suffering of Christ, and thereby to try to escape the Roman penalties for being loyal to “the name.” They thus made it a practice of denying their Christian involvements and even maligning Christ—perhaps excused in their minds by the notion that a non-suffering Jesus would not expect his followers to suffer and die. When these practices were opposed by the Christian leadership, probably emphasizing the importance of ingesting the flesh and blood of Jesus, the docetizing groups began to break off into quasi-Christian groups, holding their own cultic meetings and developing their own “theological” defense of their assimilating actions: denying the flesh-and-bloodness of Jesus. Representatives then became some of the “false teachers” and “false prophets” mentioned in the Johannine Epistles and the letters of Ignatius. These tendencies may be observed in the second antichristic threat of 1 John 4:1-3 and 2 John 7. Consider the outline of the Elder’s antidocetic appeal:

*Table #10, “The Second Antichristic Schism (1 John 4:1-3 and 2 John 7)—
The Departure of Gentile Christians and their Docetizing Teachings”*

— “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” (1 John 4:1) The warning of a forthcoming threat is issued, and the community member is advised to test the spirits, lest one be deceived by a false prophet. This antichristic threat will be different from the first in terms of christological content and the proselytizing character of its advocates, but beware; do not be deceived.

— “By this you can recognize the spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not of God.” (1 John 4:2-3a) By other appearances, these prophets may seem to be solid Christians, but ask them

⁵⁴ At this point, Schnelle’s argument (*Antidocetic Christology*) is well worth considering. He argues, based on this passage, that because the Docetists here refused to believe that the eucharistic bread was Jesus’ flesh, the Fourth Evangelist has called for full participation in the eucharist (John 6:51c-58) as a measured way to confront their docetic beliefs. Still, however, the emphasis must be placed upon the larger corporate and ethical issues rather than ritual ones. The goal of the evangelist was the restoration of Christian unity (and the prevention of further defections), and he used incarnation motifs, an emphasis on the cross, and eucharistic imagery to confront the docetizing tendencies of his audience. Docetism divided precisely because it advocated a gospel of cheap grace in the face of persecution.

about the *flesh and blood of Jesus*, and their teachings will be laid open for scrutiny. These people would not have been of Jewish origin (tending to deny Jesus as the Christ); rather, they would have been of Gentile origin (tending to deny the Christ as incarnated in the man, Jesus), precisely those least inclined to resist assimilation to Roman and/or cultural demands.

— “And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard is coming—and even now is already in the world!” (1 John 4:3b) Whereas the first antichristic schism has already departed (1 John 2:18ff.), the second antichristic threat is still on the way. Not only was the first threat different in its beliefs and socio-religious identity, it is also different in terms of timing. The warning is sounded: Beware of the Docetists!

— “For many deceivers who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh have gone out into the world. This is the deceiver and the Antichrist.” (2 John 7) By this time the docetic threat is not only on the way, but it appears that some of its adherents have also “gone out into the world.” The encouragement to remain (v. 9) implies that a second schism has indeed transpired (perhaps the Docetists were expelled from the Johannine community as much as being enticed into newly-formed docetic/Christian groups), and the Johannine Christian is warned to be on the lookout against such false teachers and their divisive tactics.

From these corollaries, one may infer a second schismatic crisis confronting Johannine Christianity, this time involving Gentile Christians with docetizing tendencies.⁵⁵ The challenge of Roman persecution and Hellenistic dualism combined here to form the beginnings of docetic christologies, which later evolved into more fully-developed gnosticism. In the “supplementary material” inferred by Lindars, one can readily locate the majority of John’s antidocetic material (the Word made flesh, 1:14; blood and water flowing from Jesus’ side, 19:34f. ; “unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood . . .” 6:53ff.), and this suggests that Johannine Christianity was faced by the docetizing crisis a few years after the crisis with the

⁵⁵ Indeed, many scholars lump all three Antichrist passages rather uncritically into the same schismatic soup, but fail to realize the generally flexible character of the term. It was the ultimate slanderous appellative within such a Christocentric setting, and it was used to warn against more than one threat. Given the historical evidence for two external sources of persecution, the opposite differences in christological beliefs between the Antichrist passages, the chronological differences between the times Jewish and Gentile converts would have entered and exited Johannine Christianity (as well as their religious proclivities), and the apparently sequential dealing with two individuated crises (in John, the Johannine Epistles, and in the letters of Ignatius), such a view becomes untenable. See also C. C. Richardson for convincing evidence that Ignatius also faced two consecutive threats: a Jewish one and a later docetic one (“The Evidence for Two Separate Heresies,” in his *The Christianity of Ignatius of Antioch* [New York, 1967 (1935)], pp. 81-85). While the Johannine situation is not identical to the Ignatian, the parallels are suggestive at least of a similar sequence of ordeals.

Synagogue. This crisis is also alluded to in John 6:51-66, where Jesus' discussants eventually shift to his disciples. They are scandalized by Jesus' words and also begin to *grumble*—like the Jews, a sure sign of their unbelieving inclination (v. 61). Their exclamation and question are, "This is sure a hard word (to stomach)! Who can possibly go along with (swallow) it?" (v. 60) Here the Johannine use of irony works powerfully. On one level, the reader might assume a misunderstanding dialogue on the controversial character of the eucharist might be ensuing. Certainly the language of eating and drinking Jesus' flesh and blood would be offensive to any audience, and real debates on precisely this topic occurred. But on a deeper level, it becomes clear that the subject being discussed is *the cross*: its centrality in Jesus' mission, and the would-be disciple's calling to embrace it in the face of persecution. The disciples in the evangelist's audience would have experienced the dialogue as follows:

— "Indeed, this bread is *my flesh which I shall give for the life of the world.*" (v. 51c—To be my disciple involves the willingness to go with me to the cross. Paradoxically, in losing one's life one finds it. This is the life-producing food offered by the Son of Man.)

— "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." (v. 54—You may think you're about to hear a defense of the eucharist against Jewish charges of "cannibalism," but beware. A far more disturbing message is coming your way. In the light of those docetizing Christians who deny the flesh-and-bloodness of the incarnation, as well as its implications for costly discipleship, you must ingest Jesus' humanity if you wish to share in the benefits of his divinity. If you expect to be raised with him on in the eschaton, you must be willing to suffer and die with him in the present.)

— "Are you scandalized by this? How will you feel when you see the Son of Man ascending to where he was at first?" (vv. 61ff.—Consider your ordeals from the perspective of eternity. Granted, you are offended at bloody talk about the true cost of discipleship, but how will you feel in the eschaton if you take the easy way out for the short term and deny your Lord and his community for the sake of saving your skins? When you see the Son of Man being raised up, triumphant over the powers, and you realize you denied him before humanity and that you will be denied by him before the Father, beware! The final scandal will be *yours and your faithless choices.*)

— "The spirit is that which is life-producing: the flesh profits nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit, and they are life; although there are still some of you who do not believe." (vv. 63f.—As we began with at the beginning of this exhortation, work not for the death-producing food, but the life-producing food, which the Son of Man shall give you. My words should offer you consolation: first, because I have promised you an

eternal reward for your faithfulness; second, because I will provide you all you need to remain in me; and third, because they are of heavenly origin and are life-producing. That hardship you have wanted to escape, perhaps viewing it as “the bread of affliction,” is actually like choosing the flesh of quail over God’s eschatological provision. As was the case in the wilderness, those who craved flesh became sick and died. Don’t make the same error. Receive the Bread which has now come down from heaven, and be willing to ingest his suffering and death if needed. Doing the work of God will be your true nourishment; the way of the flesh profits nothing!)

— “This is why I have told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him.” (v. 65—Human initiative cannot suffice when it comes to the way of the spirit. Following Jesus is paradoxical, not practical. In responding to the divine initiative, not only must one be willing to set aside one’s physical needs, one’s religious methods and wisdom, and one’s instincts for survival, but one must also lay at the cross one’s understandings of how the life of faith ought to work. Even some of you who consider yourselves true followers of mine do not understand or believe. Your only hope is to respond in faith to God’s saving initiative. It is not of yourselves, but a gift from God.)

At this, the words and knowings of Jesus are confirmed, and many of his disciples slide back and walk about with him no more (v. 66). The scandalizing words of the Lord are no mere debate over eucharistic rites or answers to Jewish charges of cultic cannibalism. The scandal is that the disciples *have* understood full well the cost of discipleship, but have not comprehended the identity and mission of the Lord. Like the shallow enthusiasm of the crowd which misunderstands the feeding as a political sign (vv. 14f.), even some of Jesus’ followers are unwilling to pay the ultimate cost of discipleship. They see the Jesus movement as offering temporal benefits—perhaps even the overthrow of the Romans—but are scandalized when asked to be willing to suffer and die for their Lord. The *einmalig* level of the narrative here pierces the situation of Johannine Christianity. In the light of a second schismatic crisis—a docetizing one led by Gentile Christians—the Johannine Christian is called to remain loyal to the Lord and his community of faith. While eucharistic imagery is used, Johannine Christianity probably does not have a full-blown sacramental ritual as of yet.⁵⁶ The “real thing” is *corporate fellowship*, which is

⁵⁶ At this point, the insight and question articulated by R. Kysar, *The Fourth Evangelist and His Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1975), p. 259, are telling ones: “I believe that the early form of the gospel . . . had no sacramental reference because the johannine community at that time was essentially non-sacramental. Could it be that the absence of the institution of the lord’s supper from the fourth gospel is due to the fact that that narrative was not part of the johannine tradition and that the johannine community did not know the institution narratives in any form?”

experienced in the gathered meeting for worship, in fellowship meals, in the caring for the needy within the group and in being willing to confess and suffer for one's Lord. Abiding solidarity with Christ and his community is the central goal of this section's appeal. This is the goal furthered by the use of graphic (and even offensive) eucharistic language, and this is the "hard word" which scandalizes the audience.

4. *The portrayal of Peter and Johannine Christianity's dialectical relationship with the mainstream church: John 6:67-70*

While indications of this crisis are far more subtle in John 6 than the other ones, they nonetheless are suggestive of other issues beneath the surface and emphasized more clearly elsewhere in the Gospel. Verses 67-70 appear on the surface to deviate from the rhetorical pattern found in the other dialogues of John 6, as well as from the standard revelational pattern. The initiative passes from the discussants to Jesus in v. 67, and Peter appears to make an exemplary confession (vv. 68f.). What is extremely odd is Jesus' negative retort immediately following Peter's confession: "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? And yet, one of you is a devil!" While this statement is entirely parallel to the Marcan Jesus' response to Peter's reluctance to allow the Son of Man (and his vice-regents) to suffer and die ("Get 'out of my face,' Satan! You are not minding the things of God but the things of humans." Mark 8:33), Jesus' calling Peter "a devil" here is highly problematic. So problematic that it is indeed probable that v. 71 represents the attempt of the compiler to resolve this perplexity.⁵⁷ Whatever the case, v. 70 represents Jesus' rejection of Peter's confession, and this implies a misunderstanding somewhere in his statement. This being so, a likely solution is to view the first part of Peter's confession (v. 68) as an adequate response to the question of Jesus; but to see something in his confession—perhaps the second part of it (v. 69) as representing some broader aspect of Petrine understanding which Jesus rejects. One might

Historically, this was probably true for some time. The question is how long did it take the Johannine expressions of sacramentality to evolve from human and social (incarnated) realities to ritual and symbolic (eucharistic) ones. Much of John seems to oppose such developments. It is probable that this transition happened, at the latest, after the passing of the Beloved Disciple around the turn of the century. See W. Marxsen, *The Lord's Supper as a Christological Problem*, trans. L. Nieting (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970); and A. Schweitzer, *The Problem of the Lord's Supper* (1901), English trans. of 1929 ed. A. J. Mattill, Jr. (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1982); and P. N. Anderson, "The 'Medicine of Immortality' in Ignatius and John 6," unpublished paper presented at the Johannine Seminar of the National AAR/SBL Meetings, New Orleans, 1990.

⁵⁷ Just as it appears that the compiler has clarified for the reader *which* Judas it was that was speaking in John 14:22 (*not* Judas Iscariot), it appears that he has also solved the perplexity of John 6:70 by explaining parenthetically, "(Jesus did *not* mean Simon Peter, who was a devil, but *Judas, son of Simon* Iscariot, who would betray him later and who must have been alluded to in v. 64b earlier.)" It appears the compiler has "clarified" the meaning of a similar text at John 11:10f.

even infer that the response of Peter comes to a full stop at the end of v. 68, and that the initiative passes from Jesus to Peter in v. 69. With the boldness of his declaration, “We *have believed and known* that . . .” one may detect the evangelist’s use of ironic exaggeration—especially, given Jesus’ abrupt response to what sounds like a perfectly acceptable and exemplary affirmation. But is it really?

Knowing how to interpret σὺ εἶ ὁ ὅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ (v. 69b) is a difficult matter. Nearly all scholars interpret it as an exemplary declaration of Jesus’ holiness and sacred mission, but given v. 70, this explanation is inadequate. Neither is Peter here being cast in the role of the Marcan demoniac (Mark 1:24), even though the confession is identical. What we probably have is a connotation that is fully parallel to Mark 8:32b, where Peter, after making his confession (v. 29), takes Jesus aside and begins to rebuke him for telling the disciples bluntly that the Son of Man must be rejected, suffer and die. At this point Jesus rebukes Peter in Mark, and his reason for doing so in John appears to have been entirely parallel. In Mark, Peter is unwilling for the Son of Man—and especially his followers—to suffer and die. In John, the same concern comes though, and what has been rendered a question by Jesus actually reads better in the declarative: “*I have not elected you, the Twelve (to escape tribulation, οὐκ ἐγὼ ὑμᾶς τοὺς δώδεκα ἐξελεξάμην), and one of you is a devil (for suggesting so).*” That being the case, one must ask how Peter’s confident confession that Jesus is the “Holy One of God” may have been tantamount to his refusal to allow the Son of Man to suffer and die. This query leads in two directions: the first concerns the function of this particular confession in Mark, and the second pertains to its associated meanings beyond Mark.

The demoniac’s declaring that Jesus is the “Holy One of God” in Mark sets the stage for Jesus’ vanquishing of Satan’s reign by his authoritative words and dynamic deeds. Indeed, Jesus promptly exorcizes the man, heals Simon’s mother-in-law and begins to proclaim the gospel. Likewise, he designates the Twelve as emissaries, commissioning them to cast out demons and to proclaim the gospel (Mark 3:13-15). As plundering the household of a “strong man” hinges upon first *binding* the strong man (Mark 3:27), so the thaumaturgical work of Jesus and his band prepares the territory for the advance of the Kingdom of God. Jesus’ recognition as the “Holy One of God” by the demoniac in Mark 1:24 introduces Mark’s Davidic and triumphal basileiology, whereby Jesus sets up his royal kingdom in Zion. This contrasts diametrically to the explanation for why the Judeans failed to recognize Jesus as the Christ in John. They expected (based on their again inadequate exegesis) that the Christ would be a Davidic Messiah from Bethlehem, not a Galilean prophet (John 7:41f.). Does having a Davidic or thaumaturgic messiology, according to John, cause the missing of Jesus’ identity and the true character of his kingdom?

As a christological title, ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ occurs elsewhere only in Luke 4:23 in the entire canonical corpus, and here it is simply a repetition of the Marcan passage. On the other hand, τὸν ἅγιον καὶ δίκαιον is found on the lips of Peter in Acts 3:14, ἱερότευμα ἅγιον and ἔθνος ἅγιον are mentioned in 1 Peter 2:5 and 9, and 1 John 2:20 refers to τοῦ ἁγίου as the source of spiritual unction. The "Holy one of Israel" is mentioned prolifically in Isaiah and some in Zechariah, but it cannot be viewed as identical in meaning, though it is certainly Zionistic and power-oriented.

From these corollaries one may hypothesize that Peter's declaration of Jesus as "the Holy One of God" suggests the following: 1.) Based on Jesus' abrupt response, it was *not* included by the evangelist as an exemplary reference to Jesus' holiness, but served a negative role, probably parallel to Peter's refusal in Mark to allow the Son of Man to suffer and die. 2.) This is closer to the sort of Jewish appellation that Peter would have used and is probably closer to Peter's actual words than the more Hellenized and confessional rendition in Mark.⁵⁸ 3.) Ideologically, we have here the portrayal of Jesus' rejecting the typically Davidic Synoptic messiology, just as he had fled the crowd's popularistic designs on his future (vv. 14f.). 4.) Such a portrayal suggests a Johannine inclination to correct the Synoptic view of the Kingdom—how it is established and how it is maintained;⁵⁹ and this corrective is illuminated by the juxtaposition of Peter and the Beloved Disciple elsewhere in the Fourth Gospel.

While not described in the context of John 6, the ambivalent relation of Peter to the Beloved Disciple in John is implicated by the ambiguous portrayal of Peter in vv. 68-71. While several scholars have done well to notice this juxtaposed relationship, few have worked out specifically the ecclesial implications as they reflect the Johannine posture toward

⁵⁸ "The Holy One of God," the "Holy and Righteous One," "Holy Priesthood" and "Holy Nation" are characteristic of the Petrine connection of sanctification with empowerment. Based on the criterion of dissimilarity, ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ would have been far less common than the more predictable Marcan rendition, ὁ χριστός, which is also more Hellenized. If indeed Peter had anything to do with the tradition underlying Mark, as Papias believed, the citation of ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ in Mark 1:24 and John 6:69 may be plausibly traced to the historical Peter (Luke even sides with the Johannine rendition by adding τοῦ θεοῦ to the Marcan ὁ χριστός). It reflects the Petrine understanding of how the Kingdom of God advances, and tellingly, just as the pre-Markan interpretation of Jesus' miracles in corrected in John 6, apparently so is the pre-Markan basileiology.

⁵⁹ It is wrong to assume that the dearth of Johannine references to the Kingdom of God implies its low priority in the thinking of the evangelist. John uses other terms to describe the Kingdom of God: nouns such as "light," "life" and "truth," and such verbs as "believe," "know" and "love." Furthermore, the two passages describing the Kingdom in John are both corrective in their nuance. John 3:1-8 corrects wooden (institutional?) notions of the Kingdom—it is like the wind of the Spirit; and John 18:36f. challenges institutional claims to authority—Jesus *is* a king, but his Kingdom is one of Truth. These critiques of human instrumentality would have applied to Jewish, Roman *and* evolving Christian forms of institutionalism.

impending mainstream Christian trends.⁶⁰ Central to this issue is the fact that the two other dialogues between Peter and Jesus in John *both* portray Peter as misunderstanding the character of servant leadership and agapeic shepherding. In response to Jesus' attempt to model Christian servanthood at the foot-washing scene (John 13:1-17), Peter totally misunderstands the point being exemplified and requests a total immersion. Climactically, Jesus declares, "A servant is not greater than his master, nor is an apostle (ἀπόστολος) greater than the one sending him." (v. 16—Is the Petrine apostolate here being alluded to as competing with Jesus?)

Peter also misunderstands Jesus' intent in the lake-side appearance narrative, where Peter fails three times to understand and respond adequately to Jesus' question (ἀγαπᾷς με?). Granted, many view John 21 as a reinstatement of Peter's authority, but it is not an unambiguous one. Peter is the first to abandon the itinerant ministry of Jesus' band, returning instead to his conventional trade ("I'm going fishing!" v. 3); he does not recognize the Lord on his own but must be guided by the insight of the Beloved Disciple (v. 7); he misunderstands the agapeic instruction of Jesus and is even hurt (ἐλυπήθη) by Jesus' questioning (vv. 15-17); his helplessness in martyrdom is predicted by the Lord (vv. 18f.); and the last glimpse of Peter shows him glaring enviously at the Beloved Disciple saying, "And what about him!" (vv. 20f.), to which the Johannine Jesus responds in ways reminiscent of the Marcan calling narrative, "Follow thou me!" (v. 22, repeated from v. 19).⁶¹ The point of all this is to suggest that the inadequacy of Peter's confession in John 6 probably reflects the

⁶⁰ Such scholars as S. Agourides, "Peter and John in the Fourth Gospel," *Studia Evangelica* 4, ed. F. L. Cross (Berlin: Akademie, 1968), pp. 3-7; A. F. Maynard, "The Role of Peter in the Fourth Gospel," *New Testament Studies* 30 (1984), 531-48; and G. F. Snyder, "John 13:16 and the Anti-Petrinism of the Johannine Tradition," *Biblical Research* 17 (1971), 5-15, have detected clear anti-Petrinism in John. On the other hand, such scholars as Brown, Donfried, and Reumann, et al., *Peter in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1973); and K. Quast, *Peter and the Beloved Disciple*, JSNTSS 32 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989) conclude that such a juxtaposition is less telling, as Peter is portrayed with a certain degree of ambiguity in all the gospels. None of these studies, however, has developed the "christocratic" implications of this relationship as they relate to John's ecclesiology and dialectical relationship with rising institutionalism in the late first century church (see my review of Quast's book in *Critical Review of Books in Religion*, 1991). This issue has been explored fruitfully by T. V. Smith, *Petrine Controversies in Early Christianity*, WUNT II 15 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1985), but the particular Johannine scald on the matter deserves further exploration.

⁶¹ Indeed, Luke appears to have taken over parts of John 21 for his rendition of the calling narrative in Luke 5. Luke's clear deviation from Mark cannot be explained on the basis of John's dependence on Luke, and the view that John and Luke shared a common source is far more speculative than to hypothesize that where Luke deviates from Mark or Q and sides with John may suggest Lucan access to the Johannine tradition. See P. N. Anderson, "Acts 4:20: A First Century Historical Clue to Johannine Authorship?" an unpublished paper presented at the Pacific Northwest Regional AAR/SBL Meetings in Walla Walla, 1992. If Luke did draw from the Johannine tradition, it must have been during the *oral* stages of the Johannine tradition, as issues of sequence and association are better thus explained.

Johannine attitude toward the evolving influence of Peter in the mainstream church around the time the final edition of John was written. A clue to at least one acute crisis in the Johannine situation, which must have exacerbated the need for this corrective, is suggested by 3 John.

In 3 John 9f. Diotrephes “who loves to be their superior” (ὁ φιλοπρωτεύων αὐτῶν), neither receives Johannine Christians nor allows any of his membership to take them in. He “gossips maliciously” about Johannine Christians and even exercises totalitarian authority over his own congregation, being willing to cast out any who should like to extend hospitality to them. Tellingly, the Elder comforts Gaius by telling him that those to whom he has ministered have reported good things about his love to the church (v. 6, ἐκκλησία), and that he has written to the church (v. 9, ἐκκλησία) about Diotrephes. Whomever he may have been, it is obvious from these references that (from the Johannine perspective) Diotrephes must have been a heavy-handed leader aspiring to rule his congregation by means of institutionally-imbued authority, granted from the centralizing church. This obviously betrays an early form of the emerging monepiscopate, rising in Asia Minor during the last two decades of the first century CE, which Ignatius of Antioch seeks to bolster a few years hence. For whatever reason, Diotrephes seems threatened by Johannine traveling ministers and denies them hospitality and access to his group.⁶² It is probable that in doing so he has constructed his positional form of leadership on the basis of the tradition, or at least the sentiment, of the Matthean “keys to the Kingdom” passage (Matt. 16:17-19), and that he feels justified in wielding his authority on christocratic grounds.⁶³ This explains

⁶² Käsemann is indeed correct to infer that Diotrephes is an episcopal leader of sorts, who is threatened by Johannine Christians (*The Testament of Jesus*, 1968). He is wrong, however, in judging the reason for this perceived threat to be the docetizing tendencies of Johannine Christianity. First of all, the Elder and the evangelist have been quite active in opposing such trends, and there is no evidence that even incipient Docetism was ever more than a peripheral phenomenon within this sector of the church. Second, as M. Meye Thompson has pointed out so well in her recent monograph (*The Humanity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988]), the evangelist’s christology was absolutely as incarnational as it was elevated. It may have been exalted, but it was never docetizing. Third, far more threatening to Diotrephes’ positional authority would have been the *Johannine view of pneumatically mediated and universally accessible leadership of the risen Christ*. The Johannine scandal in Diotrephes’ eyes (and rightly so, as far as his aspirations were concerned) was the egalitarian teaching that by means of the *Parakletos*, all believers can be led by Christ (see G. M. Burge’s excellent treatment of the Holy Spirit in the Johannine tradition: *The Anointed Community* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987]). All of these make it plausible that Diotrephes was probably more threatened by the Johannine pneumatic and egalitarian mode of christocracy which threatened his own position and his (Antiochine?) view of how his own community could be gathered in the face of Roman hardship.

⁶³ This is not to say that all hierarchical expressions of church leadership misused the image of Peter or the evolving “offices” of the church. This would be no more true than to assume that all forms of charismatic expression had the same faults as Corinthian enthusiasm. It is to say that in at least one case, we have a clear example of institutional authority—and

why the Elder implicates the ἐκκλησία (probably an Antiochine reference) centrally in this crisis, and it must imply his ideological motive for “publishing” the witness of the Beloved Disciple, “whose testimony is *true*” (John 21:25).

At stake in the Elder’s motivation to circulate the witness of the Beloved Disciple must have been not simply the preservation of one more gospel narrative, independent though it be, but the desire to declare the original intentionality of Jesus for his church. It is a matter of christocracy—the effective means by which the risen Lord continues to inspire, lead and empower the church—and John poses a familial and egalitarian model over and against the emerging institutional and hierarchical one.⁶⁴ When compared with Peter’s confession in Matthew 16:16-19, the portrayal of Peter in John 6:67-70 is all the more telling. In Matthew, Jesus imbues Peter (and those who follow in his wake) with christocratic institutional authority; in John, however, Peter is portrayed as acknowledging the living and pneumatic words of Jesus as the only christocratic hope for the Jesus movement. In effect, Peter is here portrayed as *returning* the keys of the Kingdom to Jesus. By means of this deconstructive rendering of Peter’s confession, the evangelist clears the ground for his pneumatic and familial ecclesiology developed elsewhere in the Gospel.⁶⁵ Notice, for instance, that

probably Petrine authority—being wielded in ways that were experienced negatively by some Johannine Christians. This kind of development must have affected the evangelist’s appeal to Jesus’ original intentionality for his church, and it must have motivated the Elder’s desire to circulate such a testimony.

⁶⁴ One is indebted to P. Menoud, “Church and Ministry According to the New Testament” in *Jesus Christ and the Faith* (Pittsburgh, 1978), pp. 363-435, for the term, “christocracy” (pp. 407-11). In this essay, Menoud wisely describes the tension between institution and charisma, which existed in the first century church and in every generation before and since. The relevance for the present study is to acknowledge the extent to which rising institutionalism in the late first-century church was experienced as a deviation from nascent Christianity, calling forth a corrective response by the Johannine tradition, which produced a manifesto of radical christocracy—a gospel portrayal of the spiritual means by which the risen Lord will continue to lead the church. This “dialogue” may explain one reason why good biblical traditions continue to come up with variant ecclesiologies. The ecclesiological self-understanding of the historical late first-century church was dialectical, not monological.

⁶⁵ In the writings of Ignatius one clearly sees the elevation of Peter and his monepiscopal representative in the local church as the centripetal means of countering centrifugal tendencies in the face of Roman persecution. This is clearly the function of Matthew’s supplementing Peter’s confession with institutionalizing themes. If one considers an outline of the content of Matthew 16:17-19, one may find remarkably parallel correctives to each of these seven points in John. (See Anderson, *Christology*, Table 20: “Matthew 16:17-19 and its ‘Christocratic Correctives’ in John.”)

See also P. N. Anderson, “‘You (Alone) Have the Words of Eternal Life!’ Is Peter Portrayed as *Returning* the ‘Keys of the Kingdom’ to Jesus in John 6:68f.?” (unpublished paper presented at the Johannine Seminar, National AAR/SBL Meeting, Anaheim, 1989); and my essay outlining five aspects of the Johannine Christocratic corrective to institutional developments in the late first-century church in *Quaker Religious Thought* 76 (1991), 27-43). These christocratic correctives include the character of worship, ministry, sacramentality, authority and apostolicity.

while the Beloved Disciple is not entrusted with instrumental keys to the Kingdom, he is entrusted with *the mother of Jesus* (19:26f.)—an action suggestive of not only the authority of the Johannine tradition, but also the relational (familial rather than institutional) character of the church as having christocratic primacy.

The point here is that in the face of rising Roman persecution under the reign of Domitian, the leadership of the mainstream church *and* the Fourth Evangelist sought to appeal for church unity in the face of schismatic tendencies, but they did so using diametrically opposite models of organization. The mainstream church sought to bolster church unity by raising the value of structured worship and the authority of hierarchical leadership; the Johannine leadership sought to emphasize the presence of Christ within the egalitarian fellowship, appealing for corporate solidarity with Christ and his “family” as an indication of one’s love for God and one another. Each of these had its own strengths and weaknesses, and neither expression was by any means perfect.⁶⁶ By the time 3 John was written and the final stages of the Gospel were composed, however, the mainstream “solution” to schismatic defections had itself become a source of division and alienation for at least one Johannine community. This produced not merely a complaint about the execution of “right faith and order” within the church, but a critique of the degree to which rising institutionalism in the late first-century church represented *the original intentionality of Jesus for his movement*. This being the case, John 6:67-70 would quite possibly have been interpreted by the evangelist’s audience at the time of the final stages of writing John 6 (probably in the mid 90’s) as follows:

— (Jesus asking the Twelve) “You don’t want to leave too, do you?” (v. 67—The testing motif of John 6, begun with the testing of individual disciples, the crowd, the Jews and Jesus’ would-be followers now culminates with the testing of the Twelve. The crowd misunderstood, the Jews grumbled and even some of the disciples abandoned Jesus . . . what will the Twelve do?)

— (Peter responds) “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” (v. 68—An absolutely shocking statement; especially coming from Peter—the one everybody has heard received instrumental keys to the Kingdom! Jesus himself is the source of life-producing words, not his representatives. Despite what you hear from Diotrophes and his kin, Christ’s life-producing word is available to all believers by means of the *Parakletos*, who will sustain you, guide you and convict you of all Truth. Before Jesus departed he appeared to his own and breathed on [pneumatized] them, gave them the authority [responsibility] to forgive

⁶⁶ See R. E. Brown’s excellent treatment of emerging ecclesiologies in the Sub-Apostolic era (*The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* [New York: Paulist Press, 1984]) and especially the strengths and weaknesses of each.

sins, and sent [apostolized] them as the Father had sent him [John 21:21-23]. Here Peter, the spokesman of the Twelve, declares the radical possibility of *the apostolicity of every believer*.)

— (Peter continues, a bit overly confident, though) “We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God!” (v. 69—As the demon recognized the true identity of Jesus as the apocalyptic King-like-David, who will sweep out of the skies like Enoch’s Son of Man, surely the Romans will be made a footstool for his feet and the heavenly Kingdom of God will once more rule from Zion. Surely this Messiah will be victorious over the Romans, and no harm will come to his vice-regents. Unlike the Jewish messianism of John 6:14f., the mainstream [Synoptic] Christian basileiology will emerge triumphant.)

— (Jesus responds) “I have not elected you, the Twelve [to emerge unscathed from the trials of this age in apocalyptic triumphalism]; and one of you is a devil [for suggesting so]!” (v. 70—Now *this* is an aporia! How can such a devout confession bring such a negative response from Jesus. He must have meant *Judas*, the betrayer, who was alluded to a few verses earlier. Then again, maybe Jesus’ reign never involved a foolproof plan to deliver us from all earthly trials. Maybe he expects us to abide with him regardless of the consequences. Now *that* is a test!)

In the light of such hard sayings, especially casting Peter and Synoptic basileiology in critical light, it is easy to see why translators have rendered Jesus’ response as a question instead of as a declarative (after all, it does work as a question, although not as well syntactically) and why the compiler has sought to clarify the apparently harsh treatment of Peter by adding v. 71. As the compiler inserted John 6 between chapters 5 and 7, he probably doctored this aporia of portrayal. He obviously has harmonized John 18:1 to accommodate the insertion of chs.15–17 between chs.14 and 18. Furthermore, just as he has clarified which is *not* the wicked Judas (John 14:22), and just as he has sought to elevate the presentation of Peter in the material added in the epilogue (ch. 21), so he has also “clarified” for the reader that Jesus was not addressing *Simon* Peter son of John, but Judas Iscariot son of *Simon*, the one alluded to in v. 65, who would later betray the Lord. The first audiences, however would not have been privileged to this softening gloss, and they would have understood full well the ecclesiological implications of the evangelist’s pointed crafting of the story. Here the ideological corrective returns to the critique of Synoptic thaumaturgy highlighted in v. 26 (crisis #1), and this is further evidence of the long-term duration of that critique. To follow Jesus is to embrace the offence of the incarnation. Even Christian (not just Jewish) thaumaturgy and triumphalism must be laid at the foot of the cross—precisely the reason the evangelist’s message was, and often continues to be, misunderstood.

E. SYNTHESIS

While John 6 has evoked the most prolific combination of literary, historical and theological debates of any single unit in the Fourth Gospel, this complexity also produces an equal degree of interpretive richness when considered comprehensively. Because John 6 represents a basically unitive written composition, preserving an independent oral tradition which elaborated homiletically on the meaning of Jesus' words and works for later generations, some of the issues faced by Johannine Christians are mirrored in the misunderstandings of Jesus' discussants and his corrective responses to them. In this sense, John 6 is literarily synchronic, but rhetorically diachronic. At every turn, the audience is called to work for life-producing rather than death-producing "food," and this appeal must have meant different things at various times in the community's history. In that sense, while the formal *Sitz im Leben* of John 6 was constant, the situational contexts in which its content was delivered homiletically continued to evolve.

Ironically, classic Jewish manna-rhetoric is overturned by the Johannine Jesus, as he corrects superficial understandings of the physical benefits of Jesus miracles, represented by the prevalent, thaumaturgical valuing of Jesus' wonders. The evangelist points instead to their revelational significance as *semeia*. And, in the face of Jewish appeals for Johannine Christians of Semitic origin to return to the local Synagogue, Jesus not only overturns their exegesis, but he exposes their absolute failure to understand the eschatological workings of God—in the past *and* in the present—thus running the risk of missing their reward in the afterlife. The Gentile Christian is also addressed existentially in John 6. Faced with a second round of persecution, this time from the Romans, members of Johannine Christianity are called to reject absolutely the docetizing tendencies of those who believe a non-suffering Lord would excuse their accommodating to the requirement of emperor-laud—at the penalties of harassment, suffering and even death. Eucharistic imagery is used to bolster the appeal for corporate solidarity with Christ and his community in the face of such hardships, and the cost of discipleship involves the ingesting of, and identification with, Jesus' Bread: the incarnated flesh of the Son of Man, given for the life of the world.

In the face of coping with persecution, Johannine Christians also become maligned by ecclesial groups who attempt to overcome schismatic tendencies by increasing structural authority and value. In the midst of these intramural dialogues, the pneumatically mediated and egalitarian model of christocracy is raised as representing Jesus' original intentionality for his church, and the Johannine Christian is called to resist "safer" innovations, clinging instead to the life-producing words of Jesus. Structurally and theologically, the narrative of John 6 calls for an abandonment of human-

originated ploys and methods in exchange for responding to the saving initiative of God, as revealed through Jesus the Christ. Ironically, however, all of this leads to a final and ongoing paradox for the interpreter: to understand and believe the text fully is to fully release one's dearly-held conclusions—even exegetical ones—to the priority of responding to the divine initiative which, like the daily-given manna, comes through and beyond the revelatory text. Κύριε, πᾶντοτε δὸς ἡμῖν τὸν ἄρτον τοῦτον.