

11-15-2017

## Foreword to The Testament of Jesus, A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17

Paul N. Anderson

George Fox University, [panderso@georgefox.edu](mailto:panderso@georgefox.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ccs>



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Anderson, Paul N., "Foreword to The Testament of Jesus, A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17" (2017). *Faculty Publications - George Fox School of Theology*. 274.  
<https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ccs/274>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Theology at Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications - George Fox School of Theology by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact [arolfe@georgefox.edu](mailto:arolfe@georgefox.edu).

## FOREWORD

### John 17—The Original Intention of Jesus for the Church

by Paul N. Anderson

AMONG THE MOST PROVOCATIVE New Testament scholars of the twentieth century, Ernst Käsemann tops the list, and his most striking work is *The Testament of Jesus*.<sup>1</sup> This brief book is significant not because the bulk of Johannine scholars have fully agreed with it; indeed, most have taken exception to many of its points. The impact of Käsemann's 1966 Shaffer Lectures, delivered at Yale Divinity School and rendered in book form in German and English over the next couple of years, lay in his capacity to communicate worthy insights in sharp and provocative ways, blocking some paths of discussion while opening others. According to Wayne Meeks,

When Ernst Käsemann delivered the first of these Shaffer Lectures at Yale in 1966, a friend remarked to me, "That confirms my suspicions that John represents everything in Christianity I despise." Käsemann would have been pleased, had he heard, for all his writing demonstrates his conviction that "true dialogue depends on meeting, irritating and stimulating each other precisely where

1. First published in German (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1966), *The Testament of Jesus: According to John 17* was translated into English by Gerhard Krodel (London: SCM, 1968).

the stakes are the highest.” That describes this book nicely, for it represents Käsemann at his iconoclastic best.<sup>2</sup>

That being the case, this book should be read dialogically, not monologically. On many a score, Käsemann overstates a point for effect while also sidestepping alternative evidence in the text that might contradict or modify his dictum. Therefore, while his overall thrust is correct—John 17 represents John’s view of Jesus’ “last will and testament for the church”<sup>3</sup>—the particulars of his insights and assertions must be weighed individually and collectively. To one’s “yes” and “no” in the engaged reading of this text must be added the reader’s own sense of critical reflection, as some foundations and structures are thereby laid in addressing the enduring Johannine riddles,<sup>4</sup> while others are torn asunder. Thus, *The Testament of Jesus* cannot simply be read. It can only be engaged—refuted and embraced—and dialectically so. As such, the author himself represents one of the most combative biblical theologians of the twentieth century, whose life and career also evolved in dialectical form.

### Ernst Käsemann, the Man

Born in Bochum, Germany in 1906 (d. 1998),<sup>5</sup> Ernst Käsemann’s life is punctuated by his reactive stances against his environment, teachers, and

2. Wayne A. Meeks, Review of *The Testament of Jesus* by Ernst Käsemann, *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 24:4 (1969): 414–20 (citation, 414).

3. Indeed, John 17, along with 1:1–18; 3:31–36 / 12:44–50; and 20:30–31, can be used as a means of getting at the central thrust of the Fourth Gospel, as that chapter contains the fewest number of distinctive words and themes of any other chapter in the entire gospel. Paul N. Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity of John 6*, WUNT 2.78 (1996, 3rd edition with a new introduction and epilogue, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010) 22–23.

4. For a laying out of the Johannine christological riddles, see the first six appendices in Anderson, *Christology of the Fourth Gospel*, 266–71. For a fuller treatment of a full dozen of John’s theological tensions and riddles, see Paul N. Anderson, *The Riddles of the Fourth Gospel: An Introduction to John* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011) 25–44.

5. Michael Labahn, “Ernst Käsemann,” *Encyclopedia of the Historical Jesus*, edited by Craig A. Evans (London: Routledge, 2008) 352–54; R. P. Martin, “Ernst Käsemann (1906–1998),” *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters*, edited by Donald McKim (Downers

friends; however, such is the way of learning (*and* unlearning). In 1981, he reminded his colleagues at the Marburg reunion that

no one can learn, who is not prepared to *unlearn* [emphasis mine]. Entrance into the open air is gained only by those who break out of boundaries that have been set, who venture out of fixed paths into the unknown, and who do not let their heart and head be stunted by routine. Perhaps it may be claimed that only by what we can unlearn do we show whether and to what extent we are capable of learning.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, his life and academic career reflect his oppositional stances from one signpost along his path to another. As a youth, Käsemann was touched spiritually by the work of Wilhelm Weigle, whose ministries were compelling among the youth of Essen and the surrounding regions. From Weigle he received an appreciation for the authentic German pietism of the Reformation (contrasted, in Käsemann's view, to its fanatical or egocentric manifestations), although he notes that many pietists later rejected his work. This solidified his commitment to Christ versus idolatries of self and culture, and those polarities can be seen in many of his endeavors the rest of his life. Reflecting upon Weigle's ministry, Käsemann reports,<sup>7</sup>

His theme was to bring Jesus to the youth. I venture to say he succeeded with thousands. He made clear to me what I had unconsciously sought, a Lord to whom I could give myself, and he showed me life's way and goal. . . . I came to know that each one's

Grove: Intervarsity, 2007) 601–6; Roy A. Harrisville, "Ernst Käsemann (1906–1998)," *Twentieth-Century German Theologians*, edited by Mark C. Mattes, *Refo500 Academic Studies* 10 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013) 251–69.

6. This address was given by Professor Käsemann to the theological faculty of the University of Marburg-Lahn on the fiftieth anniversary of his doctoral degree, November 25, 1981. It was published in *Kirchliche Konflikte*, Band 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982) 233–44, and it is here published in English as "What I Have Unlearned in 50 Years as a German Theologian," edited and translated by S. John Roth, *Currents in Theology and Mission* 15:4 (1988) 325–35.

7. Ernst Käsemann, "A Theological Review," is a lecture given in Tübingen in July 1996 on his ninetieth birthday, serving here as the foreword to his collection of sermons: *On Being a Disciple of the Crucified Lord: Unpublished Sermons and Lectures*, edited by Rudolf Landau with Wolfgang Kraus, translated by Roy A. Harrisville (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010) xii–xxi, citation xii.

uniqueness, or in modern parlance, each one's identity, is experienced only through the Lord or through the demons to which one surrenders. No one belongs to himself or herself. In various ways a person exists only in a participation to be discovered.

Käsemann's zealous approach to faith and discipleship led him to pursue theological studies, where his dialectical approach to alternative stances can be seen in his reactions to his teachers. Beginning at the University of Bonn (1925), he appreciated Erik Peterson's critiques of idealistic Protestantism, but when Peterson's move to Catholicism became problematic, he found in Bultmann's historical-critical methodology a basis for challenging it. Upon transferring to Marburg, Käsemann was admitted to Bultmann's seminar on Pauline anthropology, and under his mentorship he came to engage Bultmann and Heidegger's work extensively. He later transferred to the University of Tübingen, where he studied under Adolf Schlatter, a scholar whose capacity to maintain the tension between conservative and liberal scholarship actually became a frustration to Käsemann. When the faculty announced the theme of a competition inviting treatments of the state of Johannine scholarship, Käsemann reviewed the extensive literature; he then entered and won the competition. A throwaway comment in the bestowal of the award, however, was rectified several decades later, as he was accused of critiquing every Johannine scholar except Rudolf Bultmann.<sup>8</sup> Reflecting later upon his departures from Bultmann, he said,

My first doubts about Bultmann's exegesis arose because of his interpretation of the Gospel of John. His exegesis made the evangelist into the editor of a Gentile sayings source. In this way, his exegesis made it possible to let all mythological sayings be charged to the source. Hence, the incarnation of Christ and its derivative, the becoming-human of those who believe, could move into the center of Johannine proclamation. But the formal and material criteria for this hypothesis did not stand up under rigorous scrutiny. Even less was I able to accept a Gentile sayings source. When Bultmann even pulled Ignatius of Antioch into his existential interpretation and thus, to sharpen my point polemically,

8. Käsemann, "Theological Review," xvi.

transferred Kierkegaard into the beginning of the second century, I had to break with Bultmann immediately.<sup>9</sup>

Following his theological education, Käsemann served the church in a number of ways, leading to his appointment as lead pastor of the Protestant church of Gelsenkirchen-Rotthausen, where he served from 1933 to 1946, despite interruptions of the war. There he came to empathize with the poverty and the social hardships of miners and the working-class members of the community under his care. While serving earlier as the synodical vicar of Barmen, he was thrust into the political sphere. In seeking to undo the hardships inflicted upon the German people following the Treaty of Versailles, Käsemann had earlier voted for the National Socialist Party, hoping for the reconstruction of German society under strong leadership. He soon came to regret this decision after becoming aware of the criminal violence of the Nazi regime and the rise of the "German Christians" movement. He saw this as idolatrous nationalism, and in 1933 he denounced its head bishop, Ludwig Müller, as a traitor to the evangelical movement when he incorporated evangelical youth groups into Hitler's youth corps.<sup>10</sup>

In 1934, Käsemann dismissed from leadership and service in his church those who had identified as "German Christians" and replaced them with confessional believers.<sup>11</sup> Early on, Käsemann became a leader in the radical Confessing Church of Germany (*die Bekennende Kirche*), and although his name is missing as a signatory of the *Barmen Declaration* in 1934, he certainly advocated the lordship of Christ over and against such idolatries as the state, mammon, and modern liberalism. In so doing, he stood with confessing Christians resisting German nationalism, including the likes of Martin Niemöller, Karl Barth, Gunther Bornkamm, Rudolf Bultmann, Gerhard von Rad, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Claus Westermann. As he reflected later, "Dialectical theology made possible a glaring antithesis between evangelical faith and fascist ideology."<sup>12</sup> In 1937, he was arrested by the Gestapo and imprisoned for a month for preaching against

9. Käsemann, "What I Have Unlearned," 330.

10. Käsemann, "Theological Review," xvii-xviii; Harrisville, 250.

11. According to Harrisville (250), "It was the first time a Protestant congregation had publicly and before its altar dismissed Nazi collaborators."

12. Käsemann, "What I Have Unlearned," 326.

German nationalism, expanding upon Isa 26:13: "O Lord our God, other lords besides you have ruled over us, but we acknowledge your name alone" (NRSV). Nonetheless, he found time in prison to complete the first draft of his *Habilitationsschrift* on Hebrews and was later grateful for that mixed opportunity to write, unencumbered by other responsibilities.<sup>13</sup> He was drafted into the *Wehrmacht* in 1940 and later survived an extended prison camp experience in Kreuznach, against considerable odds.

Following the Second World War, Käsemann moved into the university professorate, teaching at the Universities of Mainz (1946–51), Göttingen (1951–59), and Tübingen (1959–71), where he became emeritus professor and continued to write, lecture, and engage. A personal tragedy followed in 1977, when his daughter, Elizabeth Käsemann, was killed at the age of thirty. She had been working as a translator and in service to the poor and disadvantaged in Buenos Aires, when she was abducted, tortured, and murdered by forces under the military dictatorship of Argentina at that time. In reflecting upon the cost and the calling to be a disciple of the crucified Nazarene, Käsemann concludes the introduction to his unpublished sermons follows:

As a last word and as my bequest, let me call to you in Huguenot style: 'Résistez!' Discipleship of the Crucified leads necessarily to resistance to idolatry on every front. This resistance is and must be the most important mark of Christian freedom.<sup>14</sup>

## Ernst Käsemann, On Learning and Unlearning

Following up on learnings and unlearnings<sup>15</sup> during his theological education and life of ministry, Ernst Käsemann became known for his graphic and striking judgments on key issues within biblical theology. In the

13. First published as *Das wandernde Gottesvolk*, FRLANT 55 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1939, 2nd edition 1957), translated as *The Wandering People of God: An Investigation of the Letter to the Hebrews* by Roy A. Harrisville and Irving L. Sandberg (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984).

14. Käsemann, "Theological Review," xxi.

15. Indeed, no learning can take place without some *unlearning* going on. Käsemann, "What I Have Unlearned," 335.

process, his dialectical engagements with events of the times and with the works of other biblical scholars operated variously as thesis, antithesis, or synthesis; but in many a case, Käsemann's approach embraced the mantle of antithesis. This can especially be seen in his addressing such themes of paramount importance as anthropology, the church, Jesus, salvation, and Christology, and many of his counterarguments were levied against one stance or another of his mentor, Rudolf Bultmann.

Building on his doctoral work at Marburg under Bultmann, Käsemann addresses the relation between the individual and the corporate body of the church, which was published as his first book.<sup>16</sup> In this important treatment of Pauline anthropology, he launches a frontal assault upon Bultmann's individualistic view of the body as an individualistic reality and emphasizes the corporate reality of *soma* within Paul's writings.<sup>17</sup> On one hand, Bultmann observes that a person does not just *have* a body; a person *is* a body (Rom 6:12–13).<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, Käsemann points out that most of Paul's references to *sōma* are corporate, including the bondage of human existence, which is enslaved to the powers of the *aeon*, from which Christ delivers believers, welcoming them into the new, transcendent body of the church. In reflecting upon Bultmann's countering his work, "He said: There is no such thing as humankind; that is an abstraction! I had to learn that that was totally wrong and that, more correctly, the word 'individual'

16. Ernst Käsemann, *Leib und Leib Christi: Eine Untersuchung zur paulineschen Begrifflichkeit*, BHT 9 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1933).

17. This is more than simply a student disagreeing with his teacher; it challenges readings of Paul through the lens of the introspective conscience of the west. See Krister Stendahl, "Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West: Dedicated to Henry J. Cadbury (1883–1974) on His Eightieth Birthday," in *Paul Among the Jews and the Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976) 78–96. As David J. Hawkin says in his *The Johannine World: Reflections on the Theology of the Fourth Gospel in Contemporary Society* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1966), "It is a rejection of an interpretation that privatizes the New Testament's message and leaves it without any social context." (33) See also Robert H. Gundry, *Soma in Biblical Theology: With Emphasis on Pauline Anthropology*, SNTSMS 29 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015) 493–519; N. T. Wright, *Pauline Perspectives: Essays on Paul, 1978–2013* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013) 52–67.

18. Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 1, translated by Kendrick Grobel (New York: Scribners, 1951) 192–203.



is an abstraction."<sup>19</sup> Hence, the Christ-hymn of Phil 2:6–11 is not simply a confession of worship; it represents the new humanity into which believers are welcomed in solidarity with the transformed corporeal community, which, in Christ's victory, overcomes the powers of the world.

Käsemann's second book, his *Habilitationschrift* from Tübingen on Hebrews, was completed following his 1937 imprisonment and was later published in English as *The Wandering People of God*.<sup>20</sup> In this book, he contrasts the itinerant character of God's true people who follow God in journeys they cannot anticipate, over and against established religion and its temptations to power, respectability, and comfort. These are the flesh-pots of Egypt rather than an invitation to follow Christ into a liberating Exodus into the Promised Land. It is a communal sojourn of faith and faithfulness to which God's people are called, as they travel toward that city of God, which is not yet but also is to come (Heb 13:14).<sup>21</sup> In applying the contextual realities of the first-century Christian movement to contemporary issues of the day, Käsemann sees the dynamic lordship of Christ as key to challenging the nationalistic appeals of the Third Reich, the ideological bankruptcy of modern liberalism, and the existential inadequacy of fanatical pietism. His work on ecclesiology continued to develop as he became convinced that Bultmann's attempt to consolidate New Testament theology into a coherent whole, as the canonical New Testament is actually filled with substantive diversity.<sup>22</sup> This insight became a resource when he was invited to address the World Faith and Order Conference of Montreal (1963). There he stood firmly on the diversity of the New Testament writings as a basis for embracing ecumenical diversity within the larger household of Christian faith. Unity within the diversity and diversity within unity are foundational in the New Testament writings themselves, and therein lie the

19. Käsemann, "What I Have Unlearned," 332.

20. Käsemann, *The Wandering People of God* (published in English, 1984).

21. Richard B. Hays, "'Here We Have No Lasting City': New Covenantalism in Hebrews," In *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, edited by Richard Bauckham et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) 151–73.

22. According to Käsemann, "What I Have Unlearned" (333), "Denominations and theological schools of thought must not shut Christianity up in a religious ghetto. The wandering people of God break through all barriers and do not live on canned food brought along."

seeds of contemporary ecumenical mission.<sup>23</sup> Thus, Käsemann's approach rejects an interpretation that privatizes the New Testament's message and leaves it without any social context. It is precisely the contextual realities of the New Testament that inform meaningful applications of its content within subsequent contextual situations in the future.<sup>24</sup>

Continuing his antithetical engagement with the Master from Marburg, Käsemann challenged Bultmann's view that little could be or needed to be known of the Jesus of history. In Bultmann's view, the events in the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth were the basis for the gospel, not its content. However, even the content of apostolic proclamation about Jesus locates God's redemptive activity in the life, death, and resurrection of the Nazarene, so historical inquiry cannot be avoided if one is to embrace even the kerygmatic faith of the apostles. After all, apostolic preaching heralded the eschatological activity of God in history, through the ministry of Jesus and the Christ Events, while also expanding upon their implications.

Further, in the light of the Holocaust, Europe dare not forget the fact that Jesus was himself a Jew. In a paper delivered to the Old Marburgers in 1953, Käsemann kick-started the "New Quest for Jesus," which was accompanied by the contributions of Bornkamm, Dibelius, Robinson, Perrin, and others.<sup>25</sup> In the spirit of scientific positivism, where the avoidance of errors supersedes risks of discovery, Käsemann put forward the criteria of double dissimilarity and multiple attestation. Put obversely, if a report is similar to contemporary Judaism or to the emerging Christian movement, it might reflect conventional fabrication. However, if it seems at odds with the Judaism of Jesus' day, or if it is not characterized by post-Easter Christian perspective, a detail would seem unlikely to have been concocted and could plausibly be attributed to the Jesus of history rather than the Christ

23. For a full-length treatment of this subject, see James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990).

24. Addressing more than sixty contextual crises and realities behind the New Testament writings and their meaningful contextual applications for contemporary interpreters, see Paul N. Anderson, *From Crisis to Christ: A Contextual Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2014).

25. James M. Robinson, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus*, Studies in Biblical Theology 25 (London: SCM, 1966).

of faith. In his later work on Jesus and freedom, Käsemann steps beyond a parsimonious approach and develops a radical call to discipleship for authentic followers of Jesus, yoking believers with Christ in his liberating and healing work in the world.<sup>26</sup>

Even before he completed his *Commentary on Romans*,<sup>27</sup> Käsemann had taken issue with Bultmann and classic Lutheran teaching on the character of the righteousness of God. In Bultmann's view, receiving the gift of God's righteousness (*dikaiousunē*) is a gift of faith, not of works or human deservedness; we become "rightwised" in God's sight, and the sins of believers are thereby not counted against them as a grace.<sup>28</sup> In Käsemann's view, however, how could "the righteousness of God" be received if it were not imbued with the righteous character of God, delivering the believer from the power of sin and death by the transformative and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit?<sup>29</sup> Therefore, the power of the cross unto salvation delivers believers not only from the penalty of sin but also from its existential power. This is what it means to participate in the new creation availed in Christ Jesus, whereby believers become ontological members of the family of God. To see the gospel as anything less is to rob it of its power and its promise.

A fifth contradistinctive move made by Käsemann involves his challenging Bultmann on the *Leitmotiv* of the Fourth Gospel. Given that there is no basis for a Gnostic Revelation-Sayings Source underlying the Johannine narrative, its conception of the work of the Revealer must be seen as residing within the theology of the evangelist, not an alien source. Thus, the evangelist's central christological thrust is not incarnational (John 1:14a, "the Word became *flesh*"), but it is "naively docetic" (John 1:14c, "and we beheld his *glory*").<sup>30</sup> Whereas Bultmann saw the flesh-becoming-Word as

26. Ernst Käsemann, *Jesus Means Freedom*, translated by Frank Clarke (from the 3rd German ed., London: SCM, 1969).

27. Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, translated and edited by Geoffrey A. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

28. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, Vol. 1, 270-306.

29. Ernst Käsemann, "'The Righteousness of God' in Paul," *New Testament Questions of Today*, translated by W. J. Montague (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969) 167-93.

30. Ernst Käsemann, "The Structure and Purpose of the Prologue to John's Gospel," In *New Testament Questions of Today*, translated by W. J. Montague (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969) 138-67.

the power and scandal of the Fourth Evangelist's theology,<sup>31</sup> Käsemann saw the Johannine Jesus as God striding over the earth, knowing the thoughts and feelings of humans and escaping their designs on his future if they did not match his "hour." Thus, the Johannine Jesus declares in theophanic terms, "Before Abraham was, I AM!" (John 8:58), and Thomas exclaims in 20:28, "My Lord and my God!" In unpacking this particular set of convictions, Käsemann prepared and delivered the 1966 Shaffer Lectures at Yale, which then became the basis for this book.

### John 17: The Last Will and Testament of Jesus for the Church

Given that Professor Käsemann had previously addressed the Johannine ethos in his inaugural lecture at the University of Göttingen,<sup>32</sup> he declares in his *preface* to the present work, "One need not be a frog to jump twice into the same pond" (vii). In addressing *the problem* of the Fourth Gospel (1–3), he laments the fact that historical criticism, while demolishing the traditional view of Johannine authorship, has not offered an acceptable substitute in its place. Rather, in addressing the Johannine riddles, "introductions to the New Testament could, to a great extent, be placed in the literary genre of fairy tales, their dry tone or their pretense of factual reporting notwithstanding" (1). Thus, Käsemann sets out to provide answers to the question of how the historical situation the John's Gospel should be envisioned. Given the "other worldliness" of the Fourth Gospel, however, setting its provenance within a particular context of time and space is what the historian is called to do, and raising the right questions yields scholarship's most important results (3). Therefore, in addressing the Christology, ecclesiology, and soteriology of the Fourth Gospel, focusing on the theological themes of *the glory of Christ, the community under the Word, and Christian unity* forms the outline of Käsemann's analytical approach. Addressing key theological problems potentially illuminates the historical

31. Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, Johannine Monograph Series 1 (translated by G. R. Beasley-Murray et al. 1971; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014) 60–83.

32. His inaugural Göttingen lecture, 1951, "Ketzer und Zeuge: Zum johanneischen Verfasserproblem," *ZThK* 48 (1951): 292–311, explores the Gospel of John as both witness and heresy.

Johannine situation and its place within primitive Christianity. As "true dialogue depends on meeting, irritating, and stimulating each other precisely where the stakes are the highest" (viii), in the rest of the book, Käsemann lives up to his word.

In his second chapter, *the Glory of Christ* highlights the elevated christological content of the Gospel of John through the lens of John 17, arguably cast within the literary device of "the farewell speech of a dying man" (4). In so doing, however, the evangelist also provides a sketch of John's historical community and situation. Here the desire of Jesus, communicated through his high-priestly prayer, emboldens disciples to become witnesses to the Father-Son relationship in the world, calling them to proclaim the eternal gospel as the will of the heavenly Father, to be carried out on earth as it is in heaven. The connection between John 17 and 1:1-18 is thus clear. The community's confession that "we beheld his glory" (v. 14) is carried forth in narrative form, characterizing the Johannine Christ as God striding over the earth, and the fleshly motifs in John are eclipsed by a Christology of exaltation. In John there is no movement from humiliation to exaltation, as eschatology has ceded place to protology; that which was from the beginning is revealed in the cosmic mission of Jesus as the Christ. This is why paradoxical evaluations of the subordination and equality of the Son to the Father do not suffice (contra Bultmann), as it is precisely in the lifting up of Jesus on the cross that he is thereby glorified. Thus, John's triumphal appraisal of the Christ Events affirm a naively docetic Christology, which then leads into later Gnosticism rather than reflecting gnostic influence as its source. Käsemann further sees John's theology as dogmatic and one-sided, the character of which he develops in his next chapter.

As *the community under the Word*, John's doctrine of the church is implicit rather than explicit.<sup>33</sup> Immediate access to the risen Christ's leadership of the community of faith through the *Paraklētos* is not limited to the familiar circle of apostles. Thus, "Peter no longer towers above the other disciples, as is shown in exemplary fashion in 20:21. There all disciples receive in like manner the commission, the Holy Spirit and the authority to forgive or retain sins" (29). John's view of the church presupposes

33. After all, the term *ecclesia* does not occur in John; it is only found among the Gospels in Matthew 16 and 18 (27).

organizational community life, but leadership is exemplified by Nathanael, Mary and Martha, Mary Magdalene, and even the Samaritan woman, just as much as it is by members of the Twelve. Further, John's rendering of the priesthood of all believers shows no evidence of leadership functions being associated with privileges or organization "by sacramental and cultic means" (30-31). This is surprising, given the Fourth Gospel's composition in the third Christian generation around the turn of the first century CE. Rather, followers of Jesus are regarded as his "friends" (John 15:14-15; 3 John 15), and John's swimming "against the stream" of rising institutionalism in the early Christian movement reveals the historical location of the Johannine situation. Not only is John's affirmation of the timeless workings of the Spirit of the creative-redemptive *Logos* at work behind and within the Jewish Scriptures, but this same Spirit is at work within the emerging Christian tradition—to be interpreted by the inspired community of believers abiding under the revelational Word. Thus, Johannine enthusiasm poses a set of dialectical challenges to Judaism, emerging Christian traditions, and the unbelieving world. Seeing Johannine enthusiasm as something of a bridge between the charismata of 1 Cor 14 and the pneumatism of early Gnosticism, Käsemann declares (55):

In distinction to Paul's view, the Johannine Christ becomes a stumbling-block, not on account of his cross and lowliness, but because, in the world which finds self-understanding in itself, he proclaims the rightful sovereign claim of the Creator upon his creation and demands our obedience.

Because *Christian unity* can never be ordered by uniformity, it can only be furthered by solidarity: "the tension-filled interconnectedness between those who differ among themselves" (56). Thus, the prayer of the Johannine Jesus for the unity of the church echoes the appeal for unity in Ephesians, and just as the unity of believers is established in heaven, its earthly reality is to be embraced by believers within the community of faith. Over and against Bultmann's "dualism of decision," the Johannine Jesus, through his priestly prayer, invites believers into solidarity with that heavenly reality, which "is of necessity one and indivisible" (57). As a result, John's symbolic discourses are "based on the premise that the earthly things, earthly bread, light, etc., have their truth in the heavenly prototype" (69). Thus, God's love

for the world is expressed in community as love for brothers and sisters, and the mission to the world involves bringing outsiders into the beloved community of faith, bringing sheep "not of this fold" into one flock and under the singular shepherd. Church unity within the Johannine situation is thus not a factor of institutional structures or official instrumentality; rather, it results from relationality and the exhortation to love one another as Jesus has loved his own. Seen as a whole (73),

The outstanding marks of Johannine eschatology are (1) its transformation into protology; (2) the consistent presentation of Jesus as God walking on the face of the earth; (3) the ecclesiology of the community which consists of individuals who are reborn through the divine call, which lives from the Word, and which represents the heavenly unification on earth; (4) the understanding of the world and of the community's mission; (5) the reduction of the Christian exhortation to brotherly love, and (6) finally, the hope of Christian perfection.

In his *conclusion*, Käsemann maintains a critical stance toward his own position as well as those he engages, although he also perpetuates a good number of scholarly biases uncritically. The insights and questions of this epilogue, however, are threefold. First, how are scholars and readers of John to make sense of its perplexing riddles? Hardly any other text in the New Testament has provoked such fascination and a multiplicity of interpretive theories as the Gospel of John, which stood in tension with rising Catholicism, claiming the guise of apostolic memory. Hence, this explains the "wild mish-mash" of views about John's origin, character, and meaning. Second, was the inclusion of John in the canon a human mistake as well as divine providence? Some of what was purported as apostolic memory at the end of the first century was deemed heretical by the end of the second. Indeed, "its inclusion in the canon is not without irony. . . . Which authority, then, does belong to the Gospel of John? The inclusion of this book in the canon does not answer once and for all, especially since the Fourth Gospel has no conception of closed revelation, but rather advocates, even against itself, the ongoing operation Spirit's witness" (74, 76). Third, "What is the relation between the exalted Christ proclaimed here and the earthly Jesus?" (77) The answer hinges upon how readers are thereby led to the Father; in

one's response to John's "fascinating and dangerous theology" will the link between the earthly Jesus and his glory be revealed.

### The Testament of Ernst Käsemann

The responses to Ernst Käsemann's most provocative book have been varied and many, but overall, they reflect something of a testament to his own convictions and his exegetical approach from a bird's eye perspective, rather than "from molehill to molehill," as is typical of scholars purporting to claim they can "hear the grass grow or the bedbugs cough" (75). And yet, "the threat of dogmatic security" is also in tension with its opposite threat: bondage to "the impulses and whims of the moment, no longer knowing anything except what can just as well be found outside the canon" (77). In his antithetical approach to the Christology, ecclesiology, and soteriology of the Fourth Gospel, Käsemann's monograph actually poses a novel overall thesis, the synthesis of which becomes something of a testament to his own life and work.

At the outset, reviews of Käsemann's work were appreciative but also re-active. Nearly all of them attested that this was a very important book, and yet each of them also had its own set of disagreements and counter questions to raise.<sup>34</sup> In addition, *The Testament of Jesus* was engaged further in a number of books too many to mention, but mostly they addressed his christological and ecclesiological assertions.<sup>35</sup> The overall impression of most scholars is

34. See, for instance, the reviews in journals: Paul J. Achtemeier, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 89:3 (1970) 374-75; J. Haultain Brown, *The Reformed Theological Review* 28:2 (1969) 62-63; G. Delling, *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 93:1 (1968) 38-40; C. F. Evans, *Church Quarterly* 2:1 (1969) 69-71; Victor Paul Furnish, *The Perkins School of Theology Journal* 22 (1969) 137; Jean Gible, *Louvain Studies* 2:4 (1969) 398-99; N. Hasselmann, *Lutheran World* 14:4 (1967) 404; A. M. Hunter, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 22:2 (1969) 228-30; George Johnston, *Canadian Journal of Theology* 15 (1969) 286; Robert Kysar, *Perspective* 10:2 (1969) 180-81; George W. MacRae, S. J., *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 38:3 (1970) 328-32; Wayne A. Meeks, *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 24:4 (1969) 414-20; George T. Montague, S. M., *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 31:3 (1969) 437-38; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Biblische Zeitschrift* 13:1 (1969) 143-44; H. Simonsen, *Dansk Teologisk Tidsskrift* 31:2 (1968) 151-52; Josef Smolik, *Communio Viatorum* 10:4 (1967) 279-82; Frank Stagg, *Review & Expositor* 66:3 (1969) 331; K. L. Voss, *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 44:3 (1968) 187-88; Donald Williams, *Salmanticensis* 17:3 (1970) 680.

35. See these further engagements (arranged chronologically): Günther Bornkamm,



put well by Victor Paul Furnish: "this book is a programmatic piece: some far-reaching conclusions are projected on the basis of a fairly narrow sampling and limited exegesis to certain Johannine texts."<sup>36</sup> Yet, while many of Käsemann's points remain unproven, he might also have felt the same regarding their many counterpoints lodged by other scholars.<sup>37</sup>

Further overall critiques include the following. First, as Wayne Meeks points out, Käsemann's uses of such terms as "enthusiasm," "Catholicism," and "conventicle-piety" draw more from German-Reformation history than they do from approaches based on first-century or even social-sciences methodologies. Thus, by "substituting such models for documented historical description of first century phenomena, he has come very close

---

"Zur Interpretation des Johannesevangeliums: Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Ernst Käsemanns Schrift 'Jesus letzter Wille nach Johannes 17,'" *Evangelische Theologie* 28:1 (1968) 8–25, translated by John Ashton as "Towards the Interpretation of John's Gospel," in his *The Interpretation of John* (1986, London: T&T Clark, 1997) 97–120; Eric F. Osborn, "Käsemann on the Fourth Gospel," *Australian Biblical Review* 20 (1972) 33–38; Stephen S. Smalley, "The Testament of Jesus: Another Look," *Studia Evangelica*, Vol. VI, edited by E. A. Livingstone (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1973) 495–501; Robert T. Fortna, "Christology in the Fourth Gospel: Redaction-Critical Perspectives," *New Testament Studies* 21:4 (1975) 489–504; Domingo Muñoz León, "El Principio Trinitario Immanente y la Interpretación del Nuevo Testamento (a Propósito de la Cristología Epifánica Restrictiva), parte 3," *Estudios Bíblicos* 41 (1983) 241–83; Gail R. O'Day, "Narrative Mode and Theological Claim: A Study in the Fourth Gospel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105:4 (1986) 657–68; Günter Klein, "Aspekte ewigen Lebens im Neuen Testament: ein theologischer Annäherungsversuch" *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 82:1 (1985) 48–70; Paul R. Hinlicky, "A Criticism of the Criticism of the Gospel of John," *Lutheran Forum* 29:3 (1995) 56–62; Kari Syreeni, "Incarnatus Est?": Christ and Community in the Johannine Farewell Discourse," *Testimony and Interpretation: Early Christology in its Judeo-Hellenistic Milieu: Studies in Honour of Petr Pokorný*, edited by Jan Roskovec and Jiří Mrázek (London: T&T Clark International, 2004) 247–64.

36. Furnish 137; this is also the view of Kysar 181.

37. For instance, in his third German edition of the book, he counters polemically the questions raised by Bornkamm in his extensive review. And, in my personal correspondence with Professor Käsemann in 1997 after he received the Trinity Press International copy of *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel*, he responded with appreciation for the exhaustive literature review and my approach to John's composition history, but he then asserted his view that John's Christology, from 1:14 to 20:28, is thoroughly theophanic. I responded to him asking, "Yes, but what do you do with the thoroughly mundane and subordinated Christology in Appendix II on page 267?" I never heard back from him, as he passed away the following year.

to abandoning the hard-won gains of history-of-religions scholarship.<sup>38</sup> Second, by limiting the analysis of John's theology and situation to the Johannine Gospel only, to the exclusion of the closely related Epistles and Apocalypse, Käsemann's analysis of the historical Johannine situation is considerably weakened.<sup>39</sup> His analyses of Docetism and diverse approaches to church unity would especially have been strengthened if he had performed contextual analyses of the Johannine and Ignatian Epistles as well as the Johannine Apocalypse within its imperial setting.<sup>40</sup> Third, Käsemann's denying of the Fourth Gospel any apostolic authority or historical memory fails to take into account the robust advances made by Dodd and others in recent years; thus, the merits of his approaches to historical questions remain to be seen.<sup>41</sup> Nonetheless, the "meat" of the book is found in the central three chapters.<sup>42</sup>

Regarding John's Christology, Meeks notes that "on the face of it Hoskyns' dialectic, more adequately summarized as 'the life of the world hidden in death' than as 'glory hidden in lowliness,' takes account of John's literary motifs better than Käsemann does."<sup>43</sup> And, as J. Haultain Brown queries, what does one do with the fact of John's featuring of the weariness of Jesus, his thirst, and the side-wound from which water and blood flow?<sup>44</sup> Following D. Moody Smith's insistence that the glory of Christ in the Fourth Gospel must be held in tension with the flesh of Jesus in John, Marianne Meye Thompson launched a frontal assault on Käsemann's view of John's Christology as being naively docetic.<sup>45</sup> The incarnation of the

38. Meeks 420; see also Furnish 137.

39. Montague 438; Smolík 281–82.

40. See, for instance, the works of Cassidy, Borgen, and Meeks within the Johannine Monograph Series: Richard J. Cassidy, *John's Gospel in New Perspective: Christology and the Realities of Roman Power*, Johannine Monograph Series 3 (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015); Peder Borgen, *Bread From Heaven*, Johannine Monograph Series 4 (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017); Wayne A. Meeks, *The Prophet-King*, Johannine Monograph Series 5 (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017).

41. Smolík 281–82.

42. Stagg 331.

43. Meeks 419.

44. J. H. Brown 62.

45. D. Moody Smith addresses the tension between Bultmann's and Käsemann's

Word is also real in John, and Käsemann makes no use of the monographs by E. M. Sidebottom and Davey, which show fully the humanity of Jesus in John.<sup>46</sup> Nor does Käsemann make reference to Borgen's claim that John 6 is targeted at Docetists, among others.<sup>47</sup> Udo Schnelle carries the critique of Käsemann further by demonstrating the antidocetic thrust of John's Christology. With Bornkamm, John's incarnational thrust is confirmed by Martinus C. de Boer in his treatment of the centrality of John's Passion narrative, and J. T. Forestell's treatment of "the way of the cross" in the Fourth Gospel demonstrates compellingly the reality of costly discipleship in John's presentation of Jesus.<sup>48</sup> Thus, while Käsemann rightly illuminates the exalted trajectory of John's Christology, its incarnational thrust is not eclipsed, and it cannot be ignored or sidestepped. With C. K. Barrett, the evangelist must

oppositional treatments of John 1:14 in several places: "The Sources of the Gospel of John: An Assessment of the Present State of the Problem," *New Testament Studies* 10 (1964) 336–51; "The Presentation of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel," *Interpretation* 31 (1977) 367–78; *The Theology of the Gospel of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 161–82. He then supervised the Duke dissertation of Marianne Meye Thompson, whose monograph on *The Humanity of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1988) argues compellingly from start to finish the incarnational thrust of the Johannine Jesus.

46. The fleshly humanity of the Johannine Jesus is clearly laid out by E. M. Sidebottom, *The Christ of the Fourth Gospel in the Light of First-Century Thought* (London: SPCK, 1961); and J. E. Davey, *The Jesus of St. John: Historical and Christological Studies in the Fourth Gospel* (London: Lutterworth, 1958).

47. Udo Schnelle, *Antidocetic Christology in the Fourth Gospel*, translated by Linda M. Maloney (1987, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), argues that the contextual crisis of docetizing teachers referenced in 2 John 7 was the primary reason the Johannine Gospel was composed and circulated (228–36). And, reflecting the dialectical character of the evangelist's thought, "the Fourth Gospel's theological and historical complexity is a barrier to any kind of one-sided or single-strand attempt at explanation" (1). See also Borgen, *Bread From Heaven*, who argues that John 6 targets Docetists in emphasizing the "bread" Jesus offers for the life of the world as being his flesh, a reference to his death on the cross.

48. Bornkamm 105–8. M. C. de Boer, *Johannine Perspective on the Death of Jesus*, Contributions to Biblical Exegesis & Theology 17 (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996); J. Terence Forestell, *The Word of the Cross: Salvation as Revelation in the Fourth Gospel*, Analecta Biblica 57 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1974). For implications regarding the way of the cross in reading John 6:27–58 as the outlining of "the two ways" (the way of life versus the way of death—cf. the *Didache*), see Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel* and "The *Sitz im Leben* of the Johannine Bread of Life Discourse and its Evolving Context," *Critical Readings of John 6*, edited by Alan Culpepper, Biblical Interpretation Supplemental Series 22 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997) 1–59.

be considered a dialectical thinker, and on this score, the privileging of one polarity over and against the other within John's christological thrust violates the epistemological character of John's tensive presentation of Jesus.<sup>49</sup>

Regarding the historical setting of Johannine Christianity, Käsemann's view of the community under the Word has enjoyed a stronger reception, although not all are convinced. On his view that John's church is more in the mainstream of the late first-century movement than on the periphery, Schnelle, Brown, and others concur.<sup>50</sup> John's presentation of Jesus as the Christ serves as a link between a synoptic-like Jesus tradition and emerging Gnosticism rather than being rooted in early Gnosticism connected with baptistic traditions. Thus, it is John who is the proto-Gnostic, not John's sources.<sup>51</sup> Not surprisingly, J. Louis Martyn critiques Käsemann's inference that the evangelist was interacting with "forces internal to himself" and asserts that the primary rhetorical target in the Johannine situation involved Jewish audiences.<sup>52</sup> Conversely, Josef Smolík sees the Johannine situation as reflecting "John's grounded reality, as attested by the Johannine Epistles—written in an antagonistic situation. When the Johannine Apocalypse is also considered, the community's living under Empire must also be considered as a part of John's historical backdrop."<sup>53</sup> More compelling is Käsemann's inference of the Fourth Evangelist's presentation of a

49. C. K. Barrett, "The Dialectical Theology of St. John," in his *New Testament Essays* (London: SPCK, 1972) 49–79. For cognitive-critical analyses of the evangelist's dialectical thinking, see Paul N. Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel*, 137–69; "The Cognitive Origins of John's Unitive and Disunitive Christology," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 17 (1995) 1–24. As reflected in the Johannine Prologue, see Paul N. Anderson, "On Guessing Points and Naming Stars—The Epistemological Origins of John's Christological Tensions," *The Gospel of St. John and Christian Theology*, edited by Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 311–45.

50. Schnelle, *Antidocetic Christology in the Fourth Gospel* 41–70; Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: the Life, Loves, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1979).

51. Says Meeks (420), "In that affirmation Käsemann has uncovered enough explosives to bring down the whole structure of contemporary Protestant biblical theology, but he has been content to set off fireworks."

52. J. Louis Martyn, "Source Criticism and Religionsgeschichte in the Fourth Gospel," *Perspective* 11:1-2 (1970) 247–73.

53. Smolík 281–82.

Spirit-based ecclesiology affirming the priesthood of all believers, which is held to be in tension with the likes of Diotrephes, “the primacy lover” (*ho philoprōteron*) of 3 John 9–10.<sup>54</sup> While John’s emphasis on egalitarian accessibility to the spiritual guidance of the risen Lord is palpable in the text, however, the link need not be tied to Corinthian enthusiasm (versus F. C. Baur). Rather, it could just as easily betray connectedness with the promise of the Spirit’s assistance, corroborated by synoptic traditions, reflecting an alternative memory of Jesus as a charismatic leader.<sup>55</sup>

In Käsemann’s view of John’s soteriology, it is not certain that John’s Spirit-based ethos is all that close to heterodox emerging Gnosticism. According to George MacRae, “In a word, it must be said that Käsemann’s interpretation of John places it at least one important step further along the road to Gnosticism than its structure and its attitude toward tradition would seem to allow.”<sup>56</sup> Put bluntly, Käsemann over-reads the evidence a good deal, and while the Johannine tradition may have influenced later gnostic trends, they need not be read into the Johannine ethos anachronistically.<sup>57</sup> Further, while Käsemann describes love as keeping the Johannine

54. Käsemann’s earlier naming of Diotrephes, who loves to be first, in his earlier essay (“Ketzer und Zeuge”) sets the stage for his viewing “early Catholicism” as one of John’s dialectical targets in this chapter. Nonetheless, such language is anachronistic, even though the emergence of Ignatian monepiscopacy likely led to such developments. See the treatment of “early Catholicism” in the late New Testament era by James Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, 341–66.

55. Martin Hengel, *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1968) 80; Paul N. Anderson, *The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus: Modern Foundations Reconsidered*, LNTS 321 (London: T&T Clark, 2006) 104, 171–72. Thus, as Bornkamm asserts (109–13), the Johannine tradition is not rooted in Docetism but in the evangelist’s tradition.

56. MacRae 332.

57. On this score, other interpreters have also overblown the character of Johannine pneumatism so as to imagine Corinthian enthusiasm gone awry in the Johannine situation as the basis for its divisions and secessions when more reasoned explanations abound. Note the differences between Raymond Brown’s views of the Johannine Gospel’s situation in contrast to that of the Johannine Epistles: *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1984) 84–101 and 102–23. In the latter essay, rampant enthusiasm is inferred to be the source of nearly all of the community’s tensions (you just can’t talk sense those enthusiasts, as they feel they’ve heard directly from God), which more plausibly related to differing ethical views between believers of Jewish and Gentile

commandments and loving only those within, Bornkamm disagrees regarding the docetic character of love. As it is not clear that love is a factor of revelation as opposed to sacrifice, the way of love implies costly discipleship.<sup>58</sup> Less compelling, however, is Bornkamm's view that the Ignatian "medicine of immortality" association reflects the redactor's interpolation of John 6:51–58 over and against the evangelist's narrative thrust.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, solidarity with Jesus and his community involves the way of life versus the way of death (6:27), and Christ alone has the words of eternal life (6:68).<sup>60</sup> In John's story of Jesus, Käsemann's categories of dogma and kerygma do not fit the character of John's narrative well. Rather, as Gail O'Day points out, it is precisely by means of John's narrative mode that its theological claims are advanced. Therefore,

When we study the "how" of Johannine revelation, it becomes clear that the Fourth Gospel is not just a report of Jesus as revealer, but allows the reader to experience Jesus' revelation for himself or herself. An analysis of the Johannine dynamics of revelation demonstrates that the Fourth Gospel narrative does not just mediate the revelation (as is often the case in the synoptic accounts), but is the revelation.<sup>61</sup>

In conclusion, Käsemann's creative approach to John's Christology reflects the unity and diversity of the early Christian movement, which in my view even extends to tensions within and between mainstream memories of the

---

backgrounds within a cosmopolitan setting, not a sectarian enclave. See Paul N. Anderson, "The Community that Raymond Brown Left Behind—Reflections on the Dialectical Johannine Situation," *Communities in Dispute: Current Scholarship on the Johannine Epistles*, edited by Paul N. Anderson and R. Alan Culpepper, Early Christianity and its Literature 13 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014) 47–93.

58. Kysar 181.

59. Versus Bornkamm 115, n. 9, and Achtemeier 375, there is no theological, contextual, or stylistic reason for seeing John 6:51c–58 as added by a redactor. As the main thrust is martyrological rather than instrumentalistic (parallel to Mark 10:38–39), and as the emphasis of Ignatius' letter to the Ephesians (ch. 20) is the partaking of *one* loaf (not simply a loaf), the common issue for John and Ignatius is church unity in the face of the rabid bite of divisive dogs (Ignatius, Ephesians 7) and secessionists that have left John's church (1 John 2:18–25). See Anderson, *Christology of the Fourth Gospel*, 110–36, 207–19.

60. Anderson, *Christology of the Fourth Gospel*, 199–207, 221–50.

61. O'Day 668.

church.<sup>62</sup> “By accepting the Gospel of John into the canon, Christianity had accepted the principle of theological diversity.”<sup>63</sup> As Käsemann himself notes, the diversity within the canonical writings themselves make allowance for diversity within the ecumenical movement in later generations.<sup>64</sup> However, as George MacRae rightly says, “Yet one can disagree with a great book precisely because it is challenging and rich in both exegetical and theological insight. This one deserves a permanent place on any Johannine reading list.”<sup>65</sup>

### The Dialogue Continues

As Ernst Käsemann did not store up the seeds of his thought in a granary silo but cast them liberally to the wind and upon varying types of soils, some of them have produced fruit, while others have not. Nonetheless, from one dialogue to another, the engagement continues, as questions and even counter-questions lead to fruitful engagements as well as fertile receptions.

On the naïve Docetism of the Fourth Gospel, few if any scholars have been convinced. This is not Käsemann’s fault, however, as he argued the case as robustly as it could have been. Rather, the problem lies with the facts of the Johannine narrative; John’s Jesus suffers, emotes, bleeds, groans, and dies—pierced with a spear and nailed to a cross.<sup>66</sup> Further, the Son is subservient to the Father as well as one with the Father—a factor of the Jewish

---

62. Kysar (181) quips that the lengthy footnote on page 75 on Walter Bauer and the historical method employed “is worth the price of the book!” In my view, John’s rendering of the will of Jesus for the church, over and against presentations in the Synoptics, likely reflects an alternative view in the name of apostolic memory rather than against it. Thus, Peter is portrayed as returning the keys of the kingdom to Jesus (in dialogue with Matt 16:17–19) as a precursor to his final instructions for the church in John 13–16, including the prayer for unity in John 17; Anderson, *Christology of the Fourth Gospel* 221–77.

63. David Hawkin 34.

64. Hence, as Käsemann says in “What I Have Unlearned” (332), “the biblical canon is not self-evidently the foundation for a general consensus but rather the basis for confessional *multiplicity*.”

65. MacRae 332.

66. Note the considerable tensions between twelve of John’s central theological themes: Anderson, *Riddles of the Fourth Gospel*, 25–43.

agency motif.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, a monofaceted reading of John misses entirely its polyvalent character.<sup>68</sup> Thus, the monograph of Marianne Meye Thompson on the incarnation of the Word, showing many ways the evangelist's message is conveyed through the mundane and physical ministry of Jesus, has done better at winning the day among Johannine scholars.<sup>69</sup> Further, while the Johannine Prologue makes perfect sense as an introduction to what follows in the narrative,<sup>70</sup> its strophic form, distinctive vocabulary, and doxalogical character suggest that it represents the community's response to John's story of Jesus (as does 1 John 1:1–3), which has been added to the narrative as an engaging introduction.<sup>71</sup> That being the case, John's story of Jesus likely began with the ministry of John the Baptist in ways parallel to Mark, as a more mundane narrative, rooted in traditional memory rather

---

67. Käsemann notes the presence of the Jewish agency motif in John but neglects developing it. On the Father-Son relationship and two-dozen connections with Deut 18:15–22, see Paul N. Anderson, "The Having-Sent-Me Father—Aspects of Agency, Encounter, and Irony in the Johannine Father-Son Relationship," *Semeia* 85, edited by Adele Reinhartz (1999) 33–57. See also Peder Borgen's pivotal essay, "God's Agent in the Fourth Gospel," *The Interpretation of John*, 2nd edition, edited by John Ashton (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997) 83–96, first published in Jacob Neusner, ed., *Religions in Antiquity* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968) 137–48.

68. Paul N. Anderson, "From One Dialogue to Another—Johannine Polyvalence from Origins to Receptions," *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism; The Past, Present, and Future of the Fourth Gospel as Literature*, edited by Stephen Moore and Tom Thatcher, *Resources in Biblical Studies* 55 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2008) 93–119.

69. Thompson; see also her book on God in the Fourth Gospel, where John's theocentric thrust is seen as taking precedence over John's Christology: *The God of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

70. See R. Alan Culpepper's work on the pivotal thrust of the Johannine Prologue and its thematic confirmation in the rest of the narrative: "The Pivot of John's Prologue," *New Testament Studies* 27 (1980) 1–31; and "The Prologue as Theological Prolegomenon to the Gospel of John," in *The Prologue of the Gospel of John*, edited by Jan G. van der Watt, R. Alan Culpepper, and Udo Schnelle, *WUNT* 359 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016) 3–26. See also Anderson, "On Guessing Points and Naming Stars."

71. Paul N. Anderson, "The Johannine Logos-Hymn: A Cross-Cultural Celebration of God's Creative-Redemptive Work," *Creation Stories in Dialogue: The Bible, Science, and Folk Traditions* (Radbound Prestige Lecture Series by Alan Culpepper), edited by R. Alan Culpepper and Jan van der Watt, *Biblical Interpretation Series* 139 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2016) 219–42.



than visionary imagination.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, the unity and disunity of John's Christology must be taken seriously, and discerning the epistemological origins of John's theological tensions (as well as John's historical and literary riddles) must be addressed analytically in seeking to understand what the Fourth Gospel is saying, and perhaps more importantly, what it is not.<sup>73</sup>

More compelling has been Käsemann's argument that John's witness to Jesus stands within the mainstream of the Christian movement, while also challenging other sectors and trajectories within early Christianity. However, just because the Johannine tradition may have contributed to emerging Gnosticism in the post-Johannine era (following the completion and circulation of the Johannine writings), this does not mean that John's Christology would have been considered heretical by other Christians, including those within what was understood to be apostolic Christianity. Further, just as debates over apostolic authority afflicted Paul's ministry among the Hellenistic churches, so there were likely debates over apostolic authority as the Johannine Gospel was circulated among the other Gospels. The first and second endings of John's Gospel reflect those tensions, and the fact of apostolic or eyewitness attestation rhetorically does not their inauthenticity confirm. Thus, with Schnelle, Borgen, and others, the Johannine narrative is as antidocetic as it is docetizing, and versus Martyn and company, John's targeted audiences extended beyond local Jewish authorities and communities.<sup>74</sup>

It is at this point that Käsemann's work becomes the most intriguing. Rather than seeing apostolic Christianity as a monolithic bastion of

72. Thus, the Gospel of John possesses more archaeologically attested and topographical details than all the other gospels put together; Johannine empiricism is an empirical fact, as is the Johannine spiritualization of mundane features. See Paul N. Anderson, "Aspects of Historicity in John: Implications for Archaeological and Jesus Studies," *Jesus and Archaeology*, edited by James Charlesworth (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006, 587–618). On John's spiritualization of synoptic-cohering themes, see Paul N. Anderson, "The Origin and Development of the Johannine *Egō Eimi* Sayings in Cognitive-Critical Perspective," *JSHJ* 9 (2011) 139–206.

73. On the epistemological origins of thirty-six of John's theological, historical, and literary riddles, see Paul N. Anderson, *The Riddles of the Fourth Gospel* 157–72; on implications for the interpretation of the Fourth Gospel, see 173–243.

74. Schnelle, *Antidocetic Christology in the Fourth Gospel*; Borgen, *Bread from Heaven*; Forestell, *The Word of the Cross*.

uniformity, might it have been, more realistically, filled with tensions over legitimacy of authority, validity of leadership, soundness of doctrine, and effectiveness of organization on multiple levels? With Walter Bauer and others, the very question of which individuals and communities possess the right to speak for the Jesus of history as well as the Christ of faith was more likely than not an open question in the third generation of the Jesus movement. This would especially have been the case among traditions competing for the mantle of apostolic legitimacy (or, should that be *mantles*?). Thus, if Diotrephes and his kin were citing Petrine authorization in the erecting of hierarchical authority—in keeping with Ignatian mon-episcopal developments—might the Elder’s finalizing and circulating the Beloved Disciple’s witness be seen as a corrective to rising institutionalism in the late first-century situation in the name of Jesus’s original intentionality for the church? With Käsemann’s thrust, women and non-members of the Twelve make christological confessions (John 1:49; 11:27), women become apostles to the Samaritans and the apostles, Peter affirms the sole authority of Jesus (6:68–69), access to the Holy Spirit’s guidance is availed to all believers, the mother of the Lord is entrusted to the Beloved Disciple at the cross, and apostolic priesthood is extended to all believers rather than narrowed to a few (20:21–23). However, John’s ecclesiology reflects a more primitive and dynamic view, closer to the charismatic prophet from Nazareth, over and against more structured and petrified views.<sup>75</sup> Thus, Diotrephes, who “loves to be first” (3 John 9–10), might not have excluded

75. Savas Agourides, “Peter and John in the Fourth Gospel,” *Studia Evangelica* IV, edited by F. L. Cross (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1968) 3–7; C. K. Barrett, “Johanneisches Christentum,” *Die Anfänge des Christentums*, edited by J. Becker (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1987) 255–78; A. H. Maynard, “The Role of Peter in the Fourth Gospel,” *New Testament Studies* 30 (1984) 531–48; Kevin Quast, *Peter and the Beloved Disciple: Figures for a Community in Crisis*, JSNTS 32 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989); Graydon F. Snyder, “John 13:16 and the Anti-Petrinism of the Johannine Tradition,” *Biblical Research* 16 (1971) 5–15; T. V. Smith, *Petrine Controversies in Early Christianity: Attitudes Towards Peter in Christian Writings of the First to Centuries*, WUNT 2.15 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985); Paul N. Anderson, “‘You Have the Words of Eternal Life!’ Is Peter Presented as Returning the Keys of the Kingdom to Jesus in John 6:68?” *Neotestamentica* 41:1 (2007) 6–41.

Johannine ministers from his church because they were quasi-heretics; he might have been threatened by their egalitarianism, and rightly so.<sup>76</sup>

Not surprisingly, discussions of Christian unity in the early church and later generations have continued beyond Käsemann's contributions. On one hand, John's ecclesial emphasis upon Spirit-based relationality and fluidity is seen as a challenge to institutional structure and hierarchy in early Christianity. Thus, Peter can be seen as "returning the keys to Jesus" when John 6:67–71 is viewed alongside Matt 16:17–19.<sup>77</sup> Then again, Matthean ecclesiology also emphasizes graciousness and familial approaches to community organization, and presentations of Peter and other apostles (including James and John) in the Synoptics are by no means monodimensional, as models of governance and organization emerge within the trajectories of their personal ministries.<sup>78</sup> What we do see following Käsemann's work is an interest in the multiplicity of ecclesial models of organization within the early Church, including practical appreciation for strengths and weaknesses within each model, rather than assuming dogmatic affirmation or denigration of particular models, tending to accommodate one's personal

---

76. In my correspondence with Professor Käsemann (1994), I asked him if Diotrephes might have been threatened not by Johannine perceived Docetism but perhaps more likely by Johannine egalitarianism with regards to differences over Christocracy—the means by which the risen Lord continues to lead the church. He responded: "Es ist nicht aus der Luft gegriffen." (That is not grabbed out of thin air.) He went on to explain how the role of Christ was also central to the Barmen conference in 1934 as a basis for resistance to the Nazi government.

77. See the engagement between Graham Stanton and myself in the review of *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel*, *Review of Biblical Literature* 1 (1999) 38–72. While Matthean Christianity may have employed structural leadership graciously, all it takes is one strident implementation (that of Diotrephes?) to evoke an ideological corrective response from the Johannine leadership. Regarding practical implications, following Raymond Brown's lead regarding *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind*, my response to Pope John Paul II's 1995 Encyclical was prepared on behalf of the National Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission and sent to the Vatican. It was then published, and I delivered it personally to Cardinal Kasper and Pope Benedict XVI in October, 2006: Paul N. Anderson, "Petrine Ministry and Christocracy: A Response to *Ut Unum Sint*," *One in Christ* 40:1 (2005) 3–39. With Käsemann's thrust, it elevates a historic vision of Christian unity under the leadership of Christ as a common ecumenical vocation.

78. Note the Petrine and Johannine trajectories as bases for the Markan and Johannine traditions: Paul N. Anderson, "Mark, John, and Answerability: Interfluentiality and Dialectic between the Second and Fourth Gospels," *Liber Annuus* 63 (2013) 197–245.

investments. With Dunn, we see unity within the diversity of New Testament Christianity, as well as diversity within the unity.

Further, if Johannine and other believers in the late first-century situation were facing the difficulties of seeking to be faithful to the way of the Nazarene prophet under the Flavian Dynasty, the cost of discipleship would have been especially high. No longer was deferring to Roman occupation the issue; from the reign of Domitian (81–96 CE) forward, worship of the Emperor was required, at times upon penalty of death.<sup>79</sup> Within such a situation, the accentuated emphasis upon the divine sonship of Jesus would have pushed back against assertions of the divine Julius as asserted by Caesars Augustus, Caligula, Domitian, and others, reflecting political resistance, not simply an exalted theological tenet. Thus, the affront of the docetizing ministers in 1 John 4:1–3 and 2 John 7 would have been less a matter of heterodox Christology and more a crisis of idolatrous assimilation. At stake in most theological debates are usually the implications rather than content. After all, if Jesus did not suffer, neither need his followers do the same. “Little children, stay away from idols!” is therefore not only the last word of the first Johannine Epistle (1 John 5:21); it also informs the first concern of the letter, where those claiming not to be sinning are accused of loving the world and its enticements rather than being willing to commit to loving the community in solidarity with its Lord. Thus, to ingest the flesh and blood of Jesus (John 6:51–58) reflects not an instrumentalist requirement of a cultic act for saving grace to be received; rather, it poses a call to martyrological faithfulness and costly discipleship if required by the truth. Solidarity with the crucified Nazarene and his community living under empire represents the Johannine call to freedom, and as Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, abiding in him and his fellowship is the way of truth, liberation, and love (14:6; 8:32; 15:1–17).

One wonders what Professor Käsemann would have done with the trajectories of Johannine scholarship that have developed following his contributions. Formed by his personal and pastoral experience, by his teachers and students, and by the happenings in the world, his exegetical unpacking of New Testament insights continues to impact future generations. And yet, in his commitment to following the leadership of the risen

79. Cassidy, *John's Gospel in New Perspective*.

Lord, informed by a radical appreciation of the crucified Nazarene, syntheses continue to emerge from his striking theses and antitheses along the way. In so doing, some of his contributions to the historical quest for Jesus might even find connections with the last will and testament of the Johannine Christ as critical methodologies make their own advances and as corroborative impressions emerge. Whatever the case, the learning and unlearning of Ernst Käsemann stimulates future readers of the biblical text where they concur with his bold assertions, and even when they do not. With these words he concludes his reflections on his own quest for truth; thus, the dialogue continues.<sup>80</sup>

I have trained myself to change fronts according to my understanding of Scripture and situation, not to store my seed but to cast it to the wind, and to unlearn what others have imparted to me. So one becomes lonely, and gradually also simple-minded. Gospel freedom demands its price, ultimately life itself. Yet gospel freedom is the one thing that gives meaning to all learning and unlearning.

80. With this statement, Käsemann concludes his life's reflection, "What I Have Unlearned," 335.