

## JOHANNINE COMMUNITY<sup>1</sup>

As noted in the syllabus, the Fourth Gospel [FG] is difficult to interpret without background. I believe that two aspects are of basic importance:

1. The evangelist writes on a double level – and intermingled! --
  - a] Jesus' ministry
  - b] the historical development of the Johannine community.<sup>2</sup>

2 The FG thus reflects a deep animosity that evolved **between Jews** that is back-read into the controversy with “*the Jews*” during Jesus' ministry. “The Jews” are, during Jesus' ministry, a small segment of the Jewish authority structure only.

It is vital to hold these two aspects ‘up front’ when reading the Johannine writings in order to avoid an unwarranted view of Jews/Judaism as either condemned by Jesus *en mass* or to reference as a source for an anti-Jewish/-Semitic stance. The FG is reporting its own perspective of an ‘in-family’ fight – Jew vs Jew – which is an all too common part of human life. NEVER FORGET THAT JESUS IS A PRACTICING JEW NOT A CHRISTIAN AND SO WERE HIS EARLIEST FOLLOWERS. In light of the Vatican II document *Nostra Aetate* [*Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*] and of the results of scholarship on liturgy/sacraments, we are prompted to develop a deep understanding of our Jewish roots as Christians and remember that Judaism, Islam and Christianity are sister religions worshipping the One God. As Flanagan clearly and well says: “Fear not, says John, Jesus himself is sufficient to replace all these lost and precious treasures.” [p 50] As Christians, we have reconstituted Jewish liturgy/festivals in Jesus. [We will meet this later.]

In the courses we've taken on scripture we've learned the three historical stages presented in the NT writings:

Stage I – Jesus' ministry

Stage II – the preaching/kerygma – tradition developing

Stage III – the written scripture – a later act, tradition reflected upon / theologized

Sorting these out can be difficult at times. In the FG, the complexity of this intermingling is intense.

Brown divides the history of the Johannine community into four phases.

“Phase I – Before the Gospel -- Johannine Community Origins

Phase II – When the Gospel Was Written – Johannine Relations to Outsiders

Phase III – When the Epistles Were Written – Johannine Internal Struggles

Phase IV – After the Epistles – Johannine Dissolution”

We will cover only those elements I believe most clearly aid our venture into the FG.

### PHASE I – “mid 50s to late 80s” [*Comm*, 22]<sup>3</sup> Before the Gospel -- Johannine Community Origins

- Beloved Disciple – unknown – historical – his witness is basis for the Johannine community – his “background similar to that of some prominent members of the Twelve” [32], but not of the Twelve – *may* be the unnamed disciple of 1:35-40
- Grp I -- first disciples – former disciples of JBap -- “low” christology -- Jews – some could have had beliefs congruent with the DSS
- Grp II -- later anti-Temple Jews/Samaritans join = trigger for synagogue hostility as **they** catalyzed a higher christology<sup>4</sup> of descent/pre-existence based on “high Moses piety”?

<sup>1</sup> This discussion is based on Raymond Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*.

<sup>2</sup> “What has happened in the Fourth Gospel is that the vocabulary of the evangelist's time has been read back into the ministry of Jesus.” Ibid, 41.

<sup>3</sup> Brown, *Concise*: en re the cleansing of the Temple wonders if 28 CE is the current date. It is, then, a generation later before the Johannine community organizes.

<sup>4</sup> “John always perceives a distinction between the divinity of the pre-existent Son and that of the Father. If he states “The Word is God,” he still speaks of the Word being directed toward God [*pros ton Theon*].” [Brown, *Comm*, n. 93, 53]

- Roman rule – Judaism was given legal status as a tolerated religion but, with the break between the Jews and Christians, the Christians lost their prior legal status as a sect within Judaism and could be prosecuted.
- Grp III – Gentiles join – reflected in the explanations of terms known to Jews – probable adaptation of language used for their understanding
- miracles/”signs” – expanded with theological discourse -- ?based on homilies
- 70 CE Destruction of Temple and banishment of Jews from Jerusalem

#### PHASE II – 80s to c. 90

##### When the Gospel Was Written – Johannine Relations to Outsiders

Brown locates seven groups within the Gospel in this phase, including the Johannine community,.

#### A. Nonbelievers

1. “the world” – Jesus was rejected by “his own” – was from heaven, not of this world, thus alien to this world – so also for the Johannine community at this period.
2. “the Jews” – probably now referring to the synagogue authorities = Pharisees since Jamnia which → post-Temple Judaism – the issue is the divinity of Jesus.
3. Disciples of JBap – Beloved Disciple was formerly one – in a footnote Brown says: “To understand why JBap’s followers would find acceptance of Jesus difficult, it is useful to discern between the historical preaching of JBap [which may not have referred to Jesus directly] and the Christian reinterpretation of that preaching.” [Comm, n 124, 70]

#### B. Other Christians

4. Crypto-Christians – believers still in the synagogue and silent for fear of expulsion also they knew Jesus functioned within synagogue/Temple [so Peter and James] – chose compromise over confrontation.
5. “The Jewish Christian Churches of Inadequate Faith” – e.g., disciples in 6:66, brothers of Jesus 7:3-5 – James, *et al*, though prominent in the Jerusalem church were more conservative than other Christians so did not meet criteria of Johannine faith.
6. Apostolic Churches – Johannine view is favorable but finds their understanding to be limited: no concept of Jesus’ pre-existence or heavenly origin – also issues of ecclesiology: apostolic teaching = unchanging – Johannine teacher is the Paraclete/guide – presence of Paraclete > community structure for the Johannine **community**
7. Johannine Community – embracing a christology beyond that of the Apostolic Christians, willing to be joined with them [17:20-21] – their christology is later accepted by all Christians → development of trinitarian theology.

#### PHASE III – c. 100

##### When the Epistles Were Written – Johannine Internal Struggles

Brown proposes “four figures in the Johannine school of writers”<sup>5</sup>: Beloved Disciple, evangelist [author of gospel], presbyter [author of Epistles], Gospel redactor.

Evangelist c. 90 I & II John c. 100 III John then Redactor of Gospel early 100s [before 110]

Urban setting of churches for Johannine, Apostolic, and Jewish Christians + the synagogues + disciples of JBap. The Apostolic Churches are developing structure and hierarchy, among them “presbyters.” Brown gives two meanings for presbyter: administrator/pastor; generation of teachers after the eyewitnesses [puts the Epistles’ author in this group, and calls them the “Johannine school”]

Controversy arises with division between the author and the secessionists.

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<sup>5</sup> BINT, 389.

Using the author's arguments in I John, the problem stems from different interpretations of the Gospel [Comm, 106] as the author modifies rather than denies opponents' points. Brown gives four categories of differences: "christology, ethics, eschatology, and pneumatology." [109]

The Epistles are the earliest exegesis of the FG and the author 'corrects' mis-interpretations of the secessionists.

1. Christology very high are past time of eyewitnesses and beginning period when Jesus' divinity → problem of Jesus' humanity secessionists seem to disallow the importance/value of Jesus' life and death = stress on divinity tho' acknowledge humanity<sup>6</sup> But this same incarnate Jesus proclaims I AM; knows without being told; prays knowing the outcome and not asking for change. "...an earthly career that did not really involve an appropriation by Jesus of the human condition." [116] salvation is from Jesus' presence not deeds: "The notion of sacrifice has yielded to that of revelation ...." [119]

Brown: Gospel stresses Jesus as **Son of God** – Epistle **Jesus** as Son of God [111]

FG	I John
1:1	1:1 -- //FG 15:27
1:14c	1:1
11:51-52	1:7: 2:2
20:31	2:22
17:3, 8	5:6
10:15	3:16
17:3	4:2; II John 7

2. Ethics only one commandment = "love one another" [that is, fellow believers/Johannine community] secessionists claim being in God = sinlessness [9:34 – 9:41]

FG	I John
1:12: 8:46	3:5-6, 9
15:19; 17:16	2:6; 3:3, 7
15:12	3:22-24; 4:21-5:3 [3:23; 4:21]
	2:9-11; 3:11-18; 4:20 = failure to love

Brown declares that II John 10-11 has been fuel for internecine hating of Christians, a poor bargain. [135]

3. Eschatology apparently the secessionists viewed realized eschatology as an end per se – the author thus stresses the ethical aspect and future aspect [as in 3:18-19 and 4:17] using apocalyptic imagery and the "last hour: 2:18 [Brown notes approaching Mk 13:22 and II Thes2:1-12]

4. Pneumatology Brown states that in the FG the Paraclete resembles Jesus and that the Paraclete : Jesus as Jesus : the Father Paraclete is teacher [14:26] and guide [16:13] author of Epistle[s] refers to the Spirit only in 3:24-4:6,13 and 5:6-8 --- also the author's being presbyter ≠ disciplinary status as in the Apostolic churches + the Paraclete is the primary teacher not the "we" of the Johannine school; thus the author cites the secessionists as being of the world [4:5], as breaking communion with the community of those "anointed by the Word and the Spirit" [142] and can only propose a means of determining who [he sees] as true believers [4:2-3]. [142-3]

Phase IV – early 100s & before 110  
After the Epistles – Johannine Dissolution

There is historical silence re the Johannine community after the third epistle. The earliest citations of the FG are in what evolved as Gnosticism and other later defined heresies. Johannine christology was accepted by the Apostolic Churches by being read through the filter of I John. In fact, the FG laid the base for development of trinitarian theology. Brown surmises that the epistolary author may not

<sup>6</sup> "NRS **John 1:14** And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." "NRS **1 John 4:2** By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,<sup>3</sup> and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming; and now it is already in the world".

have been able to accept fully the institution/hierarchy of the Apostolics while Diotrephes, of III John note, may well have been reflecting the transitional acceptance of Apostolic ecclesiology.

Since the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, the church has lived in the tension between the high Johannine christology and the lower christology found elsewhere in the NT [an exception is Hebrews which Brown notes: "More adeptly than John, the Epistle to the Hebrews has kept in tension a high christology ... and full humanity." *Comm*, n. 230, 116]

### Points from Brown's Reflection in *Community*

Brown cites Sir Edwyn Hoskyns as phrasing "well the insight that Johannine history presents in microcosm the church struggles of the ages: "The modern reader will therefore not apprehend the Fourth Gospel as its author meant it to be apprehended if he concludes that it is against, say Gnosticism\*, or Docetism\*, or Ebionitism\*, or even against the Jews, and rests satisfied with that explanation, without at the same time recognizing that those ancient movements of religion are still deep-seated and destructive factors in our common life."" [ *Comm*, 163]

The tension noted above can be found in the monophysitism wherein we deem Jesus more divine than human in his earthly life yet base our Nicaean theology on this same FG's high christology. Phrased as Brown does: sets of "both/and's" – high/low christology; pre-existence/virgin birth; Paraclete/magisterium; Beloved Disciple/Peter. There are warnings in the FG against abuses of authoritarianism and in the Pastorals against abuses of the Spirit – tensions that remain unresolved.

\*Gnosticism: stressed knowledge of salvation, denied the incarnation and creation as good.

\*Docetism: "Christ only "seemed" to have a human body."

\*Ebionitism: belief of a "group of Jewish Christians who considered Jesus to be the son of Mary and Joseph, not of God."  
McBrien, *Catholicism*

## SYMBOLS / SIGNS / SCRIPTURE

SYMBOL: “something that stands for or suggests something else by reason of relationship, association, convention, or accidental resemblance; *esp*: a visible sign of something invisible <the lion is a ~ of courage>. From Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary

VOCABULARY: as you read with these words/titles in mind, you can add the definitions as you go

Feast of Tabernacles

“low” christology

“high” christology

the Word ... *ho logos*

fullness

truth

love

the life – *bios* and *zoe*

the light

darkness

sent

above/below ascending/descending

come

see

follow

receive/accept

his own

hour

lifted up

the world

flesh

name

glory -- the Gk *doxa* was used in the LXX to translate the Hebrew *kabod*: “visible

manifestation of YHWH” – the use here may have relationship to Shekinah = God’s presence<sup>1</sup> --- can also mean “reputation”/“human opinion” and is used both ways.  
grace -- *charis*: means both “grace” and “gift” [an unexpected favor -- Moloney, 45]  
in v 16 Moloney translates “a gift *in place of* a gift” --- McBrien defines grace: “The self-communication, or presence, of God.” – a definition by a theologian.<sup>2</sup>

water

wine

born “again” / “from above”

living water – Jer. 2:13; 17:13

“the Jews”

food/drink

bread from heaven / eats

eat [flesh]

Feast of Tabernacles: most important and happiest feast; Solomon’s Temple dedicated on Tabernacles; week long + 8<sup>th</sup> day for communal liturgy [see Lev 23:36]; at end of fall harvest; 7<sup>1</sup> days of libation from pool of Siloam in prayer for rain for next season + the people carried branches of trees in procession; huge torches lighted in Court of the Women which lighted up the city of Jerusalem, musicians played and the men danced[Schnackenburg2:189]

I AM – Ex 3:13-14; Isa 43:10; 45:18; [Isa 41:4; 43:13;46:4;48:12; Deut 32:39]<sup>3</sup>

the Way / Truth / Life

the Resurrection

the shepherd

the gate

grain of wheat

Advocate/Paraclete

the vine

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<sup>1</sup>Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina 4 [Collegeville, MN,1998] 39.

<sup>2</sup> Richard McBrien, *Catholicism*, 1240.

<sup>3</sup> *NJBC*, 1423

## TITLES / FUNCTIONS<sup>4</sup>

the Word 1:1,14  
God, 1:1c,18 *the* God vs divine  
[the] Only-Begotten 1:14d,18b  
[the ] Son 1:18  
lamb of God 1:29,36  
Rabbi 1:38  
the Son of God 1:34,49  
the Messiah 1:41,45  
king of Israel 1:49  
the Son of Man 1:51

Descriptions of Christological / Messianic functions:

“the greater [in rank] who comes after the Baptist 1:15,27,30;  
he who exists before the Baptist 1:15,30;  
he who is in the bosom of the Father 1:18;  
he who baptizes with Holy Spirit 1:33.”

SIGNS / WORKS --- *semeion/ semeia* and *ergon/ erga* – there are seven major ones

Wedding at Cana 2:1-12  
Healing of royal official's son 4:46-54  
Healing of man sick for 38 yrs 5:1-18  
Multiplication of loaves 6:1-15  
Walking on water 6:16-21  
Sight to man born blind 9:1-41  
Raising of Lazarus 11:1-55

Use of the word “sign” whether singular or plural designates what the Synoptics term miracle. However, “work” is distinguished in meaning by number – singular “the work” [*ta erga*] is the whole task God has given Jesus, “the works” [*ton ergon*] are Jesus' deeds that reveal God. [Moloney, 143]

“If faith is the result of freely chosen relationship between God and human person, then faith is not conditional with signs/miracles. The signs/miracles would become proof if producing faith, and faith has no proof. Only those who believe God is wondrous see God's hand in the events of their lives and then in awe are aware of the generosity of God's friendship in the myriad small ‘signs’ and great wonders of which life is full. But faith does not demand signs/miracles as a condition of its verity.

“Then why the ambiguity in scripture? Perhaps the whole point of scripture and the whole of scripture points to *I AM* as subject for faith not object of signs/miracles. Jesus, the incarnate *I AM*, performed “works” as present indicators of the to-be-realized kingdom come. Both faith and the “works” are gifts to be received.” [Justice, “Signs and Faith” This excerpt from a paper I wrote does, I believe, reflect the theology found in the FG.]

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<sup>4</sup> Rudolf Schnackenburg *The Gospel According to St John*, Vol 1, 507.

SCRIPTURE --- Since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, many aspects of the Johannine writings previously thought to be Hellenistic in origin have been found to be present in the Jewish environment of the first century and so the DSS are invaluable for research and interpretation of the NT. We will concentrate on the OT allusions/citations as these are the writings we can reference in the Bible. Due to time constraints, only major events/allusions will be detailed.

#### GENESIS

1. Creation 1-3
2. Abraham
3. Jacob dream 28:1-17

#### EXODUS

4. I AM 3:13-14
5. Passover 12:1-13
6. Manna 16

#### NUMBERS

7. bronze serpent 21:4-9

#### LEVITICUS

8. Festival of Weeks 23:15-22
9. Tabernacles 23:34-43

#### DEUTERONOMY

10. Tabernacles 16:13-16
11. Prophet-to-come 18:15, 18-19

#### KINGS

12. God's indwelling I Kings 8:10-11, 27
13. Elisha feeds 100 men II Kings 4:42-44

#### JOB

14. God's breath/life 34:14-15

#### PSALMS

15. son of God 2:6-7
16. creation by God's word 33:6
17. fountain of life/light 36:9
18. water from rock 78:15-16
19. manna/bread from heaven 78:24-25
20. "you are gods" 82:6
21. Blessed who comes in the name of God 118:26

#### PROVERBS

22. personification of Wisdom, her nature 8:1-- 9:6
23. her part in creation 8:22-31

#### WISDOM

24. the righteous man 2:12-20
25. nature of Wisdom 7:22b – 8:1
26. bronze serpent 16:5-7
27. bread from heaven 16:20

#### SIRACH

28. happiness of seeking Wisdom 14:20 – 15:10
29. praise of Wisdom 24

#### ISAIAH

30. listen ≠ hear look ≠ see 6:9-10
31. light to nations/sight to blind 42:6-7
32. water/life 55:1-3

#### JEREMIAH

33. Temple sermon 7:3-15a
34. shepherds [God/authorities] 23

#### EZEKIEL

35. Shepherds 34
36. cleanse/new spirit 36:25-26 [renewal of Israel :16-38 good historical info']

#### DANIEL

37. Son of Man 7:13-14

#### AMOS

38. messianic days 9:13-14

#### ZECHERIAH

39. your king comes riding on donkey 9:9
40. mourning for one pierced 12:10
41. fountain of cleansing 13:1
42. Tabernacles and rain/no trading in God's house 14:17; 21c

#### MALACHI

43. one father 2:10
44. prophet-to-come 4:5-6