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# The Diaspora-Jewish Background of the Fourth Gospel\*

JÖRG FREY (UNIVERSITÄT ZÜRICH)

The title of the present lecture is inspired by the great British New Testament scholar Charles Harold Dodd, whose famous lecture on “The Background of the Fourth Gospel” was delivered on October 10, 1934, in the John Rylands Library in Manchester.<sup>1</sup> Adopting Dodd’s inspiration, but taking a different direction of research, I would like to address the problems of the contextual setting and the history-of-religions background of the Gospel of John under a slightly altered title: “The *Diaspora-Jewish* Background of the Fourth Gospel.”

Under this heading, I first address the search for the history-of-religions background of the Fourth Gospel, and then discuss the Jewish elements in John and the question of the type of the Judaism adopted in John. Afterward, I consider the situation of the Johannine communities in separation from the synagogue and in the diaspora, before finally discussing some aspects of the Johannine literature’s diaspora-Jewish background.

## 1. The search for the history-of-religions background of the Fourth Gospel

Since the beginnings of modern critical scholarship, the language and thought of the Gospel of John have always stimulated the quest for the

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\* This essay is a slightly reworked version of a lecture delivered on November 10, 2010 as the 50th *T. W. Manson Memorial Lecture* at the University of Manchester, on invitation of Prof. Dr. George Brooke; another version was discussed in the exegetical research seminar (storseminarium) at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Uppsala on February 2, 2012. I am grateful to Prof. Brooke as well as to my friend Prof. Dr. James A. Kelhoffer in Uppsala for the invitations and to the colleagues and students in Uppsala and in Manchester, for the stimulating discussions. Thanks are due to my assistant Dr. Benjamin Schlieser for reading and correcting the article and to James A. Kelhoffer for a number of further suggestions and a final polishing of my non-native English.

<sup>1</sup> C. H. Dodd, “The Background of the Fourth Gospel,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 19 (1935): 329–343. C. H. Dodd was T. W. Manson’s predecessor at the University of Manchester.

religious and cultural context in which this work could be composed.<sup>2</sup> This was the question at the origin of numerous collections of parallels from Hugo Grotius's *Annotationes*<sup>3</sup> and John Lightfoot's *Horae Hebraicae et Talmudicae*<sup>4</sup> down to the great collections of the 20th century, from Billerbeck to the "New Wettstein,"<sup>5</sup> and the important commentaries and investigations of Rudolf Bultmann, C. H. Dodd, François-Marie Braun and Raymond E. Brown, to mention only the most important ones.<sup>6</sup> The search was initially stimulated by the remarkable use of the term *logos* in the Johannine prologue (and in the opening of First John). This search was enhanced by the notice of the remarkable differences between John and the Synoptics, and it was repeatedly inspired by the discovery and scholarly application of new texts, such as the Avesta, the Manichaean and Mandaean sources, the Qumran discoveries, and the Nag Hammadi Codices. The utilization of these corpora regularly produced waves of enthusiasm, shared by at least some scholars, but followed, then, by a tendency toward more balanced views and sober evaluations.

In the *history of modern scholarship*, we can, thus, identify a sequence of suggested contexts: Only four years after the text of the Zend-Avesta had been translated into French in 1771<sup>7</sup>, the German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder suggested a Persian background of the notion of light

<sup>2</sup> A more extensive account of scholarship in John's history-of-religions background appeared in Jörg Frey, "Auf der Suche nach dem Kontext des Johannesevangeliums. Eine forschungsgeschichtliche Einführung," in Jörg Frey and Udo Schnelle (eds., under collaboration of Juliane Schlegel), *Kontexte des Johannesevangeliums: Das vierte Evangelium in religions- und traditionsgeschichtlicher Perspektive* (WUNT, 175; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 3–45 (esp. 7–35).

<sup>3</sup> Hugo Grotius, *Annotationes in quattuor Evangelia et Acta Apostolorum* (Hvgonis Grotii Opera Omnia Theologica II,1; Amsterdam: Blaeu, 1679), 473–574.

<sup>4</sup> John Lightfoot, *Horae hebraicae et talmudicae impensae in Evangelium S. Johannis* (London: Roycott, 1671); ET: *Horae Hebraicae et Talmudicae* (4 vols.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1859).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, vol. 2: *Das Evangelium nach Markus, Lukas, Johannes und die Apostelgeschichte* (München: C. H. Beck, 1924); Udo Schnelle (ed., under collaboration of Michael Labahn and Manfred Lang), *Neuer Wettstein: Texte zum Neuen Testament aus Griechenland und Hellenismus*, vol. 1/2: *Texte zum Johannesevangelium* (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (21<sup>st</sup> edn; Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar 2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986); C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953); François-Marie Braun, *Jean le Théologien* (vol. 1–3,2; EBib, 52/1–3,2; Paris: Gabalda, 1959–1972); Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John* (2 vols., AB, 29/1–2; New York etc.: Doubleday, 1966–1970).

<sup>7</sup> Abraham Anquetil du Perron, *Zend-Avesta: Ouvrage de Zoroastre* (Paris: Tilliard, 1771).

and darkness, the dualistic worldview and other elements of the language of the Johannine writings (including Revelation),<sup>8</sup> which now appeared to be more “oriental” (“morgenländisch”) than classical Greek. Edward Evanson, the first scholar to clearly reject John’s apostolic “authenticity,” suggested that the author was a converted Platonist “whose doctrines are a heterogeneous compound of Paganism, Judaism and Christianity.”<sup>9</sup> Other authors pointed to Philo as source of John’s ideas, especially on the *logos*.<sup>10</sup> In Ferdinand Christian Baur’s Old Tübingen school, this issue was considered focusing on the relationship between John and Gnosticism. In Baur’s view, John’s Gospel was from the second half of the second century and already presupposed the reconciliation between Judaeo-Christianity and Paulinism, as well as the beginnings of Gnosticism and even of Montanism.<sup>11</sup> Among Baur’s students, John was generally considered as a (Christian) Gnostic work.<sup>12</sup> The Swiss philosopher Johannes Kreyenbühl even attributed John to the Gnostic teacher Menander.<sup>13</sup> By contrast, the mainstream of critical research at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as for example Heinrich Julius Holtzmann and Julius Grill, or in North America Ernest F. Scott, favoured a Hellenistic and particularly Philonic background.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Johann Gottfried Herder, “Erläuterungen zum Neuen Testament aus einer neueröffneten morgenländischen Quelle” (1775), in Bernhard Suphan (ed.), *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 7 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1884), 335–470; cf. Herder’s late work on John: “Von Gottes Sohn, der Welt Heiland. Nach Johannes Evangelium. Nebst einer Regel der Zusammenstimmung unserer Evangelien aus ihrer Entstehung und Ordnung” (1797), in Bernhard Suphan (ed.), *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 19 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1880), 253–424.

<sup>9</sup> Edward Evanson, *The Dissonance of the Four Generally Received Evangelists, and the Evidence of Their Respective Authority Examined* (Ipswich: George Jermy, 1792), 219–254, here 235, quoted according to Ulrich Busse, *Das Johannesevangelium: Bildlichkeit, Diskurs und Ritual* (BETL, 162; Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 32.

<sup>10</sup> Heinrich Christian Ballenstedt, *Philo und Johannes oder neuere philosophisch-kritische Untersuchung des Logos beim Johannes nach dem Philo nebst einer Erklärung und Übersetzung des 1. Briefes Johannes aus der geweihten Sprache der Hierophanten* (Braunschweig: Culemann, 1802); cf. idem, *Philo und Johannes, oder fortgesetzte Anwendung des Philo zur Interpretation der Johanneischen Schriften, mit besonderer Hinsicht auf die Frage: Ob Johannes der Verfasser der ihm zugeschriebenen Schriften sein könne* (Göttingen: Dieterich, 1812).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Kritische Untersuchungen über die kanonischen Evangelien* (Tübingen: Fues, 1847), 349ff.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. e.g. Adolf Hilgenfeld, *Das Evangelium und die Briefe Johannis nach ihrem Lehrbegriff dargestellt* (Halle: Schwetschke, 1849), 320, dating John between 130 and 140 CE.

<sup>13</sup> Johannes Kreyenbühl, *Das Evangelium der Wahrheit: Neue Lösung der johanneischen Frage* (2 vols.; Berlin: Schwetschke, 1900/1905).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Heinrich Julius Holtzmann, *Lehrbuch der neutestamentlichen Theologie* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn; 2 vols.; Tübingen: Mohr, 1911), 2: 409–421; Julius Grill, *Untersuchungen zur Entstehung*

The pendulum only swung back when the image of Hellenism was “orientalized” in the history-of-religions school: Now that scholars noticed the links between the Hellenistic idea of the *logos* and the idea of Hermes-Thot as revealer,<sup>15</sup> they included parallels from Hermetism and Mystery Religions, so that Julius Grill, in his second volume from 1923, explained John no more from a Philonic background but, rather, from the religious atmosphere of Oriental Mysteries.<sup>16</sup> Shortly thereafter, Rudolf Bultmann reconstructed the “plot” of the Gnostic Redeemer Myth from scattered elements of various texts, from Biblical Wisdom and Philo down to the late Manichaean and Mandaean writings.<sup>17</sup> As a result, not only the idea of the *logos* but the whole way of the redeemer and thus the overall shape of Johannine Christology could now be explained by a mythological pattern of supposedly pre-Christian origin, regardless of the fact that that pattern had only been synthesized from a wide range of different, and partly much later, sources.<sup>18</sup> Ultimately, Bultmann claimed that the Johannine language should be understood *as a whole* from the syncretistic milieu of Gnosticizing sects, in which the author of the Fourth Gospel had originally grown up.<sup>19</sup>

It was not only British scholarship that remained skeptical against the views of the history-of-religions school and Bultmann’s theory of a Gnostic background of the Evangelist.<sup>20</sup> There were also a number of “outsid-

*des vierten Evangeliums*, vol. 1 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1902), 106–139; and Ernest F. Scott, *The Fourth Gospel: Its Purpose and Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1906).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Wilhelm Heitmüller, “Das Johannes-Evangelium,” in *Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments neu übersetzt und für die Gegenwart erklärt*, vol. 4: *Das Johannes-Evangelium, die Johannes-Briefe und die Offenbarung des Johannes. Sachregister zum ganzen Werke* (3<sup>rd</sup> edn; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1918), 9–184, here 39.

<sup>16</sup> Julius Grill, *Untersuchungen über die Entstehung des vierten Evangeliums*, vol. 2 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1923).

<sup>17</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, “Die Bedeutung der neuerschlossenen mandäischen und manichäischen Quellen für das Verständnis des Johannesevangeliums,” in *Exegetica: Aufsätze zur Erforschung des Neuen Testaments* (ed. Erich Dinkler; Tübingen: Mohr, 1967), 55–104.

<sup>18</sup> For a critical evaluation of Bultmann’s views, see J. Frey, *Die johanneische Eschatologie*. Vol. 1: *Ihre Probleme im Spiegel der Forschung seit Reimarus* (WUNT, 96; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 119–150 (esp. 133–141).

<sup>19</sup> Thus in his devastating review of Ernst Percy, *Untersuchungen über den Ursprung der johanneischen Theologie* (Lund: Gleerup, 1939): Rudolf Bultmann, “Johanneische Schriften und Gnosis,” in *Exegetica*, 230–254, here 233.

<sup>20</sup> This is visible in the works of C. H. Dodd, *Interpretation*; E. C. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel* (ed. F. N. Davey; 2<sup>nd</sup> edn; London: Faber & Faber, 1947); and C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John* (London: SPCK, 1955; 2<sup>nd</sup> revised edn, 1978), but see also T. W. Manson, “The Fourth Gospel,” *BJRL* 30 (1946/47): 312–329; reprinted in *Studies in the Gospels and Epistles* (ed. Matthew Black; Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1962), 105–122.

ers” who had looked more closely in a direction that had almost been forgotten in the works mentioned: the Jewish traditions.

We can try to explain why scholars had interpreted especially the Fourth Gospel in a strong disregard of contemporary Judaism: To F. C. Baur, Johannine thought so strongly appeared to be the highest expression of the idea of the true universal Christian religion that it could hardly be connected with the image those scholars had of classical Judaism. As the last and latest of the Gospels, John was thought to be the writing that had most clearly abandoned the former Jewish eggshells of earlier Christianity, not only the relevance of the law and other Judaeo-Christian elements, but also the expectation of the parousia and apocalyptic imagery. So, John was viewed to be late, standing on the shoulders of Paul,<sup>21</sup> with a very developed theology, either already Gnostic or anti-Gnostic, influenced by Mysticism or Oriental Mysteries, but in any case far away from the supposedly “normative” Judaism of the Rabbis, as well as from the apocalyptic speculations of the *Book of Enoch*, *4 Ezra* or *2 Baruch*.

A closer link with Judaism could only be maintained by conservatives who still advocated the apostolic authenticity of John and therefore also a Palestinian background of the Evangelist. For example, the learned conservative scholar Adolf Schlatter in Tübingen examined John’s language and concluded from language parallels with Josephus and with early Palestinian-Jewish midrashim that John the Evangelist had a Palestinian-Jewish “thought pattern.”<sup>22</sup> At the same time, C. F. Burney in Oxford tried to prove that John was originally written in Aramaic, but this all too bold proposal did not find much support and was, among other such proposals, also cautiously rejected by his Manchester colleague T. W. Manson.<sup>23</sup> Another exegetical outsider was the Swedish scholar Hugo Odeberg who utilized not only rabbinic traditions but also the mysticism of the Hekhalot

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<sup>21</sup> Thus Adolf Jülicher, “Die Religion Jesu und die Anfänge des Christentums bis zum Nicaenum,” in Julius Wellhausen et al. (eds.), *Geschichte der christlichen Religion. Mit einer Einleitung: Die israelitisch-jüdische Religion* (Die Kultur der Gegenwart I, IV/1; 2<sup>nd</sup> edn; Berlin and Leipzig: Teubner, 1909), 42–131, here 96.

<sup>22</sup> Adolf Schlatter, *Die Sprache und Heimat des vierten Evangelisten* (BFCT, 6,4; Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1902); idem, *Der Evangelist Johannes: Wie er spricht, denkt und glaubt* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1930).

<sup>23</sup> In his interest to examine how far John could also contain material for reconstructing the teaching of Jesus, T. W. Manson reckoned with a Palestinian author or tradition-bearer who had taught for some time in Syria. The Gospel was then edited in Ephesus; cf. Manson, “The Fourth Gospel,” in *Studies*, 120–121.



literature (3 *Enoch*), in which he saw links to the Mandaeen texts Bultmann had adduced in his interpretation of John.<sup>24</sup>

The aforementioned scholars, though a minority at their time, prepared the way for a new tendency in scholarship, a tendency that began after World War II with the discovery of the Qumran texts. As soon as the texts from Cave I had been made public, a number of scholars uttered the conviction that these texts, with their distinctive dualism as represented in the War Rule 1QM and in the Treatise on the Two Spirits (1QS 3:13–4:26), formed the background of Johannine language and thought, rather than the Gnostic dualism suggested as background by Bultmann and his followers. In face of the influence of Bultmann's views, conservative Johannine scholars welcomed the Qumran texts as providing an alternative explanation and grounds for rejecting Bultmann's explanation of John's language and thought from the background of Gnostic dualism and the Gnostic redeemer myth.<sup>25</sup> Already in 1950, the German orientalist Karl Georg Kuhn suggested that the new Jewish texts, notably representing a "non-orthodox" (in Kuhn's terms, even a "Gnostic") type of Judaism, give access to the "mother soil" of the Johannine language.<sup>26</sup> While Kuhn did not draw any historical implications from this proposition, other scholars were less cautious suggesting that the Evangelist himself was a former member of the Essene sect, that he had read the sectarian documents,<sup>27</sup> or that he had memorized the Essene teaching.<sup>28</sup> Some reputable scholars even went so far as to propose that the Scrolls confirm that John contained "authentic historical material" from "an Aramaic or Hebrew milieu"<sup>29</sup> or even "the memories of the Apostle John."<sup>30</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Hugo Odeberg, *The Fourth Gospel Interpreted in Its Relation to Contemporaneous Religious Currents in Palestine and the Hellenistic-Oriental World*, part I: *The Discourses of John 1, 19 – 12* (Uppsala and Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1929).

<sup>25</sup> On the history of research see Jörg Frey, "Qumran Research and Biblical Scholarship in Germany," in Devorah Dimant (ed.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls in Scholarly Perspective: A History of Research* (STDJ, 99; Leiden etc.: Brill, 2012), 529–564.

<sup>26</sup> Karl Georg Kuhn, "Die in Palästina gefundenen hebräischen Texte und das Neue Testament," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 47 (1950): 192–211, here 210; idem, "Die Sekten-schrift und die iranische Religion," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 49 (1952): 296–316.

<sup>27</sup> John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 205.

<sup>28</sup> James H. Charlesworth, "The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Gospel according to John," in R. Alan Culpepper and C. Clifton Black (eds.), *Exploring the Gospel of John* (FS D. Moody Smith; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 65–97, here 88.

<sup>29</sup> Frank Moore Cross, *The Ancient Library of Qumran and Modern Biblical Studies* (London: Duckworth, 1958), 161–162: "John preserves authentic historical material which first took form in an Aramaic or Hebrew milieu where Essene currents still ran strong."

<sup>30</sup> Cf. William F. Albright, "Recent Discoveries in Palestine and the Gospel of St. John," in: William D. Davies (ed.), *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology*

Generally, we can see that the Qumran discoveries provoked an important shift in Johannine scholarship in terms of a reconsideration of the links with Jewish tradition, or even of a Jewish background and setting of the Fourth Gospel or its community. It is, however, no coincidence that the breakthrough of these views was stimulated by the discovery of texts that were thought to represent a *non-orthodox* type of Judaism, the “sect” of the Essenes. And we are reminded of earlier scholarship, from the age of the enlightenment down to the great French scholar Ernest Renan, that viewed the Essenes—of course, merely on the basis of the accounts of Pliny, Philo and Josephus—as a type of Judaism which was more open to Egyptian wisdom, or Greek mysteries, Pythagorean thought or Zoroastrian philosophy, thus representing a more liberal, universalist attitude than the Rabbinis. Thus, Essenism had always been linked more easily with Jesus and his followers than the supposedly “normative” or orthodox rabbinic tradition.

Be that as it may, the development since the Qumran discoveries, and also after the decline of the so-called “Qumran fever” of the 1950s and 1960s, had a long-term effect on Johannine scholarship, so that the Jewish background or at least the Jewish elements of the Fourth Gospel are now considered much more broadly and thoroughly. Interestingly, however, already C. H. Dodd, in his 1934 lecture, uttered the conviction that John could “intelligently be read by a person with no previous instruction in Christianity... But it could hardly be so read without some knowledge of Judaism.”<sup>31</sup> It is disputable whether the first part of Dodd’s statement is true.<sup>32</sup> But Dodd was certainly right in the second part of the phrase. And whereas Dodd himself focused his later research more on the study of Hellenism and the parallels in the Hermetic Corpus, the scholarship of the last fifty years has confirmed his early view: Without any knowledge of Jewish traditions, Jewish customs, Jewish expectations, and the Jewish Scriptures, it would be very hard to understand the Fourth Gospel.

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(FS C. H. Dodd; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 153–171, here 170–171: “That the needs of the early Church influenced the selection of items for inclusion in the Gospel we may readily admit, but there is no reason to suppose that the needs of that Church were responsible for any inventions or innovations of theological significance ... we may rest assured that it [sc. the Gospel of John] contains the memories of the Apostle John.”

<sup>31</sup> Dodd, “Background,” 334.

<sup>32</sup> Dodd also was quite clear about the fact that “the common Christianity of the first century does lie behind this Gospel” (Dodd, “Background,” 332), although his point, then, was that the evangelist “has behind him the established beliefs of common Christianity, and writes in part for those who shared them with him,” but “addresses also another class of readers—religiously-minded people as yet outside Christianity...” (333).

## 2. The Jewish background of John and the question of which type of Judaism

In the Fourth Gospel, the Jewish background is obvious from the very beginning. This is important not only for the historical question of the origin of its author<sup>33</sup> and of some of his traditions, but—even more importantly—for the question what can be presupposed for the readers the author had in mind,<sup>34</sup> and thus for the context in which the gospel was composed and edited.

“In the beginning” (John 1:1), Johannine readers are expected to notice the allusion to the beginning of the Greek Bible (Gen 1:1 LXX) and the creation story; they are also supposed to know about Moses as the mediator of the Law (John 1:17),<sup>35</sup> and the enigmatic phrase that the Logos “tabernacled (ἐσκήνωσεν) among us” (John 1:14) is only conceivable on the background of the Old Testament tradition of God indwelling in the holy tent and its eschatological and sapiential continuations in Zechariah, *Jubilees*, *Ben Sira*, and other texts.<sup>36</sup> Although especially the term λόγος has a very broad range of usage in Greek philosophy and philosophical religion, the Johannine prologue as a whole is consistently shaped from the background of the Jewish Scriptures, especially the traditions on the creation, the revelation on Mount Sinai, and the Wisdom tradition as presented in Sirach 24 and elsewhere.<sup>37</sup>

One might infer that the Johannine prologue could be taken from a separate source, but a strongly Jewish background is also obvious in the Johannine narrative, from its very beginning. From the first chapter on, the evangelist introduces a number of Semitic names and terms, some of

<sup>33</sup> See also the argument in Martin Hengel, *The Johannine Question* (London: SCM Press, 1989), 109–135, where he asks for language, origin and cultural milieu of the author.

<sup>34</sup> The quest for the intended readers is based on an investigation of the narrative devices and the implied reader in R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 211–228.

<sup>35</sup> This is more than a common ancient knowledge that Moses was a lawgiver. It also presupposes that the antithesis between the law and “grace and truth,” or between Moses and Christ was relevant for the readers.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Zech 2:14; *Jub.* 1:17; *11QTemp* 39:7–8; for the sapiential type Sir 24:8, 11.

<sup>37</sup> See comprehensively Craig A. Evans, *Word and Glory: On the Exegetical and Theological Background of John’s Prologue* (JSNT Sup, 89; Sheffield: Academic Press, 1993); on the wisdom tradition, see particularly Hartmut Gese, “Der Johannesprolog,” in idem, *Zur biblischen Theologie: Alttestamentliche Vorträge* (BEvT, 78; München: Kaiser 1977), 152–201, and also Martin Hengel, “The Prologue of the Gospel of John as the Gateway to Christological Truth,” in Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser (eds.), *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2008), 265–294.

which are translated into Greek or explained.<sup>38</sup> He explains aspects of the Judaeian topography<sup>39</sup> and also of Jewish customs<sup>40</sup> for those of his readers who needed such explanation. But he also introduces many important facts without any comment.<sup>41</sup> Thus, in the beginning of the narrative, in the scene of inquiry of the Baptizer in John 1:19–24, the author mentions priests, Levites and Pharisees, the figures of the Messiah, Elijah, and “the prophet,” Isaiah and his prophecy—and all these elements are left unexplained. The Johannine readers may know about those figures from the community tradition or from earlier Gospels, but the beginning of John’s narrative would remain very difficult for non-Jews without any knowledge of the Scriptures and of the lines of Jewish eschatological expectation. Especially the mention of the three figures of eschatological expectation, the Messiah, Elijah, and “the prophet”, draw on current Jewish “messianic” discourses, representing three of the most common possibilities to categorize an expected eschatological figure.<sup>42</sup>

Johannine readers are supposed to have a considerable knowledge of the Scriptures, even of minor biblical episodes, when, for example, the uplifting of the serpent in the desert (Num 21:4–9) is just briefly mentioned but utilized for a major typological comparison to visualize the “exaltation of the Son of Man” (John 3:14). Johannine readers should know not only Jacob and Joseph but also details about the piece of land Jacob had bought (Gen 33:18–19) and had given to his son (Gen 48:22; Isa 24:32). Additionally, they are supposed not only to remember the Manna episode (Exod 16) and the temple vision of Isaiah (Isa 6) but also to follow the author’s exegetical argument, related to those passages. The Scriptures, normally used in their Greek version, are cited or alluded to in

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<sup>38</sup> Thus, e.g., “rabbi” in John 1:38; “Messiah” in John 1:41; “Kephas” in John 1:42; the allegorical interpretation of Shiloah in John 9:7; “rabbouni” in John 20:16.

<sup>39</sup> Thus, e.g., Bethesda in John 5:2, Gabbatha in John 19:13; Golgatha in John 19:17—the two latter names also with a Hebrew translation of the Greek name.

<sup>40</sup> Thus, e.g., John 4:9 on the relationship between Judaeans or Jews and Samaritans.

<sup>41</sup> This is explained by Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 1: 171: “Granted, the author provides some explanatory asides that provide minimal information for new Gentile converts; but a long-term Jewish audience would understand more, and those who remembered Jerusalem before 70, whether from frequent pilgrimages from Galilee or rarer ones from Asia, would comprehend the details of the Gospel most fluently.”

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Richard Bauckham, “Messianism According to the Gospel of John,” in John Lierman (ed.), *Challenging Perspectives on the Gospel of John* (WUNT, 2: 219; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 34–68.

a manner that requires more than a superficial acquaintance. Sometimes the author also adopts post-biblical Jewish traditions of interpretation: not only the tradition about Abraham's laughter of unbelief (Gen 17:1; 18:12–15) but also its early Jewish reinterpretation as a sign of joy.<sup>43</sup> He not only mentions the serpent in the wilderness, but interprets it as a sign of salvation, as does also Wis 16:5–6.<sup>44</sup> Thus, the evangelist himself is a player in the concert of Jewish Scriptural interpretation, and it is hardly surprising that his interpretations become most daring when the Scriptural argument is used to prove the legacy of Jesus' Christological dignity, as, most prominently, in the exegesis of Psalm 82 in John 10:34–35; the utilization of the rules for the Passover lamb in John 19:36; or the connection of Isaiah's vision of God's "glory" (Isa 6:1 LXX) with the prophecy of the "glorification" and "exaltation" of his servant (Isa 52:13, LXX)—all based on the Septuagint.<sup>45</sup>

In addition to the Scriptures, the evangelist mentions a large number of Jewish festivals and rites which are occasionally mentioned from a certain distance (as in John 2:6 on the "purification" of the Jews) and are explained to the reader (as the note on the relationship between Jews and Samaritans in John 4:9). But more often an understanding of these festivals is simply presupposed without further explanation, as, for example, the mention of the *ἐγκαινία*, the Chanukka in the winter in John 10:22, where the connection with the surrounding text is rather enigmatic. John's readers are at least supposed to know the meaning of Passover and the tradition of the festival journey to Jerusalem, and the author even plays with some elements of the festival liturgy, especially of the festival of tents in John 7–8. Readers should also know some basics of Sabbath laws to understand the problem in John 5 or to understand the issue of circumcision on the Sabbath (John 7:22–23); they are also expected to be informed about the dispute between Jews and Samaritans about the chosen place of veneration (John 4:20), about the reason why the Jewish leaders do not enter Pilate's house to avoid impurity (John 18:28), about the need to have two witnesses to get a valid judgment (John 8:13–18) and about

<sup>43</sup> Cf. *Jub.* 15:17; 16:19; *Targum Onqelos* Gen 17:17; Philo, *De mutatione nominum* 154.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Jörg Frey, "'Wie Mose die Schlange in der Wüste erhöht hat...': Zur frühjüdischen Deutung der 'ehernen Schlange' und ihrer christologischen Rezeption in Johannes 3,14f.," in Martin Hengel and Hermut Löhr (eds.), *Schriftauslegung im antiken Judentum und im Urchristentum* (WUNT, 73; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994), 153–205, here 196–197.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Jörg Frey, "... dass sie meine Herrlichkeit schauen (Joh. 17.24)": Zu Sinn und Funktion der johanneischen Rede von der *δόξα* Jesu," *New Testament Studies* 54 (2008): 375–397.

the popular idea of the prophetic gift of the high priest during the time of his office (John 11:51). All these ideas could in some way be mediated by a tradition in the community of Jesus-followers. But they are nonetheless Jewish, insofar they originate in Jewish texts and traditions and are related to issues of daily Jewish life in the time of Jesus and—at least partly—also in the time of the community. They demonstrate not only the knowledge of the evangelist, who seems to be better informed than the other evangelists about some elements of the geography of Judaea; they also show that the intended readers' horizon is shaped by Scripture, Scriptural interpretation, and a number of Jewish debates which were of minor relevance for Gentile Christians and totally incomprehensible for non-Jews possessing no knowledge of Jewish traditions and life.

Most importantly, even Johannine Christology is strongly determined by elements of the Scriptural and Jewish tradition, and Jesus' authority is consequently demonstrated in adoption of, in comparison, or even contrast with those elements: He is presented in relation with God's creative word (John 1:1, 14), with the Torah as light (John 8:12), with the temple as the place of God's presence (John 2:21). He is put in a certain contrast with Moses as the legislator (John 1:17), he is greater in comparison with Jacob "our father" (John 4:12), and he existed before Abraham came into being (John 8:58). Moses wrote about him (John 5:46), Isaiah saw his glory (John 12:41), and Abraham saw his day (John 8:56). Jesus' soteriological function is clarified by use of very different elements of Jewish tradition: He is the true Passover lamb (John 1:29, 36; 19:36), the holy place where God's house is (John 1:51; cf. Gen 28:19), he is exalted as a "sign of salvation" in correspondence with the serpent in the wilderness (John 3:14; cf. Num 21:4–9), he is identified with the true bread from heaven, in contrast or even fulfillment of the biblical manna tradition (John 6:33, 35), he is called the true source of living water (John 4:10, 14; 7:37–38), in allusion to the Biblical motif of the temple rivers. And, as a climax, his self-presentation in the *ἐγώ εἶμι*-sayings adopts the self presentation of the God of Israel at the burning bush (Exod 3:14, LXX), as well as in Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah. Moreover, the scenes where Jesus utters *ἐγώ εἶμι* demonstrate the authority that seems to be in these words: The disciples on the sea are comforted and loose their fear (John 6:20), and the Roman soldiers sent to arrest Jesus shrink back and prostrate toward the ground (John 18:6). Also, the metaphors used in connection with Jesus' *ἐγώ εἶμι*—though openly accessible and widespread in the Greco-Roman

world—are all prefigured in a Biblical context and get their particular profile on that background: The Bread of Life (John 6:35, 48) in contrast with the Manna, the Light of the World (John 8:12; cf. 9:4) in relation with the Tora, the Good Shepherd (John 10:11, 14) in contrast to the shepherds of Israel (Ezek 34), the true way (John 14:6) in adoption of the language of the Psalms, and the true vineyard in connection with the idea of Israel as God’s vineyard (Psalm 80).<sup>46</sup> Finally, the title of the “King of Israel” (John 1:49) and also the title on the cross, the “King of the Jews” (John 19:19–22), clearly connect Jesus with the Israelite-Jewish Messianic tradition which is, then, widened to a universal horizon as expressed in the proclamation of the kingship of the crucified one in Hebrew, Greek and Latin (John 19:20).

Given this vast number of parallels in Scriptural and Early Jewish traditions illustrating the religious knowledge of the Johannine author and, at least partly, of his intended readers, there is the question whether we can further specify this “Jewishness” by pointing to any particular Jewish tradition as the more precise background of the Fourth Gospel. Is the Johannine Jewish background simply Scriptural, or is it also Philonic, Qumranic or rabbinic? Is it Palestinian or, rather, diaspora-oriented?

As sketched above, scholarly discussion of those options has always been dependent on the “state of the arts” in Jewish studies. Compared with the time of Billerbeck, Schlatter and Odeberg, scholars have become much more cautious about using rabbinic materials to explain circumstances or ideas of the first century, due to the fact that the date of these traditions is often hard to ascertain, and that only a small part of them may predate the year 70 CE.<sup>47</sup> And one of the most important impacts of the Qumran discoveries is that they have given access to the *plurality* of Second Temple Judaism and the *variety* of traditions and interpretations, even within Jewish Palestine. A similar plurality can also be assumed for the Jewish diaspora which is described by contemporary scholars not only from the extensive writings of Philo and Josephus but also from inscriptions and other sources, which allow for more regional and local specifi-

<sup>46</sup> See Hartwig Thyen, “Ich-bin-Worte,” *Realenzyklopädie für Antike und Christentum*, 17 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1995), 147–213.

<sup>47</sup> On the use of rabbinic material in Johannine studies, cf. John Christopher Thomas, “The Fourth Gospel and Rabbinic Judaism,” *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 82 (1991): 159–182; cf. recently Gudrun Holtz, “Rabbinische Literatur und Neues Testament: Alte Schwierigkeiten und neue Möglichkeiten,” *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 100 (2009): 173–198.

cation.<sup>48</sup> There is a remarkable difference between the religious situation in Jewish Palestine and the diaspora but also within the wide diaspora between Syria, Alexandria, Asia Minor, and Rome. The pride and social status of Jewish communities in their respective environments had an important effect on the life and thought of the various young and developing groups of Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus.

In view of these developments in scholarship, it appears much more difficult today to specify the Jewish background of the Fourth Gospel within one or another tradition. Earlier history-of-religions work, often done in a rather unbalanced parallelomania, simply led to the result that there are important parallels in Philo and other Hellenistic Jewish authors but also in rabbinic texts and later Jewish mysticism. A vast number of parallels has also been collected from Qumran, notably not only from the “sectarian” documents but also (and sometimes even more significantly) from the documents which we have to label as “non-sectarian,” that is, which were probably not composed by the “Qumran community” or the “Essenes” but come from various traditions of Palestinian Judaism in the three centuries BCE.

Therefore, the attempts to determine the background of the Fourth Evangelist (or even some of his readers) within Qumran sectarian thought<sup>49</sup> (or among former Essenes who had become Jesus-followers)

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<sup>48</sup> On the Jewish diaspora, see Emil Schürer, Geza Vermes and Fergus Millar, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, vol. 3,1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 1–176; John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE – 117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996); on Asia Minor, see Paul Trebilco, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor* (SNTSMS, 69; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); on the inscriptions, see Walter Ameling (ed.), *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis*, vol. 2: *Kleinasien* (TSAJ, 99; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004).

<sup>49</sup> See James H. Charlesworth, “A Critical Comparison of the Dualism in 1QS 3:13–4:26 and the ‘Dualism’ Contained in the Gospel of John,” *New Testament Studies* 15 (1968/69): 389–418; reprinted in James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *John and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 76–101; idem, “Dead Sea Scrolls”; idem, “The Priority of John? Reflections on the Essenes and the First Edition of John,” in Peter L. Hofrichter (ed.), *Für und Wider die Priorität des Johannesevangeliums* (Theologische Texte und Studien, 9; Hildesheim: Olms, 2002), 73–114. According to Charlesworth, the Evangelist is an Essene who has memorized the Essene texts so that they strongly shaped his language; cf. similarly Ashton, *Understanding*, 205. According to earlier views, the Gospel provides a Christology for Essenes (so Kurt Schubert, *Die Gemeinde vom Toten Meer: Ihre Entstehung und ihre Lehrer* [München: Reinhardt, 1958], 131), or the Epistle of John addresses Essenes (so Marie-Émile Boismard, “The First Epistle of John and the Writings of Qumran,” in Charlesworth [ed.], *John and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 156–166, here 165–166).



have been unconvincing.<sup>50</sup> Of course, there are impressive parallels, especially the dualistic language of light and darkness, and some parallels appear in the well-known “Treatise on the Two Spirits” in the Community Rule (1QS 3:13–4:26).<sup>51</sup> But in recent scholarship, this passage is no longer considered the “fundamental ideology” or even the “catechism” of the Essene sect but, rather, a very particular, probably even pre-sectarian teaching which cannot serve as a proof of literary links between the Qumran community and the Fourth Evangelist. Moreover, most of the verbal parallels between the Treatise and John are also attested in other Jewish sources—in the Septuagint, in the Targums, in other intertestamental texts, and also in non-sectarian texts from the Qumran library. Thus even the element regarded to be most characteristic, the community’s self-designation “sons of light,” which is unparalleled in the Hebrew Bible but frequent in Qumran texts,<sup>52</sup> already occurs in non-sectarian or “pre-sectarian” texts such as the *Vision of Amram*<sup>53</sup>; thus we have to conclude that the term did not originate within the Qumran community but rather in a priestly precursor group, and was transmitted and adopted not only in the Qumran “sectarian” tradition but also independently of the Qumran group. As a consequence, the single occurrence of “sons of light” in John 12:36 is not a proof of a Qumranic influence on John. This is even more true in view of the earlier usage of the term in early Christian texts, in Paul (1 Thess 5:5) and the Synoptic tradition (Luke 16:8).<sup>54</sup> If we further consider the remarkable differences between the (different) types of dualism attested in Qumran<sup>55</sup> and the Johannine use of the light / darkness terminology, we should rather conclude that John adopted elements of a more

<sup>50</sup> See critically Jörg Frey, “Recent Perspectives on Johannine Dualism and Its Background,” in Ruth Clements and Daniel R. Schwartz (eds.), *Text, Thought, and Practice in Qumran and Early Christianity* (STDJ, 84; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 127–157; more extensively idem, “Licht aus den Höhlen? Der johanneische ‘Dualismus’ und das Schrifttum von Qumran,” in Frey and Schnelle (eds.), *Kontexte*, 117–203.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. the account in Charlesworth, “Critical Comparison.” See also Adriana Destro and Mauro Pesce, “The Gospel of John and the Community Rule of Qumran: A Comparison of Systems,” in Alan J. Avery-Peck, Jacob Neusner and Bruce D. Chilton (eds.), *The Judaism of Qumran: A Systemic Reading of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (SJLA, 5,2; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 201–229.

<sup>52</sup> 1QS 1:9; 2:16; 3:13, 24, 25; 1QM 1:1, 3, 9, 11, 13 etc.

<sup>53</sup> 4Q548 1–2 ii 10–11, 15–16. Cf. “sons of truth” and “sons of lie” in 4Q548 1–2 ii 8–9.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. also the form τέχνα φωτός in Eph 5:8; see also *1 Enoch* 108:11.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Jörg Frey, “Different Patterns of Dualism in the Qumran Library,” in Moshe J. Bernstein, Florentino García Martínez and John Kampen (eds.), *Legal Texts and Legal Issues: Proceedings of the Second Meeting of the International Organization of Qumran Studies, Cambridge 1995* (FS Joseph M. Baumgarten; STDJ, 25, Leiden etc.: Brill, 1997), 275–336.

common religious language to design his Gospel in a particularly metaphoric manner. Scholars have, therefore, pointed to different sources that could have inspired John's use of the light / darkness terminology: especially the use of "light" within Jewish interpretations of the creation account, the idea of the Torah as "light," or the Messianic exegesis of some passages from Isaiah.<sup>56</sup> Another particularly interesting background is the conversion language in diaspora Judaism and earliest Christianity, in which light and darkness are repeatedly used as metaphors. In Acts 26:18, the conversion of the Gentiles from the power of Satan to the true God appears as an opening of the eyes, as the transfer "from the darkness to the light." The imagery is also used in early Jewish texts, in the context of repentance,<sup>57</sup> most strikingly in Joseph's prayer for Aseneth (*Jos. Asen.* 8:9–10), where God is called the one "who gave life to all things and called them from the darkness to the light, and from the error to the truth, and from the death to the life."<sup>58</sup> Here, the three antithetical word pairs that are most important for the "dualistic" language of John occur together within a diaspora-Jewish context of conversion language.<sup>59</sup> In the same prayer, we can also find the phrases "bread of life" (*Jos. Asen.* 8:5, 9; cf. 19:5) and "eternal life" (*Jos. Asen.* 8:9).<sup>60</sup> These observations may help to

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Richard Bauckham, "The Qumran Community and the Gospel of John," in Lawrence H. Schiffman, Emanuel Tov and James C. VanderKam (eds.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Fifty Years After their Discovery. Proceedings of the Jerusalem Congress, July 20–25, 1997* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2000), 105–115, here 113; idem "Qumran and the Fourth Gospel: Is there a Connection?" in Stanley E. Porter and Craig A. Evans (eds.), *The Scrolls and the Scriptures: Qumran Fifty Years After* (JSPSup, 26 / Roehampton Institute London Papers 3; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 267–279, here 277; David E. Aune, "Dualism in the Fourth Gospel and the Dead Sea Scrolls: A Reassessment of the Problem," in idem, Torrey Selan and J. H. Ulrichsen (eds.), *Neotestamentica et Philonica* (FS Peder Borgen; NovTSup, 106; Leiden etc.: Brill, 2003), 281–303. See also Frey, "Recent Perspectives."

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Bar 4:2 (towards the light); *T. Gad* 5:7 ("repentance ... puts darkness to light"); *T. Jos* 19:3 (the sheep are led "out of darkness into light"); *T. Benj* 5:3 (the light / darkness metaphor is used in connection with doing good works). A paraenetic adoption of the metaphor can be studied in *T. Levi* 19:1, where we can also find a clear cosmic dualism (God vs. Beliar).

<sup>58</sup> Quotation *apud* Bauckham, "Qumran Community," 112; idem, "Qumran and the Fourth Gospel," 276. Bauckham mentions some more texts: *4 Ezra* 6:40; Ps.-Philo, *L.A.B* 28:8–9; 60:2; 4Q392 i 4–7; *2 Enoch* 24:4j; 25; Aristobulos, in Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 13.12.9–11; Philo, *Opif.* 29–35, and *Gen. Rab.* 3:8.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. *Jos. Asen.* 15:12, where Aseneth is rescued "from the darkness."

<sup>60</sup> Whereas "eternal life" is frequent in early Jewish and early Christian texts (since the earliest occurrence in Dan 12:2), the expression "bread of life" has no further parallels in biblical and early Jewish tradition.

explain how the light / darkness metaphor could have been adopted in the Johannine school: Without disregarding the influence of Scriptural passages pertaining to creation, the law or messianic hope, the Johannine language of light and darkness, truth and error, life and death points back not to the the Qumran sectarian “ideology” but, rather, to the conversion language developed within diaspora Judaism which was also adopted by early Christian authors and influenced—directly or indirectly—the theological language of the Johannine community.

Thus I would like to suggest that the utmost we can do to specify the type of Judaism adopted in John is to take into consideration the diaspora context in which the Gospel was composed. In this context, we have to consider the textual hints to the “parting of the ways” between the (local) synagogue and (parts of) the Johannine group and the critical distance from the synagogue that seems to be characteristic for the community situation at the time the Fourth Gospel was composed.

### 3. The “Parting of the Ways” and the mixed character of the Johannine communities

In spite of its strong Jewish influence, the Gospel of John shows a deep ambiguity in its references to Jews and Judaism. On the one side, Jesus is explicitly characterized as a Ἰουδαῖος (John 4:9), and his answer to the Samaritan woman quite clearly takes the Judaeen—or Jewish—position: Salvation is ἐκ τῶν Ἰουδαίων (John 4:22), which must be translated here with a clear religious notion: “Salvation is from the *Jews*.”<sup>61</sup> This remarkable phrase which many scholars could not accept as a part of the original gospel, points to the fact that “the saviour of the world” (John 4:42), Jesus, is a Jew, and that his claims are all phrased in terms of the Israelite-Jewish tradition. But in the phrase σωτήρ τοῦ κόσμου, climactically at the end of the Samaritan episode, it is also indicated that the “salvation” (σωτηρία) does not remain exclusively with the “Jews” but is universal

<sup>61</sup> There is still considerable debate on the translation of the term Ἰουδαῖος in John as well as, especially, in Josephus. But whereas the term here, in face of the Samaritans, might also be understood in regional terms as “Judaeans,” it denotes, in the entirety of the Gospel, not only a regional or ethnic orientation, but a strong and self-confident religious tradition and identity, so that we should translate it as usual by “Jews.” On the problem, see Daniel R. Schwartz, “‘Judaeen’ or ‘Jew’? How should we translate *ioudaios* in Josephus?” in Jörg Frey, Daniel R. Schwartz and Stephanie Gripentrog (eds.), *Jewish Identity in the Greco-Roman World* (Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity, 71; Leiden etc.: Brill, 2007), 3–28.

and finally oriented towards the world. Jesus, as his contemporaries assume, will “go to the diaspora of the Greeks” (John 7:35), and “all” shall be drawn to him once he is exalted from the earth (John 12:32).<sup>62</sup> This “movement” from the Jews towards the world is mirrored in a number of passages where not only the Johannine readers but even Jesus himself are distanced from “the Jews” and their institutions. It is not only the narrator who mentions “the purification of the Jews” (John 2:6) or a “feast of the Jews” (John 5:1) but also Jesus himself who, in face of his Jewish contemporaries, uses the term “your law” (John 8:17; 10:34; cf. 7:19; 15:25) as if he were untouched by that law, like the Roman Pontius Pilate who uses the same term (John 18:31).

The remarkable distance from “the Jews” suggests that the circle in which the Gospel originates has reached some distance from Judaism or, more precisely, from the local synagogue. This is confirmed not only by the strong anti-Jewish polemics but also—even more explicitly—by the three passages pointing to a separation or even expulsion from “the synagogue,” by use of a new term, the word ἀποσυναγωγή (John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2). This term does not occur in the Greek language prior to the Gospel of John. It might be shaped by the evangelist or within the Johannine community and could thus reflect separation processes related to the community.

There has been considerable debate among scholars about how these passages can help to describe the relationship of the Johannine author and his community with the contemporary synagogue or to determine the position of the Fourth Gospel within the process of the so-called “Parting of the Ways”<sup>63</sup> between the synagogue and the communities following Jesus. Scholars such as J. Louis Martyn and Raymond E. Brown have even tried

<sup>62</sup> On John’s universalism, see Enno Edzard Popkes, *Die Theologie der Liebe Gottes in den johanneischen Schriften: Zur Semantik der Liebe und zum Motivkreis des Dualismus* (WUNT, 2: 197; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).

<sup>63</sup> On this process, cf. also my more extensive discussion in Jörg Frey, “Temple and Identity in Early Christianity and in the Johannine Community: Reflections on the ‘Parting of the Ways,’” in Daniel R. Schwartz and Zeev Weiss (eds.), *Was 70 CE a Watershed in Jewish History? On Jews and Judaism Before and After the Destruction of the Second Temple* (Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity, 78; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 447–507, here 488–502, and idem, “Von Paulus zu Johannes: Die Diversität ‘christlicher’ Gemeindegemeinschaften und die ‘Trennungsprozesse’ zwischen der Synagoge und den Gemeinden der Jesusnachfolger in Ephesus im ersten Jahrhundert,” in Jens Schröter and Clare K. Rothschild (eds.), *The Rise and Expansion of Early Christianity* (WUNT; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012, forthcoming).

to find subsequent steps of such a separation process in different redactional layers of the Gospel and, eventually, in the Johannine Epistles,<sup>64</sup> but their stories of separation are too much based on redaction-critical hypotheses and presuppositions. Not only from a methodological point of view<sup>65</sup> but also historically, it is questionable to link the term ἀποσυνάγωγος with a particular act or central decision, such as the reformulation of the so called *birkat ha minim*, the “curse” on the heretics in the *Shmone Ezre*, which is attributed to the early rabbinic sages at Yavneh. Recent scholarship has pointed to the fact that these traditions are very complicated textually, and that it is far from certain that the liturgical changes inaugurated by the sages of Yavneh would have touched the Jewish Christians in a way to force them to leave the synagogal community.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, if those communities were located not in Palestine, nor in the Transjordan or Syrian regions but were elsewhere in the diaspora, the decisions of Yavneh would not have been effective before a considerable span of time.

We should, therefore, look for additional factors to explain the separation between the Johannine group of Jesus-followers and the (local) synagogue. Apart from theological reasons such as the debate about Christology and the Scriptures as reflected in the Gospel of John we should also consider political or social aspects of Jewish life in the diaspora. The most

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<sup>64</sup> J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn; Nashville: Abingdon, 1979); Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979). A different theory was developed in German scholarship by Klaus Wengst, *Bedrängte Gemeinde und verherrlichter Christus: Der historische Ort des Johannevangeliums als Schlüssel zu seiner Interpretation* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1981), who arrived at the conclusion that the events could only be imagined in a region with strong Jewish authorities and then concluded that the Gospel was written in the eastern Jordan region under the reign of Agrippa II.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. the criticism by Robert Kysar, “The Expulsion from the Synagogue: The Tale of a Theory,” in idem, *Voyages with John: Charting the Fourth Gospel* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2005), 237–245.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Günter Stemberger, “Die sogenannte ‘Synode von Jabne’ und das frühe Christentum,” *Kairos* 19 (1977): 14–21; Peter Schäfer, “Die sogenannte Synode von Jabne,” in idem, *Studien zur Geschichte und Theologie des rabbinischen Judentums* (AGJU, 15; Leiden etc.: Brill, 1978), 45–64; R. Kimelman, “Birkat Ha-Minim and the Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Jewish Prayer in Late Antiquity,” in E. P. Sanders, A. I. Baumgarten, and Alan Mendelson (eds.), *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, vol. 2: *Aspects of Judaism in the Greco-Roman Period* (London: SCM, 1981), 226–244; Steven T. Katz, “Issues in the Separation of Judaism and Christianity after 70 C.E.: A Reconsideration,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103 (1984): 43–76; William Horbury, “The Benediction of the Minim and Early Jewish-Christian Controversy,” in idem, *Jews and Christians in Contact and Controversy* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 67–110.

important factor to cause changes in the years after 70 CE is probably the imposition of the *fiscus Iudaicus* on all Jews in the Roman Empire, in replacement of the former temple tax.<sup>67</sup> This was the only real change the Jewish communities in Asia Minor had to suffer after the Judaean War. The new tax was imposed by Vespasian, and according to the sources it was collected with all rigor (*acerbissime*) under Domitian, also from those who had denied their Jewish origin and from non-Jews who had adopted a Jewish lifestyle.<sup>68</sup> All Jews—men, women and children from age 3 to 62—were required to pay the tax, for which a special authority was established. Jews were, therefore, registered as such, their names appearing in the appropriate tax lists, and it is very likely that these administrative pressures strongly triggered the process of defining who was a Jew and who was not. Moreover, the issue who was considered a Jew was no more merely a matter of the community but an official, administrative matter, and it is very likely that the new situation enhanced the ongoing process of separation between the local synagogues and the Christian communities: Jews and apostates, godfearers, and Jesus-followers from a Jewish or from a Gentile background were now forced to decide whether or not they belonged to the Jewish community. On the other hand, for those now considered not to be Jews, the legal situation could also become dangerous if they refused to participate in pagan cults and the imperial cult. Even the refusal of a synagogue to accept Jewish or Gentile Christians could bring them under severe pressure and cause persecution.<sup>69</sup>

In any case, the Fourth Gospel suggests that the community of the “Beloved Disciple” is already separated from the local synagogues. This is confirmed by the fact that the most important Jewish identity markers (especially in the diaspora), circumcision and the Law, were apparently no problem any more for the author or his addressees. There is no debate in John about the practical observance of the Torah (which was so heavily disputed in the context of the Pauline mission), or of particular Jewish purity rites. Purification by water is only mentioned with regard to the Jews (John 2:6), and the same is true for the practice of circumcision (John 7:22–23). Nothing suggests that the Johannine addressees still practised it.

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<sup>67</sup> On the historical circumstances see recently Marius Heemstra, *The Fiscus Iudaicus and the Parting of the Ways* (WUNT, 2: 277; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

<sup>68</sup> Suetonius, *Dom.* 12:2. The two groups mentioned could include apostates and godfearers, and it is unclear how Jewish or Gentile Jesus believers were considered.

<sup>69</sup> This could be the situation alluded to in John 16:2.

Thus, at the time of the composition of the Gospel around 90–100 CE, the Johannine communities were already in a certain distance from central elements of Jewish life and practice. However, the fierce debates between Jesus and “the Jews” or between his disciples and “Moses’ disciples” (John 9:28) suggest that there had been intense conflicts in a not-too-distant past, and possibly that these debates were still going on, at least among those of the community who were still affected by the vivid memory of those conflicts.

On the other hand, the Gospel indicates that a significant part of the addressees was from a Gentile background:<sup>70</sup> The shepherd discourse mentions two groups of people belonging to Jesus: sheep of this fold and “other sheep not of this fold” (John 10:16) who shall both be united into one flock under the one shepherd. And the cynical advice of the high priest Caiaphas, that Jesus should “die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish” is explained by the narrator in a remarkable way: Jesus should die “not for the nation only, but also to gather the scattered children of God into one” (John 11:52). These remarks point to a community situation in which Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus are together in one community, and it is very probable that such a “mixed” situation also mirrors the world around which consists of Jews and Gentiles.

Thus, in spite of the strongly Jewish background of John’s traditions and argument, we should be aware that the context of the Fourth Gospel’s composition is—at least in the end—not so much dominated by Jewish viewpoints or even institutions. Although the conflict with the synagogue and the debates about Scripture and Messianism are still important, especially for those who had previously been linked with the synagogue, the community also faces the experience of unbelief from the side of pagans, suffering from enmity or even hatred of “the world” (John 15:18).

In the dramatic structure of the Gospel, this is indicated by the fact that the polemical debate with “the Jews” is confined to the narrative of Jesus’ public ministry, starting with the cleansing of the Temple but coming to an end with the decision about Jesus’ death in John 11:46–53 and with Jesus’ final remarks about the unbelief of his contemporaries in John 12:37–43. In the Farewell Discourses, directed toward the group of disciples but strongly reflecting the situation of the community of addressees,

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Jörg Frey, “Heiden – Griechen – Gotteskinder: Zu Gestalt und Funktion der Rede von den Heiden im 4. Evangelium,” in: Reinhard Feldmeier and Ulrich Heckel (eds.), *Die Heiden: Juden, Christen und das Problem des Fremden* (WUNT, 70; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994), 228–268.

and also in the Johannine Epistles, “the Jews” are almost totally absent, and “the world” is mentioned instead as the source of distress and grief.<sup>71</sup> The same is true for the prologue, where, along with “the world” (John 1:10), Jesus’ rejection by “his own” is mentioned (John 1:11). “The world” and “his own” (who probably represent the “chosen people”) are introduced in two complementary verses, thus possibly mirroring the two facets of ignorance and rejection of the *logos*, the word incarnate, and his salvific message, by Gentiles and Jews.

The relevance of Gentile believers for the Johannine tradition is most clearly indicated in the mention of the Greeks at the end of Jesus’ public ministry. After the somewhat weary remark of the Pharisees that “the world is gone after him” (John 12:19), Greeks “come” and want to “see” Jesus (John 12:21). The terms chosen here are reminiscent of the calling of the first disciples (John 1:35–39), and the disciples busy to mediate between Jesus and those “Greeks” are Philip and Andrew, the two disciples with Greek names.<sup>72</sup> But in spite of their efforts, we are not told that those Greeks succeeded to see the earthly Jesus and listen to him at his time. The following address, sometimes called *Hellenenrede*, proclaims his imminent death and its universal effects, without directly addressing the Greeks. The theme is however adopted when Jesus predicts that when he is “lifted up from the earth”, that is, in post-Easter times, he “will draw all people” to himself (John 12:32). The universal perspective expressed here demonstrates that the “Greeks” should not be viewed merely as festival pilgrims, God-fearers or even proselytes from the Greek speaking diaspora. On the level of John’s story they may be imagined in this way. But on the level of John’s narration, they are first and foremost a literary figure, and perhaps more precisely: a representation of all those who will later, in post-Easter times, be attracted by the message of Jesus and belong to the universal community of believers. This is subtly indicated in an earlier passage in John 7, where the Jews misunderstand Jesus’ words that

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<sup>71</sup> Apart from the hint in John 13:33, the only reference to a particularly Jewish hostile action is the enigmatic passage John 16:2–3. But as we can exclude the idea that the Jews in the Roman empire had any legal power to put Jesus-followers to death, the only situation that can be imagined are denunciations, from which Christians were then endangered. In the remark that the enemies might consider this to be a *λατρεία*, there is a strong “critique of their standing before God” (thus James A. Kelhoffer, *Persecution, Persuasion and Power: Readiness to Withstand Hardship as a Corroboration of Legitimacy in the New Testament* [WUNT, 270; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010], 263).

<sup>72</sup> Interestingly, their memory is later connected with parts of Asia Minor.



they should seek and not find him (John 7:34). And—as is often the case—their misunderstanding expresses a truth on a deeper level: They say: “Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the dispersion (*διασπορά*) among the Greeks and teach the Greeks?” (John 7:35). What is a crude misunderstanding on the plain level of the narrative, is true on another level: Whereas the ministry of the earthly Jesus is strictly confined to Jewish Palestine, and he never considers to go into the Jewish *diaspora* or to teach non-Jews, he will indeed “go to the *διασπορά* among the Greeks and teach the Greeks” after his exaltation: that is, through the preaching of his disciples and through the book that transmits his message into the diaspora among the Greeks, or to the Johannine readers living there. Although the term *διασπορά* is mentioned only once in John, it appears significant for the fact that the Gospel addresses Greek-speaking readers in the area of the Greek-speaking Jewish diaspora.

I have not yet discussed the well-known traditions about Ephesus and the composition of the Johannine writings in Asia Minor. Although I do think that this is still the best assumption about the place of composition,<sup>73</sup> it is not necessary for my present argument that the Jewish background of the Fourth Gospel is best explained as a background shaped and mediated through the situation of Jews within the diaspora.

Of course, Ephesus is an ideal candidate for the localization of John, with an old and self-confident Jewish community that had a widely recognized position within the urban society and proudly “maintained significant facets of Jewish identity.”<sup>74</sup> They took distance from pagan cults, gathered on Sabbath, read the Scriptures, circumcized their males, observed the food and purity laws and other religious traditions, and sent the temple tax to Jerusalem, as long as the temple existed. Such a self-confident group of “disciples of Moses” (John 9:28) also seems to be the dialogue partner of the Johannine community, in the Johannine conflict passages: They point to Moses and to their identity as Abraham’s children (John 8:33 cf. 8:39, 53, 57), they read and know the Scriptures (John 5:39), quote them (John 6:32) and ask for arguments and signs (John 6:31)

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Martin Hengel, *Johannine Question*, passim. On Ephesus see also my argument in Frey, “Von Paulus zu Johannes”; see also U. B. Müller, “Die Heimat des Johannesevangeliums,” *ZNW* 97 (2006): 44–63.

<sup>74</sup> Paul R. Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius* (WUNT, 166; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 40. On the diaspora-Jewish identity see recently Mikael Tellbe, *Christ-Believers in Ephesus: A Textual Analysis of Early Christian Identity Formation in a Local Perspective* (WUNT, 242; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 58–65.

for Jesus' authority. And, most strikingly, in John 5 or John 9 they seem to interrogate Jesus believers like an official council, having the authority to exclude them from the synagogue (John 9:22) and to cause fear among other Jews so that they do not dare to openly confess their belief in Jesus (John 12:42).

It is more than probable that these remarks do not refer to the situation in the time of Jesus but to the situation of the later community facing such a self-confident and rather powerful synagogal community and we may also assume that most of the Jewish Jesus believers in the Johannine circle had originally belonged to that synagogal community, which could, then, be called the "mother soil," from which they adopted significant elements of their Scriptural knowledge and also of their community ethos.

#### 4. Traces of the diaspora-Jewish background in the Epistles and the Gospel

So I would like to point to some of the elements in the Fourth Gospel and the Epistles where we can see elements or the "heritage" of that diaspora-Jewish identity which were present in thought and practice, even if the Johannine groups had already been separated from the local synagogue. Rather than merely adducing parallels from various diaspora-Jewish writings, I will focus on some elements of ethos and thought that may be characteristic for the diaspora-Jewish context of the Fourth Gospel.<sup>75</sup>

a) A first element is visible regarding food and purity matters. Of course, there is no sign that the Johannine community still practised Jewish purity rites. On the other hand, the Gospel shows a considerable knowledge of such customs (cf. John 2:6; 13:8–9; 18:28–29). But the disciples seem to have obtained purity differently: They are pure through the word of Jesus (John 15:3), or, through baptism, so that the one who is washed is totally pure and is not in need of any further purification, except the service of Jesus' washing the feet (which is in itself a figure for Jesus' whole salvific work).

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<sup>75</sup> Cf. the more extensive argument in Jörg Frey, "Das Johannesevangelium und seine Gemeinden im Kontext der jüdischen Diaspora Kleinasiens," in Roland Deines, Jens Herzer and Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr (eds.), *Neues Testament und hellenistisch-jüdische Alltagskultur: Wechselseitige Wahrnehmungen* (WUNT, 274; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 99–132, here 120–128.

The same seems to be true for the food laws. Nowhere in John can we find any discussion of the purity of food, not even the problem of food offered to idols is problematized (as, for example, in Revelation). This may be due to the setting of the story in the Palestinian context, but even in the Johannine epistles there is no clear sign that the communities had followed a particular rule of food purity or that there had been any conflicts between Jesus-followers and Jewish circles about those problems. There is only one small hint in Third John when the “Elder” writes that the wandering missionaries sent to the communities need to get shelter and support from the faithful community members because they do not accept anything from the Gentiles (ἐθνικοί: 3 John 7).<sup>76</sup> This is quite remarkable, because the community addressed seems to consist mainly (?) of Gentile Christians, as the three names Gaius, Diotrophes and Demetrius suggest. But in the present passage we have not merely the only occurrence of the term “Gentiles” in the Gospel and Epistles, and thus a trace of the Jewish separation of the world into Jews and Gentiles.<sup>77</sup> The remark points even more to a distinctive part of Jewish ethos in the diaspora where the danger of impurity and even contact with pagan cults was always present. Travelling Jews were dependent on the hospitality and the social and logistic network of the diaspora synagogues, and it was a part of the diaspora-Jewish ethos to provide shelter and food supply and other necessary support for fellow Jews from elsewhere. Such an ethos was unique in the ancient world; it was not practiced in the same way by members of mystery cults, professional associations, or other religious groups. But—being rooted in Judaism—Jesus-followers adopted it, as we can see very early in Paul’s companionship with Prisca and Aquila, or in the travel activity among Pauline communities. In 3 John 7, the reason that the foreign brothers (3 John 5) “accept nothing from the Gentiles” so that the circle of believers faithful to the “Elder” should welcome and support them (3 John 8) points clearly to the Jewish ethos of distance from Gentile houses and food, that is, to the fear of getting impure or at least coming in touch with idolatry. The ambassadors of the Elder apparently practice a kind of (transformed) Jewish ethos of keeping distance from pagan houses and meals, or they kept that ethos even after having

<sup>76</sup> This is a significant facet of Jewish behaviour in a Gentile environment; cf. Dan 1:8 and also Josephus, *Life* 14. See also the 18 Halakhot from the beginning of the Jewish War, which included the prohibition to accept not only meals but even “gifts” from the Gentiles; cf. Martin Hengel, *Die Zeloten* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn; AGAJU, 1; Leiden: Brill, 1976), 204–211.

<sup>77</sup> In the New Testament, the term ἐθνικοί is only used in three other passages, in Matt 5:47; 6:7 and 18:17, always in a strongly negative sense.

accepted to follow “the name.” Obviously, the houses and meals of the Jesus-followers are acceptable for them, although it is rather improbable that the community members still practiced the common Jewish purity and food halakha. Possibly they kept themselves in distance from idolatry and pagan cults (as is also expected by the author of Revelation in Rev 2:14, 20). But even in this form, it is a very strong element of Jewish ethos adopted by a mixed Christian community with a number of members from a Gentile background. Distance from pagan cults, and the ethos of hospitality are obviously elements of a diaspora-Jewish ethos within the Johannine communities.

b) This is confirmed by the remarkable warning at the end of the First epistle (1 John 5:21): “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (τεκνία φυλάξατε ἑαυτὰ ἀπὸ τῶν εἰδώλων). This is the only explicit warning against the pagan realm in the Gospel and the Epistles, and although interpreters have tried to explain it in a metaphorical manner and to understand the “idols” as sin, unbelief, heretic ideas or the opponents themselves<sup>78</sup>, it is most natural to understand the term εἰδῶλα—as elsewhere in the Septuagint and the New Testament—as a reference to pagan deities or their visible representations.<sup>79</sup>

And since εἰδῶλα is used with the article, it is probable that the readers knew which idols they should keep away from. In any case they are in contrast with the “true God” Jesus Christ, as 1 John 5:20 states. The idols represent a concrete realm that the community should avoid, and it remains unclear whether the author warns against the defilement from paganism or from pagan food (offered to idols), or against the danger of being involved in pagan sacrificial acts, or possibly against the persecution by Roman or local authorities (as is little later confirmed by the epistles of Pliny in Bithynia).<sup>80</sup> In any case, the warning appears as a

<sup>78</sup> Thus the different options in the commentaries; see the references in Frey, “Heiden – Griechen – Gotteskinder,” 233–234.

<sup>79</sup> In the Septuagint, the term is normally used to denote pagan deities; cf. Frey, “Heiden – Griechen – Gotteskinder,” 233 n. 28.

<sup>80</sup> Pliny, *ep.* 10.95–96. Such an interpretation is suggested by Klaus Wengst, *Der erste, zweite und dritte Brief des Johannes* (ÖTK, 16; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus and Würzburg: Echter, 1978), 225–226; Gerd Schunack, *Die Briefe des Johannes* (ZBK, Neues Testament, 17; Zürich: TVZ, 1982), 106; Jens W. Taeger, *Johannesapokalypse und johanneischer Kreis: Versuch einer traditionsgeschichtlichen Ortsbestimmung am Paradigma der Lebenswasser-Thematik* (BZNW, 51; Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1989), 196ff.; but these authors separate the closure of the epistle from its body and consider the closure as a later addition. In an interesting article, Ekkehard W. Stegemann, “‘Kindlein, hütet

close parallel to the warnings of the author of Revelation (also in Asia Minor) against eating food offered to idols which was apparently practised among more “liberal” groups of Christians such as the Nicolaites but strongly rejected by the Jewish-Christian author of Revelation. The Jewish and Jewish-Christian abstinence from the “sacred food” called *ἱερόθυστα* (cf. 1 Cor 10:28) was commonly considered as a lack of reason and was thus a topos of anti-Jewish mockery. In any case, the closure of First John confirms that the Johannine communities adopted the synagogal practice of keeping distance from the pagan realm, and maintained it—at least to a certain part—even after the separation from the local synagogue.

c) Relics of diaspora-Jewish language can even be seen in strong transformation in the highest Christological title, positioned at the end of First John. That Jesus Christ can be called “the true God and eternal life” (1 John 5:20) does not only refer to the fact that God is “true” and reliable,<sup>81</sup> but even more to the diaspora-Jewish distinction between the true God and the false idols as reflected in diaspora-Jewish missionary language, as we can see from 1 Thess 1:9, “to turn to God from the idols, to serve the living and true God.” As demonstrated above, elements of this kind of diaspora-Jewish language influenced the Johannine language also in other parts.

d) There is a further aspect of diaspora-Jewish ethos which is also visible in the Johannine Epistles and, in a more veiled manner, in the Gospel. It is the ethos of communal solidarity and mutual support which was already touched when discussing hospitality for the travelling brothers. The First Epistle of John highlights such a communal ethos with terms such as *κοινωνία* (1 John 1:3, 6, 7) and *ἀγάπη* (1 John 2:7–11). When 1 John 2:16 juxtaposes the “true love” and the “love for the world”<sup>82</sup> we should notice that there is a social reality behind these “theological” terms: The love for the world is explained by three elements, “desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions,” and the third term, *ἡ ἀλαζονεία τοῦ βίου* shows that the author’s struggle with his opponents also touches upon aspects of property and living. It is

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euch vor den Gottesbildern!’ Erwägungen zum Schluss des 1. Johannesbriefes,” *Theologische Zeitschrift* 41 (1985): 284–294, pointed to the situation of the *status confessionis* in face of Roman authorities and interpreted that situation also as the reason for the secession of the secessionists. This point may be disputable, but for 1 John 5:21, the setting is quite plausible.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. 3 Macc. 2:11; 6:18; Philo, *Legat.* 366.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Hans-Josef Klauck, *Der erste Johannesbrief* (EKKNT, 23/1; Zürich: Benziger and Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1991), 138.

most probably aimed at the opponents who are said to be proud of their property; this is in view when 1 John 3:17 phrases that someone “has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him,” and it is the withdrawal of communal solidarity, the refusal of support which is then called a lack of the divine love, or even hatred towards the brothers. Within the family ethos of the community of the “children of God,” the refusal of support is considered a violation of familial obligations. Such a family ethos was apparently fundamental for the Johannine communities, and it is also implied in the call for mutual love in the Fourth Gospel. Loving each other means staying together, in mutual support, like a real family. Thus, being “children of God,” brothers and sisters, implies solidarity with those in need, and its refusal or withdrawal is not only a private act but does also affect communal life. Houses are no longer opened for the meeting of the community; food is no longer provided for the meals. In particular, a community separated from the synagogue and likewise in distance from the pagan world may have faced serious problems when some of the more wealthy members left the group and “closed their heart” and hands. In any case, the family ethos of the communities as an element of the Johannine school might derive—directly or indirectly—from the ethos of the diaspora synagogues.

e) Let me get back to the Gospel and just mention one last major theme where the diaspora orientation of the Johannine theology is most obvious: the position towards the Jerusalem Temple and the metaphoric and Christological use of the temple motif.<sup>83</sup> Of course, John and his readers are well aware of the destruction of the Temple which is mentioned in the “prophecy” of Caiaphas in John 11:48. But interestingly, the loss of the temple seems to be of no further relevance for the life and thought of the Johannine Christians. There is no indication in John that Jesus-followers had ever visited the Temple, as festival pilgrims<sup>84</sup> or simply for prayer. Nor is there any further comment on the loss of the temple or the reasons for the destruction. As already prefigured in the Pauline communities in a similar diaspora context, John uses the temple motif in a strongly metaphorical manner, focused on the person of Jesus, the true place of God’s presence on earth. The issue of the chosen place, so highly debated be-

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<sup>83</sup> On this, see extensively Frey, “Temple and Identity,” 481–488.

<sup>84</sup> The Greeks as festival pilgrims in John 12:20–22 are merely a part of the narrative world; we cannot conclude from here that the Johannine addressees themselves had formerly travelled to Jerusalem.

tween Jews and Samaritans, can thus be dismissed in an eschatological perspective: “The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth” (John 4:23). Neither in Jerusalem, nor on Mt. Gerizim, nor at another defined place is the true God worshipped in Spirit and Truth, but only in the faith in Jesus. In spite of the prominent place the Jerusalem temple has in John’s narrative, as the place of the encounter and conflict between Jesus and his opponents, the temple motif is finally transposed to indicate the Divine presence in the incarnate one, where the logos “tabernacled” (John 1:14), the heaven is open (John 1:51) and the rivers of living water originate (John 7:37–38). The true temple is, thus, no more in Jerusalem, but in the body of the incarnate, crucified and exalted one (John 2:21), mediated through the spirit and communicated to the world.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, I return to the question in John, “Will he finally go to the diaspora among the Greeks and teach the Greeks” (John 7:35)? The irony in which John attributes such a misunderstanding to Jesus’ Jewish contemporaries is striking, and it points to the truth, that John actually addresses communities in the diaspora, it aims at “Greeks” to be drawn to Jesus in a broad and universal manner, so that “the salvation” which is from the Jews finally includes the Greeks and the Jewish Messiah and King of Israel is confessed as the “Saviour of the World.” John’s Jewish background, thoroughly visible in terms and convictions, in quotations of the Scriptures and the adoption of various types of Jewish exegesis, is mediated through the situation of the diaspora as well as through the earlier Christian tradition. It is shaped in conflict and argument by the struggle with the self-confident diaspora-Jewish contemporaries questioning the Christological claims of the Johannine preaching and accusing the Johannine believers of considering a mere human as God. In the view of the evangelist, this is justified: He is “the true God” (1 John 5:20), but the fact that the argument for that belief in John 10 is again taken from Scripture demonstrates that even in its boldest claims, and in a notable distance from the local synagogue, the Fourth Gospel remains thoroughly Jewish.