

# JOHANNINE COMMUNITIES BEHIND THE FOURTH GOSPEL: GEORG RICHTER'S ANALYSIS

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**A**MONG MANY brilliant students of Professor Anton Vögtle of the Catholic theological faculty of the University of Freiburg im Breisgau was Dr. Georg Richter, who specialized in Johannine studies.<sup>1</sup> He published a number of works on Jn<sup>2</sup> and had begun a commentary on the fourth Gospel in "The Regensburg New Testament." His volume was to be a revision of the first three editions written by Alfred Wikenhauser, Vögtle's teacher and predecessor at Freiburg. Richter had hoped to complete his commentary toward the end of this decade ("so Gott will," he wrote). Tragically, however, his promising career was cut short by death from cancer on August 29, 1975.

Richter's last major article appears in a collection of essays in honor of Vögtle's sixty-fifth birthday by the honoree's students.<sup>3</sup> To me, a nonspecialist in Johannine literature, Richter's final work is one of the two most fascinating studies of Jn I have ever encountered.<sup>4</sup> Unfortu-

<sup>1</sup> In this article, "Jn" = the Gospel or epistles of John; "John" = the author(s) of the fourth Gospel, without prejudice as to identity.

<sup>2</sup> "Bist du Elias?" (Joh 1, 21)," *BZ* 6 (1962) 79-92, 238-56; 7 (1963) 63-80; "Blut und Wasser aus der durchbohrten Seite Jesu (Joh 19, 34b)," *MTZ* 21 (1970) 2-21; "Die Deutung des Kreuzestodes Jesu in der Leidensgeschichte des Johannesevangeliums (Joh 13-19)," *BibLeb* 9 (1968) 21-36; "Die Fleischwerdung des Logos im Johannesevangelium," *NovT* 13 (1971) 81-126; 14 (1972) 257-76; *Die Fusswaschung im Johannes-Evangelium* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1967); "Die Fusswaschung Joh 13, 1-20," *MTZ* 16 (1965) 13-26; "The Washing of Feet in the Gospel of John," *TD* 14 (1966) 200-205; "Die Gefangennahme Jesu nach dem Johannesevangelium (18, 1-12)," *BibLeb* 10 (1969) 26-39; "Ist *en* ein strukturbildendes Element im Logoshymnus Joh 1, 1 ff.?" *Bib* 51 (1970) 539-44; "Der Vater und Gott Jesu und seiner Brüder in Joh 20, 17: Ein Beitrag zur Christologie des Johannesevangeliums," *MTZ* 24 (1973) 95-114; 25 (1974) 64-73; "Zu den Taufenerzählungen Mk 1:9-11 und Joh 1:32-34," *ZNW* 65 (1974) 43-56; "Zum gemeindefbildenden Element in den joh. Schriften," in *Kirche im Werden* (dedicated to Richter's memory), ed. Josef Hainz (Munich: Schöningh, 1976); "Zum sogenannten Taufetext Joh 3, 5," *MTZ* 26 (1975) 101-25; "Zur Formgeschichte und literarischen Einheit von Joh 6, 31-58," *ZNW* 60 (1969) 21-55; *Studien zum Johannesevangelium*, ed. Collegium Biblicum München (Leiden: Brill, 1976).

<sup>3</sup> "Präsentische und futurische Eschatologie im 4. Evangelium," in *Gegenwart und kommendes Reich: Schülergabe Anton Vögtle zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Peter Fiedler und Dieter Zeller (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1975) 117-52.

<sup>4</sup> The other being Albert Schweitzer's "The Hellenization of Paul's Mysticism by Ignatius and the Johannine Theology," in his *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, tr. William Montgomery (New York: Holt, 1931) 334-75. Johannine studies have been impoverished by an almost universal disregard of Schweitzer's chapter. Schweitzer, conditioned as he was by the criticism of an earlier era, naturally oversimplified the process of composition, attributing the fourth Gospel to "a great unknown" about the

nately for the English-speaking world, the Vögtle *Schülergabe* is in German and, because of the recent spate of such volumes, is unlikely to receive the attention it deserves. And since Richter's own pen has been stilled, it may be useful to bring his views before a wider audience, an audience which he himself may eventually have reached through his proposed commentary, which was to be an elaboration of the position set forth in the present programmatic essay.

For clarity and brevity, I have reorganized Richter's article somewhat and have omitted a number of matters of secondary importance. His views follow without comment until the evaluation at the close of this paper.

#### THE PROBLEM

Among the questions concerning Jn which have not been answered with unanimity is that of the statements lying side by side in Jn about present and future eschatology. By far the majority of these statements have it that the eschatological acts of the coming of the Son of Man from heaven, the resurrection of the dead, and the last judgment are not to be expected only in the future but are occurring already now in the proclamation of Jesus or of John and his community. On the other hand, according to other statements these "last things" are yet to occur. In the first series of statements, salvation (=eternal life, fellowship with God) for those who believe in Jesus and damnation (=eternal death, lack of fellowship with God) for unbelievers are already present. In the second series of statements, only at the end of the world will some come out of the graves to the resurrection of life and others to the resurrection of judgment.

There is yet another distinction: in present eschatology, relation to Jesus (faith or unfaith) determines salvation or damnation. Never does salvation appear as a reward for good works or damnation as punishment for evil deeds. But in futuristic eschatology it is good works done during one's earthly life which alone will determine eternal life or death.

#### THE SOLUTIONS

How are these facts to be explained? Three solutions have been advocated.

1) Most exegetes hold that John proclaims both the presence of the eschatological events and their completion on the Day of the Lord. Even

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beginning of the second century. But there seems to be no reason why this "great unknown" could not be identified with Richter's anti-Docetic Redactor; for Schweitzer's "great unknown" also struggled with Docetism, stressed the Logos-made-flesh, and the Eucharist as the eating of the flesh of the Son of Man which is necessary for resurrection to eternal life (cf. *ibid.* 344-45, 350, 375).

though present eschatology is much more central for John than it is for the Synoptic Evangelists and for Paul, John unambiguously expresses futuristic eschatology.<sup>5</sup>

Some critics grant the possibility that the traditional futuristic apocalyptic statements in Jn are of secondary origin (chaps. 5, 6, and 12) but these critics nevertheless hold that these futuristic passages correspond to the spirit of John, for in other places he speaks of a futuristic expectation (14:2-3; 17:20-26). It is unthinkable that John's pupils would have contradicted their master by introducing apocalyptic views if he had been opposed to apocalyptic.<sup>6</sup>

The basis of this position that the present and future eschatologies of Jn are not mutually exclusive is the presupposition that Jn is a theological unity, a unity which encompasses 1 Jn, even if the latter is not by John. Sometimes another presupposition is that the NT as a whole is also in essentials theologically one. Although there may be a difference in accent between the Johannine eschatology and that of the remainder of the NT, there can be no direct contradictions.

2) According to the second alternative, John holds a present eschatology only, that is, the "last things" are being realized or fulfilled now in this age. The apocalyptic statements were introduced by a redactor who wanted to bring Jn into line with the current ecclesiastical position. John has broken through the mythology of the "vulgar" catastrophic, end-time expectation, and has reinterpreted its basic concern about the absolute end of history in light of human existence. The definitive eschatological event for John, in which the future becomes present, is the coming of Jesus as Revealer, a coming which repeatedly occurs in Christian preaching. But John's stress upon present realization does not necessarily exclude a futuristic, individualistic eschatology, which allows a final fulfilment for individuals at death (14:2-3).<sup>7</sup>

3) A third position, not commonly advocated, rejects both positions 1 and 2. In Jn the accent lies on futuristic eschatology, for the present statements are only promises and are therefore also to be understood as futuristic.<sup>8</sup>

Alternatives 1 and 3 must be rejected, for they presuppose the unity of Johannine eschatology. Alternative 2 is also inadequate, for it misunderstands the redactor as reverting to the orthodox teaching of the great Church at large rather than as representing an inner-Johannine development. A proper solution can be obtained only by a critical study of the history of traditions and of theological and ecclesiastical developments

<sup>5</sup> E.g., Wilbert F. Howard, "John" (*IB* 8; Nashville: Abingdon, 1952) 443-44.

<sup>6</sup> E.g., Raymond E. Brown, *John* (*AB* 29; Garden City: Doubleday, 1966) cxxi.

<sup>7</sup> E.g., Rudolf Bultmann, *John*, tr. Beasley-Murray (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971).

<sup>8</sup> L. van Hartingsveld, *Die Eschatologie des Johannesevangeliums* (Assen: van Gorcum, 1962).

within the Johannine communities—developments which are reflected in various strata of Jn. Such an approach will enable us to see how groundless is the presupposition of the theological unity of Jn and of the NT. But if the situation turns out to be less harmonious than is generally supposed, it will also be found to be a much more dynamic and exciting state of affairs. A truly historical understanding of Jn cannot exclude the possibility that there is no such thing as *the* Johannine eschatology. Rather, there may well be differing eschatological views in Jn. The juxtaposition of these different eschatological strata in Jn goes hand in hand with a long-drawn-out Christological controversy within the Johannine congregations.

We shall propose, then, that Jn in its present form is neither a literary nor a theological unity. Jn is not the work of a single person but of several authors who wrote one after the other and who differed in their theology, above all in their Christology and eschatology. If we take Christology as our guide to the distinctions among the authors, we shall be able to distinguish the various strata in Jn and to trace the course of theological development within Johannine Christianity. And since each author does not write as a theoretician serenely surveying the ecclesiastical situation from his ivory tower but rather writes as an exponent of a specific Johannine community engaged in theological polemics, we shall also learn something of the congregation(s) represented by each author and the stages of development of the Johannine churches.

We are now ready to set forth the four phases of theological development within the Johannine communities and the resultant three strata of Christological and eschatological deposits in Jn. We shall examine each phase under the headings of Christology, community, gospel, and eschatology.

#### PHASE 1: JOHANNINE JEWISH CHRISTIANITY

**A. MESSIAH-CHRISTOLOGY.**—Jesus is the prophet-Messiah like Moses (Deut 18:15–19; Jn 1:29–34, 45; 6:14; 7:31). Like Moses, Jesus works signs, which confirm his messiahship. In accord with Deut 18:15–19, Jesus is not divine, but a man chosen by God as Messiah, the son of Joseph of Nazareth (Jn 1:45–46; 6:42; 10:33; 19:7). Jesus is not a Davidic Messiah, not a descendant of David.

**B. COMMUNITY.**—The community holding this type of Christology was Jewish-Christian, resembling Ebionite Jewish Christianity. This Johannine Jewish Christianity was expelled from the synagogue (cf. Jn 9:22; 12:42) of a diaspora Judaism which apparently settled in the area of northern Palestine, Syria, and eastern Jordan and which expected a Mosaic Messiah. Johannine Jewish Christianity engaged in conflict with this Judaism over the messiahship of Jesus.

**C. GOSPEL.**—This Johannine Jewish Christianity, after its expulsion

from the synagogue, created for itself a writing similar to the genre "gospel," in which it gave an account to its opponents (Judaism, Baptist community) and to itself of its belief in Jesus as the prophet-Messiah. The author of this gospel selected out of the Christian tradition available to him material which appeared to be suitable and interpreted it anew in accordance with his purposes. This traditional material of his community is, in spite of many common features, identical neither with the Synoptics nor with the tradition used by the Synoptics. He used, for example, a written representation of the Baptist which differs from that of the Synoptics. He newly interpreted it and placed it at the beginning of his writing. He probably also incorporated a signs-source and a representation of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus varying from the Synoptic one. At the end of his gospel he declared he had written it all "that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah" (20:30, 31a). We may call this writing, in which Johannine Jewish Christianity declares and defends its belief in Jesus as Messiah, the "foundation document" (*Grundschrift*), for it represents the first and oldest stage of the origin of our Jn.

D. ESCHATOLOGY. — The eschatology of Johannine Jewish Christianity agrees in essence with that of contemporary Judaism and much of the rest of the NT. Since the foundation document is exclusively concerned to prove that Jesus is the prophet-Messiah promised by Moses, it seldom speaks expressly of eschatology. Yet we can learn its eschatological view indirectly from some of its sayings and above all from "the Evangelist" (the adapter of the foundation document during Phase 2). The work of the Evangelist reflects his conflict with the Jewish Christianity of the foundation document. The eschatological views of Johannine Jewish Christianity are often found in a saying in the mouth of Jesus introduced with a double "amen," in which the Evangelist more or less word for word repeats the affirmations of the Johannine Jewish Christianity. The Evangelist, to be sure, does so only for the purpose of showing that what Johannine Jewish Christianity expects only in the eschatological future is present and fulfilled in the person and proclamation of Jesus. The eschatology of the foundation document is therefore futuristic-apocalyptic, but there are also indications that it understands the present as the beginning irruption of salvation or as the time of salvation.

1) The traditional futuristic eschatology is expressed in the expectation of the kingdom of God and of the parousia of Jesus as the Son of Man together with the closely connected events of the general resurrection of the dead and the last judgment. As may be recognized from texts which are found only in the Evangelist's new interpretation of the foundation document (Jn 3:3-5), Johannine Jewish Christianity lives in expectation of the coming kingdom of God understood as the essence of

eschatological salvation. The requirement for entrance into the coming kingdom is reception of the baptism practiced in the Jewish-Christian congregation, a baptism which is understood as the continuation of the messianic baptism administered by Jesus (Jn 3:22-23; 4:1), baptism in the Holy Spirit (Jn 1:33), a baptism which includes confession of Jesus as Messiah. The foundation document's understanding of baptism arose out of the conflict of the Johannine Jewish-Christian community with the baptist community. The latter proclaimed John the Baptist as Messiah and practiced John's baptism as the messianic baptism required for admission to the kingdom.

Johannine Jewish Christianity expects Jesus' return from heaven (parousia) as the Son of Man, who will raise the dead and hold the last judgment. This community appears to know only the earliest view of Jesus as Son of Man, that is, Jesus' return as the eschatological Son of Man. Here again our results come chiefly from texts of the Evangelist which correct and outdo the Jewish-Christian form of Christianity.

a) *Jn 1:51*. — "Amen, amen, I say unto you, ye shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man!" Today it is generally recognized that the Evangelist here reproduces in essence a traditional saying. Without doubt, we may also regard 1:51 as a saying of the Jewish Christianity of the foundation document about Jesus' parousia as Son of Man at the end of the age. The basic elements in 1:51 belong to the conception of the parousia as we meet it elsewhere in the NT, namely, the Son of Man, whom people will see (always futuristic), the angels as his companions, and heaven (cf. Mk 13:26-27 parallels; 14:62 parallels; Mt 25:31; 1 Thess 3:13; 4:16; 2 Thess 1:7; Rev 1:7). The ascent and descent of the angels is, however, without parallel in the NT tradition of the parousia. Further study would be required to determine whether this phrase belongs to Johannine Jewish Christianity or is to be understood as the Evangelist's new interpretation of the Jewish-Christian parousia tradition.

b) *Jn 5:25-27*. — Also behind this text, which is likewise introduced with a double "amen," stands the view of the Jewish Christianity of the foundation document: Jesus will appear on the last day as the Son of Man, raise the dead, and hold the last judgment. We note 5:25: "The hour cometh, [and now is, = the Evangelist's interpolation] when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God [variant reading: Son of Man] and they that hear shall live." In this statement we certainly find not only the content but also the wording of the futuristic eschatological expectation of Johannine Jewish Christianity, which the Evangelist, by his variations and additions, declares to be present and fulfilled in Jesus the Son of God. And if the Evangelist grounds Jesus' eschatological function as judge, which is already (for the Evangelist) being exercised in the present, in the statement "because he is the Son of Man" (5:27)

(see below), then the probative power of the Evangelist's statement lies in the Jewish-Christian belief that Jesus as the Son of Man who comes at the end of the age is the eschatological judge.

c) *Jn 11:24*. — To Jesus' words "Thy brother shall rise again" (11:23), Martha says to Jesus: "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (11:24). Martha's statement is not only a traditional confession and catechetical formula of primitive Christian faith but is also the faith of Johannine Jewish Christianity. For that reason the Evangelist has Martha express this confession in order that he may proclaim that this expectation has now been fulfilled by faith in Jesus as the Son of God come down from heaven.

d) *Jn 12:34*. — Already in 12:23 this discourse treats the exaltation of the Son of Man: "The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified." Then the Evangelist makes Jesus express the necessity of his exaltation: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself" (12:32). The multitude (whom the Evangelist has understand that by exaltation is meant Jesus' crucifixion or exit from the world) answers: "We have heard out of the law that the Christ abideth for ever: and how sayest thou, The Son of man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of man?" (12:34).

At this point we see the objection of the Jewish Christianity of the foundation document to the Evangelist's contention that the Jesus of the fourth decade is already the Son of Man expected in the eschatological future. The statement that "the Christ abideth for ever" is not—as ordinarily understood in the commentaries—to be explained from the Jewish standpoint, according to which eternity is expected for the Davidic Messiah based on the law or Scripture. On the contrary, it is an apparently shortened reproduction of the view of Johannine Jewish Christianity that Jesus, the Christ, will come at the end of the age as Son of Man from heaven to establish an eternal kingdom, according to Dan 7:13–14. Johannine Jewish Christianity probably modified the Jewish expectation of the eternity of the Messiah only insofar as it assigned the establishment of the eternal kingdom not to the historical Jesus but to Jesus returning as Son of Man. Johannine Jewish Christianity held that the historical Jesus, because of his crucifixion, could not already have been the Son of Man come down from heaven, because this Son of Man does not die any more but abides forever.

e) *Jn 14:3*. — "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." The small unit 14:1–3 belongs to the tradition used by the Evangelist and freshly interpreted by him in 14:4–26. This traditional unit is a part of the foundation document and clearly expresses the expectation of the parousia. Here the parousia appears in connection with the reception of the faithful and their being with Jesus forever, a motif also

known by the rest of the NT (cf. 1 Thess 4:13-18, where likewise the stress is on bringing in the faithful, culminating with "being ever with the Lord"). Our view that Jn 14:1-3 refers to the parousia and not to the reception of the individual disciple at death is verified by 14:22: "Judas (not Iscariot) saith unto him, Lord, what is come to pass that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?" Here the Evangelist (through Judas) expresses the traditional view of the parousia as a manifestation to the entire world. But in 14:23 the Evangelist has Jesus correct and reinterpret this view: "If a man love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him." As elsewhere, the Evangelist surpasses a Jewish-Christian affirmation with the proclamation that for those who believe in Jesus as Son of God this Jewish-Christian futuristic expectation is now being fulfilled, for the Father and Son are already coming to believers and dwelling with them (14:4-26).

2) In the foundation document the presence of salvation is not expressly mentioned but there are sufficient clues from which we may conclude that—like the rest of the NT—Johannine Jewish Christianity also understands the present as the time when salvation is breaking in. The present has saving significance because Jesus is the Messiah promised by God. Jesus as the prophet-Messiah is the fulfilment of the prophecies of Moses and the prophets (Jn 1:45). He it is who baptizes with the Holy Spirit (1:32-33)—the Spirit is the eschatological gift of salvation—and Jesus' activity in baptizing is carried on in the Jewish-Christian congregation of the foundation document (3:22-30), because this baptism is the indispensable requirement for entry into the kingdom of God (3:3-5). In the signs which Jesus works as the proof of his messiahship, the glory of God becomes visible (11:4a, 40), which is a promise of the eschatological time of salvation. Yet all of this is merely the breaking-in of salvation, whose complete realization comes only in the future, when Jesus appears as Son of Man.

#### PHASE 2: THE NEW JOHANNINE FAITH

A. SON-OF-GOD CHRISTOLOGY. — Jesus is the pre-existent Son of God who has come down from heaven. He is the Bringer of salvation whom the Father has sent. He who believes on Jesus' heavenly origin and divine sonship has salvation. He who does not believe is excluded from salvation. We do not know how this high Christology was arrived at within Johannine Christianity.

B. COMMUNITY. — The development from Messiah-Christology to Son-of-God Christology involved only a part of the Johannine Jewish-Christian community. Just as there was a Christological conflict between Johannine Jewish Christianity and Judaism, so there arose a fierce conflict between the adherents of the Messiah-Christology and those of



the Son-of-God Christology. Just as an independent Jewish-Christian fellowship arose as a consequence of its expulsion from the synagogue because these Jewish Christians regarded Jesus as the Mosaic Messiah, so a group within the Johannine Jewish Christianity withdrew – voluntarily or by pressure – because of their confession of Jesus as Son of God descended from heaven and constituted themselves a fellowship independent of the mother congregation and in Christological opposition to it.

C. GOSPEL. – Those who professed the new faith so interpreted the foundation document of Johannine Jewish Christianity (which formerly was the gospel of the innovators) as to bring it into line with their Son-of-God Christology by making a series of additions. Above all were added discourses of Jesus as well as occasional statements which corrected and adapted the representation of the foundation document. Since the Son-of-God Christology has long been regarded as the theological characteristic of our Jn, we may designate the man who edited and expanded the foundation document in accord with the higher Christology as “the Evangelist,” a man who was certainly a representative and leading personality among the followers of the new belief.

By revising the foundation document, the Evangelist sought to represent the new faith as the original which had been proclaimed by Jesus himself and which alone corresponds to God’s will. For this purpose the Evangelist projects the entire conflict with contemporary Jewish Christianity back into the time of Jesus. Thus the objections of Jewish Christianity against the new belief appear in the mouth of the unbelieving Jews in Jesus’ time. On the other hand, the Evangelist’s apology for the new faith appears as the proclamation of Jesus himself, who says only what God has commissioned him to say. The Evangelist’s method of retrojecting his own views is, of course, not new. Already the author of the foundation document had removed the conflict of Johannine Jewish Christianity with contemporary Judaism back to the time of Jesus. And in the rest of the NT, among the rabbis, and long before that in the OT, especially in Deuteronomy, this form of presentation was customary. Moreover, the Evangelist often says that the disciples or the Jews did not understand and that only now, after Jesus’ return to the Father and the sending of the Paraclete, is the correct understanding of the words and deeds of Jesus possible (cf. 8:27–28; 12:16; 13:7; 14:20, 26).

Naturally the Evangelist wants his edition of the entire gospel to be understood in the sense of his theological tendency. Therefore he places at the beginning of the foundation document the hymn to the Logos which he had already expanded (1:1–13). This prologue then determines the meaning of the whole gospel. The Evangelist follows the same purpose by expanding the final sentence of the foundation document (20:31 – “that ye may believe that Jesus is the Messiah”) to include the

saying about Jesus' divine sonship and the necessity for salvation of believing on him as the Son of God: "but these are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name" (20:31).

D. **ESCHATOLOGY.** — Everything which the Jewish Christianity of the foundation document expects in the eschatological future happens, according to the Evangelist, already in the present. In the person and proclamation of Jesus — or in the proclamation of the Evangelist and his congregation(s) about Jesus as the Son of God descending from heaven — the eschaton, with all its component parts, is conclusively present, not merely in its beginnings. And in the relation of men to Jesus and his message — belief or unbelief — occurs now the definitive consummation of the eschatological salvation and judgment. There is no more eschatological future; it is already all here now. By means of a few examples we shall illustrate the method and tendency of the Evangelist's eschatological preaching.

1) For the Evangelist, the parousia of Jesus as the Son of Man coming down from heaven and the related acts of the resurrection of the dead and of the last judgment are present events. The starting point for the Evangelist's proclamation of the presence of the eschaton is in many cases a more or less formal confession, or, more generally, a current futuristic eschatological view of the Jewish Christianity of the foundation document, according to which the eschatological events are expected only at the end of the world.

a) The presence of the parousia is already indirectly expressed in Jn 1:51. The Evangelist reproduces here more or less varied a formal confession of the Jewish Christianity of the foundation document (see under Phase 1). In the context of 1:35–50 the Evangelist wants to correct and surpass all previous statements of the foundation document about Jesus. Jesus is more than Messiah; he is the Son of Man, that is, he has come down from heaven. And the greater things which the disciples will see (1:50b) are, according to the Evangelist, no longer — as in the foundation document — the signs and other messianic deeds as confirmation of Jesus' messiahship, but the eschatological acts which Jesus accomplishes now as the Son of Man. That the Evangelist in 1:51 is thinking not only about the parousia but also about the eschatological resurrection of the dead and about the judgment — whereby Jesus proves himself as the Son of Man — is indicated by 5:20b–22, where these two acts are called "greater works" (5:20b), that is, greater than the healing of the sick on the Sabbath (5:17–20).

Whether and to what extent the Evangelist has changed the wording of the Jewish-Christian confession in 1:51 cannot be said with certainty. He possibly has suppressed the coming of the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven and also changed the function of the angels as the companions of

the Son of Man because there was nothing corresponding to that in the story of the historical Jesus. The Evangelist was satisfied to claim that Jesus is the Son of Man who has come down from heaven. Of course, the possibility is not to be excluded that Johannine Jewish Christianity had already in some features differentiated itself from other Christian tradition and had already spoken about the ascent and descent of the angels. But in any event the Evangelist asserts with his double "amen" that it is not the tradition of the Jewish Christianity of the foundation document which reproduces the true contents of faith, but it is only the new interpretation proclaimed by the Evangelist and put in Jesus' mouth which corresponds to Jesus' intention, and that therefore the traditional futuristic expectation has become present and actual.

b) Perhaps the Evangelist's present eschatology finds its most striking expression in 5:24-27. By inserting the words "and now is" (5:25) into what is obviously an already formulated confession of the Jewish Christianity of the foundation document, the Evangelist proclaims that the resurrection of the dead and the eschatological judgment which were expected only in the future are now taking place. He who hears the voice of Jesus as the Son of God (this title belongs to the Evangelist's new interpretation of the Jewish-Christian confession of the futuristic resurrection of the dead), that is, he who believes on Jesus as the Son of God who has descended from heaven, such a one now has the eschatological blessing of salvation (=life). With the double "amen" which introduces the sayings of 5:24, 25 the Evangelist wants to express most vividly that it is not the traditional futuristic eschatology of Johannine Jewish Christianity which corresponds to the intention of the teaching, work, and significance of Jesus, but only the Evangelist's present eschatology.

c) 11:24-27 is another key passage in which the Evangelist has Jesus proclaim the futuristic apocalyptic eschatology of the foundation document as present event. Again in 11:24, 27 we find confessional formulae of Johannine Jewish Christianity which the Evangelist corrects in the sense of his own Christology and eschatology by inserting "Son of God" in 11:27 and by adding 11:25-26. The introductory "amen" is missing this time. In its place appears Martha's concluding confession of Jesus as Son of God. When the Evangelist here has Jesus designate himself as "the resurrection and the life" (v. 25a), this means that for believers the resurrection which was expected on the day of judgment by Martha (=Jewish Christianity) is now occurring in the proclamation about Jesus. It also means that the salvific gift of eternal life expected at the end is likewise being allotted already, and not partially but in unsurpassable fulness. The cessation of earthly existence by physical death is without significance for him who, on the basis of faith in Jesus, has already traversed the eschaton and has obtained eternal life (11:25b, 26).

d) In a number of other places the Evangelist speaks directly or

indirectly of the eschatological judgment which occurs in the present in relation to the person of Jesus and to the preaching of Jesus' divine sonship, a judgment from which those who believe in Jesus are spared (Jn 3:17-18, 36; 8:12-29, 50-51; 12:27-36, 44-50; in 12:48 "in the last day" is secondary). We call special attention to 9:39, "And Jesus said, For judgment came I into this world, that they that see not may see, and that they that see may become blind." Directly before in v. 38 is the confession of the blind man who was healed: his confession of Jesus as Son of Man (cf. 9:35-38). From v. 39 it is clear that "the Son of Man" in 9:35-38 is not to be understood as a designation of Jesus' essence but only as an indication of Jesus' function as judge through whom the eschatological judgment of men is now taking place (cf. 9:40-41).

2) According to the Evangelist's eschatology, both eternal salvation and eternal judgment are present. The Evangelist's position is differentiated from the rest of the NT, which also knows of the presence or at least the dawning of salvation, in that for the Evangelist the *consummation* of salvation is present. Salvation is definitive salvation, not a preliminary stage of salvation which is consummated after death in another world, in the sense of futuristic eschatology. Salvation or judgment depends upon belief in Jesus' divine sonship: Jesus is the Son of the Father who has come down from heaven to bring eschatological salvation. Since this salvation is centered in the person and word of Jesus, we may refer to the Evangelist's eschatology as "personalized eschatology."

The Evangelist also knows Jesus as the "Son of Man," a term which he takes over from the Jewish Christianity of the foundation document. For the Evangelist, Jesus is the Son of Man because he has descended from heaven and has already effected the resurrection of the dead and final judgment, functions which Johannine Jewish Christianity expected the Son of Man to perform at the end of the world. Hence for the Evangelist a futuristic apocalyptic eschatology is an impossibility, for after the appearance of the Son of Man there can be no further eschatological events. All of the expectations which traditional eschatology reserved for the end-time appearance of the Son of Man have already been fulfilled, once and for all. There is therefore no futuristic parousia with resurrection of the dead and last judgment. If the parousia of Jesus were still expected, his first and real coming would be misunderstood. The present encounter with Jesus is already the arrival at the goal of the way (14:6), with no further consummation of salvation even after the death of the individual disciple.

Moreover, Jesus for the Evangelist is not merely an eschatological figure who prepares men for the coming of the kingdom, as in Johannine Jewish Christianity. Rather, Jesus as God's Son has life within himself, and therefore is not simply one who leads others to salvation; he

actually bears salvation himself: "For as the Father hath life in himself, even so gave he to the Son also to have life in himself" (5:26; cf. also 6:35, 40, 48-51a). Jesus brings definitive participation in the life of God.

#### PHASE 3: JOHANNINE DOCETISM

A. **DOCETIC CHRISTOLOGY.**—Since the Evangelist placed so much stress on proving Jesus' heavenly origin and divine sonship against the Jewish Christianity of the foundation document which took Jesus as a mere man, the impression could arise that Jesus was an exclusively heavenly being. Thus Docetists and other Christian Gnostics could appeal to the Evangelist as they on the basis of their Gnostic dualism rejected the humanity and corporeality of Jesus and declared he was divine and not human. Jesus' earthly appearance as a man was only an illusion. Because of Gnostic deprecation of the body, the Docetists denied the reality of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection, and thus also the necessity of these for salvation.

B. **COMMUNITY.**—Those Johannine congregations which recognized the Evangelist's "high" Christology constituted another community of Johannine Christians, who apparently went out from the older forms of faith (cf. 1 Jn 2:19). They established independent Docetic congregations and engaged in missionary activity (cf. 1 Jn 2:18-19; 4:1, 5; 2 Jn 7-11).

C. **GOSPEL.**—The Johannine Docetists regarded the Evangelist's revision of the foundation document as their book of faith. No Docetic stratum, however, was incorporated into Jn. Jn, as it left the Evangelist's hand, represents a point of departure, or even a stage, of the development toward Docetism.

D. **ESCHATOLOGY.**—Docetists, viewing the body as evil, denied a futuristic parousia, the resurrection of the body, the last judgment, and all futuristic apocalyptic events of a physical nature. They affirmed, however, a realized (present) eschatology.

#### PHASE 4: JOHANNINE ANTI-DOCETISM

A. **ANTI-DOCETIC CHRISTOLOGY.**—Jesus is the Son of God come in the flesh. He was really human and corporeal. The most precise expression of this Christology is found in Jn 1:14a: "and the Logos became flesh." It is the fourth and last phase of the Christological development within Johannine Christianity, insofar as we can sketch this development from the Johannine literature.

B. **COMMUNITY.**—This congregation clustered around the anti-Docetic Redactor (section C below) and probably did not follow the entire progressive theology of the Evangelist. The attitude of the anti-Docetic Redactor in respect to Christology and eschatology is best understood if he and his followers "from the beginning" formed a group within Johan-

nine Christianity which theologically represented a kind of intermediate station between Johannine Jewish Christianity and the progressive Christianity advocated by the Evangelist. Possibly this anti-Docetic group was a conservative wing within the Son-of-God Christology of the Evangelist, which was overwhelmed by the initial wave of enthusiasm which was set loose by this "high Christology" but later applied the brakes and introduced a counteraction.

C. GOSPEL.—The anti-Docetic Redactor laid hand to the Evangelist's gospel to oppose its Docetic implications. He made anti-Docetic insertions, which form the last of the three great Christological-eschatological strata in Jn (though there may be even later strata in Jn). From this anti-Docetic Redactor—or at least from his circle—stem 1-2 Jn, and 3 Jn probably belongs in this milieu. The Redactor not only stresses the humanity and corporeality—the flesh—of Jesus (cf. esp. Jn 1:14-18; 19:34-35; 1 Jn 4:2-3; 5:6; 2 Jn 7) but also expresses his views on a number of other questions which had become of pressing importance because of the Docetists' Gnostic dualism and their resulting anthropology and ethics.

The anti-Docetic Redactor, like the Evangelist, wanted the entire gospel to be understood from his point of view. Just as the Evangelist prefixed Jn 1:1-13, so the Redactor created a new beginning for the gospel by expanding the Evangelist's prologue with vv. 14-18 (incarnation of the Logos). Like the Evangelist, the Redactor also altered the ending of Jn, the Redactor adding 20:24-29, which has Thomas testify to the corporeality of the risen Christ. Beyond that, the Redactor would probably understand the designation "Jesus the Christ" (20:31), which in the foundation document is an expression of Jesus' messiahship, in an anti-Docetic or general anti-Gnostic sense (cf. esp. 1 Jn 2:22; 5:1; 4:2-3; also 1 Jn 1:3; 2:1; 3:23; 5:20).

D. ESCHATOLOGY.—The anti-Docetic eschatology has two characteristics. On the one hand, the Redactor expands the Evangelist's exclusively present eschatology so as to include once again futuristic, apocalyptic eschatology, with its anticipation of the parousia and other realistic end-time events. In this respect the Redactor resembles the traditional eschatology of the foundation document and thus may be said to return to the teaching which was "from the beginning" (1 Jn 1:1; 2:24; cf. 2:7, 27; 3:11). On the other hand, the presence of salvation and condemnation is retained. But present salvation for the Redactor requires not only faith in Jesus as the Son of God, as for the Evangelist, but also belief in Jesus' true humanity. But beyond faith one must also adopt a definite ethical and ecclesiastical behavior, especially good works, including above all the love of the brethren. The faithful must also avoid sins and "remain with us," that is, with the group for whom the Redactor is spokesman and whose Christological confession is to be affirmed.

1) We shall first examine several texts to illustrate the Redactor's use of such futuristic eschatology as part of his defense against Docetism:

a) *Jn* 5:28–29. — “Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, <sup>29</sup>and shall come forth, they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment.” As 5:25–27 is among the Evangelist's most striking texts of present eschatology, so 5:28–29 expresses most impressively the futuristic anti-Docetic eschatology of the Redactor. 5:28–29 is nothing other than a fresh interpretation of 5:25–26 in the sense of futuristic eschatology with a pronounced anti-Docetic accent, as is obvious from the variations of 5:28–29 over against 5:25–26. The purely futuristic aspect — which is at the same time anti-Docetic — is expressed by the future tense of the verbs and by the omission of “and now is” (5:25). We see also a marked anti-Docetic and futuristic aspect in the clear reference to the dead who are in the tombs and who come out of the tombs. The Redactor's explicitly physical reference here is in stark contrast to the Evangelist's reference to the spiritually “dead” (5:25).

The Redactor's judgment according to works is also anti-Docetic. At the basis of his “marvel not at this” (5:28) is the offense felt by Docetists, for whom there can be no resurrection of the body and no last judgment. Similar consternation on the part of the Docetists is expressed in 6:52, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” Likewise in 12:34b, “How sayest thou, The Son of Man must be lifted up?”

In 5:25–29, then, we have seen the Redactor at work correcting the work of the Evangelist, even as the latter had revised the traditional Jesus words of the foundation document. Each writer — the author of the foundation document, the Evangelist, and the Redactor — was convinced that he alone was reproducing the actual meaning of Jesus' words.

b) In *Jn* 6:39, 40, 44, 54 are references to the resurrection “on the last day.” References to the resurrection on the last day are also found in 6:57 (“he that eateth me, he also shall live because of me,” that is, through eating my flesh and drinking my blood) and 6:58 (“he that eateth this bread shall live forever”). These statements, indeed all of 6:51b–58, are added by the Redactor as part of his controversy with Docetists. This stress on the general resurrection of the dead on the last day also has Christological significance for the Redactor; for Jesus' bodily resurrection, which was denied by the Docetists, is included with the general resurrection. The Redactor in *Jn* 6 refers so often to the general resurrection because for him the eating of the flesh of the Son of Man, who in his flesh was raised from the dead, is the ground for the resurrection of believers to eternal life (cf. 6:54, 57b).

c) The Evangelist had spoken of the judging activity of Jesus' word in the present: “He that believeth on him [Son of God] is not judged; he that believeth not hath been judged already. . . .” (3:18). And again in 12:48a:

"He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my sayings, hath one that judgeth him." But at the conclusion of 12:48 the Redactor appends his proclamation of future eschatological judgment: "the word that I spoke, the same shall judge him in the last day" (12:48b).

d) Jn 21:22-23 expresses the expectation of Jesus' return at the parousia, but we are not certain whether Jn 21 stems from the Redactor or was added after his death by a still later hand.

e) As we have noted, the Johannine epistles stem from the Redactor or at least from his spiritual milieu. The Redactor's futuristic eschatology appears above all in 1 Jn 2:28 (parousia), 3:2-3 (hope for the future consummation of salvation), and 4:17 ("boldness in the day of judgment"). Hope for the parousia and for the futuristic consummation of salvation is also found in 1 Jn 2:18 and 4:3 (cf. 2 Jn 7-8), where the discourse concerns the activity of the Antichrist as already present (in the preachers of Docetic Christology). The appearance of the Antichrist directly before the parousia is presupposed as known. The traditional expectation of the end of the world is echoed in 1 Jn 2:17 (cf. also 2:8), the futuristic consummation of salvation in 2 Jn 8, and perhaps also in 2 Jn 3.

2) The present eschatology which the Evangelist—and the Docetists within Johannine Christianity—proclaimed has in many places been reinterpreted by the Redactor in his anti-Docetic struggle in so far as he demands that his Docetic opponents prove their possession of salvation by correct Christology, ethics, and ecclesiastical behavior.

a) The denial of Jesus' divine sonship in 1 Jn probably no longer comes from the Jewish Christianity of the foundation document but is a solution of the Christological problem based upon Gnostic dualism. The Redactor denies the claim of the Docetists to present possession of salvation: they have no fellowship with God (1 Jn 2:23; 3:23; 4:15); they make God a liar (1 Jn 5:10); they do not have life (1 Jn 5:12); they are the Antichrist (1 Jn 2:22).

In respect to Christology, the Redactor demands not only confession of Jesus' divine sonship but also explicit confession of Jesus' flesh (=his true humanity). He who really has the Spirit of God—an expression of the present possession of salvation—"confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh" (1 Jn 4:2), "and every spirit that confesseth not Jesus [as true man] is not of God" (4:3; 2 Jn 7-9) and does not have the spirit of truth in him (1 Jn 5:6-9). A specific form of the confession of Jesus' true humanity is the belief in the Eucharist as Jesus' flesh and blood (Jn 6:51b-58); he who does not believe that and does not receive the Eucharist in this belief does not have life in him (6:53).

b) There is no direct reference to ethical libertinism on the part of Docetists and other Gnostics within Johannine Christianity. But from the Redactor's repeated ethical demands we may conclude that the



Docetists, in consciousness of their election to salvation and of their final possession of salvation, felt themselves more or less exalted above the commands. He who, like the Docetists, already has the knowledge of God, lives in fellowship with God, and has obtained complete salvation, has no more sin. The Redactor, on the contrary, proclaims there is sin. He who claims sinlessness for himself deceives himself, the truth is not in him, and he makes God a liar (1 Jn 1:8-10).

On the other hand, the Redactor admonishes believers to live without sin (1 Jn 2:1; 3:4-9; 5:18), which consists in doing that which the Docetists do not do: doing righteousness (1 Jn 3:7) and good works (Jn 3:19-21; 15:1-8; 3 Jn 11), walking in the light (1 Jn 1:6-7; cf. Jn 3:19-21), keeping oneself separate from the world and its lust (1 Jn 2:15-17), keeping the commands, especially the command to love the brethren (1 Jn 2:7-11; 3:10-18, 23b; 4:7-12, 16, 19-21; 5:1-2; cf. also the texts which stem from the Redactor: Jn 13:12-17, 34-35; 15:12-13, 17). Therein alone is proof that one has fellowship with God (1 Jn 1:6), whether he has known God (1 Jn 2:3-4; 4:7-8), whether he is in God and/or God in him (1 Jn 2:5; 4:12, 13, 15-16), whether he is begotten of God or the devil (1 Jn 3:8-10; 4:7; 5:4, 18; cf. 3 Jn 11), whether he is in Jesus or in the Son of God and Jesus in him (Jn 15:1-7, 10; 1 Jn 3:24).

We shall hardly go wrong in supposing that the Redactor is here using formulations with which the Docetists and other Gnostics within the Johannine communities were expressing their conviction that they were the elect who possessed salvation. The same or similar expressions appear already in Jn as an expression of election to salvation and of possession of salvation for those who believe on Jesus as the Son of God (cf. Jn 1:13—born of God=Jn 3:3, 5, 7, 8—born from above or from the Spirit); 8:12 (he who believes on Jesus is in the light; likewise 12:46); 8:38-47 (being children of God or of the devil manifests itself in belief in Jesus or in the rejection of Jesus); 8:54-55 (knowledge of God and seeing God through faith in Jesus; cf. also 14:7-11).

c) Over against the Docetists' decided consciousness of election and salvation, which supposedly manifested itself in arrogance, the anti-Docetic Redactor places a no less strong self-consciousness of election and possession of salvation: "Ye have an anointing from the Holy One, and ye know all things" (1 Jn 2:20); "Ye need not that anyone teach you" (1 Jn 2:27); we have "fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ," and you also have this fellowship if you hear us (cf. 1 Jn 1:3). Thus the Redactor speaks again and again to the congregation (cf. also 1 Jn 1:5-7; 2:3-6, 12-17; 5:13, 18-20).

Moreover, the Redactor advances the claim to exclusive salvation and thus outdoes the Gnostic proclamation. There is salvation only "with us." For "we are children of God"; "we are from God." To know God (=to possess salvation) means to know and to hear us; "he who is not of God

heareth us not" (1 Jn 3:1; 4:6), an anticipation of the later proposition that "outside the Church is no salvation." "To be of God" and "to have the Spirit of God" (Jn 4:1-3) is equivalent to "to be of us" and "to belong to us" (1 Jn 2:19). It proves itself by abiding in our doctrine (1 Jn 2:24-27; 2 Jn 7-10; cf. 1 Jn 2:28), by abiding in our belief (cf. 1 Jn 3:23; 4:1-6, 7-16; 5:1-13, 20), above all by believing in Jesus' true humanity (1 Jn 4:2-3; 5:6-8; 2 Jn 7)—or, in short, by continuing "with us" (1 Jn 2:19).

#### CONCLUSION

In view of these four stages of Christological-eschatological development and three strata of deposits in Jn, there can be no thought of a unity within Johannine Christianity, neither in belief (because the content of the Christological-eschatological confessions of the four communities was so different) nor as a fellowship (because each group accused the other of heresy and of being from the devil: Jn 8:42-48 and 10:33, passages to be understood from the standpoint of the Evangelist's dispute with the Jewish Christianity of the foundation document; 1 Jn 2:18-23; 3:8-10; 4:1-6; 2 Jn 7). Common to these groups is only their origin from the Jewish Christianity of the foundation document and their rejection of Judaism.

Likewise, we cannot speak of a literary or theological unity of Jn, which is a product of successive new interpretations and corrections of the older faiths, and which therefore reflects the disharmony and strife within the Johannine communities. We must not forget that before the Evangelist and the Redactor each altered the gospel as it came to him, there was another gospel, the foundation document, with its own message, theology, and tendency, which were often contrary to those of the later expansions. The exegete must interpret this original theology according to its differences from the respective theologies of the Evangelist and of the Redactor instead of seeking to harmonize them. Only in this manner can the theological profile of each author and community be truly drawn.

The fact that Johannine Christianity is a complex and disharmonious entity and that these differences have left their literary deposits in Jn must also be taken into account when one investigates individual concepts and themes, such as glory, miracles, witness, faith, Christology, and eschatology. When this method is not followed, as unfortunately is the case with most studies, the results are distorted, even though some pertinent but isolated observations may be made. Thus there is nothing left but to redo these investigations. In other words, each theme must be approached from the point of view of the stratum within which it is found, as we have sought to do with eschatology in this essay.

Jn's contradictory eschatological statements certainly do not simplify our present-day proclamation of the eschatological hope. If one does not

wish to make matters too difficult, he can start with the standpoint of the anti-Docetic Redactor as the last reviser of eschatology in Jn. With this "both-and" eschatology he not only will do justice to the liturgical texts with which his hearers are more or less acquainted, but he certainly will gain the approval of that conservative mentality which likes to hear most of all that which it already knows and believes.

But he who will not or cannot make the answer so easy should not hesitate to set forth frankly the historical state of affairs. From such an explanation it will become evident that all strata of Jn have to do with conceptions of the Johannine universe of discourse and therefore with conceptions which rest upon a world picture and understanding of the world which for us is antiquated. The Evangelist, in contrast to the tradition of Jewish Christianity, broke through the old myth of the end as a cosmic catastrophe. Because of this break-through we today in eschatological preaching are not dependent upon the "how" of the end but only upon its "thatness." The content of this "thatness," however, is always the same in the entire NT and OT Jewish preaching— including Jn in all its layers— namely, fellowship with God and the consummation of man with God. At the end stands God, who also was in the beginning. And man is still there at the end, but only in his relationship to God. This eschatological confrontation with God and consummation in God occurs, according to the Evangelist, even now in belief in Jesus as the Son of God. This exclusively present eschatology of the Evangelist, however, never became the determining one either in Johannine Christianity or in the Church at large. It is, like the entire theology of the Evangelist, fascinating in its one-sidedness, but also dangerous. The anti-Docetic Redactor with his supplements was concerned for a proper balance, and without his labors the gospel as it left the hands of the Evangelist would have become a Gnostic gospel. Some groups yet today seek to make this eschatology their own, not in the form of an exclusively present eschatology, but with the erroneous understanding that the Evangelist proclaimed an individualistic, futuristic eschatology.

#### EVALUATION

Although we may want to be cautious about Richter's occasional attempts to tell us down to the half verse what belongs to which stratum, his analysis does help us to understand a number of difficulties which have long puzzled interpreters of Jn: the mixture of present and future eschatologies; the baffling statements about salvation by faith and by works; and the varying Christologies.

By recognizing an anti-Docetic element in the Johannine literature, Richter is following a tradition of interpretation as old as Irenaeus. Yet, in assigning an anti-Docetic motif to a late stage in the composition of

Jn, he is in line with a number of modern critics.<sup>9</sup> Neither is Richter alone in seeing a polemic against the John the Baptist sect as a minor tone,<sup>10</sup> nor in finding a signs-source, a narrative of the Passion and Resurrection, and possibly a discourse-source in Jn.<sup>11</sup> In fact, Richter's results are confirmed in a number of ways by current Johannine studies.<sup>12</sup> The following are some of "the major accomplishments of recent years":<sup>13</sup>

The efforts of critical study have shown quite decisively that the fourth Gospel incorporates a body of traditional material and was composed over a period of years in what might have been a rather complex process. At the very least, the Gospel represents the result of the merging of a number of sources and traditions with the creative work of the Evangelist, and very likely there were still further stages before the document reached the form in which it comes to us. The composition of the Gospel was a process involving a number of persons and historical situations, and that insight is of monumental importance. The thought of the Evangelist may be found superimposed upon the religious thought of his source-tradition materials, and his particular contributions must be detected and articulated in relationship with those of this tradition.

The Gospel is a community's document. The theology of every stratum of the Gospel relates to the community of faith; it addresses the needs of that community at that moment. The fourth Gospel must then be viewed as an occasional writing. It was produced (and reproduced) for a specific occasion, and its thought is sustained in the atmosphere of that occasion and nowhere else. It is incumbent upon the reader to know as much about that occasion as possible. This may indeed be the primal ingredient for a grasp of the religious thought of the Gospel of John, so long eluding us.

The ideas of the Gospel must be placed against a broadly Jewish background,

<sup>9</sup> Robert Kysar, *The Fourth Evangelist and His Gospel: An Examination of Contemporary Scholarship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1975) 159.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Kysar, *Fourth Evangelist* 159.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 15-17.

<sup>12</sup> Like Richter, Wayne A. Meeks, "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism," *JBL* 91 (1972) 44-72, uses Christology as a clue to locate the kind of milieu in which the Johannine materials were formed. Meeks's analysis of the motif of the ascending-descending Son of Man enables him to identify a community which distinguished itself over against both the sect of John the Baptist and a strong synagogue from which it was traumatically expelled. As its developing Christological claims were resulting in increasing isolation from and hostility toward the world, the Johannine community suffered conflicts and schisms, including a Docetic one. Jn is thus not the product of "a solitary genius" but is as unthinkable apart from this kind of community as the commentary on Habakkuk without the Qumran sect. D. Moody Smith, Jr., "Johannine Christianity: Some Reflections on Its Character and Delineation," *NTS* 21 (1975) 222-48, also finds within the Johannine community a sharp separation from the world. The Johannine milieu is a complex one: a polemical situation within the synagogue and later against the synagogue, a process also involving sectarian Judaism, incipient Gnosticism, and charismatic prophecy.

<sup>13</sup> Condensed from Kysar, *Fourth Evangelist* 267-75.

if they are to be rightly comprehended. [The immediate setting of the Gospel] consists of a strained and hostile relationship between the Jewish and Christian communities. It may well be that the actual expulsion of the Christians from the local synagogue was the occasion for the Evangelist's specific motivation to write.

Research on the religious thought of the Gospel demonstrates that it is an innovative and sophisticated mode of Christian thought radically Christocentric in all its expressions.

The recent criticism of the Gospel attests fully to the fact that the Johannine community is a distinctive form of early Christian life and thought. The Johannine community stood in a separate and distinct relationship with other forms of early Christianity. Therefore, we must recognize (again) the variety of forms of Christianity existent in the first century, and remove once and for all any remnant of the concept of a single, harmonious Christian church in this era.

Richter's study thus fits remarkably well with Kysar's summation of the results of recent Johannine research. Richter himself claimed that his interpretation was gaining ground, as evidenced by the forthcoming commentaries of E. Haenchen, J. Becker,<sup>14</sup> and H. Thyen. But where Richter has broken new ground—and there is only a hint in Kysar's survey of this possibility—<sup>15</sup> is by showing that not only was there no single, harmonious church in the first century but that there were four phases of Johannine Christianity with four competing Christologies, four conflicting eschatologies, four opposing communities, and three contradictory gospels, each claiming to present the only true meaning of Jesus and his message. If Richter is right, not even in the Johannine communities do we find "the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3).

Such findings are understandably disconcerting to those who are nostalgic for the supposed ideal unity and harmony of the earliest church and for all who would prefer the fourth Gospel not to be a compilation of polemical propaganda tracts but rather an accurate record of events as they actually occurred, without distortion of the facts. Nor are Richter's conclusions reassuring to those who now dis-

<sup>14</sup> An illustration of Jürgen Becker's approach is found in his "Die Abschiedsreden Jesu im Johannesevangelium," *ZNW* 61 (1970) 215-46. By showing the various strata of the farewell discourses in Jn 13:31-16:33, he lays bare a cross section of the theological history of the Johannine community. The Evangelist edited the already existing tradition of the community, but during and after his time there were prophets, with their own theologies and shifts of emphasis, whose voices are also heard in Jn.

<sup>15</sup> In his references to Wilhelm Wilkens, *Die Entstehungsgeschichte des vierten Evangeliums* (Zollikon: Evangelischer Verlag, 1958). Wilkens sees the Evangelist struggling against Docetism within his own community, but, contrary to Richter, attributes the whole process of composition (=three stages, all by the Evangelist) to a mounting polemic against Docetism. Richter avoids Wilkens' errors of supposing that only the anti-Docetic factor is sufficient to explain the whole development of Jn, thereby putting more weight on the anti-Docetic features of Jn than they can bear. Cf. Kysar, *Fourth Evangelist* 45, 77-79.

cover that what they have since childhood regarded as some of the most precious words of Scripture direct from John the Baptist, Jesus, and Thomas are not from these beloved figures of sacred history at all but are in reality deposits of later conflicts among rival Johannine congregations.<sup>16</sup> Neither will many be pleased with Richter's contention that what remains valid of the various strata of Johannine eschatological proclamation was already there in Judaism, namely, fellowship with God and the consummation of man with God.

Richter's thesis, with all of the problems it raises for faith today, may or may not stand the test of time. Whatever the verdict of the experts on Jn may be, those of us who profess no special competence in this area may find Richter's proposals as convincing as any and far more stimulating than most. Some of us may even accept them as the best working hypothesis until something better comes along. And there may perchance arise someone with sufficient skill and insight to ground Richter's theories so thoroughly that they will become the dominant interpretation of Jn.

Yet the fate of Richter's views is of comparatively minor import. What is significant is the progress in Roman Catholic biblical studies reflected by his and other papers in the Vögtle *Schüलगabe*. In 1907 the papal Biblical Commission declared that the Apostle John and no other was the author of the fourth Gospel. Wikenhauser (died 1960) with caution advanced higher criticism as far as he could in his day. Vögtle carried on in the spirit of his teacher's reverence for truth, and at the price of much abuse and suffering championed the unrestricted application of the scientific method to Scripture. And now Vögtle's students are second to none anywhere in the rigorous use of the critical approach, taking full and responsible advantage of the opportunity afforded by Vatican II to express scholarly opinions openly, with relative freedom from fear of reprisal.

The upshot of it all may be this: the new look in exegesis is giving a new look to Jn in particular and to Scripture as a whole, which must in turn give Christianity itself a new look — if we are bold enough to follow the precedents set by the authors of Jn, who gave successive new interpretations to older forms of faith, and if unflinching pursuit of truth, freedom, honesty, and consistency prevail.

<sup>16</sup> The idea that the words spoken in Jn are by and large unauthentic is, of course, not new. Schweitzer, e.g., finds that the unknown author, unable to read his own interpretation into Jesus' parables and discussions with the scribes, supplied the missing material which makes Jesus appear as the Logos-Christ and preach "redemption through the working of the Spirit which was to be experienced by union with Himself" ("Hellenization" 350). Perhaps no one has ever expressed it more sharply than Hugh J. Schonfield, *Those Incredible Christians* (New York: Bantam, 1969) 271-272: "When the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel says, 'I and my Father are one', he is right, though not in the sense the Evangelist intended: he is one with John his creator and only-begotten."