

THE ORIGIN OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL

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THE purpose of this paper is to examine the three ancient statements of the purpose of the gospel of John, which come from the churches of Alexandria, Rome, and perhaps Ephesus, and to propose an alternative interpretation. It is often suggested that "patristic tradition" is likely to be more accurate than modern theories because the fathers lived nearer the events of New Testament times than we do. Professor Cadbury has examined the "external tradition" in regard to Luke-Acts in a valuable chapter in *The Beginnings of Christianity*¹ and has shown that the traditional statements "can be largely explained as inferences from the text." Internal evidence created external evidence. The situation in regard to the gospel of John is not quite the same. Here the debates over authorship and purpose were more vigorous, and the theories were wilder. At the same time, these theories require careful examination.

The first statement comes from Alexandria, where Clement, relying on the "tradition" of certain elders before him, stresses the positive purpose of the evangelist.² John knew that "corporeal events" had been set forth in the earlier gospels, and "inspired by the Spirit wrote a spiritual gospel." The idea that the evangelists were inspired by the Spirit is fairly common toward the end of the second century,³ and indeed Theophilus of Antioch (*Ad Autol.* ii. 22) speaks explicitly of the inspiration of the evangelist John, as does the Muratorian fragment (lines

¹ F. J. F. Jackson—K. Lake, *The Beginnings of Christianity* II (London, 1922), 209-64.

² *Hypotyposes*, in Eusebius, *H. E.* vi. 14. 7.

³ W. Sanday, *Inspiration* (London, 1893), 31-33.

10–20). But what is a “spiritual gospel”? To Clement this phrase implies the distinction between the inadequate knowledge which comes through sense perception and the true knowledge of “intelligible objects” which comes through the mind or spirit alone (cf. *Strom.* v. 7. 4–5). The true gnostic does not know Jesus by his “flesh” but by the power which comes from the Father (*Strom.* vi. 132. 4). “We know that the Savior does not speak to his disciples in a human manner, but that he gives them the teachings of a divine and mystical wisdom” (*Quis dives salv.* 5, iii. 163 St.).⁴ According to Clement, the simpler the sayings look the more carefully they must be searched for their secret meaning; they were simplified by the Lord for the disciples.⁵ What Clement means by “spiritual” is really “gnostic.” The gospel of John contains the secret teaching of Jesus.

Approximately the same interpretation is given by Origen in his commentary on the gospel. None of the other evangelists manifested so clearly the divinity of Jesus as John did.⁶ Behind the letter of all of them lies the “eternal gospel” (Rev 14 6), that is to say, the “spiritual gospel.”⁷ And in leading men to Christ we must first preach the “corporeal gospel” and then go on to heavenly wisdom.⁸ In this way the discrepancies between the gospels can be overcome. The gospels are not meant to be understood in their literal meaning. If we cannot hold both the literal and the spiritual meaning, we must choose the spiritual.⁹ And since God cannot literally be limited to any particular place or to any particular actions at particular times, the inner meaning of the gospels is what matters.¹⁰

⁴ Cf. T. Camelot, *Foi et gnose . . . chez Clément d'Alexandrie* (Paris, 1945), 81 f.

⁵ A different idea is presented in *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 66 (p. 82 Casey); the apostles were taught first “typically and mystically,” then “parabolically and enigmatically,” finally “plainly and clearly in private.” Both theories disagree with Justin’s statement that the sayings of Jesus were brief and concise because he was not a sophist (*Apol.* i. 14. 4; cf. Aristides, *Rhet.* i. 11. 2, p. 500 Spengel: brevity and conciseness used when one does not care about style but is concerned with the subject).

⁶ *In Ioh. comm.* i. 4 (p. 8:9 Preuschen).

⁷ *Ibid.*, i. 7 (p. 12:12).

⁸ *Ibid.*, i. 7 (p. 13:4).

⁹ *Ibid.*, x. 5 (p. 175:17).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, x. 4 (p. 174).

This explanation of the divergence between John and the synoptics was obviously useful in a school which valued allegorical interpretation highly. At the same time, it casts little light on whatever the original purpose of John may have been, for it assumes that the gospel is a book which speaks directly to the believer, whatever century he lives in; his historical circumstances, like its historical circumstances, are irrelevant.

Another description of the origin of the gospel comes from Gaius of Rome, a learned presbyter who was contemporary with Hippolytus. His arguments are reported by Epiphanius, who does not mention his name but ascribes them to a group called (first by Epiphanius?) the “Alogi,” those who lack both intelligence and the Logos-doctrine. He regarded the Fourth Gospel as pseudonymous because of its disagreements with the synoptics (Epiphanius, *Pan. haer.* li. 18. 1), and ascribed both it and the apocalypse to a certain Cerinthus (*ibid.*, li. 3. 6).¹¹ Why did he do so? He was a militant opponent of the Montanists, and attacked them for “composing new scriptures” (Eusebius, *H. E.* vi. 20. 3); and the Montanists looked for an earthly kingdom of God at Pepuza in Asia Minor and regarded the Paraclete as at work in their New Prophecy. In an anti-Montanist work Gaius ascribed the apocalypse to Cerinthus, and it was probably in the same work that he also ascribed the gospel to him. But Gaius need not have invented his own arguments against the gospel. Irenaeus, writing around 180, speaks of those who drive out the gospel and the prophetic Spirit as well.¹² These people are presumably earlier “Alogi.” Whatever the origin of Gaius’ views may be, Epiphanius is right when he points out the absurdity of Gaius’ theory, at least as far as the gospel is concerned. Its Christology and that of Cerinthus, as we shall see, are entirely different.

Gaius’ explanation of the origin of the gospel as a forgery is not especially attractive. It has the merit, however, of trying

¹¹ On the correspondence of Gaius’ arguments to those of the “Alogi” cf. P. de Labriolle, *Les sources de l'histoire du montanisme* (Paris, 1913), lxxiii f.

¹² *Adv. haer.* iii. 11. 9 (p. 51 Harvey). At the same time Irenaeus is no Montanist; cf. *Adv. haer.* iv. 33. 6 (p. 260).

to set the book in some historical context. It does not seek to raise the gospel above the level of history. Unfortunately it is quite erroneous.

A third description of the purpose of the evangelist is given by Irenaeus, who states that John wanted to take away the error of Cerinthus by the proclamation of the gospel (*Adv. haer.* iii. 11. 1, p. 40). In a chronological list of the gospels he states that John the disciple of the Lord "published" the gospel at Ephesus after the other three had appeared (*Adv. haer.* iii. 1. 2, p. 6). Another indication of John's purpose is given in a strange comparison, perhaps ultimately derived from Enoch (18:1-3),¹³ of the four gospels to the four regions of the world and the four principal winds and the four pillars of the world. The comparison continues with an analogy between the gospels and the four "faces" of the cherubim in Ezekiel 1 10 (but Irenaeus quotes from Rev 4 7).¹⁴ The lion, the first animal in the list, is active, authoritative, and royal; this symbolizes the gospel of John, which describes the authoritative, active and glorious generation of the Logos.

The basic historical statement of Irenaeus makes the gospel of John a work against Cerinthus. It is also, he says, anti-Nicolaitan; but this remark may be disregarded since it is clearly based on Rev 2 6 and 15, and since Irenaeus equally clearly knew nothing about the Nicolaitans (cf. *Adv. haer.* i. 26. 3, p. 214). In order to determine the correctness of his opinion we must next examine what little evidence we have concerning Cerinthus. A preliminary question concerns the place where he lived. Irenaeus (*Adv. haer.* i. 26. 1, p. 211) says that he lived in Asia, and tells a story about his being in Ephesus (iii. 3. 4, p. 13). On the other hand, it has sometimes been inferred from a statement in Hippolytus (*Ref.* vii. 33. 1) that he lived in Egypt. What Hippolytus says, however, is not that he lived in Egypt but that he was "trained in the

¹³ C. Taylor, *Sayings of the Jewish Fathers* (Cambridge, 1897), 135.

¹⁴ *Adv. haer.* iii. 11. 8 (pp. 47-48). At a later date the symbols of John and Mark (eagle) are exchanged; thus Jerome has to alter the original commentary of Victorinus on the apocalypse (CSEL 49, pp. 50:7 and 51:9 Hauseleiter).

education of the Egyptians." This implies nothing about Egypt but can mean that he had a normal encyclical education, for which Jewish and Christian writers sometimes use the expression "the wisdom of the Egyptians."¹⁵ On the other hand, in Hippolytus it has a special meaning. It refers to Greek learning as a whole, which according to Plato in the *Timaeus* was derived from the priests of Egypt. Hippolytus traces Valentinianism to Pythagoras and thence back to Egypt, referring to the account in the *Timaeus* as he does so.¹⁶

The idea of the Egyptian origin of Greek *paideia* was widespread in the Hellenistic-Roman period. Diodorus Siculus, *Bibl.* i. 96-98, gives a long list of historical and mythological characters who were instructed in Egypt; Plutarch, *De Iside* 10, lists philosophers and legislators (cf. the list in G. Parthey's edition [Berlin, 1850], 183-86); Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* i. 69. 1-3) gives names of Greeks and their Egyptian teachers. On the imagined superiority of oriental wisdom cf. A. J. Festugière, *La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste I* (Paris, 1944), 19-44.

Thus we may confidently accept Irenaeus' statement that Cerinthus lived in Asia. Our discussion answers the objection raised by K. Lake¹⁷ because of the statement of Hippolytus.

Our principal sources of information about Cerinthus are these:

- (1) Irenaeus (*Adv. haer.* i. 26. 1, iii. 3. 4), used by Hippolytus (*Ref.* vii. 33), used to some extent by Epiphanius (*Pan. haer.* xxviii);
- (2) Gaius of Rome (in Eusebius, *H. E.* iii. 28. 2), used by Dionysius of Alexandria (in Eusebius, *H. E.* vii. 25. 1-3);
- (3) *Epistula Apostolorum* 1, 7 (pp. 485, 487 M. R. James).

These sources require careful evaluation. The *Epistula Apostolorum* simply mentions Cerinthus along with Simon Magus as a "false apostle" and an "enemy of our Lord Jesus Christ." It cannot be shown (C. Schmidt *contra*) that this juxtaposition is based on their common docetism, for as we shall see Cerinthus

¹⁵ Cf. Philo, *Mos.* i. 23-24; Acts 7 22 (with Lake and Cadbury's reference to Lucian, *Philops.* 34 to suggest that the expression was proverbial).

¹⁶ *Ref.* vi. 22. 1 (p. 149:15 Wendland); cf. *Ref.* vii. praef. 7 (p. 190:8).

¹⁷ *HTR* 14 (1921), 25-26. We also remove a possible ground for placing the *Epistula Apostolorum* in Egypt rather than in Asia.

was not exactly a docetist. Perhaps they are mentioned together simply because of their contemporary prominence. When we consider the work of Gaius of Rome, we must bear in mind that in his opinion Cerinthus wrote the apocalypse and gospel of John. Therefore when he describes the doctrine of Cerinthus as identical with that of the apocalypse he is simply describing the apocalypse. He provides us with no new evidence concerning the teaching of Cerinthus. Our only problem is to determine whether or not Cerinthus really used the apocalypse. His Christology, which we shall presently consider, does not seem to agree with the chiliasm of the apocalypse; but such a combination may have seemed more satisfactory to ancient Christians than it does to us. After all, the gospel and the apocalypse were ascribed to the same writer. At the same time, there is no more reason to accept Gaius' theories about the apocalypse than to accept his views about the gospel. The question of positive evidence does not appear to have concerned him. If then we reject the theories of Gaius as simply anti-Montanist propaganda we are left with only Irenaeus and his followers.

In *Adversus haereses* i. 23–27 Irenaeus is following some older anti-heretical compilation.¹⁸ From it he takes over the following description:

The world was not made by the first God but by some power separate from him and distinct from the principality above all and ignorant of the God above all. Jesus was not born of a virgin but was the son of Joseph and Mary just as all other men are born. He excelled them in righteousness, prudence, and wisdom. After his baptism there descended on him, from the authority¹⁹ above all, the Christ in the form of a dove; then he proclaimed the unknown Father and performed miracles. At the end the Christ again flew away from Jesus, and Jesus suffered and was raised, while the Christ remained impassible, since it was spiritual.

According to Irenaeus' source Cerinthus' view of creation was not unique; it had already been taught by Simon, Menander,

¹⁸ R. A. Lipsius, *Zur Quellenkritik des Epiphanius* (Vienna, 1865), 52.

¹⁹ The word *ἀθροῦν* is used by Hippolytus (*Ref.* vii. 28. 2, 33.2; x. 21. 1, 3) in describing the doctrines of Saturnilus and Cerinthus; it is also used in *Corp. Herm.* i. 2 (p. 7; cf. n. 5, p. 9).

Saturnilus, Basilides and Carpocrates that the world was not made by the highest God. Carpocrates had also taught that Jesus was the son of Joseph. Basilides had taught that Simon of Cyrene was really crucified (a literalistic reading of Mark 15 21–25?), while Jesus, taking the form of Simon, ridiculed those who were crucifying Simon. But for Basilides there is no doctrine of a "spiritual Christ." This we find among the Ophites, whose teaching on this point is very close to that of Cerinthus (Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* i. 30. 13, p. 239 Harvey). Indeed, Bardy²⁰ has argued that the Ophite doctrine has been erroneously ascribed to Cerinthus; but since his principal grounds for this opinion are to be found in acceptance of Gaius' account of Cerinthus, we need not seek to deny that both groups held the same view.

The separation of the highest God from the world is common in the semi-philosophical theology of the later second century, although not among orthodox Platonists.²¹ We encounter it in the Christian heretics mentioned by Irenaeus, as well as in Valentinus and Marcion of Pontus.²² In non-Christian circles it is espoused by the eclectic Neopythagorean Numenius (Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* xi. 18. 6). In *Corpus Hermeticum* xiv. 8 (p. 225 Nock-Festugière) the doctrine is rejected.

The assertion that Jesus was the son of Joseph and Mary is found among the Ebionites. The earliest witness to their views is Justin (*Dia.* 48, p. 164 Otto).²³ But the same opinion is expressed in Mark 6 3 (reading, "the son of the carpenter" with P 45 and some minuscules, including the Ferrar group²⁴), Matt. 13 55, Luke 4 22, and John 6 42. In each of these cases the idea is expressed in the form of a question asked by the Jews; but in John 1 45 it is a statement ascribed to Philip, a disciple of

²⁰ *Revue biblique* 30 (1921), 344–73.

²¹ R. E. Witt, *Albinus and the History of Middle Platonism* (Cambridge, 1937), 124.

²² A. V. Harnack, *Marcion: das Evangelium vom fremden Gott* (ed. 2, Leipzig, 1924), 265*–270*, 274*–277*.

²³ Other testimonies in H. J. Schoeps, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judentums* (Tübingen, 1949), 73 n. 2.

²⁴ Cf. E. Klostermann, *Das Markusevangelium* (ed. 3, Tübingen, 1936), 55.

Jesus. Such passages provide the basis for Cerinthus' statement. However, if we search for a single New Testament passage which might have served as a stepping-stone for his view, we shall find it in Luke 2 40-52, which contains two references to the parents of Jesus and one to his father, and begins and ends with descriptions of his growth in wisdom, age and grace. This passage was later employed by Ebionites and dynamistic monarchians to promote their view that Jesus advanced in goodness.²⁵

The idea that it was the Christ which came down on Jesus in the form of a dove may possibly be due to the "western" text of Luke 3 22: "You are my Son; today I have begotten you." It may also be related to the statement of the Baptist in John 1 32-33. But the idea that the Christ was impassible, because spiritual, is based on Hellenistic popular philosophy. Anything which is divine is by definition impassible because the divine cannot suffer alteration.²⁶

Cerinthus agrees with the gospels in stating that Jesus' proclamation began only after his baptism, and he agrees with them (against apocryphal infancy-gospels) that Jesus' miracles also began then. The same opinion is expressed by orthodox writers, for example Melito of Sardis (fr. 6 Otto, p. 415), although Melito says that Jesus was concealing his divinity before his baptism.

The flight of the Christ is a singular idea, but it may have been suggested to Cerinthus by such a passage as Luke 23 46, "Into thy hands I commit my spirit." He would understand this spirit as the same as the one which had come down at Jesus' baptism. A similar interpretation is clearly expressed in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* xvi. 1, where a dove comes out of Polycarp's body at his death. Still more singular is the combination of the resurrection of the man Jesus with this dis-

²⁵ Eusebius, *H. E.* iii. 27. 2; cf. Hippolytus, *Ref.* vii. 35. 2; also *HTR* 43, 195.

²⁶ See a long series of arguments based on this point in Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. math.* ix. 137-73. The "spiritual Christ" is also found in the teaching of the learned Theodotus of Byzantium, on whom cf. R. Walzer, *Galen on Jews and Christians* (Oxford, 1949), 75-86.

appearance of the Christ. It affords Epiphanius an opportunity for remarkable confusion. First he says that according to Cerinthus Jesus suffered and was raised (*Pan. haer.* xxviii. 1. 7); then he says that Cerinthus taught that Christ suffered and was crucified, but has not yet been raised (xxviii. 6. 1). The first statement is apparently derived from Hippolytus; the second may simply come from ascribing to Cerinthus a misunderstanding of the views of Paul's opponents in Corinth (I Cor 15 14, 17). According to Hippolytus (*Ref.* vi. 20.4) Simon Magus told his disciples he would rise the third day but failed to fulfill his prediction; "for he was not the Christ." The simplest explanation of Cerinthus' view (neglecting the later confusion of Epiphanius) is that at this point he was in harmony with New Testament teaching. Jesus suffered and was raised.

If the gospel of John was written against the teaching of Cerinthus, it would presumably stress the following points: (1) the world was made by the first God either directly or through an intermediary which was not separate and distinct from him, and one which knew him; (2) Jesus Christ is one person; the "spiritual Christ" did not descend upon him at baptism and leave him at the end; (3) Jesus Christ, one person, was capable of suffering. The question of the virginal conception might or might not be raised, although certainly Ignatius of Antioch, the Odes of Solomon, and the evangelists Matthew and Luke insist upon its importance.

It is clear that the evangelist teaches the closeness of the union between the Logos and God. The Logos was with God and was God, and everything was made through him (John 1 1-3). Not only is the Logos one with God, but Jesus, the incarnate Logos, is one with him (10 30, 17 11); he who has seen Jesus has seen the Father (14 9). But is this directed against any teaching regarded as an aberration? Or is it positive doctrine based perhaps on Proverbs 8 22, 30 for the idea that God's agent was "with" him, and perhaps on Philo's use of "Logos" for the mind of God?²⁷ (We should not hold that John knew Philo directly, but that such ideas may have been widespread

²⁷ On this cf. H. A. Wolfson, *Philo* (Cambridge, 1948), i. 230.

in Hellenistic Judaism.) From the later second century, Bauer cites *Corp. Herm.* i. 6 (pp. 8–9 Nock-Festugière): the Father-God (man's mind) and the Logos of the Lord (man's soul) are not separate from each other; for their union is life. If we remove the pantheistic element of this statement we are not far from the evangelist's thought.

The unity of the person of Jesus Christ is plainly set forth both in the gospel and in the first epistle of John. It is probably significant that while Paul uses indiscriminately the names Jesus, Christ, Jesus Christ, and Christ Jesus,²⁸ these Johannine books never call Jesus by the name "Christ." The first epistle calls him "Jesus" six times and "Jesus Christ" six times. The gospel calls him "Jesus Christ" twice (1 17, 17 3) and elsewhere always "Jesus." Such an emphasis on the name "Jesus" is also to be found in the synoptic gospels, but not the complete avoidance of the name "Christ" (cf. Matt 1 17, 11 2, Mark 9 41). In the Johannine books it seems intended to point to the unity of the person of Jesus as against such views as that of Cerinthus. We may also observe that John carefully transliterates the archaic term *Messias* (1 41, 4 25, only New Testament examples), and explains that "Christ" is simply a translation of it. Moreover, he states that his whole gospel is written to produce belief that "Jesus is the Christ," and explains that by "Christ" he means "Son of God" (20 31).

It is possible that in I John the Christological aberration attacked is that of Cerinthus. Certain heretical schismatics, as John would view them, have left the church, have not "remained" (2 19), and have taught that Jesus is not the Christ (2 22). They, or possibly some other opponents, deny that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (4 2–3). And there are those who say that Jesus Christ "came" only through water and not through blood also (5 6). The Spirit bears witness to the truth of the doctrine that he came through water and blood. This statement can be understood as a rejection of Cerinthus' view of the Christ. It was not the Christ which came through water and it was not the Christ which came out of Jesus. The Spirit came upon Jesus at his baptism (clearly implied by John 1 28–34),

²⁸ On "Christ Jesus" cf. S. V. McCasland in *JBL* 65 (1946), 377–83.

and he gave up the spirit (19 30) before blood and water came out of his side (19 34). But the precise relation of these statements to Cerinthus is so unclear that it seems difficult to believe that John had Cerinthus in mind.

Again, in the gospel there is a doctrine of the Christ which is criticized, and it is not that of Cerinthus. The "Jews" of the gospel hold that "when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from" (7 27). We might suppose that this statement refers to the pneumatic Christ, but according to Justin (*Dial.* cx. 8) this is a Jewish doctrine. And in any case the "Jews" immediately declare that "the scripture has said that the Christ is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem" (7 42). And it is the "Jews" who tell us that according to the law (Ps 110 4, Isa 9 6) the Christ will remain forever. This is hardly the doctrine of a spiritual Christ-power.

In regard to the question of the suffering of Christ the gospel of John is clearly non-docetic ("anti-docetic" is perhaps too extreme an expression). The Logos became "flesh" (1 14), and Jesus is struck by his enemies (18 22, 19 1, 3) and really dies (19 30, 34). On the other hand, while Jesus weeps (11 35) the bystanders cannot understand why he does so. He is weary (4 6) and asks for water (4 7), but at the same time he has food to eat of which his disciples do not know, and this food is the performance of his Father's will (4 32–34). His thirst on the cross is for the fulfillment of scripture (19 28, Ps 22 16). Evidently the evangelist is not really concerned to avoid statements which could be understood in a docetic manner. The idea that the Christ not only did, but had to, suffer is set forth not in John but in Luke (24 26, 46).

As we have already observed (p. 311), the evangelist is not concerned with the problem of the virginal conception. The apostle Philip speaks of "Jesus the son of Joseph" who was foretold by Moses and the prophets (1 45). And if — as is by no means certain — the Jewish belief that Jesus was the illegitimate son of Mary (Origen, *Contra Celsum* i. 28, 32²⁹) is reflected in John 8 41, this again is not Cerinthus' view.

Finally we may point out that the evangelist is genuinely

²⁹ Cf. M. Lods in *Rev. d'hist. et de philos. rel.* 21 (1941), 5.

endeavoring to diminish the importance ascribed to John the Baptist by someone. He states emphatically that John was not the Christ (1 21, 3 28). In *Clementine Recognitions* i. 54 and 60 it is stated that some disciples of the Baptist held that he was the Christ. Whether or not the source of this statement comes from the early second century, as H. J. Schoeps argues,³⁰ it is not related to Cerinthus, whose doctrine is entirely different.

Our conclusion in regard to Irenaeus' statement concerning the purpose of the Fourth Gospel must surely be the denial of its correctness. He does relate a strange anecdote about a personal encounter between John and Cerinthus in a bath-house at Ephesus (*Adv. haer.* iii. 3. 4, p. 13 Harvey). But even if the story be true, it proves nothing about the purpose of the gospel.

Indeed, we may suggest that Irenaeus' theory is based on his desire to uphold the authority of the Fourth Gospel. As we have seen, there must be four gospels because there are four regions of the world and four principal winds, as well as four animals mentioned in the apocalypse of John (*Adv. haer.* iii. 11. 3). He criticizes those (predecessors of Gaius) who reject the gospel and the prophetic Spirit (iii. 11. 9). And if they have said that Cerinthus wrote the gospel, what simpler reply could be made than to assert that it was written against him?

Now that we have rejected two of the three ancient views of the purpose of the gospel, we can return to that of Clement of Alexandria and ask whether there is not more truth in it than in its competitors. Clement, to be sure, is not really concerned with historical facts. Elsewhere in his *Hypotyposes* he gives a tradition, probably derived from the *Acts of John*, that when the apostle touched the Lord he felt no "hardness of flesh"; he could touch the very "Word of life."³¹ But if we simplify the conflicts among Christians at the end of the first century and regard the basic struggle as between "gnostic" Hellenists and "Ebionite" Judaizers — these seem to be the parties in Ignatius' letters — we shall expect to find a "spiritual gospel" opposed to Judaism.

³⁰ *Theologie und Geschichte des Judenchristentums* (Tübingen, 1949), 453.

³¹ *Adumbratio* on I John 1 1 (iii. 210 Stählin).

In this gospel Jesus clearly separates himself from Judaism. He speaks of "the Jews" to his disciples (13 33), to the high priest (18 20), and to Pilate (18 36). To the Jews he speaks of "your father" (6 49), "your father Abraham" (8 56), and "your law" (8 17, 10 34, cf. 15 25). He reinterprets the law entirely.

According to John, Jesus' interpretation of the law is no summary as it was in the synoptic gospels, but a "new commandment" (John 13 34). In the first epistle the objection is implied that the commandment is not really new, and the answer is given that it comes from the beginning of creation (2 7). In any event, this commandment has nothing to do with Mosaic legislation. Again, the evangelist rejects the Jewish Sabbath; Jesus "destroyed" it (John 5 18). The rite of circumcision is meaningless compared with Jesus' healing work (7 22-24). Finally, Jesus himself did not eat the passover with his disciples. Passover for him was only an occasion for cleansing the temple (2 13-16) or for teaching (7 14 ff). Indeed, he refused to go to one passover because his "time was not yet fulfilled" (7 8).³² The evangelist alters the traditional passion narrative to make it plain that Jesus did not eat the paschal meal before his crucifixion; he substitutes for it the feeding of the five thousand, and suggests that Jesus, as the "lamb of God," was crucified when the paschal lambs were slain. Jews and Ebionites observe Passover;³³ Christians do not.

Has John preserved the original chronology of the passion, later altered by Judaizing Christians? This question is exceedingly difficult, as C. C. Richardson has been the latest to observe (*HTR* 33 [1940], 177-90). He argues that the Quartodecimans actually relied on the synoptic chronology, not the Johannine. And it is almost impossible to understand why the synoptists, beginning with Mark, would have altered the Johannine chronology if they had known it; on the other hand, John had every reason to remove the last supper from its paschal context. And we know that he feels free to reinterpret the passion nar-

³² It is impossible to explain why he then does go up to it (7 10).

³³ Origen, *In Matt. comm. ser.* 79 (189:16 Klostermann); Schoeps, *op. cit.*, 136.

native. The scene before Pilate is an obvious illustration. Finally, John no longer regards the Jewish law as law. He never cites it,³⁴ and three instances where Jesus is represented as quoting the Jewish law include two citations from the psalms (10 34, 15 25).

If we examine the gospel as a whole we shall find that many of its themes consciously oppose Christianity to Judaism. The scriptures are all prophetic and must be interpreted with reference to Jesus, of whom Moses really wrote (1 45, 5 39, 46). And the Fourth Gospel often implicitly explains what it was that they were saying about him. In the first place, Jesus is superior to the patriarchs. Jesus is really prior to Abraham (8 58), while the Jews are not his children but children of the devil (8 44). Jacob gives dead or stagnant water in his well, while Jesus gives his people living water (4 13). Angels descended and ascended on Jacob in the past, but they will ascend and descend on Jesus in the future (1 51). Whereas in the synoptic tradition Jesus proved the necessity of resurrection by a reference to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, here he is himself the resurrection and the life (11 25).

In the second place, Jesus is superior to Moses. This contrast is explicitly announced in the prologue, where the law was given through Moses but grace and truth came into being through Jesus Christ (1 17). No one, including Moses, has ever seen God (1 18). The first of the seven signs, the changing of water into wine, reveals Jesus as one greater than Moses, who had to use a rod to turn water into blood (Exod 7 20). Moses lifted up a serpent in the wilderness, but Jesus himself will be lifted up (3 14, etc.). At the Exodus the children of Israel crossed the bed of the sea, but Jesus himself walks on the surface of the water (6 19). Moses did not give the people the manna; God gave it to them (6 32), and Jesus is the true bread of life (6 35). Moses did give the law, although no one keeps it (7 19, cf. Gal 6 13), but the legislation regarding circumcision is not from him but from the patriarchs (7 22). Finally, Jesus is

³⁴ It is sometimes held that John 19 36 quotes Exod 12 10, 46. But the quotation is closer to Psalm 33 21 LXX.

“the prophet” whom Moses foretold in Deuteronomy 18 15 (6 14).³⁵

In the third place, Jesus transcends the whole later history of Israel. As Moses did not see God, so Elijah did not ascend into heaven (3 13). Jesus' feeding of the five thousand is a greater miracle than that of Elisha (2 Kings 4 42-44), to which John apparently alludes (6 9-10). Indeed, Jesus' miracles are heightened to show that they are superior to any others, including those of the Old Testament (cf. 9 32). The Jewish Messiah was expected to be of the seed of David and to come from Bethlehem (7 41-42), but Jesus comes from Galilee, from unprophetic Nazareth (1 46). The true temple is not that in Jerusalem (4 21); it is the body of Jesus (2 21). The priests, as in Ezekiel 34, were hirelings; Jesus is the only good shepherd (10 14). In fact, it can be said that all who came before him were thieves and robbers (10 8).

Some of these themes are already found in the strikingly anti-Jewish speech ascribed to Stephen in Acts 7. Circumcision was from the patriarchs (7 7-8). Moses did not “know” God (7 32), and the law was given him by an angel (7 38) or angels (7 53). He predicted the coming of a prophet in Deuteronomy 18 15 (7 37). God does not dwell in buildings made by human hands (7 48); the erection of the temple was thus mistaken and sinful. The Jews have always resisted the Holy Spirit and killed the prophets (7 52); they received the law and did not keep it (7 53). As W. L. Knox points out (*St. Paul and the Church of Jerusalem* [Cambridge, 1925], 54) this speech is much like parts of the epistle of Barnabas and leads logically to the views of Marcion.

This whole theme is probably summed up in the prologue, where the history of Israel is depicted as a story of man's rebellion against God and his Logos (1 10-11).

Now the old has been superseded. While in the psalms (86 11) the “way” is the law, now Jesus is the living way (John 14 6). In Psalm 80 8-13 Israel is the vine of God (cf. Isaiah 5 7); now Jesus is the true vine (John 15 1). It is possible that all the epithets of Jesus are derived from epithets of Wisdom or Logos

³⁵ Cf. H. A. Fischel in *JBL* 65 (1946), 157-74; but note the allusion in Mark 9 7.

in Hellenistic-Jewish literature; but even if this be so,³⁶ it must be remembered that Hellenistic-Jewish literature is itself trying to transcend the limits of Palestinian Judaism.

Finally, no clearer proof of the evangelist's anti-Jewish sentiment could be found than his alteration of the trial of Jesus before Pilate. From beginning to end his account is intended to throw the responsibility for the crucifixion away from Pilate and upon the Jews. Pilate says not once but three times, "I find no fault in him." The Jews have no real grounds on which to accuse Jesus (18 30), although they finally claim that he "made himself son of God," a statement which awakens religious fear in Pilate (19 7-9). Only Jewish ingenuity and malice finally persuades the Roman governor (19 12). All this may be simply pro-Roman rather than anti-Jewish; but it does not give this impression.

The conclusion to which this evidence leads us is that the primary purpose of the Fourth Gospel is to reinterpret the career of Jesus by attacking Judaism and showing how far removed from it he was. The circumstances under which such an attack would seem advisable would be those in which Jewish Christians insisted that the synoptic gospels (or any one of them) were adequate representations of the ministry of Jesus, or in which Jews outside the church pointed to the Jewishness of Jesus. Naturally Jews outside the church would influence Christians only slightly unless there were Jewish Christians inside who would be moved by the Jewish arguments. We know that at the end of the first century there were significant groups of Jewish Christians within the church.³⁷ And the evangelist seems to be pointing at those who have returned to Judaism when he has Jesus address the Jews "who had believed him" and urge them to remain in his word (8 31).³⁸ This is the polemical origin of the Fourth Gospel.

If we attempt to define the positive origin of the book we shall place great emphasis on the author's knowledge of the

³⁶ So W. L. Knox, *Some Hellenistic Elements in Primitive Christianity* (London, 1944), 44.

³⁷ This is proved by the epistles of Ignatius, e. g. *Magn.* 10:3 (cf. 8:1).

³⁸ I owe this idea to the late Dr. B. S. Easton.

Pauline epistles, interpretation of the Old Testament as prophecy, and use of "gnostic" language. His "spiritual environment" is that reflected in the Odes of Solomon and the epistles of Ignatius, whether Ignatius knew his gospel or not.³⁹

With part of the prologue (1 5, the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not "comprehend" it) we may compare the teaching of the Antiochene gnostic Saturnilus. Before the creation of man, the world had been made by seven angels. A shining image appeared from above (from the unknown Father) but the angels could not "hold" it; it returned upward. Then the angels said to one another, Let us make man after the image and the likeness (Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* i. 24. 1, pp. 196-97). But there are striking differences between Saturnilus and John: the former claimed that the Savior had no human birth or human body, and said that marriage came from Satan.

It is sometimes said that John was anti-gnostic. At certain points he disagrees with gnostic teaching, and these points are crucial. But at the same time Basilides, Valentinus, Ptolemaeus, Theodotus and Heracleon were enthusiastic about the Fourth Gospel. And while we can readily agree that John would not have agreed with every idea or aeon that they read into the gospel, he had not guarded himself from such interpretations. The gnostic parallels gathered by Bauer and Bultmann show conclusively that his language, at least, is like theirs.

Who wrote the gospel of John? Surely it was not the son of Zebedee, a simple Galilaeen fisherman with strong apocalyptic hopes (cf. Mark 10 37). In the Fourth Gospel the eschatological teaching is practically gone, and Jesus' kingdom is explicitly described as "not of this world" (18 36). There are no parables, no demons, and only two mentions of the kingdom of God (3 3-5, 18 36, cf. 6 15), which represent reinterpretations of the synoptic picture. The author is opposed to Judaism. Only historically can it be said that "salvation is from the Jews" (4 22), just as Paul had said in Romans 11 11. Because of the failure of the Jews to believe, the worship of God is no longer confined to Jerusalem (4 21). We need not deny that he may have been a Jew by race. But he has become a Christian who

³⁹ On the Odes of Solomon cf. *JBL* 63 (1944), 363-77; on Ignatius cf. C. Maurer, *Ignatius von Antiochien und das Johannesevangelium* (Zurich, 1949).

believes that if the Jewish people cannot understand the Old Testament law as prophecy, they cannot believe the words of Jesus (5 47).

The environment in which he lives is no longer that of Judaism, but of a kind of gnosticism not unlike that of Ignatius and the Odes of Solomon. There may be a theological tension in his mind,⁴⁰ but there is also, and perhaps primarily, a historical tension. He lives between two worlds, the one that of the Palestinian Judaism out of which Christianity arose, the other that of Diaspora Judaism through which it reached the gentile world. "Is he going to go to the diaspora of the Greeks and teach the Greeks?" (7 35). It is the Greeks who come to the Galilaean disciple and ask to see Jesus (12 20-21). And in his effort to express the essence of the one in terms of the other he is compelled to reinterpret the gospel from beginning to end. This is what brings about the origin of the Fourth Gospel.

⁴⁰ As Hoskyns and Davey argue, *The Fourth Gospel* (London, 1947), 131. They speak of "the historical tension of the Fourth Gospel" (pp. 58-85), but by "historical" they do not mean what is ordinarily meant by the word. For them theology not only goes beyond but at the same time obliterates history.