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*The Destination And Purpose of St John's Gospel*¹

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For whom and for what, to what audience and to what purpose, were the four Gospels written? This is one of the most elementary questions of New Testament study, and one might think that by now the answers could be given with some degree of certainty and consent. And of the first three Gospels I think this is broadly true. Naturally there will always be room for fresh lines of development and approach, but they are unlikely to modify very radically the conclusions which can be found set out in any textbook. If one had to reduce these conclusions to their barest summary, one could say, without immediate fear of contradiction, that St Matthew's Gospel was evidently written for a Jewish-Christian community, and that its overall purpose was broadly speaking *catechetical*; that St Mark's Gospel was composed for a predominantly Gentile community and that its primary purpose was *kerygmatic*, setting out, for the use of the Church, a summary of its proclamation; and that St Luke's Gospel, as he himself indicates, was again addressed, though more generally, to the Graeco-Roman world, and that its purpose was *instructional*, with the defence and confirmation of the Gospel as a dominant motif.²

But when we come to the Gospel according to St John there is no such broad agreement. On almost every question connected with this Gospel it is still possible for the most divergent views to command serious and scholarly assent. And after all this time the question of the destination and purpose of the Gospel is as wide open as it ever was. Was it addressed to a Jewish or a Gentile audience, or indeed to the inquiring individual whatever his background?³ Again, was it intended primarily for a Christian or

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for a non-Christian public? Was its motive in the first instance to win the faithless, to establish the faithful, or to counter the gainsayers? And if John's primary purpose was to *defend* the Gospel, was the opposition Jewish, or Gnostic, or Baptist, or even Christian? All these opinions have been canvassed and seriously sustained, before one even reaches the questions that have most divided scholars, and which I must here leave on one side, questions namely about the cultural and intellectual milieu to which the author and his readers belonged, whether they were Jew, Gentile or Christian.

¹ Reprinted from *NTS* VI (1960), 117-31.

² Cf., more fully, C. F. D. Moule, 'The Intention of the Evangelists', *New Testament Essays*, ed. A. J. B. Higgins, pp. 165-79.

³ It has even been doubted recently whether it was consciously addressed to *any* audience. Cf. C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John*, p. 115 'It is easy, when we read the Gospel, to believe that John, though doubtless aware of the necessity of strengthening Christians and converting the heathen, wrote primarily to satisfy himself. His gospel must be written: it was no concern of his whether it was also read.'

The mere fact that none of these views has succeeded in establishing itself over the others shows that the evidence does not point decisively in any one direction. Nevertheless, I am persuaded that there is one solution that can be stated a good deal more compellingly than it has been and merits the most serious consideration. What I shall advocate is, of course, no new position—it would almost certainly be wrong if it were—and indeed it is substantially that to which Professor W. C. van Unnik of Utrecht gave the not inconsiderable weight of his support at the Oxford conference on ‘The Four Gospels in 1957’.⁴

Let us start from the statement which is constantly made, that St John’s Gospel is the most anti-Jewish of the four. In a very real sense this is true: the Jews’ responsibility for the rejection and death of Christ is in this of all the Gospels the most solid and unrelieved: ‘He who delivered me to you’, says Jesus to Pilate, ‘has the greater sin’ (19.11). But there is no need to underline this. The term ‘the Jews’ is found overwhelmingly in polemical contexts: they are the representatives of darkness and opposition throughout the Gospel.

But it is easy to assume without further discussion that because it is anti-Jewish it is therefore pro-Gentile. We jump to the conclusion that the logic underlying its appeal is that of St Paul’s speech to the Jews in Pisidian Antioch: ‘It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it

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from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.’ ‘And’, we read, ‘as many as were ordained to eternal life believed’ (Acts 13.46, 48). ‘These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name’ (John 20.31). The purpose of the two seems to be the same.

But this is going altogether too fast for the evidence. For nowhere in St John is there any trace of this transition: the Jews have rejected, therefore we turn to the Gentiles. The remarkable fact is that there is not a single reference to ‘the Gentiles’ in the entire book. The fourth Gospel, with the Johannine Epistles, is the only major work in the New Testament in which the term τὰ ἔθνη never occurs. Moreover, so far from being anti-Semitic, that is, racially anti-Jewish,⁵ it is, I believe, in the words of J. B. Lightfoot’s magisterial but far too little known lectures on St John, ‘the most Hebraic book in the New Testament, except perhaps the Apocalypse’.⁶ If Judaism is condemned, it is always from within and not from without. Such phrases as ‘your law’ (8.17; (10.34)) and ‘their law’ (15.25) cannot be interpreted, as they often are, to imply that John wishes to dissociate Jesus from Judaism. For it is fundamental to the Gospel that Jesus himself is ‘a Jew’ (4.9), that he should distinguish Jews from Samaritans as ‘we’ (4.22). Indeed the heart of the whole tragic drama is that it is ‘his own’ to whom he comes (1.11) and ‘his own nation’ by whom he is delivered up (18.35, τὸ ἔθνος τὸ σὸν—ἔθνος in John being reserved always for the Jewish nation, not for the Gentiles).

⁴ The Purpose of St John’s Gospel’, *Studia Evangelica*, pp. 382-411.

⁵ So J. Knox, *Criticism and Faith* (1952), pp. 75-7.

⁶ *Biblical Essays*, p. 135.

And not only is Jesus very much a Jew, but the world of the Gospel narrative is wholly a Jewish world. While 'the Jews' occurs nearly seventy times in John (compared with five times in Matthew, six in Mark and five in Luke), the Gentiles as a group receive, as we have seen, no mention. Moreover, from the beginning to the end of the story there is only one individual Gentile—and he is Pilate, hardly the figure by whom to commend the Gospel to the Gentiles. Pilate with his soldiers is necessary because otherwise Jesus could not be sentenced to death (18.31) or 'lifted up from the earth' by the Roman penalty of crucifixion (12.32 f.; cf. 18.32). But Pilate makes it clear that he is a complete

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outsider to the world within which the drama moves: 'Am I a Jew?' (18.35).

The extent indeed to which the drama revolves exclusively round the crisis of Judaism is remarkable—and it stands in noticeable contrast with the Synoptists. In the Synoptic Gospels the centre of the stage is also occupied by the Jews. But we are conscious always of the Gentiles pressing in on the wings. At the very beginning of the Gospel of Matthew, the most Jewish of the Synoptists, come the Magi from the east, to make it clear that Jesus is not the king of the Jews alone (Matt. 2.1 ff.). In Luke too he is hailed from the start not only as 'the glory of God's people Israel' but as 'a light for revelation to the Gentiles' (Luke 2.32). Then, within the ministry, there is the centurion whose faith is held up as an example and reproof to Israel (Matt. 8.10 = Luke 7.9). There is the Syro-Phoenician woman whose claim to eat of the crumbs that fall from the children's table is allowed (Mark 7.28). There is the other centurion's testimony at the Cross, standing as the climax to the Marcan narrative (Mark 15.39). There are the excursions of Jesus to non-Jewish territory, to the region of Tyre and Sidon (Mark 7.24), to Caesarea Philippi (8.27). There is the damning comparison of the Jewish towns with these cities of Tyre and Sidon and 'the land of Sodom and Gomorrah' (Matt. 10.15; 11.20-4). There is the example of God's preference in the past for the widow of Zarephath in Sidon and for Naaman the Syrian (Luke 4.25-7). There is the warning that foreigners like the Ninevites and the Queen of the South, a negress, will stand up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it (Matt. 12.41 f. = Luke 11.31 f.). Many, again, are to come from the east and the west and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown out (Matt 8.11 f.; Luke 13.29 f.). There is the recurrent threat which echoes through the later teaching of Jesus that the vineyard will be taken away and given to others (Mark 12.9 and pars). The Temple is cleared so as to perform its true function as 'a house of prayer for all nations' (Mark 11.17). Above all there is always the sense that, while the immediate ministry of Jesus and his disciples may of necessity be confined to 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Matt. 10.6; 15.24), yet ultimately the Gospel must be proclaimed in the whole world (Mark 14.9).

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Released by the Resurrection, the apostles are to go to the ends of the earth (Acts 1.8), making disciples of all nations (Matt. 28.19; Luke 24.47). They will also have to make their defence before Gentiles (Matt. 10. 18)—but this too can be turned into an opportunity for witness to

them (Luke 21.12 f.). For ultimately the End cannot come till the Gospel has been preached to the entire Gentile world (Mark 13.10; Matt. 24.14).

But in John there is none of this. Jesus is not presented as a revelation to the Gentiles. The purpose of the Baptist's mission is simply that 'he might be revealed to Israel' (1.31). Instead of the Syro-Phoenician woman we have the Samaritan woman, who, though the Jews may refuse dealings with her (4.9), can still speak of 'our father Jacob' (4.12), just as later the Jews speak of 'our father Abraham' (8.53). In the story corresponding to that of the centurion's servant, the healing of the court official's son (4.46-54), there is no commendation of his faith as a Gentile, nor indeed any suggestion that he was a Gentile. (As a βασιλικός in Galilee he was presumably a Herodian.) Again, for all the piling up of witnesses, there is no Gentile witness to Jesus in the entire Gospel—not even the final testimony of the centurion to him as the Son of God, the very title round which the Gospel is written and which many have supposed to be chosen because it could come so easily to Gentile lips. Nowhere are Gentiles held up for favourable comparison with the Jews; nor is there any reference to them in the cleansing of the Temple, which is inspired solely by zeal for true Judaism (2.17). The Romans will indeed come and destroy the Jewish nation and its holy place (11.48), but there is no suggestion of the heritage of Israel being given to the Gentiles. There is nothing about the disciples' having to appear before Gentiles—only of their being expelled from the synagogues of Judaism (16.2). Again, Jesus never leaves Jewish soil; there is no reference to a Gentile mission, nor anything about their coming in, even after his glorification. The 'Greeks' do indeed ask to see Jesus—and this, as we shall see, is a point of decisive significance for the Evangelist. But it is important to insist that these Greeks are *not* Gentiles. They are Greek-speaking Jews, of whom it is specifically stated that they had 'come up to worship at the feast' (12.20) and there is no suggestion that they are merely 'God-fearers' or even that they had once been Gentiles. All that we can deduce with

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certainty is that they spoke Greek rather than Aramaic (and hence presumably the approach through Philip, with his Hellenistic name and place of origin (12.21)), and that they were in Jerusalem for a specifically Jewish reason. In fact, the Evangelist has already at an earlier point (7.35) equated the term 'the Greeks' with 'the Dispersion among the Greeks', that is, Greek-speaking Diaspora Judaism.⁷

Now to stress this unremitting concentration on Judaism is far from saying that John is narrowly nationalistic or religiously exclusivist. On the contrary, there is a cosmic perspective to the Gospel, which is introduced from the very first verse. Jesus is 'the... light that

⁷ 'The words μή εἰς Διασπορὰν τῶν Ἑλλήνων μέλλει πορεύεσθαι καὶ διδάσκειν τοὺς Ἕλληνας; are unfortunately ambiguous. 'The Diaspora of the Greeks' could mean 'the Greek-speaking Diaspora' (i.e. Jews) and 'the Greeks' be an abbreviated way of referring to the same group. Or it could mean 'the Diaspora resident among the Greeks', in which case 'the Greeks' would be Gentiles. H. Windisch comes down in favour of the latter in *TWNT* (art. Ἕλληνας) II, 506. But K. L. Schmidt, *ibid.* (art. διασπορά) II, 102, insists on leaving both possibilities open (cf. H. J. Cadbury in *The Beginnings of Christianity* v (1933), 72 f.). The decision between them can in fact only be made in the light of the Johannine context as a whole. As there is no other reference in the Gospel or the Epistles to a Gentile mission, the probability would seem to be in favour of the first interpretation.

enlightens every man' (1.9), 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the *world*' (1.29); and the purpose of his being sent is that 'the world might be saved through him' (3.17). There are no more universalistic sayings in the New Testament than in the fourth Gospel: 'I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself' (12.32). Yet for all this there is no mention of, nor appeal to, the Gentiles as such. When Jesus is pressed to 'show himself to the world' (7.4), it is not an urge to missionary expansion but to public demonstration—and that to 'the Jews'. The κόσμος is not the world outside Judaism, but the world which God loves and the world which fails to respond, be it Jew or Gentile. If as a whole the Jews are hopelessly blind and walk on in darkness, those who come to the light and hear Jesus' voice are still Jews, not Gentiles—both in general (there are repeated references to the Jews who believe in him: 2.33; 7.31; 8.31; 10.42 11.45; 12.11) and as represented by particular individuals: Nathanael, the ideal Israelite (1.47), Nicodemus, 'the ruler of the Jews' and 'teacher of Israel' (3.1, 10), Joseph of Arimathea (19.38) and the man born blind (9.1-39),

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representing respectively the governing class and the common people.

The contrast for John is always between light and darkness, not between Jew and Gentile. There is no agony, as there is for Paul, about the relation between these latter as groups (as in Rom. 9-11), no middle wall of partition to be broken down between them (as in Eph. 2). For John the question is not how Jews and Gentiles can become one, nor even how the Gentiles *as such* can come in. In this respect, it is instructive to compare their use of the figures of the vine (John 15) and the olive (Rom. 11), recognized Old Testament symbols for Israel. For both branches must be cut off (John 15.2; Rom. 11.17)—but for John there is no grafting in of alien branches. For him the simple question is the relation of *Judaism* to the true Israel, the true vine—and that means, for him, to Jesus as the Christ. For to John the only true Judaism is one that acknowledges Jesus as its Messiah. Becoming a true Jew and becoming a Christian are one and the same thing.

But John is clear that this does not mean what the Judaizers meant, with whom Paul had to fight. It does not mean retaining the whole empirical system of Judaism and fitting Jesus into it. For Judaism to accept Jesus as its truth is no mere reformation, but a complete rebirth (3.3). In him its entire existing structure is challenged and transcended—its *torah* (1.17), its ritual (2.6), its temple (2.19), its localized worship (4.20 f.), its sabbath regulations (5.9-18). And yet John is insisting throughout that there is nothing in Jesus alien to Judaism truly understood. He is the true *shekinah* (1.14), the true temple (2.21). Though Jerusalem is to be transcended as the place God chooses for his 'name' to dwell in (Deut. 12.11)—for that place is occupied by Jesus (John 17.11 f.)—yet still 'salvation is from the Jews' (4.20-2). And that is why the Old Testament plays such a vital part in the Gospel. The truth about Jesus is already present in the witness of Moses (1.45; 5.39-47; 7.19-24), Abraham (8.39, 56) and Isaiah (12.41), who condemn their own children because they do not listen to him of whom their scriptures speak. For he is the crown of everything in Judaism. It is as 'the king of the Jews' that Jesus goes to his death (esp. 19.19-22), and from the beginning he is hailed as 'the king of Israel' (1.49; cf. 12.13), 'the holy one of God' (6.69), 'the prophet who should come into the world', that

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is, as the context implies,⁸ the prophet like Moses (6.14; 7.40; cf. Deut. 18.15).

But above all he is ‘the Messiah’, ‘the Christ’.⁹ And this for John is not just a proper name, as it has become for Paul in his Gentile environment. Except in two instances, in the combination ‘Jesus Christ’ (1.17; 17.3), it is always a title, ὁ χριστός, retaining its full etymological force, as John insists by being the only New Testament writer to preserve it in its Aramaic form, ὁ Μεσσίας (1.41; 4.25 f.). We all recognize that Matthew is above all concerned to present Jesus as the Christ of Judaism. But it comes as a surprise to most to be told that John uses the title more frequently than Matthew (twenty-one times to seventeen), and more often than Mark (seven) and Luke (thirteen) put together. This, rather than ‘the Logos’, is the category which controls his Christology in the body of the Gospel. This is obvious from a concordance. But the way of thinking reflected, for instance, in E. F. Scott’s dictum that ‘in the fourth Gospel the Messianic idea is replaced by that of the Logos’¹⁰ has exercised a mesmeric effect.

Moreover, the understanding of St John’s other main category, ‘the Son of God’, must start from the fact that it stands as expegetic of ‘the Christ’, especially in the crucial passage that explains the purpose of his writing (20.31). Indeed, I believe there is no other New Testament document more important for studying the Jewish sources of the term ‘Son of God’ than the fourth Gospel. Nor should it be forgotten that John sides decisively with the Synoptic Gospels in retaining on Jesus’ lips the title ‘Son of man’, which evidently served no purpose in the Gentile mission of the Pauline churches.

Furthermore, the distinctive images which Jesus is made to use of himself in this Gospel—the Manna (6.32-5), the Light (8.1), the Shepherd (10.11-16), the Vine (15.1-6)—all by their associations in the Old Testament and later Judaism represent him in his person as *the true Israel of God*. And the primary contrast implied in the epithet ἀληθινός is with ‘Israel according to the flesh’. The true Jew, whose ‘praise is not from men but from God’, to use a Pauline distinction also made by John (Rom. 2.29; cf. John 5.44),

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is the one who recognizes in Jesus the true Light (1.9), abides in him as the true Vine (15.1), and follows him as the true Shepherd of God’s flock (10.27). The others may say that they are Jews, but are not: they are children not of Abraham but of the devil (8.30-47; cf. Rev. 2.9; 3.9).

But for the Jew who would remain loyal to his traditional faith, ‘How can this be?’ (3.9). That is the question put by Nicodemus, the ruler of the Jews and the teacher of Israel. And Nicodemus, the person he is and the question he poses, represents the problem to which the fourth Gospel is addressed. Or, in the terms of the man born blind, how can a man say to

⁸ For he too provides manna from heaven and water from the rock.

⁹ For a fuller discussion of this neglected Johannine category, see van Unnik, *op. cit.*, pp. 389-405.

¹⁰ *The Fourth Gospel, its Purpose and Theology* (1920), p. 6.

Jesus, 'Lord, I believe', without ceasing to be a Jew, even though he may be thrown out of the Synagogue (9.35-8)?

That is the problem which John sets himself to answer. There is not even a side-glance at the problem of the man who is not a Jew but wants to become a Christian, let alone at the problem of the Gentile who wants to become a Christian *without having* to become a Jew. John is not saying, and would not say, that such a man must first become a Jew—that was the answer of the Judaizers. His problem is not even considered. John is not a Judaizer; nor, like Paul, is he an anti-Judaizer: that whole issue never comes within his purview.

But again, how can this be? It is possible only if John is not involved, like Paul, in the Gentile problem as such. All the controversies in the fourth Gospel take place within the body of Judaism. The issues raised by the Judaizers are essentially *frontier* problems—of whether, in a frontier situation like that of Antioch, one lived as a Jew or as a Gentile (Gal. 2.14). But John is not faced with this problem.¹¹ Consequently circumcision and law have a

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different significance for him and for Paul. For Paul they represent the fence between Judaism and the Gentile world, barriers of exclusivism to be broken down. For John they are what must be transcended by Judaism within its own life, because they belong to the level of flesh and not spirit, *whether a single Gentile wanted to enter the Church or not*.

This fits with the many other indications that the *Heimat* of the Johannine tradition, and the milieu in which it took shape, was the heart of southern Palestinian Judaism. There is nothing, as far as I can see, to suggest that the great controversies of chapters 5-12, which comprise the hard core of the Evangelist's tradition, were not the product of discussion and debate with Jewish opposition in a purely Palestinian situation. The Gentile world, except as represented by the Romans, is miles away—as it is, incidentally, in the Qumran literature, where the sons of darkness and deceit are in the first instance not Gentiles (who are the Kittim) but faithless Israel. In this lack of contact with the Gentiles John differs from the Hellenists and the group round Stephen. John's is essentially an Aramaic-speaking background.

¹¹ In saying this I must dissent from the very interesting suggestions made by C. H. Dodd in his article 'A l'arrière-plan d'un dialogue Johannique', *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses* XXXVII (1957), 5-17. Dodd would see the background of John 8.35-58 in the Jewish-Christian controversy of the early Church, and he points out a number of parallels with the Epistle to the Galatians. But in the Judaizing controversy the crucial question was 'Who is the true Christian?' (Need he observe the whole law to qualify?) In the Johannine controversy the question is rather 'Who is the true Jew?' (Is sonship of Abraham automatic by race?) This latter is the question posed also by John the Baptist (Matt. 3.7-10; Luke 3.7-9) in a purely Jewish context; and the Pauline parallels to John would appear rather to be Rom. 2.17-29 ('Who is the true Jew?') and 4.9-22 ('Who is the true son of Abraham?'), where the Apostle is addressing himself to the Jews rather than to Judaizers. For the Judaizer the underlying question is: 'What does it involve for the Gentile to become a Christian?' For John it is always: 'What does it involve for the Jew?' And his answer is: 'Birth, not from Abraham (nor anything "of the earth"), but from above.' There is a close parallel between ch. 8 and ch. 3. Both recount the approach of Jews who believed in some way that Jesus came from God and that God was with him (cf. 8.29 f. with 3.2); and 8.23 shows the issue to be the same as in that of the conversation with Nicodemus. Neither dialogue has any apparent connexion with the Gentile controversy.

And yet quite patently his Gospel is in Greek and for a Greek-speaking public. Who are these Greeks? Precisely, I believe, the Greeks who appear in the Gospel. Again, it is necessary to emphasize who these are. For Paul, as for Luke, the distinction between Jew and Greek is the distinction between Jew and Gentile, the Circumcision and the Uncircumcision (cf. e.g. Rom. 2.9-14; 3.9, 29). But for John, the distinction is between the Jews of Palestine (and more particularly of Judaea) and the Jews of the Greek (as opposed, e.g., to the Babylonian) Diaspora.¹² The

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Ἕλληνας are for him the Greek-speaking Jews living outside Palestine—in distinction again from the Ἑλληνιστοὶ of Acts 6., and 9.29, who are Greek-speaking Jews resident in Palestine (cf. Acts 6.9). Naturally the word Ἕλληνας itself draws attention to them as non-Palestinians rather than as Jews, and indeed it is only from a Palestinian point of view that Jews could conceivably be described as Greeks—but then it is from that point of view that I believe the story of St John's Gospel is written. The Hellenistic viewpoint which we have accepted as normative, as indeed it is in the rest of the New Testament, is clearly represented in Acts 21.27 f., where 'the Jews from Asia' stirred up the Jerusalem crowd against Paul on the charge that he brought 'Greeks' into the temple. In Johannine terms this would read: '*The Greeks* stirred up *the Jews* against Paul because he had introduced *Gentiles*.'

Now this division within Israel between Jews and Greeks, thus defined, is of the greatest importance to John and contains, I believe, the clue to his purpose in writing the Gospel. If the tension between Jew and Gentile is never felt (except in the purely external antagonism of the Jews' refusal to enter the Praetorium (18.28)), the tensions within Judaism are never far from the surface. Nothing could be more false than to suppose, as has often been suggested, that 'the Jews' is a blanket-term covering John's ignorance of or indifference to the divisions of Judaism. Indeed, it looks as though a deliberate part of his purpose was to show Judaism, faced with the claims of Jesus, as hopelessly divided against itself.

There is, first, the constant tension between the common people and the Jerusalem authorities (e.g. 7.13, 25-32, 48 f.; 9.22; 12.19), who are themselves sometimes designated 'the Jews' even against their own people (5.10-15; 7.13; 9.18, 22).¹³ And there is the more subtle division within these authorities between members of the Sanhedrin (the ἄρχοντες) and the Pharisees (12.42; cf. 7.45-52; 19.38 f.). Moreover, the various groupings—the Pharisees (9.16), the common people (7.12, 43), the Jews who believed on him (6.66), and the Jews who did not (6.52; 10.19-21)—are split among themselves.

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¹² Cf. the letter of R. Gamaliel I (Jer. Sanh. 18d) 'to our brethren, the sons of the diaspora of Babylon, the Sons of the diaspora of Media, the sons of the diaspora of the Greeks, and all the rest of the dispersed of Israel' (quoted A. Schlatter, *Der Evangelist Johannes* (1930), p. 198). It is to be observed that the phrase 'the diaspora of the Greeks' (where the parallels would lead us to expect 'the diaspora of Greece') is exactly that which John also uses in 7.35.

¹³ Contrariwise, in 11.45 f. and 12.9-11 'the Jews' are the common people as distinct from the authorities.

Then there are the geographical divisions. Apart from the standing feud between the Jews and the Samaritans (4.9) there is a recurrent and bitter altercation between Judaea and Galilee (1.46; 4.44 f.; 7.41, 52). ‘The Jews’ for this Gospel are not merely the Jews of Palestine, but, with two exceptions only (6.41 and 52), the Jews of Judaea. Indeed, Ἰουδαῖος often appears to keep its strict meaning of Judaeans (as in the adjective, τὴν Ἰουδαίαν γῆν, in 3.22). Thus, in 7.1 we read, ‘After this Jesus went about in Galilee; he would not go about in Judaea because the Jews sought to kill him’, where the RSV margin reads ‘the Judaeans’ (cf. also 11.7, 54). And there is a sense, important for the Evangelist, in which Jesus himself is ‘a Jew’ in the narrower sense. According to this Gospel, it is not Galilee but Judaea which is Jesus’ πατρίς (contrast John 4.44 f. with Mark 6.1-6 and pars). Though he may come from Nazareth, it is to Judaea that he really belongs, and 7.42 probably presupposes that John knows the tradition of his birth at Bethlehem. In the strictest sense he comes to ‘his own’, even though his own may not receive him (1.11), but disown him as a Galilean (1.46; 7.41) and even as a Samaritan (8.48).

But behind these tensions within Palestine lies the still more far-reaching division between metropolitan Judaism and the Diaspora. We can hear the disgust and contempt behind the words of 7.35 ‘The Jews said to one another, “Where does this man intend to go that we shall not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks?”’

But as well as disdain there is also here surely strong irony. For this is precisely where Jesus’ teaching is now going through the words of the Gospel. The Gospel has a strong and reiterated evangelistic motive: it is written ‘that you may believe’¹⁴ (20.31), and almost every incident ends on that note. But as we have seen, there is no indication that it is to Gentiles that John is primarily addressing his message. On the contrary, everything points to his appeal being to Diaspora Judaism,¹⁵ that *it* may come to accept

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Jesus as its true Messiah, even though, to quote Paul’s speech at Antioch, ‘those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers... did not recognize him’ (Acts 13.27). This speech is in fact addressed to precisely such an audience as that for which I am arguing John is writing: ‘Men of Israel and you that fear God’ (Acts 13.16), that is to say, Greek-speaking Judaism with its God-fearing adherents. In other words, the real situation is the exact opposite of that which was suggested at the beginning. John is writing for the Jews who thrust aside Paul’s appeal, not for the Gentiles to whom he subsequently turns.

That John’s primary concern is with the Jews is perhaps confirmed by Paul himself in a striking way. In the course of what is unquestionably our best piece of first-hand evidence about the history of the early Church, Paul speaks in Gal. 2.9 of the division of apostolic

¹⁴ It is, of course, true that linguistically this could mean either to bring to faith or to deepen in faith. Cf. C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, p. 9; C. K. Barrett, *op. cit.*, p. 114; C. F. D. Moule, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

¹⁵ K. Bornhäuser, *Das Johannesevangelium eine Missionsschrift für Israel* (1928), saw very clearly that the Gospel is an evangelistic appeal to Israel, but his failure to isolate the particular section of Judaism which John has in mind made much of his argument very vulnerable.

labour between Barnabas, Titus and himself, on the one hand, and James, Cephas and John, on the other. It was agreed, he says, 'that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised'. Attention has been so concentrated on the division between Paul and Peter, which is the occasion of the whole narration, that the significance of John's name appears to have been overlooked. James is associated in any case with the Circumcision; but the passage tells us, on the highest authority, two things that we should not otherwise know about John: first, that he was alive and in Jerusalem at least fourteen, and more probably seventeen, years after Paul's conversion, which is surely the most decisive disproof, though it is seldom adduced,¹⁶ of the tradition that he was executed with his brother James before the death of Herod in 44; and, secondly, that at that time at any rate he was committed to evangelism among the Jews. This fits exactly with what I believe to have been the milieu of the Johannine tradition *during this period*, namely, the Christian mission among the Jews of Judaea. This of course will not impress anyone who does not think that John son of Zebedee was in some way connected with the tradition of the fourth Gospel, nor does it prove anything for a later period. But it does not seem to me entirely coincidental that the only three occurrences of the term *διασπορά* in the New Testament should be in the writings associated with

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the three persons specifically mentioned by Paul as concentrating on the Jewish mission, namely the Gospel of John (7.35), the First Epistle of Peter (1.1), and the Epistle of James (1.1). Even if traditional ascriptions of these writings cannot be sustained (and in no case do I regard this as proved), it is surely significant that this was the field of evangelism with which these particular figures were associated in the mind of the Church.

But the case for St John's Gospel being addressed to Diaspora Judaism stands on its own merits. And once we are prepared to take this hypothesis seriously, it is surprising what light it throws upon many passages in the Gospel.

The Evangelist's peculiar understanding of the work of Christ at once becomes perspicuous. The purpose of this is carefully defined (again in a context of heavy irony) in 11.51 f. In an editorial comment on Caiaphas' words John writes: 'He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.' 'The nation' is, as we have seen, for this writer metropolitan Judaism. Who are 'the children of God who are scattered abroad'? As in the case of 'the Greeks', the reference is almost universally taken to be to the Gentiles.¹⁷ But this is quite arbitrary. There is nothing in the Gospel to suggest it, and every reason, from the wealth of Old Testament parallels to identify them with those of God's people, the Jews, at present in dispersion.¹⁸ In the prophetic words of her own high priest, the purpose of Jesus' death, as Israel's Messiah, is to bring about the final ingathering of which bet prophets so constantly spoke. And it is when Diaspora Judaism, in the persons of the Greeks at Passover, comes seeking him, that Jesus knows 'the hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified' (12.23). Hitherto he has been confined to 'his own'

¹⁶ Though cf. B. P. W. Stather Hunt, *Some Johannine Problems* (1958), pp. 118f.

¹⁷ Most recently J. Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations* (ET, SBT 24, 1958), pp. 37f. and 64-6.

¹⁸ See C. K. Barrett, *op. cit.*, *ad loc.*, who, however, declines to accept what he admits 'in a Jewish work this would naturally mean'.

to whom he came; but once the seed falls into the ground and dies it will bear much fruit (12.24).

The supreme purpose of the laying down of Jesus' life is that all Israel should be one flock under its one shepherd (10.15 f.).

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And once more this pastoral imagery in chapter 10 is clearly modelled upon passages in Ezekiel (especially 34 and 37.21-8) and Jeremiah (23.1-8; 31.1-10) whose whole theme is the ingathering of the scattered people of Israel. The 'other sheep, that are not of this fold', whom also Jesus must bring in (10.16) are not the Gentiles—again there is nothing to suggest this—but the Jews of the Dispersion. And the purpose, that 'there shall be one flock, one shepherd', is reflected again in the repeated prayer of chapter 17 'that they may all be one', the chapter above all which interprets the purpose of Jesus' going to the Father. Here once more we have the same distinction as that between 'this fold' and the 'other sheep', the 'nation' and 'the children of God who are scattered abroad'. The prayer is not 'for these only', that is, for those already faithful to Jesus in Palestine, but 'for those also who shall believe in me through their word', that is (in terms of the same distinction again from chapter 20), for those who believe without having seen (20.29), for whom clearly the Gospel is being written. The prayer 'that they may all be one' is, on Jesus' lips, not a prayer for broken Christendom but for scattered and disrupted Judaism, viewed as the true Israel of God.

'Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved' (Rom. 10.1). That could be John speaking. His consuming concern is for the whole Jewish people, that they should find the life which is their birthright. Throughout the Gospel we can trace the anxiety of the pastor and evangelist that none of those should be lost for whom this life is intended (6.39; 10.28 f.; 17.12; 18.9). This theme is first introduced in 6.12 f., where great importance is attached to the care with which the fragments must be gathered up after the feeding—'that nothing may be lost'. Filling as they do twelve baskets, they symbolize the fullness of Israel still to be gathered in after 'the Jews' have eaten their fill.

Again we must insist that John, with Paul, is the least exclusivist or nationalistic writer in the New Testament. The right to become the 'children of God' is given to all who believe, exactly as in the Epistle to the Romans (John 1.12; cf. Rom. 3.22). John is certainly not suggesting that Christianity is for the Jews only: it is for the whole world. Indeed, it is explicitly stated in 17.21 that the bringing in of 'those who shall believe in me through their

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word' (those for whom the Gospel is written) is itself in order 'that *the world* may believe'. Nevertheless, he is directing his appeal in the first instance to a specific audience, and like a good evangelist is defining salvation in the terms of their own heritage. In the same way Paul, when he wants to, can so identify Christianity with the true Judaism as to say of the Church, 'We are the circumcision' (Phil. 3.3), and equate being 'outside Christ' with being 'alienated from the commonwealth of Israel' (Eph. 2.12).

But, unlike Paul, John is not fighting on two fronts. He is not all things to all men, but limits himself voluntarily as an apostle to the Circumcision. Always he speaks as a Jew, and indeed, like Jesus, as a Jew of Palestine. In the course of his work he writes damningly of ‘the Jews’—yet never perhaps with quite the animosity that shows through Paul’s words in I Thess. 2.14-16. This passage indeed provides an instructive comparison with John.¹⁹ It is constantly said that John’s use of the term ‘the Jews’ could come only from a man who stands outside Judaism and from a date when the break between the Church and the Synagogue was bitter and complete. Yet here in Thessalonians, in the early 50’s, we see Paul, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, writing in exactly the same vein (though with a personal animus that John does not show) and actually differentiating ‘the Jews’ from Christians in Judaea exactly as John does. ‘For you, brethren’, he says to the Thessalonians, ‘became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judaea; for you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from *the Jews*, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all men... so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But God’s wrath has come upon them finally and for ever (εἰς τέλος)’. If John also speaks thus of ‘the Jews’, it is always with the chastisement that comes from within, drawn out of him by the tragedy of his own people.

Sometimes too he speaks of them with a terrible objectivity, explaining their customs as though he did not belong to them, and indeed as though he were not writing to fellow-Jews at all. But should this seem a decisive objection to our thesis, we should remember two things.

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(a) In the majority of such passages John is interpreting *Aramaic-speaking* Judaism to those who know nothing of its language and ethos. And by the very regularity with which he renders into Greek the most obvious words, like Μεσσίας (1.41; 4.15), or Παββεΐ (1.39) and Παββουβεΐ (20.16), which Mark never even bothers to translate for his Gentile public (Mark 9.5; 10.51, etc.), we know that he is not a man who fears being redundant. Indeed, his whole style bears this out: he would rather give superfluous explanations than fail to make his meaning clear.

(b) His explanations are frequently not as redundant as they sound. The fact, for instance, that he regularly designates the feasts as feasts ‘of the Jews’ (as if anyone did not know it, let alone a Jewish audience) becomes intelligible when we observe that, in every case but one (6.4), this is put in in order to explain why it is that Jesus must go up to Judea (2.13; 5.1; 7.1-3; 11.55). It is precisely because they are feasts of ‘the Jews’ that Jesus, a Galilean, must travel into the country of the Jews, and this is of great significance for the unfolding of the drama (cf., especially, 7.1-9; 11.7-16). Again, John’s explanation of the customs of purification (2.6) and burial (19.40), on the face of it so unnecessary for an audience of fellow-Jews, is not given simply for its own sake—because otherwise they might not know (though doubtless the water-pots were distinctively Palestinian)—but because every detail is seen by him as supremely significant for the sign and its interpretation. He is concerned that nothing shall be missed which reveals Jesus as the true fulfilment of Judaism.

¹⁹ Its relevance was first brought to my attention by H. E. Edwards, *The Disciple who Wrote these Things*, p. 115.

To say that the Gospel belongs to the world of Hellenistic Judaism is still, of course, to leave undefined what sort of level of Hellenistic Judaism. That must be settled by examination of its literary and cultural background, into which it has not been my purpose to go. But since the term 'Hellenistic Judaism' immediately connotes for most Johannine commentators the world of thought most signally represented by Philo of Alexandria, I should like to dissociate my own conclusion from that inference. Mr W. D. Stacey, in his valuable book *The Pauline View of Man*, uses these words: 'Philo found in the Pentateuch... the wisdom after which Greek thinkers had been striving, and he tried to present the Pentateuch in such a way that Greeks would see in it

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their journey's end.'²⁰ It is a widely held view that we should need only to alter that very little to have a perfect description of the fourth Gospel: 'John found in Jesus as the Logos the wisdom after which Greek thinkers had been striving, and he tried to present Jesus as the Logos in such a way that Greeks would see in him their journey's end.' I am convinced that this is in fact a serious misrepresentation of his purpose. Philo 'was commending Judaism to Greek-speaking paganism: John was commending Christianity to Greek-speaking Judaism. And between those two aims there is a world of difference.

Nor am I convinced (though this again rests on detailed considerations of language for which this is not the occasion) that the world he addressed was the world of speculative philosophy in which Philo was at home. He stood, I believe, much more in what has aptly been called the 'pre-Gnostic'²¹ stream of Jewish wisdom-mysticism, new light on which is constantly coming before us. I confess, moreover, to seeing less and less evidence of a polemical motive in the Gospel, whether against Baptist, Jewish or Gnostic groups. There is undoubtedly such a motive in the Johannine Epistles. But these were written specifically for the establishing of those who had already accepted the faith (1 John 2.24), to the converts of his Gospel message, which is constantly presupposed in what they are stated to have 'heard from the beginning' (1 John 2.24). The difference of aim between the Gospel and the Epistles is in fact summarized in the clearly connected statements which set out their respective purposes. Of the Gospel it is said: 'These [things] are written that *you may believe* that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing *you may have life* in his name' (20.31); while of the first Epistle the author says: 'I write this to you *who believe* in the name of the Son of God, that you *may know that you have eternal life*' (5.13). Professor E. C. Colwell's title *John Defends the Gospel* would be appropriate enough for the Epistles; but the Gospel itself has an evangelistic purpose. It is composed, no doubt, of material which took shape as teaching *within* a Christian community *in Judaea* and under the pressure of controversy with 'the Jews' of that area. But in its

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²⁰ *Op. cit.* (1956), p. 215.

²¹ The term was used originally of the Qumran literature by B. Reicke, *NTS* 1 (1954-5), 141 The term was used originally of the Qumran literature by B. Reicke, *NTS* 1 (1954-5), 141

present form it is, I believe, an appeal to those *outside* the Church, to win to the faith that Greek-speaking *Diaspora Judaism* to which the author now finds himself belonging as a result (we may surmise) of the greatest dispersion of all, which has swept from Judaea Church and Synagogue alike. His overmastering concern is that ‘the great refusal’ made by his countrymen at home should not be repeated by those other sheep of God’s flock among whom he has now found refuge.

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