

Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel

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CHAPTER 6

“The Jews” in the Gospel of John

Henk Jan de Jonge

The depiction of “the Jews” that arises in the Gospel of John is not a favorable image.¹ The Evangelist not only speaks frequently of “the Jews” as a group that is in vehement opposition to Jesus,² but he also treats this group repeatedly as a large, monolithic, indistinguishable mass.³ The author often portrays “the Jews” *en bloc* as being opposed to Jesus, as if all the Jews of Galilee (2:18), or all the Jews of Judaea (7:1), or all the Jews of Jerusalem (5:18; 10:31–39; 18:31; 19:7) were completely and without exception hostilely antagonistic to Jesus.

A superficial reading of this Gospel can suggest that its author was led by anti-Jewish sentiments. Nonetheless, it is my view that the unsympathetic portrayal of the Jews in John is not attributable to an anti-Jewish inclination or to an anti-Jewish polemic on the part of the author. Instead, I believe this negative depiction is the unfortunate result of a combination of two very different intentions of the author. First, it is my opinion that the Fourth Evangelist did indeed write polemically in his Gospel, but this polemic was not aimed at non-Christian Jews; rather, it was targeted against contemporary Christians who refused to accept the particular christological understanding of the Johannine group.⁴ Thus, the polemic of the Fourth Evangelist, as I hope to demonstrate, is aimed against

1. My interpretation of John's Gospel as a polemic against non-Johannine Christians and not against traditional, non-Christian Jews is based on the Ph.D. dissertation of my student Dr. B. W. J. de Ruyter, *De gemeente van de evangelist Johannes: Haar polemiek en haar geschiedenis* (The Community of the Fourth Evangelist: Its Polemics and Its History. With a Summary in English) (Delft, 1998). I wish to thank Dr. de Ruyter for his criticism and helpful suggestions.

2. E.g., 8:48–59.

3. E.g., 18:31, 36; 19:7.

4. This view is less novel than it may look. The thesis that John's Gospel reflects polemics against non-Johannine Christians is part of many scholars' theories on this Gospel. These scholars include E. L. Allen, “The Jewish Christian Church in the Fourth Gospel,” *JBL* 74 (1955): 88–92, p. 92: “It is here suggested that John was aware of a Jewish Christian Church, still faithful to the Law but acknowledging Jesus as Messiah and prophet”; C. H. Dodd, “A l'arrière plan d'un dialogue johannique,” *RHPR*

non-Johannine Christians, not against non-Christian Jews. Second, the author is committed to writing a story about the earthly ministry of Jesus. Because of this, he is forced to interweave his own polemical battle into the story of the life of Jesus. As a result, he projects the opposition of his contemporary non-Johannine fellow Christians (from the end of the first century C.E.) back on the opponents of Jesus (from around 30 C.E.). In this way, the Evangelist transmits the objections that the non-Johannine Christians raised against Johannine Christology (in the author's own time) into the mouths of the opponents of Jesus, who supposedly opposed him during his ministry (sixty years earlier). For the Evangelist, the opponents of Jesus during his earthly ministry were called "Jews" simply because the author considered it to be an historical fact that Jesus lived among the Jews. The result is that John portrayed "the Jews" in his Gospel as the spokespersons of the criticism that the non-Johannine Christians had against the Johannine Christology. In other words, the Fourth Evangelist ascribes the opposition that he himself was experiencing from the non-Johannine Christians to "the Jews" of Jesus' time. He projects the criticism of his contemporary opponents, who were Christians but not members of the (or of one particular) Johannine community, back on supposed Jewish opponents of the earthly Jesus.

This is my interpretation of John's treatment of "the Jews." If this interpretation is correct, then the polemic that is found in the Fourth Gospel is not anti-Jewish but is directed against Christians who refused to support the specific Christology of the Evangelist and his group. As such, the Fourth Gospel appears to be anti-Jewish, but it is in fact directed against non-Johannine Christians.

In justification of this perspective, I present two sets of evidence. In the first place, I demonstrate that whenever a breach takes place between Jesus and his opponents in chapters 5–12, the cause of the breach is not that the opponents reject Jesus completely but that they reject the main tenet of the Johannine Christology. This main tenet is that the earthly Jesus and the Father (God) are one. The Son and the Father are one in their work;

37 (1957): 5–17; C. H. Dodd, *More New Testament Studies* (Manchester, 1968), pp. 41–57; R. E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York–London, 1979), pp. 71–88. According to Brown, John polemicalizes against at least three different groups of Christians: "crypto-Christians," "Christians of inadequate faith," and "Christians of Apostolic Churches." See also M. de Jonge, *Jesus: Stranger from Heaven and Son of God* (Missoula, Mont., 1977), p. 99: "Johannine christology is developed not only in contrast with Jewish thinking but also with other christological views"; J. L. Martyn, *The Gospel of John in Christian History* (New York, 1978), p. 120: the Johannine community is "sharply differentiated and alienated from a group of so-called Christian Jews"; L. Schenke, "Das johanneische Schisma und die 'Zwölf' (Johannes 6.60–71)," *NTS* 38 (1992): 105–21. See also de Ruyter, *De gemeente*, p. 49 n. 67.

that is to say, they are functionally one. The Son does the work that the Father gives him to do; he does the work of the Father; he works in the very same way as the Father works. The Son is in the Father and the Father is in the Son. The point that repeatedly causes the breach between Jesus and his opponents is this Johannine claim that a solid, unique, and exclusive relation exists between the earthly Jesus and the Father. But this does not mean that those who refuse to accept this "high" Christology of John's Gospel reject Jesus entirely. It is very possible that they possessed an intensely positive appreciation of Jesus, even though they rejected the extremely high assessment of the earthly Jesus that is typical of John's Christology. What the opponents in chapters 5 through 12 are rejecting is the specifically Johannine claim of the functional unity of the Son and the Father. Based on this observation, it can be concluded that the Evangelist in fact polemicizes with non-Johannine Christian contemporaries, and not with Jews, even though he calls his contemporary opponents "the Jews" in his story of Jesus' ministry. With "real" (that is to say, traditional), non-Christian Jews, the discussion would have revolved around completely different subjects, namely, whether Jesus was someone sent by God at all, or whether it was even possible for him to be the definitive agent of God's eschatological salvation. These themes do surface in some places, but they never form the breaking point between Jesus and "the Jews." The breaking point is an intra-Christian issue: Was Jesus, who is acclaimed as prophet and Son of God, already one with God during his earthly ministry?

In the second place, I defend my view by examining the speeches in which the Evangelist has Jesus react to the objections of the opponents. These speeches are formulated in such a way that the opponents whom the Evangelist addresses can be seen as possessing a certain amount of positive appreciation of Jesus. The opponents who are being represented are apparently not non-Christian Jews but Christians who do not share the Johannine Christology.

I recognize that the two types of evidence I have just mentioned are perhaps not sufficiently compelling to make the interpretation of the Gospel as a polemic against other Christians necessary. Nonetheless, I prefer the interpretation that John's polemic does not reflect a dispute with traditional Jews; it reflects only a controversy with other Christians who maintain a different christological understanding from John's own group. The reason I prefer this interpretation is that the Evangelist's depiction of the Jews in his story is so incongruent with actual traditional Jews that it is obvious they are actually strangers to him. He speaks of them as a category of people with whom he has had no contact and whom he hardly even

knows. The Evangelist's unfamiliarity with the Jewry of the first century is especially evident in the way in which he characterizes the Jews as a single, homogeneous ethnical group before Pilate in the passion account of chapters 18 and 19. The Evangelist depicts them in these chapters and elsewhere with a surprising ignorance and lack of nuance.⁵ It becomes apparent from the unnuanced manner in which he speaks of "the Jews" in the passion story that he is unable to contrive a credible image of them for himself. He is no longer able to imagine them as real people of flesh and blood. They are an undifferentiated, foreign entity out of a relatively distant past, basically a fictional category. They are an *idée fixe*. The Evangelist speaks of them as strangers.⁶ On the basis of this evidence, I am inclined to deduce that "the Jews" were no longer discussion partners for John. The Evangelist betrays his own attitude concerning "the Jews" when he has Jesus say, in 8:25: "Why do I speak to you at all?" John is no longer in dialogue with "the Jews" but with Christians who, although they did believe in Jesus in some manner, were not prepared to accept the Johannine Christology, and who therefore did not belong to the Johannine group.

I now attempt to substantiate my understanding of the Fourth Gospel by examining chapters 5–12. Due to the innate limitations of this contribution, it is inevitably necessary for the discussion to be concise. I have opted to discuss chapters 5–12 in this contribution because the Evangelist has Jesus manifest himself to the world here (chapters 1–12), and the confrontation between Jesus and "the Jews" begins with chapter 5. The Evangelist prepares the way for this confrontation in the preceding chapters. The relationship between Jesus and "the Jews" is already strained in 2:18, where they ask Jesus what gives him the right to act the way he does. In 3:11, Jesus makes the objection to Nicodemus: "You [plural, referring to the Jewish teachers (3:10), the Pharisees (3:1), or "the Jews" (3:1) in general?] do not receive our [Jesus'] testimony." In 4:1–3, Jesus leaves Judaea and goes to Galilee because the Pharisees of Judaea were unfavorably inclined toward him on account of his growing popularity. But in chapter 5, the confrontation between Jesus and "the Jews" hardens. Now the Jews (of Jerusalem) "started persecuting him" (v. 16) and "were seeking . . . to kill him" (v. 18).

5. The Evangelist's ignorance is apparent in 18:3, "police from the chief priests and the Pharisees"; 18:12, "the Jewish police"; 18:13, "the high priest that year." A strange lack of knowledge also surfaces in 11:46, where the Jews go "to the Pharisees" to accuse Jesus; 11:47, "the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council"; and 11:49, "Caiaphas, who was high priest that year." A peculiar lack of nuance is evident in John's use of the term *the Jews* in 18:31, 36, 38; 19:7, 12, 14, 31, 38; but also in 11:19, 31, 33, 36, 54, 55.

6. E.g., 19:40.

Before I begin my treatment of chapters 5–12, I make the observation that, in my opinion, many of the passages of the Gospel of John (as in the other Gospels) can carry more than one meaning. It is undoubtedly true that we are dealing exclusively with a text from the last decade of the first century. And yet many of the passages carry meanings on two different levels.⁷ First there is the level of the narrated occurrence from the time of Jesus' earthly activity. On this level the text carries a kind of "literal," *prima facie* meaning. Thus, the reference to "the Jews" simply represents the Jewish contemporaries of Jesus, even though this category, with the reactions of "the Jews" to Jesus, is for the most part a construction of the Evangelist, which he invented himself. The hermeneutical context of this primary meaning is the world of Jesus during his time on earth as the Evangelist imagines it. But in many places the Gospel also carries another, even more important meaning that is determined by the hermeneutical context of the Evangelist's own world. On this second level the author wanted to infuse into the Gospel an actual meaning for his own contemporaries. On this level the Evangelist wages an indirect polemic against his opponents within a writing that is addressed to like-minded believers (the Johannine community). It is my contention that, on this level, the nomenclature "the Jews" sometimes represents the author's Christian opponents. These opponents did not share the writer's Christology but were nonetheless Christians. The Evangelist calls them "Jews" because he took for granted that Jesus had lived and acted among Jews. Thus, in one single passage, "the Jews" can refer to the characters in the biographical story of Jesus and at the same time represent a group of non-Johannine Christians with whom the author is engaged in a dispute.

John 5

In John 5, the story is related about how Jesus heals a man in Jerusalem who had been sick for thirty-eight years. The healing induces criticism from "the Jews" (5:10, 16, 18). At first, their objection appears to be grounded on the fact that Jesus "was doing such things on the sabbath" (5:16), whereby the Sabbath was being violated. But the motif of the violation of the Sabbath is only a prelude to the introduction of a more

7. The fact that it is often necessary to accept two meanings for one passage is explained by (along with other scholars) A. Boeckh, *Enzyklopädie und Methodologie der philologischen Wissenschaften* (Leipzig, 1886; reprint, Darmstadt, 1966), p. 91. This method is necessary when "der Wortsinn zum Verständnis nicht ausreicht." An extra ("übertragene") meaning must be postulated when "der Sinn des ganzen Werks und die gegenseitige Beziehung aller seiner Theile (es) verlangt."

important theme. According to the Evangelist, Jesus' work on the Sabbath is the work of his Father: "My Father is still working, and I also am working" (5:17). "Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes" (5:21). "The works that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf" (5:36). The central motif for the Evangelist here is that Jesus is one with the Father in his works. It is true that the Evangelist needed the introduction of the theme of the Sabbath to clarify his view of Jesus: just as God is still working on the Sabbath to prove his benevolence, so also may Jesus work benevolently on the Sabbath. But the crucial point is not the Sabbath but the confession of Jesus' functional unity with the Father. It is only when this last point has been made (5:17) that "the Jews" want to kill him, because, as the Evangelist has them say, he was "making himself equal to God" (5:18; 7:1). The essential problem the opponents have is actually this: the Johannine doctrine of the unity of Jesus and his Father.

On the level of the narrated occurrence, "the Jews" in this passage are traditional Jews. And yet, it is rather striking that the decisive objection these Jews raise against Jesus concerns the Johannine claim that he and the Father are one in their work. They acknowledge entirely that Jesus performed the miraculous healing (5:16). This raises the suspicion that, on the level of the communication between the Evangelist and his readers, "the Jews" are already thought of as people who rejected the Johannine Christology but not Jesus in general.

What is truly remarkable, however, is the discourse the Evangelist then places in Jesus' mouth in 5:19-47. The discourse is directed toward "the Jews" (5:19, αὐτοῖς, referring to "the Jews" in 5:18). But the speech is formulated in such a way that the recipients are considered to accept a priori the idea that Jesus is "the Son" of God the Father (5:19, 25). Those who are being addressed in Jesus' speech (i.e., "the Jews") are also considered to be familiar with the idea that God "sent" Jesus (5:23, 24, 30). These particular conceptions concerning Jesus are not subjects of discussion between the speaker (Jesus) and the recipients ("the Jews"). Even the question of whether Jesus is the apocalyptic Son of man who comes to judge (5:27) is not a subject of discussion. The only point for which the author argues is the notion that not only will Jesus appear and act as eschatological judge (i.e., as Son of man) in the future but that he had already appeared and acted in this way during his earthly ministry sixty years earlier: "the hour is coming, and is now here" (5:25). Finally, the opponents are expected to acknowledge, just as they did in 5:17 and 18, that Jesus has performed truly remarkable works.

But people who accept that Jesus is the Son of God, that he is sent by God, and that he is the Son of man must be Christians. Thus, when the Evangelist wrote the discourse of Jesus in 5:19–47, the opponents he had in mind were Christians but not Johannine Christians. The so-called Jews of chapter 5 are traditional, non-Christian Jews on the level of the narration, but on the level of the communication between the Evangelist and his readers, they represent non-Johannine Christians.

John 6

In the sixth chapter, John tells about the feeding of the five thousand and Jesus' walking on the water. These "signs" (6:14, 26) produce two reactions: the reaction of "the crowd" (6:2, 22, 24) and the reaction of "the Jews" (6:41, 52). After Jesus has spoken to "the Jews" in the discourse of 6:41–58, there is yet the negative reaction of "his disciples" (6:60–66) and the positive reaction of Peter.

The reactions of the crowd are typical responses of believers with inadequate faith. They profess that Jesus "is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world" (6:14; cf. Deut. 18:18–20), and they want to make him king (6:15). They look for Jesus (6:24, 26). But the Evangelist has Jesus rebuke them because they are hoping only to receive food that perishes, instead of food that endures for eternal life (6:27), that is, Jesus, who is the bread of God that has come down from heaven (6:33, 35, 38, 41).

From the perspective of John the Evangelist, the crowd consists of people who "do not believe" (6:36), but they are depicted in this way only because they do not share the high Christology of John. In actuality (that is, in the reality of the author's social world), they have quite a substantially positive appreciation for Jesus: they see him as a prophet like Moses (Deut. 18:15–18), as a teacher (6:25), and as the future ideal king of Israel (6:15); in other words, they see him as the "anointed of the Lord" or the Christ.

On the level of the narrated occurrence, the crowd is a group of Jewish disciples of Jesus who are not able completely to believe in Jesus with an adequate faith. On the level of the communication between John and his readers, the Evangelist is describing Christians who do not accept the Johannine Christology. In the speech that the Evangelist has Jesus deliver in 6:32–40, John polemicizes against Christians with non-Johannine convictions.

More important for our subject are the verses of the passage 6:41–59, because the reaction portrayed in these verses is identified as that of "the Jews." The Evangelist describes these "Jews" as raising only one objection against Jesus, namely, they object to the claim that he has come down from

heaven as food that gives eternal life. Thus, "the Jews" protest only against the typical Johannine conception of Jesus, not against Jesus in general.

Moreover, in the speech the Evangelist has Jesus deliver to these Jews (6:43-58), they are considered to accept the following presuppositions: (1) that people must come to Jesus (6:44); (2) that Jesus was sent by the Father (6:44, 57); (3) that Jesus comes from God (6:46); (4) that Jesus is the Son of man (6:53); (5) that Jesus lives through the Father (6:57). These are all notions that are not justified or explained. The presumed hearers of Jesus' discourse are supposed to take them for granted.

In the context of the story of 6:41-59, "the Jews" are naturally thought of as traditional Jews. In the context of the author's message for his readers, however, verses 42-58 reflect a polemical rebuttal against Christians who do not share John's vision concerning Jesus.

Finally, John 6:60-66 relates how Jesus' speech about himself as the bread from heaven provoked exasperation from many of his disciples. They are indeed disciples, but they cannot accept the Johannine doctrine that Jesus is the bread from heaven that gives life. They have a different vision concerning Jesus; for instance, that he is the Son of man (6:62). But the Evangelist believes that if they do not share his radical Christology, they "do not believe" (6:64). He sees them as "turning away" from Jesus (6:66). On the narrative level, these people are disciples of Jesus whose faith in him is inadequate, and so they eventually desert him. In the context of John's message for his readers, however, he polemicizes here against contemporary Christians of a non-Johannine brand. The Evangelist typecasts them as unbelievers or apostates, but in their own opinion, they undoubtedly considered themselves to be Christians.

In general, then, it appears that the Evangelist is polemicizing against non-Johannine Christians not only in the passages about the crowd (6:1-40) and the disciples (6:60-66) but also in the passage about "the Jews" (6:41-59). On the narrative level, the crowd, the disciples, and the Jews are three distinct groups. On the level of the communication with his readers, however, the author uses these different groups to conduct one single polemic against one single group: it is a polemic against Christians who do not agree with his Christology.

John 7-8

Chapters 7-8 relate that Jesus goes from Galilee to Jerusalem, where he stays during the festival of Tabernacles. In the temple, he has discussions with various Jewish groups.

In the first scene (7:1–13), the writer observes that the Jews of Judaea want to kill Jesus (7:1). This is a resumption of 5:18. We have already seen that the cause of the Jewish opposition in 5:18 was the Johannine view of Jesus as the one who works like his Father (5:17). The antagonists are called "Jews" because they appear as characters in the social context of the earthly Jesus. But for the author of the Fourth Gospel, they represent at the same time the opponents of the Johannine community and its Christology. Although they maintained a positive appreciation of Jesus, they refused to acknowledge the functional unity of the earthly Jesus with God.

After Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem, it becomes apparent that the Jews in Jerusalem are in fact hostilely opposed to him (7:11, 13). This hostility receives no more explication than it does in 7:1; the explication has been given in 5:17–18, namely, that Jesus held the typically Johannine opinion that he was one with the Father. The Jews of 7:11 seem to be opposed not to Jesus but Johannine Christology.

In the second scene (7:14–30) Jesus meets "the Jews" in the Temple. Jesus knows that they want to kill him (7:19), but the crowd is not yet aware of this (7:20). The Evangelist has Jesus engage in a discussion with the Jews (v. 16, *αὐτοῖς*). In his report of the discussion, the Evangelist makes it clear once again that the anger of those who wish to kill Jesus is provoked by the claim that Jesus, just like God, works on the Sabbath (7:21, 23–24). The theme is the same here as in 5:18. The second scene is concluded with the sentence "Then they tried to arrest him [Jesus]" (7:30). It is not completely clear whether the antecedent of "they" in v. 30 is "some of the people of Jerusalem" (7:25) or "the Jews" of 7:1 (and 5:18). But for our purposes, it is irrelevant to ponder this matter too extensively. For in either case the remark in 7:30, "they tried to arrest him," immediately follows the words of Jesus in which, once again, the very typical Johannine Christology finds expression: "I have not come on my own. But the one who sent me is true, and you do not know him. I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me" (7:28–29). The opposition of 7:30 is directed against the Johannine claim that an exclusive bond existed between the earthly Jesus and God, whereby Jesus acted as the full envoy of God on earth.

It is only natural that those who wish to arrest Jesus within the story are Jewish contemporaries of Jesus. But the author also portrays them as opponents of the Johannine Christology, that is, as opponents of himself and his community. These adversaries possess a substantially positive appreciation of Jesus (7:15), but at the same time, John sees them as opponents of the Johannine Christology.

In the third scene (7:31–36), it is not “the Jews” (as in 7:11, 7:1, and 5:18) who want to arrest Jesus but the “chief priests and the Pharisees.” In this case, their motivation is not an objection to the Johannine Christology but their irritation at the fact that “many in the crowd” believed in Jesus. Thus, their motive is jealousy, a motif that goes back to Mark 15:10 and that will return in 11:45–47 (see below). As a result, the “chief priests and Pharisees” of 7:32 are only characters in the narrative, not opponents of John. They are the Jewish leaders who will later arrest Jesus in the passion story (11:57; 18:3).

At the end of this scene, “the Jews” are once again introduced and characterized as being unable to comprehend Jesus. They are portrayed as being unable to understand what it means that Jesus will go where they cannot go. It is probable that the author understands “the Jews” here not only as characters in the story but also as representing Christian opponents of the Johannine community. For the author says that these “Jews” are “searching” for Jesus (7:34, 36) but that they do not find him, because they do not realize that Jesus is going to the One who sent him and to a place where they cannot go. These “Jews” search for Jesus; they probably belong to the “many in the crowd” who believed in Jesus (7:31); but they do not acknowledge that he is God’s specific, exclusive envoy. When considered outside the parameters of the story, in the personal experience of the Evangelist, would they not actually be Christians of whom the Evangelist knows that they are in search of Jesus, but who do not share in the Johannine conception of Jesus?

The fourth scene (7:37–44) also concludes with the notation that some of the crowd “wanted to arrest” Jesus (7:44). In this case, there is no compelling reason to assume that John means any group other than the characters in the story. Their aggression against Jesus is incited by the positive reactions of some of the crowd toward Jesus (7:40–41a). The “division” of which 7:43 speaks corresponds with the contradistinction between the people who see Jesus as the prophet and the Christ (7:40–41a) and those who do not see him as the Christ (7:41b–42). All of this remains on the level of the narrative. The remark “some of them wanted to arrest him” can be sufficiently explained as a prelude, on the narrative level, to Jesus’ arrest in the passion story.

In the fifth scene (7:45–8:20), the “chief priests and Pharisees” complain that their servants did not arrest Jesus. This passage is the continuation of 7:32, where the chief priests and Pharisees sent out their servants to arrest Jesus. We have already seen that these priests and Pharisees were motivated by jealousy (7:31–32). The opposition of the chief priests and

Pharisees must therefore be construed as an intranarrative theme and as a preparation for the arrest of Jesus (18:3, 12). Within the story, these characters do not represent Christian opponents of the Evangelist.

After Jesus' speech in 8:12, 14–19, the listeners, among whom the Pharisees (8:13) are mentioned, want to kill him, but they do not do this because Jesus' time had not yet come (8:20). It is possible that the Evangelist in 8:20 is alluding to the opposition of the Johannine Christology, for the message of 8:12–19 is clearly that Jesus and the Father are functionally one. Jesus' judgment is God's judgment (8:16), and Jesus' testimony is God's testimony (8:18). This theme reiterates the theme of 5:36.⁸ Thus, it is possible that the opposition of 8:20 represents not only an element in the story of Jesus but also an element in the social context of the Evangelist. In this case, just as in chapter 5, it is the opposition of Christians against the Johannine group, because the criticism is directed against typical Johannine viewpoints and not against the appreciation of Jesus.

One cannot be entirely certain, however, that the opposition mentioned here is reflective of opposition on the level of the communication between the Evangelist and his readers. The resistance to Jesus alluded to in 8:20 can also be explained as nothing more than a narrative element within the literary context of the Gospel that serves only to prepare for the arrest of Jesus in chapter 18.

The sixth scene (8:21–59) records that Jesus tells "the Jews" that he speaks that which he has heard and learned from God (8:26, 28). As a result of his speaking, many come to believe in him (8:30). But it becomes quickly apparent that, according to the Evangelist, these believing Jews were not yet true disciples of Jesus (8:31). The writer tells us that Jesus discerns that they want to kill him (8:37, 40). The Evangelist even has Jesus tell them that they do not understand Jesus (8:43), that the devil is their father (8:44), and that they do not believe in Jesus (8:45). The contradiction between the claim that these Jews "believed in him" (8:31) and the statement of Jesus that they do not believe in him (8:45) is only superficial. In the story, they are Jews who believed in Jesus to a certain extent, but they did not accept all the Johannine refinements of the Christology that Jesus here assigns to himself. They are believers of inadequate faith. When they are referred to as unbelieving in 8:45 and 46, this is the judgment of the Evangelist, which he places in the mouth of Jesus. Their evaluation of Jesus is so inadequate that the Evangelist has Jesus say that they do not believe. From their own viewpoint, though, they would very much consider themselves to be believers.

These believers of inadequate faith, however, do not play a role only within the narrated story. They also undoubtedly represent a group of Christian believers from the time of the Evangelist whom he rejects. He reproaches them because they do not sufficiently acknowledge that Jesus speaks and does what the Father has him say and do (8:38, 40). They are certainly believers, but they do not endorse the Johannine Christology, which maintains that the earthly Jesus appeared as God's envoy in the role of the apocalyptic Son of man and that he represented God already during his earthly ministry (8:28; see also 1:51, 5:27, etc.). Believers who do not accept this understanding of Jesus are considered by the Evangelist to be unbelievers. Nowhere is it so clear as it is here that "the Jews" (8:31, 48) against whom the author polemicizes are actually Christians with a non-Johannine persuasion.

In 8:48–59, the conflict between Jesus and "the Jews" escalates. The cause of the escalation is that Jesus insists that a unique relationship exists between him and God: Jesus glorifies God and is glorified by God (8:49, 54); the divine gift of eternal life is mediated through the word of Jesus (8:51, 52); and Jesus claims to be preexistent (8:58). These far-reaching christological claims cause "the Jews" to distance themselves from Jesus. And yet, these are the same Jews who had come to believe in Jesus (8:30) and who, to a large extent, had become his disciples (8:31). The breaking point between them and Jesus is now defined by the specifically Johannine view of Jesus. On the level of the narrative, these Jews who first followed Jesus and then fell away from him are just ordinary Jews. The fact that the breach becomes evident only when the notions of the typically Johannine Christology are introduced makes it plausible that, on the level of the Evangelist's message for his readers, he is polemicizing against a group of people who claimed to be Christians but who reject John's view of Jesus. In their own opinion they are Christians, but John considers them to be unbelievers. The Evangelist projects their rejection of the Johannine view of Jesus upon the attitude of the Jews toward the earthly Jesus.

John 9–10

This section begins by telling how Jesus heals, on the Sabbath, a person who was blind from birth. The Evangelist views this healing as a work of God (9:3) that is performed by Jesus (9:4). Jesus is here doing the work of the One who sent him (9:4). The work of God and the work of Jesus are the same.

Then the Evangelist records the reactions of two different groups: the reaction of the Pharisees (9:13–17) and that of "the Jews" (9:18–34). The reaction of the Pharisees is divided. Some of them declare that Jesus has not come from God due to the fact that he performed the healing on the Sabbath. We noted the same reaction in 5:18. According to the evangelist, this reaction demonstrates, in essence, that the Pharisees deny that Jesus, like God himself, is allowed to work on the Sabbath. They deny the functional unity between Jesus and God, which Jesus claims in 9:3–4. These Pharisees do not deny that Jesus has performed a miraculous healing. The only thing they reject is the Johannine view of Jesus, whereby Jesus is one with God.

In mentioning these Pharisees in the story, the Evangelist undoubtedly means nothing other than genuine Pharisees, contemporaries of Jesus. But the Evangelist portrays them as being critical of his Johannine Christology. For the Evangelist, then, these Pharisees represent opponents of the Johannine community. These adversaries do not reject Jesus in general, only the specifically Johannine Christology as it concerns the functional unity of Jesus and God. Thus, in the notion of the Evangelist, these people appear more as Christians who are against the Johannine Christology than as traditional Jews.

A justification for accepting the idea that these so-called Pharisees represent for the Evangelist a specific type of Christian can be found in his depiction of the other group of Pharisees. The other Pharisees argue with the first group of Pharisees. The second group of Pharisees reason that the signs that Jesus performs prove he is not a sinner (9:16) and that he comes from God. They accept that Jesus performs his signs on the Sabbath and, as such, that he works in the same way as the Father and that he works the work of the Father (9:4). On the level of the narrative, of course, these Pharisees are also genuine Pharisees. But on the level of the message of the Evangelist for his readers, they are conceived as people who recognize Jesus' miraculous acts as well as his unity with the Father; that is, they are conceived as Christians who possess, or who come near to possessing, the Johannine conviction.

Therefore, in the view that the Evangelist unfolds for his readers, the Pharisees of 9:16a as well as those of 9:16b stand for Christians: the first, for non-Johannine Christians, and the second, for Christians who come near to accepting the Johannine view of Jesus.

As far as "the Jews" of 9:18–34 are concerned, they also acknowledge that Jesus truly did perform the miraculous healing (9:19, 26). But like the first group of Pharisees (9:16), they consider Jesus to be a "sinner" (9:24).

In this chapter, there is no reason provided to support this opinion other than the violation of the Sabbath (cf. 9:16). Thus, these Jews also deny that Jesus, as is also true of God, may work on the Sabbath. Accordingly, they deny the unity of the work of Jesus and God, whereby they reject the Johannine evaluation of Jesus. But they do not completely reject Jesus. The Evangelist does not even have them deny that Jesus has come from God; they go no further than to say: "We do not know where he comes from" (9:29). The only thing they reject is the unity of Jesus and God.

In the plot of the story, there is no doubt that "the Jews" stand for actual Jews from the time of Jesus.⁹ But insofar as the Evangelist wants to instruct his readers concerning what, in his opinion, the correct assessment of Jesus is, he employs the category of "the Jews" here as an illustration for non-Johannine Christians. After all, the only aspect of "the Jews" that the Evangelist discredits is the fact that they deny the unity of Jesus and God. But if this is the only basis for the Evangelist's condemnation of them, then they are Christians with a non-Johannine Christology, not non-Christian Jews. In the eyes of the Evangelist, however, Christians who do not share the Johannine Christology are unbelievers, even if they think of themselves as Christians. The Evangelist uses the category of "the Jews" as a watershed term to characterize fellow Christians who are anti-Johannine.

The parables of the shepherd and the thief (10:1-5), the gate (10:7-10), and the good shepherd (10:11-16) do not directly provide any support for our position. But the end of Jesus' speech (10:17-18) and the subsequent reactions of "the Jews" to the speech are rather enlightening. The Evangelist has Jesus claim that he can lay down his life and take it up again by virtue of a special mandate that he has received from the Father (10:18). Once again, an exclusive relationship between God and Jesus is being claimed here. This leads directly to a division among the Jews. Many of the Jews consider the claim of exclusive solidarity between God and Jesus to be unacceptable. Nonetheless, in their rejection they renounce nothing more than the Johannine view of Jesus; they do not reject Jesus in general. "Other" Jews are even able to accept the claim of the close relationship between God and Jesus on the grounds of Jesus' healing of the blind man (10:21).

Both groups of Jews in the narrative of 10:19-21 are real, traditional Jews. But at the same time the Evangelist uses these Jews in the framework of his communication with his readers. Within this framework, these people, whose only objection to Jesus revolves around the Johannine claim

9. This is why they are introduced in 9:22 and 34 as Jews who excommunicate the Christians from the synagogue.

of an exclusive relationship between Jesus and God, must be Christians. Otherwise, they would have objected to many other notions of Jesus, for example, the notion that Jesus was sent by the Father. But they only take offense at the claim that Jesus has received a special mandate concerning himself from God. If this is their only objection, then they are evidently conceived by the writer as Christians who reject the Evangelist's high Christology. The "other" Jews of 10:21 do not reject this Christology, in view of Jesus' healing of the blind man. Within the parameters of the message of the Evangelist, these other Jews are thus Christians who adhere to a view that is very near to that of the Johannine group. Therefore, on the level of the author's message for his readers, "the Jews" who reject John's Christology (10:20) are not directly traditional Jews; they are Christians whose view of Jesus does not coincide with the view of John. On the level of his communication with his readers, John typecasts the category of "the Jews" to play the role of Christian contemporaries who did not accept all, or perhaps only a portion, of John's Christology.

Although a period of approximately two months lies between Tabernacles (10:21) and the festival of the Dedication (10:22), the passage 10:22-39 belongs to the section 9:1-10:39. This is evident from the fact that 10:27-29 recalls the parables of 10:1-10. The debates between Jesus and "the Jews" that are recorded in 10:32-39 are the last in the series of discussions in Jerusalem that began in chapter 5. These last debates are particularly fierce.

The Evangelist tells his readers that "the Jews" once again want to stone Jesus (10:31).¹⁰ This is the reaction of the Jews to Jesus' utterance "The Father and I are one" (10:30). Thus, the adversaries of Jesus are introduced again as being opposed to the specifically Johannine Christology. They are not entirely ill-disposed toward Jesus, for at the beginning of the debate (10:24) they are still able to ask Jesus, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." It cannot be denied that they possess some form of interest or fascination for Jesus. But for the Evangelist, their appreciation of Jesus is much too little. He says simply that they "do not believe" (10:25, 26).

Within the narrative of chapter 10, "the Jews" of vv. 24-32 are Jewish contemporaries of Jesus. In the instructions that the Evangelist wants to transmit to his readers, however, these are people who do not reject anything except the Johannine Christology; otherwise, they exhibit a rather keen interest in Jesus. This is why the Evangelist has Jesus speak to these opponents as if Jesus can assume their acquiescence with the idea that he is

10. See also 8:59 and 11:8.

the Son of God (10:25) and that he has the right to act as the leader of a group of disciples (10:27). Thus, in the message of the Evangelist for his readers, "the Jews" of 10:22–31 represent people who are Christians but who do not accept the Johannine profession that Jesus and God are one. The Evangelist considers people like this to be unbelievers, even though they would consider themselves to be non-Johannine Christians.

At the end of chapter 10, "the Jews" persist in their rejection of Jesus. This is the Evangelist's preparation of the role "the Jews" will play in the passion story of chapters 18 (vv. 31, 36, 38) and 19 (vv. 7, 12, 14). In this passage we already see that "they tried to arrest" Jesus (10:39). On the level of the narrative, these Jews are ordinary Jews in the everyday life of the earthly Jesus. It is rather striking, however, that the objection of these "Jews" is directed against nothing other than the Johannine claim that the Father is in Jesus and that Jesus is in the Father (10:38). The opponents regard this evaluation of Jesus to be too much. And so this is the aspect that "the Jews" react against; but this is an objection against John, not against Jesus.

Thus, the Evangelist portrays "the Jews" as if they were critical of the Christology of the Johannine group. This points out the fact that the Johannine group itself was being confronted by such criticism toward the end of the first century—a criticism not of Jesus but of the Johannine Christology. But this critical attack must have emanated from a Christian source, for the discussion does not concern the significance of Jesus in general, only the typically Johannine profession that Jesus and God are one in their works. The Evangelist proceeds on the assumption that the opponents whom he has in mind share with him a positive evaluation of Jesus. He supposes that the opponents accept that "the Father has sanctified and sent [Jesus] into the world" (10:36) and that Jesus is the Son of God (10:38). The Evangelist pronounces these views without providing any justification or explanation. The opponents are considered to be in agreement with the Evangelist on these matters. Thus, the opponents are regarded by the Evangelist as Christians.

In short, the Evangelist portrays "the Jews" with the features of his own Christian opponents. The polemic of the Fourth Evangelist is directed here against Christian opponents, not against Jewish opponents.

John 11–12

The first half of John's Gospel, in which Jesus reveals himself to the world, is concluded with chapters 11–12. This section relates the reactions of sev-

eral Jewish groups to Jesus, but none of these groups plays a role that transcends the narrative level of the story. They do not represent any opponents of the Evangelist. In this respect, chapters 11–12 prepare the way in which the Evangelist treats the Jews in the second half of the Gospel.

The resurrection of Lazarus provokes various reactions from the Jews. Many of them come to believe in Jesus (11:45). Others bring accusations against him before "the Pharisees" (11:46). The "chief priests and the Pharisees" now decide that Jesus must be arrested and put to death (11:53, 57). The belief in Jesus of the one group must be told (11:45) in order to make the hostile reaction of the other group (11:46) understandable. And this latter reaction must be told in order to make the animosity of the Jewish leaders toward Jesus comprehensible. In this way, all the actions and reactions of the Jewish groups in 11:45–57 can be perceived as fulfilling a specific, literary function within the narrative context of the Gospel, whereby preparation is made for Jesus' passion. They do not reflect the social relationships at the level of the author of the Gospel. The reason the Jewish leaders want to put Jesus to death is that Jesus is performing so many signs that countless people are on the verge of believing in him (11:48). The motivation of the Jewish leaders is thus determined by envy, a motif that already controls the plot of the passion story in the Gospel of Mark (Mark 15:10). Here, in 11:45–57, there is no record of a discussion between Jesus and the Jews, nor between the Evangelist and any kind of adversary. The Jews of chapter 11 are portrayed only as contemporaries of Jesus; they do not also represent opponents of the Evangelist.

The same simple representation is true for the chief priests who want to kill Lazarus (12:10) after the anointing of Jesus in Bethany (12:1–8). The motif here is also jealousy (12:9–11). These stories simply reflect the Evangelist's reconstruction of the events on a narrative level. There is no evidence at all of a discussion between the Evangelist and some kind of opponent.

The Pharisees who become angry after Jesus' entry into Jerusalem (12:19) are also motivated by jealousy. They are simply characters in the plot of the Passion, not representatives of some kind of opponent of the Evangelist.

In 12:37–43, the Evangelist sums up the final results of Jesus' preaching. The crowd in general ("they," i.e., the crowd mentioned in 12:29, 34) does not believe in him. This observation is astonishing, especially when one considers the supernatural signs and works that Jesus has performed. Such a failure to believe requires an explanation. And so the author offers

two explanations.¹¹ The first is borrowed from tradition: the unbelief of the crowd is the effect of negative predestination (12:38–40). The other explanation is the invention of the Evangelist himself. Many of the leading Jews did believe in Jesus, but they believed in secret; they concealed the truth. As a result, the crowd was not able to confess belief in Jesus (12:42). It is necessary for the Evangelist to add the second explanation, because the explanation of negative predestination could provoke the reaction that the blind could not be held accountable for their unbelief. But from the perspective of the Evangelist, the actions of Jesus are definite signs that made it so overwhelmingly evident that he was divinely commissioned that everyone who had seen them should have believed in him. Thus, it is the Evangelist's task to explain the unbelief of the majority of the Jews, while maintaining the irrefutability of the works of Jesus. He accomplishes this by contending that the people who had seen Jesus' deeds had in fact come to believe in him but that they had concealed their faith (12:42),¹² so that many others did not come to believe.

But now the evangelist has a new problem: Why did the Jews who had actually come to believe in Jesus not publicly profess their belief? Why did they conceal their belief in Jesus? The Evangelist opts for the solution that they did not confess their faith for fear of excommunication (12:42). It is striking that the Evangelist uses the theme of excommunication in exactly the same way in 9:22. There, too, people are said to refuse to tell the truth about Jesus "because they were afraid of the Jews" who threatened to ban those who acknowledged Jesus as Messiah from the synagogue. The theme of excommunication serves simply to explain why people who had a correct knowledge about Jesus kept silent about him. Thus, the theme allows of an exclusively literary explanation, both in 9:11 and 12:42. It is unnecessary, therefore, to assume that in 16:2–4 the same theme has a more solid basis in historical facts, apart from the schism between the Johannine community and other Christian groups.

For the last thirty years, many exegetes have taken the excommunication of Christians from the synagogue, as it is mentioned in 12:42 (and 9:22; 16:2), as the historical starting point for the reconstruction of the origin of the Johannine community.¹³ In my view, however, the mention

11. de Ruyter, *De gemeente*, pp. 113–15.

12. For the same motif, see 19:38; 9:22; and 7:13.

13. J. L. Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (New York, 1968; 2d ed., Nashville, 1979); J. L. Martyn, "Glimpses into the History of the Johannine Community," in M. de Jonge, ed., *L'Évangile de Jean* (BETL 44; Leuven, 1977), pp. 149–75 (reprinted in Martyn, *The Gospel of John in Christian History*, pp. 90–121). For a critique of Martyn's position, see de Ruyter, *De gemeente*, pp. 27–29.

of this excommunication is sufficiently and satisfactorily explained as a literary invention of the Evangelist, which he created in order to explicate why those who had actually come to believe in Jesus on account of his works did not openly profess their faith. And the silence of those who actually believed was the Evangelist's narrative construction to explain the general unbelief of the Jews.

All in all, chapters 11–12 do not reveal any reflection of a polemic of the Evangelist against his opponents. The behavior of the Jews in these chapters only fulfills a literary function within the narrative context of the Gospel; it serves as a preparation of the role played by the Jews in the Johannine passion story.

Conclusion

In many places in John's Gospel, Jewish people, groups, and leaders function only as literary characters within the parameters of the narrative. They do not represent contemporaries of the Evangelist with whom he is engaged in a dispute. This is true, for instance, in the case of the chief priests and the Pharisees of 7:32–36 and 7:45–8:20; the Jews of 11:19–57 and 12:9; the chief priests of 12:10; and the Pharisees of 12:19 and 12:42. Their role is repeatedly portrayed unfavorably by the Evangelist, but this role is the narrative, more or less fictional reconstruction of John. After one has examined the literary function of these groups within these passages of the narrative, the negative depiction of them can be put aside as historically unfounded and theologically irrelevant.

In many other cases, however, "the Jews" in John's Gospel are not only characters in the narrative but also, at the same time, people who represent Christian contemporaries of the Evangelist: Christians against whom he polemicizes. These people are Christians, but they do not share John's high Christology. They refuse to accept that the earthly Jesus was already one with God. In essence, they differ from John in terms of their view of eschatology. John asserted that eschatology had been realized with Jesus' appearance in the world: in Jesus, God had sent his representative to save and to judge the world. John's opponents, however, regarded the eschaton as not yet realized. Accordingly, they possessed a lower appreciation of Jesus. As a result, John views these less radical Christians as unbelievers. In his Gospel, he projects their unbelief on persons in the context of Jesus; inevitably, this projection falls on Jews surrounding Jesus. This does not mean, though, that John polemicizes against "Jews." His criticism is

directed against Christians. He projects what he regards as the inadequacies of these Christians' faith, or what he regards as their unbelief, however, on the Jews figuring in his narrative about Jesus. This is perhaps an unfortunate technique. Nonetheless, when John practices this technique, he cannot be justifiably accused of being anti-Jewish. His polemic is elicited by and leveled against non-Johannine Christians. This is evident in John's treatment of the disciples in 6:60-66 and in his treatment of the Jews who believed in Jesus in 8:30-59. But the same interpretation applies to "the Jews" of Jerusalem in 5; 7:1-36; 9:18-34; 10:19, and 22-39; the crowd in 6:1-40; "the Jews" of Galilee in 6:41-59; and the Pharisees of Jerusalem in 9:13-16a and 40.