



WILLIAM M. WRIGHT IV

Rhetoric and Theology

Figural Reading of John 9

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For my father, mother, and sister,
with much love and gratitude

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Chapter 1

John 9 as a Two-Level Drama in Contemporary Scholarship¹

Throughout the history of exegesis, the Gospel According to John has been recognized as having a distinctive theological character.² Arguably the most famous articulation of this belief is Clement of Alexandria's remark that John the Evangelist, "seeing that the physical matters [τὰ σωματικά] were set forth in the gospels, having been inspired by the Spirit wrote a spiritual gospel."³ For Clement, this spiritual character makes the Fourth Gospel unique, since the first three Gospels are concerned with τὰ σωματικά. Eusebius does not comment further about what constitutes the spiritual character of the Fourth Gospel for Clement. However, Eusebius affirms elsewhere in his *Ecclesiastical History* that the unique quality of John's Gospel is its presentation of Jesus' divinity.⁴ This belief

1 The expression "two-level drama" comes from J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (3d ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 66.

2 For overviews of the history of interpretation of the Fourth Gospel and particular moments in that history, see Mark Edwards, *John* (Blackwell Bible Commentaries; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2004); Séan P. Kealy, C.S.Sp., *John's Gospel and the History of Biblical Interpretation* (2 vols.; Mellen Biblical Press Series; Vols 60a-b; Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002); Robert Kysar, *The Fourth Evangelist and His Gospel: An Examination of Contemporary Scholarship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1975); Ibid., "John, Gospel of," *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, 1:609–619; Maurice F. Wiles, *The Spiritual Gospel: The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel in the Early Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960).

3 Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.14 (PG 20:552); translation mine.

4 Eusebius thinks that John's Gospel was written to supplement the Synoptic Gospels. He links John's concern for showing Jesus' divinity with the absence of a genealogy in his Gospel. The genealogies in Matthew and Luke underscore Je-

that the John's theological distinctiveness lies in its presentation of Jesus' divinity became quite widespread in the history of interpretation, especially among premodern readers.

In his *Commentary on John*, Origen states, "the Gospels are the first fruits of all the Scriptures, but that of the Gospels that of John is the first fruits."⁵ Origen identifies the Fourth Gospel as the firstfruits because of its presentation of Jesus' divinity, which can be contemplated by the spiritually advanced. Augustine likewise follows the Clementine distinction between the corporeal, earthy character of the Synoptics and the spiritual, sublime character of the Fourth Gospel. As the one who leaned upon Jesus' chest at the Last Supper and learned from him, John preeminently displays Christ's divinity.⁶ The abundance of Trinitarian language and teaching in the Fourth Gospel leads Augustine to associate John with the contemplation of the divine and to endorse the depiction of the Fourth Evangelist as an eagle.⁷ Augustine's interpretation of the Fourth Gospel had far reaching influence on medieval exegesis of John with much of the *Glossa Ordinaria* for John being drawn from his

Jesus' humanity by providing his human ancestry. Since Jesus' humanity has been set forth already in the Synoptics, John omits a genealogy to present Jesus' divinity. See Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.24. Origen (*Comm. Jo.* 1.6 [ANF 9:299]) makes the same connection between the absence of a genealogy in John and John's concern for Jesus' divinity.

- 5 Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 1.6 (ANF 9:300). In the opening of *Comm. Jo.*, Origen presents the Church as the spiritual Israel and explores the spiritual relationship of the people, the priests and Levites, and the high priest of ancient Israel with the people, devotees of the Word, and office-holders in the Church as the spiritual Israel. Just as the Levites and priests were entirely preoccupied with the offering of the firstfruits, so too are the Levites and priests of the spiritual Israel the ones entirely devoted to the study of God's Word. The Gospels are the firstfruits, the mature fruit, of all Scripture, and John is the most mature of the Gospels. See Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 1.1–4 (ANF 9:297–298).
- 6 Augustine (*Cons.* 1.4.7 [NPNF¹ 6:79]) writes, "But John, on the other hand, had in view that true divinity of the Lord in which He is the Father's equal, and directed his efforts above all to the setting forth of the divine nature in his Gospel in such a way as he believed to be adequate to men's needs and notions." Cf. Augustine, *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 1.7.
- 7 Cf. Augustine, *Cons.* 1.5.8; 1.6.9 (NPNF¹ 6:80–81). Augustine's association of John the Evangelist with contemplation of the divine and the figure of the eagle will be adopted and endorsed later by Thomas Aquinas in the Prologue to his *Lectura super Ioannem*, §11. This understanding of John the Evangelist as a contemplative continues in the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar, who employs John as the model of consecrated life. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life* (trans. Sister M. F. McCarthy; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1983), 282–287, 366.

Tractates on the Gospel According to John.⁸ Through Augustine, the interpretive current to see John's theological importance in its presentation of Christ's divinity would persist in much subsequent interpretation of John. Among the Protestant Reformers, Martin Luther affirms that "No evangelist other than John was able to stress and describe this article of faith [i.e. the divinity of Christ] in such a masterly manner."⁹ Similarly, John Calvin appropriates this exegetical tradition by stating that the first three Gospels "exhibit [Christ's] body but John exhibits his soul."¹⁰

John's distinctiveness also prompted some premodern interpreters to read the Gospel in a manner appropriate to its theological nature. Following his comment that John is the firstfruits of the Gospels, Origen remarks, "No one can apprehend the meaning of it except he have lain on Jesus' breast and received from Jesus Mary to be his mother also."¹¹ According to Origen, in order to understand truly the Fourth Gospel, the reader must become another John. What does Origen mean by this? Origen takes the gesture of John resting his head upon Jesus at the Last Supper to mean that Jesus had taught his identity to John. On the one hand, grasping the significance of John's Gospel involves the apprehension of Jesus' divinity. Origen's treatment of John having Mary as his mother is more complex. Origen argues in light of Gal 2:20, "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me," that Christ lives entirely in those who are spiritually perfected.¹² Mary's only biological son is Jesus, and yet at the foot of the cross, Jesus speaks of Mary as John's mother too. For John to receive Mary as his mother presupposes that Christ lives in John. Christ speaks of Mary as John's mother because John has been spiritually transformed to the extent that her Son lives fully in John.

8 Adolph Rusch of Strassburg, *Biblia Latina Cum Glossa Ordinaria: Facsimile Reprint of the Editio Princeps 1480/1481* (4 vols.; Turnhout: Brepols, 1992); Walafridus Strabus, "Glossa Ordinaria" (PL 114:355–426).

9 Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 1–4* (ed. J. Pelikan; vol. 22 of *Luther's Works*; St. Louis: Concordia, 1957), 17.

10 John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John I* (trans. W. Pringle; vol. 17 of *Calvin's Commentaries*; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1996), 22. Both Luther and Calvin affirm the early Christian tradition that John wrote his Gospel to refute the heresies of Cerinthus (cf. Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.11.7). See Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John*, 7, 18, 57; Calvin, *Gospel According to John*, 22.

11 Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 1.6 (ANF 9:300).

12 All translations of biblical texts are my own unless otherwise indicated.

While he does not make this argument in the opening of his *Comm. Jo.*, Origen states elsewhere that a spiritual mode of exegesis is ordered toward the continuing transformation of the spiritually advanced. In *On First Principles*, Origen draws a comparison between the human being, who is composed of body, soul, and spirit, and the capacity of Scripture to benefit all who read it.¹³ Citing Prov 22:20–21 as a Scriptural warrant, Origen writes the following:

Each one must therefore pourtray the meaning of the divine writings in a threefold way upon his own soul; that is, so that the simple may be edified by what we may call the body of the scriptures ... while those who have begun to make a little progress and are able to perceive something more than that may be edified by the soul of Scripture; and those who are perfect ... may be edified by that spiritual law, which has 'a shadow of the good things to come', as if by the Spirit."¹⁴

Origen distinguishes three different groups—the simple, the intermediate, and the advanced—on the basis of their levels of spiritual progress.¹⁵ But these three groups should not necessarily be understood as referring to three discrete kinds of people. As Torjensen argues, "Origen has organized the congregation of all believers into three groups which simply represent the three distinct phases through which a soul passes on its way to perfection."¹⁶ Origen's argument is that all Christians, whether at a beginning, intermediate, or advanced degree of spiritual transformation, can read Scripture profitably. A spiritual manner of interpretation is appropriate for the ongoing transformation of those who have made significant progress in the Christian life. For Origen, a reader must have progressed to such an advanced level, to have become another John, in order to understand truly the Fourth Gospel. A spiritual manner of interpretation is thus appropriate to the perfected reader of the Fourth Gospel and its status as the firstfruits of the Gospels.

Modern scholarship understands John's theological character and the appropriate means for grasping it somewhat differently.

13 Origen, *Princ.* 4.2.4. All citations of Origen's *Princ.* will be taken from Origen, *On First Principles* (trans. G. W. Butterworth; Peter Smith: Gloucester, Mass.: 1973). On the relationship between the threefold sense of Scripture and the tripartite anthropology in Origen, see Henri de Lubac, *History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture according to Origen* (trans. A. E. Nash and J. Merriell; San Francisco: Ignatius, 2007), 159–190.

14 Origen, *Princ.* 4.4 (Butterworth).

15 Karen Jo Torjensen, *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Structure in Origen's Exegesis* (PTS 28; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1985), 43

16 *Ibid.*, 40.

Like so much of contemporary New Testament studies, the present state of scholarship on the Gospel According to John exhibits a great deal of interpretive diversity.¹⁷ This diversity results in large part from the wide range of interpretive approaches that scholars take towards the Gospel and the variety of readings that stem from the use of these approaches. While conventional questions of source, form, and redaction criticism continue to be asked, much recent scholarship has focused on the Gospel as a literary whole.¹⁸ There exists a good deal of cross-fertilization among these different approaches, with the questions of one interpretive approach building upon the results of another.

All this holds true when one considers the state of scholarship on John 9. Within the last forty years, there have been studies in which customary historical-critical questions about possible sources for the miracle story, its tradition, and redaction are again pursued.¹⁹ John 9 also has figured into some social analyses of the Gos-

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- 17 Udo Schnelle writes, "so kann ohne Übertreibung gesagt werden, daß eine neue Epoche der Johannesforschung angebrochen ist" in "Ein neuer Blick: Tendenzen gegenwärtiger Johannesforschung," *BTZ* 16 (1999): 21. For surveys of recent research, see Jürgen Becker, "Das Johannesevangelium im Streit der Methoden (1980–1984)," *TRu* 51 (1986): 1–78; Craig R. Koester, "R. E. Brown and J. L. Martyn: Johannine Studies in Retrospect," *BTB* 21 (1991): 51–55; Robert Kysar, "Community and Gospel: Vectors in Fourth Gospel Criticism," *Int* 31 (1977): 355–366; Barnabas Lindars, S.S.F., "Some Recent Trends in the Study of John," *The Way* 30 (1990): 329–338; Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B., "Revisiting John," *ScrB* 11 (1980): 9–15; *Ibid.*, "Where Does One Look?: Reflections on some recent Johannine scholarship," *Salesianum* 62 (2000): 223–251; Udo Schnelle, "Perspektiven der Johannesexegese," *SNTSU* 15 (1990): 59–72; Klaus Scholtissek, "Johannine Studies: A Survey of Recent Research with Special Regard to German Contributions," *CurBS* 6 (1998): 227–259; *Ibid.*, "Johannine Studies: A Survey of Recent Research with Special Regard to German Contributions II," *CurBS* 9 (2001): 277–305; Gerard S. Sloyan, *What Are They Saying About John?* (rev. ed.; New York: Paulist, 2006); Stephen S. Smalley, "The Johannine Literature: A Sample of Recent Studies in English," *Theology* 103 (2000): 13–28; D. Moody Smith, "Johannine Studies," in *The New Testament and Its Modern Interpreters* (eds. E. J. Epp and G. W. MacRae, S.J.; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 271–296; *Ibid.*, "The Contribution of J. Louis Martyn to the Understanding of the Gospel of John," in *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* by J. Louis Martyn (3d ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 1–19; repr. pages 275–294 in *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul & John in Honor of J. Louis Martyn* (eds. R. T. Fortna and B. R. Gaventa; Nashville: Abingdon, 1990).
- 18 So Scholtissek, "Johannine Studies," 227, 254–255; *Ibid.*, "Johannine Studies II," 299; Schnelle, "Ein neuer Blick," 24–26.
- 19 Since this chapter is concerned with the influence of J. Louis Martyn's *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* on Johannine scholarship, historical studies that acknowledge Martyn's work on John 9, include the following: John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 166–181; C. K.

pel,²⁰ and literary critics²¹ have attended to the literary devices and dynamics of this chapter, which, as Raymond Brown remarks, “shows consummate artistry [and] Johannine dramatic skill at its best.”²² The symbolic and metaphorical aspects of this account have likewise been studied, and some scholars have explored the contemporary implications of this story for areas such as preaching,

Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (2nd ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 137–138, 353–366; George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (2nd ed.; WBC 36; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987), 148–162; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), 359–379, esp. 360–361; R. Alan Culpepper, *The Johannine School: An Evaluation of the Johannine-School Hypothesis Based on an Investigation of the Nature of Ancient Schools* (SBLDS 26; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1974), 32, 268; Luc Devillers, O.P., *La Fête de l’Envoyé: la Section johannique de la Fête des Tentés (Jean 7,1–10,21) et la Christologie* (Ebib 49; Paris: J. Gabalda et Cie, 2002), 135–160, 394–397; Robert Tomson Fortna, *The Fourth Gospel and Its Predecessor: From Narrative Source to Present Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 109–113; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (2 vols.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2003), 1:775–796; Celestino G. Lingad, Jr., *The Problems of Jewish Christians in the Johannine Community* (Tesi Gregoriana Serie Teologia 73; Roma: Editrice Pontifica Università Gregoriana, 2001), 63–188; John Painter, “John 9 and the Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel,” *JSNT* 28 (1986): 31–61; Severino Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel: The Torah and the Gospel, Moses and Jesus, Judaism and Christianity According to John* (NovTSup 42; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), 510–514; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John* (trans. K. Smyth; 3 vols.; New York: Crossroad, 1968–1982), 2:238–258; Udo Schnelle, *Antidocetic Christology in the Gospel of John: An Investigation of the Place of the Fourth Gospel in the Johannine School* (trans. L. M. Maloney; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 115–125; *Ibid.*, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (THKNT 4; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsgesellschaft, 1998), 166–176; D. Moody Smith, *John* (ANTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 196, 199, 201; Klaus Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium* (2 vols.; Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 4; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2000), 1:348–373. These studies do not all have the same appraisal of Martyn’s work.

20 E.g. Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 168–178.

21 E.g. Paul D. Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 68–69, 77–79, 117–126; J. Warren Holleran, “Seeing the Light: A Narrative Reading of John 9,” *ETL* 69 (1993): 5–26, 354–82; Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B., *Signs and Shadows: Reading John 5–12* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 117–131; Gail R. O’Day, “The Gospel of John” (*NIB* 9; Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 491–865; James L. Resseguie, “John 9: A Literary-Critical Analysis” in *The Gospel of John as Literature: An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Perspectives* (selected by M. W. G. Stibbe; NTS; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993), 115–122; repr. from *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives: Vol. II* (ed. K. Gros Louis; Nashville: Abingdon, 1982); Philip L. Tite, “A Community in Conflict: A Literary and Historical Reading of John 9,” *RelStTh* 15 (1996): 77–100.

22 Raymond E. Brown, S.S., *The Gospel According to John* (2 vols.; AB 29–29A; Doubleday: New York, 1966–1970), 1:376.

spirituality and discipleship, ideological interpretation, and Jewish-Christian relations.²³

Yet behind much of the scholarship on John 9 is the highly influential analysis of this account by J. Louis Martyn in *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*.²⁴ This book stands as one of the most significant pieces of scholarship written on the Gospel According to John in the second half of the 20th century. In his *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, John Ashton refers to Martyn's book as "probably the most important single work on the [Fourth] Gospel since Bultmann's commentary."²⁵ Likewise, D. Moody Smith, in his introductory essay to the 3rd edition of Martyn's book, states that Martyn "rightly gets credit for a sea change in Johannine studies."²⁶ This "sea change" to which D. Moody Smith refers is the interpretation of the Fourth Gospel and its theology in terms of a reconstructed history of the Johannine community.²⁷ According to this proposal, specific events in the history of the Johannine community had a

23 Reimund Bieringer, Didier Pollefeyt, and Frederique Vandecasteele-Vanneuville, eds., *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001); Brian K. Blount, *Then the Whisper Put on Flesh: New Testament Ethics in an African American Context* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 104–118; Raymond Collins, "Representative Figures in the Fourth Gospel," *DRev* 94 (1976): 41–43; Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 63–65, 100–105, 144–145; Dorothy A. Lee, *The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel: The Interplay of Form and Meaning* (JSNTSup 95; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 161–187; Gail R. O'Day, *The Word Disclosed: Preaching the Gospel of John* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2002), 63–89; Sandra M. Schneiders, "To See or Not to See: John 9 as a Synthesis of the Theology and Spirituality of Discipleship," in *Word, Theology, and Community in John* (ed. J. Painter, R. A. Culpepper, and F. F. Segovia; St. Louis: Chalice, 2002), 189–209.

24 Martyn, *History and Theology*. The first two editions of this book were published by Abingdon in 1968 and 1979. John 9 also receives significant treatment in Martyn's 1957 Yale dissertation "The Salvation-History Perspective in the Fourth Gospel," (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1957), 119–167. For surveys that situate Martyn's work within the broader context of Johannine scholarship, see Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, 107; Thomas L. Brodie, *The Quest for the Origin of John's Gospel: A Source-Oriented Approach* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 15–21; Koester, "R. E. Brown and J. L. Martyn," 51–55; Kysar, *Fourth Evangelist and His Gospel*; *Ibid.*, "Community and Gospel," 362–364; *Ibid.*, "John, Gospel of," *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* 1:609–619; Moloney, "Revisiting John," 9–15; Smith, "Johannine Studies," 281–285; *Ibid.*, "The Contribution of J. Louis Martyn," 1–19.

25 Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel*, 107.

26 Smith, "The Contribution of J. Louis Martyn," 6.

27 In an editorial excursus, Moloney writes, "Martyn has been the most significant figure in developing an understanding of the history of the Johannine community" in Raymond E. Brown, S.S., *An Introduction to the Gospel of John* (ed. F. J. Moloney; ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 2003), 70.

powerful, shaping influence on the development of Johannine theology. These experiences of the community were so influential that they have been written into the Gospel narrative itself. The story of the man born blind in John 9 is *the* place in the Gospel where the community's history is considered especially visible.

Since its appearance in 1968, and especially in recent years, some fundamental tenets of Martyn's hypothesis have come under criticism from both historical and hermeneutical quarters.²⁸ Richard Bauckham, for example, has argued that the concern for the history of the Gospel communities leads to "more or less allegorical readings of the Gospels in the service of reconstructing not only the character but the history of the community behind the Gospel."²⁹ This characterization of Martyn's reading of John as "allegory" has likewise been made by others. In order to grasp the importance of Martyn's work for the study of John 9, it is necessary to set forth the fundamentals of Martyn's analysis in *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, map out the ways in which elements of Martyn's work have influenced subsequent study of John 9, and articulate the substance of the various critiques of Martyn's hypothesis, especially the allegory critique.

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- 28 For instance, Daniel Boyarin, "Justin Martyr Invents Judaism," *CH* 70 (2001): 430–437; Brodie, *Quest for the Origin of John's Gospel*, 15–21; Colleen M. Conway, "The Production of the Johannine Community: A New Historicist Perspective," *JBL* 121 (2002): 479–495; Steven T. Katz, "Issues in the Separation of Judaism and Christianity After 70 C.E.: A Reconsideration," *JBL* 103 (1984): 43–76, esp. 71–72; Reuven Kimelman, "Birkat Ha-Minim and the Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Jewish Prayer in Late Antiquity," 226–244 in vol. 2 of *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition* (3 vols.; ed. E.P. Sanders et al; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980–1982); Robert Kysar, "The Expulsion from the Synagogue: The Tale of a Theory," in *Voyages with John: Charting the Fourth Gospel* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2005), 237–245; Adele Reinhartz, *Befriending the Beloved Disciple: A Jewish Reading of the Gospel of John* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 37–53; *Ibid.*, "The Johannine Community and its Jewish Neighbors: A Reappraisal," in *"What is John?": Volume II: Literary and Social Readings of the Fourth Gospel* (ed. F. F. Segovia; SBL SympS 7; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 111–138.
- 29 Richard Bauckham, "For Whom Were Gospels Written?," in *The Gospel for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (ed. R. Bauckham; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 19–20.

1.1. J. Louis Martyn's Analysis of John 9 in *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*

1.1.1. The Starting Point for *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*

The first edition of Martyn's *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* appeared in 1968. He begins the Introduction, "the Fourth Gospel has seemed consistently to invite readers in every century to interpret it solely in their own terms."³⁰ This timeless reading of the Fourth Gospel owes something to the contrast in Clement's distinction between the Synoptics and John, the spiritual Gospel. Jesus in the Fourth Gospel often appears less historically sensible than the Synoptics' presentations of Jesus. The reception of John as the spiritual Gospel has contributed to this kind of ahistorical reading, which often ignores the Gospel's more unpleasant episodes (e.g. John 8:31–59).

In contrast to this sort of timeless reading, Martyn articulates his own objective: "to define the particular circumstances in response to which this Fourth Gospel was written."³¹ Martyn's task is fundamentally historical. He wants to situate the Fourth Gospel within its original, historical context of composition. Martyn also posits that the Gospel was written in response to particular set of historical circumstances. As such, form criticism and redaction criticism (a method which Martyn helped pioneer) are fundamental to Martyn's argument. According to the thinking implied in these methods, the Gospels are arrangements of individual forms or units that had undergone pre-literary shaping—and in some cases, creation—in various situations in the community's experience (*Sitze im Leben*).³² These forms were then arranged by the Gospel writers,

30 Martyn, *History and Theology*, 27. Martyn does not specify any commentators who represent this trend. However, one may speculate as to whether he might be including Bultmann in this camp on account of his highly individualized and ahistorical interpretation of John's theology as "a dualism of decision"; quotation from Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (trans. K. Grobel; 2 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951–1955), 2:21.

31 Martyn, *History and Theology*, 28.

32 So writes Bultmann, "The proper understanding of form-criticism rests upon the judgement that the literature in which the life of a given community, even the primitive Christian community, has taken shape, springs out of quite definite conditions and wants of life from which grows up a quite definite style and quite specific forms and categories" in Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (trans. J. Marsh; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963), 4.

who themselves wrote in particular contexts. The evangelists and redactors are thought of as both editors and composers, who write to address the concerns and needs of their particular communities. The communities' situations can be inferred from the editorial and compositional activity of the Gospel writers.

Locating John in its context of origin also has hermeneutical implications for Martyn. The Fourth Gospel needs to be understood within its historical setting so that contemporary readers can "hear the Fourth Evangelist speak in his own terms, rather than in words which we moderns merely want to hear from his mouth."³³ John's original, historical meaning provides the basis or ground for subsequent interpretations of this text. For Martyn, historical reading seems to function as a corrective to timeless, spiritual interpretations of John. Martyn's concern then is to locate the Fourth Gospel in its historical context of origin and hear the evangelist's message within that context. Having defined his goals, Martyn sets out on his historical task, presupposing the basic tenets of form and redaction criticism.

Martyn assigns much importance to the traditioning process behind the Gospel compositions. The evangelist receives traditional material, which he then adapts and composes with an eye to his community's situation. To establish the historical setting in which the Gospel was produced, Martyn starts by separating tradition and redaction in material that is known to be traditional since it also appears in the Synoptics: the healings in John 9:1–7 and John 5:1–9.

1.1.2. John 9 as a Two-Level Drama

Martyn treats John 9:1–41 as a discrete unit in its own right, without much attention to its surrounding context. While Martyn does make an occasional comment about how this chapter relates to its narrative context, he nonetheless isolates John 9 and analyzes it by itself.³⁴ Martyn first distinguishes tradition from redaction in this

³³ Martyn, *History and Theology*, 29.

³⁴ For example, Martyn (*History and Theology*, 38) writes, "It is then the evangelist who has created in John 9 a dramatic unity which captures and holds the reader's attention, and effectively prepares him for the important discourse of chapter 10."

chapter. He argues that 9:1–7, the miraculous healing, is tradition because it corresponds generally to the form of a miracle story and resembles accounts found in the Synoptics (cf. Mark 8:22–26; 10:46–52; Matt 9:27–31; 20:29–34; Luke 18:35–43). John 9:8–41, however, constitutes a new series of scenes in which new characters and concerns are present. Martyn identifies 9:8–41 as redaction and terms these verses “a *dramatic expansion* of the original miracle story (vv. 8–41).”³⁵ The weaving of tradition (9:1–7) and redaction (9:8–41) into a single unit results in a seven-scene drama.³⁶ In keeping with form and redaction critical principles, Martyn affirms that this redactional arrangement (since it contains both tradition and manipulation of that tradition) allows for the discernment of the evangelist’s historical situation.

By conflating his own *Sitz im Leben* with that of the traditional material through the redactional expansion, the evangelist creates a sense of continuity between his own community’s situation and that of Jesus. Martyn also finds evidence of this continuity in statements such as John 9:4a and 14:12, texts which illustrate the Johannine conviction that Jesus was alive and continued to work thorough believers, even though he was no longer, in a sense, present in the world. With respect to John 9, Martyn calls attention to the presence of both first person singular and plural pronouns in 9:4a: “it is necessary for *us* to work the works of the one who sent *me* while it is day.”³⁷ Jesus includes the disciples in his work, and yet he subsequently speaks of a time when no one can work: “night is coming when no one is able to work. As long as I am in the world, I am the Light of the World” (9:4b–5). A tension exists in the Gospel between Jesus as present in the work of the disciples and yet absent from the world.

The continuity between Jesus and the Johannine community, which involves the ongoing presence and work of Jesus in the Johannine community, leads the evangelist to compose the Gospel in such a way that it operates at more than one level or respect. The Gospel speaks of events in the life of Jesus and the history of the Jo-

35 Ibid., 36; italics Martyn’s.

36 Martyn (*History and Theology*, 37) articulates the seven scene arrangement as follows: 9:1–7; 9:8–12; 9:13–17; 9:18–23; 9:24–34; 9:35–38; 9:39–41.

37 Italics added. The presence of both singular and plural first person pronouns in 9:4a follows the reading of this verse found in B. For text critical discussion of the pronouns in 9:4, see chapter 4, p. 161 n. 81.

hannine community simultaneously. As Martyn writes, "the text presents its witness on two levels: (1) It is a witness to an *einmalig* event during Jesus' earthly lifetime ... (2) The text is also a witness to Jesus' powerful presence in actual events experienced by the Johannine church."³⁸ Martyn calls this phenomenon "the two-level drama."³⁹

Martyn analyzes the seven scenes of this redactional arrangement and argues that there is a "'doubling'" of characters between the two levels.⁴⁰ In other words, the characters in the Gospel narrative have reference at both the level of Jesus and the level of the Johannine community. Jesus in the Gospel narrative is not only Jesus, but also a Johannine Christian. The man born blind is not only a person cured by Jesus, but also a member of the synagogue who was affected by the ministry of a Johannine Christian.⁴¹ This doubling extends beyond particular characters to the entire narrative sequence of the chapter. The narrative sequence of John 9 is read scene by scene as recounting events in the life of Jesus and the Johannine community at the same time. At one level, Jesus heals a man born blind, who is then interrogated by Jesus' opponents, ejected from their presence, and later confesses his faith in Jesus. At another level, the ministry of a Johannine Christian affects a synagogue-going Jew, who is eventually excommunicated from the synagogue over his belief in Jesus' messiahship. This excommunicated Jew is then received into the community by that Johannine Christian.

What can be inferred about the historical situation of the evangelist and his community from this redactional arrangement in John 9? A central component to Martyn's reading of John 9 as dramatically presenting an event in the history of the Johannine community is 9:22: "For the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess him to be the Christ, he would become one of out the synagogue [ἀποσυνάγωγος]." Martyn finds John's use of ἀποσυνάγωγος especially significant. This term occurs only in the Fourth Gospel, here and in two other places (12:42; 16:2). Martyn reads this comment in 9:22 as exhibiting four key characteristics: "(1) the expression 'the Jews', (2) the verb with its adverbial modifi-

38 Martyn, *History and Theology*, 40.

39 Ibid., 66.

40 Ibid., 38.

41 Ibid., 40–45.

er 'had already agreed', (3) the messianic confession of Jesus, and (4) the predicate nominative 'an excommunicate from the synagogue'."⁴² The first two points are especially important for Martyn's hypothesis, for he understands them as referring to an official Jewish policy in effect prior to the Gospel's composition.⁴³

The other two occurrences of ἀποσυνάγωγος also shed light on the historical situation of the Gospel's composition. Martyn takes 16:1–4, with the mention of ἀποσυνάγωγος in 16:2, to be post-resurrectional words of Jesus spoken to the Johannine community.⁴⁴ Jesus tells his disciples that they will be put out of the synagogues. This statement indicates that some members of the Johannine church did in fact experience such an expulsion. John 12:42 mentions some Jewish leaders who believed in Jesus but did not make their faith public for fear of being expelled from the synagogue. The situation envisioned by Martyn's construal of ἀποσυνάγωγος calls for a centralized, authoritative Jewish magisterium that has the power for issuing and enforcing an edict to separate those who believe in Jesus from the synagogues under their jurisdiction.

Martyn maintains that the situation envisioned by ἀποσυνάγωγος is anachronistic for the context of Jesus' ministry.⁴⁵ Martyn looks for another historical situation in which these characteristics might make sense, one that might coincide historically and chronologically with the evangelist's day. He considers four different candidates for the situation. First, Martyn considers whether the situation envisioned in John could be a kind of Jewish ban (נדר or סקרו). But he decides against them because these actions do not carry the force of excommunication and separation possessed by ἀποσυνάγωγος. He discounts the second and third candidates, which are possible similarities with events in Acts. In particular, Martyn considers Paul's persecution of the early Church, the disciplining of Paul and other early Christians by Jewish leaders (e.g. Acts 13:45–50; 14:19), and Paul's departure from synagogues when his message is not received (Acts 18:7; 19:9). These possibilities are dismissed because they too do not correspond to the four points in

42 Ibid., 47.

43 Ibid., 47.

44 Ibid., 48.

45 Martyn maintains that the contrast between the discipleship of Moses and the discipleship of Jesus in 9:28 is likewise anachronistic with respect to the life of Jesus. See *History and Theology*, 47.

his construal of ἀποσυνάγωγος. Martyn settles upon the last candidate and concludes that ἀποσυνάγωγος is related to the *Birkat HaMinim*. Martyn argues that the *Birkat HaMinim* was rewritten and promulgated by the Council of Yavneh in order to remove Jews who believed in Jesus from the synagogue.⁴⁶ This candidate coincides with a time prior to the composition of John's Gospel and meets all four characteristic points that Martyn lays out in his assessment of ἀποσυνάγωγος. According to Martyn, the *Birkat HaMinim* was used both to identify and expel Christ-believing Jews: a Jew suspected of belief in Christ would be asked to recite the *Shemoneh Esre*, and depending on whether and in what manner he spoke the Twelfth Benediction, the *Birkat HaMinim*, he would be identified as a Christian and excommunicated.⁴⁷

Since he first made this proposal, Martyn's association of ἀποσυνάγωγος with the *Birkat HaMinim* has been criticized on historical grounds. But the existence of the two-level drama does not depend on the historical conclusion about ἀποσυνάγωγος and the *Birkat HaMinim*. More argumentative weight for the existence of the two-level drama rests on John's redactional expansion of a traditional miracle story.⁴⁸ John's construction of 9:8–41 (which principally portrays events in the time of the community) and his appending them to a traditional miracle story in 9:1–7 (which principally portray events in the time of Jesus) show how John blurs the distinctions between Jesus and his community. The association of ἀποσυνάγωγος with the *Birkat HaMinim* illustrates how the experiences of the Johannine community have been written into the story of Jesus. Members of the Johannine community had experienced excommunication from the synagogue, and this experience has been dramatized in the story of the blind man. The healing of the

46 For Martyn's argumentation on this point, see *History and Theology*, 56–65. As D. Moody Smith points out ("The Contribution of J. Louis Martyn," 11, n. 24), Martyn's understanding of Yavneh and the *Birkat HaMinim* resembles that of W. D. Davies in his *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 275–286.

47 Martyn also resembles Davies on this point. Davies (*Setting of the Sermon on the Mount*, 276) writes, "the Birkath ha Minim served the purpose of making any Christian, who might be present in a synagogal service, conspicuous by the way in which he recited or glossed over this Benediction." Cf. Martyn, *History and Theology*, 64.

48 Martyn writes (*History and Theology*, 39) that the healing miracle "is not terminated in Jesus' earthly lifetime, as the expansion of the simple healing narrative in verses 8–41 makes clear"; italics added.