

Article

Negotiating Complexity within the Dialectical and Cosmopolitan Johannine Situation

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Abstract: While understandings of Johannine Christianity have been many and varied, single-issue analyses no longer suffice. Things were more complex than simply inferring that synagogue-Johannine tensions, pneumatizing Gnostics, heretical secessionists, or Petrine ecclesiasts was the lone issue. Nor is a two-level reading of the Johannine narrative plausible, as there is no evidence of alien material underlying John's story of Jesus. Thus, the early, middle, and later phases of the Johannine tradition must be taken into consideration, as an autonomous memory of Jesus is best seen as developing in a first edition, which was finalized later by the Johannine Elder after writing the Epistles. Within that perspective, *Social Identity Complexity Theory* is well applied as a means of understanding a number of partners in dialogue within the Johannine Situation, including the stances of Jesus remembered by the Fourth Evangelist and Johannine Elder, who addressed no fewer than seven crises over seven decades within the cosmopolitan Johannine Situation.

Keywords: Johannine; Fourth Gospel; early Christianity; history; religion; apostles; complexity



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1. Introduction¹

In 1986, John Ashton declared that J. Louis Martyn's *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* was the most significant single volume in Johannine studies since the 1941 commentary on the Gospel of John by Rudolf Bultmann.² In some ways, he was right, as Martyn raised the visibility of Jewish-Johannine interactivity in the middle to later phases of the Johannine Situation (70–100 CE). On the other hand, I have since qualified that judgment, arguing that the more dialectical approach to the Johannine situation argued by Raymond Brown makes an advance over Martyn's single-issue analysis, as it reflects a more complex and adequate overview of five or six issues in the Johannine dialectical situation, and I thus judge the overall contribution of Brown's three volume commentaries on the Johannine Gospel and Epistles, between which is sandwiched his monographs on *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind*, and *Antioch and Rome*, as sketching a more compelling overview of the Johannine Situation in longitudinal perspective.³ And, I judge Alan Culpepper's 1983 *The Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* as the most important monograph in new literary analyses of the New Testament over the last half century or more (A. Culpepper 1983).

In particular, one of Brown's enduring contributions was to refuse the dichotomies of Judaism versus Hellenism among New Testament scholars, seeking, for instance, to label Matthew as the Jewish Gospel and John as the Gospel to the Hellenists.⁴ More fittingly, Brown identified four levels of *both Jewish and Hellenist* features of different writers and sectors of New Testament Christianity, reflecting the complexities of the movement. On one level, those requiring full observance of Jewish laws reflect one group (especially Jewish followers of Jesus in Jerusalem—in my view, “men coming from James” and some zealous Gentile converts to Judaism); a second group requiring some outward traits of Judaism (circumcision, no eating of food offered to idols) represents the Petrine mission; a third group (allowing food offered to idols and not requiring circumcision) represents the Pauline

and Lukan missions; and a fourth group (adhering to the ideal convictions of Judaism without requiring cultic participation or ritual adherence) is represented by Hebrews and the Johannine mission.

A value of this approach is that it explains how Jesus-adherents operated within the many complexities of varying social identities, which facilitates more textured understandings of what was at stake for New Testament authors and their audiences.⁵ Along these lines, Kobus Kok has fruitfully applied *Social Identity Complexity Theory* to the Pauline mission, providing a helpful heuristic perspective on the tensions between Paul and Peter (*Kēphas*) in his letter to the Galatians. Within his analysis, Kok applies the paradigm of Roccas and Brewer to Paul's confrontation of Peter in Galatians 2. Peter's refusal to share table fellowship with Gentile believers in Jesus when Jews from Jerusalem are present—despite his willingness to do so in their absence—is reflective of Jewish *Compartmentalization* (within Hellenistic settings, Jews are allowed to do some things, but not other things). This is opposed by Paul, who embraced an *Integration* model, believing that in Christ, all social boundaries are transcended as a fulfillment of the new Covenant in Christ Jesus. Thus, in Christ, there is neither male nor female, Jew nor Gentile, nor slave nor free person (Gal 3:28). Such an analysis clarifies why Paul declares that he confronted Peter to his face, as his refusal to dine with Gentile believers was perceived as a denial of the gospel itself.⁶

In addition to Kok's application of *Social Identity Complexity Theory* to the Pauline mission, this paradigm offers a valuable heuristic lens for understanding more fully the dialectical Johannine Situation. After all, if the Pauline mission deserves to be seen as taking place within a number of cosmopolitan situations (Stanley 2019; Park 2022), so should the Johannine. Thus, a more textured and realism-oriented view of the Johannine Situation (better language than “the Johannine Community”), deserves to be seen in longitudinal perspective, involving at least seven crises—or engagements with different audiences and their issues—over seven decades. In so doing, this more textured and nuanced approach provides a needed critical alternative to simplistic fallacies of New Testament scholars of the modern era.⁷

2. Simplistic Fallacies of New Testament Scholars

In particular, scholars assessing the character and history of Johannine Christianity have committed several errors, due to the failure to appreciate the complexity of early Christianity, including the Johannine trajectory within it. First, a lethal fallacy of one-sided positivism assumes too much as a default inference. *Not necessarily does not imply necessarily not*. Thus, in the aversion of error, scholars too easily assert *positivism of verification* (one cannot claim anything to be true unless it has been positively verified) without assenting also to its polar opposite: *positivism of falsification* (something cannot be claimed to be false unless it has been positively falsified). And, within historical analyses, it is nearly impossible to prove something did *not* happen or was *not* said. An argument from silence can never confirm any judgment or guess; and, an alternative account can never be disqualified without the attestation of alternative evidence rooted in disconfirming facts. For instance, problematizing a Synoptic or a Johannine presentation of Jesus and his ministry does not, in itself, prove that an alternative perspective is historically true. Conversely, an asserted presentation of an event or teaching cannot disqualify alternative presentations, in and of themselves. Both may be false; or, both might, in some way, reflect differing perspectives on a similar event or teaching, and thus be considered plausible in terms of individuated memories and their distinctive developments.⁸ To question a view is not to overturn it, historiographically; nor can the inference of a characteristic pattern exclude all other actions as beyond possibility. Humans are never delimited to a singular mode of operation, even if it reflects a characteristic pattern.

Second, syllogistic flaws of biblical historical-critical inferences abound. Indeed, *the fallacy of denying the antecedent* is perilously rife among biblical scholars. If it rains, the street will be wet; it did not rain, thus the street cannot be wet. Put otherwise, noting the absence of a particular historical feature does not, in itself, confirm an alternative view: Jesus is

presented as not speaking self-referentially in the Synoptics, therefore, he cannot have done so as referenced in the Fourth Gospel. Likewise fallacious is the syllogism of *affirming the consequent*. The streets are wet; therefore, it must have rained. Maybe, but not necessarily; in either case, a street cleaner or a sprinkler system might also have produced wet streets. Jesus is presented in the Synoptics as speaking in parables about the Kingdom of God; John has no Synoptic-type parables and only references the Kingdom in two passages, so John's presentation of Jesus cannot be seen as a historical representation of Jesus and his ministry. But, how do we know that Jesus did not speak of spirituality and the divine initiative in terms other than basileic ones? After all, the Johannine witness focuses on the King rather than the Kingdom. Again, both syllogistic movements are fallacious, logically. Thus, challenging a particular theory of John's historicity, memory, authorship, composition, relation(s) to the Synoptics, or situation-history does not in itself confirm an alternative proposal. Such must be subjected to equal scrutiny as the view being challenged.

Therefore, all the strengths and weaknesses of a view questioned must also be compared with the same, applied to the new proposal. For instance, to challenge a diachronic view of John's composition—due to the fact that the narrative hangs together well as a unity—does not prove that it was composed at a single sitting by a lone author. Editors also smooth things out and arrange things in progressive, repetitive ways. Conversely, just because the author of John 21:20–24 reports the Beloved Disciple to be the evangelist—whose apparent death is referenced indirectly—this doesn't mean that the final compiler was not also involved in the earlier stages of the narrative's composition, either as a scribe or as a collector of the evangelist's written or traditional memory. And, if weaknesses of one view of John's authorship are noted, this does not confirm an alternative view by default. Each new assertion must also withstand the same extent and intensity of criticism as the view being challenged, traditional or critical. I call this *Second Criticality*—the only respectable way to conduct critical biblical scholarship.⁹

Third, *the fallacy of the single-story* plagues biblical scholars as much as it other historians, and perhaps even more so. This fallacy not only relates to similarities and differences between the Gospels in their presentations of Jesus and his ministry; it also pertains to theorized histories of the Johannine Situation. While scholars before Barrett, Martyn, and Brown, all too easily saw John's story of Jesus as packaging the Jewish Jesus of Nazareth for the Greco-Roman world—be it in Ephesus, Alexandria, or a Transjordan region—the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls rightly convinced scholars that dualism was indeed a Jewish rhetorical feature.¹⁰ Thus, the *apospasmos* passages of John 9:22; 12:42; and 16:2 raised awareness of Jewish-Johannine tensions later in the Johannine Situation. Such, however, does not discount the fact of an uneven reception of the Galilean prophet by the Jerusalem elite during his ministry, which is also attested regarding his followers in the book of Acts. Occam's Razor indeed shaves too closely, severing other likely realities in the Quixotic quest for a single story. In particular, while indeed a Johannine theological thrust can be seen as reflecting tensions between the Johannine Community and the local Jewish synagogue—perhaps reflecting the expulsion of Jesus-adherents via the *Birkat ha-Minim* (the curse against the heretics, followers of the Nazarene)—this does not mean there were no tensions with the Judean leadership from day one.¹¹

Pointedly, was there just one set of tensions with Johannine neighbors and community members over seven decades, or were there several? How about earlier Galilean tensions with the Judean elite and Baptist adherents, followed by later Diaspora tensions with Jewish neighbors, schismatic community members, rising pressures of the imperial cult under Domitian (81–96 CE), false teachers of docetizing doctrines, rejections by the likes of Diotrephes, and even dialectical engagements between Johannine and Synoptic presentations of Jesus and his ministry? And, was there just one Johannine Community, or were there several? Further, was John's story of Jesus written for a single community, or was it prepared to be circulated among the churches, for all Jesus-adherents?

On these and other scores, New Testament scholars have too easily fallen into either-or dichotomies rather than both-and ways of appreciating real-life complexities. Rather

than seeing one Gospel as historical and the other not, John's differences from Mark—the Bi-Optic Gospels—may indeed represent differing first-impressions of a common historical figure or event, followed by distinctive developments of memory performance and recording, leading to emerging stages of oral and written tradition preservation, as delivered within an evolving situation over decades, involving multiple engagements with different individuals and groups, requiring (in John's case, at least) a longitudinal analysis of the highly dialectical Johannine Situation to account for the differences.¹² In my judgment, this involved engagements with no fewer than seven targeted audiences, or crises, from 30 to 100 CE, and a fitting critical analysis of *the Johannine Situation* (a better term for Johannine Christianity) also requires a more robust analytical approach to each of these groups, including their engagements with members of Johannine Christianity, as well as approaches taken by Johannine leaders along the way. After all, As Harry Attridge reminds us (Attridge 2002), the Gospel of John is not just like *anything*; it is not simply distinctive. It is unique as an autonomous account of Jesus and his ministry in a cosmopolitan setting.

3. A Longitudinal History of the Johannine Situation—Seven Crises over Seven Decades

While such scholars as Wayne Meeks (1972) and D. Moody Smith (1984) have described the Johannine Situation as highly dialectical, fewer have moved beyond J. Louis Martyn's and others' inference of sectarian synagogue tensions as the primary crisis in the second and third phases of the Johannine situation (70–100 CE).¹³ Further, references to “your law” (John 8:17; 10:34) or “their law” (15:25) need not imply a fully actualized parting of the ways; they simply may reflect tensions internal to first-century Judaism.¹⁴ Thus, seeing the Johannine writings as emerging within Judaism is essential for appreciating the socio-religious issues in play within the Johannine Situation.¹⁵ Over the last three decades, though, a number of New Testament scholars have noted the proverbial Elephant in the Room, commenting on the imperial presence of Rome and its impact upon New Testament Christianity.¹⁶ In particular, the Johannine Corpus, which involves one fifth of the New Testament, is especially rife with implications of Jews, Gentiles, and Jesus-adherents seeking to live under empire, and these issues impacted the early, middle, and late phases of Johannine Christianity, as well.

Within the three periods of the Johannine movement, at least two crises, or sets of engagements, are palpable within each. And, while these engagements were largely sequential, they were also somewhat overlapping. One crisis never fully goes away; it is simply displaced by other, more pressing aggravations or concerns. Thus, the crises in the Johannine Situation are as follows, with the first two and the seventh (referenced below) reflected primarily in the Gospel, and the other four reflected in the other Johannine writings, as well.¹⁷

3.1. Period I: The Palestinian Period, the Developing of an Autonomous Johannine Jesus Tradition (ca. 30–70 CE)

Crisis A—Dealing with North/South Tensions (Galileans/Judeans)

Crisis B—Reaching Followers of John the Baptist

Given the fact that Jesus of Nazareth received an uneven reception in Jerusalem, it cannot be said that the *Ioudaioi* (“Judeans”) welcomed Jesus unreservedly, with open arms. After all, John features primitive memories of Jesus as well as later ones (Goodenough 1945; Robinson 1985). In the Synoptics as well as John, Jesus was embraced by some in Jerusalem but also opposed by the religious elite. Conversely, many Jewish people—in Galilee and Judea—believed in him and received him enthusiastically as a messianic figure (John 8:31), although they are also reported in Bi-Optic perspective as being opposed by the Jerusalem leaders.¹⁸ Further, religious leaders refused to believe in Jesus, as he hailed from Galilee, rather than David's city (7:40–52). Thus, tensions between the Jesus movement and Jewish leaders did not simply begin in Asia Minor; they began with religio-political resistance

to Jesus and his followers, including the movement started by John the Baptist.¹⁹ This is attested multiply in the Synoptics, Acts, and the writings of Paul.

An overlapping pre-70 dialectical engagement also involved friendly competition between followers of Jesus and followers of John the Baptist.²⁰ In contrast to the Synoptics, the Gospel of John (1:19–3:30) presents (a) some of John’s followers becoming disciples of Jesus; (b) Jesus and John ministering together, side by side; and (c) John’s pointing to Jesus as the bridegroom, of whom he is merely the friend. Thus, when John is presented as declaring his mission as being sent to point Jesus out, and that Jesus might be magnified while he becomes less, the Jesus movement is shown in Johannine perspective to be the successor to that of the Baptist. While even in Ephesus followers of Apollos know the baptism of John but not the Holy Spirit some two decades later (Acts 18:24–28), the primary engagements between followers of Jesus and followers of the Baptist likely took place in the earlier stages of the Johannine tradition, rather than later ones.

3.2. Period II: The First Asia Minor Phase, the Forging of a Johannine Community (ca. 70–85 CE)

Crisis A—Engaging Local Jewish Family and Friends

Crisis B—Dealing with the Local Roman Presence

(The first edition of the Johannine Gospel is prepared.)

Following a move to Asia Minor, at least one Johannine community is forged—alongside other house-churches within the second generation of the Pauline Mission—perhaps joining the largest of house-churches in Ephesus. As in the case of the Pauline mission, the middle phase of the Johannine Situation likely involved Jesus-adherents worshiping in local synagogues on Sabbath and in house-churches on First Day.²¹ These Jesus-adherents would have included believers of Jewish and Gentile origin. Following the destruction of the temple, Jewish religious authority shifted from the cultic-sacrificial center in Jerusalem of the priests and Sadducees to text-based and legal interpretations of Scripture by the Pharisees. It is within this period that the *Birkat ha-Minim* is thought to have been devised as a means of expelling Jesus-adherents from synagogue worship in Asia Minor and beyond.²² Thus, some Johannine believers likely withdrew from local synagogues, worshiping only on First Day in homes of Gentile believers (John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2), and some Jewish attenders of First Day worship apparently withdrew back into the socio-religious comfort of synagogue-only worship (1 John 2:18–25).

A second crisis during this time resulted from the requirement of emperor-laud under the reign of Domitian (81–96 CE). Following his father Vespasian’s destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE, Jews around the Mediterranean world were taxed two drachmas—the same amount that Jews were supposed to pay to the Jerusalem temple as a tithe tax—to be given to the temple of Jupiter in Rome: the *fiscus Iudaicus*, the tax against the Jews. Thus, Jews were excused from having to worship Caesar, but they were required to pay a tithe to Rome. Domitian even required his officials to reference him as *Dominus et Deus* (“Lord and God,” see Suetonius, *Domitian* 13.2 and Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 67.4.7; 67.13.4). In the later correspondence between Pliny and Trajan (Pliny, *Letters* 10.96–97), those refusing to offer public emperor-laud are to be either tortured or sentenced to death.²³ Thus, the Johannine writings reference this crisis pervasively throughout Revelation (e.g., 1:17, where Christ holds seven stars in his hand, *not* Domitian); 1 John labels idol worship as the death-producing sin (5:16–21); and the confession of Thomas declares Jesus to be “Lord and God!”—a clearly anti-Domitian trope (John 20:28). And, *Jesus* is the Divine Son, *not* Augustus nor his successors (throughout).

3.3. Period III: The Second Asia Minor Phase, Dialogues between Christian Communities (ca. 85–100 CE)

Crisis A—Engaging Docetizing Gentile Christians and their Teachings

Crisis B—Engaging Christian Institutionalizing Tendencies (Diotrephes and his kin)

Crisis C—Engaging Dialectically other Christians’ Presentations of Jesus and his Ministry (actually reflecting a running dialogue over *all three* periods)

(The Evangelist continues to teach and perhaps write; the Epistles are written by the Johannine Elder, who then finalizes and circulates the testimony of the Beloved Disciple after his death.)

The later period in the Johannine Situation overlaps with the middle period, as tensions with local synagogues and the Roman imperial presence continue. However, this later period reflects engagements between the Johannine leadership and other local Jesus-adherents. Some of them are addressed by the Johannine Elder via the second and third Johannine Epistles, and the letters of Christ to the churches in Asia Minor in Revelation 2–3 (Friesen 2006) engage communities pointedly. In particular, while the Johannine schism in 1 John 2:19 reflects community members who returned to synagogue-only worship, no longer showing up for First Day worship within Johannine house-churches. Conversely, traveling ministers not teaching that Jesus came in the flesh are resisted and labeled as a second antichristic threat (1 John 4:1–3; 2 John 7). They are not Gnostics; they are Docetist teachers of pagan assimilation, teaching that Jesus did not suffer or die.²⁴ Thus, if Jesus did not suffer, neither need his followers. Just as believers in Christ need not undergo Jewish circumcision or other Jewish practices, they also need not abstain from the imperial cult or cultural religious festivities, such as the Artemis prosperity cult, which is what probably offended Jewish communities the most, causing secessions back into synagogues and also resistance from synagogue leaders.²⁵ Thus, false Christian teachers are to be resisted and held at bay if they teach a non-suffering Lord with assimilative implications.

A second threat during this period is reflected by 3 John 9–10. Here Diotrephes, who loves primacy (*philoprōterōn*), has been rejecting Johannine believers from coming to his community, and he even expels his own community members who are willing to take them in.²⁶ His primacy-loving actions are not features of self-love; they reflect his being an early monepiscopal leader, following the hierarchical structure of male leadership set up by Ignatius of Antioch, who addressed divisive issues in the churches of Asia Minor by calling for the appointing of one bishop in each of the churches, fostering unity with the bishop and the church as unity with Christ. The Elder has thus written to “the church” (likely Antioch, the center of Petrine hierarchy developments, Matt 16:17–19) complaining about maltreatment by one of their hierarchical leaders, and the Elder also intends to hold Diotrephes accountable by confronting him directly (Matt 18:15–17).²⁷ As a result, the Elder likely finalizes the witness of the Beloved Disciple after his death (John 21:20–24) and circulates the Johannine Gospel with the addition of passages that challenge Docetism, embrace the work of the Holy Spirit accessible to all believers, present Peter as “returning the keys” back to Jesus, and call for loving and sacrificial shepherding of the flock (John 1:1–18, 19:34–35, and chapters 6, 15–17, 21).

A third set of engagements during this period actually spans all three periods: engagements of other gospel traditions with the Johannine witness—sometimes augmenting, sometimes correcting, and sometimes even serving as a formative source for the other Gospels. With relation to the Markan tradition, some early Johannine engagements may have stemmed from the oral stages of these traditions—sharing some mundane details about denarii and much grass, etc.—and Mark’s actants even reference the words of Jesus in John 2:19, that the temple would be destroyed and built up again in three days (Mark 14:58; 15:29). The first edition of John thus augments Mark with two early signs (John 2:11; 4:54) and three Judean signs.²⁸ As Luke departs from Mark over six-dozen times in Johannine directions, critically, Luke must be seen as adding Johannine details or accounts (adding the right ear, Satan “entering” Judas, sisters Mary and Martha, the great catch of fish, etc.; and preferring some Johannine renderings over Mark’s: a foot-anointing, one feeding only, Peter’s confession after the other feeding, etc.).²⁹ And, as the Matthean and Johannine Gospels served as discipleship-training Gospels, some of their engagement was over church leadership. For instance, while Peter (and hierarchical leaders) were entrusted “keys to the Kingdom” (Matt 16:17–19), Peter is presented as returning the keys to Jesus, asserting

the sole authority of Jesus (John 6:68–69; [Anderson 2007b](#)). The final edition of John’s narrative also harmonizes with the other Gospels, as well as presenting an egalitarian and spirit-based approach to church governance and Christian unity, representing the original intention of Jesus for the church (chs. 6, 15–17, 21).³⁰

4. The Early Johannine Dialectical Situation in the Light of *Social Identity Complexity Theory*

While the seven crises, or dialectical engagements, within the larger Johannine Situation are identifiable in the Gospel, only the final five are identifiable in the Epistles and Apocalypse. That being the case, the first two—tensions between the Judean leaders and the Galilean Prophet, and friendly competition between Jesus-adherents and followers of the Baptist—will be treated more briefly in the present section. According to Roccas and Brewer, *Social Identity Complexity Theory* provides a way forward in identifying groups fitting into the categories of (see Figure 1):

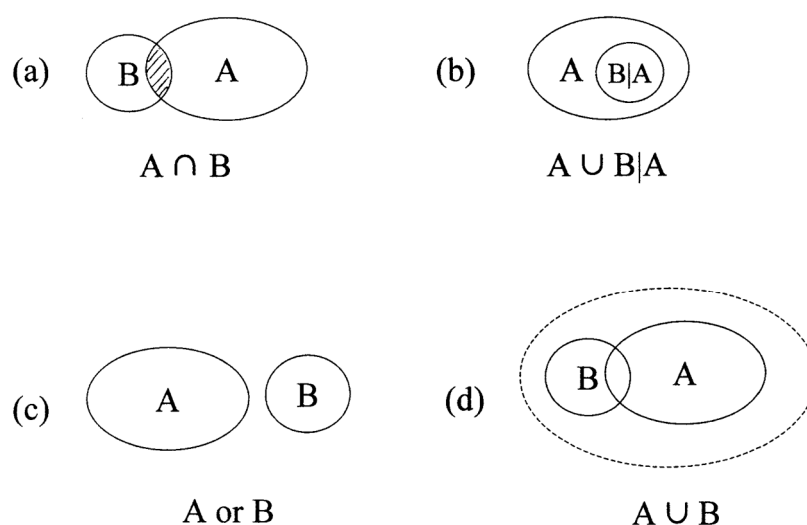


Figure 1. Four Social Identity Groups (Roccas and Brewer).

- (a) *Intersection*—groups hold together the values of two or more disparate groups
- (b) *Dominance*—one group subsumes others within itself
- (c) *Compartmentalization*—groups are separated and kept apart as having irreconcilable differences
- (d) *Merger*—attempts to include a number of otherwise disparate groups are made as a means of transcending differences in the interest of larger, inclusive values

Sketched in graphic form, these four stances are presented by Roccas and Brewer in the following diagram ([Roccas and Brewer 2002](#), p. 90).

Employing an approach to *negotiating complexity*, however, does not stand on its own. It is indebted to *Social Identity Theory*, which has also recently been meaningfully applied to the Johannine Situation. In her work on re-envisioning the Temple as the dwelling place of God, Mary [Coloe \(2001\)](#) has contributed meaningfully to understanding how the spirituality of Jesus and his followers becomes accessible to believers in other places and times in what I might call an incarnational sacramentology. The “place” in which God now dwells is within and among persons, not inanimate places, buildings, or rites. Taking these insights further, and applying *Social Identity Theory* to John’s story of Jesus in its post-70 CE context where the Jerusalem temple has been destroyed, Christopher [Porter \(2022\)](#) argues compellingly that the gathered communities of faith within the Johannine Diaspora Situation are offered a new sacred identity as the new temple in which God now dwells—one of persons—supplanting the destroyed Jerusalem temple. Thereby is God’s

promise of blessing extended to the world, offering believers a new and transformative identity in Christ Jesus, the Jewish messiah.

The advantage of *negotiating complexity* alongside *Social Identity Theory* is that it allows us to compare and contrast the organizational strategies of the Johannine leadership with other groups in the Johannine Situation, illuminating distinctive interests of particular groups, in relation to their presentations from a Johannine perspective, in relation to their socio-religious concerns. In connecting these four models of *Social Identity Complexity Theory* with first-century CE individuals and groups referenced in the Johannine Writings and the Synoptic Gospels, general observations can locate players within one of these three categories. Of course, there will be many exceptions to any particular assignment, and readings of some actors' motivations will be contravened by exceptions. Nonetheless, from the perspective we have in the New Testament and other writings incline to these assignments as understood by at least a plurality of individuals within each group, as reflected in the Johannine narrative.

4.1. John the Baptist and His Followers—Merger and Intersection

John the Baptist may also have possessed a similar level of *Merger*-oriented missionality, in his calling people to repentance. John challenged religious authorities, Roman Soldiers, Herod, and the larger populace, calling them to repentance and righteous living—inward cleansing—as outward washing in a *mikvah* is not enough. Thus, dunking people in the free-flowing waters of the Jordan and Aenon near Salim served as a protest against ritual purification if unaccompanied by authentic change. In that sense, John was calling all people to the righteous ways of God—like Israel's prophets of old—and Jesus joined him and his disciples in that vocation.

In relation to Jesus and his movement, though, followers of Jesus and John are presented in John 1–3 as representing *Intersection*. Followers of John left him and followed Jesus (1:19–51), and John inquired from prison whether Jesus were the Messiah, or if he should wait for another (Matt 11:2–6). In John 3:22–30, John declares himself to not be the Messiah, but to be the friend of the bridegroom. Thus, the relation between followers of the Baptist and Jesus is one of *Intersection* between the two movements, and this continues on, into the Johannine movement, mostly before 70 CE, but possibly later, in its Asia Minor setting.

4.2. Sadducees, Pharisees, Zealots of Pre-70 Israel, and Romans—Domination

Within Palestine, the Sadducees, Pharisees, and Zealots deserve to be categorized generally (many exceptions abound, of course) as adopting a *Domination* approach to renewal and restoration in Israel. From the priestly Sadducees' perspective, fitting Temple sacrifices and festival celebrations needed to be enforced in order for individuals and the nation to experience the full bounty of divine blessing. Likewise, the Pharisees called for proper Sabbath observances, washing regulations, and other codified means of keeping the Law of Moses. The Zealots and nationalistic revolutionary leaders saw deliverance as resulting from rebelling against the Romans (and their Jewish collaborators) as in the days of the Conquest and the Maccabean uprising. And, of course, this is because the Romans were furthering *Domination* in seeking to expand the Empire and to subjugate individuals and groups under their control. Thus, religious appeals to compliance embraced *Domination* approaches, while political approaches to Empire maintenance involved hegemony leading to both acquiescence and violent resistance.

4.3. The Essenes and Jewish Communities in the Diaspora—Compartmentalization

By contrast, the Essenes withdrew into the wilderness, thus embodying *Compartmentalization*. Having likely been offended by the *Intersection*-oriented compromises of the Sadducees with Rome, followed by *Domination*-experienced struggles with the Wicked Priest and the Jerusalem elite, followers of the Teacher of Righteousness cut themselves off from the world. They thus even cut themselves off from fellow Jewish compatriots,

referring to themselves as “Children of Light” versus “Children of Darkness.” They were the “righteous few” versus the compromised masses, in their view. In less sectarian ways, Jewish communities in Hellenistic settings likewise embraced and appealed to *Compartmentalization* as a means of opposing worldly behaviors and tenets of faith, holding to legal interpretations of Jewish Scriptures. However, in expelling (or making things uncomfortable for) Jesus-adherents in the Mediterranean world from local synagogues, they would have been experienced by Johannine believers as *Domination*-oriented wielders of power.

4.4. Jesus of Nazareth and the Johannine Evangelist—Merger

Within these four approaches, it can be argued that Jesus of Nazareth and the Johannine evangelist sought to advance inclusive, *Merger* approaches to religious values and socialization. Jesus, for instance, embraced outcasts, healed the unclean and the infirm, exorcized and liberated the afflicted and the possessed, and practiced table fellowship with sinners and Pharisees alike. This is what evoked consternation among the religious elite of Judea, as they sought to assert authority over the populace in terms of heeding the prescribed legal codes of Moses (scribes and Pharisees), requiring also approved sacrifices and tithes in support of the Temple and cultic purity (priests and Sadducees). Jesus is reported in John and the Synoptics as healing on the Sabbath and refusing to follow purification codes—perhaps as a provocation of cognitive dissonance, pointing to a higher level of religious perspective—and also by clearing the temple. Well-meaning systems of religious legal adherence functioned to make insiders and outsiders, sometimes based upon socio-economic realities, and Jesus sought to welcome the deserving and the undeserving alike into the healing balm of divine forgiveness and grace.³¹

Into the settings of first-century Palestine, Jesus came ministering, distinguishing himself from the *Compartmentalization* of the Essenes, and also from the *Domination*-oriented endeavors of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and the Zealots. Thus, Sabbath is made for humans (not vice versa), the Temple is a house of worship for all persons (not just those who could afford cultically correct offerings), and Jesus calls people to love their enemies and to put away the sword. The Synoptic Jesus aimed at the heart of the Mosaic Law rather than its legal extensions, extolling the love of God in the *Shema* and the love of neighbor in the Levitical code (Deut 6:4; Lev 19:18). Likewise in the Gospel of John, Jesus calls for loving one another (13:34–35), and Jesus is presented as fulfilling the promise of Moses, that God would raise up an Eschatological Prophet, who would speak and perform God’s messages and assignments rather than his own (Deut 18:15–22). The fact that the word of Jesus comes true a number of times in the Fourth Gospel attests to the Scriptures having been written about him, and thus calling for adherence to his teaching respect for his agency (John 5:30–47).³²

Additionally, in Jesus’ healing and delivering women beyond Jewish comfort zones, ministering among the Samaritans (John 4:4–42), promising to draw in other sheep beyond a provincial fold (John 10:16), and taking the gospel to the ends of the earth, Jesus is presented in bi-optic perspective (both Synoptic and Johannine) as merging the children of Abraham with new recipients of the Abrahamic blessing in the Diaspora—a mission that Paul, Peter, John, and others carried out more fully in later decades. Here we see the Fourth Evangelist operating on a highly dialectical level of thinking—a both-and approach over and against either-or dichotomies—which accounts for many of John’s theological tensions and riddles.³³ The Johannine evangelist also appears to embrace a *Merger*—centered mission in preparing a narrative designed to convince later audiences that Jesus is the Messiah/Christ, the Son of God, leading into the blessings of eternal life those who believe in his name (John 20:30–31).

5. The Middle and Later Johannine Dialectical Situation in the Light of Social Identity Complexity Theory

Following the movement to Asia Minor, Johannine leaders find themselves engaged with local synagogues and also with fellow believers in both synagogues and house-

churches. In contrast to the *Domination* approaches of three leading Palestine-based Jewish groups, synagogues in Asia Minor, and in Diaspora settings in general, adopted an approach of *Compartmentalization*. While not as sectarian as the Essenes, synagogue leaders and their communities in Anatolia defined membership standing along the lines of covenantal codes. In Maurice Casey's view, identity within Second Temple Israel Judaism gravitated around at least eight identity factors: ethnicity, Scripture, monotheism, circumcision, Sabbath observance, dietary laws, purity laws, and major festivals (Casey 1991, p. 12). Of course, festivals changed with the destruction of Jerusalem's temple, but Jewish identity was asserted and encouraged throughout the Mediterranean world, and what we see in the Jesus movement is a number of threats and fissures to these features of Jewish identity in the name of an Abrahamic *Merger*-vision of extending God's blessing of Israel to the world at large (Gen 12:1–3). Thus, from the Pauline and Petrine missions on, the Johannine mission posed a threat to identity-concerns of local Jewish communities, which is why they experienced intense and sustained resistance.

Since the beginning of the Jesus movement, its proponents experienced pushback from Jewish leaders in Israel, Syria, and beyond. With the Pauline missions through southern and central Asia Minor, some members of synagogues believed in Jesus, but after uneven receptions among Jewish communities, Paul took the gospel to the marketplace, and many Gentiles believed in Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. In some cases, new believers were circumcised and embraced outward markers of the Jewish covenant, but debates emerged as to which markers of Jewish identity should be required for a believer in Jesus to be accepted within local synagogues. With the Church Council in Acts 15, the requirement of circumcision was alleviated, while requirements regarding the moral and idolatrous issues it represented were maintained. This action caused tensions and revolts throughout the Mediterranean world, and in 49 CE, Emperor Claudius shut down synagogue worship in Rome due to debates over *Chrestus*—likely a reference to adherents to Jesus as the Christ (*Christos* in Greek). As the Pauline mission grew in Asia Minor, Jesus-adherents included persons of both Jewish and non-Jewish origins, worshipping in synagogues on the Sabbath or in house-churches on First Day, or both. When the Johannine leadership moved from Palestine to Asia Minor around 70 CE, they joined the second generation of the Pauline mission in the region, and their presence was likely both an encouragement to Jews and Gentiles in the region, while also exacerbating the tensions.

5.1. Asia Minor Synagogue Leaders—Compartmentalization

By the time Johannine leaders and other exiles from Galilee and Judea settled in Anatolia, new waves of tensions with local synagogues emerged. On one hand, Jews from Palestine were welcome, as they bolstered the strength of local Jewish populations as well as Gentile believers meeting in house-churches. On the other hand, the influx of Jesus-adherents increased tensions between local synagogues and house-churches, which may have precipitated the *Birkat ha-Minim*, a curse against heretic *Nazorean*: followers of Jesus of Nazareth. This curse was added to the twelfth benediction among eighteen within Jewish synagogue liturgies, and its presence seems to be referenced by John 9:22; 12:42; and 16:2: *even back then*, those who claimed Jesus openly were put out of the synagogue (*aposynagōgos*). While Jewish uses of the *Birkat* could well have begun earlier—even within or before the ministry of Jesus—it certainly is presented as a palpable, present reality around the time that the Johannine narrative was being finalized (ca. 80–100 CE).

Among the features of Jewish identity, Gentile believers in Jesus who did not fully adopt outward signs of Jewish covenantalism thus were seen to be breaching central elements of Second Temple Judaism. While some of them may have participated in synagogue worship and some festivals, they could not comply with ethnicity, and their lack of conformity to food laws, circumcision, and purity codes made them suspect among Jewish leaders. In addition, they lacked familiarity with Jewish Scripture and ways, and in confessing Jesus to be the Christ and the Father's Son, they transgressed Jewish monotheism laws. In addition, if the Christ-hymn of John 1 was used in local house-churches, this would

have come across as ditheism, violating the highest of Jewish faith-stands.³⁴ Additionally, however, if some Gentile believers were participating in pagan festivals, including eating meat offered to idols and perhaps even venerating Caesar during the reign of Domitian, that would have precipitated some Jewish participants in house-churches to abandon them and to withdraw from Johannine communities of faith (cf. 1 John 2:18–25).

5.2. The Imperial Cult under Domitian—Domination

In response to Hellenizing domination over the previous centuries, Jewish Zealots rebelled against the *Dominance* approach of Antiochus Epiphanes (175–164 BCE), which sought to overturn Jewish socio-religious resistance to Syrian occupation by desecrating the Temple, burning Jewish scriptures and writings, and forbidding Jewish worship and associated practices. In opposing Hellenizing hegemony, the resistance forces of Judas Maccabeus drove back the Syrian occupiers of Jerusalem and rededicated the Temple in 164 BCE. When the Zealots and *Sicarii* sought to push back against the Roman presence before, during, and after the ministry of Jesus, however, the result was not successful. Rather than the Romans being driven back, they destroyed Jerusalem and its Temple, killed all priestly and royal-family members, and crucified thousands as a means of making a point of Roman domination over captive Judea. As a penal reminder, Vespasian instituted the *Fiscus Judaicus*—the tax of the Jews—whereby Jews throughout the Empire were forced to contribute a tithe of two drachmas to Jupiter’s Temple in Rome: the exact amount of the Jerusalem Temple tax that Jews throughout the Diaspora were expected to pay to Jerusalem. When Domitian came to power (81–96), he hiked up the dominance expectation, requiring everyone throughout the Empire to worship Caesar as Lord, offering incense (at least), and in some settings denying Christ. The correspondence between Pliny and Trajan (Pliny, *Letters* 10.96–97) some two decades later makes this clear.

5.3. Docetizing False Teachers of Assimilation—Intersection

Three flaws of how Johannine scholars have interpreted those labeled the Antichrists of 1 John 4:1–3 and 2 John 7 are as follows. First, a fallacy of scholars over recent centuries is to see the Johannine adversaries as perfectionistic Gnostics. After all, some Gnostics claimed perfection, claiming to be perfected by secret knowledge (*gnosis*), and thus claiming to be without sin (1 John 1:5–10). However, while all Gnostics were Docetists, not all Docetists were Gnostics.³⁵ In my view, the existential motivation for denying the fleshly suffering of Jesus was to also alleviate the need for his followers to suffer under Empire and the requirement of public emperor-laud. Second another flaw is to assume that those who denied the flesh of Jesus were also the same adversaries that denied that Jesus was the Christ (1 John 2:18–25). To deny that Jesus came in the flesh is a diametric opposite to denying that he was the Messiah/Christ. And, one crisis is later and impending (false teachers), while the other is past and actualized as a church split (secessionists). Third, while the same pejorative label is used in both directions, the secessionists were likely Jewish community members, who left Johannine house-churches and rejoined local synagogues, while the false teachers were likely Gentile traveling ministers, teaching non-Jewish doctrines of cultural assimilation. And, their liberalism may be what caused Jewish community members to abandon the Johannine Jesus movement, returning back to the Jewish synagogue.

More specifically, the second antichristic threat did not involve secessions; it sounded the alarm against problematic visitations. That is why the audiences is warned to test the spirits so as to keep traveling ministers at bay if their teachings were false (1 John 4:1–3), and the litmus test is whether they teach that Jesus came in the flesh or not. Again, the issue here is the implications: if Jesus did not suffer, neither need his followers; but, if he did, they must be willing to ingest the flesh and blood of Jesus (John 6:51–58) and embrace the Way of the Cross.³⁶ Following the institution of emperor-laud requirements under Domitian (81–96 CE), non-Jewish believers in Jesus were expected to worship Caesar or pay the price, and being distanced from synagogues made them all the more vulnerable. Therefore, these assimilative teachers likely represent *Intersection* thinking, seeking to negotiate their

belief in Jesus as the Messiah/Christ, while refusing to embrace socio-religious morays of orthodox Judaism in Diaspora settings. Teachers of assimilation are directly alluded to by Jude 1:4 and 2 Peter 3:14–18—those who corrupt Paul’s teachings on grace and pervert the message that we are saved by grace through faith, not of Jewish works of the Law—teaching immoral lawlessness. Thus, their liberal standards of faith and practice were seen as violating Jewish standards of covenant faithfulness, to which local Jewish communities would have objected, creating dissention within the churches of Asia Minor and even precipitating the abandonment of Johannine house-churches by Jewish families and friends returning to local synagogues.

5.4. *The Primacy-Loving Diotrephes and Monepiscopal Hierarchy—Dominance*

In addressing these sorts of divisive issues, Ignatius of Antioch called for appointing one bishop in every church—a hierarchical male leader who would make discerning judgments within each faith community—as a means of attaining church unity throughout the region. Constructed upon Jesus entrusting Peter (and his followers) with instrumental keys to the kingdom in Matthew 16:17–19, Ignatius put forward an institutional means of dealing with the growth of the Jesus movement and its dialectical complexities and socio-religious tensions. Whereas this approach can also be understood as aspiring toward *Intersection*—holding together the basic elements of emerging Christian faith and practice—it was also experienced as *Domination* by the Johannine Elder, who lodged his complaints against primacy-loving Diotrephes in his letter to the church (likely) of Antioch (3 John 1:9–10).

And indeed, Ignatius reports the same set of issues reflected in the Johannine Situation: Judaizers, trying to get Jesus-adherents to be more faithful to Jewish standards of faith and practice; the Romans, who were persecuting Jesus-adherents and reportedly put Ignatius to death for his refusal to submit to required emperor-laud; and docetizers, who denied Jesus came in the flesh and refused to believe the eucharist was really the flesh and blood of Jesus and held their separate meetings for table fellowship and worship. Ignatius addresses these issues by instituting a monepiscopal system of church unity, by which salvation is understood to be rooted in one Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, one rightly appointed bishop in every church, and one fellowship meal and worship service (the breaking of “one loaf”) versus alternative meetings for worship and table fellowship.

While Matthew 18 emphasizes that Christ is present wherever two or three gather in his name (vv. 18–20), and that Peter is exhorted to be ongoingly forgiving (vv. 21–22), all it takes is one bad example to call forth a Johannine corrective response to rising institutionalism in the late first-century situation. Scholars have speculated as to what Diotrephes was worried about in excluding Johannine ministers from visiting his community, and also expelling his own members who took them in. However, I disagree with Käsemann, here, who surmised that Docetism was the issue. Clearly, the Johannine offense was not naïve Docetism, as the Elder and Evangelist opposed Docetism and affirmed the flesh-and-blood incarnational reality of Jesus and his suffering on the cross. Rather, he was more likely threatened by Johannine egalitarianism. John’s familial, spirit-based, and women-in-leadership ecclesiology, must have threatened his hierarchical and male-leadership approach.³⁷ Thus, this is what likely motivated the Elder to compile and circulate the witness of the Beloved Disciple after his death, affirming that his testimony is true (John 19:34–35; 21:24; 3 John 1:12). Like the Johannine evangelist, the Johannine Elder sided with the evangelist in calling for unity within his own fellowship—calling for people to love one another—while also seeking to garner unity among the churches by circulating the witness of the Beloved Disciple as a manifesto of Christ’s original intention for the church, calling for corporate unity under the present leadership of the Resurrected Lord (John 15–17).

5.5. *The Elder’s Appeal to Unity—Intersection*

As a result of previous scholars’ failures to use a more complex matrix for discerning the groups and issues related to the evolving Johannine Situation, several errors have

bene made by scholars. First, while Martyn, followed by Brown and others, correctly identified tensions between Johannine believers and local Jewish leadership in a Diaspora setting, Martyn failed to note the Jewish-Johannine tensions palpable within the Johannine Letters and Apocalypse. Thus, he wrongly distanced the Gospel from the other Johannine corpus, possibly in the interest of privileging one issue above others, but in a distortive and reductionistic way.³⁸ Second, a more complex view of the multiplicity of issues in the middle and later Johannine Situation—corroborated by the Letters of Ignatius—shows additional issues to have been in play: Judaizing influences (not just expulsions), the hegemony of the imperial cult under Domitian, and docetizing schisms, which Ignatius addressed by imposing monepiscopal hierarchical solutions to divisive tensions, creating new sets of problems, referenced by the Elder's dealing with Diotrefes. Third, versus Cullman, rather than seeing the Johannine circle as opposing such developments as beyond the apostolic pale, the familial and egalitarian Johannine ecclesiology is actually more primitive and closer to the mission of the charismatic Prophet from Nazareth than later developments.³⁹ Fourth, rather than representing a single, fledgling community, the Johannine Gospel and other writings reflect a larger set of communities, with an interest of circulating the Johannine memory of Jesus and his mission among the churches as a complement to the other Gospels, and to some degree, as a modest corrective (Anderson 2002). Fifth, despite the dualism parallels with the Qumran writings, the Johannine is not a sectarian enclave, distanced from culture. Rather, it is less sectarian than contemporary, compartmentalizing Jewish synagogues, engaging a multiplicity of intersectional issues within a cosmopolitan situation, which the Elder is seeking to merge together in loving unity.⁴⁰

Along these lines, when *Social Identity Complexity Theory* is applied to these larger sets of socio-religious issues within the middle and later Johannine Situation, the Elder can clearly be seen as endeavoring to further the *Merger*-related ethos of the Johannine evangelist, who, according to second-century memory, was his mentor. However, in something of a contrast to the Fourth Evangelist's universalist thrust,⁴¹ the Elder finds himself negotiating complexity between Jewish and Gentile community members, seeking to further *Intersection*-related concerns, given schismatic secessions and heretical visitations. As the first edition of the Johannine narrative augments Mark with five signs of Jesus (two early and three Judean signs) seeking to convince audiences that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah/Christ (five Books of Moses, five Signs of Jesus), the later material calls for abiding in Christ, as Jesus prays for unity amidst worldly pressures (John 1:1–18 and chs. 6, 15–17, 21). Following the death of the Beloved Disciple (21:20–24), the Johannine Elder appears to have added this later material after writing the Epistles and circulated the Fourth Gospel around the turn of the century as the witness to the original vision of Jesus for the church. Thus, the *Merger* concerns of the Fourth Evangelist were somewhat continued by the Johannine Elder, although he appears to have had less personal authority than his mentor, and was forced into *Intersection*-related harmonization operations, given the divisive features of the dialectical Johannine Situation.

These things being the case, the Johannine Elder's *Intersection*-related attempts to pull the various groups together in unity is displayed in several ways.

First, he appeals to what has been seen and heard from the beginning—first-hand memories of Jesus—perhaps locating himself within the first generation of eyewitness believers alongside the evangelist and others (1 John 1:1–3).

Second, he challenges those who claim to be walking in the light while walking in darkness, thus making God a liar (1:5–10). Rather than imagined gnostic perfectionism at stake, the issue here is one of a disagreement between Gentile and Jewish believers over what is biblically acceptable and what is not. In the light of the explicit condemnation of idolatry as the death-producing sin at the end of the Epistle (5:13–21), making God a liar clearly references the first two Commandments: no other gods and graven images or idolatry (Exod 20:2–6). Thus, people are exhorted to love not the world or its fleshly attractions, and to not fall prey to sin (2:1–17).

Third, the Elder calls for solidarity with the community(ies), arguing against secession and appeals to Jewish monotheism at the expense of the Son's relation to the Father, calling for people to embrace the inwardly confirming anointing they have received from the Spirit, over and against external pressures (2:18–26).

Fourth, the Elder pushed back against traveling ministers teaching assimilation with Greco-Roman culture, including local religious festivals related to Artemis worship, the imperial cult, and other anti-Jewish pressures. While docetizing teaching might not have been the lead thesis in their teachings, it is labeled as the litmus test to distinguish false teachings from acceptable ones. A non-suffering Jesus functioned to excuse believers from embracing the Way of the Cross (4:1–3; 2 John 7).

Fifth, the Elder calls people to love one another and to be more considerate of other community members. Jewish Jesus-adherents should remain in the community and not revert to synagogue-only worship, and Gentile Jesus-adherents should not offend fellow Jewish believers with their assimilative practices—loving the pagan world over and against fellow believers.

Sixth, having also suffered the rejection of Johannine traveling ministers by neighboring proto-Ignatian church leaders (such as the primacy-loving Diotrephes), the Elder appeals to “the church” to get leaders of Antioch or elsewhere to discipline a local bishop for his inhospitality, while appealing also to Gaius to extend friendly hospitality to others (3 John 2–12).

Seventh, the Elder finalizes the witness of the Beloved Disciple and circulates it among the churches as a complement to the other Gospels, but also as a corrective to rising institutionalism around the turn of the first century CE. While the Gospel's later material harmonizes with the other Gospels, the Elder defends its individualism with his own imprimatur (v. 12), claiming of the Beloved Disciple, who leaned against the breast of Jesus, that “his testimony is true” (John 13:23; 19:35; 21:20–24). Despite the multiplicity of divisive tensions within the Johannine cosmopolitan situation, the Johannine Elder furthers the *Merger*-endeavors of the Fourth Evangelist by challenging divisiveness, calling for unity, correcting false teachings, and exhorting believers to love one another if they truly love God (1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7–21; 2 John 5), just as Jesus had commanded (John 13:34–35). However, by now, the project has moved to more of an *Intersection*-interested strategy, given the diversity within and among various communities.

6. Conclusions: Negotiating Complexity within the Dialectical and Cosmopolitan Johannine Situation

While previous analyses of the Johannine Situation have been overly simple—identifying singular tensions with the synagogue, or a primary threat of secessionists, or an individual community instead of several, or pneumatizing Gnostics as the issue—things in real life are always more complex than that, especially over seven decades, or at least the final three decades of the first century CE. Further, the approach taken by one group affects the ways other groups react, which also required a more textured analysis of the Johannine Situation. As an advance over simplistic views of the first-century Jesus movement as reflected by the Johannine writings, *Social Identity Complexity Theory* provide as helpful heuristic lens for understanding at least seven crises over seven decades, as addressed by the Fourth Evangelist and the Johannine Elder. From this perspective, the four stances outlined by Roccas and Brewer can be seen as represented by the following presentations in the Johannine Gospel and Epistles.

(a) *Intersection*—groups hold together the values of two or more disparate groups. This approach is embraced by *followers of John the Baptist*, who in the Gospel of John (and also in the Synoptics) are presented in something of a collaborative partnership with followers of Jesus. A second group seeking to negotiate differences between Jewish standards of faith and practice and the assimilative pressures of Greco-Roman society is the *docetizing teachers*, who denied a suffering Lord, thus legitimating cheap grace and alleviating the expectation of having to embrace the

Way of the Cross in faithful discipleship. A third form of intersectional engagement is related to *literary dialectics between the Synoptic and Johannine traditions*, sometimes reflecting augmentation, echoing of material in distinctive ways, and modest correction.

(b) *Dominance*—one group subsumes others within itself. This approach is presented as adopted by *religious leaders in Judea*, who were offended by Jesus' healing on the Sabbath and claiming God as his Father (John 5 and 7). A second group representing this approach is the *Roman imperial presence*, identified explicitly in the Johannine narrative and also implicitly and figuratively referenced in the other Johannine Epistles and Apocalypse. A third dominating presence is referenced by *the primacy-loving Diotrephes*, which is also countered indirectly by the Gospel's juxtaposition of Peter and the Beloved Disciple, posing also a corrective to rising institutionalism in early Christianity in the name of an earlier, more primitive memory of Jesus.

(c) *Compartmentalization*—groups are separated and kept apart as having irreconcilable differences. This included the Essenes and their sectarian existence. While experienced as *Dominance* in the middle and later Johannine Situation, as referenced in the Gospel's *aposynagōgos* passages, the interest of *synagogues in a Diaspora setting* was also *Compartmentalization*—calling for faithful adherence to Jewish faith and practice—despite developing in cosmopolitan settings. It is likely that this concern that led to the proselytizing of Jewish initial followers of Jesus to abandon First-Day worship in house-churches, returning to synagogue-only worship on the Sabbath. Thus, the Johannine secessionists of 1 John 2:18–25 (versus [Brown 1979](#)) were not the same threat as the antichristic invasionists of 4:1–3 and 2 John 7.

(d) *Merger*—attempts to include a number of otherwise disparate groups are made as a means of transcending differences in the interest of larger, inclusive values. First and second, in the Johannine and Synoptic Gospels, *John the Baptist* is presented as calling people prophetically to repentance, and *Jesus of Nazareth* is presented as challenging the legal thinking of religious leaders of his day, creating cognitive dissonance by clearing the temple, embracing sinners and Samaritans, and emphasizing the inclusive love of God. Third, *the Johannine evangelist* continues in this trajectory, extending the love for God to include love for one another. However, while the Elder seeks to continue this inclusive thrust, he finds himself negotiating disparate groups in *Intersection-oriented* ways. Just as the Johannine Jesus prays that his followers will be one—abiding with Christ and his fellowship—the Johannine Elder seeks to hold together Jewish and Gentile Jesus-adherents within a highly dialectical cosmopolitan situation with his appeals to abide in the teaching about Jesus, which they have heard from the beginning.

In the light of the Johannine highly dialectical situation, involving no fewer than seven sets of targeted engagements over seven decades, negotiating complexity is required for any adequate analysis to be conducted. Simplistic, one-issue and single-community inferences simply cannot suffice. However, with the aid of *Social Identity Complexity Theory*, not only are a goodly number of situational concerns on the Johannine Situation illuminated, but so are the essential meanings of the Johannine corpus clarified for later readers, as well. In so doing, where secessionists are abandoning First-Day fellowship with believers, where the Roman imperial presence is pressuring the populace to demonstrate loyalty by their emperor-laud, where false teachers and prophets are advocating cheap grace and worldly assimilation, and where fellow Christian leaders are disparaging and rejecting Johannine believers, the teachings of Jesus are extended to cover internal community issues as well.

And, this sort of a more nuanced analysis is essential for New Testament studies, as the later ethos of institutional Christianity too easily gets wrongly superimposed over the

fledgling, nascent movement within the first century CE. Thus, no. Johannine engagements with the *Ioudaioi* do not reflect a dominant group subduing a minority; the opposite was more historically the case. Likewise emerging was the developmental history of the Johannine movement, itself. In addition to the Synoptic appeals of Jesus to love God, neighbor, and enemies, Jesus is here remembered as also ushering a new commandment: “Love one another” (John 13:34–35). And in that sense, that “old commandment that has been heard from the beginning” (1 John 2:7) becomes the basis for both resisting worldly pressures and also maintaining Christian fellowship—that the world may know that Jesus is indeed sent from the Father, and that the witness of his followers is true (John 17:20–24).

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Notes

- ¹ This paper was first presented at the Umtu Expert Symposium Safari in South Africa, July of 2013, organized by Professor Kobus Kok.
- ² (Martyn [1968] 2003; Ashton 1986, p. 12; Bultmann [1970] 2014). See also the gathering of all of Martyn’s Johannine essays alongside his second book, with a new introduction by Alan Culpepper: (Martyn 2019).
- ³ (Brown 1966–1970, 1978, 1979, 1982, 1983, 1984, 2003). See also the current re-evaluations of Brown’s “Johannine Community Hypothesis,” supplanted now—in my judgment and those of others—as a fuller “Johannine Situation Hypothesis” (see also Skinner and Seglenieks 2024; Anderson 2024).
- ⁴ See the gradations of Jewish-and-Gentile inclinations in (Brown and Meier 1983, pp. 1–9).
- ⁵ Thus, the most thoughtful analyses of early Christianity have approached the Johannine and other literature from the perspectives of socio-religious analyses (Luckmann 1966; Berger 1967; Hawkin 1993).
- ⁶ (Kok 2014; Roccas and Brewer 2002).
- ⁷ Thus, note these treatments of the socio-religious backdrop of the Johannine writings (Dodd 1953; Puskas and Robbins 2021), which led to the sketching of familiar Jewish and Greco-Roman archetypes within the Johannine narrative (Larsen 2018).
- ⁸ Along these lines, when the ministry of Jesus is compared and contrasted in both Synoptic and Johannine terms, there are ways that both perspectives corroborate each other, ways that the Synoptic presentations are preferable, and ways that the Johannine presentations are more plausible, critically (Anderson 2006, pp. 127–73).
- ⁹ Second naïvete is not enough; critical analysis must be applied to critical views as well as traditional ones (Anderson 2014, pp. x–xii).
- ¹⁰ (Brown 1955; Hengel 1974; Frey 2022).
- ¹¹ Instone-Brewer (2003) noted several instances of the *Birkat* being used in Qumran, 1 Maccabees, and other pre-70 CE Jewish texts, so it cannot be claimed that such marginalizing of “heretics” was a late phenomenon-only; and Bernier (2013) argues compellingly for such a *Birkat* being used to discipline Jesus-adherents and possible Galilean (Nazorean) insurrectionists from Jerusalem and Judean synagogues in order to avert a Roman backlash. Further, if the Beloved Disciple was indeed known the priestly household (John 18:15), he would have been aware of local controversies during the ministry of Jesus.
- ¹² On the Johannine Situation viewed in longitudinal perspective, see (Brown 2003, pp. 151–88). See also (Anderson 2010, pp. 195–265; 1997, 2007a). The present outline is published elsewhere: in particular, Anderson (2006, pp. 196–99; 2010, pp. lxiv–lxvii).
- ¹³ On the larger subject of anti-Semitism in the ancient world, see While Gager (1983); on treatments of Johannine anti-Judaism include (Reinhartz 1992, 2001, 2017, 2020; Knight 1968; Leibig 1983; Freyne 1985; Johnson 1989; Beck 1994; Sheridan 2012; Lieu 2008). See also these important collections on the subject: Bieringer et al. (2001) and Anderson and Culpepper (2017). This approach builds on the three phases of the Johannine Situation (including a community but not limited to one) in Martyn’s analysis, which Brown modifies in service to his own inference of the Johannine School (Martyn 2019).
- ¹⁴ See (Becker and Reed 2007; Charlesworth 2013).
- ¹⁵ Barrett (1975) saw John as the most Jewish of the Gospels, and recent analyses have seen the Johannine writings as developing within Judaism and in dialogue with its neighbors (Blumhofer 2020; Byers 2021; Cirafesi 2022; Wróbel 2023).
- ¹⁶ While Brown, Martyn, Meeks, Ashton, Reinhartz, and others have totally overlooked the impact of imperial-cult requirements under Domitian (81–96 CE), post-70 developments would have increased tensions between Jewish and Gentile Jesus-adherents,

especially over matters of public demonstration of empire-loyalty, or the lack thereof. See treatments of the Roman imperial presence: (Rensberger 1988; Marcus 2006; Carter 2008; Cassidy [1992] 2015; Thatcher 2008; Waters 2017; Kim 2022).

17 For an overall theory of the Johannine Situation in longitudinal perspective, Anderson 2007a; for John's engagements with other traditions, see (Anderson 2002, 2007b).

18 (Anderson 2006, pp. 127–73). Note also the fact that the feasts and festivals of Jerusalem are described in the Johannine narrative, suggesting that the ministry of Jesus took place in Jerusalem in many more times than his single-visit presentation in the Synoptics (Yee 1988; Daise 2007).

19 Note the presentations of the Galilean-Judean tensions in the Gospel of John, as *hoi Ioudaioi* can also simply mean “the Judeans” not “the Jews” (Bratcher 1974; Bauckham 2008; Davies 1996; Mason 2007; Freyne 2009; Fortes 2021). Thus, John's Galilean perspective also coheres with the Mosaic Prophet typology of the Samaritan Torah: (Meeks [1967] 2017).

20 On this score, Raymond Brown correctly follows Baldensberger in seeing friendly competition between followers of Jesus and those of John the Baptist, as referenced in both John and the Synoptics (Brown 1979, pp. 69–70).

21 Numerous references to house-churches are made by Acts and Paul, and it is likely that these gatherings were in play in post 70 CE Asia Minor, when the Johannine entourage relocated in the region (Acts 2:46; 12:12; 16:40; Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Philem 1:2; 2 John 1:2; see also Filson 1939; Petersen 1969; Banks 2020).

22 While some scholars have rightly questioned the extent to which the *Birkat ha-Minim* reflected widespread expulsions of Jesus-adherents from Diaspora synagogues (Katz 1984; Kimelman 1981), others argue correctly the likelihood of real-life tensions between Jesus-adherents (especially from Gentile and Hellenic backgrounds) and leaders of synagogue communities (Marcus 2009; de Boer 2009, 2020).

23 Note the plight of Jesus-adherents under Domitian, who required public emperor-laud, a practice that was carried over into the reign of Trajan and beyond (Cassidy [1992] 2015; McLaren 2005).

24 Thus, note the incarnational and antidocetic thrust of John's presentation of a human Jesus who suffered and died (Meyer Thompson 1988; Schnelle 1992).

25 For socio-religious analyses of Greco-Roman society in Ephesus and Asia Minor (Arnold 1972; Brinks 2009; Fairchild 2017; Oster 1990; Stenschke 2021; Tellbe 2009; Trebilco 2007).

26 On Diotrephes and hospitality, see (Malherbe 1983; Carman 2020).

27 On Johannine tensions with proto-Ignatian Petrine hierarchy, see (Agourides 1968; Anderson 2007b; Drodge 1990; Käsemann [1968] 2017; Maynard 1984; Quast 1989; Von Harnack 1897).

28 Thus, as Mackay (2004) surmised, if the Johannine evangelist had heard Mark performed among the churches, the Johannine account (at least the first edition in my estimation, Anderson 2015) was likely produced for readers and hearers of Mark (Bauckham 1998). Note, thus, its apologetic thrust (McGrath 2001), while the later Johannine witness (with Brown 1966–1970) reflects a more pastoral thrust.

29 With (Cribbs 1973).

30 On a two-edition view of John's composition, see (Anderson 2015); on John's later material serving as a dialectical corrective to rising institutionalism, see (Anderson 2010, pp. 221–65; 2007b).

31 In the Johannine presentation of Jesus ministering alongside the prophetic witness of John the Baptist, John's chronological locating of the temple incident early—coinciding with the confrontive work of the Baptist—seems plausible, or even likely (McGrath 2009).

32 Jesus is clearly presented as the Eschatological Prophet in John, fulfilling both the typologies of Moses and Elijah (Borgen [1968] 1997; Anderson 2018).

33 The evangelist's conjunctive operation as a dialectical theologian is at times contrasted to Mark's monological operation, as well as that of the Johannine Elder (Barrett 1972; Anderson 2004). While the Fourth Evangelist calls for abiding in Christ (John 15:1–8), the Elder calls for abiding in “the teaching” about Christ (2 John 9).

34 Thus, the Johannine Christ-hymn was likely added to the final edition of the Johannine narrative, rather than the first stroke of the evangelist's quill (Robinson 1963).

35 On more realistic understandings of Gnosticism—what it was and what it was not—see (King 2005; Williams 1999).

36 For a martyrological interpretation of Mark 10:38–39, John 6:51–58, and the “medicine of immortality” in Ignatius, see (Anderson 2010, pp. 110–36, 194–220). See also (Kobel 2011) on the sacramental character of table fellowship within the Johannine Situation.

37 For John's spirit-based and egalitarian ecclesiology, see (Burge 2014; Kluska 2020).

38 Martyn, Brown, Meeks

39 Cullmann (1976). Indeed, the near-unanimous second-century view of the Gospel of John sees it as representing the individuated witness of John the Apostle, and therein lay the conundrum of its differences with the Synoptics (Hill 2004; Lightfoot 2015).

40 On a non-sectarian view of the Johannine Situation, see (Fugsleth 2005; Gorman 2018).

41 Note the evangelist's dialectical tensions between universalism and particularity: Siliezar (2019), R.A. Culpepper (2002).

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