

RECEPTION OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL IN THE SECOND CENTURY

by

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(Under the Direction of Wayne Coppins)

ABSTRACT

Reception of the Fourth Gospel in the Second Century addresses the questions related to the earliest communities to receive and use the Gospel of John from 100 to 200 CE. The thesis begins by journeying through the traditional and New School positions on Christian history and presenting the issues each have in the face of criticism. Following this, a more specific look at both the earliest proto-orthodox readership of the *Gospel of John* serves to lead into a discussion of the early gnostic commentaries on the Gospel. Finally, the last discussion is on the relationship between heretical and proto-orthodox readers in the 2nd century under the influence of *1 John* 2:19-20. The relationship between heretical and orthodox readers are evaluated in light of the material from *1 John*, which provides a more believable timeline for the reception of John amongst the diverse groups using in the 2nd century.

INDEX WORDS: Gnosticism, Valentinianism, Heracleon, Ptolemaeus, Valentinus, Irenaeus, Origen, Gospel of John, Reception, Heresy, *1 John*, Johannine

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B.A., The University of Georgia, 2007

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2010

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my parents, who have each individually given me the support necessary to achieve this goal. I would dedicate this to my father, specifically for giving me the courage to do what I love without concerning myself with other people's priorities. I'd like to dedicate this to my mother, for supporting and encouraging me in my desire to learn from a young age, and for giving me the emotional *and* monetary support to see my goals through. I love you both.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the teachers and staff of the Religion Department of The University of Georgia for their constant support and willingness to help with any and all problems I've encountered on my road to the completion of this thesis. I would also like to thank my fellow graduate students, whose support during the writing of this thesis was instrumental in getting me through the rough patches.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The *Gospel of John* exists as one of the most beloved and frustrating of Christian texts. It has both inspired myriad believers and infuriated scholars who seek to penetrate the many mysteries surrounding it. Due to this, the *Gospel of John* has been a vein that scholars have been particularly interested in mining since the rise of Biblical criticism. Theories about the nature of the authorship, the dating, the style, the message, and more recently the reception of the *Gospel of John* have proliferated, with many prominent scholars taking positions that have defined the modern study of the *Gospel of John* and presented foundations for further research for decades at this point. Similarly, ‘heretics’ have been a group that has inspired much debate amongst scholars. Specially, in the last century, the rise of the New School of Biblical criticism has changed many perceptions about the earliest stages of Christian history, with a key argument of the New School being that heretical sects were among the earliest forms of Christianity that existed, and in some places in fact were the earliest. This work will explore the connections between these heretical believers and the *Gospel of John*, working with both the New School and the traditional schools of thought to determine the most likely reception history for the *Gospel of John* in light of information contained in *1 John*.

The main question that this work hopes to answer is one of timing. In most modern discussions of the *Gospel of John*, there are two main ways of looking at the earliest period of use of the Gospel; many argue that the gospel was used as a primarily heretical text up until the time of the church father Irenaeus in the late 2nd century, or that the gospel was always an orthodox work that only unfortunately received little commentary until Irenaeus and Origen applied the

same techniques to the *Gospel of John* that had been applied to the other, Synoptic gospels for almost a century at that point. My contention is that neither of these arguments are particularly accurate, as both place too much of a clearly drawn line in the history of the *Gospel of John's* usage amongst everyday Christians in the 2nd century. For many it seems too problematic to allow for a shared period of usage going back to the authorship group, generally recognized as either a Johannine author or authors, who produced the gospel that had numerous tendencies and language that both orthodox and heretical Christians could point to in order to justify their interpretations of *John's* contents. My goal then will be to produce evidence that suggests that this is indeed the case, by building through the next four chapters a case for a shared lineage that traces early Christian heretics back to the Johannine group that most scholars agree existed in Asia Minor around the turn of the 2nd century CE.

To undertake this study, I will lay out a path of evidence that will be combined in the final chapter so as to provide to the reader a clear series of distinct issues that come together to answer the question of the reception of John's gospel. To begin, the first chapter will cover the basics behind the debate between the traditional and New School positions on the earliest years of the Christian church. To be clear, I hope to build on both traditional and New School scholarly assessment in order to bring this conclusion about. Instead of ignoring or throwing out the entirety of either side's argument about the early church or the Gospel of John, I hope take insights from each side in order to build a consensus theory that will satisfy both sides, as well as hew as closely to the evidence as possible without requiring too large a leap of faith to connect the metaphorical dots. It is important to note that I will be taking a number of positions that have been laid out by previous scholars without commentary. To this end, I take it as background for this study that the Johannine Epistles were written after the *Gospel of John*, and as such represent a clear view of the community that already has access to some form of the Gospel.¹ My position

¹ Cf. Brown *The Gospel and Epistles of John*, 106.

on whether or not the Gospel as we today have it was complete at this time is irrelevant to the issue at hand, and any hypothetical redaction to the Gospel falls outside of the purview of this study. I also do not take a position on the ultimate origin for the gnostic heresy, be it a Jewish based development, something truly novel, or a combination of Christian theology and of Greek philosophical thought. To briefly summarize the afore mentioned positions, Walter Bauer presented a novel argument for the rise of Christianity by arguing that in fact heretical beliefs were coequal to the orthodox Christian beliefs in time, and even in some locals predated orthodoxy, a viewpoint that has come to be known as the New School of thought. There are a number of modern arguments against Bauer's thesis that are connected to the traditional assumptions about Christian history, presented in chapter 2, which will help provide the reader with a balanced look into the earliest years of the development of Christianity as well as an introduction to the idea of Gnosticism and its impact on the interpretation of early Christian history. In the 3rd chapter, the reader will encounter the *Gospel of John* for the first time, looking into the authorship and the dating of John's gospel, as well as discussing the early evidence for use of the *Gospel of John* by the orthodox church fathers. From this point, in chapter 4 the reader will be provided with a look at the earliest existent written material that can be conclusively connect to the *Gospel of John*, which importantly comes from two heretical Christians of the gnostic branch known as Valentinianism. In this section there will also be a brief discussion on Gnosticism as a group, and Valentinian theology in contrast to the more widely known orthodox beliefs. Finally, in the 5th chapter, the reader will be introduced to an exemplary text from *I John* that I hope presents an alternative to the normal understandings of the reception of John's gospel. Through these verses, I hope to show the reader a different answer to the above question on John's gospel, by focusing on another Johannine text that seems to provide the reader with an alternative to the black and white distinction between heretics and orthodox that most scholars seem to find appealing.

CHAPTER 2: Traditional v. New School Christian History

2.1 Introduction to Early Christianity and Gnosticism

Questions on the nature of the early Christian church have special weight for the modern scholar *and* believer, as well as relevant information for the general understanding of the development of western culture. As a time period, the early centuries of the Christian faith (here we are discussing roughly 50 CE through the year 200 CE, unless otherwise noted) have often provided the model which Christians have striven to emulate. Christianity in its modern form has constantly struggled to self-identify with the earliest phases of the church in history, with groups as diverse as Primitive Baptists, Latter Day Saints, and Roman Catholics all attempting to lay claim to a lineage stretching back to the earliest periods of the Christian faith. In this light, understanding those early centuries becomes increasingly important for both the scholar *and* the believer. The modern Christian strives for a sense of continuity with the earliest practitioners of the faith, and an accurate historical representation of that period which is often shrouded in the mist of legend and myth becomes a crucial thing for the layperson and the scholar. In this light, as well as in the general search for a more accurate representation of our shared cultural history, a study of the differing positions on the developmental phase of early Christianity seems rather appropriate.

Primarily, the traditional views on the early centuries of the Christian faith have presented a vision of a unified faith tradition that fought the advances of pagans and heretics on all fronts to eventually become the religion of a world empire, and then became the primary cultural ties that bind the western world in its development even into modern times. Reacting to this traditional position, in the last century the so-called 'New School' of thought has arisen

concerning the time period that concerns the earliest material we have available in the strata of Christian history, and makes new claims about this developmental stage of Christianity that stands outside of what modern traditionalists are willing to grant. Both the traditionalist position and the New School position present (frequently) well reasoned arguments based on historical knowledge and empirical data, but as is often times the case, many of their claims are mutually exclusive. It is on these two positions that this chapter will focus, devoting time to each position in and of itself, as well as comparing the claims of each with the other through the use of two primary scholarly views on the subject, in order to develop a fundamental understanding of the basics of the argument as they stand in modern scholarship.

2.2 Statement of the Issue

Between both the traditionalist position and the New School thesis there are several key issues. At the root of much of the dispute are questions regarding the development of heresy in the early church and as such this question serves as the primary focus of this chapter. The traditionalist position would be that which will be termed the proto-orthodox (however, this is not meant to be an affirmation of the New School and their use of this term, but as a simple way of referencing what both the traditionalists and the New School agree was the foundation of what we now know as the traditional form of Christianity, historically), and even though the term heresy is a loaded one, it will serve here for the most part since to redefine the positions at this point would be inappropriate. In this case, then, by “heresy” it is not to be implied that this author takes a stance on the developmental issues at this point, but only that this term is understood as alternative form(s) (from the proto-orthodox) of the early Christian faith which often came into conflict with the proto-orthodox belief system at some point (be it in reaction to OR being reacted to). The traditionalist position, which this chapter will proceed with first, is developed from a number of different sources. First and foremost is the work of Eusebius, *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, which bills itself, and is described as, the first true historical

look at the early Christian centuries by something close to what would be considered a modern form of the historian. Eusebius' position is developed and strengthened into its modern form by a number of traditional-leaning historians, with emphasis in this chapter given to the more moderate Arland J. Hultgren, primarily his interaction with the New School in his *The Rise of Normative Christianity*, and the more conservative (the implication by this use of the word being solely on the leaning toward traditionalism of the author) Darrell L. Bock and his more recent study *The Missing Gospels: Unearthing the Truth Behind Alternative Christianities* as the foundation for the discussion of the traditionalist position. These works, along with minor inclusion of various church fathers such as Clement serve to present the traditional argument for the development of the church as is currently known to history.

The New School's position, an alternate look at the history of the Christian movement with an emphasis on the primacy of heretical forms of the faith in early Christianity, is similarly developed through a number of important historians' work. Starting with Bart D. Ehrman's more modern work which presents the current state of what is known as the New School position, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew*, and proceeding through sections of Walter Bauer's original New School thesis as Ehrman presents them (in its more modern form), this chapter will present an overview of the New School position as can best be summarized. Unlike the traditionalist arguments, this New School has not yet had the benefit of centuries of refinement, and therefore suffers from being a bit scattered throughout the aforementioned works, with little of the clarity of position offered by the traditionalists. This, again, is not meant in the negative but as a way of explaining the presentation of the material. Following the presentation of both of these positions, then, will be a discussion of the points of argument in contrast with each other.

2.3 Eusebius's Position on Heresy in the Early Church

From the beginning, Eusebius' work on the church concerns itself with heresy. In laying out his projected plan for the work we have come to know as *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, Eusebius makes it clear he plans on both establishing as historical "the lines of succession from the holy apostles" and the "calamities that...overwhelmed the entire Jewish race" following the death of Jesus, as well as presenting

the names and dates of those who through a passion for innovation have wandered as far as possible from the truth, proclaiming themselves the founts of Knowledge falsely so called while mercilessly, like savage wolves, making havoc of Christ's flock.²

This early focus belies a more important statement. From Eusebius' point of view, early Christians were hounded by "founts of Knowledge falsely so called,"³ a reference to heretics known as the Gnostics (gnosis being the Greek term for knowledge, not of the scientific sense, but if one follows Elaine Pagels, more in the context of personal insight developed through observation and reflection).⁴ Gnostics will be discussed in more detail later, in chapter 4 during a discussion on the nature of gnostic use of the *Gospel of John*. From this point, Eusebius begins by providing a brief description of the nature of the Christ, as well as giving many references to Jewish scripture, which confirm the nature of Jesus as Messiah and provide the historical support Eusebius seeks for validation of the Christian tradition. Eusebius goes on to present a brief description of Jesus and his historical time period, as well as discuss a number of stories regarding the time period into which he came, and having written his work around roughly the year 325 CE, Eusebius is one of, if not the, oldest sources we have on the early history of the church.⁵ From here, Eusebius begins to discuss the history of the apostles to Jesus and their travels and successes. A statement made by Eusebius during this discussion belies the

² Eusebius and G.A. Williamson, *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965), 31.

³ This language may be a reference to the title of Irenaeus' work *A Refutation and Subversion of Knowledge Falsely So Called*, and also echoes 1 Tim. 6:20.

⁴ Elaine H. Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979), xix.

⁵ Eusebius, 20.

importance of the figure involved, but is however, very enlightening and relevant to the current topic. In discussing the apostles, Eusebius presents the story of how Philip, one of the disciples, brought men such as Simon the Magus (alternately known as Simon Magus, who appears in Acts 8:9-24 canonically) to the faith; “So great was the divine grace working with him [Philip] that even Simon the Magus with very many others was won over by his words.”⁶ He continues by describing the baptism of Simon, as well as his “hypocritical pretence of belief in Christ,” which underlies his “disgusting sect” even to that (concurrent with Eusebius’ writing) period.⁷ For Eusebius, Simon Magus’ followers “slip into the Church like a pestilential and scabby disease,” which characterizes Eusebius’, and therefore the basic level of the traditionalist, view of heresy as coming from the outside to corrupt the body of the church.⁸ At all times, Eusebius presents these heretics as being externally generated, and thus following historically from actual Christianity as malicious grafts into a healthy system. While he allows that Simon Magus was baptized into the Christian faith, Eusebius does not fail to point out how astonishing this admission is to even the heretic’s own followers. This form of discussion of the heretical person and position characterized the foundation of the traditional perspective on heresy in that as Eusebius states; heresy comes from people leading the flock astray from the outside. Even though Simon Magus was admittedly received into the Christian faith, Eusebius contends that he never accepted the true teachings and only presented himself as such to continue his sorcerous ways, deceiving the true flock of Christ.

As such, Simon Magus is later discussed again, at length, by Eusebius. He is called “the prime author of every heresy” at this point, stating and summing up Eusebius’ opinion on this matter.⁹ As with earlier quotes, Eusebius describes his actions as corrupting the faithful and stealing converts from the church, itself (as Eusebius already considers the church to be a

⁶ Eusebius, 73.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 74.

⁹ Ibid., 86.

monolithic organization in his time). In the same discussion, this is made most clear by the placement of Simon contemporary to the Apostles as a sort of cosmic, dualistic foe, where Eusebius states that Simon was “raised up at that time by the evil power which hates all that is good and plots against the salvation of mankind, to be a great opponent of great men, our Saviour’s inspired Apostles.”¹⁰ The emphasis here is on the placement of Simon, who Eusebius has clearly labeled the father of all heresy, as a contemporary and enemy of the Apostles. This performs the subtle act of placing these heresies after Christ (and also implicitly invalidates much of the alternative gospel material that traces its lineage back to various Apostles), and makes the proto-orthodox belief system the victim of this band of wolves Magus fosters. Interestingly enough, in this section Eusebius also uses the fight against heresy to divulge the facts behind the authorship of the *Gospel of Mark*, tying it directly to the disciple of Peter, Mark, whose name it has come to bear. Peter’s spiritual battles with Simon Magus have all, according to Eusebius, led Magus further and further away from Jerusalem and towards more far-off places where his influence could be won less costly, but against him God sends Peter to continually chastise him and prevent Magus’ followers from growing large enough to be important or truly dangerous to the emerging church in the Apostolic times.¹¹

Here, however, we see the Eusebius causing himself problems in two ways. First, it seems odd that Eusebius would devote such time to the founder of these heresies if in fact they were never more than a small minority, as Eusebius claims. Second, following his discussion of Simon Magus, he begins listing the other heresies of the previous generations, and at the foremost starts with the Ebionites, a group of early non-proto-orthodox believers who concentrated on the Jewish law, as well as their belief that Jesus was the normal offspring of Joseph and Mary, with no divine intervention. In doing so, he starts his discussion by stating that the “Ebionites...were appropriately named by the first Christians, in view of the poor and mean opinions they held

¹⁰ Eusebius, 87.

¹¹ Ibid., 89.

about Christ.”¹² This seems like a striking difference, as earlier we have heard that Simon Magus was the father of *all* heresy. Important, also, in this discussion, is the fact that these Jewish Christians actively denied the Virgin birth, which suggests the belief itself must have been widespread enough to precipitate this disavowal it garnered.¹³ He follows this discussion of the Ebionites with references to various other groups, inconsequential to this chapter’s specific goals. However, he never strays from the narrative line discussed so far; that the proto-orthodoxy was the main stream of Christian belief from the death of Christ through the actual, physical establishment of the Church here on Earth, with heresy coming in the form of outside tempters to distort and draw off sheep from Christ’s flock (from where ever these wolves may have come). For the most part, this view became the traditional understanding of the early church’s history, although there are subtle changes or updates made by more recent scholars, as it appears portions of Eusebius’ work may or may not be historically inaccurate in places.

2.4 The Modern Traditional Position on the Rise of Heresy

From this base, our discussion of more modern arguments for the traditional position can begin. The first such position to be covered will be that of Arland J. Hultgren, in his work *The Rise of Normative Christianity*. This phrase, ‘normative Christianity,’ has basically the same meaning as what has been referred to thus far as the proto-orthodox, although Hultgren argues that the terms all may be misleading on different levels (and obviously, Hultgren favors using the phrasing ‘Normative Christianity’ instead of ‘proto-orthodoxy’). From this early discussion and clarification of terms, Hultgren begins to move quickly, laying out four positions that one might take in regards to the rise of the proto-orthodoxy and heresy. Beginning with the traditional argument, as presented by Eusebius and our discussion of his work earlier, phrased by Hultgren as “Truth preceded Error,” he continues on to present three other important options; “Heresy

¹² Eusebius, 137.

¹³ Ibid., 137 (footnote 2).

preceded Orthodoxy,” “Fixed and Flexible Elements,” and “Diverse Trajectories from the Beginning.” Spelling each of them out, Hultgren presents a full and balanced argument for and against each of the positions, although he clearly discounts the actual ‘factual’ backing that the fixed and flexible elements argument has.

Beginning with his discussion of what he views as the argument of the founder of the New School, Walter Bauer, he presents the argument that ‘Heresy preceded Orthodoxy.’ Simply put, Hultgren approaches this argument as fundamentally flawed. He begins by pointing out that Bauer’s argument looks at specific places in the ancient world where Christianity developed, and singled out certain specific places to show that heresy was quite probably the earliest form of Christian belief in those locations.¹⁴ While Hultgren admits that this information seems well researched, he claims that Bauer often makes his argument “from silence,” and points out that Bauer seems to ignore information that runs counter to his main thesis.¹⁵ Important to note here is that Hultgren points out a subtle flaw in both the traditionalist and the New School positions implicitly, in that both groups seem unwilling to look at the totality of the ancient Mediterranean, concentrating instead on areas that make their points to the exclusion of other material and evidence. Hultgren here points out the flaw in Bauer’s method, since he takes only particular areas and determines broad historical trends from those specific locations. Hultgren also makes the case for an argument against Bauer that goes as follows; because heresy may, admittedly, be the primary form of Christian worship in a particular location (Bauer begins by discussing Edessa, a locale in modern day Syria), that fact does not, by consequence, mean that heresy truly historically precedes the proto-orthodoxy. In truth, this only successfully establishes that heresy was introduced into the certain areas earlier than proto-orthodoxy, which falls far short of the stated goal of proving an earlier origin in general for heresy. As Hultgren states, “The traditional view, that orthodoxy preceded heresy, does not require that orthodoxy existed in every

¹⁴ Arland J. Hultgren, *The Rise of Normative Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 9.

¹⁵ Hultgren, 10.

conceivable place prior to heresy,” just as a temporally prior entity.¹⁶ This argument strikes a formative blow, at a relatively early stage in the work of Hultgren, against Bauer’s claims. From this point, Hultgren continues, by building a case against many of the other locales that Bauer addresses, such as Egypt, Antioch and Asia Minor. Similarly to his discussion of Edessa, Hultgren has what appears to be a rather solid problem with Bauer’s thesis as it pertains to Egypt. The claim that early Egyptian Christianity was Gnostic in flavor as Bauer presents it rests on a lack of material (at the time) pointing to any proto-orthodox belief. As Hultgren points out, a number of sources, since discovered, have emerged that point to a non-Gnostic Christianity at least being in existence in Egypt concurrently with the Gnostic branches Bauer points towards.¹⁷ Hultgren points specifically to versions of the Old Testament found in Egypt that date to the time period Bauer was discussing which Hultgren implies were used in a solely Christian context. Problematically for Bauer, much of Gnostic Christianity did not view the Torah as the authoritative scripture that modern, orthodox Christians have come to view it as, nor as the proto-orthodox seemingly did. In fact, instead of seeing the Jewish scripture as foundational, many Gnostic sects viewed it as false teachings designed to obscure the true believer from a vision of the truth (whatever that truth may have been to that sect). For the most part, this Gnostic disdain for the Torah holds true across the spectrum, and a strong presence of Christians who believed and followed the teachings of the Jewish scriptures does not point to a strong Gnostic majority. To Hultgren, this seems like a striking problem. If, as Bauer claimed, Egyptian Christianity grew from a Gnostic root, one would expect that traditional (or at least, what we can call similar tendencies of the major Gnostic sects) Gnostic beliefs would prevent much use of, or the prevalence of, the Jewish scripture in the area. Hultgren goes on from this point to move towards another text, known as the *Epistula Apostolorum*, which seems to characterize a decidedly proto-orthodox belief system in Egypt. This work, which Hultgren dates to the second century, makes

¹⁶ Hultgren, 11.

¹⁷ Ibid., 12.

claims that seem decidedly non-Gnostic.¹⁸ In fact, if the dating and placement of the title are correct to this period of Egyptian Christianity, it may do much to discredit Bauer's claims regarding the Gnostic nature of Egyptian Christianity on the whole. The work strikes early, by describing Simon and Cerinthus, who Hultgren points out are both Gnostics (a debated charge), as "false apostles."¹⁹ While acknowledging that Gnosticism was rather discordant to begin with and many Gnostic teachers may have held disparaging views of each other in the same way they may have looked down upon the proto-orthodox, this seems rather harsh if we are to believe that these same Egyptians who produced this work early in Christianities development in Egypt were to be Gnostics. Similarly, Hultgren attacks Bauer's work in several other geographical areas along similar lines (focusing on Bauer's targets of Asia Minor, Syria and Rome, as well as Alexandria), building to a conclusion where he states his main problems with Bauer's thesis. To do this, he argues, as earlier stated, that Bauer's thesis speaks from silence too often, as well as overlooks key mistakes in its own argument. To wit, Hultgren points out that Bauer's argument takes as its starting point the 2nd century CE, which necessarily follows the apostolic era of Christianity (this thesis's timeframe). So, to Hultgren, while Bauer presents an interesting position, he avoids or ignores too many issues that strike Hultgren as key to this discussion to view its conclusions as usable or more than nominally interesting.

From this point, Hultgren moves on to discussing a second option, 'Fixed and Flexible Elements.' By this, Hultgren means the position as articulated by H.E.W. Turner in his work, *The Pattern of Christian Truth*. This position, while an interesting option on the surface as the argument strikes Hultgren as intrinsically plausible, seems to provide Hultgren with little challenge and he dispatches with it in much less time than given to his refutation of Bauer's works. In discussing Turner's views, Hultgren points out that while Turner did not agree with Bauer (and in fact prepared a refutation of Bauer that Hultgren praises as the true value of his

¹⁸ Hultgren, 12.

¹⁹ Ibid.

work), he did still view Christianity as different from the traditionalist position. Instead of there being a normative, proto-orthodox church as the traditionalist would contend, Turner argued that there were both fixed and flexible elements to the early church, allowing for different emphasis' within a framework of sorts that expressed the church's positions in their totality. As Hultgren states, "none of the 'tradition-lines' was adequate by itself to express the church's experience as a whole, but each made its contribution to the formulation of doctrine."²⁰ He proceeds from this to point out that Turner viewed heresy as the transgression of these "defined forms," or also "when the specific religious content of the Christian faith [was] substantially impaired."²¹ However, even though Turner's views are presented as an alternative to the others covered, Hultgren states that Turner makes similar mistakes to Bauer, ignoring the pre-New Testament period and focusing on the later periods where heresy had already arisen, as well as being unnecessarily vague in his discussion of the tradition-lines he postulates (and the method in which they came together to form the proto-orthodoxy he believed they created). In the end, Hultgren dismisses Turner's argument due to its lack of "a sustained presentation and unfolding of the approach promised at the outset," pointing out once again his belief that Turner fails to follow through on his goal of presenting this argument in a workable sense.²² In other words, his lack of actual factual basis behind his theories on the development of early Christianity dooms his positional work, even though it appears to present an interesting alternative theory to the traditionalist view.

Finally (as he has dismissed out of hand his fourth option), Hultgren comes to the third option he presents, 'Diverse Trajectories from the Beginning.' This is a development of James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester's theory, which appears in their work *Trajectories through Early Christianity*. Hultgren points out that they "give credit to Walter Bauer for providing foundations" for their theories, but implies that they take Bauer's New School foundational

²⁰ Hultgren, 14.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 15.

material in another direction from his personal work. The basic point that Robinson and Koester make relies on a sort of movement within history. Speaking historically, then, there is no single event happening at a single time; there are a multitude of events taking place simultaneously, which is a fact often overlooked in historical analysis. Hultgren implies that this sort of way of approaching the historical record of the development of Christianity is novel and seems appealing, intellectually. This option, as presented here by Hultgren, approaches a theory that looks at history with this fact in mind, and it seems to strike Hultgren as a novel approach to historical criticism. He, therefore, discusses the points of Robinson and Koester in a much more involved manner than when looking at Turner's thesis. The theory itself presents the history of the church as a sort of concurrent development, in a similar manner to the flexible elements of Turner, focusing on the "dynamics of historical and cultural forces upon traditions" while expounding on the idea that many of the sources discussed and impacting this study may have been used in different manners by different sections of the church.²³ Specifically, Hultgren points out that this method recognizes that "context is dynamic, not static;" a revelation in comparison to the theories discussed earlier which tend to view the historical church in terms of black and white.²⁴ Hultgren presents as an example the discussion of the Q source, which is the historically postulated first collection of sayings of Jesus that tied together the similar material found in the synoptic Gospels (Q standing for the German phrase *Quelle*, meaning 'source'). In the postulated Q-community, the source itself would have meant one thing (or been understood in a singular manner, most likely), while its use in a postulated later Gnostic community that valued it as well may have been different in fundamental ways from the original usage in the Q-community, and both could be meaningful in their periods. As Hultgren points out, it would mean one thing "once it has been incorporated into the *Gospel of Matthew* and still another in Luke's Gospel," as the Q source itself is seen as fundamental to both of those gospels in the same way that each draws

²³ Hultgren, 15.

²⁴ Ibid.

upon *Mark* (in the dominant position of modern source criticism of the New Testament Gospels).²⁵ Hultgren moves from this point towards a development of Robinson and Koester's theory that strikes him as less plausible than this multiplicity of action and understandings that he admits is a novel consideration; while genres of literature exist in the church from early periods (he proceeds to supply the narrative gospel form, the sayings collection form and the dialogue form as types of works which have been used to pass on the Christian message), there might be some that are more innately heretical than others. As such, Hultgren points out an article by Robinson indicating his belief that it was possible that the movement from the Q source to the more noticeably (arguably, as a number of scholars now contend that *Thomas* is not in and of itself Gnostic in origin) 'gnostic' *Gospel of Thomas*, also a sayings collection, was a marker that showed that this form or "stream" of early Christianity while existent early on in Christian history (as Q is a postulated first source in a sense, predating the canonical Gospels) was suppressed later on (the implication being that this results in our lack of knowledge and sources of this type in modern times) by the proto-orthodox streams which "got the upper hand."²⁶ Hultgren points out that under this theory there would be less rigid lines of demarcation "between canonical and noncanonical, orthodox and heretical."²⁷ From this point, Hultgren begins discussing what he sees as fundamental problems with this research. To begin with, he points out that while this does much to remove the modern lens from the its place between the scholar and the actual usage and context of a work in its time period, it still retroactively places a given text into a particular genre based off "later developments" in that particular field (specifically referencing the earlier discussion of the Q source and the *Gospel of Thomas* as participants in a shared genre).²⁸ Building on this, Hultgren points out that Koester "attributes to a 'very primitive' version of Q

²⁵ Hultgren, 15.

²⁶ Ibid., 16.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 17.

certain ‘gnosticizing tendencies’ that were developed into a Gnostic theology.”²⁹ Similarly, Robinson believes there existed a gnosticizing tendency in the sayings collection genre, as a whole. In opposition to this theory, Hultgren points out there exists no concrete factual reason that Q should itself be viewed as potentially Gnostic just because the *Gospel of Thomas* seems to itself, in his mind, be Gnostic in character. Hultgren criticizes what he sees as a “retrojectry,” or the backwards direction in which Robinson and Koester define their genres and the inclusion/exclusion in them.³⁰ This is, like his criticism of Bauer, a fundamental flaw in the theory that makes presents an insurmountable wall for Hultgren, as he just cannot move past this problematic practice.

2.5 Ultra-Traditionalist Position Regarding Bauer’s Theories

Similarly to Hultgren, our second author, Darrell L. Bock takes a markedly traditional stance on the history of the Church. His work *The Missing Gospels: Unearthing the Truth Behind Alternative Christianities* presents a modern, ultra-traditional, understanding of the New School as well as the fundamental reasons for the Traditionalist position. Unlike Hultgren, however, Bock’s position is laid out in a very populist manner, leaving out the massive amount of citations and textual fragments that Hultgren provides the reader with, with a stated goal being “to write this book for a popular audience.”³¹ Bock proceeds to do just that, starting by laying out a foundational background for the layman, providing a conservative assessment of the New School position and its argument in less ambiguous terms, and laying out a breakdown of many known alternative scriptural sources in contrast to the canonical material. In the process, Bock discusses the *Gospel of Thomas* in depth early in his argument, specifically over the issue of dating. To Bock it seems necessary to show that all of the existent non-canonical gospels post-date the

²⁹ Hultgren, 17.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Darrell L. Bock, *The Missing Gospels: Unearthing the Truth Behind Alternative Christianities* (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2006), xiii.

canonical ones. Often, the heretical material is fairly (and rightly, as far as can be ascertained) placed into a chronology, and given accurate dates reflecting general knowledge about those works. However, early on, Bock presents a bias towards what scholars would call the ‘New School’ by seemingly ignoring disputed dating material on *Thomas*. While Bock acknowledges that as a sayings source, *Thomas* might require a more piecemeal approach (in other words, some scholars contend that each particular saying needs to be dated on its own, not as part of the collection itself) to dating, he starts by presenting conflicting claims about the date of the work. This in and of itself does not seem strange, but even though he references scholars who date it earlier (in part or in totality), he ends up with the final statement on the subject being “nevertheless, the gospel itself is likely later rather than earlier.”³² This is surprising, because mere sentences earlier he mentions scholars who contrast this view, and offers nothing besides other scholars who date it later to refute them, with no actual background information as to why the traditionalist position is easier to rest upon. There is no reason to take a position either way presented, as Bock does not present more than the individual scholars date without any context for why they date the work as they do, but Bock makes the definite statement for his readers that the New School is wrong (implicitly presenting the New School’s view of *Thomas* as early as an incorrect theory). He continues to show bias by misrepresenting current knowledge of both the canonical and noncanonical gospels. A definitive statement about the authorship of *Thomas* seems like it would require a rather lengthy and historically significant amount of research, but Bock presents in two lines a rather succinct position:

The debate about *Thomas* includes what and how much of this material goes back to Jesus and how much of it is a reflection of later Gnostic concerns. Most of *Thomas* does not go back to Jesus, but a few pieces could.³³

What is most striking here is the brevity with which Bock completely dismisses the idea that much of *Thomas* outside of its shared sayings has any connection to actual sayings of Jesus. The

³² Bock, 6.

³³ Ibid., 7.

above passage is placed after a one sided discussion on the views of a specific scholar on how much of *Thomas* possibly a connection to Jesus had.

Another strikingly biased positional statement occurs early in the work, with Bock presenting to the reader the claim that “the *Gospel of Peter* is not from Peter nor does it give teaching reserved by those familiar with his teaching,” which for the most part the New School would agree with.³⁴ This is an interesting omission of balance, as there is little material given to substantiate this claim. Although it may not be arguable that *Peter* itself, which has a more generally accepted later date, had a connection to the direct teachings or writings of the Apostle Peter, Bock does not present the fact that some of the canonical New Testament also have little *provable* ties to the traditional authors (disputed authorship of the canonical gospels having been admitted earlier in the work by Bock himself). Bock also points out later that he views this questioning of the traditional understanding of the authorship of the canonical gospels as flawed. He discusses how Elaine Pagels and Bart Ehrman both begin their works with the assumption that we know little of the authorship of any of the gospels we have, and how this ignores much of the scholarship on apostolic lineage that the early church based its acceptance of these gospels on.³⁵ Problematic for Bock here is the simple fact that many of the books in the New Testament are of disputed authorship (Ehrman states that many commentators avoid using the phrase forgery by calling the disputed authorship works “‘pseudonymous’ writings”), including the *Gospel of John* and a number of the letters of Paul (the so-called “pseudo-Pauline” or “deutero-Pauline” letters).³⁶ The church, as Bock states, accepted these because of the supposed apostolic lineage present, but if they accepted works under arguably false or untrue conditions, it seems interesting that Bock views their blessing on the canonical gospels as more important than factual evidence and as able to override these historically based concerns.

³⁴ Bock, 7.

³⁵ Ibid., 203.

³⁶ Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 9.

Presenting these non-canonical gospels as blatantly false from the beginning of his discussion colors the view the layman receives from Bock against the New School without a specifically factual negative statement having been made, and his later refutation of the questionable authorship of the canonical material seems rather unfair. It must be said, however, that Bock does make an attempt to be balanced in his presentation by pointing out the arguments presented by the other side. However, often, he does this after having already managed to characterize the opposing textual evidence as foundationless. Also important to note about Bock's work is his willingness to present more of the arguments of his opponents than one might expect. In discussing Gnosticism, Bock presents a relatively strong section on the fragmented nature of the sect he will spend much of the rest of the book attacking. He does this by pointing attention to the fact that Gnosticism was not a single movement, and especially how "difficult to pin down the features that make a work Gnostic and the features that make it simply something different" from the proto-orthodoxy of today it is.³⁷ In providing the reader with this, Bock starts to present a more rounded understanding of the problems facing the New School that the Traditionalist does not face. Specifically, he points out that the works we have, generally from the find at Nag Hammadi, often "were seen to fit into this category (whatever Gnosticism might be exactly) but displayed a significant difference among themselves."³⁸ By allowing that the understood definition of what exactly Gnosticism itself is remains in constant flux for the most part, Bock shows the large difficulty that the New School scholar sets upon. The path of least resistance here (although, this may seem to be negative in speaking about the Traditionalist position, it should not be taken as such) would be the more theologically and thematically similar canonical materials. Bock does have the insight to point out that what *is* Gnostic, however, is often the separation of the few inside the many. Gnostic sources often discuss the few amongst the many (Gnosis being what separates them from their unenlightened brethren), and Bock points

³⁷ Bock, 16.

³⁸ Ibid., 17.

out that without the many, this separation would make little sense, which will become an important argument for the later dating of heresy, although Bock himself does not focus much on this seemingly important point. Bock focuses instead almost solely on Gnosticism itself as a whole. This is made more surprising by his early inclusion of the fact that the works of Nag Hammadi (and therefore most existent Gnostic texts) are so fragmented. As earlier referenced, Bock has pointed out that what currently is known as Gnostic had no true connection (or at best a flimsy one) in actuality contextually. It is surprising, then, that he disregards this knowledge and his own presentation of it when he attacks Gnosticism as a whole for much of the remainder of the work. For Bock, heresy, in this sense under which he continues his work, was Gnosticism. This presents a convenient loophole, as Gnosticism in many of its forms is a demonstrably late development. This is not to say Bock himself proves this, but he does point out that much of current scholarship on many of the Gnostic texts we have place them in the 2nd century or later. However, if his stated goal was to discuss the revelations of the alternative Christianities, he seems to fail by omission on his own part. Focusing solely on Gnosticism as a unit allows him to direct his claims against a unit that admittedly (for the New School scholar) includes late dates. Just as Hultgren rejects theories for retroactively applying genres to works, Bock retroactively attacks the entirety of the Gnostic “school” by pointing out that much of it is a later innovation after having earlier admitted that it should not be taken as a monolithic unit. When discussing the options, Bock essentially locks himself into saying that Christianity predates Gnosticism (which may or may not be a valid claim regardless), because he lays out why the alternative is incorrect right before he presents the reader with the choice between a Jewish origin of Gnosticism and a Christian one.³⁹

Much of the rest of Bock’s work is spent discussing the work of Walter Bauer and refuting it along the same lines that Hultgren used as well as a topic-by-topic breakdown of a

³⁹ Bock, 30.

selection of Gnostic texts in contrast with the canonical texts containing that material as well. Strangely, it seems at times during his discussion of these topics that Bock is judging the alternative gospel material on the criteria of the canonical works he compares them to. This leads as course to a negative comparison. If we take what one book says as Christian only, and compare another book to it, the original book will always be more demonstratively Christian. This is the method that Bock uses at most times to make his arguments, although it obviously is a simplified presentation of the reasoning.

2.6 The Modern New School Position Regarding the Development of Heresy

At this point, the New School needs to speak for itself, as it were. The traditionalist position as articulated by three distinctive voices has been presented, and the position they argue against (forcefully in many cases) must be given a fair share of time. However, as alluded to earlier, the New School is much more fragmented and harder to draw overriding conclusions from than its opposition in the traditional school. Without the firm hand of the church to guide the theological implications of the New School's scholars, there is much more variation (as Hultgren's discussion of the different ways of viewing the problem exhibit). The bulk of the material presented here on the New School will come from Bart D. Ehrman, as the one of the most popular and cited of the New School scholars, as well as the most well defined in context of the particular focus of this chapter. Material by Walter Bauer, foundational as it is to Ehrman's points, is often referenced. Both of these scholars present important arguments for the early development of heresy in Christian history, but each has a distinct take on the discussion, in contrast to the similarities between the basic positions of Eusebius, Hultgren and Bock.

Bart D. Ehrman, a modern representation of the New School that Walter Bauer is at the root of, alternately presents an interesting case for a different understanding of the history of the church in his work *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew*.

He discusses a number of topics; his sections on “Forgeries and Discoveries” and “Heresies and Orthodoxies” being two important discussions for this chapter to focus on. These two present Ehrman a platform with which to discuss and build the foundational position for this New School. To begin with Forgeries and Discoveries, it is important to be clear with what Ehrman is speaking about here. The first line of Ehrman’s discussion on the topic lays the gauntlet down, as it were, when he states “almost all of the ‘lost Scriptures of the early Christians were forgeries. On this, scholars of every stripe agree.”⁴⁰ This would be, to most, a bad admission to make at the beginning of a quest to prove the importance and possible primacy of said scriptures. For Ehrman, however, this is an important first step in a discussion that will cover a wealth of material long ignored at best and attacked violently at worst by the proto-orthodox church. This admission comes with a price for the traditionalist scholar, however. Ehrman is willing to admit (in fact, happy to) that these works are forgeries, however to him; this fact does not change the question about their validity in the tradition, as well as their importance in understanding early Christian history. Ehrman points out “forgery in antiquity was so common that no one took it seriously and that few people were swayed by it.”⁴¹ What seems to strike Ehrman as more interesting is the fact that there are books within the New Testament, which are known forgeries (often, as Ehrman states, these forgeries are pseudonymous). This first section by Ehrman seems to be more of a primer for the later works revolving around the actual question of heresy, as Ehrman spends this section more as a history lesson on various points and people in the established canon. Also, Ehrman focuses on dating for much of this, arguing for and establishing his reasons for placing certain texts at different points. Important here, again, is his discussion of the reasons behind the forgeries. For example, he discusses works such as the *Acts of Paul*, which include the stories of Thecla, an early female convert of Paul who mythically had many experiences that emphasized her virtue and faith in Jesus. The story of Thecla that Ehrman

⁴⁰ Ehrman, 9.

⁴¹ Ibid., 30.

presents is rather compelling, as it discusses a strong, positive role model for early Christian women. However, as Ehrman points out, it is well known that the *Acts of Paul* were forgeries, even in ancient times. This doesn't invalidate the meanings and teachings behind the story, Ehrman claims, but does cause the modern reader to distrust it almost immediately, as modern readers tend to be less than accepting of the ancient practice of attributing works to famous people in order for them to gain a following, and of forgery in general. However historically, forgery was much more widely practiced; as one way for the ancient author to make sure his work was read was to attribute it to a famous historical author (the famous letters of Paul and Seneca are striking examples of this). The way Ehrman presents this, it seems almost like a positive thing, and at worst it was a way of making sure one's writing was given a chance; "one common ploy used by ancient forgers was to claim that they had 'found' an older writing which they were reproducing for the world to see for the first time."⁴² In essence, then, for Ehrman this 'problem' of forgeries is a false one. Overall, it seems there exists in his mind no real separation between a forged scriptural text and an original, if the goal of both was the enlightenment of the reader. Since Ehrman considers forgery unimportant, he defeats for himself what seems an obvious and early objection to the alternative gospels he plans on considering. This is not to imply that he views all forgeries as valuable spiritually, but only that since the practice was so obviously prevalent in ancient times as a valid method of ensuring one's writings a wider audience, it is important to consider documents scholars now know are forgeries anyways. Also, Ehrman makes the point that since the authorship of much of the New Testament itself is disputed, the fact remains that there are more than likely at least some forged documents existent in the canon at this point already, and their authorship does not devalue their message to modern Christians as it currently stands, nor their importance amongst modern scholars of the earliest strata of Christian development.

⁴² Ehrman, 32.

In his next section, 'Heresies and Orthodoxies,' Ehrman continues to build a thesis, which he started with his discussion on Forgery. After a short discussion of Ebionites (an early group of Christian Jews or Jewish Christians) and Marcionites (a semi-Gnostic sect that rejected all of Judaism as false and corrupt), as examples of polar opposites existent on the side often viewed as a singular group of heretics, Ehrman discusses the more widely known Gnostics. In doing so, Ehrman draws attention to a number of distinguishing features of Gnosticism as a collective sect; extreme anti-Jewish views, a dualistic view of the material world and the spiritual world, often an abandoning of monotheism for an ordered hierarchy of gods, and an intense and widespread belief in an elitist structure of grace (in the sense that only the elite within the body of Christ would actually be truly saved).⁴³ It is important for Ehrman to lay out these foundational beliefs, because he also wishes to emphasize the immense difference between the various Gnostic sects. Many followed one or another of these beliefs, but as there was no dominant local or leader of Gnosticism in the same sense that bishops led the proto-orthodox, no firm theology developed that would characterize Gnosticism as a whole. What was so deeply insidious for the church fathers about these Gnostics (specific groups such as Valentinians, who are discussed in a later chapter, are in mind here) was their practice of attending proto-orthodox churches and meetings. Indeed, the Gnostic was often found inside the "regular" church, worshiping with the non-Gnostic; they were not "out there," as Ehrman puts it, but "'in here', with us."⁴⁴ It was solely through interpretations of the 'normal' scripture and alternate, secret scriptures, that these elite members of the church often differentiated themselves from their uninitiated brethren. This, obviously, was largely problematic for the early proto-orthodox thinkers, and explains much of why so much of their writings show a constant disdain for these heretics.⁴⁵ Implicit in what Ehrman claims here, however, is an understanding that these early proto-orthodox churches did already exist in this earliest period. Just as Hultgren overlooks the seemingly obvious so has

⁴³ Ehrman, 116-123.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 126.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 121.

Ehrman, in his rush to discuss the Gnostics, created for himself a large problem lacking in a clear solution. Ignoring this seemingly important problem, however, Ehrman moves on to discuss the formulation of the proto-orthodox church and its theological foundations.

From this point forwards, Ehrman discusses the views of Walter Bauer, who he acknowledges as the founder of the so-called New School, and proceeds from this to lay out a more modern defense of Bauer's claims in light of more recent scholarship. Ehrman calls Bauer's work *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, which he deems immensely influential, "arguably the most important book on the history of early Christianity to appear in the twentieth century."⁴⁶ As Hultgren discussed earlier, Bauer's views on heresy focused mainly on specific locations where Christianity developed from a heretical root, which he used to show that heresy preceded orthodoxy in some major Christian locations. From this foundational claim, Bauer attempts to prove that Rome was the center of the growing proto-orthodox movement. In discussing this, Ehrman points out that the earliest noncanonical materials exigent may back this particular claim of Bauer's; "the earliest noncanonical Christian writing that we have, 1 Clement, is a letter from the Christians in Rome trying to influence the internal workings of the church in Corinth."⁴⁷ Ehrman questions why a Roman church that is surrounded by proto-orthodox churches would seem to constantly be required to register its opinion on church leadership in other locations. As Bauer points out, scholars have known of early problems in these churches even from the times of Paul himself (our earliest Christian writings), as he constantly references such things as "'super apostles'...who appear to have thought there would be no future bodily resurrection of believers."⁴⁸ Ehrman adds this important quote, which he takes from Eusebius, between Dionysius of Corinth and Soter, bishop of Rome;

⁴⁶ Ehrman, 173.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 174.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 175.

From the start it has been your custom to...send contributions to many churches in every city, sometimes alleviating the distress of those in need, sometimes providing for your brothers in the [slave] mines by the contributions you have sent.⁴⁹

Adding this to the material that Ehrman himself presents regarding opponents that Paul references in his letters, such as “false teachers” or “Judaizers,” the quote from Eusebius seems to at least possibly back up the claims of Bauer in regard to the role of Rome. This argument, which Ehrman presents in defense of Bauer, seems to at least call into question the premise that Hultgren holds in such certainty. As Ehrman states this point, the early history of Christianity is at least moderately blurry to the modern historian, as these questions that our earliest sources raise cannot be ignored. Compared to Hultgren’s dismissal of Bauer’s overall claim (which may or may not be upheld, even by Ehrman), Ehrman leaves his discussion of this topic with the understanding that a solid, final answer is unavailable do to a lack of much of the evidence that would be necessary to render a final verdict on the subject, and that at best the scholar can conclude that heresy and the proto-orthodox coexisted early on. Without more information, which is seemingly nonexistent, we cannot know the extent or true order of the development of heresy and orthodoxy for Ehrman.

2.7 Conclusion

The views of both Ehrman and Hultgren are often times appealing, and each present well reasoned arguments to back their claims, while Eusebius’ early date and personal bias prevents his work from being taken as anything more than a starting point. Similarly, Bock’s obvious bias against much of the New School’s position does much to distance the reader from his interpretation of the overall argument between both the New School and the traditional school. Important in discussing the comparison between Hultgren and Ehrman, however, is that even Hultgren at times points out the inability of many scholars to recognize that history is not a static chain of events, where each event occurs at a separate point, none concurrently. To this end,

⁴⁹ Ehrman, 175.

Ehrman's explanation of Bauer's thesis, where a sort of concurrent development of heresy and orthodoxy occurs, strikes me as the most well reasoned argument in application. Both he and Hultgren agree that this model seems the most realistic in terms of actual historical events, but Hultgren's problems with the scholarship of Bauer prevent him from accepting the thesis. Ehrman expands Bauer's work with references to both Paul's letters and material Eusebius himself quotes in order to fix the flaws that Bauer passed on. Ehrman obviously does not make a claim as radical as Hultgren may assume Bauer originally sets out to, in that Ehrman only questions whether the scholar can ignore the material Bauer brings to light. In this sense, then Bauer's thesis, while often arguing from silence, has too much redeeming value to discard out of hand as Bock and, to a lesser extent, Hultgren, do. Ehrman's middle ground on this position, along with Hultgren's acceptance of the basic position as articulated later by Ehrman, seems most reasonable. Concisely then, early Christianity was too diverse to claim that only the proto-orthodox was the majority from the very beginning of the development of Christianity. Hultgren and Ehrman both agree that most likely the orthodoxy (as we would later phrase it) developed from the beginning, but Ehrman would conjecture that due to the seemingly overwhelming amount of information that the church itself provides (in the letters of Paul, the letter of Clement, and the information that Eusebius presents) one cannot discount the thesis that concurrently in many (and from Bauer, if not all) locations, beliefs later characterized as heretical were also contemporaneously arising. The early dates of Marcion, Simon Magus, Ebionism, and the general false apostles that Paul mentions disrupting his churches all present ample evidence that early on in the development of Christianity (i.e., within the first 20 to 30 years after the death of Christ and within the lifetime of Paul and his contemporaries) what was later deemed heresy had already taken root in various locations that later housed important orthodox Christian centers. In essence, however, this view does not invalidate the belief that the proto-orthodox may have originated earlier linearly, it only adds to that hypothesis that either soon after (in other words, within the life of Paul) or concurrently, various alternate forms of Christianity developed.

CHAPTER 3: The Gospel of John in Orthodox Christianity

3.1 Introduction to John's Gospel

The *Gospel of John* exists in Christianity as the 4th among the gospels, latest and most obviously different from its fellows. In fact, the other three canonical gospels are generally grouped together and have been given the name Synoptic to reference how their shared vision of Christ is so similar. John's gospel, then, stands apart in the tradition for a number of reasons. As previously stated, the *Gospel of John* appears to have been the last of the four gospels written, and as such much scholarly interest has gone into understanding the changes to the "traditional" story. Church fathers as far back as the early 2nd century debated the nature of John's gospel, and it seems that at least some early readers may have seen it as a questionable source. However, the overall patterns of acceptance and reception of John's gospel are debated among scholars who focus on Johannine issues. Questions, such as the dating of the *Gospel of John*, the authorship of *John*, and the reception history of *John*, all present interesting challenges for the modern scholar attempting to reconcile *John's* status in the modern church with its seemingly more disputed position in the earliest receptors. Important, as well, to understanding the position John held and today holds in the church proper is an understanding of its interpretation in the earliest extant sources.

This chapter will focus on understanding the earliest proto-orthodox writers and thinkers who encountered and discussed John's gospel, and endeavor to discover how they may have seen John's writing in their time period. The goal of this chapter will be to present a general overview of the positions of the church fathers of the 2nd century towards John's gospel, and as part of this overall goal, any issues which these fathers may have discussed regarding the orthodoxy of *John*

will be given a brief summary for the reader so as to build a foundation on which a nuanced view of the reception of *John* may be built.

3.2 Dating the Gospel of John

To begin with, there are a number of important questions about John's gospel that must be answered prior to discussing the views of specific writers and historical sources. In general, questions relating to the authorship, dating and early location of John's gospel all play a large part in how both modern and ancient scholars approach John as well as how the writings of the fathers should be interpreted. When scholars approach an issue like the date of the *Gospel of John*, there are many issues that arise in regards to a correct or even consensus view. Important in these are issues such as earliest references, earliest physical copies, as well as larger questions that play into questions such as authorship and location. For example, it would be hard to consider John's gospel as dating from any time after 125 CE, due to at least one textual fragment containing some verses from John in their present order existing prior to this date. This "credit-card sized fragment," known as P⁵², was found in Egypt and has been dated to anywhere between 100 and 125 CE (with consensus seemingly closer to the 125 date).⁵⁰ Seán Kealy, in his work on the history of biblical interpretation of John, notes that in fact, "this dating, which would negate any later date for John, makes it the oldest fragment of any Christian writing found to this date."⁵¹ Andrew T. Lincoln, similarly, cites P⁵² as the "earliest evidence of the existence of the Gospel [of John]."⁵² So, both Kealy and Lincoln take this small fragment to be fundamental to establishing the date of John's gospel. P⁵² serves to allow scholars to put a late bound on the writing of John's gospel, and also helps to establish facts relevant to two other areas of interest with regard to the early church.

⁵⁰ Seán P. Kealy, *John's Gospel and the History of Biblical Interpretation* (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), 23.

⁵¹ Kealy, 23.

⁵² Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 17.

If, as Kealy states, this fragment was found in Egypt and dates to 125 CE, *and* traditional ideas about the location of the writing of John's gospel are correct, it is hard to discount an extremely early spread of John's gospel. Traditionally, writers such as Eusebius and other church historians have presented John's gospel as emerging out of Asia Minor and the thriving Christian tradition therein, with many presenting a time frame around the turn of the century. This helps, to some extent, scholars who wish to determine how large the spread of the *Gospel of John* was soon after its composition. If, like most scholars, we assume that John's gospel was written near the end of the 1st century, and it has spread to Egypt by 125 CE, that assumes that it was relatively well used and known, since Asia Minor and Egypt are not directly connected to each other in any special manner that would assume a swift passage of John's gospel from one to the other soon after composition. Lincoln states this explicitly when he says "the evidence suggests that, wherever the Gospel was written, it is likely to have been known in Egypt as early as the beginning of the second century."⁵³ Lincoln continues from this point by attempting to now place an early bound on the dating of John's gospel. He states that internal evidence, such as the discussion in *John* 9:22, 12:42, and 16:2 of expulsion from synagogue(s), helps to place the earliest point the gospel could have been composed around the year 80 CE, with Lincoln presenting 85 CE as the actual earliest date for its writing.⁵⁴ Importantly then, he dates *John's* writing to the common scholarly view of the time period between the years 90 and 110 CE. This allows for, in the earliest case, a relatively slow spread throughout the Christian centers of the Empire, while at the latest a rapid outgrowth of use, to explain the P⁵² find in Egypt (putting a bound of 85 to 125 CE on the possible dates for composition and early spread). This also helps to present scholars with a possible alternative theory to the development of the gospel in Asia Minor. If the gospel developed in Egypt, a view Kealy discusses in his work, it would help to explain the early use by Egyptian influenced Gnostic Christians such as Heracleon and

⁵³ Lincoln, 18.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Valentinus. Many dates are given for the earliest commentaries on John, but the consensus seems to be that Ptolemaeus and Heracleon, two heretical writers, used John as early as 150 CE and as late as 200 CE. Both of these, however, are outer bounds on the dating, as the more acceptable dates lay in the middle of that range, with 170 CE being a good general date for the writing of one of the first commentaries on John by Heracleon (although Kealy dates it to 150 CE himself).⁵⁵

Kealy quotes Helmut Koester's work *Ancient Christian Gospels* when he attempts to show that John was seemingly absent in Rome (a theme present in Bauer's New School of thought as well) soon after its supposed writing, arguing that important items such as *1 Peter* and *1 Clement*, along with Justin Martyr do not "refer to it."⁵⁶ Instead, Koester apparently finds the gospel's growth more in line with the conventional wisdom that Irenaeus' refutation of the heretics was one of the main events that brought the *Gospel of John* into the Roman wheelhouse, as it were.

3.3 The Authorship of John's Gospel

The dating of the *Gospel of John* also is affected by whom scholars view as the ultimate author of the Gospel as we have it today, whether they view the work as a completed whole or an edited grouping of prior sources. There have been many theories put forth, and while this chapter cannot confront most of them, a certain few will be presented as likely options. The obvious place to begin is with the traditional assertion that the Apostle John, son of Zebedee, was the author. This finds support in the writings of Eusebius, as well as in various other early church writings. In fact, the gnostic writers themselves exist as the earliest exegetes to assume the authorship of the Apostle John, with Ptolemaeus stating at the beginning of his commentary "John the Lord's disciple, desiring to tell of the origin of the universe,...posits a certain

⁵⁵ Kealy, 24.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Beginning...”⁵⁷ In this, what Robert M. Grant calls the “first exege[sis] of the Fourth Gospel known to us,” we see the early attribution to the Apostle John, member of the Twelve Disciples of the Lord.⁵⁸ Similarly, Tuomas Rasimus states in his recent work on John that “Ptolemaeus not only considered the gospel to be apostolic but also wrote a commentary on its prologue some time during the third quarter of the second century.”⁵⁹

Lincoln dissents from this view, however, and states that “the tradition will not bear the weight of critical scrutiny.”⁶⁰ By this, he seems to point to problems in Irenaeus’ recollection of events, as Lincoln records the traditional ascription of Irenaeus to be “that ‘John, the disciple of the Lord, who leaned on his breast, also published the Gospel while living at Ephesus in Asia.’”⁶¹ Problematic here for Lincoln and the general scholarly consensus is the lack of verification that can be done on this claim. Lincoln discusses how the assertion seems to rest on the belief that Irenaeus learned at the feet of Polycarp, who was thought to be the traditional secretary of the Apostle John. Problematic here is that Polycarp himself never seems to state anything similar to this with any directness in any existent works. Kealy points out that neither Polycarp, nor Papias (another link in the transmission chain) refer to this important apostolic succession, even given the many opportunities where it would have been relevant to, and help bolster their arguments.⁶²

On the other side of the spectrum, Lincoln discusses the internal evidence for a number of possible candidates for the authorship of the *Gospel of John*. By stating that the character of the Beloved Disciple has been conceived throughout history as the actual author of the *Gospel of John* (related to John 21’s announcement that “This is the [Beloved] disciple who is testifying about these things and has written them”), Lincoln then proceeds to point to the commonly listed

⁵⁷ Robert M. Grant, ed. *Gnosticism: A Source Book of Heretical Writings from the Early Christian Period* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1978), 182.

⁵⁸ Grant, 162.

⁵⁹ Rasimus, 154.

⁶⁰ Lincoln, 20.

⁶¹ Ibid., 19.

⁶² Kealy, 24.

possibilities for this unnamed entity. He states: “Those [names] worth mentioning here include John, the son of Zebedee, Lazarus, Thomas and Nathanael.”⁶³ Lincoln proceeds to eliminate John by making the case that “if the apostle John was the Beloved Disciple, it is difficult to imagine that it would be necessary for someone else to endorse the truth of his witness, as is done in [John] 21:24.”⁶⁴ As for Lazarus and Thomas, Lincoln cites the arguments of other scholars here to make the case for their being the Beloved Disciple, but in the end he refutes each of them as a possible namesake (the idea being that Lazarus having already been named would be an odd choice for an un-attributive title, and that Thomas appears counter to this disciple in places, which eliminates him). With Nathanael, he takes a similar road, pointing out the infrequency with which Nathanael’s candidacy is put forth, and pointing out that it would not “explain why, having named this disciple at the outset, the evangelist then chooses not to make any explicit link between him and the Beloved Disciple and to hid this identification in the rest of the narrative.”⁶⁵

It falls to Martin Hengel to present what I take to be the most probable case for the authorship of John’s gospel. Hengel begins by point out that in discussing the possible authors; the idea that the Apostle John wrote the gospel is the traditional assumption. However, a second possibility is presented by many of the slightly later sources that sought to answer problematic questions about the idea that the Apostle John wrote the gospel. Hengel quotes Eusebius, stating: “Eusebius mentions the two bearers of the tradition once again: Papias ‘gives accounts of the Lord’s sayings obtained from Aristion or learnt directly from John the elder [*ho presbyteros*].’”⁶⁶ Kealy includes the full (disputed)⁶⁷ quote in his work:

And I do not hesitate to append to the interpretations all that I ever learnt from the presbyters and remember well, for of their truth I am confident. For, unlike most, I did not rejoice in them who say much, but in them who teach the truth, nor in them who recount the commandments of others,

⁶³ Lincoln, 20.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 21.

⁶⁶ Martin Hengel. *The Johannine Question* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989), 27.

⁶⁷ To be clear, there is concern over the translation of this particular quote, but I include Kealy’s full translation in order to make his point clear regarding this issue.

but in them who repeated those given to the faith by the Lord and derived from the truth itself; but if anyone ever came who followed the presbyters, I inquired into the word of the presbyters, what Andrew or Peter or Philip or Thomas or James or Matthew, or any other of the Lord's disciples, had said, and what Aristion and the presbyter John, the Lord's disciples, were saying. For I did not suppose that information from books would help me so much as the word of a living and surviving voice.⁶⁸

This title, 'the elder,' which appears in Greek as a singular title [*ho presbyteros*], stands out among the others given, as the author(s) of 2 John and 3 John refer to themselves as this *presbyteros* as well. Generally, this was not a singular title (the **Presbyters**, instead of the **Presbyter**), according to Hengel, and when it is used as such for the one particular author shows that it was "so fixed that it could be used by itself, *ho presbyteros*, even without the name being added."⁶⁹ This implies strongly that the Elder, as a title itself, indicates a particularly well known individual. Hengel continues by stating "probably John the elder was given this name in advanced age to distinguish him from the son of Zebedee, who by that time was probably already dead."⁷⁰ As Hengel states in his well-researched work, *The Johannine Question*, he finds it more probable that John the Elder, as opposed to the Apostle John, was the author of the Gospel (and, in Hengel's argument, the associated Johannine Corpus, including the Johannine Epistles and Revelation). For Hengel, a number of hypothetical statements concerning the probable attribution to John the Elder seem to make more sense than arguing for the Apostle John, who Frederick W. Weidmann argues may have in fact died a martyr himself.⁷¹ Weidmann provides quotes relating to the issue, coming from Philip of Side's *Church History*, where he states: "Papias reports in his second book that John the Theologian and James his brother were killed by the Jews."⁷² Weidmann cites this early, alternate theory relating to John's death as part of his work on Polycarp, and Hengel himself has taken this idea and incorporated it into his theory regarding the nature of the author of the *Gospel of John*. Regarding this, it seems that the 'John' referred to

⁶⁸ Kealy, 26.

⁶⁹ Hengel, 28.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Frederick W. Weidmann. *Polycarp & John: The Harris Fragments and Their Challenge to the Literary Traditions* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 134.

⁷² Weidmann, 134.

may indeed have been a different John than the Apostle. As John was admittedly a common name amongst Jews of the time period and in the Diaspora, many scholars seem to find the possibility of more than one 'John' following Jesus not outside the realm of believability.

3.4 A Brief Reception History of the Gospel of John amongst the Orthodox

The question of Orthodox use of the *Gospel of John* prior to 200 CE is one that scholars have been approaching and debating for many years now. Hengel, in his previously quoted work, takes the opinion that the Johannine School was a separate sect, although still connected and active in the wider proto-orthodox community, to some extent. In addition to this it seems obvious from Hengel's work that since he dates the writing of the gospel to sometime in the earliest part of the 2nd century/late 1st century, he seems to believe that the orthodox use of the *Gospel of John* was a relatively early phenomenon. As such, it is important to note the progression of ideas presented in this chapter; significant to a discussion of the reception history of the *Gospel of John* amongst the earliest orthodox readers are the issues of the dating of the work, as well as the author of the work. Having established the probable answers to these two questions (to summarize, a date between 85 and 125 CE, and, as with Hengel, the authorship of a John the Elder), it is now time to discuss the progression of the earliest readers of the gospel.

Kealy notes, importantly if tradition relating to the authorship of John in or near Ephesus is to be believed, that the church father Justin Martyr, who spent time in Ephesus, does not directly reference the *Gospel of John* itself, although Kealy does point out Justin seems to know and reference the *Apocalypse of John*. Kealy points out there may have been many indirect references to Johannine material, such as a reference to "the incarnation of the Logos," but it appears that Justin Martyr "knew the Fourth Gospel, was influenced by its theology but made only tentative use of it because its origin was suspect or because it had not gained widespread

recognition as an apostolic writing.”⁷³ Kealy notes again how odd it seems for Justin who supposedly came from Ephesus, where tradition states the *Gospel of John* was composed, to never directly reference the Gospel while making liberal use of the Synoptics, *and* discussing an Apostle/Disciple John at least 47 times.

Charles E. Hill, in his monumental work *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church*, presents a thorough rundown of pre-170 CE proto-orthodox use of the *Gospel of John* and discusses the modern consensus surrounding John’s reception by the earliest Christians, touching on many of these issues. He begins by quoting Raymond Brown, the noted Biblical scholar, who states, “the earliest indisputable orthodox use of the Fourth Gospel is by Theophilus of Antioch in his *Apology to Autolycus* (ca. A.D. 180).”⁷⁴ Kealy, as well, discusses this reference, quoting it in full as: “And hence the holy writings teach us and all the spirit-bearing men, one of whom, John, says, ‘In the Beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God.’”⁷⁵ Hill states here that “Theophilus shows no awareness that his use of the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel was in any way controversial,” in arguing against the use by Theophilus being seen as the starting point for the orthodox use of John, and specifies that “there is no attempt to address any gnostic monopoly or to appease any possible orthodox objection to the use of this book.”⁷⁶ Kealy has dated Theophilus’ works to the controversy around Marcion, giving the years 161-181 CE as the possible dating for this work, while Hill also states it may be from 188 CE.⁷⁷ Rasimus, similarly, uses Marcion as a centerpiece for his argument that John was used by proto-orthodox Christians prior to the writings of Ptolemaeus and Heracleon, stating that “Ptolemaeus adopted his way of

⁷³ Kealy, 28.

⁷⁴ Charles E. Hill. *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church* (New York: Oxford Uni. Press, 2002), 75.

⁷⁵ Kealy, 35.

⁷⁶ Hill, 80.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 77.

using the Fourth Gospel's prologue as a proof-text for Valentinian theology from an anti-Marcionite Roman discourse from the 150s."⁷⁸

Hill, however, moves from this rather definitive statement into a series of further stretches backwards into Christian history, attempting to find the earliest proto-orthodox use of John's gospel. Hill goes on to point out that the Quartodecimans of the 2nd century seem to require the *Gospel of John*'s chronology in order to make their point about the alternative church calendar, which they argued for. Specifically, Hill mentions that "Polycarp's Easter observance as early as 154-5 CE followed 'the chronology of the Gospel of John.'"⁷⁹ Also in Kealy's work is a discussion of Tatian, a student of Justin Martyr, who famously composed what has come to be known as the *Diatessaron*, a harmonization of the four canonical New Testament gospels that achieved a relative fame and which used the *Gospel of John* as the framework into which the other Synoptic gospels were fitted when necessary. While Tatian is often discounted by scholars because of his later shift to the Encratite heresy, he apparently wrote the *Diatessaron* while still a nominally orthodox Christian in Rome, with Kealy dating his authorship of this work somewhere in between 150 and 160 CE. To some extent this may validate some of what Hill argues about early proto-orthodox use of the Gospel in Rome in the face of later traditional assumptions about its disuse.

From this point, Hill goes on to reference the heretical Montanists, who argued for the continuation of revelation through the actions of the Paraclete, which relied on the discussion of this idea in the *Gospel of John*. Hill points out that traditional arguments against the Montanists point to a historical figure known as Gaius, an important figure in the discussion of dating of Roman use of the *Gospel of John* who was supposedly in the Roman church during the middle to late part of the 2nd century, who argued against the Montanists and the *Gospel of John*, on account

⁷⁸ Rasimus, 145.

⁷⁹ Hill, 76.

of its “historical discrepancies and its contradictions of the synoptic Gospels.”⁸⁰ Kealy discusses the Montanists and Montanus as well, dating the time of this controversy to roughly 170 CE. Montanus apparently believed he was the figure who “fulfilled the expectation of John 14:26, 16:13 for ever-new promptings of the Paraclete who would guide God’s people into all truth.”⁸¹ As well, Kealy dates the period when the famous Gaius was active against the Montanists to between 170 and 180 CE, calling him “the orthodox presbyter.”⁸² Apparently,

He, while accepting 13 Pauline epistles, rejected both the Gospel and Apocalypse of John because they were the work of Cerinthus. Gaius carefully pointed out John’s historical discrepancies from the synoptic gospels but did not challenge John on theological grounds. He wrote down his views in his *Dialogue with Proclus*.⁸³

This infamous (as Hill would characterize him) writer, Gaius, is the source of much consternation for scholars who wish to understand the place of the *Gospel of John* in the early church. Hill, it seems, argues that Gaius himself may have been not an orthodox presbyter, but instead a heretical opponent of the Gospel, although he also argues against the idea that a large group was in agreement with his theories on John, which comes from the late attribution by Epiphanius in 374-6 CE of the title ‘Alogoi,’ which means ‘one(s) without the word,’ to a group of followers of Gaius.⁸⁴ This ascription comes in a discussion that Kealy quotes:

Beloved, let us apply (this) name to them, that is Alogoi. For indeed the heresy which they held is appropriately so-called because it rejected the books of John. Since therefore they do not accept the Logos preached by John, they shall be called Alogoi.⁸⁵

Kealy continues from this point by stating that the existence of this group is called into question by many (see Hill’s comments), but also stating that even in the face of such questions, this

⁸⁰ Hill, 76.

⁸¹ Kealy, 34.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 35.

(Gaius' heresy) indicates the "rather unusual position in the period before Irenaeus" of the *Gospel of John*.⁸⁶

Both Kealy, but most certainly Hill, indicate in their discussions of the reception history of John that near the time of Irenaeus, and certainly after his rise to popularity and fame, "neither the authority of the Gospel as scripture nor its apostolic authorship were debated until modern scholarship began to challenge the latter."⁸⁷ Hill begins his discussion of Irenaeus' use of the Fourth Gospel by noting that it is under "Irenaeus that most scholars mark a sea change in the fortunes of the Fourth Gospel among the orthodox."⁸⁸ Implied in this is part of Hill's systematic destruction of what he calls the theory of Orthodox Johannophobia (OJP). This idea is the central theme and discussion of his work, and here in his discussion of Irenaeus, he finds a turning point to argue against the theory. Orthodox Johannophobia, he states, is the idea that prior to the writing of Irenaeus, the *Gospel of John* was shunned by the orthodox in the majority of Christian areas. Hill states that the general scholarly consensus often places the adoption of the *Gospel of John* in Irenaeus' hands, giving him credit for beginning the movement to take the Gospel back from gnostic hands and to vindicate it in the eyes of the orthodox majority. Bernhard Mutschler similarly argues that the earliest, after Theophilus, explicit references to the *Gospel of John* come from Irenaeus, when he states that "Irenaeus refers to the Fourth Gospel not only more often than any author before him, but also more explicitly and more closely."⁸⁹ After spending the previous portion of his work arguing against this, he begins to discuss how Irenaeus did in fact "mark a watershed in our available traditions about the Fourth Gospel," when he wrote his *Against Heresies (Adversus Haereses)*.⁹⁰ Hill, then, does not argue that Irenaeus' position should be ignored in the reception history of John's gospel, but instead that there existed a parallel tradition

⁸⁶ Kealy, 35.

⁸⁷ Hill, 77.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 95.

⁸⁹ Mutschler, 332.

⁹⁰ Hill, 96.

of use of the *Gospel of John* during the 2nd century from its writing until the time of Irenaeus' works alongside the admitted gnostic use of the Gospel that has not been documented to the point where we as modern scholars can find clear references to it. In fact, Kealy notes that some scholars state that following Irenaeus' work using John, "Henceforth it can almost be said without exaggeration that Christianity will be Johannine Christianity."⁹¹ Interestingly enough, Kealy states that it seems Irenaeus was unaware of the difference between the Apostle John and John the Elder, referring in all cases (including the Epistles, it seems) to the author as John the Apostle (or Disciple of the Lord, or Beloved Disciple). Kealy cagily calls Irenaeus the "'chief culprit' whose definitive but credible views about John and the 'quadriform Gospel' were not challenged until modern times."⁹² Kealy ends his discussion of Irenaeus and John by noting that the traditional assumptions of authorship by 2nd century writers "were often simplified; and that authorship tradition was sometimes more concerned with the authority behind a biblical writing than with the physical writer."⁹³

Hill, however, continues to discuss Irenaeus for the majority of the rest of his work, arguing against his conception of Organized Johannophobia as a scholarly consensus. As Hill himself states, discussing the use of John's gospel by Irenaeus alone would itself take up a lengthy study, so any reference here must necessarily be curtailed by space concerns. Hill points out that there is little debate among scholars about the use of the entire Johannine Corpus (The Gospel, the Apocalypse, and all three Epistles) by Irenaeus. When using the gospel, Irenaeus often "quotes the Fourth Gospel by invoking John's name, sometimes by citing 'the Gospel,' [and] sometimes without formal introduction at all."⁹⁴ He also clearly recognizes it as scripture, using the same citation methods for it as he does for his quotes from Moses and the prophets, and often uses the words of John's Jesus as unqualified statements on theological issues of

⁹¹ Kealy, 37.

⁹² Ibid., 39.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Hill, 96.

importance. This obviously shows a great reverence for the material and to some extent validates the thoughts of Hill regarding the proto-orthodox use of John's gospel prior to Irenaeus. This is because it seems highly unlikely that Irenaeus would have developed his attachment and use of the Gospel in a vacuum, or even the more generally accepted negative atmosphere that scholars often perceive to have existed around John's gospel prior to Irenaeus' writing without at least in that case making a token effort to revitalize the gospel in his writings. This is in contrast to the straightforward and unambiguous usage that we actually see, as related by Hill.

Even more important in the eyes of Hill is the fact that, while proponents of what he calls the OJP argue that John's gospel was especially rejected or at least suppressed in Rome, it appears to Hill that "Irenaeus' 'reader', his 'dear friend' whom he addresses personally in many asides in the *Against Heresies*, is very likely a friend in the Roman church."⁹⁵ To some extent, Hill argues, "we may be sure that the majority of his [Irenaeus'] intended audience were members of the church at Rome," which dovetails with his larger goal, destroying the scholarly consensus on the OJP and providing the theoretical background of common usage in the Roman church that would undercut the traditional assumption about Irenaeus' redemptive work on that Gospel's image in the larger church. The central position of the *Gospel of John* in Irenaeus' massive refutation of heretical thinking seems to strike Hill as an important clue towards the more widespread acceptance of the gospel. Why, Hill asks, would an author and thinker attempting to combat incipient heretical movements and show the one, true path, resort to using an outside (even generally negatively perceived) text, a work the heretics themselves praised and cherish, were it not something already seen amongst the proto-orthodox themselves? This simple question informs much of the rest of Hill's work, which is considerably more in depth than this work could hope to discuss in its totality. Suffice to say, Hill spends the rest of his lengthy work arguing against the OJP position, building in its place a theory that instead has the proto-orthodox church

⁹⁵ Hill, 97.

holding John's gospel in its trust from the very beginning, soon after its writing, and with no real gnostic recovery needed.

Modern scholarship in the face of the extant texts concerning John have rightly questioned the original receptors of John's gospel, considering our earliest texts indeed come from Gnostic sources; however, Hill makes a persuasive argument for the idea that John's gospel found an early home among at least a good portion of the proto-orthodoxy, and while there exists little textual material to back this up, circumstantial evidence points almost unavoidably in this direction.

3.5 Conclusions from Orthodox Usage of John's Gospel

The *Gospel of John* has long provided scholars with numerous questions. From the point of its writing, it almost seems as if Christians have been debating its nature and authority for use in the church. Following the work Irenaeus did using the *Gospel of John*, to some extent it is acceptable to say that only after the late 2nd century was the *Gospel of John* clearly accepted by all proto-orthodox Christians. However, the work of Hill in disproving the commonly held scholarly position that John's gospel was ostracized by the mainline church has turned out to hold some weight. Reading Hill, many of his more broad points are well taken regarding John's reception, and he brings together nicely a number of importance sources that help to back his claims regarding the reception of John amongst the earliest orthodox readers. Just as important to a discussion of the reception history of John, however, is the discussion about the dating and authorship of John, in which both Martin Hengel and Andrew Lincoln make a number of important points for a later discussion of its reception situation and history. Hopefully, taken together, this chapter will have provided a firm foundation for moving forward into a more in depth look at the discussion going on in scholarly circles about the gnostic/orthodox divide and how the community of early Christians truly saw the *Gospel of John*.

CHAPTER 4: The Gospel amongst Early Heretics

4.1 Introduction to John's Use by Heretics

The *Gospel of John* has a long and illustrious history among Christians, as previously discussed. It has often been lauded as a special gospel, and been recognized as standing apart from the other three canonical gospels in the New Testament for a variety of reasons. Some point to John's unique chronology that disagrees with the one year time-frame presented in the Synoptics. Even more point at its seemingly more developed Christological views, which present Jesus' divinity in a way different from the at times less obvious presentation of the Synoptics. Regardless of the actual differences, even the laity of Christianity has long noted various differences that hold John's gospel apart from its brethren. This may be for both good and bad, as while modern Christianity recognizes the differences as not fundamental to understanding the message of the *Gospel of John*, according to many scholars some in earliest Christianity may have been less receptive to John's unique message and vision of Jesus' life, especially where it contrasted the portrait painted by the Synoptic gospels.

An important question raised by these people often lay in the fact that early proto-orthodox church leaders seemingly saw the *Gospel of John* in use by their theological enemies, as it seems John's gospel was among the most popular in a particular brand of heretical thought that presented those proto-orthodox leaders with constant struggle during the 2nd century CE. This heretical movement took on a number of guises, but generally modern scholars describe it with its more common name today, Gnosticism. It seems, in fact, that these Gnostics in many cases preferred John's gospel over the others for a variety of reasons (although usually not exclusively). In fact, it is striking how many allusions to John's gospel are contained in the material found at

Nag Hammadi (especially in texts such as the *Tripartite Tractate* and the *Gospel of Truth*), providing some evidence that among the many groups we have today contained in the heading ‘Gnosticism’ there was some overlap with proto-orthodox thinkers. In some sense, these early proto-heretical movements used similar material, albeit in unquestioningly different manners and with different understandings, to press their understanding of the Christ event into the minds of potential converts. Among the more interesting facts about this heretical use of John comes in the form of a surprising twist for the orthodox, as John’s gospel, while undoubtedly orthodox today, seemingly had a questionable place in early Christian thought as a result of this mixing (or usurpation) with heretical view points.

In discussing the development of the *Gospel of John*, important recognition has been given in recent times, and in the previous chapter, to tracing the reception of John’s gospel among its earliest readers up until the point where scholars can unarguably see its influence on the entirety of the proto-orthodoxy. This takes scholars from the generally accepted time period of John’s writing through the end of the 2nd century CE, when church fathers such as Irenaeus and Origen began using John’s gospel in earnest. These church fathers, who represent the clearest most unambiguous references to John’s gospel from the early orthodox movement (as discussed in the previous chapter), present one of the earliest witnesses to the canonical character of the four New Testament gospels. Problematic for many of the more conservative scholars, however, is the issue that has arisen with the modern discoveries that involve the specifically Valentinian form of Gnosticism and its apparent favor for John’s gospel.

The earliest recorded partial commentary on John comes to us in quotes that Irenaeus preserves from Ptolemaeus’ commentary on John, a work that contains a complete Valentinian exegesis of the Prologue to John’s gospel, as well as a separate work known as the *Letter to Flora* (also by Ptolemaeus), and as quotes that Origen argues against in his commentary on John, wherein the heretic Heracleon’s work (what appears to be the first full commentary on John) is

presented at times by Origen for the purpose of refutation. This work on John by Origen, being written between 200 and 240 CE, the time of Origen's death, uses Heracleon's work in an auxiliary manner, referring to it infrequently but consistently showing it to be in some sense an important document worth refutation. Overall, these references play into the larger body of knowledge modern scholars have accrued relating to the use of John by so-called heretical sources early on in the development of Christianity.

The goal of this particular chapter will be to present a general overview of each of the three main sources scholars continually point to when discussing John in heretical hands: Heracleon's commentary on John, as well as Ptolemaeus' work using John (both the commentary and the *Letter to Flora*). By examining each of these sources, the foundation for exploring the development of John's gospel as it grew out of a group of Christians that was built in the previous chapter will be elaborated on and discussed in order to present to the reader a more developed sense of how the 4th gospel first broke onto the scene in Christian circles.

4.2 A Brief Summary of Valentinian Gnostic Beliefs

To begin with, a discussion of the general nature of the Gnostics who used John's gospel is necessary. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, presents readers with a relatively thorough description in his work *Adversus haereses*, where he places before his readers a number of heretical systems and their champions, which he attempts to trace backwards from his time to the time of the earliest heretics (Eusebius, in his discussions on Irenaeus in his *Church History*⁹⁶, generally attempts to trace heresy back to Simon Magus, as the Biblical prototype of the unrepentant heretic, citing Irenaeus as his source for this claim in a roundabout manner).⁹⁷ Through Irenaeus' work, scholars have long known of a number of different sects of the Gnostic persuasion, and have filled in the beliefs as best as possible through the use of other early church sources.

⁹⁶ Eusebius, 122.

⁹⁷ Alastair H.B. Logan, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy: A Study in the History of Gnosticism* (New York: T&T Clark, 1996), xiii-xxi.

With the discovery of the Nag Hammadi codices in 1945, and their subsequent publishing, modern scholarship on the issues surrounding the development of Gnosticism as a traceable phenomenon has somewhat splintered, with different groups taking the developments and sources now available in very different directions. Some postulate a Jewish background for the Gnostic movement, others see a development in Christianity of the mystery religions tradition, and others present even more varied ideas about individual forms of what today has been lumped together under the heading “gnostic.” However, the specifics of the group discussed in this work are fortunately comparatively well known and agreed upon by modern scholarship, which makes it unnecessary for this work to focus on the many varied theories regarding the origin of Gnosticism.

The Valentinian Gnostics, a branch of this nebulous “gnostic” grouping, were the heretics that seem to have made the most use of the *Gospel of John* to the consternation of many early church fathers, as well as many modern scholars. As Martin Hengel states:

Among the Nag Hammadi documents, too, it is primarily the Valentinians who use the Fourth Gospel,...elsewhere the Synoptics are cited considerably more often. So we cannot say that the Fourth Gospel was particularly the Gospel of the Gnostics. This is true only for the Christian school of Valentinus.⁹⁸

So, the first step we can take as modern scholars is to remove John from the wide-spread groups of the early 2nd century, and place it in two places: in the proto-orthodox groups that became the later-day church, and the Valentinian gnostic groups that were producing commentaries on it. Valentinianism is characterized by a number of important differences with mainline proto-orthodox belief, which are presented briefly: these are a focus on the pleroma and its aeons, a focus on a three-fold understanding of both humanity and the cosmos, a lack of reverence for the “demiurge,” and a lack of belief in the validity of much of the proto-orthodox church’s teaching authority. Each of these ideas, individually, plays a part in the later exposition of John’s gospel that the Valentinian writers Heracleon and Ptolemaeus undertake, but individually, each of these

⁹⁸ Hengel, 9.

important differences also helps explain the hostility the proto-orthodox church felt towards the Valentinian branch growing within it. For example, Elaine Pagels quotes the *Tripartite Tractate* (a debatably Valentinian writing from Nag Hammadi) in her discussion of the Valentinian aversion to the official hierarchy of the growing proto-orthodox church:

Could gnostics stand among the critics who opposed the development of church hierarchy? Evidence from Nag Hammadi suggests that they did...The *Tripartite Tractate*, written by a follower of Valentinus, contrasts those who are gnostics, “children of the Father,” with those who are uninitiates, offspring of the demiurge. The Father’s children, he says, join together as equals, enjoying mutual love, spontaneously helping one another. But the demiurge’s offspring—the ordinary Christians—“wanted to command one another, outrivaling one another in their empty ambition”; they are inflated with “lust for power,” “each one imagining that he is superior to the others.”⁹⁹

For the most part, this quote presents a very good view of the internal problems consuming the church at this point in its development. Pagels argues, in her work *The Gnostic Gospels*, that this, among the other issues between Valentinians and proto-orthodox, shows the conflict as internal and confined within the growing church. However, it is important to note that this only takes self-identification of the Valentinians into account. Most early church fathers no more considered the Valentinians true members of the church than they did other heretical groups that saw themselves as outside the proto-orthodox church. The Valentinians, famously, did not see themselves as a separate group, existing outside of the proto-orthodox lines however. In fact, Pagels asserts that “what distressed Irenaeus most was that the majority of Christians did not recognize the followers of Valentinus as heretics,” pointing again to the early social-continuity of the church with regard to this particular brand of Gnostic.¹⁰⁰ While proto-orthodox leaders clearly saw a distinction between the Valentinians and the ‘regular’ believers, according to Pagels then it seems that many of the regular people saw no distinction between the two groups.

Also important to understanding the difference between the Valentinians and proto-orthodox is their emphasis on the three-fold nature(s) of humanity. In its most basic, this belief

⁹⁹ Pagels, 40-41.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 32.

states there are three types of believers, the Hylic, the Psychic, and the Pneumatic. These three classes correspond to the three levels of reality that the Valentinian theology called for. The first, the Hylic, were the general masses, associated with nothing more than materiality. The second, the Psychic, correspond to the believers in the god of Israel, including regular Christians. And finally, the third branch, the Pneumatics, were the Valentinians, those who had true knowledge of the workings of the universe and recognized the Logos, Christ, as the messenger sent to return those from above the material world back to their lofty origins in the Pleroma. These three branches will again come into play during a discussion of specifically Heracleon's commentary on John's gospel.

While today scholars view this group of Valentinian Christians as a distinct, external competitor to the proto-orthodoxy, for critics of this scholarly view such as Pagels, the sources do not easily agree with the traditional interpretation and instead suggest that the church held many divergent views in its early development. Pagels again neatly sums this up when she states that

Followers of Valentinus shared a religious vision of the nature of God that they found incompatible with the rule of priests and bishops that was emerging in the catholic church—and so they resisted it. Irenaeus' religious convictions, conversely, coincided with the structure of the church he defended.¹⁰¹

Similarly, the scholar Kyle Keefer quotes in his work Bentley Layton, who states that “Valentinianism ‘had the character of a philosophical school, or network of schools, rather than a distinct religious sect.’”¹⁰² However, Keefer amends this to point out that “He [Layton] does not mean that Valentinians did not think of their tenets as religious; they simply did not consider themselves distinct from other Christians.”¹⁰³ While Keefer's point is clearly made, it must be admitted that self identification is not the last word on the topic. The larger group also retains the ability to define itself to, in many ways, draw a line in the sand regarding the inclusion of the

¹⁰¹ Pagels, 46.

¹⁰² Kyle Keefer, *The Branches of the Gospel of John: The Reception of the Fourth Gospel in the Early Church* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 26.

¹⁰³ Keefer, 26-27.

minority. Regardless of this issue of self-identification, however, it is again important to see the differences between these pseudo-Christians and the proto-orthodox for the purposes of further discussion in this area. To some extent, in our later discussion on the *Gospel of John*, we will refer back to this point about the underlying early ties between the groups, but important for the time being will be the references to the different beliefs and understandings these Gnostic Christians held regarding the interpretation of the work of John.

4.3 Heracleon's Commentary on John's Gospel

Regarding the commentary of Heracleon on John's gospel, this section will provide a brief overview of the writings, as to help inform regarding both the Valentinian understanding of John, as well as provide a more full understanding of the differences between Gnostic and proto-orthodox interpretations of John. Grant provides, in his work *Gnosticism*, a thorough description, including extensive quotes from primary texts, for many of the non-Nag Hammadi material relating to Gnostic belief. Grant notes that it seems most likely that Heracleon composed a complete commentary, due to the wide net his existent quotes cast in John's waters, with the few remaining quotes from this work being passed down to modern scholars only in the remnants of Origen's commentary on John (5 of the 32 supposed books are all scholars today have of Origen's work on John's gospel).¹⁰⁴ These comments that Origen includes were obviously written prior to the completion of his commentary, which Grant states was "written before and after his exile from Alexandria in 231."¹⁰⁵ In Grant's work, these fragmentary notes number 48 individual citations from Origen (not including two more from his predecessor, Clement of Alexandria, which discuss the gospel of Matthew in Heracleon's exegesis¹⁰⁶), including full responses to specific Johannine passages, and while I will not cite every one of the quotes (which

¹⁰⁴ Keefer, 32.

¹⁰⁵ Robert M. Grant, ed., *Gnosticism: A Source Book of Heretical Writings from the Early Christian Period* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1978), 195.

¹⁰⁶ Grant, 207.

are included in the appendix from Grant's translation), I will detail a number of specific instances of Heracleon's exegesis that is relevant to a discussion of the reception of John's gospel among Christians in this first generation.¹⁰⁷

The quotes begin by looking at the Johannine Prologue, which offers Heracleon much fertile ground for interpretation. Heracleon's first existent quote comes regarding John 1:3 ("All things came into being through Him, and outside Him nothing came into being."), where he provides the following commentary on this passage:

"All things" means the world and what is in the world; the Aeon and what is in the Aeon did not come into being through the Logos. "Nothing," this is, of what is in the world and the creation. The one who provided the cause of the generation of the world to the Demiurge—and that one was the Logos—is not the one "from whom" or "by whom" but the one "through whom." For the Logos himself did not create as if he were given energy by another [so that "through Him" might be understood thus] but, while he was giving energy, another created.¹⁰⁸

In this, Heracleon has laid out a statement consistent with the Valentinian theological position on the existence of the Pleroma (here discussed in terms of the Aeon, which often are interchangeable terms) as being not the creation of the Logos directly (so as to avoid a linking of the Salvific figure with the corrupting influence of the material world), but only the creation of one (the Demiurge) who used the power of the Logos in its act of creation. Important to note here is that Heracleon has presented what may be the first modern style commentary on the *Gospel of John*, and in doing so has presented his exegesis of the Gospel's words in a manner that is not particularly fanciful, but instead using methodologies that are shared by exegetes from this point forward. Often, the heretics are derided by the early church fathers as being fanciful and beyond belief in many of their theologizing, but Heracleon has presented here an internally consistent expansion of a passage of text, seemingly equal to a spiritual reading offered by the hermeneutically similar writer Origen himself, who was importantly viewed as a church father

¹⁰⁷ In this section, I will be using quotes from Grant's work, where he uses his own translation of the material from Origen, using a compilation scheme and numbering previously done by A.E. Brooke ('Texts and Studies,' I, 4, Cambridge, 1891.) and W. Volker ('Quellen zur Geschichte der christlichen Gnosis,' Tübingen, 1932.) in their two works, which are included in appendixes A-C at the end of this work.

¹⁰⁸ Grant, 195-196.

even after his excommunication from the church for unrelated issues. Heracleon followed this with an exegesis of a specific passage in the next verse, John 1:4, where he clarified the “in him was life” statement by arguing that this was only meant to signify the life inherent in “spiritual men,” which ties back to the three tiered breakdown amongst the types of human beings.¹⁰⁹ From this point, there are a number of statements about the nature of the ‘John the Baptist’ discussion at the beginning of John’s gospel, ending with another important theological point, where Heracleon begins a section that focuses on the Pleroma and Jesus’ role in it. Discussing John 1:29, Heracleon takes a quote describing Jesus as the Lamb of God, and fractures it into two pieces, contending that the first section, “Behold the Lamb of God,” refers only to the body of Christ, as the lamb is the imperfect form of sheep, while a ram is the perfect form (on this point it may be trenchant to point out that the male vs. female dynamic of much of Gnostic thought was not understated, although in its historical milieu, it was not especially sexist or out of the ordinary).¹¹⁰ In the second section, “who takes away the sin of the world,” Heracleon finds a reference to the eternal Aeon of the Christ, the untarnished figure inhabiting the tarnished mortal frame.¹¹¹ Most of the next quotes regard this same issue of the Christ and his place in the Pleroma, discussing at length John 2:12, 13, and 13-15 as again making the point that the Christ had come into the material world, and was descending/ascending along a path. Specifically, in 2:13-15, the ascent of Jesus into Jerusalem is likened by Heracleon as the ascent to the “psychic place, which is an image of Jerusalem.”¹¹² As an example of shared Christian thought, into this section Heracleon also reads the Holy Spirit (a topic not always discussed by Gnostic sources due to the various groups often being uncomfortable with Trinitarian imagery). Here we see Heracleon state

the whip which Jesus made of small cords is an image of the power and energy of the Holy Spirit, blowing out the wicked...Of these two substances the whip was made; for Jesus did not make it of

¹⁰⁹ Grant, 196.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 197.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid, 198.

dead leather, for he desired to construct the church as no longer a den of thieves and merchants but as a house of his Father.¹¹³

As well, in this section a reference to Jesus (the earthly savior) as creating the church from living, not dead materials, is a focus of Heracleon's exegesis. Just as other early church fathers endeavored to show the church as a growing organism, Heracleon emphasizes this as well, showing a shared concern among early Christians.

Another point that early Christians referred to is the story of the Samaritan women at Jacob's well, from John 4:12. Heracleon provides an in-depth commentary on a number of issues regarding this story that Origen fortunately quotes for us, with roughly 1/5 of the available material from Heracleon relating to his interpretation of this story. To quote Heracleon regarding the nature of the overall story:

That well signified insipid, temporary, and deficient life and its glory; for it was worldly. This is proved by the fact that Jacob's cattle drank from it. But the water which the Saviour gave is of his Spirit and Power. "You will never thirst," for his life is eternal and will never perish like the first [water] from the well, but is permanent. For the grace and the gift of our Saviour are not to be taken away or consumed or corrupted by the one who shares in them. The first life [however] is perishable. "Water springing up to eternal life" refers to those who receive the life supplied richly from above and themselves pour forth what has been supplied them for the eternal life of others. The Samaritan woman exhibited uncritical faith, alien to her nature, when she did not hesitate over what he was saying to her. "Give me this water": she hated the shallows pierced by the word, as well as that place of so-called living water. The woman says these things to show forth the toilsome and laborious and unnourishing quality of that water.¹¹⁴

This long piece of exegesis provides the reader with an in-depth look into the manner in which Heracleon proceeded in his commentary. In order to make the plain words of John's gospel fit into the Valentinian theological system, Heracleon was forced to use allegorical language to describe the entirety of the passage and its meaning. However, much like early church fathers, Heracleon seems to have commented on a number of stories that offered themselves up as important parts of early Christian reception of the *Gospel of John*. The story of the Samaritan woman and her conversion at the well was an extremely popular and memorable story, and Heracleon here is shown attempting to work within the system he inhabits (Christianity's overall

¹¹³ Grant, 198.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 199.

themes) to bring about the knowledge he is attempting to share in his readers, by using a popular story to press his message. Regardless of whether Heracleon himself was one of the first to notice the strategic importance of this story in the *Gospel of John*'s use of the traditional betrothal scene (see Lincoln's assessment of this scene in his commentary¹¹⁵), or was merely following the already established convention of viewing this story in a certain light, his use shows an interest in using a story that holds great importance in understanding the overall themes of John's gospel. Heracleon goes on to discuss a number of important individual points in this story's Johannine form, including a discussion on the nature of the Pleromic meaning of the pericope, its impact on understanding Jesus' station in the three tiered universe, as well as a discussion relating the dichotomy of Samaritan/Jewish worship differences in John 4:21-22 to the misunderstanding of regular, psychic Christians to the true knowledge of the gnostic, pneumatic Christians Heracleon represents.¹¹⁶ On John 4:34 ("My Meat is to do the will of him who sent me."), Heracleon's interpretation mirrors the overall understanding of the proto-orthodox church, when he states: "The Saviour thus narrated to the disciples that this was the subject of his discussion with the woman, calling the will of the Father his 'meat,'" and continuing by explaining that "the will of the Father is for men to know the Father and be saved; this was the work of the Saviour, on account of which he was sent into Samaria, i.e., into the world."¹¹⁷ However, Heracleon clearly understands the totality of the pericope differently from the overall church, as he states, commenting on John 4:39 ("out of that city many believed because of the woman's report."), "Out of that city, i.e., out of the world. Through the woman's report, i.e., through the spiritual church. Many, since there are many psychics, but the imperishable nature of the election is one and uniform and unique."¹¹⁸ Heracleon has taken a popular portion of John's gospel here, and while he agrees on some of the basic interpretations that the church holds, he takes the majority of

¹¹⁵ Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 170.

¹¹⁶ Grant, 200-201.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 202-203.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 204.

the statements as verifying the theological underpinnings of Valentinianism. The totality of the remaining statements in Heracleon's commentary discusses various areas in John's gospel, with a good deal of the remaining focus being on John 8:21-50, and two shorter statements regarding the Gospel of Matthew in interpretation, although both of these are irrelevant for this study.

4.4 Ptolemaeus' Commentary and Letter to Flora

The other source of importance is Ptolemaeus' (commonly written Ptolemy) partial commentary on John, which Grant notes show that Ptolemaeus was "indeed the first exegete of the Fourth Gospel," (although it is important to note that most scholars would stipulate that Heracleon produces the first complete commentary) due to its early date, which again only serves to emphasize the importance gnostic thinkers found in John's gospel.¹¹⁹ A specific example comes from Rasimus, where he states that many believe that "John's Gospel was first properly accepted and adopted by the Valentinians of whom the first one was Ptolemaeus."¹²⁰ Grant explains that Ptolemaeus "was the head of the Valentinian school in Italy and apparently succeeded Valentinus himself, perhaps about 160," providing us with a good time frame for both his commentary on John due to its inclusion in Irenaeus' work, as well as his (the shared authorship of both works is debated, but taken for granted by Grant) "Letter to Flora," which will also receive a brief discussion following this discussion on his commentary (each is contained in full in Grant's translation in the appendixes).¹²¹

Ptolemaeus' commentary on *John* only discusses the Prologue to John's gospel, and unlike Heracleon's commentary, does not often (if ever) agree with the proto-orthodox understanding of the material. He begins by affirming the authorship of *John* (a matter disputed even today), by stating unambiguously that "John the Lord's disciple, desiring to tell of the origin of the universe, by which the Father produced everything, posits certain Beginning [*translator's*

¹¹⁹ Grant, 162.

¹²⁰ Rasimus, 145.

¹²¹ Grant, 162.

aside: this is the principle, not the later described Aeon]...”¹²² Ptolemaeus goes on from this opening statement to discuss the generation of the various Aeons described by John in the Prologue.¹²³ Specifically, he starts by recalling *John*’s framing of the Prologue (“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”), and proclaiming:

Since, then, he [John] speaks of the first origin, he rightly sets forth the teaching from the Beginning, i.e., God and the Logos; for he says, “In the Beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God; this was in the Beginning with God.” First he differentiates the three: God, Beginning, and Logos; then he combines them again in order to set forth the emission of each of them.¹²⁴

This section of text lays out the beginning of Ptolemaeus’ systemization of the generation of the Aeons, which account for his understanding of the Pleroma, and his attempt to find this generation story in the Prologue of John’s gospel. When he discusses the “Beginning,” Ptolemaeus is naming one of the aeons, in fact one of the members of one of the Tetrads that make up the cosmic order, and is then in essence seeing in John’s use of these terms characters as well as ideas. ‘Beginning,’ ‘Logos’ and ‘Father’ all represent to Ptolemaeus aspects of a hidden, gnostic message contained within the opening chapter of John’s work.

Obviously, we have stepped through the looking glass here with regard to changes from Heracleon’s now seemingly minor differences in understanding; although many have posited that in effect, these different Valentinian cosmologies, in regards to discussing the Aeons, in fact all represent the same understanding but shared gradually with different levels of believers. Under this theory, Ptolemaeus is presenting a higher level exegesis of John’s writing than Heracleon was attempting to do, having geared his [Heracleon] writing towards someone closer to the proto-orthodox churches teachings, while Ptolemaeus, as Grant states, was evidently “the greatest

¹²² Grant, 182.

¹²³ For a more complete understanding of the concept of the Pleroma in Ptolemaeus’ work, see Grant’s translation of Irenaeus’ section regarding this material from *Adversus Haereses*, which he lays out in his work *Gnosticism*.

¹²⁴ Grant, 182.

systematic theologian of the [Valentinian] school.”¹²⁵ In fact, in Ptolemaeus’ commentary, he outlines two Tetrads, as well as the over-riding Ogdoad, which seems to have been the name given to the first 8 Aeons, contained in the first two (there were more, totaling 30 separate Aeons) Tetrads. These Tetrads he finds in the Prologue in different order, bringing them together in his summation, where he states that within *John*’s Prologue he has found John

reveal[ing] the first Tetrad, mentioning Father and Grace and Only-Begotten and Truth. Thus John spoke about the first Ogdoad, the Mother of all the Aeons. For he spoke of Father and Grace and Only-Begotten and Truth and Logos and Life and Man and Church.¹²⁶

There is an incredibly detailed cosmology associated with Ptolemaeus’ system, as one might imagine from reading these sparse quotes, which I do not, unfortunately have time to delve into. However, it is important to note the obvious differences between this understanding of the beginning of John’s gospel and the proto-orthodoxy’s more straightforward reading, which does not understand a good percentage of the words used to represent members of a cosmic creation that occurs outside the gospel scope itself (although defining the ‘*logos*’ as an alter-ego of the Savoir/Christ may or may not cause one to see similar trends in the proto-orthodoxy).

Also important to the wider question of the Valentinian role in proto-orthodox church societies is Ptolemaeus’ use of many of the texts today known as canonical. In the commentary on *John*, he uses both *John*, as well as a reference to Paul’s *Letter to the Ephesians* 5:13, where he states “Paul says: ‘For everything made manifest is Light.’ Since then, Life manifested and generated Man and Church, it is called their Light.”¹²⁷ Ptolemaeus shows a system that uses many of the same texts (even more are quoted or referred to in Irenaeus’ quoted material from Ptolemaeus’ description of the Valentinian system) that the proto-orthodox church later claimed to have sole authority to. And he appears to use these writings with little or no discussion of the consequences of what might today seem like unauthorized appropriation. Ptolemaeus (and

¹²⁵ Grant, 162.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 182.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 183.

Heracleon, for that matter) saw no problem inherent in his use of material that was later canonized, quoting it freely when it helps to prove his exegetical points.

Ptolemaeus' *Letter to Flora* is too lengthy to reproduce here in any systematic manner without losing focus, although specific quotes will show the relationship between this letter and the Johannine gospel (and the totality of the text is contained in the appendix). The letter, unlike the two commentaries discussed previously, contains a systematic discussion of theological principals set out to convince what many scholars assume was an unaffiliated Christian woman of the time period, Flora (who we have no other reliable references to). Grant describes this work by stating:

In his [Ptolemaeus'] 'Letter to Flora' he set forth the answers to some theological difficulties encountered by a Christian woman named Flora, carefully leading her along a seemingly orthodox path to the point where she will recognize that the Valentinians share in the apostolic tradition and that the truth of their teaching is guaranteed by the words of the Saviour.¹²⁸

This description provides the basic outline of the purpose and methodology of Ptolemaeus' *Letter*, but a specific look into the actual text will show a number of areas where this Ptolemaeus (who may or may not be the same as the previously discussed one) again moves from a position seemingly inside the church and takes his charge outward, into the realm of what has become known as gnostic speculation. Ptolemaeus begins by arguing that the god of the Laws of Moses could be neither the all-powerful, perfect God the Father, "for it is secondary, being imperfect and in need of completion by another, containing commandments alien to the nature and thought of such a God."¹²⁹ However, he also states that it cannot be what the opposing men argue, that the founder of the Law of Moses was the Devil, "for it [the Law] is opposed to injustice."¹³⁰ He proceeds to quote *Matthew* 12:25 ("A house or city divided against itself cannot stand."), showing again a reverence for the pre-canonical gospel material, and continues by quoting direct, in the text, a line from John 1:3, stating to his charge "Furthermore, the apostle says that the creation of

¹²⁸ Grant, 162.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 184.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

the world is due to him, for ‘everything was made through him and apart from him nothing was made.’”¹³¹

At this point, it is important to note that even opponents to the theory that the gnostic use of John’s gospel came from a shared earlier point of cohesion in a gnostic-leaning sect uses the Ptolemaic writing just described to make his point about the authorship of John’s gospel: Martin Hengel, whose work *The Johannine Question* is largely concerned with dispelling what he calls a mistaken theory (and what Hill develops into the theory of Orthodox Johannophobia, as discussed in the previous chapter) on early gnostic use of the *Gospel of John*, quotes Ptolemaeus here and states that while it is important for his larger claim about the identity of John’s author, it does not in any sense show any real use of the *Gospel of John* before the earliest date of 145, which Hengel claims is the earliest date for Ptolemaeus’ teaching.¹³² Following from this, Hengel uses a number of quotes from Ptolemaeus’ *Letter* to justify the early attribution of the disciple John as the author of the *Gospel of John*, while ignoring (to some extent) and arguing against the fact that the early references he discusses come from gnostic sources that are still the earliest references to John’s gospel existent.

For much of the rest of the *Letter*, there exists little in the way of direct allusions to Johannine thought, although the early direct quote does show a clear knowledge (doubled, if the two authors are indeed one, by the writing of the commentary on the Prologue) of John’s gospel and the early attribution of the gospel to the Disciple John. However, the letter does end with an interesting call back to the ideas present in the commentary previously discussed, as Ptolemaeus states:

It remains for us to say who this God is who ordained the Law; but I think this too has been shown you in what we have already said, if you have listened to it attentively. For if the Law was not ordained by the perfect God himself [as we have already taught you], nor by the devil [a

¹³¹ Grant, 184.

¹³² Hengel, 8.

statement one cannot possibly make], the legislator must be someone other than these two. In fact, he is the demiurge and maker of this universe and everything in it...¹³³

This is followed almost directly with a short description of the nature of the one, true God, who exists as the head of the Ogdoad previously discussed (although not named as such yet in the *Letter*, due to what seems Ptolemaeus' unwillingness to introduce all the concepts of Valentinian cosmology to a student in so short a letter). Ptolemaeus attempts to cement the quest for this further teaching in the mind of Flora by stating that she should "not let this [question about the nature of the cosmos] trouble you for the present in your desire to learn...For, if God permit, you will later learn about their origin and generation, when you are judged worthy of the apostolic tradition which we too have received by succession."¹³⁴ Ptolemaeus clearly alludes to the further teachings of the Valentinians here, but without stating them so as to confuse a new convert with overly technical statements about the nature of the Pleroma and the generation of the Aeons and the hierarchy of Tetrads and the Ogdoad.

4.5 Conclusion with Regard to John's Use amongst Heretics

During this exploration of the gnostic appropriation of John's gospel, a clear picture of the manner in which gnostic exegetes attempted to understand the Johannine gospel's message will have hopefully been presented. The two Valentinian thinkers presented above offer scholars the earliest references to John's gospel, and thus their input is valuable to the scholarly discussion for a variety of reasons, including; dating of the gospel, authorship issues such as the identity and background of the writer(s), reception history, as well as offering the modern scholar of Christian origins a more complete picture of the manner in which the early church saw writings now recognized as canonical. Both Ptolemaeus, in his limited and highly technical discussion of the Prologue and his introductory *Letter to Flora*, as well as Heracleon, in his more general discussion of various parts of John's gospel, present the modern scholar with an entirely new way

¹³³ Grant, 189.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 190.

of viewing the Johannine gospel. This gospel flowered, bloomed and expired relatively quickly in the historical record, but inspired in the early church a reaction towards, at least, and at best the outright reclamation of the *Gospel of John* by the proto-orthodox church, in which its position has been unquestioned for millennium since this early period of heterodox use.

CHAPTER 5: John's Gospel, a Shared Source

5.1 Restatement of the Issues

Building upon the separate and divergent statements above seems challenging, and may well go in the face of modern scholarly debate about the issues surrounding the early reception of the *Gospel of John*. To restate in short the above chapters: first, a New School of thought about the earliest period of development in Christian history arose under Walter Bauer, but has come under serious challenge by modern traditionalists who have pointed out the obvious flaws in the assessment of Bauer regarding the staged development of heresy and proto-orthodoxy during and immediately following what is known as the Apostolic period in Christianity. Into this discussion on the development of heresy in the early church, a more specific look into the early reception and use of the *Gospel of John* amongst the proto-orthodox, concentrating on Irenaeus and other late 2nd century church fathers brought us to what Charles E. Hill has termed the theory of Orthodox Johannophobia, or the idea that the church as an entity spurned the use of the *Gospel of John* in this earliest period. Hill's theories are factually sound, and he makes a number of good points that are seemingly overlooked by scholars who hold to the idea that *John* was unused among the orthodox before the time of Irenaeus. From this point, having affirmed that Hill seems to be correct regarding the true usage of *John* amongst the proto-orthodox prior to the rise of Irenaeus in the later half of the 2nd century, a discussion of the earliest written discussion on John's gospel provides an in depth look at the first commentaries produced to discuss Johannine issues by Christians. In this section, we concluded that the early proto-orthodox church did not produce the first commentaries on *John*, which were in fact brought out by two Valentinian gnostic writers, Ptolemaeus and Heracleon. This, however, does not mesh well with the

information we have previously discussed regarding the early use of *John* by the proto-orthodox. To think that *John* was heavily used by the proto-orthodox and yet remained uncommented upon until the time of Irenaeus is not an easy idea to accept without question. Why, many have asked, would the *Gospel of John* be used by Christians extensively, but fall by the wayside when we have much in the way of clear references to the other canonical gospels from this early 2nd century period? When *John*, a clear favorite of much of Christianity from the time of Irenaeus onwards, does not appear outside of heretical documents until the 170's, we must in many ways question Hill's conclusions. This leaves us with the question of whether or not the Gospel of John was first used by heretical Christians or proto-orthodox.

Instead of drawing the same line in the sand yet again that has come to dominate modern scholarship on the issue, I contend that we need to reexamine the problem and see where we as scholars are mistaking bias for evidence. While it is clear to me that many would happily find that the proto-orthodox use described by Hill as the basis of a new understanding of John's reception amongst the earliest Christians, I also think that the New School produces a number of positive, factual theories that correspond to the evidence available. I also see the problems in the New School approach that, similar to much of the traditional camp, overlook evidence that runs contrary to the dominant New School themes. However, to avoid the constant back and forth between scholars on both sides of this divide, I think the material that is the key to this discussion comes out of the totality of material previously presented taken together, and bringing with it a new perspective based off a reading of *1 John*.

5.2 1 John 2:19-20 in Context of the Debate

In *1 John* 2:19-20, we find a key to this issue that builds off the totality of the previously discussed topics. It takes the ideas presented in chapter 2, on the intertwined development of the early heretical and early proto-orthodox, and combines them with the discussion on the reception

of the *Gospel of John* from chapters 3 & 4. This text of *1 John* holds important implications for the further study of the *Gospel of John*'s reception. Important here is a presentation of the full quote of the material in question for reference, from the NRSV:

They went out from us, but they did not belong to us for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. But by going out they made it plain that none of them belongs to us. But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and all of you have knowledge.

In this section, described as part of the "Victory over false teaching" subheading by the *New Oxford Annotated Bible* (NRSV), we see the presentation in the (possible) words of the Johannine author(s) in describing a situation that becomes instantly important for scholars considering an internal sect excised for false teachings from the Johannine community.

The first striking thing with regards to this quote is the easy manner in which we as scholars can connect 'false teaching' and Eusebius' earlier cited quote, "proclaiming themselves the founts of Knowledge falsely so called while mercilessly, like savage wolves, making havoc of Christ's flock;" which especially connects with the use prominent use of 'knowledge' in each quote, a term often implicitly signaling to many the Gnostics we found ourselves dealing with in some sense regarding John earlier, although to be clear in no way can we connect this faceless group with any specific group.¹³⁵ I must make it clear here that I take it to be the case that the Johannine Epistles were written *after* the *Gospel of John* itself, and that these letters can therefore give us information about the Johannine community during its formative period, and will be working from this position for the rest of the thesis. I leave it to other, more directed studies to argue about the chronology of the Johannine material. To continue, in Rudolph Bultmann's *The Johannine Epistles* he discusses this particular section of *1 John* in a way that seems to back up the interpretation I have presented above. In fact, Bultmann states that "the false teachers claim to be Christians follows from v 19...('they went out from us, but they were not of us')." ¹³⁶ From this point, emphasizing the importance in this section of "false teachers," Bultmann contends that

¹³⁵ Eusebius and Maier. *Eusebius: The Church History* (Grand Rapids: Kregel), 31.

¹³⁶ Rudolph Karl Bultmann. *The Johannine Epistles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press), 36.

the author clearly wants to show that “the heretical teachers belonged to the congregation at one time, for they emerged from it.”¹³⁷ This section of Bultmann’s thinking is even more important for our purposes, as his emphasis on emergence falls right into line with the larger point behind this issue; specifically, here we see a similar thought pattern to our previous discussion in chapter 4 regarding the growth of the Valentinian movement from within the proto-orthodox church itself. When in *1 John* the author(s) discusses a group of emergent heretics leaving the in-group of Johannine Christians, Hengel makes the clear point in reference to this section of the Epistles in his work *The Johannine Question* that while there may be a tendency to see in these “they” of *1 John* specific gnostic groups or theology, we don’t have “any reason to suppose that the ‘separatists’ of I John 2:19 had a strictly fixed doctrinal system.”¹³⁸ In this place it must be affirmed that Hengel’s statement is correct; while I wish to show an analogy between our earlier claims about the emergence of specific gnostic groups from within the church framework, in no way can we make any definitive claims about the nature of this in-group referenced in *1 John*. There is simply not enough information contained in the Epistle to make a sustainable claim for any one group. However, *1 John* does show that in discussing the Johannine community, we have no reason to suggest there was not the possibility of community splits. Important then is the recognition that if the *Gospel of John* was indeed written prior to the Epistles, we have evidence that a group of Johannine Christians, with access to the Gospel (at some stage of its redaction), left the main group at an early stage in the overall development of Christianity. What this means in the light of chapters 3 & 4 going forward will be discussed in the next sections.

5.3 Orthodox Reception in Light of *1 John*

In discussing how the passage from *1 John* helps us to understand the reception history of John’s gospel, we must concentrate on both the proto-orthodox and the heretical groups

¹³⁷ Bultmann, 36.

¹³⁸ Hengel, 54.

interacting with it at the earliest stages of development. When concerned with the history of the proto-orthodox movement's use of the *Gospel of John*, this evidence from *1 John* shows us a community that was related in some way to the Gospel continuing in themes contained within. Just like in chapter 3, which discusses the early use of the *Gospel of John*, we can see in the communities of the Epistles a group of Christians who used Johannine material from the earliest strata of Christian development. Regardless of whether or not the Johannine group was a separate sect within the larger Christian movement or just the particular creation of the churches in Asia Minor, we have evidence of early use of Johannine themes and material by a group of Christians that most assuredly predates the use of *John* by Irenaeus in the late 2nd century.

Hengel discusses this topic in more depth, concerning himself with discounting the probability of the Johannine School experiencing anything remotely out of the ordinary amongst early Christian groups in this section of *1 John*.¹³⁹ Specifically, this is important because it meshes with the contention I am making that the Johannine group represents in many ways a viable proto-orthodox model. Some scholars contend that the Johannine group was itself a smaller, internal sect that only later became incorporated into the larger proto-orthodox movement; however, along with Hengel I see no need for this argument based off the evidence. The Johannine community appears to have been at best a specific geographically demarcated branch of Christianity, not an ideologically separate one. In Hengel's assessment, he notes that all the way back through *Acts* we see heretical branches breaking from the tree: "already in a relatively early text, which in my [Hengel's] view must be dated around 80 CE, the speech of Luke's Paul to the presbyters of Ephesus, we find a warning about the 'fierce wolves.'"¹⁴⁰ So, roughly 10 to 20 years before the Gospel of John was written, we already see groups leaving the main churches from proto-orthodox Christian communities. This information will serve us well in the next section on heretical reception of the *Gospel of John*.

¹³⁹ Hengel, 55.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

To return to our main point here, we must then note that *1 John* backs up the ideas presented by Hill, especially if the Epistles are considered to follow the *Gospel of John* in time; clearly in this case they show a community that has some knowledge and access to Johannine thought, in a time period prior to the use of John's gospel by the heretical writers of the later century. If this is the case, like Hill's argument against OJP, we can then take the proto-orthodox movement as having access to the *Gospel of John*'s teaching earlier than the traditional argument for John's disuse amongst the orthodox until Irenaeus.

5.4 John's Use amongst Heretics in Light of 1 John

Moving on, *1 John* will also play a role in our interpretation of how early heretical movements may have used the *Gospel of John*. Building from chapter 4, wherein we discussed the specific writings of Ptolemaeus and Heracleon, it seems obvious how *1 John* 2:19-20 will determine our interpretation of events. In the same way that *1 John* can be read as a clear indication, through its use of similar themes and language, of the use of the *Gospel of John* in the Johannine community prior to the rise in importance of Irenaeus in the later part of the 2nd century, with our information from chapter 4 we can also see how it is possible that *John*'s readers also developed in a heretical manner from the early splits that the Christian community experienced. This would show a simultaneous developing of traditions using the same text, and help to get rid of the artificial line in the sand amongst scholars I have discussed previously. If, using the language of Bultmann's commentary, we see that "the repeated warnings against them [the "they" group of *1 John* 2:19] show that they constitute a present danger to the congregation, and therefore understand themselves as legitimate members of the congregation," we can move in the direction hinted at in chapter 4, when we discussed the early development of Valentinian Gnosticism as a group that arose in its own estimation out of the church-proper.¹⁴¹ Bultmann even suggests in his commentary that the use of 'anointing' by the author of *1 John* may have

¹⁴¹ Bultmann, 36.

been a veiled reference to Gnosticism, as he states “that the author mentions ‘anointing’ rather than ‘spirit’ [in 1 John 2:27] probably owes to the fact that ‘anointing’ played an important role in Gnosticism.”¹⁴²

As previously stated, however, I am not attempting to connect the Valentinian group directly with the “they” of *1 John* 2:19, just secondarily. It strikes me as imminently plausible to argue that if, as both Hengel and Bultmann recognize, the earliest phases of the church had trouble with the rise of heretical groups from the very beginning of the Christian missionary movement (under Paul as referenced above) through the time of the writings of the Johannine community, there is little to suggest that this early and emergent phenomenon, which would validate many of the arguments laid as a foundation by Bauer’s New School in chapter 2, could not also be ultimately responsible for the widespread heretical use of the *Gospel of John* during the middle-to-late 2nd century, prior to Irenaeus. Similarly, Hengel writes that the use of the term “antichrist” may be important in the surrounding text, as it demarcates clearly for the reader that these people who have left the community are “dissident disciples.”¹⁴³ This distinction is again important for the close tie to the community that these dissidents had, as if true it would confirm the theory that the Johannine community splintered in some way over interpretation and theology. These former members of the group are described in a way that Hengel argues tie the Epistle to the “first conclusion to the Gospel (John 20:31),” again validating the earlier contention that members of the Johannine community would have in some form had access to the entire Johannine corpus of the time.¹⁴⁴ This is important to note because if we wish to argue that early heretics who left or were cast out from the Johannine community had access to the corpus and would have taken it with them as a source text after the expulsion, we need to show a time when this occurred as an example. This is a key portion of the argument; that Heracleon and Ptolemy

¹⁴² Bultmann, 37.

¹⁴³ Hengel, 57.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 58.

were using the *Gospel of John* and had been participating in a shared tradition from the onset of their specifically gnostic branch of theology, but that in general many of the groups that exited the Johannine, and indeed the larger proto-orthodox, community used as source texts works shared with the proto-orthodox community. Without some evidence of this, the thesis that heretical use of the Gospel of John shares a similar time frame to proto-orthodox use would fall apart. Fortunately, *1 John* seems to provide us with a clear example of a shared source that an early Christian group would have access to, shared across an early division.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to present the argument that, taken with the previously cited material, 1 John 2:19-20 provides the modern scholar with a clear, early reference to a specifically Johannine group splitting over theological issues. In context of the preceding material, this has been used to show that while many scholars argue for the clear delineation of heretical and proto-orthodox usage of the Gospel of John, in fact it appears that evidence suggests that John's usage amongst the earliest Christians was a shared affair. In support of this conclusion, the evidence from chapters 3 & 4 seems to point to a scenario where later groups fractured from an early Christian community that held a number of diverse theological views, and eventually produced the evidence in the form of Heracleon and Ptolemaeus' works on the *Gospel of John* through a shared tradition of focus on *John* as a central text. Both, in this case, the original group and the heretical offshoot would have equal claim to a historical lineage back to the original author(s) of the gospel, and each would be producing an alternate reading to be shared and spread amongst similar-minded believers. To this end, we in the modern time can reconcile the lack of explicit sources that concern the *Gospel of John* coming from the proto-orthodox side as simply an accident of history. Through the evidence presented by Hill and other scholars, we can clearly see that John's gospel was used by the proto-orthodox, even though we have oddly little in the way of explicit references to the *Gospel of John* in the same manner as the

other canonical gospels, with explicit textual citations or even relatively clear allusions. Alternately, we know from the existence of the fragments of Heracleon, as well as Ptolemaeus' material, that John's gospel was widely used by many gnostic and heretical groups; specifically in the case of chapter 4, the Valentinian gnostic group. Taken together, we have painted a picture of the probable nature of splits between early Christian groups, and have pointed to a clear example of one within the Johannine literature itself; this has allowed us to bridge a gap between the later Valentinians and the early authorship-community that produced the Johannine corpus on a theoretical level, offering to the reader a more reasonable answer to the question of the reception of the Gospel of John amongst the earliest Christian groups.

CHAPTER 6: Conclusions

6.1 Summation of Thoughts

The *Gospel of John*'s role in Christianity is rather large; its place in the minds of scholars of the church may be even greater for the important role it plays in our understanding of the early Christian movement. *John*, uniquely out of the canonical gospels, offers us a vision into the world of what may have been a sectarian early Christian group with particular thoughts and beliefs about Christ that were spread throughout the wider movement with the Gospel's dissolution into the movement. Important questions have been asked since the rise of Biblical criticism about the nature and meaning behind John's gospel, and have intrigued scholars from far before the rise of the modern form of criticism. The earliest reception of *John* remains a murky area in scholarly knowledge, with debates about specific aspects of Johannine Christology and theology playing out in scholarly writings even today. This work set as its goal helping to define this reception of John.

In building for the reader a background of knowledge about the disagreements between traditional and New School historians, we have set the stage for the larger debate about John's history. These earliest Christians that the traditional and New School scholars debated over hold an important place in determining the eventual reception of the *Gospel of John* by preparing the two main groups we seek to find traces of the *Gospel of John* in. The earliest proto-orthodox Christians were thought by many to have abandoned the *Gospel of John* out of concern over its heretical language and leanings, but though Charles E. Hill's work on his theory of Orthodox Johannophobia, we found many references in earliest Christianity to the use and knowledge of the *Gospel of John*. However, in our study of the early heretical Christians, we found three important

references to *John* that predate any written discussion of the gospel by proto-orthodox Christians, which for many created the belief in *John*'s heretical background that Hill refutes. However, the evidence cannot be ignored, and Ptolemaeus and Heracleon represent for scholars the oldest unambiguous commentaries on the *Gospel of John* we are currently aware of. These heretical writers produced their own theological interpretations of the gospel based out of their gnostic belief systems, and laid claim to having an important early say for Christianity as a whole in the reception of the *Gospel of John*. In context of each of these competing claims, then, we moved forward by bringing the text of *1 John* into the discussion. *1 John*'s reference to a group having left the Johannine community because of what the Epistle's author claimed was false belief provides an exemplary text for the idea that Christian groups were splintering in this period into proto-orthodox and heretical sects, and specifically in this case we see an example of a group with access to the *Gospel of John* leaving the group over interpretational differences. The reference in *1 John*, then, helps us as modern scholars to see the possibility that throughout the earliest stages of development of the Johannine community groups were splintering off from the eventual orthodox movement and taking the text with them. While we must again stress that in no way can we suppose that the exiled group in *1 John* can be tied directly to the Valentinian Christians that are represented by Ptolemaeus and Heracleon, we can still see in this section a probabilistic argument for the eventual splintering of the group that may have included the Valentinian forefathers. So, instead of arguing as many scholars do for either proto-orthodox or heretical dominance when it comes to the earliest use of the *Gospel of John*, we may argue that there was a shared tradition of usage that at some point was fractured by the eventual concrete division between the groups.

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APPENDIX A¹⁴⁵*Ptolemaeus' Exegesis of John*

John the Lord's disciple, desiring to tell of the origin of the universe, by which the Father produced everything, posits a certain Beginning ["principle"] which was first generated by God, which he called Only-Begotten Son and God, in which the Father emitted all things spermatically. By this the Logos was emitted, and in it was the whole substance of the Aeons, which the Logos itself later shaped. Since, then, he speaks of the first origin, he rightly sets forth the teaching from the Beginning, i.e., God and the Logos; for he says, "In the Beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God; this was in the Beginning with God." [John 1:1-2]. First he differentiates the three: God, Beginning, and Logos; then he combines them again in order to set forth the emission of each of them, the Son and the Logos, and their unity with each other and with the Father. For I the Father and from the Father is the Beginning, and in the Beginning and from the Beginning is the Logos. Rightly, then, he said, "In the Beginning was the Logos," for it was in the Son; and "the Logos was with God," for the Beginning was; and "the Logos was God," consequently, for what is generated of God is God [cf. John 3:6]. "This was in the Beginning with God": he set forth the order of emission. "All things came into existence through it, and apart from it nothing came into existence" [John 1:3]: to all the Aeons after it the Logos was the cause of formation and origin. "What came into existence in it is Life" [John 1:4]: from this he reveals the Pair (*syzygy*), for "all things" came into existence "through" it, but Life, "in" it. This, then, coming into existence *in* it, is closer *in* it than the things which came into

¹⁴⁵ Grant, Robert M., ed. 1978. *Gnosticism: A Source Book of Heretical Writings from the Early Christian Period*. New York: Harper & Brothers.

existence *through* it; for it is present with it and bears fruit through it; for it is present with it and bears fruit through it, since he adds, “And the Life was the Light of Men.” Having just said “Man,” he mentioned “Church” as having the same meaning as “Man,” so that through the one name he might set forth the common nature of the Pair; for from Logos and Life come Man and Church. He spoke of Life as the Light of men because they are illuminated by it, i.e., transfigured and made manifest. This what Paul says [Eph. 5:13]: “For everything made manifest is Light.” Since, then, Life manifest and generated Man and Church, it is called their Light.

Clearly, then, through these words John explained [in addition to other matters] the second Tetrad: Logos and Life, Man and Church. Moreover, he revealed the first Tetrad. Discussing the subject of the Saviour, and saying that “everything” outside the Pleroma was formed through him, he says that he is the fruit of the whole Pleroma. For he called him the “Light shining in the Darkness and not overcome by it,” since, even when he shaped everything which came into existence out of passion, he was not known by it. And he calls him Son and Truth and Life and Incarnate Logos, “whose glory we beheld, and his glory was such as belongs to the Only-Begotten, given him by the Father, full of Grace and Truth” [John 1:14]. He speaks thus: “And the Logos became flesh and dwelt in us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father, full of Grace and Truth.”

Correctly, then, he revealed the first Tetrad, mentioning Father and Grace and Only-Begotten and Truth. Thus John spoke about the first Ogdoad, the Mother of all the Aeons. For he spoke of Father and Grace and Only-Begotten and Truth and Logos and Life and Man and Church.

APPENDIX B¹⁴⁶*Ptolemaeus' Letter to Flora*

The Law ordained through Moses, my dear sister Flora, has not been understood by many persons, who have accurate knowledge neither of him who ordained it nor of its commandments. I think that this will be perfectly clear to you when you have learned the contradictory opinions about it.

Some say that it is legislation given by God the Father; others, taking the contrary course, maintain stubbornly that it was ordained by the opposite, the Devil who causes destruction, just as they attribute the fashioning of the world to him, saying that he is the Father and Maker of this universe. Both are completely in error; they refute each other and neither has reached the truth of the matter.

For it is evident that the Law was not ordained by the perfect God the Father, for it is secondary, being imperfect and in need of completion by another, containing commandments alien to the nature and thought of such a God. On the other hand, one cannot impute the Law to the injustice of the opposite [God], for it is opposed to injustice. Such persons do not comprehend what was said by the Saviour. "For a house or city divided against itself cannot stand" [Matt. 12:25], declared our Saviour.

Furthermore, the apostle says that the creation of the world is due to him, for "everything was made through him and apart from him nothing was made" [John 1:3]. Thus he takes away in

¹⁴⁶ Grant, Robert M., ed. 1978. *Gnosticism: A Source Book of Heretical Writings from the Early Christian Period*. New York: Harper & Brothers.

advance the baseless wisdom of the false accusers, and shows that the creation is not due to a God who corrupts but to the one who is just and hates evil. Only unintelligent men have this idea, men who do not recognise [sic] the providence of the creator and have blinded not only the eye of the soul but also the eye of the body.

From what has been said, it is evident that these persons entirely miss the truth; each of the two groups has experienced this, the first because they do not know the God of justice, the second because they do not know the Father of all, who alone was revealed by him who alone came.

It remains for us who have been counted worthy of the knowledge of both of these to provide you with an accurate explanation of the nature of the Law and of the legislator by whom it was ordained. We shall draw the proofs of what we say from the words of the Saviour, which alone can lead us without error to the comprehension of reality.

First, you must learn that the entire Law contained in the Pentateuch of Moses was not ordained by one legislator-I mean, not by God alone; some commandments are his [Moses'] and some were given by men. The words of the Saviour teach us this triple division. The first part must be attributed to God himself and his legislating; the second to Moses [not in the sense that God legislates through him, but in the sense that Moses gave some legislation under the influence of his own ideas]; and the third to the elders of the people, who seem to have ordained some commandments of their own at the beginning. You will now learn how the truth of this theory is proved by the words of the Saviour.

In some discussion with those who disputed with the Saviour about divorce, which was permitted in the Law, he said, "Because of your hard-heartedness Moses permitted a man to divorce his wife; from the beginning it was not so; for God made this marriage, and what the Lord joined together, man must not separate" [Matt. 19:8, 6]. In this way he shows that there is a

Law of God, which prohibits the divorce of a wife from her husband, and another law, that of Moses, which permits the breaking of this yoke because of hard-heartedness. In fact, Moses lays down legislation contrary to that of God; for joining is contrary to not joining. But if we examine the intention of Moses in giving this legislation, it will be seen that he did not give it arbitrarily or of his own accord, but by necessity because of the weakness of those for whom the legislation was given. Since they were unable to keep the intention of God, according to which it was not lawful for them to reject their wives [with whom some of them disliked to live], and therefore were in danger of turning to greater injustice and thence to destruction, Moses wanted to remove the cause of dislike, which was placing them in jeopardy of destruction. Therefore because of the critical circumstances, choosing a lesser evil in place of a greater, he ordained, of his own accord, a second law, that of divorce, so that if they could not observe the first, they might keep this and not turn to unjust and evil actions, through which complete destruction would be the result for them. This was his intention when he gave legislation contrary to that of God. Therefore it is indisputable that here the law of Moses is different from the Law of God, even if we have demonstrated the fact from only one example.

The Saviour also makes plain the fact that there are some traditions of the elders interwoven with the Law. "For God," he says, "said, Honour your father and your mother, that it may be well with you. But you," he says, addressing the elders, "have declared as a gift to God, that by which you might have been aided by me; and you have nullified the Law of God through the tradition of your elders." Isaiah also proclaimed this, saying "This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me, teaching precepts which are the commandments of men" [Matt. 15:4-9].

Therefore it is obvious that the whole Law is divided into three parts; we find in it the legislation of Moses, of the elders, and of God himself. This division of the entire Law, as made by us, has brought to light what is true in it. This part, the Law of God himself, is in turn divided

into three parts: the pure legislation not mixed with evil, which is properly called “law,” which the Saviour came not to destroy but to complete [Matt. 5:17]--for what he completed was not alien to him but needed completion, for it did not possess perfection; next the legislation interwoven with inferiority and injustice, which the Saviour destroyed because it was alien to his nature; and finally, the legislation which is exemplary and symbolic an image of what is spiritual and transcendent, which the Saviour transferred from the perceptible and phenomenal to the spiritual and invisible.

The Law of God, pure and not mixed with inferiority, is the Decalogue, those ten sayings engraved on two tablets, forbidding things not to be done and enjoining things to be done. These contain pure but imperfect legislation and required the completion made by the Saviour.

There is also the law interwoven with injustice, laid down for vengeance and the requital of previous injuries, ordaining that an eye should be cut out for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, and that a murder should be avenged by a murder. The person who is the second one to be unjust is no less unjust than the first; he simply changes the order of events while performing the same action. Admittedly this commandment was a just one and still is just, because of the weakness of those for whom the legislation was made so that they would not transgress the pure law. But it is alien to the nature and goodness of the Father of all. No doubt it was appropriate to the circumstances, or even necessary; for he who does not want one murder committed [saying, “You shall not kill”] and then commanded a murder to be repaid by another murder, has given a second law which enjoins two murders although he had forbidden one. This fact proves that he was unsuspectingly the victim of necessity. This is why, when his son came, he destroyed this part of the law while admitting that it came from God. He counts [this part of the law] as in the old religion, not only in other passages but also where he said, “God said, He would curse father or mother shall surely die” [Matt. 15:4].

Finally, there is the exemplary part, ordained in the image of spiritual and transcendent matters, I mean the part dealing with offerings and circumcision and the Sabbath and fasting and Passover and unleavened bread and other similar matters. Since all these things are images and symbols, when the truth was made manifest they were translated to another meaning. In their phenomenal appearance and their literal application they were destroyed, but in their spiritual meaning they were restored; the names remained the same but the content was changed. Thus the Saviour commanded us to make offerings not of irrational animals or of incense of this [worldly] sort, but of spiritual praise and glorification and thanksgiving and of sharing and well-doing with our neighbors. He wanted us to be circumcised, not in regard to our physical foreskin but in regard to our spiritual heart; to keep the Sabbath, for he wishes us to be idle in regard to evil works; to fast, not in physical fasting but in spiritual, in which there is abstinence from everything evil. Among us external fasting is also observed, since it can be advantageous to the soul if it is done reasonably, not for imitating others or from habit or because of a special day appointed for this purpose. It is also observed so that those who are not yet able to keep the true fast may have a reminder of it from the external fast. Similarly, Paul the apostle shows that the Passover and the unleavened bread are images when he says, “Christ our Passover has been sacrificed, in order that you may be unleavened bread, not containing leaven” [by leaven he here means evil] “but may be a new lump” [1 Cor. 5:7].

Thus the Law of God itself is obviously divided into three parts. The first was completed by the Saviour, for the commandments, “You shall not kill, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not swear falsely,” are included in the forbidding of anger, desire and swearing. The second part was entirely destroyed. For “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” interwoven with injustice and itself a work of injustice, was destroyed by the Saviour through its opposite. Opposites cancel out. “For I say to you, do not resist the evil man, but if anyone strikes you, turn the other cheek to him.” Finally, there is the part translated and changed from the literal to the

spiritual, this symbolic legislation which is an image of transcendent things. For the images and symbols which represent other things were good as long as the Truth had not come; but since the Truth has come, we must perform the actions of the Truth, not those of the image.

The disciples of the Saviour and the apostle Paul showed that this theory is true, speaking of the part dealing with images, as we have already said, in mentioning “the Passover for us” and the “unleavened bread”; of the law interwoven with injustice when he says that “the law of commandments in ordinances was destroyed” [Eph. 2:15]; and of that not mixed with anything inferior when he says that “the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good” [Rom. 7:12].

I think I have shown you sufficiently, as well as one can in brief compass, the addition of human legislation in the Law and the triple division of the Law of God itself.

It remains for us to say who this God is who ordained the Law; but I think this too has been shown you in what we have already said, if you have listened to it attentively. For if the Law was not ordained by the perfect God himself [as we have already taught you], nor by the devil [a statement one cannot possibly make], the legislator must be someone other than these two. In fact, he is the demiurge and make of this universe and everything in it; and because he is essentially different from these two and is between them, he is rightly given the name “Intermediate.”

And if the perfect God is good by nature, as in fact he is [for our Saviour declared that there is only a single good God, his Father whom he manifested]; and if the one who is of the opposite nature is evil and wicked, characterised [sic] by injustice; then the one situated between the two, neither good nor evil and unjust, can properly be called just, since he is the arbitrator of the justice which depends on him. On the one hand, this god will be inferior to the perfect God and lower than his justice, since he is generated and not ungenerated [there is only one

ungenerated Father, from whom are all things [cf. 1 Cor. 8:6], since all things depend on him in their own ways]. On the other hand, he will be greater and more powerful than the adversary, by nature, since he has a substance and nature different from the substance of either of them. The substance of the adversary is corruption and darkness [for he is material and complex], while the substance of the ungenerated Father of all is incorruption and self-existent light, simple and homogeneous. The substance of the latter produced a double power, while he [the Saviour] is an image of the greater one.

Do not let this trouble you for the present in your desire to learn how from one first principle of all, simple, and acknowledged by us and believed by us, ungenerated and incorruptible and good, were constituted these natures of corruption and the Middle, which are of different substances, although it is characteristic of the good to generate and produce things which are like itself and have the same substance. For, if God permit, you will later learn about their origin and generation, when you are judged worthy of the apostolic tradition which we too have received by succession. We too are able to prove all our points by the teaching of the Saviour.

In making these brief statements to you, my sister Flora, I have not grown weary; and while I have treated the subject with brevity, I have also discussed it sufficiently. These points will be of great benefit to you in the future, if like fair and good ground you have received fertile seeds and go on to show forth their fruit.

APPENDIX C¹⁴⁷*Heracleon's Fragments in Origen*

1. [John 1:3, “all things came into being through Him, and outside Him nothing came into being.”] “All things” means the world and what is in the world; the Aeon and what is in the Aeon did not come into being through the Logos. “Nothing,” that is, of what is in the world and the creation. The one who provided the cause of the generation of the world to the Demiurge—and that one was the Logos—is not the one “from whom” or “by whom” but the one “through whom.” For the Logos himself did not create as if he were given energy by another [so that “through him” might be understood thus] but, while he was giving energy, another created.

2. [John 1:4, “in him was life.”] “In him” means “for spiritual men,” for him himself provided the first formation for them in accordance with their generation, producing and setting forth that which had been sown by another [so that it resulted] in form and illumination and individual outline.

3. [John 1:18, “no one has ever seen God,” etc.] This was said not by the Baptist but by the disciple [John].

¹⁴⁷ Grant, Robert M., ed. 1978. *Gnosticism: A Source Book of Heretical Writings from the Early Christian Period*. New York: Harper & Brothers.

4. [John 1:23, “I am a voice of one crying out in the desert.”] The Logos is the Saviour; the voice which was in the desert is that symbolised [sic] through John; and [its] echo is the whole prophetic order. The voice which is closely related to Logos [reason] becomes Logos [word], just as woman is transformed into man; and for the echo there will be a transformation into voice, giving the place of a disciple to the voice which changes into Logos, but the place of a slave to that which changes from echo into voice. When the Saviour calls him [John] “a prophet” and “Elijah” [Matt. 11: 9, 14] he does not teach his nature but his attributes; but when he calls him “greater than prophets” and “among those born of woman” [Matt. 11: 10-11], then he characterises [sic] John himself. When John himself is asked about himself, he does not answer about his attributes. Attributes are things like clothing, other than himself. When he was asked about his clothing, whether he himself were his clothing, would he have answered “Yes”?

[John 1:19, “the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him.”] It was the duty of these persons to investigate and inquire about these matters, since they were devoted to God; and John himself was of the Levitical tribe. They asked him if he were a prophet, since they wanted to learn about the general subject. “Greater” [than prophets, Matt. 11:10; among those born of women, Matt. 11:11] was prophesied by Isaiah, so that none of those who ever prophesied was deemed worthy of this honour by God.

6. [John 1:25, “why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ or Elijah or the prophet?”] Only Christ and Elijah and the prophets ought to baptize. The Pharisees asked the question from malice, not from a desire to learn.

7. [John 1:26, “I baptize in water.”] John replies to those sent from the Pharisees, not in relation to their question, but on his own terms.

8. [John 1:26, “In your midst stands one whom you do not know.”] This means that he is already present and is in the world and in men, and he is already manifest to all of you.

[John 1: 27, “he comes after me, and I am not worthy to loose the thong of his sandal.”] John is the forerunner of Christ. In these words the Baptist acknowledges that he is not worthy of even the least honorable service for Christ. “I am no worthy” that on my account he came down from the Greatness and assumed flesh as a sandal; of this flesh I cannot give an account or describe it or explain [unloose] the dispensation concerning it. The world is the sandal. [John represents the Demiurge.] The Demiurge of the world, who is inferior to Christ, acknowledges the fact through these expressions.

9. [John 1:28, “these things happened in Bethany across Jordan.”] Heracleon read “Bethany” [Origen himself preferred “Bethabara”].

10. [John 1:29, “behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”] As a prophet, John said, “Lamb of God”; as more than a prophet [Matt. 11:9] he said, “who takes away the sin of the world.” The first expression concerns his [Christ’s] body; the second, him who was in the body. As the lamb is imperfect in the genus of sheep, so the body is imperfect by comparison with him who dwells in it. If he had wanted to ascribe perfection to the body, he would have spoken of a ram which was to be sacrificed.

11. [John 2:12, “after this he descended to Capernaum.”] This again means the beginning of another dispensation, since “he descended” was not spoken idly. Capernaum means on the one

hand the ends of the world, on the other the material things to which he descended. And because the place was alien to him, nothing is reported as having been done or said in it.

12. [John 2:13, “and the Passover of the Jews was near.”] The great feast itself; for it was a symbol of the passion of the Saviour, when the sheep not only was slain but when eaten provided rest. When sacrificed it signified the passion of the Saviour in the world; when eaten it signified the rest which is in marriage.

13. [John 2:13-15, “and Jesus ascended to Jerusalem, and he found in the temple those who sold oxen...and he made a whip of small cords.”] The ascent to Jerusalem signifies the ascent of the Lord from material things to the psychic place, which is an image of Jerusalem. He found them in the holy place [*hieron*], not in the temple as a whole [*naos*], so that it might not be supposed that simple “calling,” apart from the spirit, is assisted by the Lord; for the holy place is the Holy of Holies, into which only the High Priest enters [Heb. 9:7], where the spirituals come. But the court of the temple, where the Levites also are, is a symbol of the psychics outside the Pleroma who are found to be in salvation. Those who are found in the holy place selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers sitting there, are those who give nothing freely but regard the coming of strangers to the temple as an occasion for trade and gain, and because of their own profit and love of money supply the sacrifices for the worship of God. The whip which Jesus made of small cords is an image of the power and energy of the Holy Spirit, blowing out the wicked. The whip and the linen [Rev. 15:6] and the winding-sheet [Matt. 27:59] and other things of this kind are an image of the power and energy of the Holy Spirit. The whip was tied on wood, and this wood was a symbol of the cross. On this wood were nailed up and destroyed the gambling merchants and all wickedness [cf. Col. 2:14]. Of these two substances the whip was

made; for Jesus did not make it of dead leather, for he desired to construct the church as no longer a den of thieves and merchants but as a house of his Father.

14. [John 2:17, “the zeal of thy house shall consume me.”] Spoken in the role of those powers which were cast out and consumed by the Saviour.

15. [John 2:19, “in three days I will raise it up.”] “In three days” rather than “on the third,” which is the spiritual day of the resurrection of the church. [Consequently, says, Origen, the first is earthly and the second is psychic.]

16. [John 2:20, “this temple has been building for forty-six years.”] Solomon’s building the temple of forty-six years is an image of the Saviour, and the number six refers to matter, i.e., that which is formed, while forty, which is the uncombined Tetrad, to the inbreathing [Gen. 2:7] and the seed in the inbreathing.

17. [John 4:12ff.; the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well.] That well signified insipid, temporary, and deficient life and its glory; for it was worldly. This is proved by the fact that Jacob’s cattle drank from it. But the water which the Saviour gave is of his Spirit and Power. “You will never thirst,” for his life is eternal and will never perish like the first [water] from the well, but is permanent. For the grace and the gift of our Saviour are not to be taken away or consumed or corrupted by the one who shares in them. The first life [however] is perishable. “Water springs up to eternal life” refers to those who receive the life supplied richly from above and themselves

pour forth what has been supplied them for the eternal life of others. The Samaritan woman exhibited uncritical faith, alien to her nature, when she did not hesitate over what he was saying to her. “Give me this water”: she hated the shallows pierced by the word, as well as that place of so-called living water. The woman says these things to show forth the toilsome and laborious and unnourishing quality of that water.

18. [John 4:16ff.; the Samaritan woman and her previous husbands.] It is obvious that this means [“If you wish to receive this water, go, call your husband”] the Pleroma of the Samaritan woman, so that coming with him to the Saviour she might receive from him power and union and mixture with her Pleroma. He was speaking to her about an earthly husband, to call him, since he knew that she did not have a lawful husband. The Saviour said to her, “Call your husband and come here,” meaning her fellow [*syzygos*] from the Pleroma. As for what was meant [allegorically] she was ignorant of her own husband; as for the simple sense, she was ashamed to say that she had an adulterer, not a husband. “Truly you said you had no husband,” since in the world the Samaritan woman had no husband, for her husband was in the Aeon. The “six husbands” signify all the material evil to which she was bound and with which she consorted when she was irrationally debauched, insulted, rejected, and abandoned by them.

19. [John 4:19ff.; the Samaritan woman and Samaritan worship.] The Samaritan woman properly acknowledged what was said by him to her; for it is characteristic only of a prophet to know all things. She acted as suited her nature, neither lying nor explicitly acknowledging her immorality. Persuaded that he was a prophet, she asked him and at the same time revealed the cause of her fornication, because on account of ignorance of God she had neglected the worship of God and everything necessary for her life, and was otherwise [...] in life; for she would not have come to

the well which was outside the city [unless she had] wanted to learn in what way, and pleasing whom, and worshipping God, she might escape from fornication; therefore she said, “Our fathers worshipped on this mountain,” etc.

20. [John 4:21, “believe me, woman...neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.”] Earlier Jesus did not say, “Believe me, woman”; now he thus commands her. The mountain means the devil or his world, since the devil was one part of the whole of matter, and the whole world is a mountain of evil, a deserted dwelling of beasts, which all [Jews] prior to the law and all the Gentiles worship; Jerusalem is the creation or the Creator, whom the Jews worship. In a second sense the mountain is the creation, which the Gentiles worship, and Jerusalem is the Creator, whom the Jews worship. So you, as the spirituals, will worship neither the creation nor the Demiurge, but the Father of Truth. And he accepts her as one already faithful and to be numbered with the worshippers in truth.

21. [John 4:22, “you worship what you do not know.”] These are the Jews and the Gentiles. As Peter [*Kerygma Petri*] teaches, “We must not worship in Greek fashion, accepting the works of matter and worshipping wood and stone, or in Jewish fashion worship the divine; for they, thinking that they alone know God, do not know him, and worship angels and the month and the moon.”

22. [John 4:22, “we worship what we know, for salvation is of the Jews.”] “We” means the one who is in the Aeon and those who have come with him; for these knew the one they worship, worshipping in truth. “Salvation is from the Jews” because it was in Judaea, but not in them [“for

he was not pleased with all of them,” 1 Cor. 10:5], and because from that race came salvation and the Logos to the world. In terms of what was meant [allegorically] salvation came from the Jews, since they are regarded as images of beings in the Pleroma. Previous worshippers worshipped him who was not father, in flesh and error. They worshipped the creation, not the true Creator, who is Christ, since “All things came into being through him, and outside him nothing came into being.”

23. [John 4:23, “the Father seeks such to worship him.”] In the deep matter of error has been lost that which is related to the Father; this is sought for so that the Father may be worshipped by his kin.

24. [John 4:24, “God is Spirit, and those who worship must worship in spirit and in truth.”] Undefined and pure and invisible is his divine nature; and worthily of him who is worshipped [one must worship] in spiritual, not fleshly fashion. For those who are of the same nature as the Father are spirit, those who worship in truth and not in error, as the Apostle teaches when he calls this worship “spiritual [rational] service” [Rom. 12:1].

25. [John 4:25, “I know that Messiah comes, who is called Christ.”] The church expected Christ and believed of him that he alone would know all things.

26. [John 4:26, “I who speak to you am he.”] Since the Samaritan woman was convinced that when Christ came he would proclaim everything to her, he said, “Know that I who speak to you

am he whom you expected.” And when he acknowledged himself as the expected one who had come, “his disciples came to him,” for on their account he had come to Samaria.

27. [John 4:28, “the woman left her water-jug.”] The water-jug which can receive life is the condition and thought of the power which is with the Saviour. She left it with him, that is, she had such a vessel with the Saviour, a vessel in which she had come to get living water, and she returned to the world, proclaiming the coming of Christ to the “calling.” For through the Spirit and by the Spirit the soul is brought to the Saviour. “They went out of the city,” i.e., out of their former worldly way of life; and through faith they came to the Saviour.

28. [John 4:31, “the disciples said, ‘Rabbi, eat.’”] They wanted to share with him some of what they had obtained by buying it from Samaria.

29. [John 4:32, “I have food to eat that you do not know.”] Heracleon said nothing on the text.

30. [John 4:33, “Did anyone bring anything for him to eat?”] The disciples understood in a low way and imitated the Samaritan woman, who said, “You have no dipper, and the well is deep.”

31. [John 4:34, “My meat is to do the will of him who sent me.”] The Saviour thus narrated to the disciples that this was the subject of his discussion with the woman, calling the will of the Father his “meat”; for this was his food and rest and power. The will of the Father is for men to

know the Father and be saved; this was the work of the Saviour, on account of which he was sent into Samaria, i.e., into the world.

32. [John 4:35, “the harvest comes.”] He speaks of the harvest of the fruits as if it had a fixed interval of four months, and yet the harvest of which he was speaking was already present. The harvest is that of the souls of believers. They are already ripe and ready for harvest and suitable for gathering into the barn [cf. Matt. 13:30], i.e., through faith into rest, as many as are ready. For not all are ready; some are already ready, others are going to be; others are already oversown [cf. Matt. 13:25].

33. [Matt. 9:37, “the harvest is great, but the labourers are few.”] This refers to those who are ready for harvest and suitable for gathering already into the barn through faith into rest, and suited for salvation and reception of the Logos.

34. [John 4:36, “he who reaps receives a wage.”] This is said since the Saviour calls himself a reaper. And the wage of our Lord is the salvation and restoration of those reaped, i.e., his rest upon them. “And he gathers fruit for eternal life” means either that what is gathered is the fruit of eternal life or that it itself is eternal life.

35. [John 4:37, “so that the sower may rejoice together with the reaper.”] For the sower rejoices because he sows, and because he already gathers some of his seeds; similarly the reaper, because he reaps. But the first one began by sowing and the second one, by reaping. They could not both

begin with the same thing, since sowing and the second one, by reaping. They could not both begin with the same thing, since sowing is first, then afterwards reaping. When the sower stops sowing, the reaper still reaps; but at the present time both effect their own works but rejoice in a common joy when they consider the perfection of the seeds. “One sows and another reaps.” The Son of Man above the Place sows [cf. Matt. 13:37]; the Saviour, who is himself also Son of Man, reaps and sends as reaper the angels known through the disciples [Matt. 13:39], each for his own soul.

36. [John 4:38, “others labored, and you have entered into their labour.”] These seeds were sown neither through them nor by them; those who labored are the angels of the dispensation, through whom, as mediators [cf. Gal. 3:19], they were sown and nourished. The labour of sowers and reapers is not the same, for the former, in cold and wet and toil dig up the earth and sow, and throughout the winter look after it, hoeing it and pulling out weeds; but the latter, entering upon a prepared fruit, reap harvests with gladness.

37. [John 4:39, “out of that city many believed because of the woman’s report.”] Out of that city, i.e., out of the world. Through the woman’s report, i.e., through the spiritual church. Many, since there are many psychics, but the imperishable nature of the election is one and uniform and unique.

38. [John 4:40, “he remained there two days.”] He remained “with them” and not “in them,” and for two days, either [to signify] the present Aeon and the future one in marriage, or the time

before his passion and that after the passion, which he spent with them, and when after converting many more to faith through his own word he departed from them.

39. [John 4:42, “we no longer believe because of your word.”] It ought to say, “only your word.” “For we ourselves have heard and know that this is the Saviour of the world.” At first men are led by others to belief in the Saviour, but when they read his words, they no longer believe because of human testimony alone, but because of the truth itself.

40. [John 4:46ff.; the royal officer’s son and his healing.] The royal officer is the Demiurge, since he himself reigned over those under him; but because his dominion is small and temporary he was called a “royal officer,” like some petty king set over a small kingdom by a universal king. His son, in Capernaum, is in the lower part of the intermediate area by sea, i.e., in that which adjoins matter. In other words, the man belonging to him was sick, i.e., not in accordance with nature but in ignorance and sins. “From Judaea to Galilee” [4:47] means “from the Judaea above.” The expression “he was about to die” refutes the doctrines of those who suppose that the soul is immortal; soul and body are destroyed in Gehenna [Matt. 10:28]. The soul is not immortal but only has a disposition towards salvation; it is the perishable which puts on imperishability and the mortal which puts on immortality, when its death was swallowed in victory [1 Cor. 15:53-55]. “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe” [4:48] was properly spoken to such a person as had the nature to be persuaded through works and through sense perception, not to believe a word. “Descend before my child dies,” because the end of the law was death [cf. Rom. 7:13]; the law kills through sins, the father asks the only Saviour to help the son, i.e., a nature of this kind. “Your son lives” [4:40] the Saviour said in modesty, since he did not say, “Let him live,” or show that he himself had provided life. Having descended to the sick man and healing

him of the disease, i.e., of sins, and having made him alive through remission, he said, “Your son lives.” “The man believed” because the Demiurge can easily believe that the Saviour is able to heal even when not present. The slaves of the royal officer [4:51] are the angels of the Demiurge, proclaiming, “Your child lives,” because he is behaving properly and rightly, no longer doing what is unsuitable. For this reason the slaves proclaimed to the royal officer the news about his son’s salvation, because the angels are the first to observe the actions of men on earth to see if they have lived well and sincerely since the Saviour’s sojourn. “The seventh hour” refers to the nature of the man healed. “He and his whole house believed” [4:53] refers to the angelic order and men related to him. It is a question whether some angels will be saved, those who descended upon the daughters of men [Gen. 6:2]. The destruction of the men of the Demiurge is made plain by “The sons of the kingdom will go out into the outer darkness” [Matt. 8:12]. Concerning them Isaiah prophesied [1:2, 4; 5:1], “I begot and raised up sons, but they set me aside;” he calls them “alien sons and a wicked and lawless seed and a vineyard producing thorns.”

41. [John 8:21, “where I go you cannot come.”] How can they come to be in imperishability when they are in ignorance and disbelief and sins?

42. [John 8:22, “will he kill himself?”] In their wicked thoughts the Jews said these things and declared themselves greater than the Saviour and supposed that they would go away to God for eternal rest, but the Saviour would slay himself and go to corruption and death, where they did not think they would go. The Jews thought the Saviour said, “When I have slain myself I shall go to corruption, where you cannot come.”

43. [John 8:37, “my word does not abide in you.”] It does not abide because they are unsuited for it either by substance or by inclination.

44. [John 8:44, “you are of your father, the devil.”] This gives the reason for their inability to hear the word of Jesus or to understand his speech. It means “of the substance of the devil.” This makes their nature evident to them, and convicts them in advance, for they are neither children of Abraham [for they would not have hated Jesus] nor children of God, because they do not love him [Jesus].

45. [John 8:44]. Those to whom the word was spoken were of the substance of the devil.

46. [John 8:44, “you wish to perform the desires of your father.”] The devil has not will but desires. These things were spoken not to those by nature sons of the devil, the men of earth, but to the psychics, who are sons of the devil by adoption: some of them who are such by nature can become sons of God by adoption. From having loved the desires of the devil and performing them, these men become children of the devil, though they are not such by nature. The name “children” must be understood in three ways; first by nature, second by inclination, third by merit. By nature means that which is generated by some generator, which is properly called “child”; by inclination, when one does someone’s will by his own inclination, and is called the child of him whose will he does; by merit, in the way that some are called children of Gehenna and of darkness and of lawlessness [cf. Matt. 23:15, 33], and offspring of snakes and vipers [Matt. 3:7], for these [parents] do not generate anything by nature their own; they are ruinous and consume those who are cast into them. But since they do their works, they are called their children. He

[Jesus] calls them children of the devil, not because the devil generates offspring, but because by doing the works of the devil they became like him.

47. [John 8:44.] For his nature is not of the truth, but of the opposite to the truth, of error and ignorance. Therefore he can neither stand in truth nor have truth in himself; he has falsehood as his own by his own nature, being by nature unable ever to speak truth. Not only is he a liar, but so is his father, i.e., his nature, since he originated from error and falsity.

48. [John 8:50, “there is one who seeks and judges.”] The one who seeks and judges is the one who avenges me, the servant commissioned for this, the one who bears not the sword in vain [Rom. 13:4], the king’s avenger; and this is Moses, in accordance with what he previously said to them, “On whom you have set your hope” [John 5:45]. The judge and punisher is Moses, i.e., the legislator himself. How then does he say that all judgment has been delivered to him? [cf. John 5:27]. He speaks rightly, for the judge who does his will judges as a servant, as appears to be the case among men.

[This is the last fragment preserved by Origen in his *Commentary on John*.]