

# Trauma & TYPOI: The Fourth Gospel as Warning Not Example

Jolyon G. R. Pruszinski 

Department of Religion, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ 08544, USA; jolyonp@princeton.edu

**Abstract:** There are at least four traumatic events that likely lie behind the Gospel of John: (1) Jesus' death and inaccessibility, (2) the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, (3) the Johannine community's excommunication from the synagogue, and (4) the loss of the Beloved Disciple. Evidence of all of these traumas can be found in the Gospel itself and, as extant, the Gospel exhibits a number of strategies for addressing these experiences of suffering. Working from Gaston Bachelard's observations regarding literature produced in response to suffering, this paper outlines the textual evidence for each of these experiences of suffering, notes the responses to them that the Gospel displays, and seeks briefly to evaluate the responses for the TYPOI (patterns/examples/warnings) they provide. In short, the Fourth Gospel employs psychologically attractive, compensatory responses to experiences of loss. However, it deploys in parallel a toxic cocktail of anti-Jewish polemic, condemnation of "the world", and self-protective, sectarian insularity. Regarding whether the text's trauma response can be viewed as exemplary for ethically-minded Christians, Desmond Tutu's 2009 statement, "there are certain parts [of the Bible] which you have to say no to", is directly applicable, while the warning the text's example suggests is significant.

**Keywords:** Gospel of John; trauma; suffering; anti-Judaism; ethics; biblical interpretation; Gaston Bachelard; Anglican Church; Articles of Religion; African-American hermeneutics



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## 1. Introduction

Much of the past fifty years of scholarship on the Gospel of John, shaped significantly by J. L. Martyn's *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Martyn 1979), has suggested that some kind of traumatic experience contributed to the formation of the Johannine community, and by extension, the production of the Gospel itself (e.g., Brown 1979; Culpepper 1983; Ashton 2007; Marcus 2009; Frey 2018, etc.). At this point we can say with some confidence that there are at least four major traumatic events which likely lie behind the Gospel of John:

- (1) Jesus' death and (post-resurrection) physical departure/inaccessibility,
- (2) the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple/general destruction of the Jewish War,
- (3) the Johannine community's excommunication from the synagogue and disruption of related relationships, and
- (4) the loss of the Beloved Disciple.

Direct and indirect evidence of all of these traumatic events can be found in the Gospel itself and the Gospel, as extant, exhibits a number of strategies for addressing these experiences of suffering. Since many who receive this text as scripture view it as "exemplary", perhaps the most obvious mode by which the Gospel could operate as an example could be in providing a kind of prescriptive pattern for how to deal with suffering or trauma. This paper outlines the textual evidence for each of these experiences of suffering, notes the responses to these experiences of suffering that the Gospel appears to display, and seeks briefly to evaluate the responses for the TYPOI (patterns/examples/warnings) they provide. In short, the Gospel of John employs creative, and, for many, psychologically compelling, compensatory responses to the aforementioned experiences of loss. However, in parallel it deploys a toxic cocktail of targeted polemic, broad vituperative condemnation,

and self-protective, sectarian insularity. As such, even as the text itself is a trauma response, and many receptions of the text assume that it is exemplary, any prescriptive example the text provides for those suffering is very ethically limited, while the warnings its example suggests are quite significant.

We will begin with a few introductory and methodological considerations (Section 1), followed by an explication of the main traumatic events that likely shaped the Gospel (Section 2). These sections will be followed by observations of the approaches the Gospel takes to address the Johannine community's significant experiences of trauma and suffering (Section 3). The discussion section (Section 4) addresses the ethical issues raised by the Gospel's responses to trauma and highlights approaches to scripture in modern Christian receptions that do not require scriptural patterns (*TYPOI*) to be treated as exemplary but can allow them to serve as warnings. Section 5 reports key conclusions.

### 1.1. Method with Respect to Trauma, or "Trauma" Broadly Conceived

For the purposes of this article we will be employing the word "trauma" in its broad colloquial sense, including the overlapping ideas of suffering, loss, deprivation, "common shock", and medically defined physical and psychological "trauma." While there is a growing body of literature in the field of biblical studies devoted to the hermeneutics of trauma understood according to current medical practice (e.g., Collicutt 2012; Poser 2012; Becker et al. 2014; Reinhartz 2015; Boase and Frechette 2016), at times over-attention to the details of some of this theory can obscure basic, defensible observations about the biblical texts.

This study will be working with the idea of trauma as deployed broadly in Gaston Bachelard's literary-psychological analysis of fundamental human experiences in *La poétique de l'espace*. There are a few reasons for this unconventional choice. First, "trauma" studies as an approach to biblical studies is still in a nascent stage of theorization, and consideration of the work of an under-used theorist is warranted. Second, the Gospel of John is a literary work with pervasive "dwelling" themes<sup>1</sup> and Bachelard's text is specifically oriented around literary-psychological analysis of texts with significant dwelling language. Bachelard's treatment of formative traumatic experiences behind such literature is pertinent for consideration of such experiences in and behind John. Thirdly, Bachelard's treatment rightfully recognizes, accepts, and deals with the realities of semantic overlap and imprecision in literary imagery, and supports a broadly inclusive approach to defining the traumatic.<sup>2</sup>

The Gospel itself witnesses to various experiences in the semantic range of suffering, loss, and "trauma", and treatment of this constellation of ideas as a literary "solidarity",<sup>3</sup> rather than parsing them overly precisely according to modern medical standards, seems judicious, as suggested by the work of Thate (2019) and Pruszinski (2021a). In her treatment of trauma in John, Reinhartz (2015, p. 35) defines trauma so broadly as to include events like Mary's unexpected pregnancy, Saul's Damascus road experience, and –the emphasis of her study– the Incarnation.<sup>4</sup> As such, our analytical method here considers the full breadth of trauma-related and adjacent phenomena<sup>5</sup> which John's Gospel appears to manifest.

Reinhartz's treatment of trauma in John bears mention for another reason. Her contention is that the primary trauma behind the Gospel of John is the Incarnation, and she shows how aspects of this idea and its early reception in the author's community appear to align with definitions of a traumatic experience according to modern trauma theory.<sup>6</sup> This argument is largely on solid ground. Where her argument is less helpful is in its categorical dismissal of the shaping influence of various other possible traumatic events, in spite of her introductory statements purporting to cast a broadly inclusive net.

Reinhartz claims that the crucifixion and death of Jesus, which is considered traumatic in other New Testament texts like the Synoptic Gospels and Pauline Epistles, is not traumatic for John. This conclusion is based on a reading of trauma theory that suggests that a text produced as a result of trauma must depict the traumatizing event as traumatic, and John's Gospel presents Jesus' response to his death as rather impassive when compared to

the Synoptic accounts. Such a conclusion, though perhaps based in a particular reading of trauma theory,<sup>7</sup> goes against simple logic. One typical strategy in the aftermath of a traumatic event is a compensatory response<sup>8</sup> that denies the trauma, or describes it as a good thing.<sup>9</sup> Suggesting that Jesus' death in John is not in fact traumatic goes against the seemingly compensatory Johannine response and evidence from all the rest of the New Testament literature.

Further, Reinhartz appears to dismiss the synagogue expulsion as a traumatic event shaping the Gospel. This dismissal is based partly on her exegetical conviction,<sup>10</sup> and her reading of trauma theory,<sup>11</sup> that the traumatic event must be the core concern of the "trauma literature." The synagogue expulsion is not the core concern of John (according to Reinhartz' reading) and thus it can be dismissed as an important traumatic influence.<sup>12</sup> However, dismissal from consideration of what would presumably then be an author-invented traumatic scenario ignores the traumatizing effects that such a narrative can have. Since narratives have the ability to induce trauma even if the events they narrate were not directly experienced by the listeners, as Reinhartz herself acknowledges (Reinhartz 2015, p. 37), such inventions still can produce trauma and the Gospel of John can still be a bearer of this trauma.

It is strange that Reinhartz privileges the Incarnation, which is a doctrine or idea, or perhaps an interpretive strategy for addressing events and ideas but not an event *per se*, as the primary trauma of the Gospel rather than *actual* events (Jesus' death), or ostensibly unconfirmed, but still-discussed, events (the synagogue expulsion). Not to mention the fact that the "Incarnation" is a doctrine which developed later, based in part on the Gospel of John, but which is neither mentioned by name in the Gospel nor explicated systematically in the Gospel. For a scholar concerned with anachronism this is an odd choice. This is not to say that the doctrine of the Incarnation should not be understood as a traumatizing doctrine. Reinhartz has made a good case for it, and its deleterious effects should be considered.<sup>13</sup> However, to use trauma theory to exclude categorically actual events that fall within the semantic range of trauma, which are considered as potentially traumatic according to ancient consolation literature<sup>14</sup> and *DSM-5*,<sup>15</sup> and which plausibly occurred within the milieu of and prior to the composition of the Gospel, appears unwarranted.

As stated by Reinhartz (2015, p. 48), findings largely depend on definitions and chosen theorists. The benefit to the approach employed here is that it acknowledges that traumas are diverse, and that their effects (even literary ones) can be equally diverse: positive or negative and sometimes both.<sup>16</sup> The response need not appear as the core of a text. The trauma need not be described in purely negative terms. For a text like John, which is acknowledged by many scholars to have both a traumatized generative background and a traumatizing history of reception, while still being a widely celebrated and cherished text, these considerations are paramount. As John was composed over a long period of time, possibly by various authors, expecting precision about the degree to which the author or community was experiencing the exact symptoms of medical trauma, or expecting textual symptoms to cleave perfectly to modern theory, is perhaps too much to ask of the text.<sup>17</sup> As such, the investigation will attempt to be expansive with respect to the possibilities rather than reductive.

### 1.2. The Literary Theory of Trauma in Bachelard's *La poétique de l'espace*

Thomas Tweed (2006), a scholar of the sociology of religion, has described a significant basic function of religion as "home-making." The Gospel of John appears to be engaged in this fundamental work in several ways including discussions of the *logos* "tenting" among (or in) humans (1:14), the heavenly mansions (14:2), and a focus on the "indwelling" of the Holy Spirit (Farewell Discourse), to name only a few. Dwelling language pervades the Gospel (Pruszinski 2021a) and many of the phenomena that appear in the Fourth Gospel can be explained by recourse to psychologies of formative (and traumatized) experiences

of dwelling. Gaston Bachelard's *La poétique de l'espace* (1964) considers the psychologies and experiences that contribute to such literary manifestations.

Bachelard observes that a common feature of literature dealing with "dwelling" is an authorial experience of suffering, trauma, or loss which had a generative influence on the text. One way of understanding such an experience is of being "jeté dehors, c'est-à-dire . . . mis à la porte . . . circonstance où s'accumulent l'hostilité des hommes et l'hostilité de l'univers" (Bachelard 1964, p. 26).<sup>18</sup> Reimagining a home that has been lost "maintient l'[auteur] à travers les orages du ciel et les orages de la vie" amid "un monde trouble" (Bachelard 1964, pp. 26, 190).<sup>19</sup> "Bachelard asserts that the full depth of the image of home is not accessible to the imagination without serious loss [and] . . . this experience of loss or trauma fosters an even deeper and more vital imagination of home" (Pruszinski 2021a, p. 26): "Il faut perdre le paradis terrestre pour y vraiment vivre, pour le vivre dans la réalité de ses images, dans la sublimation absolue qui transcende toute passion" (Bachelard 1964, p. 47).<sup>20</sup>

An aspect of [such experiences is] that the imagination they generate typically takes on a highly oppositional form with regard to the surrounding world. The corner of retreat . . . operates . . . as a foil against the rest of the world. And what the refuge provides in terms of shelter, support, protection and nourishment, it constructs in reaction and opposition to the real or imagined failings of the world outside. Thus, the compensatory home, imagined, constructed, and experienced in response to a loss of home, typically shelters a deeply negative imaginative reaction to the surrounding world. (Pruszinski 2021a, p. 35)<sup>21</sup>

Among such shaping influences behind the Gospel of John<sup>22</sup> are experiences of rejection, exclusion, loss, and death. And among the typical literary manifestations of such experiences is angry, polemical language directed either toward those viewed as responsible for the suffering, or more generally "world-negating" language directed generically outward (Bachelard 1964).<sup>23</sup> Similar patterns have been identified in various other biblical texts (e.g., Frechette 2016; Claassens 2017; Thate 2019; Pruszinski 2021b)<sup>24</sup> and are described as common responses even in non-literary contexts (Alexander 2012; van der Kolk 2014).

Thus, if we are to ask whether a particular text bears the marks of a generative background in . . . a marginal . . . [or] traumatized experience, or to use Bachelard's term, an experience of being "cornered", we would look for certain things. On the one hand, we might expect to see elements of an ideal, imagined dwelling space that includes positive aspects of previous ideas or experiences of dwelling appearing as an amalgam, generated in compensatory response to the experience . . . And, on the other hand, we might see evidence of deeply condemnatory or destructive emotional language for the world outside the "corner", that is, the world that consigned the author to the corner. (Pruszinski 2021a, p. 100)<sup>25</sup>

We can also expect such a text to mention the experience (or experiences) of suffering or trauma to which it may be responding. There are several possibilities for the Gospel of John, and the Gospel is likely responding to more than one trauma.<sup>26</sup> We will now examine the traumatic events to which the Gospel of John is most likely responding.

## 2. The Traumas Shaping the Gospel

### 2.1. Jesus' Death and Physical Departure

That Jesus' death was viewed as traumatic by the members of the early Jesus movement is not debated (Collicutt 2012). It was a crucifixion, the most brutal form of the death penalty commonly meted out in the Roman Empire. That the death was, at least initially, traumatic for his followers is also not debated. It is an event referred to as the "destruction" of his body (2:19–21, NRSV). In the passion narrative he is described as first being "arrested and bound" (18:12), "struck . . . on the face" (18:22), and "flogged" (19:1). He has a crown of thorns placed on his head (19:2), is further struck by soldiers on the face (19:3), and is forced

to bear his own cross (19:17) to the site of his crucifixion (19:18). After he is executed his body is mutilated, as “one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out” (19:34). All of these traumas could have induced “common shock” and trauma for any witnesses (Weingarten 2003), or even those who heard the account, and the horror of witnessing such actions lingers.

Further, after Jesus’ death there is clear evidence of the community of believers mourning his departure. The Gospel of John mentions this difficulty multiple times, emphasizing that Jesus is “no longer in the world, but they [his followers] are in the world” (17:11). The difficulty for his followers is indicated by the repetition of the problem in the Farewell Discourse with the words “where I am going you cannot come” (13:33) and “where I am going you cannot follow me now” (13:36), because “I go to the Father” (14:12).<sup>27</sup>

### 2.2. The Destruction of the Temple

There are multiple indications in the Fourth Gospel that the writer is aware of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and that the loss of the earthly “dwelling” of God would have been perceived as a traumatic incident. The first mention comes in the Temple action pericope in John 2. Jesus initiates an altercation within the Temple precincts, “explains” his action ambiguously referring to destruction of “this temple” but is understood to be referring to “The” Temple by those listening. Anxiety about destruction of the Temple is indicated in the rationale given in John 11 for why the religious leaders decide to attempt to put Jesus to death. They state “If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation (ἡμῶν καὶ τὸν τόπον καὶ τὸ ἔθνος)” (11:48). Here τὸν τόπον is a direct reference to the Temple. Further, John has Jesus make a prophetic statement regarding the Temple in John 4: “the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem (ἔρχεται ὥρα ὅτε οὔτε ἐν τῷ ὄρει τούτῳ οὔτε ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις προσκυνήσετε τῷ πατρὶ)” (4:21). All these passages suggest deliberate reference to the Temple with an awareness of its subsequent destruction. Reinhartz (2014) has shown that the Temple destruction was a formative traumatic event for early Christian communities.

### 2.3. The Loss of the Beloved Disciple

The “disciple whom Jesus loved”, a designation which does not appear in any of the other canonical Gospels, plays a distinctive and pivotal role in the Gospel of John. He (or she) is described as the one whose testimony lies behind the Gospel. This may indicate that the Beloved Disciple was a cherished member of the Johannine community, possibly even its founding member.<sup>28</sup> In chapter 21 of John we read: “This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true” (21:24). This attribution of authorship, however, comes immediately after a discussion of a rumor that the Beloved Disciple would not die before the Parousia:

When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, “Lord, what about him?” Jesus said to him, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!” So the rumor spread in the community that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?” (21:21–23)

Such text suggests that though perhaps much of the Gospel may have been based on the witness of the Beloved Disciple,<sup>29</sup> we can also conclude that some (perhaps much) redaction and editing occurred after his (or her) death and that the death of such a foundational and important member of “the community” (21:23) would have been very upsetting, especially in light of the concern related to the aforementioned rumor and the apparent delay of the Parousia.<sup>30</sup>

#### 2.4. The Excommunication from the Synagogue

A fourth major trauma that likely shaped the experience of the Johannine community was some kind of expulsion from a synagogue community. While still considered speculative by some scholars, many have acknowledged (e.g., Marcus 2009) the likelihood of such an episode in the background to the Gospel<sup>31</sup> (but occurring after the life of the historical Jesus) as described in broad terms by J. L. Martyn (1979) in *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*. He points to the language of synagogue excommunication as likely anachronistic for the life of Jesus, and indicative of a concern or experience of the later community. According to this theory, the Gospel narrative occurs on two levels: that of the historical Jesus, and that of the Johannine community. Thus the mentions of synagogue excommunication in 9:22, 12:42, and 16:2 would point to traumatic events in the life of the Johannine community that may have shaped the language of the Gospel of John to a considerable degree:

“for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue [ἀποσυνάγωγος γένηται].” (9:22)

“and they drove him out” (9:34)

“Nevertheless many, even of the authorities, believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue [ἀποσυνάγωγοι γένωνται].” (12:42)

“They will put you out of the synagogues [ἀποσυνάγωγους ποιήσουσιν].” (16:2)

The associations of the synagogue with Sabbath rest<sup>32</sup> connect it to Bachelard’s psychologies of “dwelling” (Pruszinski 2021a, p. 19). Being ousted from such a space, one’s primary locus of corporate Sabbath rest and worship, would assuredly have had the potential to be experienced as traumatic, and thus implicates the phenomena of dwelling-related trauma response described by Bachelard.

Whether this experience of separation from the synagogue can be traced *exclusively* to the life of the Johannine community or not, the reference in the Farewell Discourse suggests that it is still a relevant experience for the community, not simply for the historical Jesus.<sup>33</sup> For the purposes of this paper, then, we will assume that the essential outline of Martyn’s thesis is correct: that a synagogue expulsion episode was a formative experience of trauma in the background of the Johannine community and that the Gospel shows evidence of this trauma in its language and emphasis. The corollary of this contention for our method is that the process of interpreting the language of the Fourth Gospel will be concerned primarily with an awareness of this later context of the Johannine community (as opposed to the context of the historical Jesus) and will be the primary lens for considering the meaning of the Gospel for the author and its immediate community of reception.<sup>34</sup> It should also be noted that the telling of traumatic stories to later generations who did not experience the trauma in real time can still inscribe the trauma onto that later generation (Degloma 2009). This means that even if the synagogue expulsion themes are utterly without historical basis, their presence in the Gospel *still* works to introduce such a trauma into the experience of the Gospel’s communities of reception. In short, even if one is to concede that the expulsion is without historical warrant, the invented trauma has the ability to cast a shadow of actual trauma upon subsequent generations.

We will now turn our attention to the various responses that the Gospel evidences in light of the aforementioned traumatic events.

### 3. Responses to Trauma and Suffering in John

The Gospel evidences many strategies for responding to the aforementioned experiences of suffering and trauma. Many of these involve some kind of idealized compensation for the thing lost: The Gospel account itself replaces the presence and active witness of the Beloved Disciple; the Johannine community acts as a compensatory replacement for the community of the synagogue; the Johannine community is likewise a compensatory

replacement for the destroyed Temple as the new locus of dwelling of God's Spirit; and of course, the Holy Spirit itself is a replacement for Jesus' physical presence. Sometimes these compensatory responses are overt and prescriptive and sometimes indirect and/or functional, perhaps possibly even unintentional. I will identify some of the most prominent instances.

A further form of response can be understood to involve the various ideal "universal" images and totalizing language deployed by the Gospel, both positive and negative. This totalizing, and often polarizing, language can be seen as part of a strategy of self-protection for the community, which not only justifies the "truth" of its own beliefs, but characterizes all opposition, or even disagreement as evil.<sup>35</sup> This last element brings up an integral and unfortunate part of the Gospel's responses to trauma which cannot be ignored, namely, its language used to cast blame, denigrate, and consign to judgment those the author and/or community viewed as responsible for their plight, or even simply those who disagree with their beliefs and, at times, the whole "world." According to Bachelard (1964) these are typical features of texts produced in response to an experience of trauma or suffering, and as we will see, they appear throughout the Gospel of John.

### *3.1. Compensation for the Loss of the Beloved Disciple with the Gospel Account, etc.*

Many scholars have surmised that the composition of the canonical Gospel accounts occurred when it did, in part, because of the need to record the oral traditions of the first generation of apostles, disciples, and Jesus-followers when that generation was dying out. The theory goes that this was done in order to preserve their memories for later generations who had no first-hand experience of Jesus' earthly ministry. Of all the gospel accounts, the Gospel of John furnishes the most overt pronouncements to suggest that this may have been the case for its own composition, as previously mentioned. But beyond this functionally unprovable contention, are the other possible elements of response to the purported death of the Beloved disciple that the Fourth Gospel displays: one related to the Peter pericope in chapter 21, and one related to the Lazarus pericope in chapter 11.

As regards the Peter text, one possibility is that the rehabilitation of Peter in chapter 21:15–19 is a response to the death of the Beloved disciple. If Peter became the primary authority figure for the church in Rome, and was also considered by many other local churches to be a key authoritative figure, then the prominent role of the Beloved disciple in the Johannine community could have been somewhat awkward for that community's relations with other local churches. The attempt to rehabilitate Peter in chapter 21, a chapter that is likely a later addition, may date to a period when the Johannine community needed to be folded into, or at least come to a working harmony with, one or more other church communities that viewed Peter as the most authoritative disciple.

As regards the Lazarus text, one can consider whether the statement made by Martha is directly relevant to the death of the Beloved Disciple. She says "Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (11:32). On its face this statement seems to relate directly to the concern regarding the Parousia and the death of the Beloved Disciple. A statement later in the Lazarus text (11:37) also bears on this issue: "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" These statements echo the concern regarding the "rumor" of chapter 21. Jesus' response in 11:40 to Lazarus' death and to these statements and concerns is to say "Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" The statement is followed by Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Presumably the Lazarus text bears directly upon the rumor regarding the Beloved Disciple and his death through deploying what is, as we will see, a very typical Johannine solution to a variety of difficulties: an admonition to "believe" harder. The Johannine community knows that Jesus is able to heal, especially when present, and is also able to raise the dead, and so those of the Johannine community are encouraged to lean in to this belief even as the Parousia appears increasingly delayed.

### 3.2. Compensation for Jesus' Missing Physical Presence with the Holy Spirit

The difficulty presented by Jesus' missing physical presence is one of the main issues the Gospel attempts to address. More than awkward, the missing presence of the living Jesus, both in the immediate aftermath of the crucifixion, and in the time subsequent to his final appearances, is described as keenly felt and distressing to those who loved him:

Very truly, I tell you, you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice; you will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy. When a woman is in labor, she has pain, because her hour has come. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world. So you have pain now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. (16:20–22)

In the Farewell Discourse John's Jesus promises a joyful solution to, and compensation for, his departure: the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is not simply described as a stand-in, or alternative, to Jesus' relational presence and authority, but in some parts of the Gospel is described as a preferred alternative.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, the Gospel portrays this substitute from very early on as predicted and intended.<sup>37</sup> Jesus is described from the first chapter as "the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit" (1:33). Dialogues with Nicodemus<sup>38</sup> and the Samaritan woman (4:10–26), as well as public pronouncements in the Temple (7:37–39), and the many private teachings in the Farewell Discourse<sup>39</sup> presage the final giving of the Holy Spirit in 21:22: "He breathed on them and said to them 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'"

However, the fact that similar foreshadowing does not appear nearly as heavily in the Synoptic Gospels might justifiably lead us to question whether the Historical Jesus made these specific statements, and might induce us to wonder whether, or to what degree, the heavy emphasis on the Holy Spirit is a distinctive feature of the theological convictions of the Johannine community.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, we should consider whether such a conviction arose in response to the traumatic loss of Jesus' physical presence rather than appearing as a regular, and intentional feature of the teachings of the Historical Jesus, as John's Gospel might have its readers believe.

In John the Holy Spirit serves in lieu of Jesus in many important functions. One of the most important is in the accurate<sup>41</sup> representation of Jesus:

When the Counselor comes, who I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me; and you also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning. (15:26–27)

The Spirit bears witness to Jesus, but, as such, acts as an authority, not only as Jesus did, but in place of Jesus. The author of John is allowing the authority that the community believes Jesus to have received from the Father to be passed through the Holy Spirit to the community itself, as seen in 13:21: "he who receives any one whom I send receives me; and he who receives me receives him who sent me" and 17:22: "the glory which you have given me I have given to them."

One of the most obvious ways that this authority functions in the Gospel is in the authorization of new interpretations of events well after they have occurred. Over and over again in the Gospel we see explicit evidence of this reinterpretation, often couched in terms of new understandings being realized "post-resurrection"<sup>42</sup> or "post-glorification",<sup>43</sup> but certainly nevertheless authorized, and perhaps inspired, by the action of the Holy Spirit. This is the result of an understanding of direct authorization of new interpretations from Jesus through the action of his Spirit within the community.<sup>44</sup> In the Farewell Discourse Jesus says "the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (14:26). And further:

I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the

things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (16:12–15)

In this way we can begin to see how the giving of the Holy Spirit allows authorization of new interpretations of events for the Johannine community,<sup>45</sup> presumably as required by changing circumstances, including difficult or traumatic ones. The ability to reimagine what traditions mean for new situations is an important flexibility for a community under duress. If license for interpretive innovation can be attributed to the Holy Spirit, and by extension, Jesus, and God the Father,<sup>46</sup> we can begin to see how so much innovation appears to have occurred in the Gospel of John as compared to the Synoptics, and also how freely the author interprets the events of Jesus' life through the lens of the experience of the Johannine community. Functionally, then, Jesus and his authoritative teachings are replaced by the Johannine community's beliefs about Jesus, as understood to be authenticated and authorized through the operation of the Holy Spirit. We will see some of the issues that arise from such a strong sense of divinely sanctioned interpretation in our subsequent analysis.

### 3.3. Compensation for the Destroyed Temple with the Johannine Community

While many interpreters have thought that the Gospel of John teaches that the destroyed Jerusalem Temple is replaced by Jesus (Brown 1966; Dodd 1968; Coloe 2001; Neyrey 2009; Hays 2014; Levine 2022),<sup>47</sup> in fact it makes much more sense, when viewed from the perspective of the experience of the Johannine community, to consider the community itself as a replacement for the Temple. Without going into too much detail<sup>48</sup> the basic historical understanding of the Temple as the primary locus of the dwelling of God's Spirit would not, in the time of the Johannine community have been adequately replaced by viewing Jesus as the locus of dwelling of God's Spirit, as Jesus is physically absent from the community and himself needs replacing by the Holy Spirit. Rather, the community itself would be seen as the locus of that dwelling.<sup>49</sup> That the Holy Spirit, as already discussed, is operating as a replacement for Jesus at the time of the writing of the Gospel cannot be in serious dispute as a result of the aforementioned testimony of the Gospel itself. One could make the case that the individual believer could be understood to be acting in this role rather than the community of believers, as many texts<sup>50</sup> do refer to the human body as a temple. But it is far more likely, due to the communal impulses of religion at this time, that the sense is corporate rather than individual.<sup>51</sup>

### 3.4. Johannine Community as Compensation for Lost Synagogue and Family Attachments

In the same passage as the first mention of synagogue excommunication (9:22), there seems to be some indication of family strife that accompanies the episode:

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." (9:18–23)

Leaving aside the anachronism of the passage<sup>52</sup> we can see a strain, and a developing distance between the parents and their son over Jesus. This is likely exacerbated when later the healed man is in fact driven out (9:34), precipitating a situation of divided loyalties between worshiping community and family. The Gospel refers (often negatively) to many people who kept their belief in Jesus secret for fear of the public consequences (e.g., Joseph of Arimathea [19:38], and possibly Nicodemus [19:39], but certainly many unnamed others are implied [e.g., 12:42–43]). What was the suggested response to this relational strife,

either at a familial level or a public level? The Gospel insists on public testimony (in spite of the consequences) and faithful cleavage to the Johannine community. An example of one intended response appears among those who do not flee the crucifixion, but rather stay faithful to Jesus, publicly, until the end: specifically, the Beloved disciple and Mary the mother of Jesus. The surrogate family that John's Jesus forges by fiat through his words: "behold your son . . . behold your mother", as a consequence of his faithful witness and theirs, is likely intended to appear exemplary for the Johannine community as it worked to respond to familial strife and relational suffering resulting from devotion to Jesus.

### 3.5. Totalizing Impulses to Address Conflict/Creating a Sectarian Community

In addition to its language of "universal" images,<sup>53</sup> the Gospel deploys other "totalizing" language very freely, which should perhaps be understood as a product of its generative environment in the experiences of the Johannine community.<sup>54</sup> Chapter three is illustrative:

The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, yet no one accepts his testimony. Whoever has accepted his testimony has certified this, that God is true. He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God's wrath. (3:31–36)

This passage is replete with totalizing words such as "all", "no one", "whoever", "true", "without measure", and "eternal." The use of such language is typical for John. "Truth" (ἡ ἀλήθεια) and "true" (ἀληθής) appear approximately three times as often in John as in the Synoptic Gospels combined. "No one" (οὐδεὶς) appears more in John than any of the Synoptics, as do the concepts of "only" and "never." This is part of a pattern throughout John in which we see totalizing language likely deployed within an exclusive, sectarian text intended for exclusive, sectarian use.

The language in John is polarizing,<sup>55</sup> suggesting that anyone who disagrees with the Johannine community's interpretation of "the Gospel", or who Jesus is, doesn't know God the Father (8:19), and should perish, e.g., "you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am [he]" (8:24). The author and/or community are confident in their interpretation of "the truth"<sup>56</sup> as a result of their conviction regarding the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This confidence, based on the sense of the transference of authority from God the Father (through all of the aforementioned transitive language) to the community<sup>57</sup> is seen in the confidence with which judgment<sup>58</sup> is assigned to those who harmed the community (e.g., 9:39), or even simply to those who do not conform to the community's standards.<sup>59</sup>

Having the right belief (only that which the Johannine community sanctions) will "save" you (4:50), and believing this right thing about Jesus is equated with "doing good", while not believing the right thing is equated with "doing evil" (5:28–29). This formulation, "this is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent" (6:29), is essentially entirely ideological, and the Gospel sows seeds of self-doubt even among those who do believe<sup>60</sup> in order to bolster efforts at conformity of belief. Believe enough and you can see healing (11:40). Belief is treated as an antidote to suffering: "Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me" (14:1). Sometimes belief is treated as exemplary in the text without even any clear narrative sense of what is being believed!<sup>61</sup> The particular perspective of the community is not even understood to be objectively discernable, and in this way the Gospel of John represents an example of "apocalyptic" thinking,<sup>62</sup> which is to say, presenting a worldview that purports to require divinely revealed, and otherwise imperceptible,<sup>63</sup> knowledge to understand and adopt.

In some ways, it appears that the Gospel account seeks to trap people within the community based on what they know from their experience to be true about Jesus: "Jesus

asked the twelve, ‘Do you also wish to go away?’ Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God’” (6:67–69). One could argue that this experience of good things, good works,<sup>64</sup> is leveraged in attempts to maintain cohesion and conformity to “the” Way. And for John, there is no other way (10:1). The proper way is through belief in the interpretation of Jesus proffered by the Johannine community (as in 14:6–7) and obedience to the community. This conformity to beliefs and “commandments” is then described as the terms under which love is given: “They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them” (14:21). This love is conditional: “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love” (15:10).<sup>65</sup> “You are my friends if you do what I command you” (15:14).<sup>66</sup> This language of love that is deployed heavily in the Farewell Discourse (e.g., 17:20–23, 26) relies on the language of obedience that comes before. And this love is insular. It is not for outsiders, but only for the community’s own, i.e., “one another.”<sup>67</sup> Even the self-sacrificial love of 15:12–13 is only self-sacrificial insularity, meant only for the community.<sup>68</sup> Thus even much of the often quoted and apparently lovely language that appears in the Gospel has behind it, or paired with it,<sup>69</sup> very controlling or vindictive negative elements or bilious negative corollaries. This reading accords with Raymond Brown’s (1979) assessment of the community in *The Community of The Beloved Disciple*.<sup>70</sup>

### 3.6. Condemnation of Others: The World and “the Jews”

The extremity of exclusivity and ire directed at the perceived enemies of the community, those outside it, who disagree with it, or who simply don’t cleave quite closely enough to its priorities, is particularly vivid. General condemnations abound. Chapter three is indicative:

Those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. (3:18–20)

However, as is clear to any reader of the Gospel, the general condemnations appear throughout (e.g., 1:29, 3:3, 7:7, 12:31, 14:17, 15:19, 16:8ff., 17:25).<sup>71</sup>

Beyond these general condemnations however a particular ire is reserved for “near” enemies, specifically fellow Jews who have not embraced the Johannine community’s understanding of Jesus, who in the eyes of the author of John, have contributed to the suffering of his community. The generally negative portrayal of “the Jews” in the Gospel of John has been much documented and debated, but for our purposes here it is sufficient simply to identify the tendencies toward anti-Jewish language and characterizations as persistent and vituperative (See Table 1).<sup>72</sup> Beyond the specific statements there is the further judicial reversal theme, as highlighted by several scholars,<sup>73</sup> whereby according to the structure of the narrative, Jesus only *appears* to be judged but in fact it is his accusers and those who cause his execution who are judged. According to the narrative the guiltiest party is “the Jews”, particularly as represented by the religious elites. Pilate, who actually orders the execution, and by all reasonable historical accounts had to have been the primary one responsible, is effectively exonerated (19:11) by the author.

**Table 1.** Some of the Negative Portrayals of “the Jews” in the Gospel of John. (An \* denotes that the addressees are the Jews).

1:11	Jesus’ “own people did not accept him”
5:16	“The Jews persecuted Jesus.”
5:18	“The Jews sought all the more to kill him.”
5:37	“His [God’s] voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen.”
5:42	“You* do not have the love of God within you.”
5:45	“It is Moses who accuses you*.”
5:47	“If you* believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me.”
5:47	“You* do not believe his writings.”
7:1	“The Jews sought to kill him.”
7:19	“Why do you* seek to kill me?”
7:25	“They seek to kill me.” (Referring to Jews).
7:26	“Can it be that the [Jewish] authorities really know that this is the Christ [and reject him]?”
7:28	“Him [God] you* do not know.”
8:19	“You* know neither me nor my Father.”
8:24	“I told you* that you would die in your sins.”
8:54ff.	“You* say that he is your God. But you have not known him.”
10:8ff.	“All who came before me are thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not heed them . . . the thief only comes to kill and destroy . . . he who is a hireling and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hireling and cares nothing for the sheep.”
10:32	“I have shown you* many good works from the Father; for which of these do you stone me?”
11:8	“Rabbi, the Jews were but now seeking to stone you.”
11:49	The realpolitik of Caiaphas’ pragmatic statement is intended to reflect negatively upon the Jewish authorities.
18:35	“Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me.”
18:38	Pilate’s “I find no crime in him” is an indictment of Jewish conspirators (repeated in 19:4 and 19:6).
19:6	“Crucify him.” (These words are given to Jews).
19:11	“He who delivered me to you has the greater sin.” (A condemnation of the Jews).
19:12	“Upon this Pilate sought to release him but the Jews cried out, ‘If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend; everyone who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar.’”
19:15	“Crucify him.” (These words are given to Jews).
19:15	“We have no king but Caesar.” (These words are given to Jews).

As can no doubt be seen from their tone and exaggerated nature, most of these portrayals, criticisms, and accusations can at best be understood as inaccurate and at worst, entirely unfair and unjustly vindictive. In many instances Jesus’ language toward “the Jews” is deliberately confusing or ambiguous, such as in the interchange with Nicodemus over being born *ἄνωθεν*.<sup>74</sup> The narrator repeatedly suggests that “the Jews” want to kill Jesus because he broke the Sabbath (5:16, 5:18, 7:23–24) or made himself equal to God (5:18), when the narrative actually shows that he was using deliberately confusing and combative

language that intentionally alienates those who do not already understand things according to the interpretation of the Johannine community. The narrator has Jesus say “Why do you seek to kill me?” in 7:19, which is then immediately followed by the obvious (from the narrative) retort “Who is seeking to kill you?” In a sense, this is a narrative admission of the absurdity of the accusations against “the Jews.” They don’t make sense in their narrative context. They are retrojections based on later disagreements, and particularly poisonous retrojections at that. “The Jews” are made to appear outlandishly dull, saying “tell us plainly” in 10:24 when Jesus obviously already did so. In 8:31–59 even Jews who had believed are goaded into disbelief and violent action by unnecessarily and infuriatingly combative argumentation from Jesus.

These tendencies toward specious argumentation intended to alienate are perhaps best on display in the “Bread of Life” discourse in 6:26–71. Jesus starts by making an odd claim following the miraculous feeding, that he is in fact the “bread of life.” In a series of questions apparently intended to attempt to understand the teaching, his interlocutors are goaded into rejection of increasingly outlandish claims. These go from the bread being Jesus’ literal flesh (σάρξ, 6:51), to the insistence by Jesus that they must literally eat (ἐάν μὴ φάγητε) his flesh and drink his blood (6:53), to the requirement that to be saved each must become “one who chews (ὁ τρώγων)” his flesh (6:54). A call to cannibalism, never publicly suggested to be figurative, is not a fair reason to suggest that those who reject you are being unreasonable. And yet, the insistence from the author is that Jesus has done nothing wrong, and that all fault lies with those who reject him:

If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not have sin. But now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. It was to fulfill the word that is written in their law, ‘They hated me without a cause.’ (15:22–25)

What we have here is, effectively, a Gospel-length ideological purity test intended to weed out weak believers, to self-protect from criticism, and harangue the perceived enemies of the Johannine community:

I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness. I do not judge anyone who hears my words and does not keep them, for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. The one who rejects me and does not receive my word has a judge; on the last day the word that I have spoken will serve as judge. (12:46–48)

There is no sense that those who disagree may have legitimate arguments, even as the Gospel itself presents many such ostensibly fair critiques, questions, and criticisms.<sup>75</sup> In spite of legitimate reasons for disputing the claims of John’s Jesus (claims which are not even all directly supported in the Synoptic Gospels) the narrative insists on retributive framing of events in order to condemn perceived enemies. John employs tragic irony in 11:48 to suggest indirectly that the execution of Jesus, in an attempt to avoid the destruction of the Temple, has in fact resulted in the vindication of Jesus over his enemies and the subsequent destruction of the Temple. John consigns not just those who have caused Jesus’ and his community’s suffering, but all those who disagree with him, to a judgment ordained by God: “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, so that they might not look with their eyes, and understand with their heart and turn— and I would heal them” (12:40). He views all who reject his message as predestined to punishment, even those who believe but will not confess publicly “for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (12:43).

### 3.7. Other Additional Responses

In addition to providing explanation for the rejection of their views and community, the strategy of employing themes of predestination, foreknowledge of events, and explicit language of the divine control of events by God/Jesus, is intended to comfort the reader

who may otherwise be inclined to think that the suffering experienced is indicative either of failure or of the error of the Johannine worldview. Such language is ubiquitous in the Gospel.<sup>76</sup> This is not to say that the author of the Gospel subscribed to a consistent theology of predestination. There is still a sense that there is human agency and responsibility, and that even “derivation as destiny” can be chosen (Keck 1996).<sup>77</sup> Rather, the deployment of the theme is in service to the author’s sectarian priorities.

Another strategy for dealing with trauma includes minimization of Jesus’ suffering, as seen in the unique framing of Jesus’ conflicted internal monologue in John: “Now my soul is troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father save me from this hour?’ No” (12:27). It can also be seen in the lack of expressed feeling from Jesus in Gethsemane (18:4), and his impassive “it is finished” on the cross (19:30), suggesting total control rather than suffering. Peter’s death is also recast in positive terms: “This he said to show by what death he was to glorify God” (21:19). This recasting of suffering as good, and in particular, Jesus’ crucifixion and death as glorifying, represents another strategy deployed in the Gospel in response to suffering. It is by no means unique to John, as the entire early Jesus movement worked to turn an obviously horrific and shameful experience of suffering in the crucifixion into one with positive connotations. These attempts to reframe Jesus’ execution as glorifying, or as purposeful, appear throughout the Gospel.<sup>78</sup> There are, without doubt, many other less marked patterns (TYPOI) of strategy for dealing with trauma, suffering, and loss in the Gospel, some examples of which I have attempted to collate in Appendix B,<sup>79</sup> but I have enumerated the primary ones above.

#### 4. Discussion: What If the TYPOI Are Warnings, Not Examples?

As is typical according to Bachelard (1964) for “dwelling”-interested texts produced in response to trauma, the Gospel of John produces compensatory responses out of its traumatic experience, in many cases working to replace the things lost (Jesus, the Beloved Disciple, the Temple, the Jewish synagogue community) with a new idealized version (the Holy Spirit, the Gospel account, the Johannine community), but also producing polemical, condemnatory language both for those blamed (the Jews), and all those outside its own close-knit sphere (the world).

Many of these responses to trauma and suffering may have been problematic even in their own time. The Gospel’s approach to consolation bears some resemblance to the paradigms of ancient consolation literature, especially in the Farewell Discourse (see Holloway 2005, pp. 1–34; Parnenios 2005; Malunowiczowna 1975), but its polemical responses do not seem to find substantial parallel in ancient teaching on consolation or therapeutic speech (Entralgo 1970), nor do the illogical rhetorical strategies. And there is in fact no guarantee that in its final (vituperative) form that it was well received even in its *immediate* context.

The redactional seams and other evidences of ongoing editing<sup>80</sup> suggest the Gospel wasn’t fully finished. That may mean either that the community dissolved before the final form of the text could shape it significantly, or even that it dissolved *because* of the approach the Gospel took to dealing with the community’s experiences.<sup>81</sup> The Johannine community only had to last long enough to be absorbed into other Christian communities where other texts that were less insular were more important. The text, *in isolation*, may not have been a success. It is possible that the legitimacy of the perspective and approach of John in its reception is entirely dependent on the dilution of its influence through being only one of many important texts. It may have originally aspired to be the “only” Gospel in its community, but once outside of that sphere could it possibly have been?

Once outside that original sphere, however, the Gospel’s problematic approach to dealing with the traumatic events that shaped it became even more problematic because of the outsized theological influence John developed in the Christian church. It quickly became the lens through which Christians interpreted Jesus’ identity and the other gospels, reading its perspective into the Synoptics (Pagels 2003, pp. 143–85). That such a clearly anti-Jewish and rhetorically polemical text became the most influential gospel of course had

disastrous consequences for Jews, who are victimized and traumatized by the expansive effects of the Gospel's condemnatory language, and even its doctrine (Reinhartz 2015), to this day.<sup>82</sup> John's retributive response to losing "home" has inflicted upon many of the Jews who remained in the synagogue a catastrophically worse displacement. The latter half of the twentieth century saw various attempts by Jews and Christians to take seriously the problematic language in John and to stop the practice of copying its condemnation of Jews. This period also saw various scholarly admissions of the impoverished ethics of the Gospel,<sup>83</sup> especially compared to the Synoptic Gospels.

However, a veritable cottage industry of scholarly production related to Johannine Ethics has sprung up in the early decades of the twenty-first century (e.g., Nissen 1999; Kanagaraj 2001; Smith 2002; Schnelle 2006; van der Watt 2006; Zimmermann 2009; Zimmermann 2012a; Zimmermann 2012b; van der Watt and Zimmermann 2012; Frey 2013; Zimmermann 2013; Weyer-Menkhoff 2014; Trozzo 2017; Brown and Skinner 2017; Bennema 2017; Drews 2017; Gorman 2017; Rahmsdorf 2019; van der Watt 2019; Shin 2019; Skinner 2020; McDowell 2022). This movement has largely featured strenuous attempts to mine ethics from John.<sup>84</sup> It has been paralleled by<sup>85</sup> a movement in Johannine studies to find "nuance" in the anti-Jewish language of the Gospel,<sup>86</sup> by extension minimize the significance of said anti-Jewish language, and thus "exculpate" the text, as Amy-Jill Levine (2006) says.

Both of these movements doth protest too much.<sup>87</sup> Just because some references to "the Jews" in John are not overtly negative, or may refer only to the Judean authorities, or that Jesus was Jewish, or that the author may once have identified as Jewish, does not change the fact that rhetorically the effect of the language throughout the Gospel is substantially and incontrovertibly anti-Jewish (Levine 2006; Sheridan 2013). Just because the Gospel of John has an "implicit" ethics,<sup>88</sup> does not mean that these ethics constitute an adequate, or fully responsible approach to ethics for modern environments of reception in which the Fourth Gospel is given pride of place.<sup>89</sup> When compared to the ethics of other New Testament texts, Johannine ethics appear lacking, not even clearly taking up the admonition to "love your enemy."<sup>90</sup> Sanders (1975) was not wrong to assert that the twentieth-century reception of John in fundamentalist groups—who ostensibly seek to be faithful to the text and copy its example—shows that there is a "moral bankruptcy" to the ethics of John.

It would seem that the many attempts to discern a Johannine ethics, and the attempts to dismiss the Gospel of John's anti-Jewish language, indicate anxiety.<sup>91</sup> This anxiety seems to have two objects: concern over what is an obvious dearth of overtly actionable ethics in John, and concern to present scripture as unobjectionable as a source of ethics and with respect to anti-Judaism. While the goals of these attempts may appear noble, they obscure the actual nature of the Gospel of John rather than dealing with it as it is: lacking appropriately actionable ethics, and overtly anti-Jewish.

These anxieties seem to be based in common Christian misapprehensions about scripture. Many Christian readers, including some scholars, balk at the interpretations presented above, due in part to the assumption that considering a text to be scripture requires that it be treated as "true", or "infallible", or "exemplary"<sup>92</sup> (or perhaps all three), while the observations of this paper contest such a categorization. Protests of the kind that insist that our primary inquiry be "but what if it were true?"<sup>93</sup> (while expecting an affirmative answer and an attendant imperative deference to the attitudes presented as normative in the text) fail to ask *how* such a text might be "true" and whether its "truthiness" might yet still fail to constitute a prescriptive example.

In this sense, the interpretive approaches employed by some Black Christians in America, such as those highlighted by Abraham Smith (2007) offer an alternative. In response to the many instances of scripture which ostensibly condoned, or at least assumed the normativity of slavery, many faithful Black Americans deployed interpretive strategies, including "radical rejection", "intra-canonical correction", and "extra-canonical correction", in support of their insistence that certain paradigms from scripture could not be received as exemplary or prescriptive. Lisa Bowens (2020) acknowledges this strand of interpretation in

her discussion of Howard Thurman and Albert Cleage Jr. in her chapter “African American Pauline Hermeneutics and the Art of Biblical Interpretation” in *African American Readings of Paul: Reception, Resistance, and Transformation*. Among the scriptures used for critique was certainly Jesus’ statement to his faithful followers in John 15:15 “I no longer call you slaves . . . but friends” which inspired generations of enslaved Black Americans to resist both slavery and pro-slavery biblical interpretation.

But it is not only possible or necessary to employ the “radical rejection” approach in a hermeneutical “state of exception” prompted by experiences of suffering, trauma, and marginalization for the reader (e.g., the experience of enslaved Black Americans). There are similar approaches to this issue affirmed even in Christian expressions as institutionally committed as the Anglican Communion.

The thirty-nine “Articles of Religion” in *The Book of Common Prayer* of the Episcopal Church suggest that certain scriptures “(as Heirome saith) the Church doth read for example of life . . . but yet doth it not apply them to establish any doctrine.”<sup>94</sup> And the meaning of “example” here is crucial. No doubt, in the background to “example” is the Greek *TYPOS*, which can mean “example” but more literally means “pattern”, and in John 20:25 it means the “pattern” from the nails in Jesus’ hands. Figuratively it often means “example” but it is regularly used to connote, not merely a positive example to be followed, but a negative example to be avoided. Such is the clear usage, for example, in chapter 10 of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, where he suggests that events in Israel’s history (which necessarily includes negative examples to be avoided) are a guide for believers. In this sense, scripture offers *TYPOI*, that is “patterns” that can be examples or warnings. In the Anglican Church this concept is formally and officially applied to the deuterocanonical books as per the “Thirty-nine Articles”, however biblical scholars and clergy have long applied the idea to much of the rest of scripture in practice, including the New Testament texts.<sup>95</sup>

As it pertains to our current inquiry, one certainly cannot responsibly continue to support the polemical statements of the New Testament authors against Jews in light of the results of such language in the *Shoah*.<sup>96</sup> For decades, responsible biblical scholars and clergy have been interpreting irresponsible<sup>97</sup> New Testament pronouncements about “the Jews” as a negative example for the church to avoid rather than a positive example still to be copied, though this is usually done without explicitly admitting what is actually implied: that some of the suggestions of New Testament authors *require faithful rejection* and their prescriptions should not be followed by those who receive their texts as scripture.<sup>98</sup> And though at the time he was referring specifically to biblical treatments of slavery and gender roles, such a perspective was cogently and openly advocated by Anglican Bishop Desmond Tutu in 2009 when, in discussing how the Bible should be received he said “there are certain parts which you have to say no to.”<sup>99</sup>

Such an approach to texts received as scripture (honoring *and* sifting) has a well-established pedigree. The Jewish traditions of interpretation have acknowledged this reality for millennia, recognizing that responsible reception of the text requires relative prioritization; which is to say, saying “yes” to some parts of scripture requires saying “no” to others.<sup>100</sup> This is not to say that Christians should only allow some Hebrew Bible scriptures to be prioritized over others, or for New Testament scriptures to be prioritized over Hebrew Bible texts. These approaches perpetuate the very Christian anti-Judaism that must be avoided. Some Christians recognize the need to prioritize certain New Testament texts and teachings over others. Such de-prioritized texts can be understood as presenting warnings to be avoided rather than examples to be followed.

There is no need to go as far as Episcopal Bishop (emeritus) John Shelby Spong, whose treatment of the Gospel of John does not de-categorize it as scripture, but does suggest that its account is largely “mythological” (Spong 2013). One can consider it to be scripture, and not purely mythology, and yet still not view it as exemplary. Those who would protest that neither Bishop Tutu’s nor Bishop Spong’s statements are aligned with “true” orthodox Anglican theology should also remember that neither of them was ever required to recant their—very public—positions under canon law for heresy, because their perspectives

are not heretical in the Anglican tradition. This approach to reading simply amounts to a hermeneutically self-conscious awareness of limitation—one which nevertheless is typically rejected in name by fundamentalists unaware of the ways they also functionally prioritize certain texts over others in a similar fashion. Scripture is not univocal. Not even the Gospel of John is univocal. The parts of the Gospel that were composed under a different motivating impulse from the anti-Jewish sections can be, and in some traditions are, allowed to critique the anti-Jewish polemic of the Gospel, insisting, with John 4:22 that “salvation is from the Jews.” Some faithful Christian readers simply reject both the author’s efforts to convince them to make his Jewish enemies their own, and the text’s overall enemy-treatment rhetoric and paradigms.

## 5. Conclusions

As we have seen, among the formative influences behind the Gospel are various experiences of trauma and suffering. And among the typical literary manifestations of such experiences in texts focused on “dwelling” are “world-negating”, angry, polemical responses to the traumatic experiences. Such responses appear in John. But in more general terms, it has been widely acknowledged<sup>101</sup> that the psychological dynamics present in many sectarian communities appear pervasive within the Fourth Gospel. This reality, combined with the, also widely acknowledged, traumatized background of the Gospel presents an important question for those who receive the Gospel of John as scripture: If such language is part of the Gospel’s response to suffering, what should be done with such language? If the patterns discerned in John’s response to trauma are representative of common human behavioral patterns, does that mean that they constitute an inevitable or ideal response? To what degree can those who receive the Gospel of John as scripture consider its response to trauma exemplary?

The Bible is full of patterns, and many of them need not, or indeed *should not*, be copied. The Gospel of John evidences many patterns in its responses to suffering. Some of these have been shown to be both unhealthy for those who copy them,<sup>102</sup> and fatal to those victimized by the Gospel’s vengeful characterizations of alterity. At this point, the church has the ability to stop replicating harmful paradigms from the Gospel of John, and the attendant obligation to do so, even with respect to its resources for addressing suffering. Faithful Christians can and do openly and freely refuse to copy patterns of behavior that are harmful, even when they appear in the Bible. The Gospel may present *TYPOI*, but like Thomas (20:24-29), one can recognize their outline without plunging one’s fingers in and recapitulating and revivifying the trauma. In fact, it is incumbent upon those who receive this text as scripture, if they are to appropriate any positive patterns from the Gospel of John,<sup>103</sup> that they hasten to reject explicitly and without caveat the deeply harmful patterns of language and behavior that manifest in parallel with language of beauty, hope, and healing. In short, many Christians have recognized that one of the most obvious and compelling resources offered by the Gospel of John for addressing suffering and trauma is the warning provided by its examples of behavior to avoid.

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## Appendix A

### Language of Foreknowledge and Divine Control of Events in John.

3:27	“No one can receive anything except what is given him from heaven.”
6:44	“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.”
6:65	“No one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.”
7:33	“I shall be with you a little longer, and then I go to him who sent me.”
8:23	“You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world.” Here said to indicate unchangeable destiny.
10:18	“No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.”
10:26	“You do not believe because you do not belong to my sheep.”
12:39	“Therefore they could not believe. For Isaiah again said . . . ”
13:1	“Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart”
13:18	“I am not speaking of you all; I know whom I have chosen”
13:19	“I tell you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am [he].”
13:26–27	“So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. Then after the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him ‘What you are going to do, do quickly.’”
14:29	“Now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place, you may believe.”
14:30	“He has no power over me” (14:30).
15:16	“You did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you.”
15:19	“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”
16:4	“I have said these things to you that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you of them.”
16:32–33	“The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each one to his home, and you will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me. I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!”
17:6	“I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.”
17:9	“I am not asking on behalf of the world but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours.”
17:12	“Not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost.”
18:4ff.	“Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward . . . ” and scared everyone with I am statements.
19:11	“You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above.”

## Appendix B

### Additional Strategies for Addressing Trauma and Loss in the Gospel of John.

Promise of resurrection/raising of the dead (5:21, 6:39–40).

Compensatory heavenly home (13:36, 14:1–4, 17:24).

Promise that those who believe will never die (e.g., 11:26).<sup>104</sup>

Add new stories (e.g., 8:1–11)?<sup>105</sup>

Escape/get out of there (10:40).

Euphemize/Gaslight/Lie (E.g., “this illness is not unto death” [11:4]).<sup>106</sup>

Being insensitive to the suffering of others to advance your own agenda (11:5–6).<sup>107</sup>

Euphemize: 11:11–14 saying “he’s asleep” when actually “he’s dead.”<sup>108</sup>

Accept suffering as in Mark: “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (11:16).

Mary anoints Jesus with costly perfume (12:3) and is not rebuked by Jesus.

Be dismissive of the poor in order to prioritize “Jesus” (11:8).<sup>109</sup>

Invitation into suffering with Jesus (12:23–26, 15:20).  
 Be explicitly comforting (14:1, 14:18, 14:27, 17:13, 20:20, 20:21).<sup>110</sup>  
 Say that being with God is better (14:28).  
 Order others to rejoice and not mourn (14:28).  
 Reject previous state of slavery (15:15): “no longer slaves . . . but friends . . . ”  
 Acknowledge the danger of “falling away” (16:1).<sup>111</sup>  
 Acknowledge sorrow (16:6).  
 Get others out of trouble (18:8, 18:19).<sup>112</sup>  
 Keep your head down (approach of secret disciples, frowned on by John).  
 Overcompensate: bring extravagant amounts of myrrh and aloes to the tomb (19:39).  
 Be persistently faithful and responsible (e.g., show up early to anoint the body, 20:1).  
 Deal with “departure” by telling others (20:2).  
 Weep (11:33, 11:35, 16:20, 20:11). Or ask people why they are weeping (20:13, 20:15).  
 Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances.  
 Showing proofs of resurrection (20:20, 20:27).  
 Require proof to believe the resurrection (20:25).  
 Insist people not require proof of the resurrection (20:29).  
 Go back to work (21:3).

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Including frequent language of “abiding” and related to the “indwelling.” See Pruszinski (2021a, pp. 11–21).
- <sup>2</sup> Bachelard, coming from a background in the philosophy of science, is aware of the seemingly scientific impulse toward precision (Bachelard 1964, pp. 1–14). But he recognizes that the literary impulse is poetic and produces images rather than language easily reducible to “principe” (Bachelard 1964, p. 1). Analysis of literature requires “l’archéologie des images” (Bachelard 1964, p. 4). Such archaeology will not merely uncover “les souffrances secrètes” (Bachelard 1964, p. 12) and the “pressions –surtout de l’oppression” (Bachelard 1964, p. 2) but will recognize that the phenomenology of writing produces a “rentissement” (Bachelard 1964, p. 2) of images of such suffering which do not map precisely onto the lived experiences, but are rather a “sublimation” of them (Bachelard 1964, p. 13) that may resonate with the reader in spite of, or even because of, ostensible distortions. Considering such images (including images of “dwelling” and “trauma” or “suffering”) in accordance with the nature of their production requires some comfort with imprecision, and as such, “Le vrai phénoménologue se doit d’être systématiquement modeste” (Bachelard 1964, p. 8).
- <sup>3</sup> Bachelard (1964, p. 24).
- <sup>4</sup> Such a broadly inclusive approach is merited, even if Reinhartz retreats from it later in her article, as it rightly acknowledges the breadth of experiences that can precipitate trauma recognized in, for instance, *DSM-5* (American Psychiatric Association 2013).
- <sup>5</sup> As suggested by Bachelard’s observations of the literary-psychology of traumatized/marginalized dwelling (in its full semantic range).
- <sup>6</sup> Here she describes how the Incarnation operates according to Geoffrey Hartman’s description of trauma (Hartman 1995, p. 543) which suggests that trauma constitutes “the rupture of the symbolic order.” This is a broadly inclusive idea of “trauma” which deserves consideration, but perhaps not at the expense of all other possible traumatizing events that may have affected the production of the Gospel.
- <sup>7</sup> She (Reinhartz 2015, p. 28) draws on the theories of Eyerman (2013) and Alexander (2004), who suggest that a potentially traumatic event only becomes actually traumatic when received as such by one or more people. This observation from theory is unobjectionable on its own, but does not logically result in an exegetical rule that a potentially traumatizing event can only be considered traumatic for the author of a text if the event is described in traumatic terms in the text.
- <sup>8</sup> Such a response often compensates for the loss or minimizes the loss by insisting nothing significant was lost, or that it was destined to occur, or that what remains is better, or that the loss is only illusory (Holloway 2005). Compensation here can also have the sense described by Foucault (1986, p. 27), imagining an ideal that helps us deal with reality.
- <sup>9</sup> Indeed, Reinhartz acknowledges that her choice for the core trauma in John, the Incarnation, is portrayed favorably by the author (Reinhartz 2015, p. 47). Why she allows positive framing for the Incarnation, but not other potentially traumatizing events is not clear.
- <sup>10</sup> Reinhartz (2018) favors a “propulsion” theory to explain the various features of the Gospel of John rather than an “expulsion” theory (Martyn 1979) which she articulates more fully in her *Cast Out of the Covenant: Jews and Anti-Judaism in the Gospel of John*, particularly chapter 7 (Reinhartz 2018, pp. 131–57). According to this theory the author of the Gospel is attempting to prompt Jews to leave the synagogue, rather than reacting to an expulsion episode. I would agree that propulsive rhetoric is present, but I don’t think that precludes an expulsion of some kind.

- 11 [Reinhartz \(2015, pp. 38–39\)](#) does not state specifically which theorists are the source of this conviction.
- 12 It should probably also be noted that her dismissal of the synagogue expulsion background is substantially based not in a reading of trauma theory, but in Reinhartz' own historical convictions regarding the text.
- 13 It might be more judicious to say that the ideas presented in John, which later developed into the doctrine of the Incarnation, may have had a traumatizing effect on the Johannine community and later communities of reception, including Jewish communities that rejected the ideas presented.
- 14 Death, loss of community, and loss of a city or temple are all understood as traumatic events requiring consolation in antiquity ([Holloway 2005](#)).
- 15 [American Psychiatric Association \(2013\)](#).
- 16 [Reinhartz \(2015\)](#) laments that so few literary treatments of trauma discuss the positive outcomes. This is one of the strengths of Bachelard's observations, and is certainly relevant for John, though the scope of this paper precludes an exhaustive treatment of the Gospel's "positive" responses.
- 17 Even as *DSM-5* ([American Psychiatric Association 2013](#), pp. 271–80) suggests that a very wide range of events and experiences, including vicarious ones only experienced through narration or report, can induce trauma.
- 18 "Cast out, that is to say, thrown out . . . a circumstance in which the hostility of men and of the universe accumulates" ([Bachelard 1994](#), p. 7). The English translation of [Bachelard \(1964\)](#) used here is the M. Jolas translation ([Bachelard 1994](#)).
- 19 It "maintains [the author] through the storms of the heavens and through those of life" amid a "disturbed world" ([Bachelard](#), pp. 7, 210).
- 20 [Bachelard \(1994, p. 33\)](#): "We must lose our earthly Paradise in order actually to live in it, to experience it in the reality of its images, in the absolute sublimation that transcends all [suffering]."
- 21 Such an experience "appelle l'homme . . . affronter le cosmos" ([Bachelard 1964](#), p. 58).
- 22 One need not agree with Martyn's "two-level drama" thesis or the idea of the "Johannine Community" as significantly more sectarian than other Christian communities to acknowledge the operation of these psychological forces in the shaping of the Gospel.
- 23 "Le rêveur, dans son coin, a rayé le monde en une rêverie minutieuse qui détruit . . . [le] monde" ([Bachelard 1964](#), p. 135). And documents produced under such influence bear "la marque d'un négativisme . . . le coin <<vécu>> refuse la vie, restreint la vie, cache la vie. Le coin est alors une négation de l'Univers" ([Bachelard 1964](#), p. 130). [Thate \(2019, pp. 81, 105\)](#) identifies this dynamic at work in the Gospel of Mark, though he prefers not to emphasize it.
- 24 These align with Criteria C4, C5, and D2 among the diagnostic features described for PTSD in *DSM-5* ([American Psychiatric Association 2013](#)).
- 25 There is not sufficient space within the context of this paper to discuss at length the possibly "positive" compensatory responses to suffering evidenced in the language of the Fourth Gospel, but certainly the ideal language, discussion of the heavenly home, communion with God, and imagery of sustenance (light, bread, water, shelter, life, etc.) could be understood in this way.
- 26 As stated by [Reinhartz \(2015, p. 38\)](#). However, a particular trauma need not consume an entire work nor constitute the "core" of that work (*pace* [Reinhartz 2015, p. 39](#)) for us to consider the work as being shaped by it or responding to it. If the Gospel is shaped by multiple traumas they can't all form the single core of the work.
- 27 It should be acknowledged that Jesus' passion/execution and Jesus' absence afterward can be understood to operate as distinct traumatic events, the former very obviously fitting typical patterns of a traumatizing event in the medical literature, and the latter, while fulfilling elements of these patterns, doing so somewhat less vividly, but certainly still fitting a broader definition of "traumatic" experience. The two are combined under one categorical heading for the purposes of this paper in part due to their historical connection: Jesus' death must be understood as connected to his absence, even as the Johannine resurrection appearance accounts ostensibly separate them. One could argue that the separation which is achieved between them through the production of the resurrection accounts is itself is a coping strategy for dealing with the traumatic events (as will be considered later). Nevertheless, both should be understood as traumatizing "events" and the author's responses to them will be considered.
- 28 A small number of scholars suggest that this disciple is a literary fiction (e.g., [Dunderberg 2002](#)), however for the purposes of this paper I will assume that the disciple is an actual historical figure who was important to the Johannine community. In my estimation it strains credulity that the author of the Gospel would seek to address rumors related to the death of the Beloved Disciple (21:21–23) if such a person were a literary fiction.
- 29 Even as other biblical texts suggest that John the son of Zebedee, who is usually assumed to have been the "disciple whom Jesus loved", was illiterate (e.g., [Acts 4:13](#)).
- 30 [Charlesworth \(2019, pp. 64–65\)](#) refers to this loss as likely "traumatic."
- 31 If not all the details of Martyn's reconstructions, e.g., the purported Jamnia decision. Though Joel [Marcus \(2009\)](#) supports Martyn's contention and, at least as of the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting of November 2018, did not believe that his arguments have been refuted.

- 32 Along with the private home, these are the two most important loci associated with “rest” and “dwelling” for Jews of the first-century CE.
- 33 While I do not agree with the entirety of assessments such as those of Richard Bauckham (1998) or Adele Reinhartz (2018) that the evidence for a particularly sectarian Johannine Community shaped by a later synagogue expulsion episode is inadequate, the point is not crucial for the purposes of this paper. I am simply drawing out the responses that the Fourth Gospel displays to what appear to be significant experiences of suffering from conflict, trauma, and loss. Whether a synagogue expulsion happened according to the theory of J. L. Martyn is not important, because the text itself suggests that such an experience at least lies in the earlier background of the community (see Bernier 2013; Charlesworth 2019, p. 13 n. 10, p. 45), if not its recent life. Jörg Frey (2018, p. 26) writes: “There is no need to ascribe such a rejection to a decision of the rabbis in Palestine, as J. Louis Martyn and others have suggested, but it is quite plausible that diaspora synagogues after 70 CE were in the position to reject such a deviant group from their assemblies.”
- Similarly, whether the community was unusually sectarian in comparison to the broader contemporaneous church (as suggested by many scholars, among them Martinus C. de Boer 2018) is not important, as the evidence from the Gospel itself suggests that it at least displayed many characteristics of sectarian ideology, as I will show. I do however agree with Reinhartz, against many of those scholars who posit a synagogue expulsion episode as a formative experience for the Johannine community, that an expulsion background does not soften the problem of anti-Jewish rhetoric.
- 34 As indicated in the prayer at the end of the Farewell Discourse (17:20–21): “I ask not only on behalf of these [the disciples in the room with him], but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”
- 35 Whether one agrees with the attempts by some modern scholars to excuse the polemical language against the *ioudaioi* as simply in-group argumentation, or more oriented toward Judean leaders than all Jews, or geographical rather than ethnic or religious etc. (Ruth Sheridan (2013) has a good summary of many of these theories), the plain meaning of the text as received (and certainly in common English translations) is highly anti-Jewish. All the aforementioned attempts to justify the vindictive language are speculative and partial at best, and the fact remains that the author of John unapologetically polemicizes against everyone who disagrees with him, even those who disagree in the most marginal of ways, as we will see. Nevertheless, that the target of this polemic is “the Jews” matters for reception. And that pretty much everyone else who disagrees with the author also comes in for polemical treatment also matters for reception. It may be true that polemical language was commonplace in antiquity (see Johnson 1989), but that does not mean that such polemical language should be justified or ignored.
- 36 “It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you” (16:7).
- 37 The construction of prediction and intention generally (not just as pertaining to the giving of the Holy Spirit) is another strategy that the Gospel writer deploys to address traumatic events, as subsequent analysis will show. See also Appendix A.
- 38 E.g., “no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit” (3:5) and ff.
- 39 E.g., “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you” (14:16–17).
- 40 It is, of course, not entirely distinctive, as evidenced by the language on display in the Pauline Epistles and Acts, but the overt admissions in John of the Holy Spirit adjusting interpretations of events well after the fact seems to indicate a particularly strong, and in some ways distinctive, embrace of this type of pneumatology.
- 41 At least in the mind of the author, and or the Johannine community.
- 42 E.g., “After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken” (2:22). And “When you have lifted up the Son of man then you will know that I am he” (8:28).
- 43 E.g., “Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (7:39), and “His disciples did not understand this at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that this had been written of him and had been done to him” (12:16).
- 44 E.g., “What I am doing you do not know now, but afterward you will understand” (13:7).
- 45 E.g., “I have said this to you in figures; the hour is coming when I shall no longer speak to you in figures but tell you plainly of the Father” (16:25).
- 46 The Farewell Discourse is dripping with language of these transitive relationships, e.g.: “On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them” (14:20–21).
- 47 These arguments largely draw on somewhat anachronistic readings of John 2. Many interpreters read the loss of the Temple back into the life, teaching, and ministry of Jesus in John and suggest that he is the new locus for the dwelling of God’s Spirit. Believers in Jesus may have retrojected such ideas into their view of the life of the Historical Jesus, as the Gospel of John itself works to do. However, for modern interpreters to adopt such logic simply copies the very anachronism deployed by the author of John. It addresses neither the historical situation of the community, nor the fact that the Temple had not actually been destroyed

during the life of Jesus. Recapitulating Johannine anachronism in interpretation results in major logical inconsistencies and hermeneutical errors. For instance, if Jesus were the replacement for the Temple for believers in the Johannine community how would that work exactly? The Holy Spirit dwelling in the community is already acting as compensation for the departure of Jesus (as the Farewell Discourse suggests) because Jesus is no longer physically present with the community. Why would Jesus be viewed as adequate compensation for the loss of the Temple when the community already needed compensation for the loss of Jesus? If what is needed for worshippers in the Temple is access to the Spirit of God, then how does Jesus as a new locus for the Holy Spirit (in lieu of the Temple) help the Johannine community? The idea only works if what is needed is a replacement for the Temple during the life of the Historical Jesus, which is of course unlikely to have been understood or appreciated by followers of Jesus during his life (as John's Gospel itself admits). If Jesus is not physically present for the community, then the logic of divine dwelling in a Jesus-replaces-the-Temple-argument for this later historical stage (of composition) is flawed. Amy-Jill Levine (2022, p. 155) seems to make a similar move suggesting that Jesus replaces the Temple, basing her argument on the idea that Jesus' sacrifice replaces the Temple sacrifice, as if to suggest that is the entire function of the Temple. Just because some of the Temple functions are described as fulfilled in Jesus does not make Jesus a replacement for the Temple. If however the Spirit of God (or the Spirit of Jesus) is seen by the community to dwell in its midst then clearly the *community* would be viewed as the replacement for the Temple at the historical stage of the writing and early reception of the Gospel. The sacrifice is what enables God's Spirit to dwell in the new locus. The community is the new locus.

48 This idea is addressed more robustly in Pruszinski (2021a, pp. 39–57), expanding on what is concluded in Coloe (2001, pp. 13–14) *in nuce*: that whatever may be going on with the Temple at the ostensibly *einmalig* level in the text is mooted by the “present” experience of the Johannine community.

49 Not unlike in the Pauline Epistles (e.g., 2 Cor 6:16) or the sectarian documents at Qumran (e.g., 1QSb 1.2, 2.24, 5.6).

50 Including New Testament texts such as John 2:21, 1 Cor 3:16–17, and 1 Cor 6:19.

51 Additionally, the Gospel attempts to compensate for the loss of the Temple both by minimizing the importance of it and suggesting that the loss had already been predicted (e.g., 4:21). However, these coping strategies are applied to more traumas in the Gospel than just the loss of the Temple, as I will show below.

52 Even narratively the passage is anachronistic. Who at this narrative stage of the Gospel has so strong a sense of Jesus as the messiah that they would push this so hard as to be kicked out of their community of worship?

53 E.g., light/dark (1:4–5, 1:9, 3:19–21, 8:12, 9:4–5, 11:9–10, 12:35–36, 12:46), life/death (3:15–16, 3:36, 5:24–26, 6:51, 6:63, 8:12, 10:28, 11:24–26, 12:25, 14:6, 17:2–3), drink/thirst (4:10–15, 6:35, 6:53, 6:55–56, 7:37–39), food/hunger (4:31–34, 6:27, 6:35–71), air/Spirit (1:32–33, 3:5–8, 3:34, 4:23–24, 6:63, 7:39, 14:17, 14:26, 15:26, 16:13, 19:30, 20:22), *the way* (1:23, 14:4–6).

54 This is likely true whether or not one concedes that the Johannine community was more sectarian than other Christian communities; most of the Christian communities should be understood to be sectarian to some degree. However, experiences of suffering were also a significant part of the experience of most of the Christian communities, as previously mentioned, not just the Johannine community.

55 E.g., 3:17–21, 7:17, 8:12, 8:19, 12:43, 14:22, 15:2, 15:6, 17:14–16, among others.

56 “The sheep hear his voice . . . the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers” (10:3–5). See also 10:14: “my own know me.” See also “I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the father has bidden me” (12:50). See also 16:30: “Now we know that you know all things, and need none to question you; by this we believe that you came from God.” See also 17:7–8: “Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.”

57 See 20:23: “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

58 Which through much of the text is ostensibly assigned to Jesus (5:22, 5:27, 8:15–16, 9:39), even as it is clear that the Johannine community views itself as a legitimate arbiter of that judgment.

59 Including even just not admitting publicly that you agree with the Johannine community (12:43, 14:22).

60 E.g., 4:50/4:53, 7:4–5, 14:6–7, 15:2.

61 E.g., 20:8: “Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed.”

62 As suggested by John Ashton (2007).

63 E.g., 12:28–29, the voice only the faithful hear.

64 See 9:25: “one thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see.” See also 10:25: “The works that I do . . . bear witness”; “I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of these do you stone me?” (10:32); “believe the works” (10:38); “the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe in me that I am in the Father and the Father in me; or else believe me for the sake of the works themselves” (14:10–11).

65 Emphasis added.

66 Emphasis added.

67 See 13:1, 13:14, 13:34, 13:35, 15:12–13, 15:17.

- 68 “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (15:12–13).
- 69 E.g., 1:4–5, 1:9–13, 3:16–21, 3:36, 5:23–24, 10:10–11, 10:26–28, 12:46–48, 14:6–7, 14:23–24, 15:5–6. One example is the foot-washing scene, and intimate expression of care, which is nevertheless couched in exclusive terms: “If I do not wash you you have no part in me” (13:8), and while the “betrayers” Judas is presumably included, Jesus is still rude and condemnatory about it (13:11).
- 70 Raymond [Brown \(1979\)](#).
- 71 In 1:29 the “sin of the world” suggests blanket evil in the world. In 3:3 the need to be “born anew/from above” suggests natural birth is inadequate. In 7:7 John’s Jesus says “The world . . . hates me because I testify of it that its works are evil.” In 12:31 he says “Now is the judgment of this world.” In 14:17 he says “the world cannot receive [the Spirit of truth] because it neither sees him nor knows him.” And in 15:19: “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.” In 16:8ff.: “When [the Counselor] comes he will convince the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me . . . concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.” And in 17:25: “The world has not known you [God].”
- 72 See [Table 1](#): “Some of the Negative Portrayals of ‘the Jews’ in the Gospel of John.”
- 73 E.g., the “lawsuit with the world” as mentioned in [Martyn \(1979, p. 145\)](#).
- 74 I.e. hinging on the dual meaning: “from above” or “again.”
- 75 E.g., “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (1:46); “If I bear witness to myself my testimony is not true” (5:31); “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?” (6:42ff.); “This is a hard saying, who can listen to it?” (6:60); “The Pharisees answered them “Are you led astray, you also? Have any of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd, who do not know the law are accursed” (7:48ff.); “No prophet is to rise from Galilee” (7:53); “You are bearing witness to yourself; your testimony is not true” 8:13; “Even if I do bear witness to myself . . . ” (8:14) is an admission from John’s Jesus; “If any man keeps my word he will never see death” . . . “Abraham died, as did the prophets; and you say ‘if any one keeps my word, he will never taste death . . . ’” (8:51ff.); “It is not for a good work that we stone you but for blasphemy; because you, being a man, make yourself God” (10:33). Jesus’ subsequent response is logically weak and can apply to anyone; “We have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of man must be lifted up?” (12:34).
- 76 See [Appendix A](#): “Language of Foreknowledge and Divine Control of Events in John.”
- 77 See [Leander Keck \(1996\)](#).
- 78 E.g., “Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (3:14–15); “He prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad” (11:51–52); “When Jesus was glorified” (12:16); “The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified” (12:23); “Father glorify thy name . . . ” (12:28); “I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself” (12:32); “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once” (13:31–32); “Glorify thy son” (17:1); “It was better to have one person die for the people” (18:4).
- 79 See [Appendix B](#): “Additional Strategies for Addressing Suffering and Loss in The Gospel of John.” This list is by no means exhaustive.
- 80 As seen in the oft-mentioned differences in style in the different sections of the text, the apparent redundancies (e.g., content from chapter 14 repeated in chapter 16), the mention of “all the signs” Jesus is doing in 2:23 when only one has been mentioned, the locative discrepancy at the end of chapter five, the questions from Peter (13:36) and Thomas (14:5) to Jesus about where he is going—followed by Jesus’ statement “none of you are asking me where I am going” (16:5), and of course the discrepancy between 14:31 “arise let us be on our way” and the subsequent chapters of discourse during which Jesus and the disciples neither arise nor go on their way. Many attempts to explain these issues by means other than a hypothesis of unfinished editing have, of course, been made, but to my mind they generally strain credulity. Though it is possible that the disjunctions may suggest a trauma response, in that trauma literature is often full of disjunctions and aporias which evidence the difficulty the author has in processing the trauma ([Boase and Frechette 2016, p. 11](#)), the disjunctions seem too incidental and minor to fit a trauma-response explanation obviously.
- 81 As previously mentioned, Raymond Brown’s evaluation ([Brown 1979](#)) was that the community wasn’t exactly healthy and that it did not survive intact and distinct for very long.
- 82 Evidence for which is vast, but in particular Susannah Heschel’s work (e.g., [Heschel 2008, pp. 106–111](#)), is illustrative.
- 83 See [Meier \(2001, pp. 47–48\)](#) for what [Skinner \(2017, pp. xix–xx\)](#) considers a typical treatment. See [Zimmermann \(2012a, pp. 44–57\)](#) for a critically negative survey of this well-established perspective. Among this earlier strain of treatments are [Houlden \(1973\)](#); [Sanders \(1975\)](#); [Schrage \(1982\)](#); and [Meeks \(1996\)](#).
- 84 Typically, both broadening what counts as “ethics” (e.g., [Wannenwetsch 2012](#); [Skinner 2017](#)) and counting as “in” John things that are implicit, or at times true of the cultural milieu that produced John.
- 85 Albeit, preceded somewhat.

86 E.g., von Wahlde (1979, 2000), Caron (1997), Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998), and de Boer (2001).  
87 Though typically the protests take the form of an ostensibly scrupulously diligent concern for historical accuracy.  
88 As suggested by Kanagaraj (2001); Zimmermann (2009); Zimmermann (2012a); Zimmermann (2012b); van der Watt and  
Zimmermann (2012); Zimmermann (2013); Gorman (2017), and the majority of the “Part 2” chapters in the recent *Johannine Ethics*  
edited by Brown and Skinner (2017), among others.  
89 Reinhartz (2017) does not see John as having an interest in “normative” ethics.  
90 And appearances matter. “Finding” an enemy-love ethic buried implicitly does not change the fact that the bare words of the text  
do not suggest much in the way of enemy love. In like manner, the Gospel’s universal images of sustenance don’t address actual  
*material* needs. In John it seems that actual material needs are assumed to be met (or are simply ignored) since the “needs” that  
the universal, figurative images meet are perhaps more psychological. I am reminded of anecdotes of various approaches clergy  
took to ministry toward Hurricane Katrina evacuees in the Houston Astrodome, some making no attempt to meet material needs  
and others addressing them directly, as documented in Stout (2010, pp. 196–200).  
91 It seems that the scholarly work is responding to this (largely evangelical/fundamentalist) anxiety.  
92 E.g., Hartog (2022).  
93 E.g., Rowe (2022).  
94 *The Book of Common Prayer* of The Episcopal Church (1979, p. 868).  
95 And as such this practice represents a *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi*.  
96 To say nothing of the subsequent work of modern biblical scholarship to re-emphasize the importance of the Jewish identity of  
Jesus and his earliest movement.  
97 And often anachronistic.  
98 The many attempts by various, largely confessionally conservative, biblical scholars to insist on great nuance in interpreting  
some of the instances of language of “the Jews” in the Gospel of John to somehow soften the significance of the rest of the clearly  
anti-Jewish rhetoric does not remove said voluminous (and aforementioned) instances. Again, see Levine (2006) and Sheridan  
(2013) for excellent treatments of this issue.  
99 As reported by CNN (2009).  
100 Recently Erica L. Martin (2016) and Judith Plaskow (2005), to say nothing of the traditions of being able to negotiate with G-d, or  
change G-d’s mind, as appear repeatedly throughout the Pentateuch.  
101 E.g., Wayne Meeks (1972) and Keck (1996).  
102 There is not adequate room in this limited context to go into depth regarding the current state of modern scientific trauma studies,  
but it should suffice to say, denying the significance of suffering, or being pressured to “believe harder” in the spiritual provision  
of God in spite of a horrific experience of literal want, or acquiescing to being controlled by an authoritarian community, or  
insisting that your own hard-headed and belligerent arguments are not at fault for alienating you from your previous community  
of support (among other problematic examples) are not in fact “healthy” responses, nor are they considered beneficial approaches  
to addressing suffering by modern psychological or medical science.  
103 Which can be seen in the flexibility with which lost or traumatized homes can be re-imagined: a new supportive community  
can replace an unsupportive community (e.g., family, or religious community); proximity to God can be reclaimed in spite of  
alienation from traumatized loci of engagement (e.g., the Temple/the synagogue).  
104 An awkward promise that requires “death” to become a somewhat meaningless word.  
105 The “Woman caught in adultery” is a later text but may be indicative of a later event where the community allows adulterers to  
be part of it based on their profession of belief even when they were kicked out of the synagogue. But the text is so late that it  
may post-date any synagogue relation and could simply indicate the welcome of gentile community rejects.  
106 Some might, more sympathetically, argue that Jesus is simply trusting in resurrection to delegitimize death, not lying, but the  
plain meaning of the interchange certainly has the cadence of gaslighting.  
107 Even if this is not what is happening in the text, in modern receptions the text is often used to justify such behavior.  
108 This is, of course, not an approach unique to John as many ancient writers euphemize death as sleep. We may have in mind  
Luke’s Jesus who, in disputing the Sadducees, suggests that the Patriarchs are not dead but alive. One could of course argue that  
John’s Jesus is, similarly, disputing the power or apparent reality of death, in which case this is a semantic tactic related to the  
meaning of the word “death”, in which Jesus finally condescends to the disciples’ “misunderstanding” of “death” and agrees, for  
the sake of clear communication, to use their meaning.  
109 Again, even if this is not the best interpretation of the text, this interpretation is popular in modern receptions.  
110 “Let not your hearts be troubled” (14:1). “I will not leave you desolate” (14:18). “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you  
... let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (14:27). See also 17:13 “these things I speak in the world, that they  
may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.” See also “Peace” (20:20, 20:21).  
111 Here as a result of synagogue excommunication.

112 18:8: “If you seek me, let these men go.” And when asked about them he did not give them away (18:19).

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