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OUR ADDICTION TO VIOLENCE
CONFLICT AND THE JOHANNINE COMMUNITY

by

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DEDICATION

This ongoing discussion can be traced back to the boy that looks at me from my imagined past is only possible owing to the nurture that was offered to me by Patricia Tannis, nee Zarbatany (1916-2006): my Sitto (grandmother). A woman who made choices that placed her and her children in a reality that was uncomfortable within a patriarchal context. Nonetheless, her integrity and faith have and continue to inspire me. To her I owe more than words, and I pray this unfolding conversation is but one way I honour the woman she was and the man whom she cherished as a boy.

ABSTRACT

Within the field of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) there is a phrase that summarises well its understanding of conflict: "Conflict is inevitable, violence is not." The Johannine Community, as experienced in the New Testament, offers the reader an opportunity to explore how the Early Church lived out its understanding of Discipleship within a reality of various tensions – tensions in which the community lacked power. The context of the community existed within clashes that were both inter and intrapersonal – for the Johannine community there developed a reality in which people were polarised into 'us' and 'them.' From the pressure of the dominant culture of the Roman Empire, in which violence was pervasive, the religious discord between the Jewish and evolving self-identification of the Christian community to internal theological differences, the presence of conflict presented the Johannine Community with opportunities that possessed the potential for creativity or division – new life or death. There have been many approaches to better appreciate this community that has left a deep mark upon the Christian psyche. The following examination will endeavour to add to the extensive work that has come before. In order to further this ongoing dialogue, this journey will make use of some of the processes and terminology that comes from the contemporary ADR paradigm. Any approach that attempts to parallel or imagine the past with concepts foreign to its context – in this case the Johannine Community of the Early Church – possesses the potential to either trivialise or misconstrue the historical circumstance. The benefits, however, of such an approach hold the potential to offer insight that might, as of yet, been only glimpsed. Within the tension of such an

approach, it is the intent of this investigation to better appreciate the Early Church

through the lens of conflict as currently understood within the framework offered by

ADR.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE:
SUBJECTIVITY OF SELF: PERSONAL OVERVIEW

As I prepared to write my first undergraduate thesis, in the late 1990s within the discipline of Classical History, I made a choice that was, at the time, a challenge for those from whom I had the privilege to learn. The problem – the conflict if you will – was that I chose to discuss not only the subjectivity of my sources, primary and ancient, but also my own. Needless to say, the tension was clearly present for the Professors who had to grade that paper. The problem, as I recall, was whether or not this was, in fact, an appropriate methodology – something I will discuss in the forthcoming section more thoroughly. Whether or not my Greek and Latin Professors ever reconciled their differences, they did, nonetheless, arrive at a compromise.

It is really quite amazing how much effort has gone into the discussion of subjectivity in the interceding years. In fact, the comfort within the Academy to name one's context, social location and biases seems to me to have added a richness that promises to open up study in a manner that has been, in many ways, closed to the general public. Though perhaps somewhat cynical, (something that I am more than comfortable to identify as a characteristic I possess), it has been my experience that simply discussing methodology has, in the past, served to exclude the general reader in a way that fails to share the insight that might come from study. Whether or not such developments can ever be clearly tied to specific people or events, I would risk a gloss that the development of Liberation Theology and Feminist critiques within the Academy have ensured that there exists the potential for both transparency and honesty in a manner that feels more like a discussion – between the Writer and the Reader – than existed prior to the 1960s.

The perspective that I bring to this study is grounded within my own history and an on-going interest in the topic. As a young man, disillusioned with myself, the patriarchy into which I was born, I was – simply put – a statistic waiting to happen. The eddy, in which I was being transported, did not promise to be gentle. At that juncture, I was introduced to a different way to frame my own narrative – a different language with which to understand who I might be, not who I assumed I already was. The language that I began to learn is called Mediation, which is just one Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) process that can also include negotiation, arbitration and collaborative law.[1]

As this language became a part of the man I journeyed toward, I explored both the practical and academic applications of ADR. In particular, I attempted to utilise ADR processes as a lens by which to better appreciate Ancient Greek civilisation. Despite challenges that existed within that time of Graduate Study, my bias for nonviolent ways to resolve conflict became not just an academic pursuit, but one that has become a part of who I am.

Though study has been rich for me, in fact it has become one way in which I pray, it has been in the application of ADR processes – specifically as a Victim-Offender Mediator/Trainer and Conflict Resolution Facilitator within the United Church of Canada

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[1] ADR comes out of a context, roughly speaking during the late 1970s/early 1980s, when it became clear that Western courts were not only bogged down by the bureaucratic processes within the adjudicative – win-lose – model of conflict resolution, but that this model was not necessarily offering people justice as understood as restorative. As a result, third-party neutral processes began to be developed and/or adapted from indigenous models. Mediation, negotiation, arbitration and collaborative law, therefore, have often developed within the court systems, as well as outside of them, in order to offer alternatives that involve those in conflict as active participants in the resolution of the conflict. Such ADR processes/mechanisms are now utilised in all forms of conflict, from civil disputes and family law to criminal matters, which were once solely the purview of adjudication.

– that I have seen transformation in lives that is real, palpable and often tear-filled. In these places, I have seen lives transformed. Where previously a person was seen as the Other (the Enemy) there now existed a human being full of flaws and mistakes and who was not the crime, but a person who had committed one and sought forgiveness.

My bias, therefore, is that I understand the process and tools that have come from ADR as possessing the potential for transformation. I believe, furthermore, that they are tools that need not be tied solely to its specialised field. I contend that they can be utilised to examine conflict both within contemporary and historical contexts and by making use of them in this manner, insight as to where we have been collectively (whether that be as a community of believers or as a species struggling to find balance) can be had. And, perhaps even more significantly, the transformation that can occur at the end of a dispute between individuals within an ADR process can also be striven for by applying it as a methodological approach to conflict.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

If the outline of a methodology is intended to describe the ways in which a topic is

approached, then the next piece that is important to discuss is the ways in which the

text – the Gospel of John – has been examined and in turn, will be utilised in this current

discussion. The need for this is to strive toward transparency – though not necessarily to

claim objectivity. This endeavour ensures that there are frames of reference should

there be objections to any conclusions that might be drawn.

> I do not intend to impute to my critics anything less than a legitimate
> scholarly judgement, and in the end it may be that we simply disagree on
> what the text says. I imagine that none of our judgements is objective or
> disinterested, mine or theirs. I hope it is fair to try to state what I think
> the disagreement is about and regard my own judgment on the matter as
> a quite provisional one.[2]

I cite Walter Brueggemann, in order to draw from the wisdom that I hear with his

challenge. In respect to the methodology, which has been used for this current

exploration, I believe that it is significant to start with the individual – me. I come with

an expectation in which I hope to illustrate as clearly as possible the ways in which ADR

processes and conflict structures can be used to further appreciate the richness that lies

within the Gospel of John as it speaks to a community's response to dispute. A future

application of this, therefore, could also approach the Gospel itself as a tool by which

the very same ADR processes can then be used as case study – a case study whose

intent is to serve as a teaching opportunity to further the use of ADR processes as one

means by which to approach conflict non-violently.

As I mentioned briefly in the previous section, such an approach must be taken with the

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[2] Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress P., 2001) xiii.

understanding that there lies within it an inherent danger. That danger is the possibility

of relativising the text or the subject under examination. The approach of imposing on

the text a framework that is not contemporary to its context can be appropriately

challenged. The balance of what might be drawn is nonetheless, in my opinion, worth

the risk. That risk, therefore, must be mitigated, as it would be improper to claim it

could be altogether dismissed.[3]

There are two significant methodological approaches that should be used to address the

challenge named above. The first is the use of historical-critical analysis that has, in

many ways, been a cornerstone to much that has been gleaned within the Academy.

Historical-critical analysis aims to examine the text in a manner that is not dissimilar to

an archaeological survey. By examining the various layers of the text, insight can be

found. The richness that can be found, however, has often been challenged in that it has

the danger of becoming short-sighted and stands to undermine the integrity of the text:

> The model of research is that of a 'tell' in which archaeologists can
> unearth strata which derive different historical periods. This model
> depends on dissection and differentiation of elements within the gospel.
> Consequently, little attention has been given to the integrity of the
> whole, the way its component parts interrelate, its effects upon the
> reader, or the way it achieves its effects.[4]

If historical-criticism offers the explorer a window into the world of the text, then

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[3] Such an approach might be argued to be similar to Reader-Response Criticism, in that the text is interpreted by the Reader. Meaning is found in how the reader interacts with the story and thus meaning is found individually, regardless of context of the text or the intent of the literary narrative or agency of the writer. Though such an approach can be appropriately challenged, because the individual's context might precede that of the text, I believe that the difference lies in the nuance that Reader-Response Criticism approaches the Reader as interacting with the text as a performance. Though I definitely respond to the text in many ways, in the case of this exploration, my response is grounded from a paradigm with which I approach the text in order to discern something new, as opposed to the creation of a new meaning in the moment itself.

[4] R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* 1983 (Philadelphia: Fortress P, 1987) 3.

narrative-critical analysis is akin to a mirror.[5] The narrative of the text becomes a way in which the reader must appraise his/her own world after being exposed to the text as an integral whole – a text that is crafted (in the case of the Johannine Gospel) by an Evangelist who has a narrative that is complete and benefits from an omniscient point of view:[6]

> The implicit purpose of the gospel narrative is to alter irrevocably the reader's perception of the real world. The narrative world of the gospel is therefore neither a window on the ministry of Jesus nor a window on the history of the Johannine community. Primarily, at least, it is the literary creation of the evangelist, which is crafted with the purpose of leading readers to 'see' the world as the evangelist sees it so that in reading the gospel they will be forced to test their perceptions and beliefs about the 'real' world against the evangelist's perspective on the world they have encountered in the gospel.[7]

To summarise, the methodology in this current discussion of the Gospel of John and the Johannine community that can be discovered is grounded in one assumption and three methodological approaches, two of which will hopefully serve to mitigate the danger of imposing a foreign construct on the text:

1. Assumption: The Gospel of John and the community that is grounded within a historical context of pervasive violence can be further understood when approached from a perspective of conflict;

2. Methodological Approach: In order to delve into the conflict as it exists within the Johannine Community, a contemporary appreciation of conflict from ADR procedures will be applied to the text; and

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[5] *Anatomy* 4.
[6] *Anatomy* 19.
[7] *Anatomy* 4-5.

3. Methodological Approach: Both historical and literary-criticisms[8] will lie under this examination, in order to ensure that the foreign nature of contemporary conflict constructs does not mistreat the text and, ultimately, leave it void of integrity.

Gail R. O'Day, "Johannine Literature," *The New Testament Today* ed. Mark Allan Powell (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999) 75.

O'Day raises an important point of clarification in respect to the use of a literary-critique. Though the approach can benefit the reader in respect to text as 'ahistorical,' much study has also tended toward favouring this perspective. As a result, though literary-criticism might be a balance to historical-criticism, it might also serve to minimise that it also has much to say about the context of the world view of the Johannine community itself and not just the narrative world of reimagining.[8]

CHAPTER 3: DEFINITIONS

Prior to undertaking the task at hand, it seems important to first introduce some terminology that may be foreign to the text of the Gospel of John. The definitions in this section will, primarily, be concerned with the various types of responses that occur in relation to conflict. As well, though there are many kinds of ADR processes, it seems that the model used in the stories we possess of the 1st century Palestine framework of the Gospels is something akin to a combination of Mediation and an Aboriginal Sentencing Circle. As a result, these two processes will be discussed as well prior to beginning the analysis of the Johannine community.

If there is any one thing that I have learned in relation to conflict, it is that the tendency toward violence – whether external or internal – is directly tied to the investment that those who are in tension are willing to make within the relationship.[9] The more important the relationship the more likely that conflict can be addressed – though not necessarily resolved. This then leaves us with the reality that conflict is not often addressed in a manner that is healthy. Without a language that frames the overarching

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[9]Violence should never be understood as simply physical in nature. Violence perpetuated within a power dynamic of Oppressor -> Oppressed is often cyclical and can intertwine in a culture where one who suffers violation from one offender, in turn, perpetuate the same on someone else. Thus the Victim becomes the Offender and the spectrum ranges from physical violence to self-induced acts. Violence is not simply perpetuated against the body; it is an action that can include every aspect of our being: body, mind and spirit (See: Violence: Introducing a Hermeneutic of Conflict 16ff).

I believe that biblical scholarship and the wrestling that occurs with the Gospels and its relationship to violence is best articulated by Culpepper, when he challenges the Reader:

> Christian interpreters still have much to do. Accountability requires us to seek interpretations that are both faithful to the text and ethically responsible. Only by asking whether our interpretation of the Gospel serves to put an end to violence against Jews and other ethnic minorities, to empower the marginalized and oppressed, and to bring understanding between persons of different religious traditions can we expect that our interpretations will stand the test of accountability when they are read with a 'hermeneutics of suspicion.

Alan R. Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John* Interpreting Biblical Texts. (Nashville: Abingdon P, 1998) 305.

realities of disagreement, power and authority can be misused in a manner that might bury the conflict, but not dissipate it. Furthermore, the underlying tensions can then escalate to a point where the next disagreement, the next argument, the next clash is no longer about the past, but about reclaiming power that might have been acquiesced previously. In a conflict that sees escalation end up in a binary of 'us' and 'them,' returning to healthy forms of discourse becomes much less likely.

In any conflict there are two important pieces that are present: an investment in the goal (i.e. the outcome) and the relationship. In a civil dispute the goal might be a financial judgement and the relationship has little meaning – thus a more aggressive approach (**Competition**) might be utilised. In the dissolution of a marriage, there might arise the question of access and guardianship of children. In an amicable divorce, the guardians might place the relationship of the children and themselves as more important than the goal, thus a more concessive approach might be utilised (**Compromise**).

Though there are many ways in which to respond to conflict and, in turn, just as many models, I would offer the following five ways in which to deal with conflict as a reference point for this ongoing discussion:[10]

1) **Avoidance**: Occurs when those involved choose that either the commitment to the relationship is low or the damages that might occur far outweigh the benefits. This response can be appropriate if there is a need for space to reflect,

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[10] Dispute Resolution Office, *Victim Offender Mediation* (Regina: Dispute Resolution Office, Department of Saskatchewan Justice, 2004) 18-22.

but often avoidance leaves the dispute unresolved and can lead to escalation in the future if relationships remain important.

2) **Competition**: The goals in the conflict are more important than the relationship itself and can often rely on mechanisms that involve the use of power, i.e. courts, judicial processes, power, authority and violence. When conflict is grounded in a competitive model, the likelihood for escalation occurs more quickly if the other party also remains within a competitive framework.

3) **Accommodation**: In this model, those involved feel that the goals that might underlie the conflict are far less important than the relationship. There exists in this response the groundwork for future healthy problem solving. The inherent danger, however, is that the choice places the relationship before a group's/person's needs. This form of self-sacrifice might, inevitably lead to further enmity if the choices are not reciprocated as the relationship continues.

4) **Compromise**: In this possible reaction to conflict, those involved share a balanced desire for both the goals and the relationship. As a result, there exists the possibility to come to a *middle ground* that allows both sides to meet most of their needs, while perhaps avoiding the more contentious matters. Often, compromising can occur if time and resolution are tied to one another. Finally, compromising does not necessarily further build relationship, but neither does it deteriorate it.

5) **Collaboration**: In this model both the goals and the relationship are important. As opposed to Compromise, time is deemed not to be a factor and thus there is a

realisation that such a choice might take more, rather than less time. If there does exist a commitment to this course, relationships and further insights become possible for all parties. As well, Collaboration possesses the potential to build future experiences that are more dialogical in nature than confrontational.

What should be stressed is that no response is, in itself, superior to another. Rather, when those in conflict have access and the language to make choices, as opposed to habitual responses, there develops the potential for understanding.

Within Christian Scripture there are many examples of conflict: Communities at odds with other Jews, with the Empire and with one another. Furthermore, as the Early Church began to self-identify as Christian and distinct from its Jewish roots, the internecine conflict that arose is most apparent in the Gospel of John. There is only one process mentioned that is clearly geared at conflict resolution, within the Second Testament, and even in that instance, it is aimed at the internal reality of the community and not externally. That particular reference can be found in Matthew 18.15-20:[11]

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[11] The inserted bold **()** are my own and are used to indicate the stages of the process as offered by Matthew.

It should also be noted that within the Gospel of John (8.17), there does exist a reference to a judicial process for conflict resolution. In the passage, Jesus is addressing a theological challenge, in which he refers to Deuteronomy (17.6 and 19.5) where witnesses are required to verify a particular position or perspective. There are two issues that, for this current exploration, removes this as an example of a process that can be paralleled with an ADR mechanism, as opposed to the Matthew passage: 1) The use of witnesses indicates an adjudicative process, as opposed to one in which the disputants themselves work toward a solution jointly; and 2) the conflict in this instance is theological in nature. And though such a dispute does not preclude an ADR model, the context is presented in a manner that though Jesus may have been *right*, the outcome was judicial in nature (#1).

Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* trans. G.R. Beasley-Murray, et al. (Philadelphia: Westminster P, 1971) 282.

Nolan B. Harmon, et. al. "The Gospel According to St. John," *The Interpreter's Bible: Volume 8* 12 vols. eds. Harmon, Nolan B, et. al. (New York: Abingdon, 1952) 596.

David K. Rensberger, "The Gospel According to John," *The Harper Collins Study Bible: NRSV* ed.

Matthew 18.15 (1) 'If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. **16 (2)** But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. **17 (3)** If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; **(4)** and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax-collector. **18** Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. **19** Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. **20** For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.'

CONFLICT RESOLUTION MECHANISMS AND MATTHEW

There are four primary approaches to Conflict Resolution mechanisms as they exist within an ADR framework: Transformative – Relational; Evaluative – Directive; Facilitative; and Settlement – Agreement.[12] It would also be dangerous to oversimplify the categories and claim that there is not overlap. In general, these four categories help frame the style, if you will, and all are concerned with reconciling the conflict.[13]

For those who operate from a Transformative perspective, the words of Matthew ascribed to Jesus' approach to conflict would be considered the most hoped for process

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Wayne A. Meeks (New York, New York: Harper Collins P, 1993) 2029.

[12] Richard Manley-Tannis, "Faith Based Mediation," *Through Conflict to Resolution* eds. Augustine Meier and Martin Rovers (Ottawa: Novalis, 2006) 52.

[13] A Transformative/Relational Model approaches conflict with the intention to use the tension as an opportunity not only to reconcile those in dispute, but also to address the root causes in order that the patterns of the past can be avoided in the future. The relationship (inter/intra-personnel) is paramount and time is not necessarily a constraint.

Evaluative/Directive utilises an approach that is more authoritarian in nature where the third party is more prescriptive in nature.

Facilitative approaches are similar to the Transformative/Relational model in that consensus is central to the process. Facilitative approaches focus primarily upon the substantive issues.

Settlement/Agreement processes often make use of negotiation techniques, in order to balance the needs of those in dispute. Balance within this process is weighed between needs and time/efficacy constraints and the relationship is not necessarily a primary concern.

– a conflict in which those in disagreement would be able to approach one another in a face to face manner to discuss their differences with the ability to listen and hear what the other has to say.

Matthew offers further instruction that addresses the possibility that the initial step might prove inadequate; the next two steps involve witnesses. The role of these witnesses seems unclear in this brief passage, but it is not inconceivable that their role, likely as Elders, would be to help the discussion move toward some sort of resolution. A contemporary ADR process that might parallel these two stages would be Mediation:

Mediation can be defined as follows:

- Facilitated negotiations.

- A problem-solving process in which a third party helps others to reach a settlement.

- Helping people have difficult conversations.

- The intervention, into a dispute or negotiation, of an acceptable impartial and neutral third party who has no authoritative decision making power, to assist disputing parties voluntarily reaching their own mutually acceptable settlement of the issues.

- A process to foster participant empowerment and mutual recognition.

- Facilitated communications for agreement, resolving a past dispute and/or creating agreement for the future with the assistance of an

impartial facilitation.[14]

The intent of the process in Matthew, in stages 2-3, is reconciliation and, as such, I do not feel it is an inappropriate inference that those invited into the discussions would be expected to help assist, as the disagreement is too difficult to be resolved individually. What is different in this model than a contemporary process is clearly the use of power at the end: if resolution is not acquired and, if the conflict is severe enough, banishment from the community seems to be the final resort.

This use of authority seems to find a parallel in a process that is called an Aboriginal Sentencing Circle.[15] In this process, the same active listening techniques are utilised by the person(s) who are responsible for the facilitation at hand. The difference, however, is that they also possess an adjudicative power that comes to them (traditionally) from the community and not from a legislative or institutional authority.[16]

Prior to concluding this section, I do believe there are a few provisos that should be named, in order to maintain the integrity of this discussion:

- Matthew is the only Gospel that seems to outline a process by which the community might resolve internal disputes. The parallel of a mediation/Aboriginal Sentencing Circle is used to offer insight and not to equate

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[14] *Victim* 6.

[15] Brendan Thomas, *Sentencing Circle: Involving Aboriginal Communities in the Sentencing Process* (Australia: New South Wales Aboriginal Justice Advisory Council, 2000) 3.

Aboriginal Sentencing Circles are not primarily focused upon punishment, though punishment is not excluded as a response to the conflict. Circles involve the community in a manner that endeavours to balance communal cohesion and address the root causes of the conflict.

[16] *Sentencing* 3.

It is important to note that modern use of the Aboriginal Sentencing Circle, in many jurisdictions, is now a part of the institutionalised criminal system (i.e. Australia and Canada). The precedent, however, is based on an indigenous approach to conflict, which has now been codified into Commonwealth countries that utilise the Common Law as a framework for jurisprudence.

them. The reality is that the process of conflict resolution in the passage could include a model of **Competition**, **Compromise**, **Accommodation** or **Collaboration**. What is significant is that there is a process in place in which the participants are able to choose. Therefore, the potential for a resolution of the conflict is inherent in that the goal and the relationship are both held in a high regard.

- There is no evidence, *ex silentio* or otherwise, that such a process can be found in the Johannine community. It is not unimaginable however, that the community possessed a similar method for preserving stability.

- The ultimate intent of the ADR framework is to further the discussion both within this current exploration and beyond. By attempting to ground us, at this juncture, in a structure that offers a parallel, it is hoped that the Johannine Community can serve as a model of where we have been as a faith community and what we might learn as a people who have always struggled with healthy ways in which to engage with the creative force of conflict.

CHAPTER FOUR:
VIOLENCE: INTRODUCING A HERMENEUTIC OF CONFLICT

Before proceeding to the discussion at hand – the Community of John and what the Fourth Gospel has to say about conflict and violence – it is important to take a moment to pause and thread those two words together in a manner that is intentional. The reason for this is twofold. First, it will allow the Reader an opportunity to better appreciate the intent of the Writer. This clarification will also provide for a richness that is easily lost in any examination that covers a large breadth of material. Taking time to be explicit, at this point, allows for the implicit understanding to remain as we move from one area of the Johannine Community to another. Secondly, it will allow for the introduction of a theological nuance that seems to be necessary. This necessity, I believe, speaks to a critique of the Christian Tradition that is only possible when the lens applied comes from a conflict paradigm. This application, therefore, begins to highlight the potential for a Hermeneutic of Conflict.

In the late 1960s, Hannah Arendt offered a critique of her context through a treatise entitled, <u>On Violence</u>.[17] Though this exploration continued the work that she had been doing as a Political Theorist since as early as 1951,[18] it spoke specifically to a generational experience that was new to the human condition. She referred to this experience as those who heard the 'ticking.'[19]

What was the nature of the generation that influenced the writing of <u>On Violence</u>?

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[17] Hannah Arendt, <u>On Violence</u> 1969 (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1970).
[18] Hanna Arendt's first widely available book was <u>The Origins of Totalitarianism</u>, published in 1951 by Schocken Books.
[19] Arendt 18.
By ticking, Arendt was using a metaphor to illustrate a sense of foreboding.

Arendt observed the following:

> They inherited from their parent's generation the experience of a massive intrusion of criminal violence into politics: they learned in high school and in college about concentration and extermination camps, about genocide and torture, about the wholesale slaughter of civilians in war without which modern military operations are no longer possible even if restricted to 'conventional' weapons.[20]

So, what is the connection to this current study? Why 'digress' from the exploration of the Johannine Community with the work of a Jewish Political Theorist whose examinations repeatedly discussed power and violence – a life pursuit that often placed her in a difficult position within her own intellectual circles?

Hannah Arendt's work focuses on violence in a manner that holds, in my opinion, great import for an appreciation of Christian Scripture. Her work remains untapped, I would contend, and I would like to begin to make use of that wisdom in this exploration.

As noted above, the generations that have been raised since the end of the Second World War have experienced a reality that is relatively new in human history; namely that technology has so far outstripped violence that violence verges on the absurd. Arendt saw that:

> The technical development of the implements of violence has now reached the point where no political goal could conceivably correspond to their destructive potential or justify their actual use in armed conflict. Hence, warfare – from time immemorial the final merciless arbiter in international disputes – has lost much of its effectiveness and nearly all its glamour.[21]

This revelation led Arendt to realise that violence had, prior to this point, never been examined independently or – perhaps more succinctly – as its own subject matter in

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[20] Arendt 14.
[21] Arendt 3.

relationship to power.[22] For Arendt, any previous discussion of violence simply saw it as "nothing more than the most flagrant manifestations of power."[23] This could no longer be the case when the human condition was threatened by extinction from its own instruments: Violence must become a subject unto itself.

If violence becomes its own subject matter and examined intentionally, its role in Scripture can also be examined; and this, I contend, leads to a Hermeneutic of Conflict: a lens that opens up the Sacred Stories in a way that is often, at best, only implicit.

The Hebrew Scriptures and the Second Testament are grounded in an experience of warfare that we would call 'conventional:' an experience that did not necessitate a contemporary need to wrestle with the political ramifications of violence as its own subject – because 'conventional' warfare did not possess the inherent danger of the annihilation of life. And yet throughout both Testaments, violence is rampant, sometimes wrenchingly so. The text and its presentation of the Holy seem so convoluted that it has, in many ways, served to alienate men and women within our contemporary context. But, what if, at the core of those violent stories, lies a critique that parallels the observations of Arendt? What if violence is one of the quintessential subjects with which the Christian experience has always wrestled?

> Who has ever doubted that the violated dreams of violence, that the oppressed 'dream at least once a day of setting' themselves up in the oppressor's place, that the poor dream of the possessions of the rich, the persecuted of exchanging 'the role of the quarry for that of the hunter,'

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[22] Arendt 44 and 46.

Arendt defined power as: "*Power* corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of the individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together." And, in turn, violence as: "*Violence* … is distinguished by its instrumental character."

[23] Arendt 35.

and the last of the kingdom where 'the last shall be first, and the first last'? The point, as Marx saw it, is that dreams never come true.[24]

'Dreams never come true' – Arendt's words echo a challenge that comes from a Liberation Theology perspective that is also richly fed by the same context in which *On Violence* was written. Yet as a people of faith, it is our dreams, our hope that has and continues to embolden us to go into places that feel dangerous and where apathy and cynicism always exist. The Oppressor-Oppressed construct, therefore, should be at play within any discussion of violence. There is a thread within our Sacred Stories that I believe not only echoes this, but offers to expand upon the initial work discussed so far as influenced by Arendt.

The following overview, then, comes as an introduction to a Hermeneutic of Conflict. It compromises various key principles:

- Violence is a subject unto itself;

- Violence as a subject, can also be (and perhaps more clearly so) understood as an Addiction;

- Violence is often experienced through the instruments of war. Addictions are often satisfied through the use of paraphernalia;[25]

- The Christian Scriptures evidence the faith community's ongoing struggle with the instrumentation of war;

- The Fourth Gospel, specifically, was steeped in a context of violence, namely the First Jewish-Roman War (66-70 CE);

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[24] Arendt 21.
[25] Paraphernalia, depending on the addiction, might be something like a syringe, pipe, grenade or chemical/biological weapons.

- All conflict within the Fourth Gospel must be understood as occurring within a milieu of violence;

- This Christian experience offers a critique of our collective addiction to violence; and

- Understanding violence as an addiction offers potential to introduce a Hermeneutic of Conflict. Such a Hermeneutic possesses the potential to make accessible Sacred Stories that seem inaccessible in a contemporary context where our addiction now threatens our collective survival: "The practice of violence, like all action, changes the world, but the most probable change is to a more violent world."[26]

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[26] Arendt 80.

CHAPTER FIVE: JOHN: CONTEXT

> There is, after all, no such thing as objectivity in scholarship. Anyone who supposes that by setting scholarship within a modern secular university, or some other carefully sanitized, nonreligious setting, they thereby guard such work against the influence of presuppositions that can seriously skew the results should, we suggest, think again.[27]

I do not introduce this reference to either threaten the integrity of the text of the Gospel of John or simply to be argumentative. The quote above, in my experience, is not an intellectual hair splitting, rather it is an opportunity to share the truth as to the *why* and *how* one will approach any given topic within the Academy. As I have mentioned, the methodology which I intend to utilise in respect to the text, which survives from the Johannine Community, is grounded in applying a foreign or contemporary filter of conflict. The intent of utilising this filter – ADR conflict processes and mechanisms – is to highlight the Methodological Assumption previously identified: "The Gospel of John and the community that is grounded within a historical context of pervasive violence can be further understood when approached from a perspective of conflict that has been identified."[28] What is key to the Methodological Assumption is recognising that all conflict within Johannine Community was informed by the violence that led up to and followed First Jewish-Roman War (66-70 CE).

Though the paradigm of conflict and the structure of how to discuss it may be alien to the text owing to my separation (in time and culture) from the Gospel, I do not think that the conflict(s) that is (are) clearly intrinsic to its message have changed:

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[27] Marcus J. Borg and N.T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999) viii.
[28] See Methodology 6.

> At the center of all conflicts are human needs. People engage in conflict either because they have needs that are met by the conflict process itself or because they have (or believe they have) needs that are inconsistent with others.[29]

My intent, therefore, in this current section is to attempt, in broad stokes, to offer the context of the conflict in which the Johannine Community can be discussed. There have been numerous endeavours that have sought, to varying degree, the *truth* in relation to the Early Church.[30] Attaining *truth* is difficult and possesses the challenge named above by both Borg and Wright. My intent, therefore, is to offer what seems pertinent from scholarly endeavours that will further an examination of the Gospel of John in relation to conflict.

The first item to note is the history of the text in relation to the continuum of the Christian community. There has been a tendency to consider that the Gospel of John is best understood as a spiritual text, as opposed to being historically grounded in experience. Fortunately, this trend has come under appropriate scrutiny.[31]

One way in which to reconcile recent scholarship with previous spiritualising of the text is a bridge offered by Boring and Craddock. This middle road is found in the theological intent of the Gospel of John in which, "John composes a theological interpretation of

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[29] B. Mayer, "The Dynamics of Conflict Resolution: A Practitioner's Guide," *Dispute Resolution: Readings and Case Studies* 2nd ed. Eds. Julie McFarlane, et. al. (Toronto: Emond Montgomery P, 2003) 17.

[30] D. Moody Smith, *John* 1981, Proclamation Commentaries (Philadelphia: Fortress P, 1986) 67.

Smith offers an important caveat that helps any discussion about history, truth and context when he observes, "So the Johannine controversies between Jesus and the Jews are not historical in the sense that they are reports of what went on between Jesus and the people he encountered in his ministry in or about A.D. 30 in Galilee and Judea. They may, however, be historical in another sense. That is, they portray the tension, struggle, and polemics between Jesus' followers and those who did not share their beliefs about him."

[31] M. Eugene Boring and Fred B. Craddock, "The Gospel according to John," *The People's New Testament Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox P, 2004) 285.

Rensberger 2011.

the history offered in the Synoptics."[32] Raymond E. Brown continues this bridging by observing that, "If John is based on historical tradition and genuine theological insight, then one of the principal reasons for writing the Gospel may have been to preserve the tradition and insight. But once we have observed this caution, the question arises of immediate aims which may have guided the choices of the material and the orientation the author gave to it."[33]

There is an abundance of ways in which to present the context of the Gospel of John. For the sake of this current exploration, I will outline four particular ways that will more fully expose the community within the text in respect to the conflict that can be discerned and examined: Cultures: Low and High Context; Timeline; Intent; and, Light and Darkness.

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[32] Boring 284.

[33] Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* 1966, 2 vols., The Anchor Bible (Garden City: Doubleday, 1982) LXVII.

JOHN: CONTEXT
CULTURES: LOW AND HIGH CONTEXT

I would like to introduce another resource that comes from current Conflict Resolution

Studies. In particular, I will introduce the differentiation between low and high context

cultures. There are several advantages of utilising this resource prior to examining the

Johannine Community. The first is that it will allow for a general appreciation of how the

Community of John viewed conflict. More specifically, how the Synagogue community

responded to a dominant culture – Roman – that viewed conflict in a manner that was

not the same. This tension, therefore, can lead to insight about context. As well, another

advantage will be that it can serve to continue to build upon a Hermeneutic of Conflict.

Such a hermeneutic must be influenced by more than one resource. So far the following

have been used: 1) An exploration of mediation and Aboriginal Sentencing Circles; 2)

definitions and descriptions of ways in which to respond to conflict (**Avoidance**,

Competition, **Accommodation**, **Compromise**, and **Collaboration**); 3) ADR approaches

(Transformative – Relational; Evaluative – Directive; Facilitative; and Settlement –

Agreement); and 4) An exploration of violence as its own subject and framed as an

addiction.

Prior to discussing where the Johannine Community might fit within this framework, the

chart below illustrates some of the differences between a low and high context

culture.[34]

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[34] It should be noted that the use of *high* and *low* do not possess value. They are neutral and are used to illustrate differences. They do not denote preference and are not hierarchical in nature. As well, just because a culture can generally fit into one model, it does not imply that there is not overlap. As with all tools, there must remain flexibility in order to avoid creating an impression of authority that is inappropriate.

Low Context Individualistic	High Context Collectivistic
• Process shaped & determined by individual;	• Process shaped & determined by cultural/social controls;
• Prefer directness, specificity, frankness in stating demands, confrontational & open disclosure;	• Prefer indirectness, ambiguous, cautious, non-confrontational, subtle communication;
• Conflict perceived as instrumental;	• Conflict perceived as expressive;
• Language is considered as objective data;	• Language is employed in a rich and elaborate system of metaphor/simile. Rhetoric is complex and colourful;
• Third Party utilised less often from outset (i.e. Developed Nation);	• Third Party utilised more often from outset (i.e. Developing Nation);
• Conflict style: analytic, linear, sequential logic;	• Conflict style: holistic, spiral, correlational logic;
• Shame: Seek to minimise shame & anxiety, while socializing to be motivated by guilt;	• Shame: Motivated by shame;
• Conflict: Issue & person are separated; and	• Conflict: Issue & person interrelated; and
• Conflict is managed: Instrumental, solution-oriented & impersonal.	• Conflict is avoided: Affective, relational, personal issues are indivisible.[35]

The most universally practiced response to conflict is **Avoidance**.[36] Though there are likely many reasons behind this response, I believe it is appropriate to highlight that the potential for violence is often a prominent factor. Augsburger offers two particular pieces that further the role that violence has when it occurs from a conflict. The first is the following:

> Violence, viewed cross-culturally as a social/antisocial behavior, has four key properties, which can be asserted as universally valid:
> 1. Any act of violence is inherently liable to be contested on the

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[35] David W. Augsburger, *Conflict Mediation Across Cultures: Pathways and Patterns* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox P, 1992) 28-29, 31-34, 82, 91.

This chart presents some of the most pertinent observations that are applicable to the Johannine Community. The comparisons are those of Augsburger and a more thorough presentation of the differences between low and high context cultures can be found throughout the text, *Conflict Mediation Across Cultures*.

[36] Augsburger 18.

> question of legitimacy …
> 2. There is a universal consensus among those involved as to what constitutes a violent act.
> 3. All the senses keenly perceive the act of violence.
> 4. Violence is, in essential nature, an act of unskilled labor, possible for untrained hands, thus available to all humans.[37]
> 5.

And he offers the following conclusion in respect to why violence can never have a positive outcome:

> There are laws within violence that prevent violence from having positive results …
> 1. There is a continuity in violence in the sense that one act leads inexorably to another, so that violence begets violence.
> 2. There is a sameness about violence, so that however high its goals all practitioners are reduced to the same level.
> 3. There is a desperation in violence, so that one who uses it will go to any length, even someone's death, to justify both it and oneself.
> 4. There is a close link between violence and hatred. Thus violence leads toward death or toward physical or psychological harm. Violence is the antithesis of peace, of life.[38]

In many ways the Community of John, which we will examine within the Fourth Gospel, is one that operates within a framework of high context. Relationships are extremely important, especially as the Community remained a part of the Synagogue community.[39] Language and rhetoric are clearly rich and the use of metaphor throughout the text, and generally within both Testaments, conveys great depth in respect to social controls and expectations. For a high context culture, therefore, conflict is something to be avoided and making use of tools such as language and metaphor to mitigate the possibility for

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[37] Augsburger 130.

[38] Augsburger 131.
I believe that the fourth observation continues to assist in an appreciation of violence, framed in one way as an addiction, within a Hermeneutic of Conflict. Not only is harm the final outcome of violence, theologically it limits the potential for concrete peace. The Sacred Stories within the Two Testaments evidence well a general discourse about the Holy's expectation for peace for Creation and a consistent challenge that human choices continue to lead to death through the use of war.

[39] See Conflict: *Synagogue* 49ff.

violence is essential.

For the Johannine Community, however, as it moved further away from the Synagogue and was eventually ostracised following the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, it found itself unmoored. Though Diaspora and Palestinian Jews within the Empire can be seen to reflect high context cultures, the same could not be said of the dominant Roman culture that placed great stock in the analytical and displayed comfort with direct confrontation. As a marginalised group with the Synagogue, the Johannine Community had some space to voice its beliefs. After the Jewish community was fractured following the First Jewish-Roman War (66-70 CE), the Roman Empire no longer perceived the Johannine Community as Jews. And, as a result, the violence that had been avoided would become a reality that the Early Church would experience.

JOHN: CONTEXT
TIMELINE

The perspective, from which I write, benefits greatly from previous academic studies of

the literary and historical influences that have moulded the Gospel of John. Source

discussions and redaction queries[40] have added richness to the appreciation of not only

the Gospel of John, but the general field of Biblical Scholarship. As this discussion is

focused on exploring the community within the text of the John, an examination of the

nuances that do exist within these areas are outside of the scope of this brief section.

My hope, therefore, is to highlight the general scholarly consensus regarding the

development of the Johannine community. Each stage of the community will also serve

future discussions about how conflict has been addressed and how the context can be

further appreciated by a Hermeneutic of Conflict. Such a Hermeneutic serves as a

reminder that he Johannine Community navigated its various conflicts within the reality

of explicit violence.

There is a timeframe that generally acknowledges that the Gospel of John was likely

written near the end of the first century of the Common Era.[41] What is more significant

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[40] It would be inappropriate for me not to mention the work that has gone into source criticism and redaction investigations in respect to the Gospel of John. Much of that work is best presented by Bultmann in *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*. Much of Bultmann's challenge to the Academy, at the time, was in respect to the order of the text and the inference of a timeline of redaction that was attributable to many sources (i.e. *Offenbarungsreden/Revelatory Discourses*, *Semia Quelle*/Signs Source, Passion Narrative and others) from which the text was influenced. Raymond E. Brown, in *The Gospel According to John*, attempted to address the dense and complicated theory that Bultmann proposed. Though I do not wish to detract from the intensity and significance of this discussion, it is fair to say that it lies outside of the scope of this discussion. Furthermore, for the discussion framed within a construct of conflict, the wholeness of the text, as it exists within the tradition, is more important than the historical inferences and theories as to how the text developed.

[41] It should be noted that I have chosen to utilise Brown's date of 110 CE from the most recent date that he attributes to the Gospel of John. This current discussion uses several resources from Brown, and though there is not a significant discrepancy within his writings, it feels appropriate to acknowledge

than the timeframe, however, is the development of the various communities or voices that can be discerned within the text. There are several models of the development of the Johannine community. Each of the following models contains between 3-5 stages:[42]

4 Stage Model (Boring and Craddock)[43]

1. The events remembered and repeated after Easter by eyewitnesses. Primary witness was the "Beloved Disciple," the original leader, teacher and guarantor of the community's tradition. This stage would have been relatively contemporary to the historical events following the execution of Jesus;

2. Stories and sayings transmitted, expanded, and developed to the needs of the developing community. The community reshaped the traditional sayings of Jesus, because they believed the Spirit of Christ was present and the community was authorized to speak for Jesus. This stage represents the Johannine Community's attempt to begin to gather and understand their context after the '"Beloved Disciples;"

3. *First* Edition derived from the reformulated traditions that come out of Stage 2;

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the most recent interpretation.

The following list illustrates the range of dates ascribed to the Gospel of John:

Boring 285. 90-125 CE.

Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John* ed. Francis J. Moloney, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday: 2003) 214-215. 110 CE.

Bultmann 12. 80-120 CE.

Shimon Gibson, *The Cave of John the Baptist: The first archaeological evidence of the historical reality of the Gospel story* (London: Arrow, 2004) 3.

William F. Howard, "The Gospel According to St. John," *The Interpreter's Bible: Volume 8*, 12 vols., eds. Harmon, Nolan B, et. al. (New York: Abingdon, 1952) 442. 130-150 CE.

Rensberger 2012. 80-90 CE.

[42] I should acknowledge that I have chosen models that are more contemporary and have built upon the work that developed during the twentieth century. I do not intend to discuss the advantages or disadvantages of each as there exists enough consistency that, though they might not reach a consensus, they present a pattern that remains important to the discussion of conflict within the community found in the Gospel of John.

[43] Boring 285.

and

4. *Second Edition* found in the addition of the epilogue of chap. 21 and compromises the version we now have.

3 Stage Development (Raymond E. Brown)[44]

1. Origins in ministry/teachings of Jesus & witnessed by a disciple. Distinction apparent between ethnicity of Synoptics (Galileans) & Johannine (John the Baptist/Jordanian) community;

2. John proclaimed in a postresurrectional context. Beloved Disciple takes on leadership, who was not one of the 12. Several decades and primarily an oral tradition, with some writing near end perhaps; and,

3. 2 stages – Writing of Gospel by the 'Evangelist' not Beloved Disciple. 2nd stage the Redactor (1.1-18, 21.1-25).

4 of 5 Stages (Alan R. Culpepper)[45]

1. Origins: Beloved Disciple, an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry. Perhaps originally a disciple of John the Baptist (1.35-40);

2. Early Period (in Synagogue): Perhaps Samaritans in this stage;

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[44] Brown, *Introduction*, 64-69 and 79-85.

As mentioned previously, there are several texts by Brown that are applicable to an investigation of the Johannine Community. This particular text contains further refinement of his timeline and, as a result, it seems suitable to use that which is most recent. Other examples of the development of Brown's timeline can be found at:

Brown, *Gospel*, XXXIV-XXXVI.

- - -, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Lives, Loves, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times* (Mahwah: Paulist P, 1978) 22-24.

[45] Culpepper, *Gospel*, 55-61.

Culpepper's reconstruction also includes a fifth stage that includes the Epistles of John. They have been excluded, therefore, as they stand outside of the current focus on the Johannine community that can be studied within the Gospel of John.

3. Middle Period (Johannine Community formation): Begins with exclusion from Synagogue with likely multiple reasons. Dualistic language begins & Pharisaic persecution;

4. Middle Period (Second Generation): Death of Beloved Disciple and message of support. Concern for unity and egalitarian rule to love one another (reinforced). Relationship with other Christians of different folds becoming an issue and rival claims from Petrine tradition.

I believe this introduction of a few of the models that speak to the development of the Community of John allows for an appreciation of a voice or context. I do not believe that any one of the models is necessarily superior than another and I feel that there is a general repetition – Early Witness, Development of Community, Community begins to write traditions which leads to tension within the Synagogue, and finalisation of the Gospel and separation from the Synagogue. For this discussion, I will be utilising the model offered by Culpepper primarily. The reason for this is on account of the connexion that the model draws between both the writing of the text and the context of the community itself. Furthermore, as the context of the community is established, the use of ADR mechanism serves to develop a better appreciation of the conflict that was present and assists in highlighting the use if a Hermeneutic of Conflict.

JOHN: CONTEXT
INTENT

As John P. Meier begins to discuss Jesus, he creates an opportunity for the reader to

differentiate between the 'real' and the 'historical.' His challenges, I believe, can also be

applied to the communities within the Gospels that wrestled with who Jesus was for

them and how his ministry was to be lived out after his execution. The core of his

challenge is that one can never know the 'real' Jesus, but the 'historical' one can be

discerned by using intentional tools that are available through historical research. The

'historical' Jesus can never be fully reconciled with the 'real' one who walked and

ministered in 1st Century Palestine.[46]

Whatever one may discern from a historical examination, Meier offers a key with which

to understand the ministry of Jesus: "A Jesus whose words and deeds did not threaten

or alienate people, especially powerful people, is not the historical Jesus."[47] If Jesus'

model of ministry was threatening to those who held authority, then the communities

that followed and attempted to live out their discipleship likely discovered that they

would have to navigate conflict too. How they chose to steer through the tension of

being in the world and not of the world*[48]* can illustrate approaches that are effective

and healthy or combative and destructive.

One matter to note about context is the Intent of the Gospel of John. To whom was it

written? What was it trying to say? How might it have been heard or understood?

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[46] John P. Meier, "Introduction and Part One: Mentor," *A Marginal Jew. Volume 2: Mentor, Message, and Miracles* The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1994) 4.
[47] Meier 6.
[48] John 17.6-19.

At John 20.31, the use of πιστεύω (to believe) – πιστεύ[ς]ητε[49] – has sometimes

been taken to mean "Come to believe." Rensberger suggests, however, that perhaps the

reading of other traditions – "continue to believe" – might be more appropriate. If that

is correct, then Rensberger's' observation that the intent of the text "may better reflect

the purpose of the Gospel of John as it stands, to strengthen the faith of an existing

Christian community,"[50] would seem applicable. As I will demonstrate, any

understanding that speaks to intent is, in the end, an act of interpretation.[51] And any

interpretation should not be offered in a binary manner – either/or – rather as holding

the tensions inclusively as both/and.

William F. Howard has also offered that the intent of the Gospel of John is to appeal to

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[49] 3 P/P, Aorist, Subjunctive.

[50] Boring 290.

Lindars 617.

Rensberger 2053.

Boring and Cradock further observe that, "The Gospel is written not to inform nonbelievers, but to clarify, strengthen, and even correct the faith of insiders in the Christian community" (John 1.6-8).

[51] Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John* New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans P, 1972) 55.

Smith 6 and 107.

"We are then in the Fourth Gospel confronted with an interpretation, by intention an interpretation of history, not an interpretation that ignores or willingly depart from history … Thus, in interpreting the Fourth Gospel we interpret and interpretation."

I believe that Smith's discussion of interpretation is connected with the previous Methodological conversation. Any attempt to historically examine the text is bound to the subjectivity of the Reader. As well, any interpretation, whether literary or historical, is an act of interpretation and imagination from the context of the Reader to engage with the text before her/him. As a result, the Reader's choice and the attempt of the academic are grounded in an interaction of interpretation through which the layers can be both rich and obscured.

Furthermore, Smith also acknowledges that as early as the second century, Christians were wrestling with *why*. Though interpretations may change, the reality, as it seems to me, is that we continue to look for why and, at times, dismiss one interpretation for another. This approach can, therefore, serve as a distraction, as opposed to offering a mosaic of possibilities. The point turns on whether a combative/evolutionary or inclusive approach to interpretation is more useful for the modern reader. Barnabas Lindars suggests that the modern reader's most important question must be whether or not even the writer of John's interpretation of Jesus is correct. I would suggest, however, that, as the integrity of the text must be honoured, so too must the tradition: Approaching the tradition, in a manner that does not dismiss one in favour of the next, possesses the potential for new insight that an adjudicative approach might overlook.

an audience who understands religion through the vocabulary of the Hellenistic world. Though the text is *intensely* grounded within a Jewish framework, it aims to speak beyond that audience.[52] In essence, such intent can be understood as missiological.

If the intent, in light of Howard's interpretation, can be seen as missionary, then one of the groups or constituencies to whom the Gospel was directed could be the larger Roman and Hellenistic cultural group that was present in Palestine and the surrounding provinces of the Roman Empire: "But we began by seeing that John's problem was not the problem of presenting Christianity to the Jewish world; it was the presenting of Christianity to the Greek world."[53] Such an appeal, therefore, was not only to Greek-speaking Hellenised (Diaspora) Jews,[54] but also to the Gentiles who were attracted to Judaism on account of its ethical foundation.[55]

Intent that motivates a person or community can be telling about how conflict is addressed. The Johannine Community, as presented within the Gospel of John, is not monolithic. Neither, therefore, is the Intent of the text in which it can be discerned. A summary of the Intent discussed, thus far, can be summarised in the following manner:

- The Gospel of John spoke to those who were already members of the community. The intent, therefore, was to offer both direction and strength;

- The text was also geared to speak beyond its own constituencies to two

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[52] Boring 286.

Howard 437.

Lindars 192 (John 40.27-42).

[53] William Barclay, *The Gospel of John* 1955, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew P, 1957) 1.11.

[54] *Anatomy* 211.

[55] Howard 441.

"The Johannine Gospel was addressed to a constituency varied enough to require such a missionary message."

Lindars 427 (John 12.20).

particular groups: Gentiles and Diaspora Jews; and

- As the Gospel served to address those were outside of its context, but who might be sensitive to its theology, it was also a missionary text for those who already believed.

Intent can be further viewed as to how and what it reveals about the communities within the text – those who were believers and needed support and direction, those who were seeking, and instructions as to how to be the church. Each Intent possesses an approach(s) to conflict, which can be utilised to further appreciate the community within the text. As well, each approach is further clarified by the categories previously discussed: **Avoidance**, **Competition**, **Accommodation**, **Compromise**, and **Collaboration**. The use of the ADR models also allows for a further appreciation of the use of an Hermeneutic of Conflict.

JOHN: CONTEXT
LIGHT AND DARKNESS

> Conflict cannot be understood independently of its historical context. The history of the people who are participants in a conflict, of the systems in which the conflict is occurring, and of the issues themselves has a powerful influence on the course of the conflict.[56]

Though we have, up to this point, been discussing the definitions of contemporary ADR models of conflict and providing an overview of the context of the Gospel of John, it is with the metaphor of Light and Darkness that the tensions within the Johannine Community become more apparent. The following passage can serve as an effective way to begin to transition from Context to Conflict within the Gospel of John.

> Values are the beliefs we have about what is important, what distinguishes right from wrong and good from evil, and what principles should govern how we lead our lives. When a conflict is defined or experienced as an issue of values, it becomes more charged and intractable.[57]

Any holy text contains the values of a community. For the community within the Gospel of John, the conflict evidenced is one that has, in many ways and in particular with the outside dominant culture, become intractable. When that occurs, the conflict is defined as either/or, us/them, and is binary in nature.

The danger with such developments is the tendency toward isolation and violence. When communities can stereotype another collection of human beings into *them*, the possibility for reconciliation becomes very difficult. Liberation theologians frame such a development within an oppressor/oppressed paradigm, in which those who are oppressed have a choice of utilising the tools of humankind – weapons – in order to free

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[56] Mayer 21.
[57] Mayer 20.

themselves, and thus becomes the Oppressor themselves. In respect to the Hermeneutic of Conflict, these tools are symptomatic of the challenge of an addiction to violence.

Though the Gospel of John clearly illustrates oppression and indicates that the conflict has escalated to the point of intractability, it is the imagination that is utilised to bring freedom and not might or force. Though we will return to the option of violence as it is presented within the text, in particular in the unfolding introduction of a Hermeneutic of Conflict, it is important to mention again that the Gospel of John presents a community that has and is experiencing conflict at a heightened and dangerous level of escalation, as would be understood within an ADR conflict model.[58]

> The main portion of the Gospel (1.19-20.31) is the drama of the conflict between light and darkness. This falls into two parts. The first carries us from the first public appearance of Jesus and the testimony of the Baptist to the end of the public ministry (12.50) … the second part tells of the Last Supper and the promise of the Paraclete, through whom the disciples will find their true fellowship with the Father and the Son.[59]

The Light and the Darkness are polarities, in which one is clearly *good* and the other is *evil.* Who is *good* and *evil*, however, is fluid. Depending on the community within the Gospel and the context and to whom the text is addressed, those in the darkness vary. What is important to realise is that the language that frames the entire Gospel presents as an example of **Competition**, yet occurs, most often, from a position of **Avoidance**, a tension within itself that again can be paralleled within an Oppressor/Oppressed construct. The oppression that the Early Church experienced led to a choice to begin to

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[58] See Conflict: *Rome* 43ff.
[59] Howard 445-446.

see the world in absolutes, one in which it felt it was not called to confront, but to live

within.[60]

One of the prominent ways in which this dualism is apparent throughout the Gospel is

with the relationship between the Johannine community and the Synagogue.[61] What is

important to note is that this duality possesses a rhetorical function within the narrative

that influenced how the evolving community framed its interaction with others

throughout its evolution.[62] The binary frame was used internally as tensions mounted

within the community itself. The Johannine community's experience within the

Synagogue will come to serve as a lens through which it will experience all conflict.

At the core of the conflict that can be discerned by the binary of *Light* and *Darkness* is a

question of faith: a question that serves to illustrate whether one is a part of the

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[60] Boring 317. John 8.44
Lindars 331. John 8.31-59.
Boring and Craddock write:
As illustrated by the writings of the Jewish groups that produced the Dead Sea Scrolls, Jewish groups used harsh words in their religious debates. The debate between Jews who did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah and those who did was an acrimonious debate; we hear it reflected in the debates between Jesus and his opponents in the Fourth Gospel. Within the schism that occurred in the Johannine church, Christians used such language of each other; some Christians called others they considered heretical and false believers 'children of the devil'; in dualistic thought in which everyone belonged to God or the devil, all evildoers were 'children of the devil.'

Lindars also observes that, "John's debt to Jewish dualism, especially as it is found in the Two Spirits doctrine at Qumran, is very marked."
[61] See Conflict: *Synagogue* 49ff
Smith 77.
Smith writes:
The Johannine dualism of light and darkness, truth and lie, above and below, God and Satan comes into play in order to comprehend the total antimony and contradiction that exists between Jesus and his followers and those who reject him … That is, it mirrors the disjuncture and hostility that has developed between the now separate Jewish and Christian communities.
[62] As we have noted in discussions about a high context culture, the art of rhetoric, when filled with metaphor and simile is often used to address conflict. The intent is to reinforce social relationships without spiralling into violence.

community or not. The various stages of the growth of community that can be discovered within the Gospel of John indicate a developing propensity toward orthodoxy.

Orthodoxy relies on an approach to conflict that can be understood as **Competition**. One must prove whether one believes that which is accepted as normative within the community. If not, violence often happens. And herein lays a paradox.

For the Johannine community, violence, at least that which was physical in nature, was not permissible (John 18:10-11).[63] The imagination, however, may very well have served as a way in which the community's narrative could seek justice and address the persecution it felt. Whether imagination can be violent, whether what we think can implicate us in sin - separate us from God - is not a point that is lost throughout the discourse of Christian theology, let alone contemporary jurisprudence. For this discussion, however, what is noteworthy is that the poles of Light and Darkness frame the Gospel of John in a way that must not be lost on the contemporary reader. This polarity has often been cited as one of the seeds from which anti-Semitism grew. In order to explore such charges, conflict within the Early Church and the Synagogue can frame a discussion that finds dark echoes occurring as the twenty-first century unfolds: a century when the presence of violence also finds similar pervasiveness within the Fourth Gospel.

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[63] See Conflict: *Rome* 43ff.

CHAPTER SIX: JOHN: CONFLICT

We, as Western inheritors of Christian supersessionism and colonialism, in which missionary work continues to be marked by anti-Semitism and chauvinism that has caused irreparable harm throughout our journey, must face the reality that the Gospels and, in particular, the Gospel of John has been much misused. Rather than seeing it and examining it as a community's response to conflict and oppression, there have been instances in which the Christian tradition has taken it as a missiological framework with which to enter God's Creation. As a result, the context that existed within the Johannine Community has been understood as *how to* engage in conflict as opposed *how not to*. I hope that the following critique might offer some ways in which to begin to re-evaluate that Christian history and discern what might be most necessary as we enter into a human reality of greater interconnection through globalisation and the tensions (and gifts) that such plurality inevitably brings to the human condition.

I think one of the most important ways in which to approach the Gospel of John is to recognise that it is structured, in many ways, as an apologetic and polemic within a **Competition** model of conflict that is legalistic in nature.[64] In other words, the ways in which the very dialogue of the text, especially in the scenes in which Jesus debates the authorities, is not dialogic, but polarised with the intent to convince not the Pharisee or those in the story who challenge Jesus, but the reader: a reader for whom solace was

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[64] Boring 286. John 4.22

Bultmann 263. John 5.31-47 and 7.15-24.

Howard 441.

Boring and Craddock offer this observation about the relationship of Polemic and Synagogue, which is helpful to keep in mind for the next section (See Conflict: *Synagogue* 49ff): "John's Gospel is in polemical dialogue with the Synagogue, while at the same time affirming its Jewish heritage."

required – as opposed to you and me, people who are mostly removed from a context of being powerless. This is a harsh critique but, until we, as 21st century Western readers, realise our separation from the text, we stand in danger of continuing to misunderstand the Gospel of John.

A parallel, which is perhaps more readily applicable than one that is solely adjudicative in nature, is the Rabbinic (Orthodox Yeshivot in particular) approach to learning. Within this model, the Rabbi enters into a debate of challenge and critique with his/her students. The dialogue can be fast and seem disconnected as references are drawn that might be obscure. The intent of the Rabbi is to lead the student both to learning and to enforce orthodoxy. The paradox of Jesus' role, therefore, within the debates with the Pharisees is that he holds the position of Rabbi and the reader knows that the questioners, the authorities who are challenging him, are wrong.[65] It is not that the challenge in itself is wrong, as that is the intent of the **Competition** model, but that there is no recognition that Jesus has authority.

It is this structure within the Gospel of John that must be remembered as we engage further with the conflict that occurred in the communities within the text. A structure that serves as both apologetic (**Accommodation**) and polemic (**Competition**) within a general genre that is both direct and combative in nature. As well, the structure serves to illustrate the context of the Johannine Community and how that can deepen an

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[65] Bultmann 312. John 7.45-52.
Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 211.
Bultmann describes this reality of conflict between Jesus as Rabbi and the Sanhedrin this way: Their study of the Scripture leads them to a dogmatics which provides them with the security they want, in that it puts at their disposal criteria by which to judge the revelation but which makes them deaf to the word of revelation.

appreciation of the Gospel as illustrative of a struggle with conflict and, by extension,

the potential for violence.

JOHN: CONFLICT
ROME

The difficulty with any attempt to examine a historical context, especially one as viewable through a holy text, is the inherent tendency to become stuck in the minutiae and lose sight of the larger tapestry. Looking at the Johannine Community through a lens of conflict structures and models, will lead to an appreciation of the ways in which resolution might have been reached: Synagogue, The Community, The Beloved Disciple, John the Baptist and Samaritans. Though this parsing may be illustrative by highlighting specific experiences, it can be counter-productive. Counter-productive in the tension that the larger picture gets lost. The larger picture for the Johannine Community is that it existed, grew and evolved within the matrix of Empire: an Empire that was maintained by the mechanisms of war and clearly grounded in violence. The degree of violence that was present for the Johannine Community can easily be lost to a contemporary reader and to lose sight of this context is not only to do a disservice to the text, but creates the danger of misconstruing the message. The Fourth Gospel, and by extension both Testaments, are not always explicit about the reality that they were written within in a reality of pervasive violence.

Whether or not larger cultural structures are encouraging or oppressive, they always require a certain level of conformity. For a segment of the population, those who are oppressed and marginalised, lack of conformity often leads to further exclusion. Within a culture where the instrumentations of war are explicitly used to reinforce conformity, a group such as the Johannine Community existed in a reality of powerlessness.

Within a theological framework, this model can be described as Oppressor (Roman

Empire) and Oppressed (Johannine Community). Liberation theologians argue that in the human condition exists in a cyclical model: the Oppressed replace the Oppressor with the tools of war, until they too are challenged. The cycle is destructive and, ultimately, runs contrary to the expectations of peace and justice that we find within the Two Christian Testaments.

And yet, the Johannine Community, in its interaction with the Roman Empire possesses, a memory that is not only contrary to the human condition, but possesses an implicit challenge to the use of violence. This challenge, framed as a Hermeneutic of Conflict (a critique that identifies violence as a human addiction that is facilitated by the instrumentation of war), can be seen to have been lived out by the Johannine Community in respect to its intentional choices of rejecting violence (the addiction).

When we first began to discuss utilising a Conflict Paradigm to frame a discussion of the Johannine Community, it was identified that the options – **Avoidance**, **Competition**, **Accommodation**, **Compromise**, and **Collaboration** – are neutral in meaning. They only possess connotative value based on whether or not they are habitually or intentionally chosen. A learned or habitual response may not be 'bad,' but doing anything by rote is always worth reflection.

For the Johannine Community, the dominant culture operated from a perspective of **Competition** as a low context culture: it made use of tools – such as the judiciary, Senate and tools of war – in order to ensure its goal (maintenance of state control) was realised. As we shall see, the Community of John made an intentional choice that was contrary to the Oppressor-Oppressed human cycle. This choice was grounded in a

memory of Jesus' ministry: **Avoidance**.

> **John 18.3** So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police
> from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with
> lanterns and torches and weapons.[66] **4** Then Jesus, knowing all that was
> to happen to him, came forward and asked them, 'For whom are you
> looking?' **5** They answered, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus replied, 'I am he.'*
> Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. **6** When Jesus said to
> them, 'I am he', they stepped back and fell to the ground. **7** Again he
> asked them, 'For whom are you looking?' And they said, 'Jesus of
> Nazareth.' **8** Jesus answered, 'I told you that I am he. So if you are looking
> for me, let these men go.' **9** This was to fulfil the word that he had
> spoken, 'I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me.' **10** Then
> Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and
> cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. **11** Jesus said to
> Peter, 'Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that
> the Father has given me?'

Regardless of the historical truth, that is, or fact of this scene, the Johannine Community

remembered that Jesus was confronted by not only the Pharisees, but a Roman Cohort:

Men specifically trained in conventional warfare that were, in their day, the most

efficient military. This Cohort, which is not inappropriate to understand as a mechanised

military unit, was usually six hundred strong.[67] Clearly for the Johannine Community,

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[66] Lindars 539.

Lindars writes: "[I]t is possible that John has introduced the soldiers not the traditional account for a symbolic reason." To indicate the arrival of *ruler of the world* who *has no power*." Lindars' suggestion is interesting in that indicates the many levels upon which the text works. For some readers, therefore, this was not only a rejection of Roman power (**Competition**), but the paradox the powerlessness, is in fact the final arbiter when choice (**Avoidance**) is claimed.

[67] Arthur John Gossip, "The Gospel According to St. John," *The Interpreter's Bible: Volume 8*, 12 vols., eds. Harmon, Nolan B, et. al. (New York: Abingdon, 1952) 651.

Bultmann 637.

Howard 650-61 and 757.

Rensberger 2047-48.

Bultmann questions whether the Temple Police and the Romans would have worked together. Rensberger questions whether or not a Cohort would have actually been present. Furthermore, he identifies that it is only in the Gospel of John that Roman soldiers were present at Jesus' arrest. For Howard, however, he contends that it is not inappropriate to imagine that Roman authorities might have been called owing to their great resistance to any popular movement that might indicate revolution. Furthermore, Gossip contends that it also likely that the Sanhedrin, sharing that Rome's sensitivity, would have also requested such assistance. Finally, Howard does not believe than an entire Cohort would have

this confrontation lay at the core of not only Jesus' choices, but the manner in which they too might respond to the explicit use of Roman force against them.

In this scene, the Johannine Community remembers violence. Who these people are going to be as they developed into the Middle Period is shaped by this scene. They lived in a world of oppression and force, where **Competition** was normative in the dominant culture. A culture, I would suggest, that was well aware of the Oppressor-Oppressed paradigm. Roman culture may not have framed it as such, perhaps it was more implicit in the Pax Romana and Pax Deorum,[68] but they knew that peace and conformity were always threatened by instability. Instability was best confronted coldly, mechanically and thoroughly.[69]

Messianic figures were not usually confronting power non-violently. Usually it was done with the tools of war – such is the reality that confronted Roman Palestine during the First Jewish-Roman War.[70] The Johannine community, however, chose a different route. They already had a memory that embraced the enemy with a healing gesture, as opposed to a striking fist. In John 4.46-54, the Johannine Community imagines a time in

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been dispatched.

[68] Both the Roman Peace and the Peace of the Gods was predicated on the assumption that plurality was always preferable and that this was possible through recognising Rome/the Emperor as the way in which peace and conformity could be realised. Roman expectations were simple: recognise the Emperor as the authority and arbiter and you could worship whomever you wanted. For the Christian community, especially once outside of the Synagogue, this would become the place in which the rich rhetorical metaphor would resonate as a direct form of resistance and encouragement.

[69] Rensberger 2033.

John 10.8: Regardless of whom the Johannine imagined itself to be and its relationship with violence, the Roman Empire framed their perspective through a lens of power and force and where, "Leaders of anti-roman revolutionary movements, who sometimes made messianic claims, were occasionally called *bandits*."

[70] Rensberger 2023-24.

"In the first century C.E., a number of leaders who claimed to be the *prophet* or the messianic *king* to do *signs* to prove that God had sent them to bring about the liberation of Israel from the Roman Empire." And they usually came also with the implicit challenge of violent resistance.

Jesus' Ministry when not only did he perform a miracle of healing – he offered it to the son of an Official within the Court of Herod Antipas: the enemy.[71]

The challenge with framing the Johannine Community's response to oppression as counter-cultural is the reality of the debate between Just War and Pacifism that has a long history within Christian discourse, especially from the vantage point of possessing power: Something that finds no parallel in the Johannine Community, as we have discussed.[72] Gossip, whenever discussing power and non-violence within a Christian milieu, observes the following: "If people carry weapons, it is presumably because upon due and fit occasion they propose to use them … [This] do[es] not seem to fit easily into the pacifist position."[73]

'Fitting easily' is, I would contend, the ultimate struggle for anyone who identifies themselves as a Christian. I will not attempt to mollify or reject this appropriate and uncomfortable challenge. There are many levels upon which Peter's sword can be examined: as literary tool; ironic metaphor; and historical context, to name but a few. The reality is that the sword is no more anachronistic to the scene than is a full automatic weapon in most contemporary experiences of oppression today. These tools – whether made of tempered steel or carbon fibre – are the symptoms of our addiction to violence. What is evident, however, is that the scene clearly demonstrates the Johannine understanding that Jesus rejected its use. What is perhaps even more significant is that, contextually speaking, there were Messianic groups who were

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[71] Rensberger 2020.
[72] See Conflict 40ff.
[73] Gossip 758.
John 18.10-11.

responding to such force with force: **Competition**.

The paradox of weakness, or the perception thereof, is it can in fact embolden and speak to strength, speak to power. We have defined **Avoidance** in the following manner:

> Occurs when those involved choose that either the commitment to the relationship is low or the damages that might occur far outweigh the benefits. This response can be appropriate if there is a need for space to reflect, but often avoidance leaves the dispute unresolved and can lead to escalation in the future if relationships remain important.[74]

If we do not choose **Avoidance**, but rather perpetuate an instinctive response to conflict, then escalation can and often does occur in the future: Such escalation can often become manifest in violence. When **Avoidance** is chosen, there is space for reflection, opportunity to consider other avenues of recourse. Depending on where one is in our human tendency as Oppressor-Oppressed, the outcomes can be different. For those with no power, this option leads most often to safety. It also allows for the wisdom that can be garnered from hindsight to be cherished and passed on. For those who possess power, it might lead to new options that avoid the ultimate temptation that occurs when responding to an addiction to violence. When one who pauses to reflect has been both Oppressor-Oppressed, the revolutionary nature of whatever action follows is only limited by imagination.

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[74] See Definitions 9-10.

JOHN: CONFLICT
SYNAGOGUE

Jesus was a Jew – the culture into which he was born and in which he was raised was

Jewish. The way in which he learned and debated was dictated by the norms of the

model offered by Synagogue. Whatever the communities that followed began to

discern, whatever revelations they experienced, Jesus' ministry began within a Jewish

milieu, and though it may very well have appealed to Gentiles for its ethical and moral

foundation, and though it may have offered hope to people on the margins within

Judaea who were not Jewish, I do not believe there is any evidence to indicate that his

intent was to establish a new religion.

Those of us who have since followed, celebrate and hold up his life and ministry, death

and resurrection as the Christ as ways in which to articulate and experience God. For the

community that is present within the Gospel of John we find a people that begin in

Synagogue and by the end have been expelled and are persecuted for their beliefs

about Jesus. This community debated with other Jews as Jews[75] … and it is in that light

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[75] Culpepper, *Gospel*, 44.
Smith 18 and 40.
Smith challenges the reader with the following declaration:
To put matters boldly, Jesus did not consider himself anything other than a Jew, and his
summons to discipleship was not a call to cease being a Jew and become a Christian. In
John's Gospel, however, that is in effect what becoming a disciple of Jesus means.
In the last sentence, I would qualify Smith's appropriate critique by stating that the Gospel of
John is not monolithic, but indicates a trajectory that highlights the evolving Johannine Tradition as it
moved toward equating Discipleship with belief in Jesus.
I believe that Smith would not be comfortable with this addition, as he indicated that the
Community within the Gospel of John was different than the Synoptics, in that they were already
Christians, as opposed to practicing Jewish Christians. I believe, however, that the text remains dynamic
enough to find balance in respect to a movement toward as opposed to a static and monolithic
community:
The reason for the exclusion from the Synagogue is not known. The preaching of the
Johannine Christians, the emergence of a high Christology, their acceptance of non-

that a clearer appreciation of the Gospel of John must develop.

One way to reimagine the narrative that has informed Christian anti-Semitism is to borrow the parallel of Catholic and Protestant tension during the Reformation.[76] The parallel can, therefore, be used with those Jews who felt that Jesus was more than a Prophet and those Jews who disagreed: "The conflict between the Jews and Jesus and his disciples was an intramural Jewish conflict, as Catholic/Protestant conflict at the time of the Reformation was not the persecution of one religion by another but an intramural Christian conflict."[77]

This conflict, though not violent, likely would have tended toward polarisation, yet there remained a dialogue between the two Jewish perspectives, where one tried to share one's revelation of Jesus as the Messiah, with a dominant Jewish segment that was doubtful. At this point for the community, the Jewish Christians were likely in what Culpepper describes as the Early Period where, "They lived as Jews and thought of themselves as Jews who had found the Messiah."[78]

Another way in which to further appreciate the relationship of the Jewish Christians to the Synagogue was something akin to a sect. Boring and Craddock suggest that, "The

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Jewish converts, and differing attitudes regarding the Jewish revolt of A.D. 66-70 may have contributed to the exclusion. Regardless of the precise cause, it appears that originally the Johannine Christians were part of the Jewish Synagogue but at some point they were excluded from the Synagogue and formed a separate community.

[76] Borg 90.

Without taking seriously this challenge, Borg clearly identifies the outcome that has occurred and continues to be a possibility:

Unwittingly, early Christians thus created a version of the death of Jesus that has contributed to anti-Jewish attitudes in Christian lands in the centuries ever since. We Christians need to be aware of how the passion stories have become texts of terror for Jewish people, and we need to find ways of correcting the impression generated by an uncritical reading of these stories.

[77] Boring 287.

[78] Culpepper, *Gospel*, 55-61.

earliest church would have appeared to the external observer as a Jewish sect, like the

followers of John the Baptist or the Essene community at Qumran, both of whom were

alienated from mainstream Judaism."[79]

The parallel of the Johannine community as a sect also serves to illustrate the escalation

of conflict that is apparent within the text. The dualism and reference to values as

absolutes would reinforce a dysfunctional use of a **Competition** model of conflict

engagement. The dysfunctional aspect is further highlighted by the reality that a sect

often chooses to avoid those with which it is (or would be) in conflict. Thus the narrative

of their writings and texts illustrate **Competition**, while ensuring that there is separation

(**Avoidance**).[80]

Clearly something must have shifted, however, for the debate to lead to a schism that

finds the community of Jewish Christians expelled from the Synagogue.[81] As with any

conflict that begins to be intractable, there is often an external catalyst that forces both

groups to entrench and place their values, ahead of the possibility for relationship. I

would suggest, therefore, that the cause was the First Jewish-Roman War (66-70 CE)

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[79] Boring 286.

[80] O'Day 78.

O'Day observes:

The issue of the Johannine community's self-definition is echoed in another area studied by social-world critics: the extent to which Johannine Christianity is a sectarian movement … Many Johannine scholars, taking their cue from Meeks's work, appealed to the work of sociologists to identify the way key characteristics of the Fourth Gospel— establishment of its own community in opposition to the world at large, dualism, exclusivism—fit the definition of sectarianism.

It is important to note, however, that the use of paralleling the community in John with a sect is also a foreign filter to the text. It is, nonetheless, an additional opportunity that offers insight into the conflict present.

[81] John 9.22.

and the destruction of the Temple.[82]

The destruction of the Temple forced Jewish society, in all of its facets from governance to culture, to reorganise. With the Roman Empire intolerant of insurrection, the Jewish community would have to find ways to conform more readily and less objectionably to Rome and that, in turn, likely meant less tolerance internally for voices that might provoke the Empire.[83]

> It is now widely recognized that this state of affairs reflects [the separation of John's community from the Synagogue and] the circumstances not of Jesus himself but of a Christian group some years after his death. The Gospel of John seems to have been written in a specific Christian community in the late first century that was undergoing a painful separation from the Jewish society to which its members had belonged.[84]

It is at this point, the transition between the Early Period and Middle Period that the Johannine community begins to reimagine itself outside of the Synagogue.[85] And although this evolution can be discerned from the present, for the men and women at the time they were Jews, who had suffered by the choices of other Jews. As conflict escalates, as we have discussed, polarities not only develop, but are exacerbated when

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[82] Lindars 37.

Lindars presents the following observation that helps to further establish the reality that the final text that is the Gospel of John was likely edited, if not written, after the Jewish War.

> This conclusion is reinforced by the gospel's attitude to the Jews. We hear no word of the Sadducees, the leading party in the time of Jesus, or of the Zealots, to whom one of the Twelve probably belonged. Only the Pharisees are named, and they are the undisputed leaders. This reflects the situation after the Jewish War of A.D. 68-73, when the Sadducees and Zealots were virtually liquidated and the Pharisees were left in sole possession of Jewish loyalty.

[83] Boring 286 and 296. John 2.12-25.

Boring and Cradock believe that after the end of the First Jewish-Roman War, the Pharisees began to restructure the extensive destruction of the Jewish condition. In this situation, they maintain that, "Jewish Christians, gnosticizing Jews, and other sectarian Jewish groups were caught in this squeeze and forced to conform or leave."

[84] Rensberger 2011.

[85] Culpepper, *Gospel*, 55-61.

the issue became personal and identity based. For both the Pharisees, who replaced the Sadducees, and the Jewish Christians expelled from Synagogue, they both considered themselves the rightful voices of Judaism. One, however, continued to have power and authority – the Pharisees – and the other found itself now threatened for its theological beliefs – Jewish Christians.

What should be noted, therefore, in the development of the Johannine Community in relation to the Synagogue is that the dualistic language and reference to *Jews* in the text, is not a racial reference, but rather one that is applied to the authorities themselves, those who were now responsible for the governance and the Synagogue:[86] The Sanhedrin[87] and the Pharisees. And at the centre of the controversy was the question of Jesus' relationship to God.[88]

Rudolf Bultmann names the tension for the modern reader in the following manner:

1. "The term οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, characteristic of the Evangelist, gives an overall portrayal of the Jews, viewed from the standpoint of Christian

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[86] Brown, *Gospel*, 42.43. John 1.19.
Brown, *Introduction*, 161ff. John 1.19
Lindars 102. John 1.19.
Rensberger 2012.
Brown (*Introduction*) offers 4 categories to further distinguish the use of: Ethnic, Geographical, Role (authorities), and Religious.
[87] Brown, *Gospel*, 330. John 7.45-52.
Howard 481, 650-651. John 1.19 and 11.45-53.
Rensberger 2036. John 11.47-48.
For the Sanhedrin after the First Jewish-Roman War, the claim that from the Johannine Community that Jesus had performed signs was a significant cause for alarm. Rome was less than tolerant and such a claim could only serve to attract further attention. Rensberger writes, "*The council* i.e., the Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish court and the governing body. A man doing *signs* might intend to challenge the rule of the *Romans* and so bring an attack." Howard further adds, "Many of the Jews were moved to belief; others reported to the Pharisees, who induced the chief priests to summon the Sanhedrin. Whatever they themselves thought about the report, they recognized that the populace was greatly impressed, and that the increasing reputation of Jesus as a worker of signs was in danger of stirring up the excitement of the messianic movement which would attract the notice of the Roman authorities."
[88] Rensberger 2013. John 8.23.

> faith, as the representatives of unbelief … This usage leads to the recession or to the complete disappearance of the distinction made in the Synoptics between different elements in the Jewish people; Jesus stands over against the Jews."
>
> 2. "So too in 1.19 the Ἰουδαῖοι are seen as an authority which, from its seat in Jerusalem, sends out learned men to conduct an enquiry, it is as such that the priests and Levites are named, for it is a question of baptism, of purification."[89]

The tension, therefore, for those of us who read from a different context is to see the *Jews* as a universal reference. The early reference in the Gospel of John, however, allows for a nuance that lends a Synoptic appreciation: namely that *Jews* does refer to the authorities, though the tone of the text, without a contextual appreciation, could indicate otherwise.

As the two communities moved further apart, there developed a tone that is responsible for our inability to realise that this debate was between members of the same family of faith. The personal nature of the invective, for the dualism within the Gospel of John most definitely contains that depth, serves to allow the community a

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[89] Brown, *Introduction*, 159.

Bultmann 86-87. John 1.19.

Bultmann draws a further distinction that helps appreciate the filter of conflict that becomes the Johannine Community's *modus operandi*. In particular, just as the Jews can be universalised (and misunderstood) to denote a racial reference, the words also become a term that can be applied to those who deny Jesus: "The forum are the 'Jews'; just as in the rest of the Gospel they appear as the opponents of Jesus, here they appear as the opponents of his witness." I believe that Brown further clarifies the intent I hear in Bultmann when he suggests that Jesus was not anti-Jewish, as opposed to anti-Pharisee/Sadducee.

sense of power that the reality of their situation did not afford them: "The hatred of the Jews, already mentioned in general terms, is now described in detail. It will involve excommunication from the Synagogue, and even death. In their fanaticism they will regard even such murder as a proof of their loyalty to God."[90]

The separation of the communities, the schism in which Jewish Christians can be discerned within the text, is found at John 9.22:

> 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.

The term, which also is used at 12.42 and 16.2, is Ἀποσυνάγωγος and denotes a sense of separation, hence *put out*.[91] This expulsion is likely to have begun after the Jewish War and may have occurred around 80 CE.[92] The exact meaning of the word is somewhat open to interpretation. Both Bultmann and Howard indicate that the duration of the expulsion was not permanent, at this stage.[93] Regardless of the distinction as to how long the exclusion was, the reality is that it is at this point in which

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[90] Howard 729. John 1-4.
[91] Bultmann 335n5.
[92] Rensberger 9.22.
[93] Brown, *Gospel*, 487. John 12.42-43.
Bultmann 335n5.
Howard 617. John 9.18-23.
Lindars 303. 7.48.
Howard believes the reference indicates a tradition that would have an individual expelled for thirty days and Bultmann says, "… such a person is to be distinguished from the man who is completely separated from the community."
Brown also contends that one of the reasons that might have also influenced a shift in relations after the end of the First Jewish-Roman War could also have been that the Synagogue was aware that there were members who were sympathetic to the Johannine community and wrestling where they might belong. Lindars continues this idea and suggests that the resulting persecution that was directed against the Johannine community was on account that they had in fact failed to convince enough of the Pharisees and priestly establishment: "Though certainly priestly families and Pharisees were converted, the failure of the first Christians to win over the ruling classes of Jews was undoubtedly a big factor in the eventual estrangement from the Synagogue."

the two began to separate.[94] Those who remained in the Synagogue maintained a

particular sense of identity as they retained the remaining moorings of their faith.

Though the exact timeline is likely never to be established, the reality is that eventually

the two communities not only saw themselves as distinct, but so too did the Roman

Empire. As has been discussed, the text of the Gospel of John illustrates many stages of

the development of what would become two separate communities. By the Middle

Period of the Second Generation,[95] expulsion seems no longer to have been the only

tool used by the Synagogue. John 16.2 indicates that there existed the fear of

persecution in the form of execution. Though the historical accuracy of the polemic

cannot be verified, even the belief that it was possible would serve to heighten the

increasing polarisation: "Whether or not Jewish Christians were also executed or subject

to fear of execution by their fellow Jews, as 16:2 may be taken to imply, is an important

question. … Yet in view of the harshly polemical tone displayed on both sides of the

Gospel debates between Jesus and the Jews, that possibility must be taken seriously."[96]

For such a rift to have occurred in the identity of this community would have been

understandably devastating. There is the possibility, as well, that much of the dualism

that develops within the Gospel of John is as much polemic, as apologetic to the

Synagogue. In fact, Brown suggests that for the Jewish Christians, the Gospels might

have been an attempt to address the message that the Pharisees and the Sanhedrin felt

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[94] Lindars 340. John 9.1-41.
Lindars uses the term 'perpetual' exclusion. I believe that eventually this was likely the case and, as with the discussion in n58, this can be reconciled by observing that the text is also a lens to follow a community as it proceeds in an organic and evolutionary perspective from once being part of the community to finally being both separate and different.
[95] Culpepper, *Gospel*, 55-61.
[96] Smith 53. John 9.22 and 16.2.

required to send after the Roman's destroyed the Temple: "If the Gospel entered into any continued dealings with the 'Jews' in the evangelist's time, it would have been one of countering Jewish propaganda rather than persuading Jews with a hope of mass conversion."[97]

The anchors that moored Jesus' followers were not only wrenched free owing to their expulsion, but the devastation of the efficient and thorough dismantling of the Jewish underpinnings of Judaea by the Romans must have only increased the Johannine community's sense of identity. As Brown notes, such an appreciation is important because it allows for an understanding of the context of the text, which is not to be confused with the purpose. When this blurring occurs, it then becomes easy to universalise the Gospel's reference to *Jews* as a racial generalisation, as opposed to an intentional term denoting the authorities that severed the Jewish Christians from the Synagogue.

> Because they have been challenged and attacked by those who do not accept Jesus and they have undergone traumatic expulsions from the Synagogue(s). That is where the apologetics and polemics visible in the Gospel enter the community. They reflect controversies in the community's history and serve to reinforce those who believe in Jesus that they have been and are correct despite the argumentation directed at them …. Thus in my judgment the subdivisions on apologetics below pertain to the context out of which the Gospel developed rather than its purpose.[98]

Within the 'original' community of those Jews who were in Synagogue and also acknowledged Jesus as Messiah, we can trace the progression of the conflict that is apparent with those who did not accept Jesus within the Gospel of John. The mounting

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[97] Brown, *Introduction*, 173.
[98] Brown, *Introduction*, 152-153.

rhetoric and polemic that is applied to authorities within the Synagogue illustrates intensification as separation occurs and expulsion becomes permanent. It would be dishonest or at least difficult, therefore, to deny that, "[o]f all the NT Gospels, John presents by far the most hostile picture of relations between Jesus and the Jews."[99] This hostility, however, must be understood within its context. Culpepper articulates well both the context and the evolution that is clear within the Synagogue of the Gospel of John:

> The Gospels and Letters of John were written in the midst of theological debate. One's place within the community was defined by one's confession of Jesus as the Messiah. At first, believing Jews distinguished themselves from others in the synagogue by their confession that Jesus was the Messiah. Then, when the community of believers separated from the synagogue, their confession defined them over against the pagan, Greco-roman world.[100]

There are several communities within the Gospel of John; the Synagogue is simply the one which is most readily apparent. As such, it makes sense to continue to examine this as an initial foray of applying a filter of conflict upon the text. At this point, there are two particular items that are noteworthy. The first is that the Gospel of John, in general, and the community that was once a part of the Synagogue clearly used a **Competition** model of dialogue. What is interesting to note, however, is that clearly for the initial relationship, this level of engagement was not fracturing. In fact, the next part of this discussion about The Community promises to indicate that there was enough back and forth to illustrate that people on both sides of the discussion were listening to one another. If such a supposition can be established, there also remains the possibility that

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[99] Rensberger 2011.
[100] Culpepper, *Gospel*, 16.

there were other conflict models being used prior to the First Jewish-Roman War – and the most likely would be **Accommodation**.

The other item that is clear within the Synagogue community is that the First Jewish-Roman War was shattering for everyone: for the Jewish Christians, in particular. Loss of identity and likely the disintegration of friendships and family relations would have only fuelled the use of **Competition** dialogue. With relationships finally severed, however, there no longer remained a need for restraint. The already existing dualism within Judaism allowed for an imagination that was grounded in language that was not only polarised, but absolute. Language that in our contemporary context would be called *fundamental* – and yet the parallel is inadequate, as *fundamental* implies a level of violence that clearly was not an option. Why that is may be found in Jesus' challenge of Peter as he begins to draw his sword in Gethsemane (John 18.10-11).[101] Again, that is an inference that possesses a great deal of potential for learning. As a community under pressure, it chose **Avoidance** and found its outlet in imagination. And in the imagining, we have the Gospel of John: a **Competition** dialogue geared universally and yet applicable specifically.[102]

The conflict apparent within the Synagogue, though the Gospel does not explicitly relate the pervasive context of violence, was consistently subjected by Rome through the use of the mechanisms of war. This context, which underlies the Methodological Assumption of utilising a foreign construct on the text, offers a richness that comes with

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[101] See Conflict: *Rome* 43ff.

[102] If a Hermeneutic of Conflict illustrates a critique of a human addiction to violence, the Johannine Community, though identifiable as the oppressed, chose not to respond to the temptation: A temptation that would lead to utilising the tools of the oppressor, thus reinforcing our habitual response to conflict.

the appreciation that the Johannine Community was intimately aware of violence, though we do not necessarily see that subtext present in the text. The use of a Hermeneutic of Conflict reinforces that the experience of conflict within the Synagogue points to a much larger reality of violence that is too easily lost if the text is not approached with serious intention .

JOHN: CONFLICT
THE COMMUNITY

As we continue our discussion about the Community of John and begin to examine, specifically, the core group that would move from within Synagogue to outside, it is fair to offer some generalisations that connect with the previous section. The Synagogue stage serves as a macro–overview of the manner in which the Community can be appreciated. Prior to separation, the Johannine Community utilised a **Competition** model of dialogue that was, nonetheless, balanced by **Accommodation**. In other words, verbal debate through the use of rhetorical metaphor and simile was employed to reinforce the communal norms/culture, yet was balanced by the reality that the relationship within the Synagogue was often more important than the goal, which was to prove one's theological perspective in relationship to Jesus' role or, at least, claims as Messiah.

Unlike the Synagogue experience, which devolved into a **Competition** and **Avoidance** approach, the internal experience would have to wrestle with one of two options: become simply **Competition** or balance with **Compromise**. In order to maintain the community, the danger of orthodoxy (where the goal becomes more important than the relationship, i.e. who Jesus was) would have to be balanced with the possibility of inclusivity (i.e. the relationships supersedes the goal).[103]

As discussed previously, the Community evolved. This evolution can be presented as 'In' and 'Out.' While the Johannine Community remained 'In,' there is clear indication that there were Jews in Synagogue who shared the belief in Jesus' Messianic identity, yet did

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[103] See Conflict: *John the Baptist* 72ff and *Samaritans* 79ff.

not publicly confess:

> **John 12.42** 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; **43** for they loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God.[104]

This group within Synagogue clearly had influence within the larger community's leadership as is evidenced by reference to Nicodemus as one of the non-confessing believers.[105] The struggle, however, was twofold while in Synagogue. There was the danger of alienating any influence they might have if they proceeded from a **Competition** and **Accommodation** model to orthodoxy (**Competition**). To escalate while still worshipping in Synagogue would have obviously been a dangerous and difficult decision: difficult because internal relationships would have to be severed and dangerous because if there were members in leadership, such as Nicodemus, it is a fair inference that their power must have softened some of the tensions within

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[104] Brown, *Introduction*, 173.

Brown, *Community*, 71 and 73.

Rensberger 2012 and 2039.

Other references to Secret Christians: John 9.22, 12.42-43, 19.38.

Brown refers to them as Crypto-Christians, and observes (*Community*), "In keeping silent they would not in their own eyes have been guilty of cowardice but were exemplifying prudence ... History has shown this strategy had not future ... Without such hindsight, however, the choice between confrontation and compromise may not have been a clear issue to many in the late first century."

[105] Bultmann 311.

Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 135.

Rensberger 2017 and 2028.

John 7.45-52: In this passage, Nicodemus is defending Jesus. Though the Community of John may have wrestled with the fact that some Secret Christians did not evangelise, this passage must reflect a memory that there was previous open debate as to Jesus' Messianic identity.

Bultmann observes the following in respect to Nicodemus' defence of Jesus: "Yet Nicodemus' behaviour immediately shows us that there are exceptions. Even among the official authorities a kind of σχίσμα arises, although it is only a single man who contradicts the united front of the others ... Nicodemus' cool objectivity allows us to see that the revelation does not simply contradict the law, but that it is the misuse of the law which makes the world deaf to the Revealer."

Culpepper furthers the discussion about Nicodemus and says, "Nicodemus seems to represent the many Jews in Jerusalem who believed in Jesus because they saw the signs he was doing ..."

John 3.1-21.

Synagogue.[106] These possible divisions would have obviously become more pronounced until tensions became overwhelming after 70 CE.

Though the Community did not internally escalate the conflict, it remains clear, however that there was frustration. Rensberger, when discussing John 6.35-40, observes that, "The ideas of *coming* to Jesus, *seeing* him and *believing* in him and being *given* to him by God are closely associated in this passage. They are related to the situation of the early Christian community within the synagogue, where only some were coming to join those who believed that Jesus was the Messiah."[107]

As a marginal group within Synagogue, maintaining cohesion and calm with the dominant group must have carried a great deal of tension. This balance has already been identified in some of the Intent of the Gospel of John: To offer direction and support to those within the Community (**Competition** with the possibility to devolve into Orthodoxy); and Apologetic/Missionary to speak directly to other Jews within Synagogue (**Competition** and **Accommodation**).

As we have discussed, however, after the First Jewish-Roman War (66-70 CE), relations

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[106] Brown, *Introduction*, 174-175.
Bultmann 453-454.
Culpepper, *Gospel*, 45.
In relationship to the difficulty to publicly declare one's faith in Jesus' Messianic identity (John 12.42-43), Bultmann says: "This purpose of awakening the will is discernible also in the last of the sayings added by him (vv. 42f.); it shows the difficulty of the decision for faith in those who indeed believe, but who dare not stand up for it. They are afraid of being expelled by the Pharisees from the synagogue. There are even many among the 'ruling class' …"
Brown further adds (John 9.22), "The Jewish Christians who hesitated to go public may have observed that such effrontery was not likely to bring about understanding and acceptance and may have decided to avoid confrontation till a later, more opportune period. Weighing the evidence, I would allow at least a likelihood that an appeal to the Jewish crypto-Christians was a minor purpose of the gospel."
[107] Rensberger 2024.

in Synagogue began to polarise (as is clear in the increasing hostility in John 8.30-59).[108]

This developing intolerance for members who were not explicit about where they stood

is well articulated by Howard, when speaking about the beginning of 8.30ff, he says:

> In vs. 30 the words (ἐπίστευσαν εἰς αὐτόν) mean **believed in him**. In vs. 31 the literal translation is 'who had believed in him' (τοὺς πεπιστευκότας αὐτῷ). If we observe this distinction in the meaning, the previous paragraph ends with the report that many of our Lord's hearers put their faith in him. The next paragraph refers to a section who had accepted his words, but had not made full surrender of faith.[109]

What this obviously meant for the Community, however, was that there was less and

less room for **Accommodation**. Members would be expected to finally choose and in

that requirement the orthodoxy of who Jesus was in relationship to the dominant

Jewish perspective would become entrenched.

What happened to the Community following separation from the Synagogue and

finalisation of the text we have inherited as the Fourth Gospel after the Middle Period is,

to a large extent, beyond the scope of this current discussion. The building tension that

was experienced within Synagogue and primarily what can be discerned internally was

to a large extent circumvented by the aftermath of the First Jewish-Roman War. Though

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[108] Brown, *Community*, 56.

Brown contends, "Thus, in no stage or *pre-Gospel* history do I see evidence of sharp internal struggle within the Johannine community; its battles were with outsiders. This helps to explain the deep sense of 'us' against 'them' … It also explains the intense shock and anger seen in the Epistles, when internal dissent finally appeared."

Though this current exploration is not primarily concerned with the later Johannine Tradition as found in the Epistles, I do feel it is important to recognise that Brown's argument is, primarily, *ex silentio* in nature. I do not think his assumption is incorrect, nor do I think it is improbable that there was internal division within the community while still firmly in Synagogue. It is likely, however, that as long as the security of Synagogue was not in question, i.e. pre-Gospel history, such concerns would not have been manifest and hence no 'sharp internal divisions.' It was only when the relationship with the Synagogue community became tentative would the need for orthodoxy begin and such hints with the Fourth Gospel indicate this likely began as tensions built toward the First Jewish-Roman War.

Rensberger 2030.

[109] Howard 600.

there may have been a developing internal frustration with the existence of Secret Christians who were non-confessing, and thus the danger of orthodoxy, the debate became moot after 70 CE. The entire frame of reference was turned upside down and the Jewish Christians, following the destruction of the Temple, were no longer perceived as part of Judaism – they were now not only marginalised, they had no semblance of protection.

The irony, if such it can be called, is that the Epistles of the Johannine Community offer the potential for a future examination of the influence that orthodoxy would have. The building tension and potential for devolving into a solely *Competition* approach to internal conflict can be clearly seen to come to fruition in the later evolution of the Johannine Community.

The Community's experience of conflict, as it moved into the later Middle Period, was primarily with other Christians who had a different claim of authority. This is most clearly apparent in respect to the discussion about Petrine Authority in relationship to "The Beloved" (See Conflict: *The Beloved* 67ff).[110] As we shall see, this internecine conflict would illustrate how the Johannine Community responded to conflict in a manner not yet discussed: **Compromise**. As this internal conflict is explored, it is important to remember that all of this tension occurred within a context of violence: Violence wherein the dominant Roman culture had made use of the instrumentations of warfare to such a degree that the previous power structure within Synagogue, as represented by the Sadducees, was utterly and irrevocably destroyed. Not only was the

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[110] See Context: *Timeline* 35-36

model of order dismembered, but those who survived saw the utter devastation of the Temple itself. For the Johannine Community, a Hermeneutic of Conflict serves to illustrate that the Fourth Gospel was steeped in conflicts that had as their background an ever present violent pervasiveness.

JOHN: CONFLICT
THE BELOVED DISCIPLE

Whatever the *truth* is in respect to the Beloved Disciple, it cannot be denied that he was essential to the sense of identity that can be found within the Johannine Community. The Beloved Disciple served to galvanise the Community's sense of self and how they understood themselves in respect to Jesus. The Beloved Disciple offered a frame of reference that would bring the Community comfort during its persecution. After the Middle Period, as reflected in the Epistles, the Beloved Disciple would also become a cornerstone of orthodoxy.

In respect to this conversation, the Beloved Disciple will be explored in relationship to the Community and the conflict that occurred with other Christians who placed authority in Peter, a conflict that introduces another way of responding to tension that, up until now, has been but a definition: **Compromise**.[111]

As we have discussed, the primary manner in which the Community engaged was **Competition**. This model is culturally consistent with the debate-like model of discourse inherent to the Synagogue and later Rabbinic tradition within a high context culture.[112] While still within the Synagogue, the Community often entailed **Accommodation**, in order not to sacrifice either the relationships or their safety. In respect of the Beloved Disciple and the challenge of Petrine Authority, however, the goal and the relationship were more in balance. As a result, **Compromise** was a viable avenue that allowed the status quo to remain while also recognising the parallel realities that were confronting

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[111] See Definitions 12.
[112] See Conflict 40ff.

Early Christian communities (i.e. persecution and marginalisation) throughout the Roman Empire.

In the Gospel of John, the Beloved Disciple is often referred to as 'the one whom Jesus loved.'[113] The Beloved Disciple, as with the Gospel in general, possesses more than one layer of interpretation. Some identify the Beloved Disciple as allegorical of the Johannine Community itself.[114] John 21.24 has also been identified as clear reference that the Beloved Disciple was not only influential in the writing of the Gospel, but can be understood to imply the Beloved Disciple died during its formation: "The Greek word translated *has written* does not necessarily mean 'written with one's own hand.' Thus the verse may mean only that the beloved disciple was responsible for the tradition on which the written gospel is based (esp. since 21.23 may imply that he was now dead)."[115] Others suggest that the Beloved Disciple was not only the central figure – authority – through which the Community understood itself as a Christian expression in a hostile world, but that he was also the writer of not only the Gospel, but the entire Johannine Tradition including the Epistles.[116]

Whatever the *truth*, the Gospel of John cannot be understood without realising that the

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[113] John 13.23; 19.26-27; 20.1-10; and 21.7, 20-24.

[114] Rensberger 2040.

[115] Rensberger 2055.

Rensberger is referring to the use of γράψας. The use of the aorist, in this instance, is flexible enough that Rensberger's observation is appropriate. Regardless, the reality is that the Beloved Disciple, at the end of the Gospel, remains core to the Community's identity.

[116] Brown, *Introduction*, 195-196.

Howard 441.

Brown argues that the Beloved Disciple was the core person who offered the witness for the text, but is not to be understood as the Redactor (John 21.24): "The solution that seems to do the most justice to the Gospel evidence is that Beloved Disciple was the eyewitness who was responsible for the basic testimony/witness that was incorporated into the Fourth Gospel. But others were responsible for composing the written Gospel and redacting it."

Beloved Disciple is inseparable from the tradition. Whoever he was and however he influenced the creation of the text that survives, without him there would be no record of this Christian experience.[117]

The reason for establishing that the Beloved Disciple was the 'idealised' figure within the Community is on account of what followed after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE and the subsequent fragmentation of the Early Church into various communities. The Beloved Disciple, as a figure of authority for the Johannine Community, clearly came into contact with another Christian community that traced its authority not to the Beloved Disciple, but to Peter: "The effect of the characterization of Peter in the Gospel of John is to recognize his role as an apostle, but to insist that the Beloved Disciple had an equal authority by virtue of his special relationship to Jesus … [W]e may well suspect that in the figures of Peter and the Beloved Disciple we see something of the concerns of the Johannine community to reply to those who represented churches that were looking to Peter as the leading apostle."[118]

Orthodoxy and institutionalised doctrine was not present in the Early Church. In many

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[117] Boring and Cradock 334.

Bultmann 11 and 700.

Bultmann helps by recognising that it was not until the writing of Irenaeus (writing in the 2nd Century CE) that the identity of the Beloved Disciple became a discussion point unto itself. For Bultmann, the Beloved Disciple was not to be understood as the Christian community, but as a 'definite historical person (700).' Interestingly enough, Irenaeus' efforts were grounded in the debate as to whether to include the Gospel of John in the Canon. This conflict centred on whether or not the Johannine Tradition could be separated from Christian Gnosticism that had, if you will, a prior claim on the Gospel.

Boring and Cradock (John 13.23-24) offer this perspective as to the identity of the Beloved Disciple: "He may represent an ideal figure not to be identified with any historical person, but more likely represents the idealized memory of the founder of the Johannine school, the 'patron saint' of the Johannine church, the one through whom the community originally attained access to Jesus and whose testimony is still the basis of that continuing relationship."

[118] Culpepper. *Gospel*, 47.

John 13.23-24 and 21.7.

ways, each of the Christians communities came to rely upon their *truths*, as ways in which to rationalise and find abundant life in the reality of struggle and hardship within the Roman Empire. That having been said, as the Early Church spread, clearly there was inevitable interaction and such junctures can be viewed in the experience left to us from the Fourth Gospel.

As we have discussed and highlighted, there is no clear consensus as to who the Beloved Disciple was. This is important, especially in light of the tradition that this represents, because at no time can the Beloved Disciple be identified conclusively. So, the ramification for the Johannine Community, when they came into contact with Christians who claimed Petrine Authority, was that they could not disregard such Authority. They did not necessarily recognise it, but nor could they dismiss it:

> The gospel's portrayal of these two seems intended to provide an answer to those who may have been pressing claims of authority derived from Peter over the Johannine community, which derived its authority from the Beloved Disciple's testimony. If there is an anti-Petrine polemic in John, it is defensive rather than offensive in tone. In the community's gospel it is clear that there is no basis for pressing Peter's superiority over the Beloved Disciple, but there is not denial of Peter's pastoral role either.[119]

The experience of the Early Church, consisting of plural communities with differing contextual interpretations as to how they understood Discipleship, was not monolithic. Nor was there any manner in which differing Christologies, Missiology and all of the various pursuits that have developed throughout our faith tradition could be reconciled. Without such an infrastructure in place and as long as each community, in many ways, was fractured owing to the desperate reality of oppression within the Empire, such

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[119] Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 122.

differences had no mechanism with which to find consensus.

As we have discussed, the cultural (Jewish) norm in respect to conflict, was **Competition**. This model, however, was not effective in respect to relationships that were unable to develop. As a result, **Compromise**, in this instance, is clearly discernible. Both the goal (theological perspective) and relationship (between the Johannine and Petrine Communities) were in balance. Clearly Petrine Authority was of concern, yet there was no effective way in which to effectively debate (**Competition**) various claims. As a result, the Gospel of John strikes a balance by, at the very least, recognising (**Compromise**) that Petrine Authority has a 'pastoral role,' that the Beloved Disciple does not universally possess. That recognition, however, does not indicate that the Johannine Community was utilising **Accommodation** (in the form of Apologetic as occurred within the Synagogue), nor acquiescing the internal authority of the Beloved Disciple within the Community.

This response to conflict – **Compromise** – can be seen to also be present in the Community's interaction with other groups that might have been sympathetic to the Christian message. As we shall see, such a model is not inappropriate as one way in which to understand the record within the Fourth Gospel that speaks to the interaction with those who identified with John the Baptist. This interaction is further affirmation that the use of a contemporary conflict paradigm leads to a better appreciation of the context of the Johannine Community.

JOHN: CONFLICT
JOHN THE BAPTIST

That there was a community of followers of John the Baptist is clear within our Christian Tradition. What happened to them, however, after John the Baptist was executed will likely never be definitively established. It is clear, however, that at some point in the journey of the Johannine Community they not only again came into contact with them, but that it is probable that some of them were welcomed in.

As we have discussed, in respect to the Beloved Disciple, the changing reality of the political and social framework of the Community of John is apparent in the Fourth Gospel. During its journey from Synagogue to beyond it utilised more than one form of response to conflict. The innovation or adoption of **Compromise** presented an option that was less contentious than **Competition** and ensured that both its theological perspectives (goals) and relationships were maintained. Those who followed John the Baptist and began to interact with Community may have experienced this model of resolution in respect to their differing ideas of authority – not unlike that with the Petrine Community. For those who stayed, however, we might also be able to discern yet another resolution model not yet discussed: **Collaboration**.

The first thing to realise about John the Baptist and those who followed him is that, even after his death, they held him in high esteem. This group of Disciples obviously had to confront the eschatological reality that John the Baptist was in a position quite different than those who recognised Jesus as the Messiah. Harmonising these two perspectives would be inevitable if any group of Christians and John the Baptist followers interacted with the potential of coming together as community. So, wherever

Christians met followers of John the Baptist, we see that, "all four Gospels have to struggle to 'make John safe' for Christianity."[120]

That there were competing perceptions of authority between John the Baptist and Jesus during their historical ministries is necessary to acknowledge. As well, this tension likely occurred through dialogical debate that utilised **Competition**. What we find within the tradition of the Fourth Gospel, however, is that clearly the Messianic identity had long found Jesus as the successor, even if at one time that had been in dispute.[121] And, regardless of the dominant perception, what we find in the testament of the Johannine Community was an ongoing interaction with those who continued to consider themselves disciples of John the Baptist.

The Synoptic relationship with John the Baptist, however, is quite different than that of the Johannine. Whether that is a question of historical context or theological perspective (or some combination of both), there clearly is an experience of John the Baptist's followers that is quite different. This experience, according to Meier, suggests that Jesus was, in fact, a Disciple of John the Baptist:

[D]espite my refusal to rule the Fourth Gospel out of court a priori as

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[120] Meier 21 and 23.

Meier furthers the reality of this theological tension when he says, "This incredible diversity, not to say conflict, of interpretations in the Four Gospels is due to a simple fact …. The Baptist constitutes a stone of stumbling right at the beginning of Christianity's story of Jesus, a stone too well known to be ignored or denied, a stone that each evangelist had to come to terms with as best he could."

[121] Gibson 143.

Meier 32.

Meier writes, in respect to the Community of Matthew (Matthew 3.7-10), that there was likely competing claims to a Messianic identity: "Read in isolation, Matt 3:7-10 provides a good argument for those who claim that John saw himself as the forerunner of God alone, just as in the pre-Christian period Judaism generally thought of Elijah as the forerunner of God alone, and not of some human messiah. Whether or not John presented himself as the returning Elijah, the eschatology f 3:7-10, without Christianity or its Christ, fits in perfectly with the independent Baptist who felt no need to define himself by his relation to Jesus of Nazareth"

unhistorical, I recognize that special caution is called for when treating the Baptist in the Fourth Gospel. To begin with, being dependent on this Gospel alone, we are deprived of multiple attestations. Then, too, while the Fourth Gospel is not to be rejected out of hand as a possible source for the historical Jesus, even its ardent admirers usually admit that the Evangelist's theology has massively reshaped the tradition reflected in his Gospel, especially the sayings tradition. Finally, even if we do accept the narratives in chaps. 1 and 3 of the Fourth Gospel as basically historical, we must be honest: nowhere in the chapter does the Gospel state explicitly that Jesus was John's disciple. Jesus' discipleship is rather inferred from his appearing in the Baptist's ambit, from Jesus' first followers' being drawn from the group of the Baptists' disciples, and from Jesus' apparent imitation of John's practice of baptizing disciples, an imitation that creates a certain rivalry.[122]

Whether one responds to this reasoning as an opportunity for further reflection or as sensationalist and argumentative, there can be no denying the intent of Meier's challenge. In the Fourth Gospel, there is an intimacy between the two leaders, John the Baptist and Jesus, which must speak to a historical reality. For Meier, the question of Jesus' discipleship to John the Baptist is less important than the claim that he believes that the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist, is one of the most historically accurate claims that can be discerned from the Gospels:

In my opinion, Jesus' being baptized by John is one of the most historically certain events ascertainable by any reconstruction of the historical Jesus. The criterion of embarrassment strongly argues in favor of it, the criterion of multiple attestation probably does as well … so strong was the impact of John on Jesus that, for a short period, Jesus stayed with John as his disciple and, when he struck out on his own, he continued the practice of baptizing disciples.[123]

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[122] Borg 91.

Borg uses the term 'mentor' to refer to the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus. Meier 118.

[123] Bultmann 18.

Howard 440.

Meier 129.

Though Howard echoes the recognition of Meier that Jesus and John the Baptist were contemporaries (Bultmann also acknowledges that Jesus was a Disciple of John the Baptist), Howard

We must pause for a moment and try to ascertain where we are in relationship to the development of the Johannine Community. Meier's argument, thus far, places us in Stage 1: Origins of the Johannine Community, as outlined by Culpepper.[124] That there was likely conflict in this stage seems well articulated by Meier. Likely this conflict took place within a dominant recognition that regardless of one's Discipleship, Jesus or John the Baptist, they considered themselves Jews. Furthermore, likely during this era (nascent for Christians and somewhat problematic for followers of John the Baptist, whose execution was recent) both groups engaged in **Competition** within the rhetorical model.[125] As for specifics, the historical record does not allow for much more other than inference, and, as such, it lies outside of the lens of conflict with which we are currently journeying.

I would now like to shift to the Middle Period of the Johannine Community. The time when not only is the text of the Gospel coming into being, but also the memory of the relationship of the Johannine Community with John the Baptist is likely being recalled, owing to interactions with those remnants of the John the Baptist community following

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contends that they were simply had 'parallel' ministries in Judea at the same time.

[124] See Context: *Timeline* 24ff.

[125] Gibson 123.

Gibson frames the conflict between the followers of John the Baptist and Jesus in the following manner: "One has to remember that the Gospel writings were ultimately crafted with a very definite pro-Jesus bias, i.e. Jesus was portrayed there as the Messiah and within this scenario John could not be anything else but the 'Precursor.' … Indeed, following the deaths of John and Jesus, it would appear that the Jesus movement became fairly antagonistic towards the Baptists and they would certainly have advised their members to shun the writings of the Baptist adherents that might have been circulating at the time."

I do not think that Gibson's framing of the conflict is improbable. In fact, it speaks to intentionality within a **Competition** model that marks a high level of polarisation. I believe, however, that it is also as appropriate to acknowledge that there may have been less antagonism then Gibson infers in his historical reconstruction and that, as will be discussed, **Competition** and **Compromise**/**Collaboration** may have been as likely a pairing that accounts for the record as we see it from our removed vantage.

the destruction of the Temple.

The following reconstruction, though probable, possesses the tenuousness that is attributable to any historical reconstruction. The reconstruction, however, presented within the developing Hermeneutic of Conflict, continues as an effective frame to imagine learnings that might yet be waiting for us.

As we have seen with the interaction with the Petrine and Johannine Communities after 70 CE, people were coming together without the semblance of security that might have been present during the actual ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus up until ostracization from the Synagogue. Furthermore, men and women who had once employed **Competition** to reinforce their goal of establishing theological, eschatological and Christological claims were now, more than likely, finding that their commonalities were more important in an Empire that was already intolerant.

These commonalities, therefore, would only be more significant for the Community of John considering the history outlined above during Stage 1: Origins:

> The reason for their deep-rootedness may be the fact that some early Christians in the Johannine community did actually stem from the circle of John the Baptist and carried these traditions with them when they gave their allegiance to Jesus (or to the early church). Another reason may be that the Baptist sectarians also knew about the origins of Jesus and his first disciples in the circle of John the Baptist, and in their polemics they did not let the Johannine Christians forger the unforgettable fact.[126]

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[126] Brown, *Community*, 32.
Meier 119.
Brown augments Meier's connexion between John the Baptist and the Johannine Community by conjecturing that the Beloved Disciple was, in fact, a Disciple of John the Baptist. This tantalising idea offers much for reflection. As with most historical possibilities, it remains probable, yet unlikely to be proven. Though the possibilities such a reference creates are of import, for the current discussion, however, it shall be simply recognised for the possibility it raises.

In Meier's observation, one can discern – "in their polemics" - the **Competition** we have already discussed.[127] As well, the possibility that by the Middle Period – their "deep rootedness"[128] – both communities were willing to imagine **Compromise**, and perhaps even **Collaboration** as a response to the fracturing of the Jewish framework, in which they had previously competed.

One of the reasons it seems more probable that the Fourth Gospel must have had more connexion than Stage 1: Origins is the reality that even in our contemporary context, there are men and women who continue to attribute authority to John the Baptist.[129] If the possibility is entertained that the Johannine Community continued to be open to relationships with followers of John the Baptist (as discussed in the interaction with the Petrine/Synoptic Communities) following the destruction of the Temple, then both communities would have had to find a way to place the relationship in a framework that also recognised their differing theological perspectives. The difference between **Compromise** and **Collaboration** is time frame. Following 70 CE, each community no longer had the luxury of any protection, so the time was at hand for the work to be done in a manner where the 'potential to build future experiences' was probable.

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[127] Moody 32.
John 1.6-8.
[128] Brown, *Community*, 29-30.
Culpepper, *Gospel*, 46.
In respect to John 1.6-8, Culpepper writes: The other reason that he Johannine Community may have come/continued to have contact with followers of John the Baptist, was owing to the shared geography. The Community of John and those who recognised the authority of John the Baptist shared the same geography.
[129] Howard 454.
Howard cites Mandaeism in particular as a contemporary faith system that attributes authority to John the Baptist, while specifically recognising Jesus as a 'false Messiah.' The intent of this reference is not to confirm the historical possibility I have outlined, but simply to establish that there is legitimacy to its potential.

The followers of John the Baptist and the Johannine Community clearly had history. In that history, there was at one time, **Competition**. Following the death of John the Baptist and the development of Jewish Christians in Synagogue, clearly one group ascended. Following the end of the First Jewish-Roman War, which must be remembered paints the context of the Fourth Gospel within a milieu of violence, any group that was no longer afforded protection as Jewish within the Roman Empire was now clearly in danger of suffering not only oppression, but might experience implementations of war.

In this reconstruction, followers of John the Baptist and the Community of John would have interacted as they continued to share the same geographical reality and recognised their historical connexions. As a polemic reconstruction is plausible from the Fourth Gospel, so too is the possibility that the record of John the Baptist within the Johannine Tradition reflects various influences that range from **Competition** during Stage 1 to the need for **Compromise/Collaboration** in the Middle Years. Such work can be read into the Gospel of John as ways to find balance in a world gone awry.

JOHN: CONFLICT
SAMARITANS

Since leaving the Synagogue, we have explored two instances of how the Community of

John responded to conflict: First, from the interaction with another community of

Christian Disciples who placed their authority in Peter and not the Beloved Disciple. This

interaction, after 70 CE, illustrated the Community utilising a new form of conflict

response: **Compromise**; and second, the Johannine Community, owing to a shared

geography and history, likely again encountered followers of John the Baptist. The

theological differences, in this confrontation, were at the very least addressed also with

Compromise and even possibly with **Collaboration**. The former would have afforded

that the status quo would have been maintained, but the latter would be more probable

if long term relationships were to continue as they developed a shared identity. Within

both of these instances, the use of a Hermeneutic of Conflict leads not only to an

appreciation of the historical context of the Johannine Community, but the ADR models

serve to remind us that the seminal date of 70 CE grounds every experience we read in

Gospel of John within the horrors of war. The Johannine Community and Judaism, in

general, had been subjected to the war machine of the Roman Empire. A mechanised

and efficient military that was, contextually, most illustrative of the addictive nature of

violence.

One other group that the Johannine Community encountered in its journey were

Samaritans. These Samaritans may have been present during the Synagogue years, but

might not have been as influential as would come following the Middle Period. If these

Samaritans, attracted to the Christology of the Johannine Community, were to become

integrated, the question is how?

> If John reflects not only the events in Jesus' but the experience and concerns of the community also, it may well be that these references point to the inclusion of Samaritans and Greeks among the believers at some point in the history of the Johannine community. We can only guess what effect such an influx of non-Jewish believers had on the community.[130]

As we have discussed previously, although there were clear possibilities for the development of orthodoxy within the Community of John, this did not occur owing to the realities of war that shook Judaism with the destruction of the Temple. Following expulsion from the Synagogue, the Johannine Community, as with any group that could no longer refer to Jewish heritage for some level of protection from the Roman Empire, was neither organised enough nor possessed an institutional mechanism that could support the use of **Competition** to reinforce orthodoxy. That would not always be the case, as has been indicated in the later Johannine Tradition as seen within the Epistles. But during the Middle Period and the formalising of the Fourth Gospel, it is quite possible that the Johannine Community remained a place of welcome and, as is often the reality of any community that attempts to be inclusive, the outsider often brings change, and healthy change can be implemented when **Collaboration** is utilised.

One of the telling aspects that the Samaritan Ministry brought to the Johannine Community was explicit egalitarianism. The role of women, in the conservative realm of Synagogue, was clearly at odds with Samaritan expectations as is evidenced in John

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[130] Culpepper, *Gospel*, 46.
John 7.33-36 and 12.20-22.

4.27-30:[131]

> **John 4.27** Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, 'What do you want?' or, 'Why are you speaking with her?' **28** Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, **29** 'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?' **30** They left the city and were on their way to him.[132]

Not only was the Johannine Community ministering in Samaria, clearly in the challenge issued in John 8:48, there was a recognised Samaritan element that had been accepted by followers of the Beloved Disciple: **John 8.48** The Jews answered him, "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?"[133] So, if this element had become part of the Johannine Community, in addition to the open role offered to women, what ways can we discern their influence upon the tradition?

As is often the case in trying to thread possibilities, the best that we can do is present what is possible. The following, therefore, is an attempt to imagine how Samaritans, who would come to be part of the Johannine Community, might have influenced the developing tradition that we possess as the Fourth Gospel.

First of all, the metaphorical rhetoric, in particular much of the Light and Darkness imagery could very well have been influenced by the Samaritan presence. Samaritans

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[131] Howard 519.
Rensberger 2020.
Howard also clarifies that not only was their Pharisaic concern that the Samaritan Ministry was effective in spreading the Good News, but that Samaria was a place where violence occurred between Samaritan and Jews.
[132] Howard 529-530.
Howard offers the following Rabbinic saying to reinforce the revolutionary nature of egalitarianism that can be found within the Johannine Tradition: "A man should hold no conversation with a woman in the street, not even with own wife, still less with any other woman, lest men should gossip."
[133] Brown, *Community*, 37.

had a much more intolerant relationship with their Jewish kin[134] than would have been

the situation for Jewish Christians. As the Community lived through the war with Rome

that finally led to expulsion from the Synagogue, that element could very well have

influenced some of the metaphorical rhetoric we have discussed previously.[135]

Another area in which there may be discernible influence is in relationship to the

Johannine Community's Christology, which is arguably much higher than the Synoptic

Tradition. The Samaritan element might also have had an effect here as they their

Christology was not grounded through the Davidic Messiah Model, but rather through

the pre-existence of one who had seen God, as in Moses and Elijah.[136]

Though these examples are few, they are discernible elements that can be traced to the

inclusion of the Other within the Johannine Tradition. The full extent of their influence,

however, is likely to remain conjecture. Smith offers this challenge: "It is probably too

much to say that Samaritanism per se had a strong and direct influence upon Johannine

Christianity. The influence was more subtle and is probably to be explained by the

interest among Johannine Christians in promoting a Christian mission in Samaria and

among Samaritans. Quite possibly Samaritan converts affected the development of

Johannine theology."[137]

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[134] Brown, *Community*, 40.
Rensberger 2019.
Rensberger offers the following useful piece of context that allows for an appreciated that, in many ways, the tension between Samaritans and Jews can be understood as familial in nature (John 4.8-9): "Though both Jews and Samaritans were descended from ancient Israel and practiced similar religions, there was a long-standing hostility between them. Thus it was also unusual for Jews to buy food from Samaritans."
[135] See Context: *Light and Darkness* 36ff.
[136] Brown, *Community* 44.
[137] Smith 86.
In this passage, Smith is particularly referencing John 4.

Regardless of the extent of influence that is evident, for this discussion in respect to conflict, it is simply significant that it can be discerned. This is important, because for this to be the case lies the implication that as the Johannine Community evolved and developed its worldview – as presented within the Fourth Gospel – it was willing to make space for ideas that were new and, possibly, even resisted.[138] *How* this was possible, therefore, can be found within the framework of conflict that we have been using.

Any response to conflict is grounded in where emphasis is placed: goals and/or relationship. Clearly, the Samaritan influence speaks to a relationship that covers a long enough amount of time and acceptance that **Collaboration** was likely the way in which such influence came to be threaded into the Fourth Gospel. The duration of time indicates that the goals (theological perspective from a Samaritan point of view) broadened the Johannine Christology. At a time when the Johannine Community would have felt threatened, perhaps even wavered in its faith, there are clear indications that it remained open enough to expand its perception of the Holy, when the experience during the Middle Period could have afforded them an understandable intolerance to the Other.

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[138] Again this is supposition, but as the Johannine Community came into contact with Samaritans, whose Christology and relationship with Synagogue was different, it is probable that there would have been resistance by Jewish Christians, who carried their own pre-existing prejudice vis-à-vis Samaritans.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

> But the world's opposition is not limited to Judaism, although the Jews have become representative of the world. It is thus accurate to say that in John the Jews represent the world, but wrong to discount the role which the synagogue and certain Jews have actually played in the evolution of Johannine theology and styles of speech. A genuine church-synagogue dialogue and conflict underlies the Fourth gospel.[139]

In 2008, I was in Israel-Palestine with Christian Peacemaker Teams. In that time, I was able to sit and listen to the stories of people – Israeli and Palestinian – who are working toward peace in non-violent ways. There were many threads that connected these people, other than the desire for peace. Many had to do with their *children* and the desire to reframe the conflict with *them* as the focus – something that I believe lies at the core of all the holy texts of Abraham's children.

In each of these conversations with Jew, Muslim, and Christian the spectre of anti-Semitism was there. Whether in Yad VaSehm – the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem – or in the Dheisheh Refugee camp in Bethlehem, the Holocaust and the full, unspoken import of that human nightmare was present.

Our species does not like conflict, we are even worse at confronting it after it has passed. We avoid and we accommodate too often, we choose to be passive and that passivity can only serve to perpetuate the hurt and stifle the healing. Approaches to conflict as begun and continued through Alternative Dispute Resolution methods offer ways to begin to have healthy conversations about unhealthy choices.

The Gospel of John has been and is often used as a text to espouse a form of evangelism

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[139] Smith 54.
John 16.3.

that places Christians at the top and everything and everyone else below. Whether that is Earth as she suffers or Rwandans whose lives hold no value in a consumerised Global culture, Christians, and in particular those from a Western context, have much upon which to reflect. Reflection, however, can be misunderstood as guilt and in those places apathy and despair can paralyse.

The Gospel of John is, in many ways, a quintessential text for the Christian experience. In its depth it illustrates men and women suffering oppression who found hope to live, thrive and care for one another when every message they heard told them the contrary. The text is only alive when we appreciate the voices within it and are aware when we project ourselves into it to the point where it is simply a mirror of what we want to see, as opposed to an opportunity to imagine where we might be.

The Gospel of John is a text of oppression and imagination. A combative and confident voice of reassurance in a time where people were and would be executed and suffer for what they believed. The paradox is that though the imagery and language was polemic, in many ways, and especially in respect to Light and Darkness, the option of violence or retribution was left to God – as the Community ensured it cared for its own.

The Gospel of John has a context and a purpose and to misconstrue one for another helps plant the seeds for what we call anti-Semitism. Christianity eventually emerged from persecution and became the power structure and authority for the millennia that have proceeded. The challenge, however, is that without truly appreciating the context of the Johannine Community – those who were oppressed and yet lived vibrantly with their faith as a bulwark – one places the filter of oppression over a world-view that is in

fact the oppressor. And without humility when one has power, people will suffer. And that, I believe, is irony in its darkest and most sinister sense.

By applying ADR concept and models of conflict to the text, I believe that the communities within become more understandable. They also serve to illustrate the context of contemporary Western Christianity and how very different things have become and how much responsibility we now have. No modern parallel will ever truly reveal the 'real' Jesus, let alone the 'real' Johannine Community, but if this one offers insight that leads to greater awareness and, in turn, compassion, then I conjecture that we might very well be living into the Discipleship that is at the core of our faith.

The Johannine Community offers us a window through which we can examine choices made in respect to conflict. For the Early Church, **Competition** was the Roman Empire's means to maintain order. For those on the margins and were perceived to threaten the stability of the state, the instruments of war were certain to be utilised. Within the Gospel of John there are at least six discernible conflicts/communities: Synagogue, The Community, The Beloved Disciple, John the Baptist, the Samaritans, and The Roman Empire. Each can be explored and examined with a filter – a hermeneutic – of conflict. And in so doing, the context offers new life.

> Competition is an either-or, win-lose process; it stimulates either-or communication, either-or solutions, and either-or attitudes and action …
> As the competition escalates, the thinking becomes more concrete, the positions become more polarized, and the communication becomes more and more either-or.[140]

A hermeneutic is simply the theory and/or practice of interpretation – the lens/means

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[140] Augsburger 50.

by which we might spy something more clearly. It is an approach to examination that walks between rigorous practice and artistic expression. In this unfolding conversation, we have introduced a lens, a means of more clearly appreciating the Johannine Community: A Hermeneutic of Conflict. The Community of John has served as just one possible group within the Christian Testaments that deepens an awareness that our collective journey has and continues to wrestle with violence. Violence requires it be approached and appreciated as its own topic for discussion.

It is difficult, at times, to perhaps see the connexion and link between conflict within the Johannine Community and violence. The text is surprisingly silent about the milieu of Empire and the use of the mechanisms of war: mechanisms that have only been rivalled in the last century. Yet the contemporary reader must not let go of the task of this fundamental nuance within the Fourth Gospel. While conflict can be clearly examined within the text, forgetting that the conflict existed within a context of persecution, execution, and warfare is not only does a disservice to the exploration, but creates the very real danger of approaching not only the Gospel of John, but the Two Testament isogetically. As our history with anti-Semitism clearly illustrates, this is a lesson that continues to be a challenge.

We are a species who have unlocked the atom and with that, violence as simply instrumentation is no longer a significant enough way in which to understand our relationship with conflict: violence is an addiction that has and continues to be a part of our journey. Learning that conflict can be resolved in non-violent ways holds the promise for our collective healing. The choices that we can see that the Johannine

Community made in its own context of oppression and marginalisation provide us with a template of where we have been. With the gift of hindsight, we now sit in the place known as the Oppressor and what we learn in our moments of reflection stand as testament as to whether or not we have heard what our Brothers and Sisters who have passed have to say.

Conversations begin and pause. As we pause in this current discussion, it is clear that there is much work to be done, as I hope to move toward a more thorough appreciation of the text and how it speaks about conflict. Confronting the text has allowed for the recognition of the import of such a project – realising that such opportunities lead to confrontation with topics filled with pitfalls and danger, as in the Holocaust, I tread with humility and offer these words for the challenge that they require, while offering the reader a mirror. What we are able to imagine can offer life and solace, as was the case for the Early Church, or it can create the illusion of authority and dominion.

> The chief reason warfare is still with us is neither a secret death wish of the human species, nor an irrepressible instinct of aggression, not, finally, and more plausibly, the serious economic and social gangers inherent in disarmament, but the simple fact that no substitute for this final arbiter in international affairs has yet appeared on the political scene.[141]

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[141] Arendt 5.

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