

# The Beloved Disciple

## Befriending Adele Reinhartz

The bosom friend of Jesus responds to a Jewish reading of the Gospel of John

Helmut Schütz, Gießen, Germany

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Has the Fourth Gospel a profoundly anti-Jewish character? Or can its implicit author—by putting myself in his place—convince the Canadian professor Reinhartz to take him seriously as a Jewish Messianic fighter for Israel’s liberation from the Roman world order?

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## The Bosom Friend of Jesus Introduces Himself

Dear Ms. Reinhartz,

in your book „Befriending the Beloved Disciple. A Jewish Reading of the Gospel of John“<sup>1</sup> you tried to get into contact with a literary figure and took it for granted that such a process can't take place anywhere else than in your own head and at the places in the Gospel of John you have constructed in your own way.

1 Adele Reinhartz, *Befriending the Beloved Disciple. A Jewish Reading of the Gospel of John*, New York / London 2001. All page numbers in the following text in round brackets (. . .) without further reference refer to the respective following quotations from your book. If such quotations are indented as a separate paragraph, they are highlighted in blue. Quoted notes from your book are introduced with page number and number of the quote. Square bracketed numbers in the running text [. . .] refer to page numbers of cited works by other authors.  
To the German translation of your work, Adele Reinhartz, *Freundschaft mit dem Geliebten Jünger. Eine jüdische Lektüre des Johannesevangeliums*, Zürich 2005, translated by Esther Kobel, I refer with "Kobel" plus page number.

But there is another chance to meet such a counterpart, namely by a reader of your book making an attempt to put herself or himself in the place of this literary character and asking you in this role for a conversation that is more than a soliloquy.

One such reader who has read your book (first in the German translation by Esther Kobel, later also in the original English) with fascination, is a German pastor of the Evangelical Church in Hesse and Nassau named Helmut Schütz, who runs the website <https://bibelwelt.de>. His view of John's Gospel is shaped by an interpretation of the biblical theologian Ton Veerkamp, which is openly available under the title „Solidarity against the World Order“,<sup>2</sup> and he has critically reviewed your book „The Word in the World“<sup>3</sup> in the post „Otherworldly Word or Overcoming the World Order?“ With the help of his thoughts, I turn to you in this way.

Who am I? You call me the “Beloved Disciple” because I appear in John's Gospel as the disciple *hon ēgapā ho lēsous*, „Jesus was attached to in solidarity“ (13:23; 19:26; 21:7, 20)<sup>4</sup>, or *hon ephilei ho lēsous*, „Jesus was friends with“ (20:2), which is usually translated as “whom Jesus loved.” Ton Veerkamp states regarding his less emotive translation of *agapan* as “being in solidarity” reproduced here:<sup>5</sup>

2 So far, Ton Veerkamp's book is not available in an English print version, but it is accessible online at <https://bibelwelt.de/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Veerkamp-John.pdf> (the text is also available at: <https://bibelwelt.de/veerkamp-john>). In this review, quotations from his book are highlighted in red and cited with the abbreviation **Veerkamp 2021** and the page number of the PDF version. I also add the link to the corresponding section of the online version with the number of the respective paragraph.

Furthermore, there are quotes from the article [Ton Veerkamp: „The World Different“](#), in which Helmut Schütz summarizes another book by this author: **Veerkamp 2013** = Ton Veerkamp, *Die Welt anders. Politische Geschichte der Großen Erzählung* © Institut für Kritische Theologie Berlin e. V. according to the edition published in Berlin © Argument Verlag 2013.

3 Adele Reinhartz, *The Word in the World. The Cosmological Tale in the Fourth Gospel*, Atlanta/Georgia 1992.

4 All references to the Bible are given with chapter and verse number in round brackets (...), without further indication they relate to the Gospel of John. Bible quotations indented as a separate paragraph are highlighted in yellow.

5 Veerkamp 2021, 81-82 ([note 125](#)). Explaining 3:16 (“for GOD so solidarized with the world”), continues at this point,

In John, the response of human beings to the *agapē* of God is precisely not expected to be “love of God,” but *agapē* (“solidary relationship”) among humans. Solidarity, because you can't demand that all people “love” each other. Therefore, God's attitude to his people and to the living space of his humans, here to be translated as “world,” is that of unrestricted solidarity. The word is rather “modern,” but it makes clear the basic structure of the relationship between “God” and “human” in the Tanakh. The Hebrew verb *ʾahav* (phonetically close to *agapē*) is much more powerful. Anything from “being solidary” to “sensual-desirous love” is possible. Even murderous greed that ended in rape and had nothing to do with love, the story between Amnon and Tamar, is rendered with *ʾahav*, 2 Samuel 13:15.

It is often claimed that John uses the verbs *agapan* and *philein* synonymously, meaning “to love” in either case. In fact, *agapan* is a rather prosaic word (see Plato, *Politeia* 330b, where money, poems, and children—as belonging to property—are possible objects). *Philein* has more emotional coloring, from “to be friends with” to “to kiss, to love.”

As for my relationship with Jesus, I use both words; in 13:23 I even say that during a meal I lie at Jesus’ bosom; I refer to myself, so to speak, as Jesus’ bosom friend, the confidant of the Messiah who is closest to him.

In 1:18, *kolpos*, “bosom,” occurs once more in my Gospel. I call Jesus *monogenēs theos ho ōn eis ton kolpon tou patros*, the “only-begotten, divine, who is in the bosom of the FATHER,” as Ton Veerkamp<sup>6</sup> translates. This passage makes clear the closeness that is at stake here. Definitely not eroticism. The FATHER in my Gospel is the paraphrase for YHWH, the liberating and justice-creating NAME<sup>7</sup> of the God of Israel. And I am concerned with the confidence that Jesus is indeed the one in whom the *agapē* of this FATHER, his solidarity with Israel, is fully embodied. Just as the Messiah Jesus is “the exemplary concentration of Israel, ... in ‘the bosom of the NAME/FATHER,’ completely and utterly determined by God, just divine,” *theos*<sup>8</sup>, so I play “the role of *exemplary concentration* ... of the Messianic community” trusting fully in this Messiah Jesus.

From 19:35 and 21:24 it is clear that for the authors of the Gospel of John—whose work of many years accompanied by discussions can be concluded from ruptures of the text itself—I am a disciple and the most faithful witness of the Messiah Jesus. Historically, I am a fictional character, similar to the way Thomas Mann, a poet of your time, gives a “Doctor Serenus Zeitblom” as the fictional author of his work “Dr. Faustus.” In this respect, Ton Veerkamp<sup>9</sup> says at the end of his interpretation of the in his view “radical Messianic” Gospel of John:

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See in addition Veerkamp 2021, 243 ([Lazarus](#), par. 10):

It should be noted that friendship (*philia*) includes solidarity (*agapē*), but not vice versa.

One can and must be in solidarity with every person; therefore only *agapē* can be the epitome of the “new commandment” (13:34), not *philia*. One cannot and must not demand of anyone that he be a good friend to everyone, not to speak of “love” at all.

6 Veerkamp 2021, 39 ([A Postscript](#), par. 1), the following quote par. 17 (Veerkamp 2006, 26).

7 Since in your days the word FATHER hardly lets shine through the meaning of the liberating name of the God of Israel but seems to refer only to the heavenly Father of Jesus, I use the all capitalized word “NAME” (analogous to the Hebrew designation *HaShem* = “the name”) to paraphrase the tetragram *YHWH*, which is not pronounced because of the inaccessibility of God.

8 The first half of this sentence quotes Veerkamp 2021, 43 ([A Postscript](#), par. 18), the second half Veerkamp 2021, 243 ([Lazarus](#), par. 9).

9 Veerkamp 2021, 417 ([Signature: “This is the disciple.”](#) par. 5 and 3).

In the narrative that we have interpreted, the beloved disciple is one of the seven who saw “the Lord” on the beach of the Sea of Galilee. The research may try to find behind Serenus Zeitblom the “Thomas Mann” of this Gospel. For the interpretation of the story about *Jesus ben Joseph* from Nazareth, Galilee, the success or failure of such attempts is irrelevant. The Doctor Serenus Zeitblom of our narration, the beloved disciple, has given a truthful and trustworthy testimony about Jesus ben Joseph.

For several reasons, however, I cannot confine myself in my argument to the identity of the beloved disciple presupposed in the Gospel itself:<sup>10</sup>

1. The Gospel of John is not only about the time of Jesus himself, but it is written at the end of the 1st century to deal with problems that occur in the authors’ circle of vision. As a contemporary of Jesus, I cannot yet be aware of this, but it must be included in my argument.
2. You yourself define my identity as the implied author of the Gospel of John differently than Ton Veerkamp because you do not read it as a Jewish Messianic text but assume the later Greek Christian influenced reading as the original one. As a contemporary of Jesus, I can have even less of an insight into this than the authors of my Gospel, but nevertheless, I must address it as well.
3. Since you are trying to befriend me from a distance of almost 20 centuries, I can only get involved by also taking into account certain problematic situations and ways of thinking prevailing in your time, I only mention the problem of religious tolerance and intolerance, especially anti-Semitism, and, as the climax of contempt for humanity, the Holocaust.

Would you like to sit down with me again to meet each other face to face—at eye level? Then, mediated through the eyes and thoughts of Helmut Schütz, let me begin to comment on your highly interesting book.

## 1 On the Difficulty of Engaging with the “Most Spiritual of the Gospels”

In the introduction to your book (11), you mention in passing that the Christian theologian Origen<sup>11</sup> in the 3rd century calls my Gospel of John the “most spiritual of the Gospels.” If by spirituality he would mean the inspiration of fidelity that Jesus, as the Messiah of Israel, in his death on the cross hands over to those who trust in him

10 More on my identity in section 2.2, “The Beloved Disciple and his elusive facets.”

11 (168, *Prologue*, n. 1) The term “spiritual Gospel” was first applied to the Gospel of John by Origen, in his *Commentary on the Gospel of John* 1.40. See Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, Books 1-10, trans. Ronald E. Heine (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of American Press, 1989), 42.

(*paredōken to pneuma*, 19:30) so that they might join together in the resistance of *agapē*, solidarity, against the world order, then I might agree with him. But he means a turning toward the otherworldly pure spirituality of Christianity, away from fleshly, this-worldly oriented Judaism.

In contrast, it seems to me very sympathetic that you from “outside the Christian faith” can hardly „comprehend the Fourth Gospel” in exactly this otherworldly form of spirituality. Basically, for this very reason, you are in the best position to understand me as I would like to be understood.

This is not meant to be an attempt to curry favor with you. I remain aware that there are chasms between your convictions and mine. You will never be able to comprehend my testimony for the Messiah Jesus. But I would like to make it clear to you that my roots are also of Jewish origin.

In doing so, I am also aware of the matter-of-factness with which the majority of New Testament scholarship assumes that this is precisely not the case. You write (13-14):

Particularly engaging was the very difficult question of whether the Gospel might be used as a window on the historical, religious, and cultural context for which and within which it was written.

Thus, you also assume that my historical, religious, and cultural context is already the Gentile Christian, Greek mythological philosophical, perhaps even Gnostic context that will determine the reading of my Gospel from the 2nd century on. However, that is precisely what it is not. My context is the Jewish Scriptures and the liberating NAME of the God of Israel. The fire of my spirit burns for justice and peace on this earth and thus the fight against any unjust world order.

In your introduction, I am also struck (13) by the matter-of-factness with which you excluded your Jewish thinking and feeling at the beginning of your study of my Gospel. It pains me to read that you were “desensitizing” yourself to the hostility “of the seventy references to the ‘Jews’ in the Gospel of John” which “felt like a slap in the face.”

At this, two feelings are rising in me: anger at those who call themselves Christians and misuse my Gospel as a message of hatred against Jews, and a deep shame because my wild-eyed agitation in the battles between conflicting Jewish factions made such abuse possible.

I am glad that at some point you stopped “hiding behind the cloak of scholarly objectivity” and then did (15-16) make “several attempts to read the Fourth Gospel self-consciously and intentionally as who I am: a Jewish, female professor of New Testament.”

## 2 Reading as an Ethically Responsible Relationship with Literary Friends

Excitingly, (18) you want to read my Gospel like a novel, with an ethically responsible stance that Wayne Booth<sup>12</sup> has advocated:

Booth warns us not to take our literary friends for granted, nor to drift along in easy, unquestioning companionship. He exhorts us, rather, to engage with books fully, honestly, and with commitment, to address rather than to bracket the ethical considerations with which our human relationships are fraught.

That sounds promising. And I am curious whether we can be friends, in the end, knowing (20) that it will be very difficult to explain to you why of “the seventy or so occurrences of the term *hoi Ioudaioi*, often translated as ‘the Jews,’ many, perhaps even the majority, occur in the context of hostile or negative statements.” But more on that later.

### 2.1 The Woman Giving Birth and the Mother of the Messiah in John’s Gospel

I am pleased with (19) your appreciation of “the image of the birthing woman in Jesus’ farewell discourse.” Can you imagine that I am alluding to the indescribable joy that Isaiah 54:1-8 expects in the future for the people of Israel?<sup>13</sup>

It seems now that Jesus gives a nice example: A woman is in great pain at the birth of her child; when it is there, she forgets her pain. Ulrich Wilckens refers with Nestle-Aland to Isaiah 26:17. It is indeed about a situation similar to the situation of the disciples, “ETERNAL, our God, our Baals play the Lord, unlike you,” 26:13. But then it says, 26:17-18,

Like a pregnant woman about to give birth,  
she writhes, screams in her labor pains.  
This is how we have become,  
away from your face, ETERNAL!  
We were pregnant, we writhed,  
wind, we have born.  
Liberation was not done to the country;  
the settlers of the earth did not fall . . .

As everybody can see, this reference does not explain our passage; in John 16 no wind is born, but a child! Jesus answers rather with a midrash of the song “Rejoice, barren woman (*rani ‘aqara*)”, Isaiah 54:1-17. In v.7-8, it says,

12 (188, Bibliography) Booth, Wayne, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

13 Veerkamp 2021, 328 ([The Hour of the Woman](#), par. 10-16).

For a little moment (*chronon mikron, rega<sup>c</sup> qaton*) I left you,  
with great mercy I brought you back;  
With a flood of anger, I hid my face  
a moment before you,  
with agelong affection I have had mercy on you:  
said the NAME, your redeemer.

And the song began like this, 54:1-2,

Rejoice, barren woman who did not bear,  
break out in jubilation, rejoice who were never in labor,  
more are the sons of the desolate  
than the sons of the wife of Baal,  
said the ETERNAL.

The group does not understand the Scriptures, so they cannot understand John/Jesus. What happens to Israel after the defeat against Rome and the destruction of the place [*maqom*, the temple of Jerusalem] is not the first time. The *micron* of 16:16 is *the little moment* of Isaiah 54:7-8. The birth of the child of the woman of pain, who transforms her pain into joy, is the return of Israel from the desolation of the deportation to Babylon.

I am sorry (20) that you consider the way Jesus addresses his mother at the Cana wedding (2:4) to be a “rather rude rebuke.” Yet *gynē* is a perfectly normal, respectful form of address for a woman (John 4:21; 8:10; 19:26; 20:13; Matthew 15:28; Luke 13:12; 22:57; Judith 11:1).

And in asking, “what concern is that to you and to me?”—a well-known phrase from the Scriptures<sup>14</sup>—it is important to note the context within which Jesus asks this question<sup>15</sup>. After all, Mary is the first to be on hand at the wedding. She represents Israel, she points out to the Messiah the missing wine which is necessary for the Messianic wedding between the God of Israel and his people Israel to be celebrated, as announced in Isaiah 62:4-5.

But just as Jesus in Acts 1:6 rejects the disciples who hope for an imminent establishment of the kingship of Israel, so here he has to tell his mother clearly that his hour has not yet come. This is not due to “his apparent lack of enthusiasm” nor is his expression impertinent, rather Jesus takes his mother seriously as the representa-

14 Veerkamp 2021, 67 ([note 101 on the translation of John 2:4](#)):

*Ti emoi kai soi, gynai*. The phrase is not Greek; it is often attested in Hebrew, *ma li u-lakh*. It means a distancing, such as “not my problem, your problem.” The address *gynai* is not disrespectful; the statement is aimed at the fact that the Messianic time has not yet come. What is happening here is the sign of the age to come, and indeed the first, i.e., principle, sign, *archē tōn sēmeiōn*, v.11.

15 Veerkamp 2021, 67 ff. ([Messianic Wedding](#)).

tive of Israel by robbing her of the illusion that there could be a quick victory of Israel over the Roman world order, such as militant zealots dream of.

His hour will be different, he will be victorious by exposing the world order—through his death on the Roman cross—as the murderous machinery of oppression that it is, and at the same time handing over the inspiration of the fidelity of the God of Israel to those who trust in him: in the form of *agapē*, solidarity. Even then, Jesus—through Mary Magdalene<sup>16</sup>—will have to inform his brothers, who impatiently await the liberation struggle, that his ascension to the Father is “not yet” completed. This completion is not reached until justice and peace are reigning everywhere on earth.

You don’t need to believe this, but it is my conviction.

Regarding the mother of Jesus, I share your respect for “her confidence that her son would provide the necessary wine” because it is she who makes it clear that Israel has a future if those in ministry listen to what the Messiah tells them (2:5). With this action, she responds to Jesus’ question, “What have I—the Messiah—to do with *this* Israel?” as Ton Veerkamp<sup>17</sup> puts it, and from this follows: “With *such* an Israel, he does have something to do, indeed.”

## 2.2 The Beloved Disciple and His Elusive Facets

Back to the topic of friendship (20):

Were the Fourth Gospel a flesh-and-blood acquaintance, it would be possible to sit down over a leisurely dinner to air the issues between us. On this basis, we could determine together the future course of our relationship: to develop a friendship, to maintain the status quo, or, most drastically, to part company.

On the other hand, (20-21)

the process of befriending a book, unlike that of encountering a human acquaintance, takes place solely within the consciousness of the reader in interaction with the words of the text itself.

As I said, I am experimenting with an alternative: Here you are confronted with thoughts of Helmut Schütz, who reconstructs me differently than you by recourse to Ton Veerkamp’s interpretation of my Gospel within the framework of the Jewish Tanakh (the Hebrew Bible consisting of *Torah*, *Nebiim*, *Ketuvim* = “Guidance, Prophets, Writings”) interpreted by him as the Grand Narrative of Israel.

Will it be possible on this basis (21) that our two “ethos” (according to a formulation of Wayne Booth [8]) meet each other? Will (22) “this exercise in ethical criticism” succeed? You, at any rate, imagine that “the Beloved Disciple as implied author ... gladly accepts the invitation extended by me, one of the readers of his Gospel.” And to this, in turn, I will indeed gladly respond.

16 See Veerkamp 2021, 392 ff. (“Not yet”).

17 Veerkamp 2021, 71 ([Messianic Wedding](#), par. 12).

One of the difficulties that stand in the way of our encounter, however, is the question, as indicated above, of who I am after all.

Am I the narrator of the Gospel of John or the one who first wrote it down in ink on papyrus? Were several members of a Johannine community involved in this writing, at the same time or one after the other, due to discussions within the group and to changes that had to be responded to? All of this is open to speculation but it is less important than the way in which you reconstruct me—incorrectly—as the implicit author of a spiritualized cosmological narrative.

But this means: Your encounter with me, as Ton Veerkamp and Helmut Schütz reconstruct me, would require that you tentatively take leave of your own previous image that you had formed of me. A questioning of such images happens in every actual human encounter, but can also take place in one's own head. Helmut Schütz, for example, said goodbye to his old ideas about me when he saw himself challenged by Ton Veerkamp to radically rethink.

Who am I? No one knows my name. I am, by no means, John Zebedee. He and his brother rather embody the type of those Messianists who also existed among the followers of Jesus, wanting to see the Son of David Jesus on the throne in Jerusalem at the end of a victorious rebellion against the Romans—and themselves on his right and on his left (Mark 10:35 ff). Therefore, I do not find it appropriate to mention him at all in my Gospel. Only in the final chapter, he has to appear, because our group has no perspective for itself in the long run and in the end joins the Messianists led by Peter, to whose leadership also the Zebedees belong.

Ton Veerkamp<sup>18</sup> says that I “play the role of ... the exemplary concentration of the Messianic community.” Seen in this light, I am the representative of a community that knows itself rooted in the Grand Narrative of Israel's freedom and justice and at the same time is convinced that Israel's ancient hopes can only be realized in trusting the Messiah Jesus. As the Beloved Disciple, the Messiah of Israel is attached to me in a unique way of solidarity.

Are those right (23) who are viewing me “as the founder and first leader of the community that many believe was the historical location and audience for the Fourth Gospel?” This is true insofar as the testimony I unfold in my gospel is quite different from the testimony of other messianists such as Peter/Matthew or Paul/Luke, and we initially gather in our own communities apart from this mainstream. Even among us, however, there is not always unanimity; my gospel contains many traces of discussion about what the Messiah Jesus requires of us and what we may hope for from him. In this respect, Sandra Schneiders<sup>19</sup> may be agreed with suggesting that I am

18 Veerkamp 2021, 243 ([Lazarus](#), par. 9).

19 (170, n. 23) Sandra M. Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 224.

neither a single historical individual nor a pure literary symbol, but a textual paradigm “who concretely embodies in the text the corporate authority of the Johannine school” and includes both male and female aspects and characters.

I do not dispute this attribution of female traits. We are proud to have the mother of the Messiah in our ranks. We take the Messiah testimony of women like Martha and Mary Magdalene more seriously than other Messianic communities. And the woman at Jacob’s well as the embodiment of the ancestral mothers Rebekah and Rachel opens our eyes to the fact that Israel is not whole without Samaria.

### 2.3 On the Removal of “Sedimented Layers of Previous Interpretation”

Although you (24) approach my text with bias, I like to meet you because you are willing to examine preconceived judgments:

For many readers, myself included, the Fourth Gospel is an “always-already-read text,” one that is apprehended “through sedimented layers of previous interpretation,” acquired in church, in the academy, or from Western christianized society in general.<sup>20</sup> Digging out completely from these many layers is virtually impossible. Nevertheless, with some effort, we can shake off enough sand to shift our positions if we so choose.

Reading what you write about the removal of such “sedimented layers” reminds me of how Ton Veerkamp<sup>21</sup> describes his own attempt to reach back behind the post-Nicene translation and interpretation of the crucial Christological terms of John’s Gospel:

Our text is like a painting of an old master, hidden under one or even several layers of varnish darkened by the action of light. There is little to be said against varnish; it protects the picture from harmful influences from the outside. Just as little can be said against dogmatics; a binding interpretation protects against arbitrary interpretations caused by the respective spirit of the times. However, the protective layer can itself become harmful. What is on the picture is hardly visible anymore. Careful restoration by removing the protective layers brings to light an image that we had never seen before. Our translation, founded on an interpretation that protects against arbitrariness, is comparable to such a restoration. It is to be freed from ancient dogmatic prejudices, hardly perceived as such.

John did not know “Father-Son-Holy Spirit dogmatics” as it was developed in the 3rd century in the categories of the Greek scientific language of that time

20 (170, n. 24) See Frederic Jameson: *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981), 7.

21 Veerkamp 2021, 13-14 ([On the Translation of John](#), par. 6-8).

and became orthodox since the early 4th century (Council of Nicaea). When we read such words as “Father,” “Son,” “Holy Spirit,” we can be quite sure that he who thought Semitically would not have been able to do anything with the language of orthodoxy. Therefore, where possible, we must translate differently than the orthodox—but not biblically—trained readership expects.

All recent translations in German [or English] are “post-Nicene” translations, that is, they cover the text, even if they do not want to use newspaper German [or English], with that thick layer of varnish of Christian dogmatics that has become partly dark.

Would you be willing to shake off even the sands of a Gentile Christian distorted reception of my Gospel in order to be able to meet me as the Jewish Messiahist?

Being a construct in the mind of a 21st-century person, I am aware that everything we Messiahists—Peter, Paul, Mark, and all the others—had envisioned for Israel amidst the nations, namely the new world age of peace on earth, was soon devalued by the Gentile-Christian dominated church as Jewish-fleshly. Spiritual, on the other hand, would be the hope of an afterlife in heaven. And so my Gospel was transformed from a fight against an unjust world order inspired by the God of liberation into a fleshless and thus ultimately also spiritless consolation to eternal life in the hereafter, which, however, was to be reserved only for those who worship Jesus—completely detached from Israel and its hopes—as an essentially pagan All-Ruler and Savior of souls. So of all things not for those who are most dear to Jesus and me as his follower, namely the Jews!

I don’t know whether people like Ton Veerkamp will succeed in convincing Christians of the need to return to their Jewish roots. I know even less whether I can convince you as a Jew that I am not a Jew-hater. For I know that you already attribute to me what I call a later anti-Semitic reception of my Gospel.

## 2.4 An Ethically Questionable Gift That if Rejected Will Lead to Damnation?

Opening (24) my gospel, you mean to be offered a gift which, as you understand it, was not in my mind at all. You write with reference to 3:16-21:

The gift offered by the Beloved Disciple is the promise of eternal life, through faith in Jesus as the Christ and Son of God.

In a way, that is indeed what I mean. But what exactly are we talking about here: “eternal life,” “faith,” “Christ,” “Son of God”? In my eyes, trusting in the Messiah Jesus, who embodies the liberating name of the God of Israel, is the only way to overcome the Roman world order and live in the coming world age of peace and justice.

Unfortunately, in retrospect, I have to realize: Very early on, the more and more Gentile Christian dominated church loses sight of this goal and interprets my Gospel as you do. Under Constantine and Theodosius, it even becomes a pillar of the Ro-

man Empire itself, but not to create equitable structures according to the Torah; rather, a new class society emerges with the nobility and the ecclesiastical clergy at the top. At the same time, all political or religious opinions that deviate from the dominant Christianity are suppressed and all Jews are branded as Christ-killers.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, a reinterpretation of the Grand Narrative of Israel's liberation from oppression by the dominant world order, as I intend, becomes a religious myth of redemption with the downside of condemning those who refuse to accept this message. You already discover such an attitude in my text (25) and draw the conclusion:

Thus the Beloved Disciple judges me as "evil" if I reject his gift, that is, if I refuse to believe in Jesus as the Christ and Son of God.

You say even more clearly on the next page (26)

that faith in Jesus as the Christ and Son of God leads to eternal life, whereas rejecting this belief leads to eternal condemnation.

Much more abstractly, you formulate: (25)

The Beloved Disciple as implied author exercises ethical judgment with respect to his readers by separating those who are good—who believe—from those who are evil. In doing so, he also aligns one group with himself, as the one whose witness is conveyed through the medium of the Gospel itself, and consigns all others to the role of "Other."

It may serve me right that you judge my text in such a way because I express myself misunderstandably. I have not counted on the fact that very soon people will read my writing who are neither familiar with the Tanakh nor with the political conflicts in 1st century Palestine. These can no longer understand my sharp words against political opponents, especially since already in my time, Gnosis uses similar words, but in a completely different sense.

Now, whom do I address in my gospel? Whom do I push into the role of the "Other" if she or he does not accept my invitation to trust in Jesus as the Messiah?

First of all, I have to explain: In my Gospel, I often use the same word *Ioudaioi* for quite different groups of people.

The man whom I confess as the Messiah embodies the God of Israel who revealed himself in the Tanakh, as such, Jesus is a Jew. However, Jesus comes from Galilee, insofar he is not a Judean but a Galilean and opposed to the leading Judeans from Jerusalem. Toward the Samaritans, in turn, Jesus claims to be a Judean, but he

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22 According to Veerkamp 2013, the church has no choice but to legitimize the "social allocation of place" in the imperial dominate with its economic system, which tends to be organized as a colonate, in terms of state ideology: see [Colonate](#) and [Social places and Christian religion](#).

wants to merge Samaria—that is, the lost ten tribes of northern Israel—into a united Israel with Judea. Conversely, it occurs to Jesus being insulted by Judeans as a Samaritan.

In Judea itself, there are various parties and groups that refuse to recognize Jesus as the Messiah:

1. The leading priests, who are collaborating with Rome, as if the emperor, who lets himself be called “Lord and God,” had the right to rule as a king over Israel. This emperor stands as an adversary (*satan/diabolos*) against the liberating God of Israel.
2. The Zealots, who, with their attempts to defeat Rome militarily, are later partly responsible for the fall of Jerusalem in the Judean War.
3. The Pharisees, who after the year 70 give birth to Rabbinic Judaism and who are glad that the Roman Empire grants the Jews a niche existence as *religio licita*. At my time, this way seems to be wrong in my eyes, because thus neither the whole of Israel can be reunited nor a life according to the Torah on earth can be possible—so I think. History teaches me better: In fact, it is Rabbinic Judaism that survives with the Torah in the ghettos of the Middle Ages and modern times, while the Christian Church shows contempt and mortal threat to Judaism.
4. Former Jewish comrades-in-arms who have separated from our group. Our disappointment about this finds expression in my putting words into Jesus’ mouth that are inexcusable, especially the accusation that—as Jews who do not (anymore) trust in the Messiah—they are in fact not children of Abraham or God, but children of the Roman *diabolos*. Such invective can later be taken as an expression of hatred directed toward all Jews. I cannot undo that, I cannot even expect you to believe me not to have had such hatred in mind.

Finally, as soon as Judaism and Christianity emerge as distinct religions from the 2nd century onward, the word *Ioudaioi* in my Gospel can give rise to the misunderstanding as if I were speaking of Jews who do not trust in Jesus, as opposed to Christians who do.

In your time, would I still trust in Jesus the Messiah? Yes. I still firmly believe that the *agapē*, love, solidarity proclaimed by Jesus is the key to overcoming any unjust world order, even a Christian Papal Church of the Inquisition or liberalistic capitalism.

But quite at ease, I could probably not be a member of any church of the 21st century because the path of *agapē*, which also includes solidarity with Jews who refuse to trust in the Messiah Jesus, is only followed in parts of the Christian church. After all, where *agapē* is practiced, it does not seem to be limited to the Christian church; it also exists in Judaism, Islam, other religions, and even among people without any religious confession.

I criticize Christianity, which emerged from the Messianic movement, for reinterpreting the trust in Jesus in a pagan, Hellenistic-philosophical, or even Gnostic way. But Jesus is to be understood from the Jewish Scriptures instead of considering the “Old Testament” as obsolete due to Jesus.

You may consider an encounter with me on such a basis impossible or unfruitful from the outset, since you reconstruct me as the implied author of the Gospel of John in a completely different way. Insights like the ones I have just sketched would not match such a picture. Nevertheless, I ask you to at least consider and examine the way Ton Veerkamp and Helmut Schütz view me as the implied author of the Gospel of John. Am I a meaningless construct, without any attachment to a 1st-century reality? Or could a discussion with me perhaps even lead to exciting new insights about my Gospel?

## 2.5 Four Responses to a Gift: Compliant—Resistant—Sympathetic—Engaged

Very promising I find your intention (26) to meet my “overture” of friendship “with integrity” on your part. “The three aspects of” my gift to you, as you interpret it —“the life-and-death impact, the element of ethical judgment, and the universal scope”—invite you “to invoke ethical and universal categories” in your response to me as well. As you experience me as a person whose deepest concerns are life and death, so you do not want to spare me in your criticism.

First, you see yourself urged by me (27) to become “either the compliant or the resisting reader.” You want to play through both options, but do not want to limit yourself to them, in order to (28) possibly “stage a more direct encounter between the storyteller’s ethos and my own.” Precisely because you and I (29) “must acknowledge those in all arenas who are other to me, whose otherness poses a problem for me and the way in which I attempt to live in the world,” you take up two other positions,

from which to forge friendship, or at least a respectful relationship, with those who are other to me. One is to focus on the elements that unite me with others while ignoring the aspects that divide us. This may be termed a sympathetic position, in the sense that I attempt to understand and sympathize with the life of the Other in a way that resonates with my own. A second and infinitely more challenging possibility, however, is to engage fully with what separates me from the Other, not in order to persuade him or her but simply to acknowledge and accept his or her difference. Although the temptation is to expect reciprocity, this engaged position cannot demand such reciprocity without compromising its radical acceptance of the Other's otherness along with one's own.

Regarding the (30) “four reading positions” mentioned above, in “each case” you will

ask two related questions: What kind of friend is the Beloved Disciple to each sort of reader? What are the ethical implications of each reading position, that is, what kind of person do I as a reader become as I take on each of these positions in turn?

In doing so, you hope (31)

to forge a friendship with the Beloved Disciple on the basis of which I may continue to work on his Gospel with integrity and appreciation.

I share this hope, especially since in your contact with me on the path I propose to you here (30) you need not even “construct the partners to the relationship” yourself in the course of your reading of my Gospel; rather, “active and reciprocal communication between both parties” is possible.

### 3 The Gospel of the Beloved Disciple

About my Gospel, you summarize the view of New Testament scholarship as follows (32):

Scholars generally agree that the Gospel was originally written in Greek, perhaps in Ephesus in Asia Minor in the last decade or so of the first century, and that the identity of its author or authors is unknown to us. A number of its literary features, including the enumeration of signs (2:11; 4:54), geographical inconsistencies,<sup>23</sup> and interruptions,<sup>24</sup> suggest a complex history of composition. Some scholars discern the presence of a prior written source underlying the narrative material or the likelihood of successive editions during which revisions, additions, and deletions may have occurred.

Since you write that “almost everything we know about the Gospel, whether as lay readers or as scholars, is a construct,” I point to what Ton Veerkamp<sup>25</sup> says about the “Western logic of chronic and topographical order.” More important to me than a report free of contradictions is to present the Messiah Jesus in the tension of his appearance between Galilee and Judea and to understand his work in the context of the Jewish festival calendar, not by replacing Jewish festivals with Christian ones but by bringing the Jewish festivals to fulfillment so that the Messianic Passover of liberation can be celebrated in the age to come.

23 (171, n. 1) For example, John 4 has Jesus returning from Judea to the Galilee, whereas John 5 places him immediately in Judea with no transition. John 6 then places him on the other side of the Sea of Galilee, without noting how he arrived there.

24 (172, n. 2) For example, in 14:31 Jesus apparently concludes his discourse to the disciples with the words “Rise, let us be on our way,” and then continues to speak, virtually uninterrupted, for another three chapters.

25 Veerkamp 2021, 149 ([Near Passover. The Nourisher of Israel](#), par. 1).

In 14:31 there is indeed a disruption.<sup>26</sup> What is written down up to that point triggers further discussion, the results of which fill the following chapters.

You now recognize in my Gospel, as you have already pointed out in your book *The Word in the World*<sup>27</sup> (33),

three distinct but interrelated stories: a story of Jesus, a story of the world, and a story of a community of believers. Together, these constitute the venue within which I will stage my four encounters with the Beloved Disciple.

### 3.1. The Story of Jesus

In the presentation (33-34) of the story of Jesus, as I describe it in your eyes, you see as Jesus' antagonists exclusively

the Jews and their authorities, who believe that this man, whom his followers claim is the long-awaited Messiah and king of Israel, poses a threat to the Jewish community in its delicate relations with the Roman powers (11:50).

Although you mention the Roman state, you do not perceive that exactly this state, this so-called *Pax Romana*, is my main antagonist—and precisely not “the” Jews as such. In this respect, the sentence you just quoted is not wrong. But it must nevertheless be misunderstood if we do not realize that the ruling Roman world order is the common enemy of all Jews who trust in the liberating God of Israel. My opponents among the Jewish people are those who collaborate with Rome or play into their hands (in my estimation) by rejecting the Messiah Jesus.

Further, (34) you are listing “three main activities” of Jesus, “the gathering of disciples, the working of miraculous signs, and the delivering of complex discourses.” Again this is true—and at the same time, these formulations contain distortions of what I meant.

In fact, the activity of gathering is directed toward disciples, but you do not address the goal of this gathering: Jesus the Messiah wants to reunite all Israel from Judea, Samaria, and the Diaspora in his Messianic community, plus God-fearers from the nations.

In fact, the Messiah is working signs, but the focus is not on their being supernatural. As in the story of liberation in the Tanakh, it is about “signs and wonders” that bring about Israel's liberation, back then from the Egyptian slave house, in my time from the worldwide slave house of the so-called *Pax Romana*.

26 Veerkamp 2021, 307 ([The Parable of the Vine. Solidarity](#), par. 2).

27 See the commentary of Helmut Schütz: [Otherworldly Word or Overcoming the World Order?](#)

Finally, to unfold the complexity of Jesus' speeches, we need the appropriate key, namely the background of the Jewish Scriptures. Only from them, my Gospel can be grasped, otherwise, we understand pagan philosophy or Gnosis, but nothing of what is close to my heart, of the trust in the liberating NAME of the God of Israel.

In your brief recount of the events during Jesus' appearance, as I describe them, I notice details that do not correspond at all to my intentions.

Your account that "Pilate is willing, even eager, to release Jesus," whereas "the Jews clamor for his crucifixion," ignores the fact that it is not "the" Jews who are at work here, but henchmen incited by the leading priests. Neither the Pharisees nor the *ochlos*, "crowd," which is undecided in its attitude towards the Messiah, both of whom I mention often before, play a role in the trial of Jesus.

Furthermore, it is not clear to you what game Pilate is playing here. He very cleverly represents the interests of Rome by compelling the Jewish leadership to submit to the emperor as their only king. Pilate, on the other hand, by insisting on crucifying the "King of the Jews," inadvertently confirms Jesus' kingship according to the precepts of the Torah.

Finally, citing 19:35, you claim that I am ascribing historicity to my story. No, that is not what I am concerned with. I am not a historian like Herodotus or Josephus. Ton Veerkamp<sup>28</sup> has described very well what I mean by the truth of my testimony about water and blood flowing from the wound of the Messiah, drawing on the Scriptures of Israel; this truth is what I am concerned with, not historical correctness.

### 3.2. The Story of the World

My "historical tale" of Jesus you see embedded (35) in what you call a „cosmological tale“<sup>29</sup> (34):

The Beloved Disciple's story of Jesus is placed within the framework of a broad chronological, geographical, and theological narrative that has the cosmos as its setting and eternity as its time frame.

That such an idea of cosmos and eternity is completely foreign to me, I have already made clear. The Messiah Jesus comes from the FATHER, the God of Israel, and only insofar from heaven, as this symbolizes the NAME's inaccessibility. Jesus does not come from a temporally-spatially determinable or even habitable pre-existence. Where does it say in my Gospel (35) that Jesus "continues to exist in some non-worldly realm" after the completion of the creation of the world in which he partici-

28 Veerkamp 2021, 382-84 ([Fourth Scene: The Stabbed One](#), par. 7-16).

29 (171, Anm. 6) For a detailed exposition of the cosmological tale, see Adele Reinhartz, *The Word in the World: The Cosmological Tale in the Fourth Gospel*, Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series 45 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992).

pated? And according to your cosmological tale, how could the Word ever have created a world that is fundamentally nothing but evil? In Gnosis, after all, it is not the Redeemer who does this, but the evil Demiurge.

On the other hand, even in my eyes, (34) the antagonist of the Messiah is indeed “the ‘ruler of the world’ (14:30), ‘the evil one’ (17:15), Satan (13:27), or the devil (8:44; 13:2).” But this *satan* or *diabolos* must be understood from the Scriptures as the representative of the anti-divine world order, namely the Roman idol and adversary of the NAME, and not as an evil counter-god with demonic otherworldly features.

How far your cosmological tale is from my Messianic testimony about Jesus is clearly shown by the way you (35) contrast the “description of Jesus as the ‘Christ’ (a historical designation) and ‘Son of God’ (a cosmological designation)” as if the two designations were not both deeply rooted in the Jewish Scriptures and dealing in differently accented ways with one and the same entrustment of the Messiah by the God of Israel.

As for (35-36) “the usage of the word ‘world,’ or *kosmos*, itself, which signals the presence of the cosmological tale in the Gospel,” you see correctly that it can have very different meanings. But with all the distinctions you apply, you miss the most important one, namely *kosmos* as—indeed unjustly ordered—“world order.”

Thus, it is true (36) that in “some verses, the term seems to refer primarily to humanity in need of salvation.” However, it does not refer to the salvation of souls to an otherworldly heaven but to the liberation of the world (the people of Israel in the midst of the nations) from the unjust world order that weighs upon it.<sup>30</sup>

Here our ideas diverge very significantly because for you, in

most instances, ... *kosmos* is not a neutral term, simply describing humankind in general, but a value-laden term designating that element of humankind that is alienated from Jesus. ... In its negative aspect, the world is presented in terms that strongly resemble the portrayal of the Jews. The negative usage of “world” parallels the negative representation of the Jews, and, in many verses, is associated directly with the Jews or their leaders.

Thus you conclude that, in general, “the unbelieving Jews are the evil one’s agents in the world.” But this does not meet what I mean because you completely disregard the political meaning of the *kosmos* as the Roman world order and the disputes of the Messiah Jesus with different groups of the Jews about collaborating with or fighting against this world order.

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30 Veerkamp 2021, 89 ([“You are the teacher of Israel, and you do not understand this?”](#), par. 32-37).

### 3.3 The Story of a Community

Very extensively you deal with the attempt, advocated by meanwhile very many exegetes, to read my Gospel also in a third way, namely from the premise (48) that our “community read the Gospel both as a story of Jesus and as its own story.”

You view this attempt with justifiable skepticism, for it is not my purpose to describe our own community situation, nor will an unbiased reader read my Gospel as an account of our internal problems. Your following words apply insofar as I rather want to describe the truth embodied in the Messiah Jesus (49-50):

Like the words of the biblical prophets, Jesus’ word is the word of God and expresses the divine will (14:24; cf. 8:45-47, 14:10). The events in which they are fulfilled must therefore also be “true,” both as part of a divine plan for humankind and as an actual representation or reflection of human history. These points draw the reader’s attention not to the role of the Gospel as a mirror for the community’s own historical experience but precisely to its role as the true story of the sojourn of the son of God in the human world.

However, I disagree with you insofar as you reduce my interest in the truth of the Messiah to the factuality of historical details from the time of Jesus. Once again, I am no Josephus, no more or less objective historian, but I am interested in truth in the sense of the Jewish Scriptures: namely, the probation of the fidelity of the God of Israel in the words and deeds of the Messiah. His name embodies the liberating NAME of the God of Israel. And only through his departure, through his apparent defeat on the cross of the Romans, this Messiah Jesus can hand over to those who trust in him the inspiration of sanctification that has already overcome the ruling world order.

There is nevertheless something about the matter of the ecclesiological history reflected in my Gospel. The authors of my Gospel can tell the story of Jesus only from their own time and from the presuppositions of the community to which they belong. This community, in the broader sense, are the Messianists who, since Peter and James, the Lord’s brother, proclaim Jesus as the Messiah. They are the assemblies founded by Paul, who try to build up the Body of the Messiah as a community of peace of Jews and Gentiles; with my skepticism about this experiment, I am unfortunately right, since soon the Gentile Christians make it impossible for any Jew to keep his own identity as a practicing Jew in the emerging so-called Christian Church.

You do not address the central events that produce the Gospels as Messianic literature, namely the Judean War and its catastrophic outcome: the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Second Temple. This is a catastrophe for all Jews, including the Messianic Jews around Peter and James and even the Pauline Messianists. All followers of the Messiah Jesus expect his imminent return in the first decades after his death. How triumphantly Paul pictures it that his contemporaries are partly still

alive and—together with the dead raised from the graves—meet the Messiah descending on the clouds (1 Thessalonians 4:17)!

But instead of the age to come, in place of the Messianic Kingdom of Peace, the year 70 comes as a tremendous shock even for us Messianists. My fellow evangelist Mark<sup>31</sup> is the first to write a “beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Messiah,” *Archē tou euangeliou Iēsou Christou*. Paul in his time can think that he does not have to know the Messiah according to the “flesh,” that we do not have to ask about his Jewish origin. When the message of the Messiah will have reached every nation of the *goyim*, the Jews finally will trust in the Messiah as well, and the Kingdom of Peace of the Messiah is dawning. That’s what Paul is hoping for. Mark has to go back to the “flesh” of the Messiah, to his existence as this particular Jew. He can only deal with the trauma of the events of the year 70 by writing the passion of Jesus into the history of the suffering of the Jewish people in the Judean War. That is why Jesus, according to Mark, follows the procession of the Roman legions that put down the Jewish uprising, from Galilee to Jerusalem. Matthew and Luke later try to answer the questions that Mark has to leave open under the immediate impression of the catastrophe. I, too, another generation later—here I have to identify with the authors who write down my Gospel—can not tell the story of Jesus in any other way than Mark in principle: I have to write the burning issues and problems of our own time after the year 70 into the story of Jesus.

This is by no means about circling around ourselves, not (48) about “the particulars of the community’s history, specifically its relationship with the Jewish community,” but central for me remains the still unresolved question of how we as Jews should confront the Roman world order, whose power is even increasing and seems insurmountable. I oppose the Zealot way of trying to force the Messianic Kingdom of Peace, as Bar Kochba will try to do. I also consider the Rabbinic way, to survive separated from the nations and gathered around the Torah in a niche of the Roman Empire as *religio licita*, to be an aberration that must lead to the downfall of Judaism (in which I am mistaken). My hope, the hope of our group, is directed solely to the Messiah Jesus, who with the gift of the inspiration of sanctification, with the Paraclete, with the new commandment of *agapē*, which summarizes the entire Torah, has given us a weapon in our hands to live *under* the world order not *from* it and *for* it, but to work *against* it!

As Messianic Jews, we live at the end of the 1st century together with Jews who do not trust in Jesus as the Messiah. We want to preserve our Jewish identity and at

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31 See the books: Andreas Bedenbender, *Frohe Botschaft am Abgrund. Das Markusevangelium und der Jüdische Krieg*, Leipzig 2013, and Andreas Bedenbender, *Der gescheiterte Messias*, Leipzig 2019. For the following section, see the first six chapters in my review of Veerkamp 2013, [From the Gospels to the Making of Christianity](#).

the same time convince our fellow Jews that only trust in Jesus can bring life in the age to come. So we live together in everyday life as neighbors, as Jews, who think differently and argue about many things. But more and more conflicts arise when we represent our Messianic position in the synagogues, up to insults and physical violence, to accusations of blasphemy against us, and of collaboration with the Roman enemy of us against the others.

As far as I know, there is no official decision to exclude us from the synagogue, but one or the other Rabbi or synagogue leader does not want to tolerate us as trouble-makers in the synagogue anymore; there could be problems with the Roman authorities or the gentile neighbors.

From the safe distance of two millennia, Ton Veerkamp<sup>32</sup> describes this conflict between Messianic followers of Jesus and the Rabbinic leadership of the synagogues of my time much more soberly than I am able to: Our stance actually represents a threat to the status as *religio licita* in the eyes of the Rabbis. Although there is no other way for them, it is life-threatening for us if they expose us defenselessly to pogroms as people without a synagogue, *aposynagogoi*, so that I am carried away to accuse even “the Jews” at the time of Jesus of wanting to kill him and his followers. As a child of my time, I do not have the necessary distance that would allow me to come to a proper judgment of my fellow Jews who are Pharisaic or Rabbinical. I am indebted to Ton Veerkamp for his objective criticism that confronts me harshly but respectfully with the facts.

Back to your text (50), in which I find your reference to “extratextual referents” to be interesting:

The Beloved Disciple therefore ascribes extratextual referents to the events he recounts. The locus of these referents, however, is not within the detailed historical experience of the Johannine community in the latter part of the first century C.E., but in the life of Jesus several decades earlier. The Beloved Disciple places this extratextual history in the context of the eternal relationship among God, Christ, and humankind, and thus gives it a seminal role in the spiritual journey of the intended readers as individuals and as a community.

Unfortunately, you do not look for “extratextual referents” of my Gospel in the Jewish Scriptures, where I find them, and make of the liberation of Israel a spiritual journey that pagan authors could not have thought up better.

However, I then find it remarkable that for my time (52) you still do not presuppose a difference of religious affiliation “between those who confess Jesus to be the Messiah and those who do not.”

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32 Veerkamp 2021, 218-19 ([The Interrogation and the Exclusion](#), par. 4-5), and Veerkamp 2021, 316-18 ([“When he comes, the advocate, the inspiration of fidelity,”](#) par. 4-12).

The story would refrain ... from identifying these two groups as Christian and Jewish; rather, it would hold open the possibility that both groups were primarily Jewish in their ethnic origins and self-identification.

Therefore, the stories about Mary and Martha as friends of Jesus, who are comforted by their Jewish neighbors, do not contradict at all that there are conflicts with anti-Messianic forces among the same neighbors on the other side. In general, Jews are not a homogeneous unit in my Gospel, I already mentioned it. There are all kinds of differently influenced Judeans, Galileans, Pharisees, Zealots, priests, there is a Jewish crowd that is cursed by other Jews as lawless, and there is Nicodemus who criticizes this and is scolded for it as a Galilean (7:43-52).

Perhaps, however, I misunderstood the passage I just quoted, because immediately before and after it you mention the “ongoing social contacts between Jews and Christians to which theological differences were not necessarily a barrier.” With that, you presuppose already for the time of my gospel a difference of the religions, here Jewish, there Christian. And you impute to me something that could not be further from my mind, namely an enmity against everything that is Jewish, that is, in your words,

the incompatibility of participating in synagogue fellowship while confessing Christ. This incompatibility is emphasized throughout the Gospel, in which, for example, the disciples are not referred to as Jews, Jewish customs and festivals are explained, and Jesus refers to the Torah as “your Torah” (10:34).

If this were true, Jesus would have objected when he is addressed as a Jew by the Samaritan woman in 4:9. He does not, rather he tells her explicitly (4:22), “*Sōteria*, salvation, liberation, is happening from the *Ioudaiōn*, Judeans, Jews.”

If this were correct, Jesus would not have used the synagogue at Capernaum to proclaim his message of the Bread of Life, and he would not have undertaken a cleansing of the temple; rather, he would have attacked or dismissed all Jewish institutions as such.

It is true, however, that already Jesus neither succeeds with his cleansing of the temple nor with his preaching in the synagogue. The temple remains a department store, has practically become an idol temple of the Romans, to whose emperor the leading priests submit at the latest in their deal to crucify Jesus. And the synagogue does not open itself to the liberating work of the Messiah to become a place of gathering of all Israel including the Samaritans and individual God-fearers from the *goyim*, but in fact, as said above, has understandable reasons to expel us from the synagogue.

It is also correct that I explain “Jewish customs and festivals,” because my readers are joined by people from the *goyim*, even if not as many as Paul. And why should I attach so much importance to such explanations, why should Jesus fill these festi-

vals as the Messiah with new content, strive for a new Passover of liberation from the prevailing world order, if everything Jewish would be so hateful to me as your formulations suggest?

In fact, the alienation between us Messianic Jews and the synagogue of my time, especially its leadership, is already so far advanced that I am indeed talking about “your Torah,” where this Torah is not interpreted and lived in the sense of the Messianic *agapē* that Jesus proclaimed as a new commandment. So, in a sense (53), I can agree with you in

that the ecclesiological tale that may be pried from the Gospel narrative is itself shaped not only or perhaps not even primarily by the historical experience of the community but by the ideological agenda of the Beloved Disciple himself, by his strong convictions concerning the central christological message that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God, and/or by his desire to keep his followers from turning their backs on the gift that they have accepted. While the two-level reading strategy is useful as a framework within which to speculate about the followers of the Beloved Disciple, it should not mislead us into viewing the Gospel as a clear window to the history and experience of “the” Johannine community.

No, I don’t want to focus on our community. Yes, I want my readers to trust in the Messiah Jesus for the life of the world to come. And no: Nowhere do I condemn Jews who do not trust in Jesus to the eternal damnation of hell! But I am convinced that Zealotism and Rabbinitism lead to destruction: the Zealot way to new military defeats and the Rabbinic way to the downfall of Israel under the Roman world order.

From the perspective of your time, I must admit: I was politically mistaken. Until the 21st century, Christianity has not overcome the world order through *agapē*; in contrast, Judaism has preserved the Torah through all persecutions. In your time, I would proclaim the *agapē* of Jesus the Messiah to people of goodwill in all religions, denominations, and worldviews.

### 3.4 The Missing Story of the Struggle against the World Order

At the conclusion of Chapter 3, you write:

The three stories that emerge from the Gospel—the historical, the cosmological, and the ecclesiological—... define the venue within which I will meet the Beloved Disciple.

I suspect that it will be difficult for you to find me right there, since I am neither a historian nor a proclaimer of an otherworldly redemption myth, nor did I write my gospel as a church board president of a Johannine congregation. What is missing in addition to your historical, cosmological, and ecclesiological narrative is a fourth nar-

rative, namely a political narrative of Israel under the so-called *Pax Romana*. You do not mention such a narrative with a single word, as if this conflict did not exist and did not influence the authors of the Gospels in any way. That is why I take the liberty to invite, in addition to the scholars who are lurking in the shadows around the table of our encounter, an author like Ton Veerkamp, again and again, in order to be able to exhaust this fourth possibility of an encounter with you.

## 4 The Beloved Disciple as Mentor

In the fourth chapter (69) you outline a “complying reading” of my Gospel and present my gift to the readers once again as “the knowledge of how to attain salvation or eternal life.” In the meantime, I have emphasized several times that I am not at all concerned with such a redemption of the soul into otherworldly eternal heaven. And compliance with my Gospel trusting in the Messiah, which is indeed close to my heart, is not (as the German translator explains, *Kobel* 69, n. 1) about “a certain degree of submissiveness or docility,” rather I hope that this trust is accompanied by the consciousness of liberation and a feeling of joy.

### 4.1 Compliant Reading of the Historical Tale

I naturally like (60) readers who agree with me and participate “on all levels—intellectual, spiritual, and emotional”— in what is close to my heart, namely trusting in the Messiah and overcoming the world order through the commandment of his *agapē*.

In describing some of the characters who, as you put it (55), “accept the gift of eternal life,” you are right in emphasizing that “these figures do not remain static in their faith ... but are portrayed as coming to greater understanding and belief as the narrative proceeds.” And in connection (56) with my person, you point out the role of the Scriptures mentioned in 20:9, without which an understanding of the resurrection of the Messiah is not possible.

#### 4.1.1 The Woman at Jacob’s Well as the Embodiment of Rebekah and Rachel

But the background of the narratives of my Gospel in these very Scriptures you do not perceive anywhere. Thus, you miss the fact that the woman at Jacob’s well confronts Jesus as the embodiment of Rebekah and Rachel and represents the lost ten tribes of Northern Israel, as Ton Veerkamp<sup>33</sup> explains:

A woman from Samaria came to draw water. The woman sets the water jug down. She puts her hands on her hips—so we may imagine the woman, the

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33 Veerkamp 2021, 109 ([In the Land of the Beginning](#), par. 3-4).

story will prove us right!—, speaks unmistakably and loudly, from top to bottom. So she will stay during the whole conversation, she is not to be made small. Jesus asked her to give him a drink after he had sent the disciples away. Besides this impious figurative imagination, we need “Bible firmness.” We explain a *Biblical* text, the context of the narrative is the whole Scriptures and the current political situation, both. Our narrative first sends us into the book, *In the beginning*, Genesis.

The village of Sychar near Shechem evokes an event from Genesis. The area was a gift of Jacob to his son Joseph; Joseph here stands for Samaria. Jacob gave to Joseph “the mountain ridge (*Shekhem*), which I (= Jacob) took away from the Amorites with my sword and bow” (Genesis 48:22). Jesus, like the fathers of Israel, like Isaac and like Jacob, sat down at the local well, which Jacob had already dug. Three names we have heard: Jesus, Jacob, Joseph. Now comes a woman who makes us think of Rebekah and of Rachel—the mother of Israel and the mother of Joseph (= Samaria). The woman at the well is not some stupid person with a grubby past, she is one of the great women of Israel. Whoever does not realize this right at the beginning will not understand anything here.

#### 4.1.2 Signs and Proofs of Power of the God of Israel and His Messiah

Also hidden from you is the symbolism of the four signs, which refer to the healing of the paralyzed and blind Israel, the feeding of the starving, and the raising of dead Israel. In terms of content, they structure chapters 5 to 12, summarized by Ton Veerkamp<sup>34</sup> as the second part of John’s Gospel under the title “The Hidden Messiah,” which deal with “the conflict between the Messianic community and its opponents, the Judeans”:

In this conflict Jesus is not accepted as Messiah and is not perceived as such; as the Messiah, he is hidden. This part consists of five chapters of varying length. They contain the events during five different festivals of the Judeans.

There are *signs* here too, and here too they appear in pairs: The healing of the paralyzed and the feeding of Israel (5 and 6) as well as the opening of the eyes

34 Veerkamp 2021, 131 ([PART II: THE HIDDEN MESSIAH](#), par. 1-2). The “five chapters of varying length” mentioned by Veerkamp in his text do not refer to the chapter count that became common much later but to the text originally structured by the Jewish festivals (loc. cit., par. 4):

7. A Festival. Life of the Age to Come, 5:1-47

8. Near Passover. The Nourisher of Israel, 6:1-71

9. Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles. The Great Struggle, 7:1-10:21

10. Hanukkah, the Festival of Renewal. Living and Dying, 10:22-11:54

11. The Nearness of the Passover, 11:55-12:50

and the revival of Israel (9 and 11). The signs are the works by means of which Jesus completes the work of God. And the works are the signs and proofs of power (*ʾothoth, mofthim*).

What Jesus says about signs and wonders you also do not interpret in the context of the biblical Scriptures. I do not want (58) to “criticize a faith that is based on sight,” since both the Scriptures testify to the mighty deeds of power of God and I myself can testify to the signs of Jesus that lead to the liberation of the world from the world order that weighs on it. Ton Veerkamp<sup>35</sup> explains this in connection with the healing of the son of the king’s official, and I quote him at great length because this is an issue that plays a major role in Christian anti-Jewish polemics:

The official had a son. The son is his future, and in the deadly illness, even his future is at stake. So he asks Jesus to heal his son. Jesus says something that seems to have little to do with the matter, “If you had not seen *signs* and *proofs of power*, you had not trusted.” The comments always see an accusation in v.48. So Wilckens [Ulrich Wilckens, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (NTD Band 4), Göttingen 2000, 90],

They only believe if they have seen signs and wonders. The Old Testament expression has become established in the early Christian missionary language . . . , in this respect, a critical tone can certainly be heard in v.48 in the overvaluation of miracles in connection with becoming a believer.”

... Faith, in this kind of theology, is always something that cannot be seen, and always causes something that cannot be seen. The meaning of Jesus’ answer, according to these commentaries, is a reproach, in the sense that “I have always to do signs and wonders so that you may believe—when will you believe without me having to do wonders?” The reproach is absurd, it would invalidate the whole Scriptures. We hear Deuteronomy 4:34,

If ever a god had tested it  
to come, to take a people from among a people,  
with trials, with signs, with proofs of power,  
with war, with a strong hand, with an outstretched arm,  
with all these awe-inspiring great things,  
which the NAME, your God, has done for you in Egypt before your eyes?

Liberation has always to be experienced sensually in Israel, “Do not forget,” says Moses, “all the speeches [*devarim*, words, deeds] you *have seen*, that they will not depart from your heart all the days of your life . . .” (Deuteronomy 4:9). So if Israel had not seen any signs and proofs of power even then, it would not have trusted and could not have trusted. It is about the double des-

35 Veerkamp 2021, 128-30 ([The Other Sign in Cana, Galilee: “Your son lives,”](#) par. 5-13).

ignation of what is happening; signs (*ʾothoth, sēmeia*) refer to Israel as the object of God's action; proofs of power (*mofthim, terata*) refer to God himself as the subject. Therefore, these words often occur together, especially if God's action is brought up in connection with the liberation from Egypt and in the wilderness. Signs and proofs of power always mean the verification of the liberation power of Israel's God.

... If humankind sees signs and proofs of power that are liberating and reviving, then they trust. But what if they see nothing more, how can they still trust? John invokes the question but only answers it in 20:24 ff.

The official insists, "Run down before my infant dies!" The answer is, "Your son lives." The man trusts this word. Without having seen anything! This seems to contradict what we just said: Signs and proofs of power cause the trust of Israel. The understatement of the commentaries is anti-Jewish. Jews "believe" when they see signs and acts of power, Christians "believe" without the like, and that is *genuine* "belief." We express it so that nothing anti-Jewish remains smoldering. Of course, in the days of the failure of the Messiah, of his departure, you can see nothing but the unshakable power of the world order and the ruins of Jerusalem. It is the difference between the Israel of sensually experienced and experienceable liberation and Israel in front of the ruins of its history. This Israel is required to hold on to a Messianic perspective at a moment when it seems to have lost its future. Certainly, there is a tension between *seeing* and *trusting* in this situation. There are times without *signs* and *proofs of powers*, as Israel knows and sings in the bleak song: *Why, God, do you detest forever*, Psalm 74:9,

We no longer see our signs,  
Nowhere a prophet any more,  
nobody is with us, who knows until when . . .

The official has no choice but to trust. Only afterward the man will find out whether he was in the hands of a messianic charlatan. What is true and therefore trustworthy can always be determined afterward, whether in good or in evil. He must have the affirmation that his son lives. The fever has left his child, his slaves say. "When?" "In the seventh hour." The official must be sure that it is not a spontaneous recovery, but that the word of Jesus has brought the child back to life and founded his future. The exact time is crucial. Only now it is possible to have real trust; the first trust was a trust in advance. If it is certain that something has really changed, has really turned to good, the word of Jesus becomes a sign and a proof of power. He and his whole house—wife, children, servants—they trust because all have seen that the word is *happening*.

In fact, after the year 70, we live in a time (and it is not over in your 21st century!) when signs and proofs of power of God are rarely seen. That's why we often can't do without a trust in advance.

Why (58) should I tell the story of Thomas if I were only concerned with rebuking his doubt and addiction to wanting to see a sign? No, I do not raise my forefinger and say, "Thomas should have believed on the basis of the disciples' testimony." Rather, in view of the experiences of the catastrophe of the year 70, I give the skeptic the place he deserves:<sup>36</sup> he is allowed to feel the wounds of the one crucified by Rome, in order to realize that it is precisely this murdered and desecrated one who deprives the Roman emperors of the right and power to present themselves as "Lord and God." It is precisely the skeptic Thomas who is allowed to proclaim the one crucified by Rome as "Lord and God"!

#### 4.1.3 Are Jews More Responsible for Jesus' Death than the Governor of Rome?

The downside of your complying reading involves those who reject Jesus. According to you (61), these are especially "those whom the Beloved Disciple calls 'the Jews' (*hoi Ioudaioi*)."

I admit that I have caused many misunderstandings with this word. For, as stated above, I use it to refer to many different groupings among the Jews. In the most general sense, I mean Rabbinic Judaism at the time of the writing of my Gospel, who so vehemently oppose our Messianic testimony to Jesus.

I sharply disagree with your following sentence (62):

The narrative leaves no doubt that the moral responsibility for Jesus' death lies with the Jewish authorities and the Jewish crowds.

First, it is a matter of political responsibility, not moral. Politically, I see directly the priesthood in responsibility, which is ready to sacrifice Jesus for the privileges of the Jewish upper class and the status of Judea as a nation. The Pharisees, as representatives of the later Rabbis, are indeed involved in the capture of Jesus; they too consider Messianists like Jesus dangerous. But they do not participate in the demand of his crucifixion before the praetorium of the Roman governor. There, apart from the priests, only their henchmen are present, not even the Jewish crowd, the *ochlos*, who had shown an ambivalent relationship to Jesus.

How anyone can think that Pilate should be less guilty of Jesus' death than the Jewish leadership in having a harmless crank executed as part of political power plays with the provincial elites is a riddle to me. Is convicting an innocent man morally more justifiable than calling for the conviction of a man you consider politically dangerous?

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36 See Veerkamp 2021, 401-03 ([To See and to Trust](#)).

I admit, however, that I have hinted at the blood lust of the Roman world order, which was all too familiar to my contemporaries, rather between the lines. Otherwise, I would have risked more easily having my writing fall victim to Roman censorship. As the *Revelation of John* speaks of Rome with the secret code “Babylon,” in my Gospel, Rome is mostly spoken of with the expression which the Romans themselves give to the cosmos they claim to be so well-ordered. And their emperor I mark—well understandable to people who know the Scriptures—with the designation of *satan* or *diabolos*, who appears in the Scriptures as the adversary of God and of the kings anointed on his behalf.

#### 4.1.4 Jesus and Almost All Who Follow Him are Jews or Samaritans

After all (63), you cannot help but concede that I do not question Jesus’ Jewish identity, even though I refer to him only once (4:9) as *Ioudaios*. In this context, the word also simultaneously denotes a *Judean* as opposed to a *Samaritan*. But of course, it is more than “conceivable that Jesus’ Jewish identity is so much taken for granted that it does not need to be mentioned.” Pilate the Roman naturally assumes that Jesus is Jewish, and even affirms his Jewish kingship. And, as you rightly point out, “Jesus’ messianic identity is in large measure expressed in Jewish terms.” Unfortunately, however, from this, you do not draw the conclusion that this Jewish terminology should now also be appropriately interpreted from the Jewish Scriptures.

Instead, you claim that I would “dissociate Jesus from Judaism in three ways.”

1. It is true that he speaks of “your Torah”; however, he does not reject it but demands its fulfillment by the new commandment of *agapē*. By declaring in 5:17, according to your words, not to “be bound by the Sabbath laws because of his unique relationship to the Father,” he does not detach himself from Judaism; rather, he understands himself precisely as the embodiment of the NAME of the God of Israel. And since in his eyes the works of creation are not yet completed, both the FATHER and the SON must continue these works, namely the liberation and creation of law for Israel.

2. Your following sentences contradict what has just been said, that Jesus does not deny to be a Jew, neither in Samaria nor facing Pilate:

Jesus’ discourses propose such a sharp dichotomy between Jesus and believers, on the one hand, and the unbelieving Jews, on the other, that the term “Jew” is rendered inappropriate as an explicit descriptor for Jesus. Similarly, Jesus’ named disciples are never spoken of as Jews, though it seems logical to assume that they were Jews, given that the narrative is set in Palestine and that the followers come from the common people rather than the Roman soldiery or bureaucracy.

That you even consider the possibility of Jesus' followers coming mainly from the ranks of the Roman *goyim* does not fit my Gospel. Not even the official (4:46-47) who asks Jesus for a healing is a Roman in my Gospel as in the Gospel of Matthew.

That Nathanael is a Jew, even an Israelite without deceit, you do not deny (1:47). Philip, who "finds" Nathanael, is certainly a Jew despite his Greek name, perhaps coming from the Diaspora, since he enlightens Nathanael about the Messiahship of Jesus, citing the Scriptures (1:43-45). Likewise, Peter, Andrew, and the two disciples named Judas are definitely Jews.

3. Your reference to the interest of some Greeks in Jesus (12:20-21) virtually proves that this is an exception, and I even leave open the question of whether Jesus accepts these Greeks as his disciples. Especially to them Jesus makes clear that his discipleship is connected with a high commitment (12,23-26).

The fact that Jesus also appears as the Messiah of the Samaritans points beyond Judean and Galilean Jews, but not beyond Israel, because Jesus addresses the woman at Jacob's well as the representative of the lost ten tribes of Israel, which had five husbands (4:18),<sup>37</sup> referring to the deities of the five nations that ruled Samaria as their lord and owner, *ba'al* (cf. Hosea 2:18): Assyria, Babylon, Persia as well as the Hellenistic Egypt or Syria; in addition, there were the Hasmonean Judeans and, in Jesus' time and mine, the Roman world empire, which a fortiori cannot be a "husband" for Samaria in the sense of Hosea 2:18. Here it is about the reconciliation of two mutually hostile parts of ancient Israel, which overcome their enmity by the Messiah holding out the prospect of liberation from the ruling world order for all Israel, Judea and Samaria. It is precisely here that my Gospel is completely misunderstood if the background of Israel's Scriptures is disregarded. It is no coincidence that in this context the Messiah pronounces the *egō eimi* for the first time in my Gospel, presenting his work as being in full harmony with the work of the NAME of the God of Israel, as Ton Veerkamp<sup>38</sup> explains:

We hear for the first time in our text the words: "I AM, I WILL BE THERE." 24 times in the Gospel of John we will hear this *egō eimi*, "I AM, I WILL BE THERE," 24 times we will be reminded of the revelation of the NAME in Exodus 3:14, the foundation of prophetic self-consciousness. This peace and liberation conversation of the Messiah with the woman at Jacob's well is the "way of God's being" in Israel, and right *now*. To the person to whom these words have fundamental meaning, a new life begins. With this, the announcement becomes true: "Trust me, woman, for the hour [of the *neither—nor*] comes ... and this is happening now!" At the moment when Jesus removes the blockade, *Judeans do not associate with Samaritans, but they beat each other to*

37 See Veerkamp 113-16 ("[The husband you have now is not your husband](#)").

38 Veerkamp 2021, 120-21 ("[I AM HE,](#)" par. 3).

*death*, the NAME is happening as it was revealed in Exodus 3:14, *I will be there as I will be there*. The NAME is happening in speaking, in this political conversation, where a way out becomes visible that has never been there before.

Also, your argument (63) that the name of the traitor Judas with its allusion to the “term ‘Jew’ (*Ioudaios*)” connects this term as such “tightly with the opposition to Jesus” is easily invalidated, since there is another Judas in the discipleship of Jesus (14:22), whom I expressly distinguish from the traitor Iscariot. Not every *Yehudah*, i.e. a member of the Israelite tribe Judah, is, as such, a traitor, but only where he makes common cause with the arch-enemy, the Roman *satan* or *diabolos*.

#### 4.1.5 Is the Jewish People in John’s Gospel “Violent and Repugnant”?

Thus (64), what you impute to me in the following sentence does not apply at all:

Through their portrayal as a violent and repugnant people, filled with hatred and misunderstanding, the Beloved Disciple attempts to steer his readers away from the path that they have chosen and toward the preferable path of accepting the gift that he offers.

No, not all Jews and not “the” Jews as a people are violent and repugnant. However, I cannot blame you for your judgment, since I overshoot the mark in the sharpness of my criticism of the Jewish high priestly leadership and of the Zealots, of Pharisees and Rabbis who deny Jesus’ Messiahship. But I see a difference between harsh words in an inner-Jewish political dispute and an eternal condemnation to hell of people who do not want to follow another religious faith. The latter is as far from me as the belief in otherworldly heaven or hell in general.

In the following paragraph (65), in which you describe Jews who are wavering between “acceptance and refusal” of Jesus as the Messiah, you contradict your own assumption that in my Gospel Jews only appear in a negative estimation. However, you turn the fact of Nicodemus’ positive view around again so that it confirms your view in that

the rather positive portrayal of Nicodemus and others does not in fact soften the Gospel’s negative representation of the Jews as a whole but rather reinforces it.

Significant is the following argument:

The fact that Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish leadership himself, could be attracted to Jesus means that Jesus offers him something that he does not find within his own faith community.

The error in this argument is that Jesus does not offer Nicodemus another religion as a faith community, but argues with him from Jew to Jew about whether Jesus is the Messiah of Israel and how this Messiah can overcome the Roman world order.

As a teacher of Israel, Nicodemus ought to know, Jesus expects him to know, and he argues to him with a series of passages from the Scriptures about the Son of Man and the exalted serpent in the wilderness.<sup>39</sup>

Unfortunately, I must admit that after almost 2000 years of Greek Gentile Christian narrowed interpretation of my Gospel, it is probably futile to expect that my appeals to readers to read the Gospel from the Jewish Scriptures might bear fruit. Who, after all, knows the Jewish Scriptures in such detail, who burns with enthusiasm for the liberating Grand Narrative of Israel, who is able to trace my allusions to often very scattered passages of the Scriptures? In this respect, you are probably right that most readers of my Gospel have no choice but to interpret it anti-Jewishly (65-66):

The binary opposition inherent in the plot and illustrated by the characters of the historical tale suggests that accepting the gift of the Beloved Disciple requires a negative evaluation of and attitude toward those figures who refuse Jesus' gift. Because this group of characters are the only ones explicitly identified as "Jews," a compliant reader of the Fourth Gospel's historical tale would tend to view Jews not only as negative role models but also as the ones held responsible for Jesus' death and feared as potential persecutors of Jesus' followers. Thus a compliant reader of the Beloved Disciple's story of Jesus must of necessity come perilously close to outright hostility toward Jews as a group.

However, such hostility is by no means my intention. By not being squeamish in my sharp and often even unfair choice of words in the inner-Jewish political dispute, I nevertheless take a large part of the responsibility for it. Whether people will ever stop reading my Gospel as anti-Jewish writing and take it seriously in its liberation-political impulses for an Israel of peace in the midst of the nations, I therefore hardly dare to hope.

## 4.2 Compliant Reading of the Cosmological Tale

Also (66) „a compliant reading of the cosmological tale,“ as you construct it,

requires the reader to flirt with anti-Judaism. The fruits of a compliant reading of the Fourth Gospel as cosmological tale are therefore equivocal and even dangerous.

I do not contradict this. However, I have already made clear that I do not represent any so defined cosmological tale at all.

So an ambiguity already exists in the interpretation of the metaphors I use. I leave aside (67) details of "theories of metaphor" but I stumble over a formulation borrowed from Janet Martin Soskice:<sup>40</sup>

39 Veerkamp 2021, 79-93 (["You are the teacher of Israel, and you do not understand this?"](#)).

40 (175-76, n. 11) In her detailed study of metaphor and theology, Janet Martin Soskice notes

Metaphors permit an “intercourse” of thoughts between implied author and reader and compel new possibilities of vision. [57]

But how can metaphors “compel” a particular view if they allow for different interpretations, or if a formerly self-evident interpretation is no longer that obviously available to later readers because of changed circumstances? You describe my use of metaphors in a very formal way:

The Beloved Disciple uses metaphorical language to express his gift. Through paired metaphors he guides the reader toward accepting his gift and thereby toward complying with his view of the cosmos. He does so by employing two sets of dichotomies. One set consists of metaphors that describe contrasting states of being, such as light/darkness, life/death, from above/from below, being from God/not from God. The other set comprises contrasting activities, such as believing/not-believing, accepting/not accepting, doing good/doing evil, loving/hating.

The first element of each pair is associated with Jesus. The second element of each pair is associated with the forces that oppose and reject Jesus or, more precisely, the claim that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

You identify the latter elements with maximal generalization as follows (67-68):

Although these terms often appear in passages that have a general and universal tone, the Gospel consistently and directly associates the negative side of each pair with explicitly Jewish characters within the narrative. This point can be made through a brief overview of each of the pairs.

This formalization and generalization of the metaphors I use, however, does not capture what I originally wanted to say, since it considers them completely dissociated from their underlying root in the Jewish Scriptures.

#### 4.2.1 Darkness, Light, and Life as Political Metaphers

Darkness is indeed not an abstract metaphor in the Scriptures. In Genesis 1:4-5, what in other mythologies has been called the quasi-divine cosmic power of darkness becomes simply *night* alternating with the light of *day* and belonging to God’s creation. Jeremiah 4:23-26 on the other hand knows as Ton Veerkamp<sup>41</sup> writes a “man-made darkness”:

Here the condition of a land ravaged by war is described as the condition of earth before every creating word: crazy and mazy, no light, no mankind, no

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that philosophers and literary critics through the years have proposed over 125 definitions of metaphor, with no consensus in sight (*Metaphor and Religious Language* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985], 15).

41 Veerkamp 2021, 25 ([The Life and the Light](#), par. 6, 8-9).

birds, everything devastated, what came about because of the foolish policies of the elites of Jerusalem, their refusal to preserve the reform policy of the good king Josiah and to consider the regional power relations. The result of this policy is nothingness and darkness, in the eyes of the prophet the result of the wrathful reaction of Israel's God. If the order of the Torah—being "God" for Israel—is destroyed by the politics of its elites, this order reacts by the wrath of its being destroyed. It isn't about a mythic primal state, it is a matter of all that people around John and we now were or are seeing every day: darkness, chaos, destruction of life.

Jeremiah exactly describes the condition of the people of Judea after the year 70. The city is devastated, the population massacred, the land uninhabitable. An absolute new beginning is necessary. From the catastrophe of the year 70, there's no going back, nothing will be as it was before. Because of the present state, somebody who interprets the year 70 as the end must begin with the words *in the beginning*. The work of the Messiah is a new earth under a new heaven, life and light. Darkness did not win: the verb turning up here, *katalambanein*, "to overcome", in the Greek version of the Scriptures is always connoted in a violent sense. Against the nothingness and the darkness that prevailed since the disastrous outcome of the First Judean-Roman War 66-70, John brings out "light" and "life": darkness did not overcome light and life.

What is called *darkness* here, I explicitly relate to evil deeds in 3:19-20, to the machinations of social groups that shun the light.

Nicodemus, however, comes to Jesus *by night*, because he does not dare to confess him openly, but nowhere do I identify him with darkness.

Ultimately, *light* to me is a political term. It denotes the enlightenment about the darkness of what is going on in the world order and about the ways to overcome this oppressive world order. I accuse the priestly Jewish leadership of involvement in dark dealings with the Roman world order, and Pharisaic Rabbinic Judaism of blindness to the opportunity to overcome the world order by trusting in the Messiah.

Nor is *life* to me synonymous with otherworldly eternal fleshless life. Rather, *zōē aiōnios* is as political a term as *light*. To understand what I mean by this, I again quote a few paragraphs from Ton Veerkamp:<sup>42</sup>

The one who trusts in Jesus receives the life of the age to come. This one is the bread of life. This means: if the "I AM, I WILL BE THERE," is still valid, then only as that *bread* which is the Messiah. The fathers ate the manna and died. It was not by chance that they died, but because they refused to go into the land of liberty, Deuteronomy 2:14. They ate but did not listen to the words of

42 Veerkamp 2021, 168-69 ([Grumbling. Bread of Life, Eating Meat](#), par. 13-14).

God through Moses, so they died. The Messiah is the bread that comes down from heaven; just as the manna secured the life of Israel in those days, so the bread of Messiah now secures the life of Israel. This *bread* named *Messiah* is the living bread, the bread coming down from heaven, which secures life until the age to come.

Now Jesus becomes concrete. The *Messiah* is the *bread* and as the most vital bread, he leads the earthly-political existence of the Messiah Jesus ben Joseph, whose parents people know. He leads this political, endangered, and vulnerable existence. “Flesh” is what John calls the life of humans under the world order. The short formula for the Messiah’s existence is, “Flesh for the *life of the world*.” “World” does not live; people live, people in the world, that is, people living under the conditions of a real ruling world order. Being human is always to be *in* the world, to be *under* the world order. The existence of the Messiah is *flesh*—*in* the world, *under* the world order, and thus *for the world*—so that its order can be an order of life. Messianic existence is political existence, otherwise is it nothing at all.

For those who are not sure what all this should mean, I recommend reading Ton Veerkamp’s interpretation as a whole and also taking a look at the corresponding Scriptural passages to which he refers. It is not easy to grasp the coherences to which I want to draw attention.

#### 4.2.2 The Beloved Disciple Does Not See Himself as a Spiritual Travel Guide

Since you start from a cosmological tale that does not think in political but mythological otherworldly categories, you cannot grasp the true background of the actual hard conflicts my Gospel deals with, but come to the following conclusion (69-70):

These examples show that the Jews personify the negative pole of Johannine soteriology; that is, they display the attitudes and engage in the behavior of those who, from the vantage point of the Beloved Disciple, will not attain salvation. Furthermore, they are associated directly with the devil, the villain of the cosmological tale, whose power over this world is countered and subdued by the Son of God through his mission, death, and resurrection.

As I said, I am not talking about soul salvation and not about an otherworldly devil. I am politically fighting the Rabbinic rejection of trusting in the Messiah to overcome the ruling world order through the practice of solidarity and to bring up the life of the age to come in freedom, justice, and peace. Whether you can concede that I have such a reading of my Gospel in mind, I do not know. I, at any rate, do not at all agree with the compliant reading of my Gospel outlined by you as follows:

The compliant reader of the Beloved Disciple’s cosmological tale engages in a spiritual, even cosmic, journey with potentially life-changing implications, and—apparently—only the most positive of results.

No, I am not a spiritual travel guide in this cosmic, otherworldly sense. When I speak of the spirit, *pneuma*, Hebrew *ruach*, I am talking about the inspiration of the fidelity of the God of Israel, inspiring liberating action here on earth, bringing the flesh alive, not opposing the flesh, earthly, this-worldly reality.

### 4.3 Compliant Reading of the Ecclesiological Tale

Looking (70) at the ecclesiological tale, you begin by quoting Louis Martyn,<sup>43</sup> who “urges readers of the Gospel to ‘make every effort to take up temporary residence in the Johannine community.’” Whether this is possible in the comprehensive sense that this metaphor evokes I leave open to question. I do, however, find his appeal sympathetic to

listen carefully to the kind of conversations in which all of its members found themselves engaged. Only in the midst of this endeavor will we be able to hear the Fourth Evangelist speak in his own terms, rather than in words which we moderns merely want to hear from his mouth.

While I don’t know how Martyn wants to know which members of our community participated in our conversations, at least he perceives that there were discussions, and he wants to engage with our “own terms.” But does he really? And do you follow his appeal? Our terms, as already explained in detail, correspond to the categories of the Jewish Scriptures, to the objectives of the Grand Narrative of Israel, which are not otherworldly-mythological, but political in nature. To the situation of our group, which shares the situation of suffering under the world order with other Jews but disagrees with them about the way to overcome this world order, your depiction of the identity of members of our community who trust in Jesus does not correspond at all:

They did not do so as individuals alone in the world, engaged in a private spiritual exercise, however, but as members of a community in which others also shared their beliefs and similarly saw themselves as assured of salvation.

Such a (71) “community identification” with such an assurance of salvation would, in your opinion, “also entail a sense of separation from the nonbelieving Jewish community,” to the point of harboring “hostile feelings toward the Jews, from whom they feel themselves to be separate.”

To this I say: Yes, soon it actually came about that my Gospel was read in this way. And: No, this was not my intention! Nothing is further from my mind than what you unfold as the two aspects of an anti-Jewish attitude:

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43 (176, n. 14) J. Louis Martyn: *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), xviii. This statement appears also in the second edition of this book (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 18.

Not only do compliant readers view Jews in negative terms as rejecting God and persecuting his legitimate followers, but they also do not recognize Judaism in itself as a valid path to relationship with God.

In fact, I accuse my fellow Jews who reject Jesus as Messiah of going the wrong way, just as Jews have repeatedly accused other Jews of going the wrong way in the Scriptures. But it is not Judaism that I reject, but as a Jew, I advocate the trust in a Jewish Messiah of Israel.

#### 4.3.1 What Does the Word *Ioudaios* Refer To?

In this respect, those scholars are right who advise that when translating the word *Ioudaioi*, one should not think broadly of what was later understood by the term “Jews,” namely people who belong to a religion distinct from Christianity. I have already pointed out how diversely I myself use this term. Therefore (72) *Ioudaioi* does not almost always refer only “to the Jewish authorities in contrast to the Jewish people as a whole,” as Urban C. von Wahlde<sup>44</sup> thinks, but there are Jews who are afraid of other Jews, there are Jews who, as neighbors of Mary and Martha, are mourning their brother Lazarus; in any case, priests, Pharisees, Zealots and Jesus Messianists represent different parties of the Jews.

Now, von Wahlde<sup>45</sup> does not want to refer the “term *Ioudaios* ‘... to the nation as a whole in a way that can be called racially anti-Semitic.” This argumentation, however, falls short. I can certainly mean by *Ioudaioi* the people of the Jews, for example in 11:50, where the high priest Caiaphas is involuntarily prophetic about Jesus dying for the people (*laos*), or in 18:35, where Pilate calls the Jews Jesus’ people (*ethnos*). But this is not at all connected with the fact that I would condemn this people—like later anti-Semites—as unworthy of life.

Nevertheless, the following sentences are partly true (73):

The Beloved Disciple’s use of the term supports an interpretation of *Ioudaios* that includes ethnic-geographic, political, and religious elements. In places the

44 (176, n. 16) Von Wahlde derives this definition from its usage throughout the Gospel, with the exception of 6:41 and 6:52, in which *hoi Ioudaioi* denotes the Jewish audience of Jesus’ discourse in 6:25-65. For a detailed discussion, see Urban C. von Wahlde, “The Johannine ‘Jews’: A Critical Survey,” *New Testament Studies* 28 (1981-82): 54, 74; and idem, “The Gospel of John and the Presentation of Jews and Judaism,” in *Within Context: Essays on Jews and Judaism in the New Testament*, ed. David P. Efroymson et al. (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1983), 67-84.

Confusingly, in the German translation (*Kobel* 91-92, n. 17) this note lists only the first book of von Wahlde, with page numbers 33-60, 42-60.

45 (176, n. 17) Von Wahlde, “Johannine ‘Jews,’” 74.

In the German translation (*Kobel* 92, n. 18), the second book of von Wahlde from the previous English note is now mentioned here with page number 74.

term is used in the context of religious customs and beliefs that extend beyond Judea and are characteristic of Diaspora as much as Palestinian Jewry.

I find interesting your remark that according to Malcolm Lowe<sup>46</sup> “in the Diaspora, ... the broader sense of *loudaios* as designating a national, religious, political group was already current.”<sup>47</sup> It is exactly this latter political dimension that is completely missing in your analysis.

However (74), there are also in your eyes “some contexts” that “may permit a narrower translation.” Therefore, your conclusion that “the sense in all cases is best met by the direct translation of *loudaios* as ‘Jew,’ including its connotations of a national but not geographically limited religious, political, and cultural identity,” is precisely not accurate. Where I have in mind political differences with particular Jewish groups—priestly, Pharisaic-Rabbinic, Zealot, or formerly following Jesus and then splitting off—, the translation “Jews,” which assumes the anti-Jewish coloration later taken for granted by Christians, is misleading.

But I have to admit: “the fact that the same word occurs numerous times and in a variety of contexts tends to blur the fine distinctions and nuances implied by these contexts.” I wish I had been more precise! As Jews, we live with Jews, fiercely debating whether Jesus is the Messiah, and in peaceful neighborhoods as with Mary and Martha, there are also denouncers who report extraordinary occurrences like the raising of Lazarus to the authorities.

You are also right in writing (74-75):

The interchangeable use of “Pharisees” and “Jews” in these verses, coupled with the fact that the same negative attributes are associated with each of these labels, suggests that the Beloved Disciple is not drawing a careful distinction between the general Jewish group and their Pharisaic leadership, or between Diaspora, Galilean, or Judean “Jews.”

In fact, it is not only the Rabbinical leadership of the time in which my Gospel was written that is hostile to us Messianists. On some occasions, whole groups of Jews who feel provoked by our proclamations seem to confront us as an aggressive mob.

#### 4.3.2 Anti-Judaism as a Legitimate Response to Synagogue Exclusion?

I agree with your argumentation (75) against those scholars who interpret “the Beloved Disciple’s anti-Jewish rhetoric” as “a reasonable response to the experience

46 (176, n. 18 and 21) Malcolm Lowe, “Who were the *loudaioi*?” *Novum Testamentum* 18 (1976) 104.

47 Whether I really (92) wrote the Gospel “in the Diaspora,” as most scholars assume, or whether they thereby succumb to the circular argument that a supposedly Gentile Christian evangelist could not have been rooted in Palestine, I leave open. Verses 10:40-42 suggest that I may feel more at home in the area beyond, that is, east of the Jordan River.

of exclusion ... from the synagogue.” This is not in view of the fact that my rhetoric is actually anti-Jewish—more on that in a moment—but in view of the fact that “anti-Jewish rhetoric” in the sense of a general condemnation of the Jewish people as such could be excused by any deeds of members of this people. Even if “the Johannine community ... was excluded or expelled from the synagogue on account of its confession of Jesus as Christ,” all of Judaism as such cannot be blamed

for the exclusion of the Johannine Christians, which led in some direct way to the ultimate separation of Judaism and Christianity, and then, by extension, to the many difficult centuries in the history of Jewish-Christian relations...

The crucial question is whether my polemic directed against *Ioudaioi* is in fact generally anti-Jewish, indeed, anti-Semitic, which authors like Samuel Sandmel<sup>48</sup> or Janis E. Leibig<sup>49</sup> (76) are presupposing.

Robert Kysar’s<sup>50</sup> attempt to defend such a procedure by saying that I “could tell the story of Jesus most powerful only with a negative figure set over against the Christ figure in the dynamics of the narrative,” is simply silly. Nothing could be further from my mind than to write an exciting biography of Jesus and increase its tension to the extreme at the expense of the people of the Jews.

#### 4.3.3 Stereotypical Polemics and Strong Emotions as a Cause for Anti-Judaism?

Nor do I want (76) to try to excuse my “strong language with respect to Jews” as a simple reflection of “the norms of ancient polemic” which “would have been used against other opponents as well,” as Urban C. von Wahlde<sup>51</sup> does. I do agree with his call “to distinguish clearly between the later interpretations and aftereffects of this text and its original meaning,” but not in the way he does. I am not concerned with (77), as von Wahlde says, “a stylized form of debate designed to separate the opponents ... and to dissociate them from the goods represented by the author and his community.” Rather, it is about a sharp confrontation with specific opponents, but on a very different—political—level.

48 (176, n. 28) Samuel Sandmel: *Anti-Semitism in the New Testament?* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 119.

49 (177, n. 29) See Janis E. Leibig, “John and ‘the Jews’: Theological Antisemitism in the Fourth Gospel,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 20 (1983): 224.

50 (177, n. 30) Robert Kysar, “Anti-Semitism and the Gospel of John,” in *Anti-Semitism and Early Christianity: Issues of Polemic and Faith*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Donald A. Hagner (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1993), 123.

51 (177, n. 32 and 35) Urban C. von Wahlde, “‘You are of your Father the Devil’ in its Context. Stereotyped Apocalyptic Polemic in Jn 8:38-47,” in *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel. Papers from the Leuven Colloquium, January 2000*, ed. Reimund Bieringer, Didier Pollefeyt, Frederique Vanneuville (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2001), 437-48, und von Wahlde, “Johannine ‘Jews,’” 81.

You argue against von Wahlde,

that even a stereotypical polemical argument would be fueled by strong emotions and would be intended to inculcate negative attitudes. This would be the case whether one views the polemic within the ecclesiological tale as taking place between fully separate Christian and Jewish communities, a view that may be anachronistic, or as an inner-Jewish feud.

Here you concede in passing that your assumption of Christians and Jews already confronting each other in my Gospel may be wrong. At the same time, you secure your argumentation by the fact that also an “inner-Jewish feud” can be charged with negatively strong emotions. But could such a feud already be branded as anti-Semitic?

I am concerned about what you write in the following sentence:

After all, as we have already noted, the Gospel explicitly demands its readers’ full engagement—not only intellectual and spiritual but also emotional. Readers, like the disciples within the Gospel narrative, are not only to know and understand Jesus’ relationship to the Father (10:38), and to believe the words of spirit and life (6:63-74), but also to love one another (13:34) and let their hearts rejoice (16:22). Negative emotions are certainly not to be ruled out.

In fact, I am concerned with strong emotions, though not with “love” as a compulsion to like everyone. Friendship, *philia*, and solidarity, *agapē*, play a major role in my Gospel. However, Ton Veerkamp rightly calls my attention to the fact that behind locked doors (20:19, 26), “for fear of the Judeans,” we limit this solidarity to our own group. I confess that we are not like Paul (Romans 11:28) or Matthew (5:44) in solidarity also with those who face us as enemies.

#### 4.3.4 An Inner-Jewish Feud with the Harsh Language of the Prophets

As already indicated, you do not allow either

the suggestion that reading the Gospel as an “inner-Jewish” argument neutralizes the anti-Jewish potential of a compliant reading.

Thus (77-78), according to Robert Kysar,<sup>52</sup> “the frontal attack that John mounts upon the Jewish people of his time and place should be read as a ‘family feud,’” instead of taking it “as a sweeping condemnation of the Jewish people as a whole.” You, however (78),

reckon with the possibility that the potential of an anti-Jewish reading exists not only for a contemporary audience ignorant of the historical experience of the community but also for the ancient readers within that community itself.

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52 (176, n. 27, and 177, n. 39) Robert Kysar, “The Promises and Perils of Preaching on the Gospel of John,” *Dialog* 19 (1980): 219-20.

How else to account for the fact that the universalizing term *Ioudaios* is used not once, but repeatedly, when “Jewish authorities” would have been more precise? Or for the shocking identification of the Jews as the children not of Abraham but of the devil (8:44)?

Here we have to look very carefully. In fact, as I said, I use the word *Ioudaios* also for the whole of the Jewish people, which also includes the vast majority of our community. It is important to us that the Messiah Jesus gathers all Israel—including Samaria and the Jews from the Diaspora and individual God-fearers from the *goyim*—in the Body of Christ as the new sanctuary which the NAME has chosen (14:23) as “a place of permanence,” *monē*, to dwell in.

But the majority of Jews and the Rabbinical leadership of the synagogues, which we want to be the place of this gathering, refuse to trust in the Messiah Jesus, even deny us more and more our place in the synagogue.

This hurts us and challenges us to words, some of which are inappropriate in their sharpness. However, as also stated earlier, in 8:44 I am not referring to an other-worldly, demonic devil whose children we would condemn to hell but rather we are reproaching Jewish opponents for siding with the political arch-enemy Rome, whom I paraphrase with the biblical term *satan*, *diabolos*.

This choice of words does not belong to my brilliant achievements, I am aware of it in retrospect, and unfortunately, I cannot undo it. In no way, however, do I qualify the entire people of Israel, to which Jesus and all of us belong, as the spawn of a demonic entity and as unworthy of life. You think that my words are “calculated to breed not only distance but also hatred,” but I rather borrowed harshness from the language of the prophet Isaiah, for example, who knew of a humanly insurmountable hardening of hearts, to which I refer in 12:37-43.

#### 4.4 The Beloved Disciple: Spiritual Mentor or Messianic Witness?

In conclusion (79), you describe the kind of friendship with me that develops as a result of a compliant reading as a “dynamic” mentorship:

Thus a relationship that begins in hierarchy will end in equality when the reader is compliant, that is, when he or she accepts the gift that the Beloved Disciple offers through his Gospel and thereby becomes his spiritual equal—as believer assured of eternal life. ... The Beloved Disciple thus becomes our mentor and guide to the ideal life as he understands it, ethically, spiritually, and in all other ways.

But “the ethical implications of such a reading are highly problematic,” you assure, because “through a rhetoric of binary opposition,” all those are labeled as “bad” who “refuse the gift.” And since in my Gospel “the Jews are associated closely with unbelief,” their presentation (79-80)

has an undertone of hostility: the Jews repeatedly misunderstand and bait Jesus and his followers; they seek the death of Jesus and his followers; they are of their father the devil (8:44). Even if the content of the label “the Jews” in the Gospel is deemed to be ahistorical, idiosyncratic, and even incorrect, the identification of the Jews with the negative pole of the Gospel’s rhetoric of binary opposition is dangerous precisely because there exists a “real” group that shares the same “Jewish” label. A compliant reader is not at all unlikely to transfer the negative assessment and hostility that he or she would absorb toward the Gospel’s Jews to that {80} group in his or her own world that shares this label. In this way, then, a compliant reading would inculcate anti-Jewish sentiments.

In fact, all this applies to a compliant reading of my Gospel as you interpret it and as it not only dominated for centuries but appeared as the only possible reading. The only mistake in the matter is that I myself cannot agree to such a reading. For, after all, I see myself as a witness to the Messiah Jesus, who embodies the liberating NAME of the Father, the God of Israel. I do not claim a position of superiority for myself, but only for the One God and the Messiah sent by him. My own position is more similar to that of the prophets of Israel (although I cannot measure up to them!) than to that of a spiritual mentor, as you understand it.

In addition, I do not want to or cannot assure the compliant readers of my Gospel of otherworldly eternal life. Rather, I try to inspire them to follow the Messiah, which in my eyes alone is suitable for overcoming any prevailing world order of injustice and degradation of humans by trusting in the God of Israel and through the solidarity of *agapē*. Indeed, I do not spare criticism of Jewish persons or groups who refuse or seek to thwart this discipleship, since it is, precisely, to them that the offer of the Messiah applies in the first place, and the majority of them (quite unlike the Samaritans) do not accept it. In this respect, I feel quite similarly about the Rabbinic Judaism of my day, as, for example, the prophets Jeremiah or Isaiah felt about their contemporaries. Would you also accuse these prophets of anti-Semitism?

But as I said (80), with regard to the Gentile Christian reception of my Gospel, which has become the self-evident reading of almost all people up to your 21st century, I would even agree with Richard B. Hayes<sup>53</sup> according to whom my Gospel “really does adopt a stance toward Judaism that can only engender polemics and hostility.” In this context, you rightly criticize Martin Luther’s anti-Semitism, which is based on a reading of my Gospel that remains determinative for centuries after his time. Only after the Holocaust, Christian churches that refer to Luther will change their minds and no longer share this anti-Semitism.<sup>54</sup>

53 (177, n. 44 and 45) Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation* (San Francisco: HarperCollins 1996), 427 and 429.

54 Thus, in 1991, the Evangelical Church in Hesse and Nassau, of which Helmut Schütz is a

That it is virtually impossible for you as a Jewish reader to even tentatively agree with a compliant reading of my Gospel as you have outlined it is clear to me. After all, I cannot do it myself.

## 5. The Beloved Disciple as Opponent

According to what has been said so far (105), you are one of those “who refuse the gift” of the Beloved Disciple “but nevertheless read the Gospel,” that is, you are one of the “resistant readers” who want to read it from the point of view of “the designated Other within the worldview of the Beloved Disciple,” which you describe as follows:

they are outside the scheme of salvation that he propounds. Their refusal of the Beloved Disciple’s gift consigns them to condemnation and death.

I have to repeat myself. Such a salvation grid is far from me, as well as the idea of eternal damnation. What I offer is a Messianic-political perspective of liberation from the yoke of the Roman world order, the rejection of which, in my eyes, means staying oppressed by Rome’s death powers of degradation and oppression.

That I am mistaken in my political assessment of Rabbinic Judaism and the future of my own Messianic movement, I have already explained. In this respect, I even welcome a resistant reading of my Gospel, since it can help me to find out whether all the hopes we have placed in the Messiah Jesus must at the same time be thrown on the garbage heap of history as an error.

Above all, I am interested in whether you think that Christians have to answer this question all by themselves, or whether a Jewish contribution to an interreligious conversation about this question would make sense in principle.

### 5.1 A Side Glance at the „Jüdinnen und Juden“ of the German Translation

Here I would like to insert a small side glance at the German translation of your book by Esther Kobel. I want to ask her: Is it really appropriate to translate the English “Jews” into German unreservedly with “Jüdinnen und Juden”?<sup>55</sup>

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member, added the following sentences to its “Basic Article” (church constitution):

“Called out of blindness and guilt to repentance, it (the EKHN) testifies anew to the lasting election of the Jews and God’s covenant with them. The confession to Jesus Christ includes this testimony.”

55 Helmut Schütz knows from the “Bibel in gerechter Sprache” (“Bible in fair Language”) that women made invisible in the text of the Bible are to be made visible. For his 25th anniversary of ordination as a pastor on July 8, 2004, he wished the church council of his congregation to collect donations to promote a book of this translation—the Gospel of John, by the way!

But see also what he wrote about this project in one of the prefaces of his article

With the concern to make visible women who are invisible in the text of the Bible, the translator is preaching to the choir. After all, women are among the most important actors in my Gospel, and I do not even, as you yourself write, “consign them to the role of Other,” on the contrary: “all of the female characters in the narrative belong to the positive side of the Johannine polarity.”

Immediately following, however, is the sentence:

Rather, it is the Jews, meaning those Jews who do not believe, who are Other.

This sentence is gendered by Esther Kobel into German in a somewhat questionable way:

Vielmehr sind es die Jüdinnen und Juden, die das Andere verkörpern. Gemeint sind jene Jüdinnen und Juden, die nicht an Christus glauben.

Twice Jewish women are specifically mentioned in the translation of a single sentence, of whom it is clear that I am not explicitly accusing any of them of hostility against Jesus. Not to be misunderstood: I am not suggesting that there may not be women among the Jews who are hostile to Jesus. But the stereotypical emphasis on the female element by what you call gender-sensitivity in your century leads to a distortion of what I actually mean in this context. At the very least, the definite article should be missing here, because it is not “the” Jewish women who embody “the Other,” because the Jewish women Mary, Martha, Mary Magdalene, and the mother of the Messiah are excluded from this. And that I nowhere explicitly call these four women “Jewish” does not change the fact that, implicitly, they are indeed Jewish women. Precisely the principle of making visible what remains unsaid must not lead to making them tacitly Christians because these did not exist at all at the time when my Gospel was written.

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[Bibelauslegung – politisch UND fromm](#) [Bible Interpretation—Political AND Pious] in 2018 [Vorwort 5: Von der “Bibel in gerechter Sprache” zur Zeitschrift “Texte und Kontexte”](#) [Preface 5: From the “Bible in fair Language” to the journal “Texts and Contexts”]:

In the project “Bible in fair language,” Ton Veerkamp and his fellow campaigners criticized, among other things, the tendency towards political correctness, which wants to make the significance of women in the Bible visible even where they really did not play a role because of the patriarchal power relations that actually existed, and that it pretends that the problem of “unfair” language does not already exist in the Bible itself, for example, if God is imagined as a male ruler figure (Veerkamp 2013, 73, n. 37): “The German translation of the ‘Bible in fair language’ sweeps the—actually forbidden—male conception under the carpet. This is politically correct, but elegantly circumvents the real problem, the essentialist conception of God as a male ‘being.’ The ‘unfair’ translation seems offensive and provides an opportunity to problematize in readers the essentialist conception of God in the first place.” To Veerkamp, taking the Bible seriously from a political-social point of view also meant that the biblical writers and the actors portrayed in them are not always right, but deserve to be taken seriously even where they are wrong—by critically measuring them themselves against the standard of the Torah, God’s guidance, which they put at the center.

My argument may come to nothing, as far as it refers to a reading which in any case generalizes the talk of Jews in contrast to Christians (in each case of both sexes), which emerges shortly later on. However, as already said, I actually do not attack “the” Jews in general but deal with concrete Jewish groups with different political interests. And when I do so, it is usually about men. Not even once in my Gospel I specifically name a woman as an opponent of the Messianic movement—quite different, by the way, from my fellow evangelists Mark and Matthew, who have Herodias and her daughter appear as opponents of the Baptist, Mark 6:19, 22 and Matthew 14:6-8). How little it is taken for granted in my time that men speak publicly with women at all, I show abundantly clear (4:27) when the disciples encounter Jesus in conversation with the Samaritan woman. In any case, the Jewish priestly ruling class consists only of men, the Pharisees in overwhelming numbers, and in the nocturnal mob demanding Jesus’ crucifixion in front of the Praetorium, the presence of women is hardly imaginable.

Where I criticize my own Messianic movement, I also have men in mind, especially the brothers of Jesus who (7:3-5) try to challenge him to Zealot adventures or (20:19, 26) hide resignedly and fearfully behind locked doors. In contrast, as Ton Veerkamp says,<sup>56</sup> “those who were considered less than the male apostles in the Messianic communities,” namely women like Mary Magdalene, “here become the evangelists of the actual message.”

## 5.2 Resisting Reading of the Historical Tale

In the context of (83) your analysis of the historical tale, you first address “the resistance of the Baptist’s followers,” and it strikes me that you see “the political element” in the foreground—but only in the sense that they “perceive the Jesus group as rivals who deliberately engage in recruitment activities that threaten the strength and perhaps even the viability of their own group.” You do not ask with a single word about the political goals of the two Messianic movements.

### 5.2.1 Jesus as a Victim of the Jews, Who Thereby Become Victims?

In three different ways (84), “Jews demonstrate their rejection of faith in Jesus as Christ by their words”: 1. in “statements” that “question Jesus’ identity directly,” 2. in “comments” that “are more hostile and accusatory,” 3. in “defensive statements.”

In addition (85), there are hostile acts; 1. they want to kill Jesus (7:1), throw stones at him (8:59), 2. expel “Jesus’ followers from the synagogues” (9:22; 12:42; 16:2), 3. “exploit their connections to the Roman authorities ... to remove Jesus from the scene.”

56 Veerkamp 2021, 388-89 ([The Tomb](#), par. 2-9, the quote par. 4). As to 7:3-5, see Veerkamp 2021, 177-81 ([Ascent to Jerusalem](#), par. 2-15).

At least you are aware that one “reason for the determination of the Jewish leadership to be rid of Jesus is said to be political,” for the high priest Caiaphas recommends that the Jewish authorities sacrifice the troublemaker Jesus lest the Roman regime revokes Judea’s autonomy and endanger the Jerusalem temple.

At this crucial point, however, you immediately turn back again by rigorously excluding a political reading of my gospel based on the Jewish Scriptures (85-86):

But politics alone do not account entirely for the Jews’ opposition to Jesus and their fear of his power. The Johannine Jesus views the Jews’ refusal as stubbornness (5:39), as a misreading of scripture (5:45-46), and as evidence of their spiritual blindness (9:39). These accusations go beyond the political and pragmatic, and indeed, beyond the narrative parameters of the historical tale. They suggest that from the point of view of the Beloved Disciple, the Jews’ resistance comes fundamentally from a misapprehension of God’s relationship to the world and of the role of Jesus in God’s plan of salvation.

Apart from the fact that there is nothing about stubbornness in 5:39, this argumentation shows that two readings of my Gospel, yours and mine, fundamentally differ at exactly this point: It is precisely not about spiritual blindness or an otherworldly-oriented plan of salvation of God in which earthly politics plays only a secondary role but about a misinterpretation of the Scriptures with regard to their perspective of liberation. In my eyes, Pharisaic or Rabbinic Jews are blind to the fact that trusting in the Messiah Jesus is the only way to overcome the unjust Roman world order and its false gods. They hold to the Torah and its prescription of separation from the nations, but at the same time cooperate with the world order to the extent of collaboration in order to survive in a niche of the world empire by the grace of the emperor. As I said, there may be some objections against this assessment in retrospect; but it is about an inner-Jewish dispute about the appropriate interpretation of the Scriptures in view of the inner-worldly goal of the age to come, and precisely not about a religious dispute about the salvation in the hereafter.

Things get complicated at the moment (86) when you, “as a resistant reader,” accuse me of performing “a subtle but powerful role reversal.” By presenting Jesus “as the victim of the Jews’ political machinations within the historical tale, the Jews become the victims of Jesus’ discourse within the rhetoric of the Gospel as a whole.”

By putting myself in your retrospective position, I understand what you mean. Put simply, evil Jews victimizing Jesus are more easily victimized by pogroms, in the end, by the Holocaust. That such an intention is far from my mind, I cannot prove. I will try to explain, nevertheless, in three different ways.

1. The Jesus I trust in is not rejected by all Jews, certainly not by Jewish women. In presenting those whom I call *Ioudaioi*, from the prologue on, as those who do not accept Jesus, I have in mind, on the one hand, the Pharisaic-Rabbinic Jews who close

their minds to the message of Jesus the Messiah. But my particular outrage is challenged, on the other hand, by the Jewish ruling class of priests whose interest is to be on good terms with Rome. In doing so, it not only brings Jesus to the cross but betrays the God of Israel as the sole King of the Jews.

2. Jesus himself emphasizes that he does not die as a victim of any man, but is putting his soul in of his own accord (10:18). Since this Bible verse is almost always misunderstood as if the expression *lambanein tēn psychēn*, “to take the soul,” simply means that Jesus will easily get his life back when dying, I must quote at length Ton Veerkamp’s<sup>57</sup> alternative interpretation:

Then there is a cryptic subordinate clause, “again so that I take it,” or, “all the more so that I take it.” What does “to take” mean? The expression “to take a soul” means “to kill”; for instance Psalm 31:14, “They plot to take my soul.” That cannot be meant here. Rather, the Aramaic verb *qebal* stands behind “to take.” It is the verb we heard in Mishna Avot 1:1 ff.,

Moses accepted (*qibbel*) the Torah of Sinai.

This corresponds to the last line of v.18, “This commandment I took from the FATHER” (*elabon, qibbel*). The word *palin* doesn’t only mean a repetition, but also a reinforcement. “To put in one’s soul” means “to take the soul.” The only and real task of his soul, his life task, is to put in his soul, his life, for the sheep. The death of the Messiah, as the most extreme form of the putting in of his soul (“to take away” the soul, *airein*), does not happen because those who kill him would have the authority (*exousia*) to do so, but because he himself—and unhindered by others—went this way; he puts in his soul of himself. To this, he has the authority, he is commissioned with it, and in such a way that he accepts this commission from himself. His path of life is the consequence of the commission that the God of Israel gave him; to accept the commission, his life’s work, to take his soul is his decision. The purpose of this argumentation is to make it clear to the people that the assassination of the Messiah was not a sign of his political weakness, but that he goes this way of his own accord. To this, he has the authority.

3. If Jesus can be called a victim at all, he is a victim *for* the people of the Jews (see three times *hyper tou laou / hyper tou ethnous* in 11:50-52), for the purpose of the goal of their liberation, and not *against* the Jews, for their condemnation or destruction. Thus, it is not about mutual victimization but the victim Jesus could be transformed into a sacrifice of reconciliation. Unfortunately, Christians in later centuries are completely incapable of such insights.

57 Veerkamp 2021, 231 ([The Interpretation of the Comparison](#), par. 26-28).

### 5.2.2 The *Pax Romana*—a Kingship “as among All Nations”—Kills the Messiah

By no means (86), I take “pains to minimize Roman responsibility for Jesus’ death.” Not only doesn’t it lessen Pilate’s guilt to have an innocent man crucified but my point in the Messiah’s direct confrontation with the representative of the Roman world power is to expose this world power as a kingship of oppression and exploitation “like all the nations” have it (*ke-kkol hagoyim*, 1 Samuel 8:20).

In fact, Pilate, as a Roman, does not understand at all what Jesus is about,<sup>58</sup> namely, to overcome the rule of Rome by a kingship of “fidelity”—or “truth” as *alētheia* is usually translated—according to the Torah of the God of Israel. To him, “fidelity” or “truth” is not a politically relevant concept, to Jesus, from the Jewish Scriptures, it is. The Jewish high priests understand this better than the Roman, so they consider Jesus a greater danger than Pilate.

I include the episode with Barabbas to make clear that Jewish circles in the course of the Judean War very well opted for a Zealot—in my eyes terrorist—way and not for a way of overcoming violence from above with the means of *agapē*.

Furthermore, you cannot downplay the flogging that Pilate orders as “a mild punishment.” There were many who did not survive even this measure.

Nor do you understand (87) why the statement (19:7) that Jesus “claimed to be the Son of God” according to me (19:8) “strikes fear into Pilate’s heart.” For this I let Ton Veerkamp<sup>59</sup> have his say, who explains this point very well:

The accusation that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God is much more serious, even for Romans, than the accusation that Jesus claimed to be the King of the Judeans. Pilate has nothing to do with the Torah, but he does with one who claims divine dignity for himself. Only Pilate’s highest master, the emperor of the Roman Empire, the real “son of God,” one *like-God*, has this right. Pilate’s fear is not of magico-religious but of political origin. He must fear all the more that there is more behind this prisoner than some local fool. Perhaps he is, after all, someone who challenges the emperor as “God’s son” and behind whom there is a serious political movement. Then the emperor would hold him, Pilate, liable for letting an adversary of the emperor himself go free.

Finally, you completely disregard the point (19:12) that the priests try to blackmail Pilate with the accusation that he is “no friend of the emperor.” To this (87), Pilate does not respond “as a weak leader” but he makes the priests pay a high price (19:15), namely, that by having Jesus crucified as the King of the Jews, they are choosing Caesar as their king and Rome as their god.

58 See Veerkamp 2021, 351-57 (“[What is fidelity, anyhow?](#)”).

59 Veerkamp 2021, 362-63 (“[There, the Human,](#)” par. 22).

Of course, I understand that the later Gentile Christian reading of my Gospel, especially when it began to play a decisive role for the leadership of the Roman Empire in the fourth century, could no longer have a sense for all these subtleties that are related to a political reading of the Grand Narrative of Israel. From this point of view, it is quite understandable that you must accuse me of “placing full responsibility for Jesus’ death to the Jews.” But originally this was not my intention. Not all Jews are responsible, only those who give up God as the king of Israel in favor of the Roman emperor. And even the Jewish leadership isn’t solely responsible but the main responsibility for the death of the Messiah is borne by the arch-enemy of the God of Israel, the *diabolos* Rome, the oppressive world order, which calls itself *Pax Romana* and lets itself be worshipped divinely.

### 5.3 Resistant Reading of the Cosmological Tale

In your sketch of the cosmological narrative found in my Gospel, virtually nothing matches my actual statement intentions.

#### 5.3.1 Does Jesus Dispossess Judaism of Its Identity with Harsh Accusations?

Only to a later Gentile Christian interpretation with its fundamental anti-Judaism, your following sentence does correspond (88):

Throughout the Gospel, Jesus usurps Jewish symbols, identity markers, and sacred spaces, and thereby denies their effectiveness for the Jews themselves.

Therefore, although factually *the later reception* of my Gospel amounted to a usurpation, *in my eyes* Jesus is not a usurper but the rightful Messiah sent into the world by the God of Israel. And his criticism of the Jewish leadership and of those who do not trust in the Messiah is consistent with the prophetic criticism of Israel and Judah and their kings recorded in the Scriptures.

In other words (87), it is only true to a limited extent that “the divine-human relationship” is no longer “grounded in the Torah and the temple.” The Torah is not abrogated, the *agapē* instituted by Jesus is not a new Torah, but a new commandment that summarizes and fulfills the Torah. If it were otherwise, I would not constantly insist on interpreting the words of the Messiah and his destiny from the Scriptures.

I take the temple very seriously as the place where the God of Israel wants to dwell his holy NAME. And (88) by driving the “merchants and bankers” out of the temple, Jesus in the sense of the prophets (Zechariah 14:21) sharply criticizes an institution that has lost its character as a sanctuary of the NAME and has become a pagan temple, even a department store.<sup>60</sup> So it is not at all the case that Jesus with his “act raises the ‘Jesus flag’ over the temple and ... thus stakes his claim to this house as

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<sup>60</sup> See Veerkamp 2021, 77 and 79 ([A Lesson](#), par. 5 and 10).

the legitimate son of its divine owner.” From the perspective of Rabbinic Judaism toward Gentile Christianity, this looks like a would-be world redeemer here pretending to be the son of Israel’s God and unlawfully taking possession of everything that belongs to that God. And all those who refuse to follow him, he throws out. But originally, this is not what my Gospel is about.

However, in fact, the temple, since it is already destroyed in my time, no longer plays a role for me as a place where the NAME wants to dwell, rather I think (14:2-3, 23) that God creates a new place for himself in the assembly of those who trust in the Messiah, where he wants his NAME to dwell. Paul calls this place the “body of the Messiah,” I call it *monē*, a place of permanence, as translated by Ton Veerkamp.<sup>61</sup>

You now go on claiming that in my Gospel Jesus not only “evicts the Jews from their sacred place but also denies their self-identification as children of Abraham (8:39)” and “their role as sons of God ... (8:34-35),” and branded them instead as “children of the devil ... (8:44).”

Indeed, we are dealing here with harsh accusations made in a sharp political dispute. Ton Veerkamp<sup>62</sup> deduces the “almost unbearable vehemence by which Jesus attacked these new opponents” from the remark in 8:31:

It is about Judeans “who had put their trust in him” (*pepisteukotas autō loudaious*) but now no longer do so. This requires a past perfect. A sect can talk of apostates only with hatred.

An additional difficulty is that in the further course (8:48), Judeans will be mentioned without further specification. But there too, it is about those very particular Judeans who “no longer walked the way with Jesus,” 6:66. This does not excuse the boundless vehemence by which John harasses the “renegades,” as the apostates were called among communists. Apparently, the disappointed Messianists accused the group around John of not belonging to Israel, probably, of being members of the *goyim*, non-Judeans. John turns the tables. To him, *they* were “children (seed) of Abraham” and thus “children of the people of Israel,” you, disappointed Judean Messianists, should ask yourselves whether *you* are actually still “children of Abraham.” This question is the subject of the part that follows.

Yes, I hear the criticism of my friend Ton and accept it. The disappointment about followers of the Messiah who have become renegades should not have led me to words that would later evoke boundless hatred against all Jews and everything that is Jewish.

61 Veerkamp 2021, 292 ([note 425 on the translation of John 14:2](#)).

62 Veerkamp 2021, 202-03 ([Fidelity and Freedom](#), par. 2-3).

Nevertheless, I would like to specify more precisely what Jesus' reproaches in my Gospel were originally directed at. I do this best by addressing (89) the "three statements of self-definition" of the Jews you have "constructed ... from 8:31-59,"

that Abraham is their father, that they have never served or been enslaved to anyone or anything, and that they are children of God. Together these claims express a commitment to monotheism as the foundational tenet of Second Temple Judaism.

This would mean (88):

Within the Beloved Disciple's cosmological tale, the Jews' rejection of Jesus is directed not so much against Jesus' activities as against the redefinition of divine covenant that Jesus' words and acts imply.

Since in explaining this rejection you refer to the Jewish Scriptures in great detail, we now arrive at an argument on a ground that alone is suitable to mutual understanding. Or, if that is not possible, to at least understand the opposing positions from their actual background.

### 5.3.1.1 The Jews as Children of Abraham

Let's start with Abraham. One of your sentences about him makes me wonder (89):

Abraham's status as the patriarch of the Jewish people is based entirely on his role as the first monotheist.

You do not invoke the Scriptures to justify this proposition but find evidence in post-biblical sources that Abraham was "recognizing the powerlessness of his father's idols and discerning the presence of a supreme being to whom the natural world, in its beauty and intricacy, is to be attributed (*Apocalypse of Abraham* 1:1-8:6; *Jubilees* 12:12-14).<sup>63</sup>" Further you quote, among others, Josephus, according to whom Abraham (89-90)

determined to reform and change the ideas universally current concerning God. He was thus the first boldly to declare that God, the creator of the universe, is one, and that, if any other being contributed aught to man's welfare, each did so by His command and not in virtue of its own inherent power. (*Antiquities* 1.7.1)

This is reminiscent of the Qur'an (Sura 6:74-84) which later portrays Abraham primarily as the overcomer of his father's polytheism, though not as the first monotheist ever.

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63 (178-79, n. 10) *Apocalypse of Abraham*, trans. and ed. R. Rubinkiewicz, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth, 2 vols. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983, 1985), 1:689-93; *Jubilees*, ed. O. S. Wintermute, in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. Charlesworth, 2:80.

The Torah itself expressly knows nothing of the idolatry of Terah, Abraham's father. The NAME of the One God is invoked, according to Genesis 4:26, already since the days of Enosh, who is born to the third son of Adam, Set. What is special about Abraham in the Torah, therefore, is not establishing monotheism but trusting in the word of the NAME who wants to make him a great nation, indeed, the father of many nations (Genesis 12:2; 17:4-6). In Exodus 6:3, God emphasizes that he has *not* already revealed himself to Abraham but only to Moses with his holy NAME.

Back to my Gospel: In Jesus' discussion with his opponents in 8:37-41a about Abraham, it is neither a question of monotheism at first but of the reproach—admittedly repeated all too often by me—(8:37), “You are seeking to kill me.”

Ton Veerkamp<sup>64</sup> describes this course of discussion as follows:

After the concession that his opponents are the seed of Abraham, the harsh accusation follows: The opponents are “indeed” seed of Abraham “but” they seek to kill Jesus. ...

Jesus, in explaining that “but,” begins by saying that he speaks what he has seen (!) with the *FATHER*; they do what they have heard from *their father*. Thus it is about the confusing contrast between *FATHER*/father. To Jesus, *FATHER* is the God of Israel, the impulse of his whole life. Also, the opponents act from an impulse, which determines their way of life, from *their father*. They understand this genealogically, their father is Abraham. Your work, so Jesus, is that you seek to kill me; this is not the work of Abraham, but the work of your father. Abraham did not kill his son, GOD (*FATHER*) forbid! You seek to kill me, the *monogēnes* (1:14, 18), the new Isaac. *Your god* (father) must be the absolute opposite of *my God*.

So, all the time the question is: Who is my father, who is your father? This question is first dealt upon Abraham, and here it is important what I mean in my Gospel when I call (1:18 and 3:16) Jesus *monogenēs*, the “only begotten” son. Indeed, I understand him as a second Isaac, as the embodiment not only of the NAME of the God of Israel but at the same time also as the embodiment of the son who was promised to Abraham, namely Isaac, who in turn became Jacob's = Israel's father. People who rightly claim to have Abraham as their father should not, therefore, want to kill Jesus, of all things, as the second Isaac; not even Abraham did this, although he was first urged to sacrifice him, for the angel of the NAME called out to him, “Do not lay your hand on the boy!”

### 5.3.1.2 Jewish Filiation to God

When the Jews, who formerly trusted in Jesus and then fell away from him, take Jesus' reproach (8:41), “You are doing the works of your father,” as an accusation of

64 Veerkamp 2021, 206-07 ([The Diabolos is Not the Devil](#), par. 2-3).

worshipping another God than the God of Israel, they then in defense and counter-attack really resort (89) to the “*Shema*” in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 to which you refer, which asserts “the absolute uniqueness of YHWH as the one and only God, and as the only one whom Israel should worship.” Confidently they retort (according to Ton Veerkamp’s<sup>65</sup> translation):

“We are not begotten of fornication,  
the ONE we have as FATHER, GOD!”<sup>66</sup>

This phrase reflects what we followers of the Messiah Jesus agree on with all Jews who actually trust in the One God. To this end, you point (90) to the “filial language” that is

used as a metaphor for the covenantal relationship between God and Israel and appears in passages in which the concepts of election and monotheism are central. In Exodus 4:22-23, God instructs Moses to tell Pharaoh, “Thus says the Lord: Israel is my firstborn son. I said to you, ‘Let my son go that he may worship me.’ But you refused to let him go; now I will kill your firstborn son.” In Deuteronomy 14:1, Moses instructs Israel to avoid the rituals associated with idolatry: “You are children of the Lord your God. You must not lacerate yourselves or shave your forelocks for the dead.” The prophet Malachi laments, “Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our ancestors?” (Malachi 2:10).

You also mention a whole range of “postbiblical Jewish sources” that call God the Father of Israel and, such as the Book of *Jubilees* 2:20, connect “the language of God’s fatherhood ... explicitly with Israel’s election.” In particular, you point to another passage in *Jubilees* 19:29 that “implies that the falling away from God, and hence from sonship is the work of Mastema, that is, the devil.”

Here you hint at why the opposition between Jesus and his opponents becomes irreconcilable in my Gospel, even though both sides start from faith in the One God of Israel. Both sides accuse each other of having abandoned this God or of having touched his NAME, of having blasphemed. It is a matter of mutual condemnations exaggerated to the extreme. Already in 5:18, Jesus after the healing of the paralytic

65 Veerkamp 2021, 205 ([The Diabolos is Not the Devil](#), par. 1).

66 Veerkamp 2021, 205 ([note 288 on the translation of John 8:31](#)):

FORNICATION: What is meant is idolatry. In the apocryphal book “Wisdom of Solomon” it says in 14:12, “The principle (*archē!*) of fornication (*porneias*) is the recognition of idols.” The Judeans feel that Jesus reproaches them of the service of idols—the gods of Rome, for nothing else can be meant—and denies them the seriousness of their confession, Deuteronomy 6:4-5. This confession they utter here: “Hear, o Israel, the NAME our God, the NAME is ONE!” Therefore we have to translate, “The ONE we have as FATHER,” and not, “We have only one Father.”

on the Sabbath is accused that, as Ton Veerkamp translates, “he was saying that GOD was his own FATHER, making himself equal to GOD.” Veerkamp<sup>67</sup> explains that

the problem is not that Jesus calls God “Father”—this is also done by the Judeans in 8:41, and with the words *ʾavinu malkhenu* (“our Father, our King”) Judaism addresses God in many traditional prayers. The only problem is the singular. By referring to God as “*his* Father,” Jesus seems to implicitly exclude the Jews from being children of God. In the eyes of the Judeans, the penetrating “my Father” in the mouth of Jesus means that he claims the God (and Father!) of Israel for his own Messianic enterprise and makes it the real concern of God, everything else would be then godless. But “my Father” does not mean that Jesus excludes all Judeans. In 8:41-44, he accuses very specific Judeans of having chosen the emperor, the *diabolos*, as their God, Father, King (see 19:15!), and thus excluded *themselves* from the filiation to GOD.

That you as a Jew cannot accept that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel, I understand, especially since I learn from Ton Veerkamp that not Jews, but my alleged followers, who call themselves Christians, actually later take over the power in the Roman Empire and misuse my Gospel for the oppression of all those who believe differently, including the Jews.

I hardly dare to hope that you will nevertheless try to comprehend what I am really about originally. Ton Veerkamp expresses it this way:<sup>68</sup>

Jesus demands of his opponents that they see him as he sees himself, as the one who went out and came from God, as the messenger who does and speaks only what he was told. Why, asks Jesus, can’t you understand this, why can’t you listen? Jesus answers this question himself and with it at the same time the question of the respective real fatherhood.

Different political points of view stand hard against each other. Opponents of Jesus practice their worship of the One God of Israel within the framework of the *religio licita* of Judaism guaranteed by Rome and accuse Jesus of transgressing the Torah with healings on the Sabbath, of illegally claiming that he is the Messiah, and of acting blasphemously by pretending to be the Son of God.

Jesus and his followers, in turn, confront their Jewish opponents with equally harsh accusations, as Ton Veerkamp<sup>69</sup> puts it:

Jesus accuses his opponents of pursuing the politics of Rome, Rome is their god and father. They let themselves be determined in their political actions by the interests of the ruling world order, it is to this they are in solidarity. Therefore they cannot solidarize with the Messiah (“to love”—*agapan*).

67 Veerkamp 2021, 136 ([The Shabbat](#), par. 1, and [note 193 on the translation of John 5:18](#)).

68 Veerkamp 2021, 207 ([The Diabolos is Not the Devil](#), par. 6).

69 Veerkamp 2021, 208 ([The Diabolos is Not the Devil](#), par. 13-14).

Everybody can know that this Satan, this *diabolos*, is a murderer of humans, after the massacre that the Romans carried out after the devastation of Jerusalem. In this Satan there is no fidelity, he speaks “lies and deceit” (*pseudos*), “in principle (*ap’ archēs*).” Whoever pursues politics with Rome is “a deceiver (*pseustēs*) like his father.”

So this conflict is not about excluding all Jews from the sonship of God! The later Christian interpretation of my Gospel, which amounts to branding all Jews as children of the devil, is detestable in my eyes as well as in yours. However, I cannot undo being partly responsible for it because I—in the heat of Jesus’ battle of words with Jewish opponents—put into his mouth the sentence (8:44), “You are of the father, the *diabolos*, the enemy.” Of course, this does not refer to a demonic, otherworldly devil but to the Roman emperor as the false god of this world order. But later on, when this context can no longer be inferred, I must be misunderstood, with tragic consequences. Moreover, Ton Veerkamp appeals to my conscience that even in my time my formulation goes too far. It is born out of the disappointment that Jesus is not accepted as Messiah, that our group experiences hostility and exclusion. Veerkamp rightly accuses me of sectarian agitation and a lack of critical self-reflection.<sup>70</sup>

You as a Jew can certainly also not agree with this kind of hostility of Jewish opponents by Jesus and his followers and would probably have to put my Gospel as a sectarian paper to the files of Jew-hostile history even if you considered such a reading possible.

Ton Veerkamp, therefore, deliberately appeals to Christian addressees, for whom my Gospel belongs to the biblical canon, and tries to hammer into their heads that a dispute about the worship of the proper God in the Bible has nothing to do with an otherworldly mutual condemnation. It was so when Elijah fought for YHWH against Baʿal, and it is no different in my Gospel. Let us listen to Ton Veerkamp<sup>71</sup> on Jesus’ reproach that his Jewish opponents, who had formerly belonged to his followers, had turned over to the Roman enemy (8:44), “to the murderer of humans on principle”:

Now no more communication is possible. If the members of society can no longer communicate about “God,” about the basic order, civil war is called for. If the Christian listeners do not understand that the ambivalence of the word “God” and the NAME was the theological and therefore political main problem of the Jewish society in antiquity, they will never be able to understand the Scriptures. ... The question here is: what is working in each case as the FATHER, as the God of Israel?

70 For instance in Veerkamp 2021, 173 ([An Evil Speech](#), par. 10) or 195 ([The Light of the World](#), par. 3) or 202 ([Fidelity and Freedom](#), par. 2).

71 Veerkamp 2021, 207 ([The Diabolos is Not the Devil](#), par. 5).

Much might be gained if Christians were to understand that Jesus does not want to abolish Judaism, but to unite all Israel (Judeans, Samaritans, Diaspora Jews) as the Messiah, with the goal of overcoming the Roman world order—and not by Zealot violence but by the new commandment of *agapē*, solidarity, which brings the Torah of the God of Israel to fulfillment.

According to Ton Veerkamp,<sup>72</sup> as I said, such an appeal to oppose the anti-Semitism that my Gospel has evoked “as the basic text of Christianity” can only be addressed to Christians:

We undertake the attempt to overcome anti-Semitism *for ourselves* because it is a mutilation of our souls. Precisely because we are deeply disfigured by anti-Semitism and racism, we are a danger to the Jews, to all humanity, and not least to ourselves. It is a matter of course that Christians, Jews, and others have to talk to each other about how to combat the plague of anti-Semitism and racism in our society. *This* dialogue is a sheer duty.

### 5.3.1.3 Jewish Freedom from All Slavery

Now (90) what about the “Jews’ claim that they have never served or been enslaved to anyone”? In no way do I refer to this (91) “as a sign of the Jews’ inordinate and unrealistic pride, and as evidence that the Jews really are liars.” But this is how, for example, Raymond E. Brown<sup>73</sup> understands this statement, whom you quote as follows:

“The Jews” seem to misunderstand Jesus’ words about freedom and take them in a political sense. Even on this level, however, their boast is ill founded, for Egypt, Babylonia, and Rome had enslaved them. Perhaps they mean that, being the privileged heirs to the promise to Abraham, they cannot be truly enslaved, although occasionally God has allowed them to be chastised through temporary subjection.

Against Brown I can state that, on the contrary, “the Jews” understand Jesus’ words correctly precisely because they understand “them in a political sense.” Jesus wants to make clear to them that God’s fidelity to Israel—*alētheia* is to be translated from the Scriptures as “fidelity,” “truth” is only a partial aspect of it—makes people free. Under the conditions of the Roman world order, however, this fidelity can only be recognized by those who are apprenticed to the Messiah Jesus. The further course of the political discussion is outlined by Ton Veerkamp<sup>74</sup> as follows:

72 Veerkamp 2021, 420 ([The Gospel of John and Anti-Semitism](#), par. 15 and 18).

73 (179, n. 15) Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, vol. 1, I-XII, Anchor Bible 29 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966), 355.

74 Veerkamp 2021, 203-04 ([Fidelity and Freedom](#), par. 6-11).

When Jesus demands that freedom be given only by focusing on the word of Jesus, they take this as an abandonment of their Judean identity.

In the Mishnah, those people are referred to as *free* or *noble* people (*bene-chorin*) who are engaged in the teaching of the Torah (*thalmud thora*) (Mishna Avot 6:2). Thus the occupation with the Torah sets people free. Although the Mishnaic quotation from the sixth chapter of Mishna Avot (*qinyan thora*) is much younger than John, it is probably an original and essential idea of Rabbinical Judaism that the Torah makes people free: as Judeans, they are “seed of Abraham,” as such never slaves (*doulos*, ‘*eved*) and therefore not in need of liberation. Their identity is freedom. To what else should fidelity liberate them? It says in this passage:

There is no free one for you (*ben-chorin*)  
unless he who strives for the teaching of the Torah (*thalmud thora*).  
Everyone who strives for the teaching of the Torah,  
climbs height after height, for it is written (Numbers 21:19),  
From Mattana to Nachaliel, from Nachaliel to Bamot.

As I said, this passage dates from much later times. John was aware of the effort surrounding the *thalmud thora*. His opponents say: If someone strives for the whole Torah and tries to live the Torah, he can never be a slave of the world order. John thinks this is at best an illusion, but actually an evil and grumpy adherence to a tradition that is outdated.

Jesus says, “Fidelity (not the Torah!) makes free, aberration (*hamartia*) enslaves. The children of Israel were “seed of Abraham” and yet they were slaves in Egypt. Anyone who in Rome does not necessarily see salvation, but a *modus vivendi*, is mistaken, he is inevitably made unfree by this aberration, he must take political considerations into account. To be “slave of aberration” in the end means to be “slave of Rome.”

Jesus explains this with a midrash on Genesis 21:9-12, where Sarah asked Abraham to send away the son of the slave woman (*paidiskē*, ‘*amah*). The son of Sarah stays in the house. The son of the slave woman, Ishmael, is a slave and may not stay in the father’s house. At this point Jesus deviates from the narrative: the son who stays in the house will free the slaves and thus give them a place in the house.

Thus, although Brown hints at something of the political significance of what is being negotiated here, he cannot in any way grasp it from his Christian spiritualized reinterpretation of the Jesuan proclamation. In the same sense, you quote (91) commenting words of Rudolf Schnackenburg:<sup>75</sup>

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75 (179, n. 16) Rudolf Schnackenburg: *The Gospel According to St. John* (New York: Crossroad,

Whatever the religious inspiration of the Jewish sense of freedom, it is far removed from freedom as Jesus understands it. The Jews' pride and complacency are clean contrary to the attitude which would make them receptive to Jesus' message of freedom.

This is precisely the **Christian pride and self-glory** by which people who thoroughly misunderstand my Gospel elevate themselves above an alleged Jewish pride and self-glory.

However, I understand, since such a Christian reading of John's Gospel is given to you, that you cannot interpret Jesus' attitude in any other way than apolitical and spiritualized, either (91-92):

From the Johannine Jesus' point of view, the Jews' declaration reveals their complete ignorance of and blindness to their own spiritual state, from which they can be set free only by continuing in Jesus' word.

In contrast (91), you understand "the Jews' claim in 8:33 that they have never 'served' anyone or anything" in the sense of (92)

their unshakable commitment to monotheism. They have never served any being other than God; indeed, to serve another "divine" being would be tantamount to slavery. Read in this way, the Jews are neither lying nor boasting but simply explaining why they cannot believe in Jesus or continue in his word. To do so would be to violate the foundation of their faith and self-understanding as Jews.

You reason this (91) by pointing out that "the Greek verb *douleuō*" does not only mean "to be enslaved," but also "to serve" or "to worship" (1 Samuel 7:3; Jeremiah 5:19; Psalm 105 [LXX 106],36; Galatians 4:9).

Thus you describe very clearly the point of view from which Jesus' opponents answer his harsh accusations with counter-accusations.

### 5.3.2 Harsh Counter-Accusations of the *Ioudaioi* Refuting Jesus' Messiahship?

The three statements discussed in the previous three sections (92)

—that the Jews are children of Abraham, that they are also children of God, and that they have never served, or been (religiously) enslaved, to anyone or anything—stake the Jews' claim to monotheism. They also imply that Jesus violates or transgresses the boundaries of monotheism as the Jews understand it. This conclusion is bolstered by the two direct accusations that the Jews hurl at Jesus in 8:48: that he is a Samaritan and that he has a demon.

### 5.3.2.1 Jesus as a Samaritan and Demon-Possessed

Is the accusation (92) of demon possession related to Psalm 106 [LXX 105] 36-37, where there is “a parallel between the Israelites’ worship of idols and the sacrificing of their sons and daughters to demons”? However, to accuse Jesus’ opponents of such an abominable practice is going too far even for me.

That Jesus is made a Samaritan, that is, someone with whom Judeans do not associate, as I note in 4:9, may be related to the fact that to Samaritans were attributed demonic powers. Mention has already been made of the passage in the Book of *Jubilees* 19:28 that deals with demonic powers causing apostasy from God. According to you, this means:

Therefore, in calling Jesus a Samaritan and claiming that he is possessed by a demon, the Jews are accusing him of straying from the one true God.

### 5.3.2.2 Jesus as a Blasphemer

As (93) “evidence of demonic possession,” Jesus’ opponents evaluate his words about eternal life in 8:52, “Whoever keeps my word will never taste death”, and about Abraham in 8:56, “Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad,” which you interpret as “Jesus’ claim to preexistence.” Finally, you cite Jesus’ claim (8:58), “Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am [*egō eimi*],” which in your eyes with its “absolute use of the words ‘I am,’ a divine self-designation, ... asserts Jesus’ divine status.”<sup>76</sup>

At this point I again turn to a very extensive quotation from Ton Veerkamp<sup>77</sup> because, drawing on the Torah, he gets to the heart of the way in which Abraham can see the day of Jesus:

He who keeps the word of Jesus will not see death until the new epoch begins (*eis ton aiōna*). To the opponents, this seems to be total nonsense. We shall all die, all have died, from Abraham to the prophets, “To whom do you make yourself?” ...

*Life of the age to come*—what does it mean, they ask; even Abraham died, so what is this talk about “not dying”? To whom are you making yourself?

Thus Abraham. Abraham has died, but he is not yet finished with life. His goal in life, says Jesus, will be achieved when “his day” has come. Abraham, your father, rejoiced that he should see Jesus’ day. *Your father*—this is never denied. Jesus tells them that their father should cheer the day of Jesus. He, who

76 “For a detailed discussion of the Johannine use of *ego eimi* as a divine name,” you hint at (179, n. 18) Brown, *John I-XII*, 533-38. In your book *The Word in the World* you didn’t relate the phrase *egō eimi* to the God of Israel. See [Egō eimi](#).

77 Veerkamp 2021, 211-12 ([Stones Instead of Arguments](#), par. 3.5-12).

according to the opinion of all the Judeans, including Jesus, lives in the hiddenness of God, has actually seen it. The Gospel often speaks of Jesus' hour, but only here of his day. The day at issue here is *hēmera eschatē*, the Day of Decision.

As so often, Jesus puts up with the inevitable misunderstanding. Jesus is not a very old man, not even fifty years old, so Abraham cannot have seen his day. This is not a flat interjection, how else should they react?

The interjection is the occasion for the decisive sentence, "Before Abraham was born: I WILL BE THERE." To understand this verse, it is necessary to read the book *Tholedoth/Genesis* correctly. It tells how Israel became the firstborn among the nations. It is the book of *geneseis* (plural), in Hebrew, *tholedoth*. The book is structured by a series of *geneseis*, *tholedoth*, from Adam to Jacob... The expression *tholedoth Avraham* does not appear anywhere. Abraham was begotten by Terach, his father. He is the subject of the begetting of his son Isaac. But this is an element of the *tholedoth Yitzchaq*, Genesis 25:19:

These are the begettings of Isaac.

Abraham begat Isaac.

Isaac was a forty-year-old,

when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Betuel the Aramean ...

The content of the chapter *Begettings of Terach* is the life path of Abraham. That Abraham begat Isaac was the determining moment in Isaac's life. *Prin Abraam genesthai* must not be translated, "Before Abraham was, I am." This is ontology, not Scriptural interpretation. Rather, *yalad*, "to beget," is to be thought of, therefore, "Before Abraham was begotten/born, the NAME is there," who made Abraham the father of the first-born among the peoples; before the decisive turn in the begettings (*tholedoth*) of humankind ('*adam*') already applies: I WILL BE THERE, '*ehye, egō eimi*.'

Jesus' political program in John is the restoration of Israel as the firstborn among the nations, 10:16 in connection with 11:52. Abraham was the beginning, Jesus is the completion of Abraham's life. Therefore, Jesus Messiah is given the title *monogenēs*, "only begotten"; it is the honorary title of Isaac, the Only One (*yachid*, *monogenēs*) of Abraham, Genesis 22:2. The Only-Begotten was the joy of Abraham. He sees that what his God began through him is completed through Jesus, the begettings of Israel, *tholedoth yisra'el*. It is about the becoming of Israel (Genesis), and only about that. The NAME is there, always, before the genesis of Israel, after the completion of Israel; before Abraham, your, our father, was born, is the NAME.

The opponents have not understood this reading of the Book of Genesis by John. The formulation of 8:58 is taken by them as a provocation. The opponents can only see here a "blasphemy—touching, infringement (see 10:36) —

of the NAME" (Leviticus 24:11. The "I" they refer to Jesus himself, who, in an evil way, claims the *ʾehye* of Exodus 3:14 for himself. According to them Jesus "blasphemes the NAME." For such a "blasphemy" the Torah provides the death penalty by stoning. Apparently, the "cult" of the Messiah Jesus—"My Lord and my God," John 20:28!—in the Messianic communities has led the synagogue to insinuate such blasphemy. Admittedly, John or his Messianic community does not make much effort to dispel this suspicion.

From this point of view, I partially disagree with your following sentences (93):

Preexistence, eternal life, and the ability to grant life to others are explicitly labeled as divine characteristics in the context of the Fourth Gospel itself. God existed before the creation of the world (1:1) and will presumably exist for all time; God "raises the dead and gives them life" (5:21). Therefore, in describing himself in this manner, Jesus is assigning divine attributes to himself.

I am not interested in imputing to Jesus a divine preexistence before all time with God. It is true that the Messiah comes from the God of Israel since he perfectly embodies his fidelity, his will to gather all Israel, his liberating NAME. But he as a person exists nowhere else than in the flesh of Jesus of Nazareth ben Joseph on this earth.

Nor will Jesus coexist with God in an eternal afterlife but rather his ascension to the Father denotes the process of handing over the inspiration of fidelity to those who trust in the Messiah and, by following his commandment of *agapē*, solidarity, challenge and overcome the prevailing world order—up to the dawn of the age of peace to come. Such thinking does not correspond to spiritualized-religious ideas, but it does correspond to the prophetic and apocalyptic thinking of Israel.

I do *not* contradict your further sentences:

That the Jews are deeply troubled by this claim is made explicit elsewhere in the Gospel. In 5:17, the narrator informs us that the Jews aimed to kill Jesus because he "called God his own Father, making himself equal to [or like] God." In 10:33, the Jews themselves tell us that "it is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, make yourself God."

Again, however, I am ambivalent about the conclusions you draw from this:

From the Gospel's point of view, these statements are ironic; for Jesus *is* the Son of God, and is equal to, or resembles, God. Jesus is not calling for the worship of a god other than the God of Israel. Rather, he is proclaiming himself to be the Son of God (20:31), the one through whom God reveals himself to the world (1:18).

It is true, of course, that in my eyes Jesus is not calling for the worship of another God. But irony was not my point. Irony corresponds to an attitude of hurtful superiority. My attitude is one of hurt disappointment—disappointment that the majority

of Jews are unwilling to accept the Messiah who fully embodies the liberating NAME of God.

From a retrospective distance, however, I can understand what you write about the reaction of Jesus' opponents:

But the Jews' accusations show that they are not convinced. Rather, their final response, throwing stones, implies not only their firm rejection of Jesus but also their conviction that he is guilty of a capital crime. This response therefore implies that in claiming to be the Son of God who shares in God's attributes, Jesus is setting himself up as a god in his own right. From the perspective of the Johannine Jews, belief in Jesus is the path *not* to the God of Israel but away from God to idolatry. No flesh-and-blood person can be equal or similar to God, or share in the attributes that are uniquely and singularly divine.

I admit that Ton Veerkamp is even too protective of what we Messianists think about Jesus conceiving himself as the subject of *egō eimi*. Of course, Jesus as the Messiah is not God himself, certainly not in the sense of Greco-Roman demigods; he is not identical with the inaccessible God. But at the same time, he fully embodies the word of the God of Israel, his self-revelation, his fidelity to Israel, his will to overcome the world order so that Israel can live in peace amidst the nations. And from this conviction, many in the Messianic communities began very early to worship Jesus together with the FATHER as God.<sup>78</sup>

In this respect, I must agree with your statement (93-94):

From the point of view of strict monotheism, these claims are truly {94} offensive and support the Jewish charge against Jesus of blasphemy (10:33).

### 5.3.2.3 Jesus as a Seducer to Apostasy from the God of Israel

However, I am critical of your sentence (94):

But even more problematic than Jesus' claim to have divine attributes is his proselytizing activity.

I deny that Jesus wants to convert people away from Judaism to the new religion of Christianity. If the God of Israel himself sent Jesus into the world as the Messiah, then the call to trust in Jesus and follow him does not mean "to stray from their ser-

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78 Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ. Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*, Grand Rapids/Michigan 2003, brings convincing arguments that such worship, which he calls "binitarian," was already an undisputed practice in the so-called Jewish Christian communities at the time when Paul came into contact with the Jerusalem community, e.g. (167): "So far as we can tell from Paul's letters, there was never any conflict or complaint from Jerusalem leaders, or from those Jewish Christians who made it their aim to correct features of Pauline Christianity, about the Christ-devotion that was practiced in Pauline congregations. The most natural inference is that the pattern of devotional practices was not very different from that followed in the Judean circles with which Paul had these contacts."

vice to and worship of the one true God of Israel,” but on the contrary, the God of Israel himself demands this trust and this following.

However, I express all my criticism of you with great respect for you and with full understanding that you cannot evaluate my Gospel in any other way based on its Christian reading.

At the same time, I am full of anger at this Christian reading, which has actually turned the call to trust in Jesus as the Messiah of Israel into a call to conversion far away from the God of Israel and the Jewish Scriptures. Thus, away from the Old Testament “Law” and an allegedly only punishing God to an allegedly quite different God of a Christian “Gospel” of grace, forgiveness, and redemption, first revealed in the New Testament.

And finally, I am full of sorrow and shame because I myself contribute to this development by putting exorbitantly exaggerated formulations into Jesus’ mouth, which perhaps no one can understand properly. I mean, for example, his provocative invitation “to eat his body and drink his blood (6:53).” Ton Veerkamp<sup>79</sup> explains about Jesus as the bread of life:

The one who trusts in Jesus receives the life of the age to come. This one is the bread of life. This means: if the “I AM, I WILL BE THERE,” is still valid, then only as that *bread* which is the Messiah. The fathers ate the manna and died. It was not by chance that they died, but because they refused to go into the land of liberty, Deuteronomy 2:14. They ate but did not listen to the words of God through Moses, so they died. The Messiah is the bread that comes down from heaven; just as the manna secured the life of Israel in those days, so the bread of Messiah now secures the life of Israel. This bread named Messiah is the living bread, the bread coming down from heaven, which secures life until the age to come.

Now Jesus becomes concrete. The *Messiah* is the *bread* and as the most vital bread, he leads the earthly-political existence of the Messiah Jesus ben Joseph, whose parents people know. He leads this political, endangered, and vulnerable existence. “Flesh” is what John calls the life of humans under the world order. The short formula for the Messiah’s existence is, “Flesh for the *life of the world*.” “World” does not live; people live, people in the world, that is, people living under the conditions of a real ruling world order. Being human is always to be in the world, to be *under* the world order. The existence of the Messiah is *flesh*—in the world, *under* the world order, and thus *for the world*—so that its order can be an order of life. Messianic existence is political existence, otherwise is it nothing at all.

79 Veerkamp 2021, 168-69 ([Grumbling. Bread of Life, Eating Meat](#), par. 13-14).

Already here, I have to admit, this is tough fare. It's hard to grasp. And then it gets even harder, indeed, unacceptably offensive:<sup>80</sup>

Some do not come along here anymore, others are undecided, are quarreled (*emachonto*): "How can this one give us his meat to eat?" John would have a chance here to explain what "eating meat" could mean.

John not only undauntedly continues what he has said so far, but he tops it all off: eat the flesh of the Human, *my* flesh, even drink his blood, *my* blood. But what exactly is to eat (*phagein*) here? Chew (*trōgein*) his flesh! Drink his blood, then you will get alive into the world age to come, "I will raise him up on the Day of Decision," the fourth time. "Only that is food," says Jesus, only that is really food and drink, that keeps you alive, only that.

The fact that it says "to chew" instead of "to eat" is thus by no means a "stylistic variation," as Wengst says<sup>81</sup>. Johannes does not have the sense of exercises in style here. Here our text is taking a far-reaching turn. Now he wants provocation. Whoever talks like that does not want any understanding. He wants separation, schism. That is the language of the sect.

We are so blunted by our communion services that we no longer feel the provocation. Jesus does not talk about the wafer or a cup of grape juice, with or without alcohol. The provocation is really intended. Meat is allowed to be eaten in Israel, but, "Meat that has its blood in its soul, you must not eat under any circumstances," Genesis 9:4. This so-called Noahide prohibition is repeatedly inculcated: the blood must not be eaten, it must be allowed to flow away before eating the meat; it must be kosher. Chewing human flesh and drinking its blood at the same time for every child of Israel is a disgusting violation of the fundamental commandment based on the unconditional reverence for human life, Genesis 9:5-6. Therefore, the Torah declares blood an absolute taboo.

Certainly, by this expression, John means a complete identification with the political existence of Jesus, unconditional discipleship on the path of the Messiah, "He who chews my flesh, drinks my blood, remains united to me, and I to him." But by formulating this thought in a way that is so repulsive to the Judeans, he obviously does not want them to find any access to this Messiah. This is *scandalous* in the true sense of the word, and John knows it, v.61! Consequently, the group around John ends up in a locked room, "doors locked for fear of the Judeans," 20:19, 26.

80 Veerkamp 2021, 170-71 ([The Dispute among the Judeans](#), par. 2-8).

81 Klaus Wengst, Das Johannesevangelium. 1. Teilband: Kapitel 1-10 (ThKNT), Stuttgart 2000, 253.

Jesus, the one sent from the FATHER, only lives “through the FATHER.” That means: he does not only work for the cause of the God of Israel, he rather is the cause itself, that—and only that—is his life. And whoever chews the Messiah lives through the Messiah, for he himself becomes the cause of God, the cause of the Messiah. He can do nothing else.

John summarizes, “This one is the bread coming down from heaven, not like the fathers at that time: they ate and died. He who chews this bread will live until the world age to come.” However “sublime” this theology may be to some, it seems divisive and is therefore worthy of criticism. The provocative, divisive teaching which Jesus presented in the synagogue of Capernaum—and this was probably also the teaching which John presented in the synagogue of his own city—divides his listeners, it divides the Messianic movement. In any case, this sentence marks a turning point. Up to this point in the text, the Messianic community gathered together. From this moment on the disintegration of the community begins. This is a tragedy for him whose political program was the gathering of Israel in one synagogue (11:52).

To repeat: I confess my guilt and co-responsibility for the development that has led to the opposite of my intention, namely to gather all Israel in the body of the Messiah, in the new sanctuary of the Messianic community inspired by the fidelity of the God of Israel. I wish I had not written my Gospel so that it could not be misused by the Christian church for the disparagement and alleged expulsion of the Jews from the covenant with the God who chose them!

Nevertheless, back to your criticism (94) of Jesus’ “proselytizing activity.” In your eyes, Jesus can be convicted on the basis of Deuteronomy 13:1-5 as “a person or prophet who seeks to lead Israel astray” and, according to Deuteronomy 13:10, deserves “death by stoning” because:

He has appeared among them (1:26) and has promised portents (e.g., 1:51); at least some of his portents have taken place (e.g., 4:50), and he has urged others to follow him (e.g., 1:43; 8:31).

But Jesus did not do all this to preach apostasy from the God of Israel. He did not say: “‘Let us follow other gods,’ (whom you have not known) ‘and let us serve them,’”; on the contrary, this is exactly what he reproaches his opponents with, namely that they follow and serve Rome as a false god through their political practice.

Whoever, though, hands out reproaches with such harshness should probably not be surprised at equally harsh counter-reproaches. The later Talmudic condemnation of Jesus (95) “as someone who has lead Israel astray” responds to the disinheritance of Judaism by the Christian church, which had long been accomplished by that time, but already in my Gospel, indeed (7:12) “the crowds debate whether Jesus is a good person or one who intends to lead them astray.”

### 5.3.3 Does Jesus Enhance Jewish Monotheism or Destroy It?

Your conclusion to this chapter of your book therefore summarizes quite well what is in dispute between Jesus and his Jewish opponents (95):

The words assigned to the Jews in John 8:31-59 suggest that the basic issue at stake is whether or not Jesus and the claims made for him are an enhancement of monotheism, that is, a “new and improved” but fundamentally recognizable revelation or, conversely, a radical infringement on this basic Jewish belief.

Only the word “enhancement” does not apply insofar as in my eyes the Messiah Jesus embodies the best in Judaism, namely the liberating NAME of the God of Israel, which cannot be surpassed or enhanced.

In principle, I may agree with your following sentence, but with the limitations, I have already asserted against a spiritualized cosmological tale of the afterlife:

In effect, this debate is over different versions of the cosmological story, that is, of the relationship between God and humankind, and of the place of both the Jews and of Jesus within these different versions.

### 5.4 Resistant Reading of the Ecclesiological Tale

As a resistant reader (96) of the ecclesiological tale, you outline it again more succinctly than you have done so far:

The key feature of the ecclesiological tale as I have constructed it is the absolute religious separation between the Johannine and Jewish communities alongside ongoing informal social contact. From the point of view of their faith commitments, I picture the Johannine believers and the Jewish nonbelievers staring at one another with suspicion and hostility across a deep canyon, each side simultaneously regretting the rupture between them and also blaming one another for having caused it.

Seen in this light, you and I stand hostile to each other on different sides of this canyon, with you accepting “the separation that exists between myself and those who have chosen to accept the Beloved Disciple’s gift.”

Exciting now, however, is your question posed to me:

Was there a bitter controversy between the Johannine community and the Jews among whom they lived and with whom they worshiped in the synagogue? If so, what was this controversy about? And, most pressing, did it result in a formal expulsion of Jesus-followers from the Jewish community?

You quote from J. L. Martyn's *Buch History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* the fictitious letter of a president of the synagogue with accusations such as the following (96-97):

The troubles began when the Jesus-followers gradually stopped socializing with the others and eventually formed their own group, first within the synagogue, and then outside it. Before long they had separated themselves off from the community altogether, except to come around occasionally and harangue our members about Jesus, the Messiah, and our scriptures. So they say they were expelled? Don't believe a word of it. It's just an attempt to escape responsibility for a break which they themselves initiated.

I have to agree with you again: This fictitious account "is no less, or at least not much less, plausible than the dominant historical reconstruction" that there has been an exclusion from the synagogue and that only from this, our hostility towards "the" Jews has resulted.

I have already explained my position on this problem. As a criticism of your presentation, I repeat here only that in my time there is not yet (96) an "absolute religious separation between the Johannine and Jewish communities." The disputes are of an internal Jewish and political nature. They concern the question of whether trust in the Torah of Moses alone is sufficient to be able to live a Jewish life under the world order, or whether trust in the Messiah Jesus must be added to be able to overcome the world order through *agapē*.

However, it also follows from this that we actually bear a considerable share of the responsibility for the acuteness of the way in which this conflict has been fought out. In this respect, in line with you, I also disagree with (97) what you call the "Johannine guild" when they try to excuse an alleged sweeping hostility to Jews on my part with an allegedly understandable reaction to our exclusion from the synagogue. Such expulsions occur now and then, but as measures to ward off harm from troublemakers like us, they are more than understandable.

### 5.5. The Beloved Disciple: Not Only an Opponent and Also Capable of Self-Criticism

By confronting me (97) as an opponent in a resistant reading of my gospel, you must "pity" those who are falling for my Gospel, so to speak, since they are "tragically misguided in their beliefs about Jesus and God." In your eyes, Jesus is not "an innocent victim of a Jewish murder plot," rather you (98) take your

place alongside the Johannine Jews ... who are the victims, whose identity and whose lives are threatened by the Beloved Disciple's cruel rhetoric and by a narrow view of God and humankind in which we Others have no place.

However, you subject your own resistant reading "to the same criticisms as the compliant reading in the previous chapter" because you "cannot overcome or bypass the rhetoric of binary opposition" that you conceive me to use by reproducing it "in reverse."

Resistant reading is therefore not a basis for friendship with the Beloved Disciple; in refusing the gift a resistant reader also denies its value to the Beloved Disciple himself.

But since I do not really feel at home at all in your reading of my Gospel on the various levels, it has become apparent in the meantime that in your resistant reading I find more points of contact both for agreement with you and for painful self-criticism than in your compliant reading.

## 6 The Beloved Disciple as Colleague

In a third form of your reading (99) you want to meet me benevolently and empathetically, and you

identify various elements within the Beloved Disciple's three tales that resonate positively in some way with the stories, written or lived, that belong to my own tradition and experience.

I am very happy to have an exchange with you about this!

### 6.1 Sympathetic Reading of the Historical Tale

While you (100), as a Jewish reader, cannot sympathize with "the content of the Beloved Disciple's historical tale ... because of the negative role assigned to the Jews," you do want to look at two of "a number of literary aspects of the historical tale" that "have strong parallels in Jewish texts."

#### 6.1.1 Exodus and Liberation through Jesus—Where Is the Parallel?

I am pleasantly surprised how positively you respond (106) to the fact that I am directing the readers of my Gospel

to view the Gospel story as their own, to situate themselves alongside the disciples and followers of Jesus, including the Beloved Disciple himself, and so to view Jesus' acts and hear his words as if they were there themselves.

In this you see (102) a parallel to the "Passover Haggadah," which describes the ritual course of the annual Jewish Passover meal:

Jews are enjoined every Passover to relive the exodus experience as if they themselves came out of Egypt.

With a moving presentation (103), you go into detail about the "*Dayeinu*":

One popular song that has been reinterpreted and rewritten to express the lived Jewish experience is *Dayeinu*, meaning, "It would have been enough for us." In the traditional Passover Haggadah, this song commemorates the many

miraculous things God did for the Jewish people and declares that any one of these would have been ample on its own.

In modern times, however (104), there is also a “bitter and ironic version of the song” with an enumeration of “the many tragedies of Jewish history” and „a vision of the Jewish community itself working for Zion.”<sup>82</sup>

Finally, you mention “the Jewish feminist movement” as another “arena in which the Passover event has been used paradigmatically” to “acknowledge the centuries of women’s oppression and the hopes for freedom that the feminist movement has fostered.”

Unfortunately, you see the Passover Haggadah and my Gospel as paralleling each other only in purely formal terms (106):

This ability to reach out beyond the boundaries of time, space, and text helps to account for the ongoing vitality of both the Haggadah and the Gospel of John, and their ongoing formative role within the communities that hold them dear.

If you would acknowledge that the Messiah Jesus, as I conceive and proclaim him, is by no means an enemy of the Jews, but dies on the cross of the Romans to bring about a new Passover for Israel, the liberation from the worldwide slave house of the Roman world order, then we could discuss much more far-reaching parallels of the Exodus message and my Gospel. Let me quote Ton Veerkamp<sup>83</sup> again, who compares the Christian celebration of the Easter Vigil with the Jewish celebration of the Passover:

During the Jewish celebration of Passover night, the son must ask the father, “Why is this night different from other nights?” And according to the son’s comprehension, the father instructs him. “He begins with the Jewish people’s disgrace and concludes with their honor,” Mishna Pessachim 10:4. Annually this night is lived through and celebrated.

Christians do not do otherwise, at least not if the annual liturgy of the Easter Vigil is somewhat Scriptural. ... If the people was liberated once and uniquely from the hand of Pharaoh, this unique event determines the whole history of the people. At the same time, this liberation had to be fought for again and again, and to be fought for, it must be remembered again and again.

... The Passover of the Jews is like the Christian Easter: what happened once is still pending. Pharaoh was defeated, and Pharaoh continued to reign. Rome is

82 (179, n. 6) Yosef Dov Sheinson: *A Survivors’ Haggadah*, ed. Saul Touster (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2000), 63.

83 Veerkamp 2021, 395-96 ([Scholion 10: Death and Resurrection of the Messiah; Once and for All?](#), par. 2-8).

defeated, and Rome continues to reign. The night of the Messiah is unthinkable without the night when the Angel of Death passed by the doors smeared with the blood of the Passover lamb.

We must therefore treat John's distancing expression, *pascha loudaiōn*, the Passover of the Jews (2:13; 6:4; 11:55), with great caution. Here no Jewish Passover is abolished, but the same Passover is sharpened under completely new, Roman circumstances: as a promise for all peoples. Therefore, according to John, the Christian Easter is not the substitute for the Jewish Passover. We must not underestimate this difference.

Even if John, according to our reading of the Gospel, limited his Messianic mission to worldwide scattered Israel including the ten lost tribes (Samaria), he sees himself in the tradition of Jeremiah 31:31. There the NAME makes a "new covenant" (*berith chadasha*) with Israel. A "New Testament" with a new era was not a Christian but a Jewish invention! Of the Passover, Jeremiah (23:7-8) says,

Therefore:

There, days come—announcement of the NAME—,  
there you no longer say:

May the NAME live,  
who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of Egypt.

No! May live the NAME,  
who brought up, who caused to come,  
the seed of the house of Israel from the land of the north,  
from the lands where they were carried away,  
and shall dwell on their ground.

Just as Jeremiah did not see the liberation from Egypt as outdated, so too the death of the Messiah does not outdate the liberation from Pharaoh's slave house. To Paul and Luke, probably also to Matthew, and ultimately also to the school of John, Passover is a promise for the nations. Exactly at that point, the ecclesia and the synagogue diverged. The death of the Messiah makes liberation a worldwide perspective for all peoples—not just any liberation, but the liberation of Israel from the house of slavery: The God of the Christians is the God whose NAME can only be pronounced as the one "who led Israel out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery," Exodus 20:2.

I admit: Such a reading of my Gospel is not anchored in the Christian mainstream. How I wish that Christians would at least start discussing it! But by relating my Gospel to the Exodus tradition, you nourish my hope that perhaps it is still recognizable in the 21st century how much my Gospel is also centrally rooted in the liberation traditions of the Jewish Scriptures, especially the Exodus.

### 6.1.2 Criteria for the Coherence of References to the Jewish Scriptures

How glad I am that you, too, are aware (106) that both of us

belong to traditions whose texts and belief systems are shaped by those scriptures that later became known to be known as the Old Testament for Christians, and the Hebrew Bible or Tanakh (Torah, Prophets, Writings) for Jews.

But it is a pity that you, in your representation of the cosmological tale, pay so little attention to the fact that when identifying Jesus with the divine word it is not about a preworldly preexistence to be understood just in formal temporal-spatial terms but about the agreement of Jesus with the will of the God of Israel as he reveals himself, for example, in the biblical Wisdom. That is the sense of my allusions to the “female Wisdom figure who was present and active in the process of creation (Proverbs 8:27-31).”

However, you take seriously that people come to trust in Jesus as the Messiah “at least in part because of their assessment that he is the one ‘about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote’ (1:45).” And you perceive that “some of the events of Jesus’ life are seen as fulfilling scripture,” though you do not examine them all in detail.

In a sense, you are then using a procedure similar to Ton Veerkamp’s in that you are picking up on implicit allusions to biblical texts (106-07):

But even more intriguing is the complex use of biblical allusion through which the Beloved Disciple tells some of his most intriguing stories. One superb example is the profound and playful role of biblical allusion in John 20:1-18, the story of Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb.

Because in other contexts you refrain from referring to the Scriptures, either explicitly or implicitly, I would like, before dealing with your interpretation of this story, to go into criteria that must be fulfilled in order to prove a reference to the Scriptures to be coherent. Ton Veerkamp<sup>84</sup> faced being told that he was overshooting the mark with some of his suggestions to refer passages from my Gospel to the Jewish Scriptures. For explanation he therefore writes:

John is not understandable without comprehensive knowledge of Tanakh. For his language in the comprehensive sense of the word (French: “*langage*”, not “*langue*”) is, as with every Jew of that time who went to the synagogue, deeply determined by the language of the Scriptures, and this is not only evident in the explicit quotations. It is important to work out the implicit references. Therefore, we quote explicitly where, in our opinion, John is quoting

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84 Veerkamp 2021, 105 ([Scholion 4: The Source of John](#), par. 5 and 7).

implicitly, so that the connections become traceable and verifiable. In the House of Study, it must be discussed whether the reference is correct or not. ... Under certain circumstances, it may turn out that the reference is too far-fetched and that the proposal does not go further. But we have always to try to understand John from the Tanakh.

In a comment on the elaboration of implicit references to the Tanakh, as you contemplate with regard to the narrative of Mary Magdalene and Jesus in the garden, Veerkamp<sup>85</sup> adds the following clarification:

Klaus Berger mocks himself in his book “Im Anfang war Johannes. Datierung und Theologie des vierten Evangeliums” (Stuttgart 1997, 18 ff.) about alleged “allusion hunters” who, as “scientists,” smell “reference to what is written” everywhere. This polemic is ridiculous. John quotes the Scriptures repeatedly. He fulfills Berger’s criterion, according to which “the text to which allusion is made ... has been generally known.” The Tanakh was “generally known” among Jews. ... A further criterion would be, “The function of allusion must be clearly recognizable and theologically important.” That is what we are trying to prove. Against Berger, we can say: Comprehensive knowledge of the whole Scriptures is not a modern “biblicism” and has nothing to do with a “perfectionism of modern pious people.” Admittedly, unlike Professor Berger, we read John not as a Christian text but as a heterodox Jewish one born of Tanakh.

### 6.1.3 Mary Magdalene Alone with Jesus in the Garden

Let us now have a look at whether the allusions to the Tanakh you discover in my Mary-and-Jesus-in-the-Garden story are “clearly recognizable and theologically important” in their function or perhaps “too far-fetched” after all.

#### 6.1.3.1 A New Adam and a New Eve in the Garden of Eden?

You begin (107) assuming that the “garden setting in which Jesus and Mary are alone together calls to mind ... the primordial garden of Eden of Genesis 2-3.”

However, John 20 is lacking the verb *peripatein*, to walk one’s way, which is used in Genesis 3:8, 10 for God’s walking in paradise and which I use very often for Jesus’ *halakha* in my Gospel (1:36; 6:19; 7:1; 10:23; 11:54). Here, in particular, it is not the case that “the risen Jesus walks about the garden that holds his tomb,” as Sandra Schneiders<sup>86</sup> thinks. Nor does my Gospel speak of the cross “as the tree of life,” as

85 Veerkamp 2021, 105 ([note 152](#)).

86 (179-80, n. 9) Sandra M. Schneiders, “John 20:11-18: The Encounter of the Easter Jesus with Mary Magdalene—A Transformative Feminist Reading,” in “*What is John?*” *Readers and Readings of the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia, Symposium 3 (Atlanta: Scholars

Nicolas Wyatt<sup>87</sup> supposes, nor of Jesus as “the new gardener of Eden, reversing the banishment that had been passed on the first Adam.”

Not at all does “Jesus as the new Adam transform Mary into the new Eve.” Only Paul views Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:45) as *ho eschatos Adam*, “Humankind of the Day of Decision.” I keep it with Jesus as the second Isaac. You yourself recognize (107) that Mary Magdalene is not portrayed “using the familiar Genesis images.” That she is called “woman” by Jesus has nothing to do with the address of the first woman by the first man (108) in Genesis 2:23 because with *gynai* he also addresses his mother (2:4; 19:26) and the Samaritan woman (4:21). Strictly speaking, Genesis 2:23 does not even have the form of address; rather, the human, *ʾadam*, speaks in the third person of the *ʾisha*, *gynē*, “woman,” who was created from his “bone and flesh” and through whom he first recognizes himself as *ʾish*, *anēr*, “man.”

Also, that (108) Jesus then calls Mary “by name, just as Adam called the first woman by name (Genesis 3:20),” is not an exact parallel because Eve is being given her name by Adam here, and this can be understood as an expression of the woman’s subordination to the man, which, according to Genesis 3:16, is one of the consequences of her distrust of God. Jesus’ addressing Mary by name has nothing to do with such a submission but rather (10:3) with the shepherd who calls his sheep by name, in which Jesus again acts as the embodiment of the God of Israel according to Isaiah 43:1.

Finally, you think that

Jesus’ directive that Mary not cleave to him challenges the physical basis of the male-female relationship described in Genesis 2:24, according to which a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife and they become one flesh. This echo suggests a contrast between the sexual relationship that developed between the first man and woman and the relationship of devotion between Jesus and Mary. In doing so, it also draws attention to the sexual potential of an encounter between this man and woman in a garden.

I know that male-female relationships always give rise to sexual fantasies, but usually, men tend to do this.

Thus, the scene in which Jesus negotiates with the representative of the first mothers Rebekah and Rachel at the well of the first father Jacob (4:18) about the enslavement of (Northern) Israel and Samaria to five foreign powers—whose gods (Hosea 2:18) were to be addressed as *baʿali*, “my owner,” as opposed to a liberated life in

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Press, 1996), 161.

87 (180, n. 10) The allusion to the Garden of Eden is reminiscent of the Pauline description of Jesus as a second Adam (Romans 5:12-20). See Nicolas Wyatt, “‘Supposing Him to be the Gardener’ (John 20,15): A Study of the Paradise Motif in John,” *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 81 (1991): 38.

covenant with the God of Israel, whom Israel could call *ʾishi*, “my husband”—is completely misunderstood by a “dirty exegete’s fantasy about a slut and her ‘enormous wastage of men,’” as Ton Veerkamp<sup>88</sup> formulates.

In any case, in the relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene, it should be unmistakable that I clearly emphasize who Jesus is to Mary, namely her *rabbi*, her “teacher.” In case someone among my readers does not understand the Aramaic word *rabbuni*, I even explain it again in Greek: *didaskale*. So in plain language: I don’t know if there was any other relationship between Jesus and Mary in a historical sense, and I don’t care. In my eyes, he is the teacher, she is the disciple.

This applies accordingly also to Thomas, whom Jesus even allows to touch him; should not your imagination of the 21st century also speculate about a homoerotic relationship? With him, you do not do that. However with me, the disciple, to whom Jesus is particularly closely connected in *agapē* and even *philia*, there are probably such considerations. I do not condemn sexuality, as many later Christians do, although they practice it secretly. But though I know human attachment in many forms, in my Gospel eroticism and sexuality are not at all my subjects.

### 6.1.3.2 The Song of Songs and the Messianic Wedding

Just for this reason, I have to concede to you (108): In your interpretation of Mary’s search for Jesus’ body from Song of Songs 3:1-4, you actually hit on something that is close to my heart and that even Ton Veerkamp overlooked. I think that he disregarded this passage in order not to participate in erotic speculations about Mary and Jesus, and indeed I am not concerned with such.

But I know (111) the interpretation of the Song of Songs as referring “to the covenant relationship between God and Israel,” and something of it is quite reflected in the search of Mary for the disappeared corpse of her teacher Jesus whom she has experienced as the embodiment of the fidelity of GOD.

Yet, in such a context, Jesus’ injunction, “Touch me not!” marks a clear difference then from Song of Songs 3:4, “I held him and did not let him go.” Neither Mary can hold her beloved teacher, as if his ascension to the FATHER would be nothing else than an undoing of his death, nor is already his ascension to the FATHER completed, so that already now, on “day one” of the new creation, the Messianic wedding could be celebrated. This is possible in my eyes only when, through the acceptance of the *pneuma*, the inspiration of God’s fidelity, by those who trust in the Messiah, and their practice of *agapē*, solidarity, the prevailing world order of injustice and violence will have been overcome. Jesus makes this clear by the emphasis on “not yet” in his further words to Mary (translated by Ton Veerkamp<sup>89</sup>):

88 Veerkamp 2021, 113 ([“The husband you have now is not your husband,”](#) par. 2).

89 Veerkamp 2021, 392 ([“Not yet,”](#) par 1), see as well 394-95 (par. 10-14).

“Do not touch me,  
for I have not yet gone up to the FATHER.  
But go to my brothers and say to them,  
‘I am going up to my FATHER and your FATHER,  
to my GOD and your GOD.’”

Ton Veerkamp<sup>90</sup> himself connects the prohibition of touching with passages like Leviticus 11:24 ff and Numbers 19:11 ff. Yes, this is also what I have in mind:

The untouchable one is the Messiah completely marked by death. He will not show himself differently to the disciples.

... Even if the grave cannot hold Jesus, he, the living one, remains nevertheless a dead one, a living corpse, which you must not touch—both! Therefore, the perfect would be out of place. The movement to the FATHER begins on day one. That is the only thing, but it is everything. There are no guarantees, but on day one the death history of the ruling world order is open again.

In a tension with this interpretation, however, is the fact that Jesus allows Thomas to touch this very corpse. He does not do this with the word *haptou*, but he says *phere*, “take” your finger here, to the wounds of my hands, “take” your hand, and *balē*, “throw” it into my side.

That is to say: in the foreground for me is not the point that the corpse of Jesus as such would be untouchable—in fact, Mary would have anointed it if it had remained in the tomb—but neither as a dead corpse in the tomb, nor as a revived human being, as if nothing had happened, nor as a Messiah already ascended to the FATHER, as if one could already celebrate the Messianic wedding of the completed liberation of Israel amidst the nations, can Jesus be held by Mary or Thomas.

Thus, no triumphantly risen Jesus is sitting on a throne next to God in a glorious otherworldly heaven; rather, his glory consists in the fact that he—as the second Isaac and King of Israel murdered by the *Pax Romana*—has finally torn off the mask of peace of this world order and—in order to overcome it—leaves to his successors the inspiration of sanctification, the Paraclete, the new commandment of *agapē*.

So once again: I agree with you that in the relationship between Mary and Jesus something of the Messianic wedding actually expected by me is reflected. That this expectation is in the center of my wishful dreams, I already make clear in the first, principle sign of Jesus at the wedding at Cana—what does not prevent exegetes to overlook this point and to regard Jesus merely as a miracle worker who can change 600 liters of water into as much wine to help the bridegroom of some peasant wedding out of the embarrassment. Seen in this light, Mary Magdalene can be under-

90 Veerkamp 2021, 393-94 ([“Not yet,”](#) par. 6-9, 12).

stood in much the same way as I understand myself, namely, as Ton Veerkamp<sup>91</sup> has put it, as an “exemplary concentration of the Messianic community.”

In the context of this image, Mary now has the crucial task of making clear to the male disciples, especially Jesus’ brothers,<sup>92</sup> that the *kairos*, the appropriate time for the militant Messianic uprising, has still “not yet” come as they imagine it. Jesus’ ascension to the FATHER is “not yet” complete but Jesus *is* ascending, and his ascension will someday be complete when they, the disciples, and all who trust in Jesus, will have overcome the prevailing world order through their solidarity.

I know that this sounds like an illusion, like a hope for the day of never-never. But at least it is not a comfortable consolation of the oppressed and degraded to a heaven in the hereafter, which oppressors and enemies of mankind (including Christian enemies of Jews!) have allowed themselves later under abusive reference to my Gospel. I still hope that my Gospel will be understood once again as I meant it, as a call for solidarity against every oppressing world order and against any hatred for the Jews!

### 6.1.3.3 Mary Magdalene and the Prohibition to Touch Jesus

Back to your interpretation of the scene with Mary and Jesus in the garden. From my just completed clarification, much speculation about Jesus’ request to Mary not to touch him is moot.

The point is not (108) that he was “too insubstantial.” Then he could not have asked Thomas to even “throw” his hand into his side. Nor is it a matter of delaying his “glorification” by “a human embrace,” as Raymond E. Brown<sup>93</sup> thinks. This does not fit his time-intensive engagement with his disciples on two days behind locked doors and then again on the shores of the Sea of Tiberias. After all (109), the aforementioned Sandra Schneiders [164] rightly “argues that the directive teaches Mary that she should not encounter Jesus as if he were the earthly Jesus resuscitated.”

PHEME PERKINS and Rudolf Schnackenburg<sup>94</sup> in their turn opine,

that the original point of Mary’s action may have been an act of worship, as it is in Matthew 28:9, in which the disciples hold the risen Lord’s feet and worship him. This reading is supported by the fact that “my brothers” is found in both passages (Matt. 28:10; John 20:17). An act of worship is prohibited because Jesus’ return to the Father is not yet completed.

91 Veerkamp 2021, 242-43 ([Lazarus](#), par. 4, 9).

92 Veerkamp 2021, 394-95 ([“Not yet.”](#) par. 11-14).

93 (180, n. 14) Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, vol. 2, XIII-XI, Anchor Bible 29A (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970), 1012.

94 (180, n. 18) PHEME PERKINS, *Resurrection: New Testament Witness and Contemporary Reflection* (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 175-76; RUDOLF SCHNACKENBURG, *The Gospel According to St. John* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 3:317.

The fact that already in 9:38 I use the word *proskynein*, “to prostrate himself, bow to,” when the healed man born blind is bowing to Jesus as the Son of Man, contradicts this interpretation. In general, it is the question of whether this act of *proskynein* actually has to be translated as “to worship.”<sup>95</sup>

An (109) “interesting parallel in *Apocalypse of Moses* 31:3-4” pointed out by Mary Rose d’Angelo<sup>96</sup> contains Adam’s request to Eve: “When I die, leave me alone and let no one touch me until the angel of Lord shall say something about me.” In my eyes, this rather confirms Ton Veerkamp’s interpretation that the prohibition of touching is related to the uncleanness of a corpse according to the Torah. You, on the other hand, find implied here “that Mary’s touch is not rejected but only postponed until after she has delivered his message as the Lord’s messenger (or angel).”

How do you imagine this? On the one hand, Mary is supposed to represent the Messianic community whose wedding with the God of Israel is imminent as a symbol of liberated life in the age to come, and on the other hand, Mary returns to the garden after completing her mission as a messenger for Jesus and is then allowed to touch him after all, thus meeting her beloved Jesus for a private date, so to speak? Such a scenario would be a trivialization of the importance of Mary. She has, in fact, the important task of witnessing the continuing “not yet” of Jesus’ ascending to the Father to those who, as brothers of the Messiah, tend to a militant-Zealot impatience in the struggle against the world order.

Therefore, I also disagree with Sandra Schneiders’ [164] view “that 20:17b should be seen not as a statement, ‘I am not yet ascended,’ but as a rhetorical question, ‘Am I not yet ascended?’—the answer to which is, ‘No, you are indeed ascended, that is, glorified.’” In fact, Jesus comes to glory at the very moment when (19:30) on the cross he is handing over the inspiration of the fidelity of the God of Israel. Thus, his ascent to the Father is beginning but “not yet” finished until the handed over inspi-

95 In Veerkamp 2021, 118-19 ([Neither—Nor, Inspiration and Fidelity](#), par. 10, I explain what it means to bow down „inspired and faithfully“:

“The hour is coming—and it is now!—that those who *really* bow to the FATHER are bowing according to *inspiration and fidelity*.” This is always translated “*in spirit and truth*.” Not false, but worn, worn out. Consciousness has as essential content the fidelity of God to Israel, and this fidelity is *inspiring*. *Inspiration*—the word contains the Latin word “*spiritus*” (*pneuma*, *ruach*)—is what orients people’s actions, speech, and thinking, from fidelity—to fidelity. “God” is what claims the ultimate loyalty of people, it is what a person is actually concerned about. “God” has a NAME in Israel, and this NAME can only be pronounced as, *Who is leading out of the house of slavery* (Exodus 20:2), as *moshia’ yisra’el*, “liberator of Israel” (Isaiah 45:15). But in fact, “God” is functioning as anything else, as nameless gods. Samaria is called upon to pay homage only to this NAME as “God,” as what it is actually about.

96 (180, n. 15, 21, and 22) Mary Rose d’Angelo, “A Critical Note: John 20:17 and Apocalypse of Moses 31,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 4 (1990): 532 and 535.

ration is also accepted and put into practice in the form of the *agapē* (20:22 and 21:18 with reference to 13:1-17).

#### 6.1.3.4 Mary Magdalene and Jesus as Lovers?

After the presentation (110) of these different possibilities of interpretation, which are plausible in your eyes, you propose another interpretation by placing “Mary and Jesus in the role of lovers” from Song of Songs 3:1-4:

Mary’s search for the body of her beloved is fueled by love as expressed through her desire to hold him and touch him. Had she found the body in the tomb as she had expected, she would have touched it and cared for it. She may have anointed it with spices as her Markan counterpart prepares to do according to Mark 16:1. But imagine the joy of the lover in finding that her beloved is not dead after all! How else could such joy be expressed other than to touch and to hold, and to vow never to let go (Song 3:1-14)?

However, Jesus has to teach Mary

that physical contact is not possible or appropriate given Jesus’ liminal location between the grave and his father’s house.

This is about a process of cognition of Mary, which you express following Carla Ricci:<sup>97</sup>

Mary must grow and pass from the known dimension of her relation to Jesus to a new one.

And drawing on thoughts of J. Duncan M. Derrett,<sup>98</sup> you rightly conclude:

In this line of interpretation, 20:17 aborts the Song of Songs paradigm because the woman and man will never be together or achieve the consummation of their relationship.

At least it becomes clear here that it is not my intention to tell an erotic love story of Mary and Jesus.

By trying to follow your further course of thought, I keep stumbling over several statements:

The message to Mary may be that she must endure their physical separation as she goes off to the disciples with Jesus’ message while Jesus ascends to the Father.

Here I have the impression that you presuppose: Just as Mary covers the way to the disciples and reaches them, so Jesus at the same time covers the way to the Father

97 (180, n. 27) Carla Ricci, *Mary Magdalene and Many Others: Women Who Followed Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 144.

98 (180, n. 28) J. Duncan M. Derrett, “Miriam and the Resurrection (John 20:16),” *The Downside Review* 111 (1993): 178.

and also arrives at him. It is precisely this arrival at the Father as a completed process that Jesus denies in his words “not yet,” which Mary is explicitly instructed to tell his brothers.

It is also difficult for me to follow your speculations about the emotions of Mary, of which I myself do not say a word (110-11):

According to this reading we imagine Mary as tearful and angry at her lover’s rebuke, or perhaps stoically accepting a necessary separation.

Of course, in the absence of narrative clues as to her mood or the tone of her voice we may only guess at Mary’s state of mind as she does Jesus’ bidding. But the joyful and awestruck tenor of the resurrection narrative argues against the negative reading we have explored above. It seems more natural to imagine that Mary’s tears are now dry and that she hastens eagerly to do her teacher’s—her lover’s—bidding.

Definitely wrong here (111) is the explanation “her lover” added to the word “teacher” because I doubly emphasize the quality of Jesus as Rabbi and teacher. Apart from the fact that the words *agapan* and *philein* in my Gospel are not to be understood in a purely emotional or even erotic sense, I have avoided them in connection with Mary, also in order to avoid misunderstandings as far as possible—but which I obviously did not accomplish.

However, you rightly state that my “Gospel is silent on the prior relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene” and that “John 20 clearly rules out the possibility of a sexual encounter after the empty tomb.”

Then again, you turn to speak of alternative forms of “consummation” in Mary’s loving relationship with Jesus, as if intense woman-man relationships could not also exist at the level of a mere student-teacher relationship or, conversely, as if every relationship of a disciple to her teacher must have an erotic undertone (144-45):

Instead, the words of Mary suggest that her relationship to her beloved is expressed not through touch but through speech and vision. Its consummation is not an embrace but Mary’s testimony to the disciples of what she has seen and what she has heard. Although the beloved is not accessible in the flesh, she has his image in her mind’s eye and his words upon her lips.

In an annotation (180-81, n. 29), you again address in this context (as you did on page 58-59) my alleged devaluation of seeing over believing based on hearing alone:

According to Craig Koester,<sup>99</sup> Mary’s story confirms that seeing alone does not guarantee faith. Only when she heard Jesus speak her name did Mary recog-

99 (180-81, n. 29) Craig Koester, “Hearing, Seeing, and Believing in the Gospel of John,” *Biblica* 70 (1989): 345.

nize him. What she heard enabled her to make sense of what she saw, although the command to stop touching Jesus (20:17) indicates that she did not fully comprehend the significance of the resurrection.

I explained what is necessary already above: Although God is not visible in images which should make him available—which also means that liberation hoped for by him cannot be forced in arbitrary Zealot-military adventures—the Jewish Scriptures do not devalue at all the seeing of the “signs and proofs of power” of God, precisely *because* God reveals himself (Deuteronomy 4:12) as *zulathi khol*, “voice only,” that (Isaiah 43,1) is calling Israel by name.

It also does not result from the touch prohibition that Mary “did not fully comprehend the significance of the resurrection” because Mary is even the first to whom Jesus explains this meaning and she obeys him without hesitation. Jesus’ brothers and male disciples have much more difficulties understanding and accepting what Jesus tells them later. Unfortunately, I have to assume that hardly anybody among the Christian readers of my Gospel understands the “not yet” of Jesus ascending to the FATHER even in a rudimentary way.

Back to your own interpretation (111). You call attention to a “subtext of the Gospel that emerges when we read John 20 against the background of the Song of Songs,” and suggest that only “on the surface” I uphold “the authority of the disciples as an exclusive group within the community of Jesus’ followers” whereas by my “allusions to the Song of Songs” I

implicitly define Mary as the one who exemplifies the intimacy and love between the believer and the risen Lord. Through the Gospel the Beloved Disciple not only allows his readers to learn of and appreciate Mary’s experience but also to experience the intimacy of her relationship with the risen Lord by seeing, hearing, and almost touching him through the “signs that are written in this book” (John 20:30-31).

Here you underestimate me. My esteem for Mary is central to my Gospel, not merely a subtext, while I repeatedly criticize very harshly the very portion of Jesus’ discipleship that I emphasize as “brothers of Jesus.”

Contrary to what you think, however, I am not concerned with intimate love for the risen one, but with a trust by which female and male disciples—sent by the Messiah—can solidarily strive for overcoming the world order.

#### **6.1.3.5 Mary Magdalene’s Vision of Jesus and Elisha’s Vision of Elijah Taken to Heaven**

In addition to the discussion of some of the Scriptural passages you have cited as parallels to John 20:11-18, I would like to introduce another attempt at interpreta-

tion of Mary Magdalene, which I consider interesting but not accurate. Helmut Schütz presents it in a sermon with recourse to Jane Schaberg<sup>100</sup>:

In a book about Mary Magdalene, the American theologian and poetess Jane Schaberg points out that this scene recalls another ascension to heaven in the Bible. When God was about to take up the great prophet "Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind" (2 Kings 2:1), Elijah and his disciple Elisha were on their way. Three times Elijah tried to sort of get rid of his disciple: "Stay thou here, because the Lord hath sent me" to some other place. But Elisha the disciple stayed in touch with his teacher Elijah saying (2 Kings 2:2, 4, 6):

"As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee."

At last, both crossed over the Jordan (2 Kings 2:8), and Elisha was allowed to address a last request to Elijah before he was taken from him. Elisha said: "I beseech thee that in me may be thy double spirit." (2 Kings 2:9)", und Elijah replied (2 Kings 2:10):

"Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless if thou see me when I am taken from thee, thou shalt have what thou hast asked: but if thou see me not, thou shalt not have it."

After all, Elisha the disciple had to let go his teacher Elijah, could no longer hold on to him, no longer touch him, because for Elijah the time had come to be taken into heaven (2 Kings 2:11-12):

„And as they went on, walking and talking together, behold a fiery chariot, and fiery horses parted them both asunder: and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw him, and cried: My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the driver thereof."

Subsequently, the other disciples of the prophet Elijah shouted (2 Kings 2:15):

"The spirit of Elijah hath rested upon Elisha."

They acknowledged him as the successor of the prophet and as their new teacher.

Similar to Elisha seeing his teacher Elijah when being taken up to heaven, here in the New Testament Mary Magdalene sees her teacher Jesus on his way to the Father in heaven. Does Jesus originally give a double portion of his spirit to her, like Elisha received two parts of Elijah's spirit? Does Jesus in fact intend to appoint her to be his successor leading and teaching the congregation or does he at least delegate to her a shared responsibility with Peter and the beloved disciple?

100 Helmut Schütz, service „[Mary Magdalen and Jesus, ascending](#)“ on April 4, 2010, referring to thoughts by Jane Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, New York 2002.

... Mary comes to the disciples announcing bravely and gladly what Jesus told her. And that is the end of her appearance. We don't come to know, whether the disciples answer her at all. What follows, is a sudden change of scene. Jesus appears to all disciples together, at first without, a week later including Thomas, and they all receive the Holy Spirit. Not a word is henceforth told about Mary Magdalene or other women in the Gospel of John.

As I said, this is also an interesting attempt to relate my Gospel to the Scriptures, however, in connection with Mary Magdalene, I do not mention the prophet Elijah or the word *pneuma*, and Mary does not even have a vision of Jesus being taken up to heaven (*anambanein*), but he only speaks to her of *ascending* to the FATHER (*anabainein*), but just "not yet" *having* ascended.

## 6.2 Sympathetic Reading of the Cosmological Tale

Since I (113) am not familiar with Wayne Booth's book you cite, I can't say whether the "cosmological tale" you discover in my Gospel is indeed "an example of what Booth calls a metaphoric world, macro-metaphor, or cosmic myth."<sup>101</sup>

I strongly disagree with the following assessment, however:

Like other founding myths, the Beloved Disciple's view of how the world works criticizes all other views of the world. As Booth notes [342], "To tell a story about how divinity took upon itself a life in history, leading to *His* crucifixion, is to offer a standard for judging other metaphoric views of what God and God's creatures *are*."

I definitely do not understand my Gospel as a founding myth of a new religion or worldview, nor is it about the divine in general. Rather, it is conceived as arguing on the ground of the religion of Judaism for trust in the Messiah Jesus as the embodiment of the fidelity of the God of Israel.

However, I must accept that you interpret my Gospel as a "metaphoric world" that is an "alternative to the world that the Johannine Jews accept as their own."

### 6.2.1 Hope for Life after Death?

You, on the other hand, in the context of your sympathetic reading, "can acknowledge that there might be something of value in the imaginative world offered by" me, and in your eyes (113-14) this is primarily my

approach to the anxiety with which humankind customarily views the inevitability of death. Through his cosmological tale the Beloved Disciple puts forward a particular view of the human condition: humankind is in darkness

101 (181, n. 33) Wayne Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 325.

until the coming of Christ; those who come to faith in Christ will be saved and have eternal life. Even if I do not accept this view, I can appreciate deeply the struggle with the inevitability and finality of death that underlies it. The Beloved Disciple holds out a hope for a life after death, and explores, at least indirectly and partially, the impact that this hope for eternal life can have on life in this world.

I am embarrassed by this assessment. I like to be appreciated. However, not for something that is not so important to me centrally, that does not belong to the special and new aspect of my Gospel, or that I do not represent at all.

Not the hope for a life after death is in the center of my intentions but the dawn of the life of the age to come before death, on this earth.

What is special about my Gospel in this context is a new answer to a political analysis of life under a world order that is anything but well-ordered, at least not according to the standards of the Torah. In the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, in the Persian Empire, it was still possible to proclaim a republic in which, separated from the peoples, God's people tried to live under the state constitution of the Torah and guided by priests according to the liberating will of the God of Israel. In Hellenism and even more so in the Roman Empire, which like a worldwide new Egypt turned the whole world into a slave house, this is no longer possible, as the apocalyptic movement already has realized. This is what I mean by saying that "humankind is in darkness until the coming of Christ." As Messianic Jews, we are convinced that trust in the Messiah Jesus alone can bring liberation from this darkness of enslavement under the world order and thus the light of the life of the age to come.

In no way, therefore, does it correspond to my view that there was no justified hope of resurrection at all before the birth of Jesus. Where we as Messianic Jews hope for a resurrection of the dead, we do so in accordance with Isaiah and Ezekiel, with Daniel and the Pharisees. In this respect, I agree with your following account (116):

Both the Gospel of John and classical Jewish sources provide a complex set of metaphors through which to express a belief in continued human existence after death. These metaphors fit within the Johannine and classical Jewish macro-metaphors which assign meaning to human life within the context of a covenantal relationship with God.

To me, the last sentence is decisive here, because it assigns its meaning to the hope of resurrection in connection with "the covenantal relationship with God." So it is not generally about an afterlife in heaven, quite apart from everything that happens on this earth, but about the fact that the murdered members of the people of Israel will not be excluded from God's liberating deeds for his people.

In this sense, the hopes for resurrection and for the life of the age to come, which are of central importance for my Gospel, do not stand in opposition to Judaism (115)

but relate to the testimonies of the Scriptures about “overcoming death,” among which you yourself particularly emphasize Isaiah 25:6-7 and 2 Maccabees 7:9. Likewise, you could have mentioned Ezekiel 37 or Daniel 12, to which I frequently allude in my Gospel. And also “in the *’Amidah*, also known as the Eighteen Benedictions, the central prayer of Jewish liturgy,” the Jewish belief in the revival of the dead is included.

Only the Christian church later interpreted my Gospel as if before Jesus’ resurrection it was impossible to believe in a resurrection of the dead at all. And (115-16) with good reason “the beliefs of ‘the sectarians’ who deny the biblical basis for the doctrine of resurrection” is refuted in the Babylonian Talmud (bSan 90a-91b)

by adducing resurrection from a number of biblical passages. One example is found in the words of Rabbi Meir, who asked, “Which verses in the Torah attest to resurrection? From the verse ‘Then shall Moses and the children of Israel sing this song unto the Lord’ (Exodus 15:1).<sup>102</sup> The verse does not say ‘sang’ but ‘shall sing.’ This is a reference to future resurrection. The verse ‘Then shall Joshua build an altar unto the Lord God of Israel’ (Joshua 8:30) should be read in a similar way. The verse does not say ‘built’ but ‘shall build’; This is a reference to future resurrection.” Such beliefs persisted well into the modern era and continue among many Jews today.<sup>103</sup>

From your reference (115) that according to Josephus (Antiquities 18.1.3 and 18.1.5) both Pharisees and Essenes believe “the soul as immortal,” I gather that since the time of Hellenism also in Jewish circles the tendency has grown to understand the resurrection in the sense of a salvation of the immortal soul into heaven. In contrast, Jesus and his followers up to my time hold on to Daniel’s visions of the Son of Man and the Maccabean expectation of a resurrection on the day of decision in the sense of a dawning of the age to come. However, very soon after my time, when the Messianic movement becomes dominantly Gentile Christian, all the passages in my Gospel that deal with the age to come get alluded to eternal life after death in the hereafter.

Furthermore, you speak (114) of my metaphoric of eternal life utilizing “the language of human senses,” that is, that people who trust in Jesus “will never see death” or “never taste death” or have “eternal life” by “hearing” his word. This metaphor goes to the offensive point that

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102 (181, n. 38) This interpretation requires reading the Hebrew verb normally translated as “sang” as a future tense, which is how it would have been read in rabbinic Hebrew. The same is true of the verb normally translated as “built” in Joshua 8:30.

103 (181, n. 39) Two good surveys of Jewish beliefs in the afterlife are Simcha Paull Raphael, *Jewish Views of the Afterlife* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1994); and Neil Gillman, *The Death of Death: Resurrection and Immortality in Jewish Thought* (Woodstock, Vt.: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1997).

Jesus insists that one must eat the “bread from heaven” that is Jesus himself (6:58) and drink the water that Jesus provides, water that will become in those who drink it a “spring of water gushing up to eternal life” (4:14).

You’re right, by this I’m pointing out (in offensive terms) “that faith in Jesus as the Christ and Son of God is essential for eternal life.” However, it is important to note—as you yourself do—that

What exactly constitutes eternal life is much more difficult to discern.

At every single point, it must be understood from the Jewish Scriptures, what it means, for example, that (8:56) Abraham could see the day of Jesus,<sup>104</sup> or what (3:36) is meant by the wrath of God, which permanently weighs on the one who distrusts the SON.<sup>105</sup> That the role of the spirit “that makes alive,” in 6:63 is not to be understood in absolute opposition to the “flesh,” is understood only with reference to Ezekiel 37.<sup>106</sup> Under the oppressive conditions of the Roman world order, walking one’s way according to the Torah, *halakha*, is possible only in trusting the Messiah Jesus, who (8:12) is the “light of the world.”<sup>107</sup> “Otherwise, no matter how loyal to the Torah you act in the world, you would only confirm the world order; you then ‘walk with darkness,’” as Ton Veerkamp<sup>108</sup> puts it. It is in such a context (114) that the “paradox” of passage 12:25, as you call it, must be understood: “Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” To this, Veerkamp:<sup>109</sup>

“Soul in this world order” describes the existence of a person who adapts to the world order. Exactly this form of existence (“soul”) is to be hated. Here no attitude toward martyrdom is beatified. No one is required to hate his life, no one should be condemned who loves his life. The words “in this world order” are decisive. What according to the measure of this world order is a matter of the heart and soul for men is to be hated by those who want to follow the Messiah, and this because otherwise, they destroy “their soul,” that is, that which is deeply “dear to their heart.”

You (115) refer the passage 17:2-3 only formally to the fact that “eternal life is equated with knowledge of God.” But the authority, *exousia*, which God gives to the Son over all flesh has to do with that *exousia* which is given to the Son of Man in Daniel 7:14<sup>110</sup>, and this word “Son of Man,” Aramaic *bar enosh*, has to be interpreted

104 See section 5.3.2.2 “Jesus as a blasphemer.”

105 Veerkamp 2021, 103-04 ([Heaven and Earth; Trust and Distrust](#), par. 11).

106 Veerkamp 2021, 172-73 ([An Evil Speech](#), par. 4-9).

107 Veerkamp 2021, 195 ([“Where is your FATHER,”](#) par. 1).

108 Veerkamp 2021, 195 ([The Light of the World](#), par. 2).

109 Veerkamp 2021, 269-70 ([The Grain of Wheat](#), par. 10, see also par. 7-15).

110 Veerkamp 2021, 332 ([note 486 on the translation of John 17:2](#)).

in view of (17:1) his honor and the honor of the FATHER as Ton Veerkamp<sup>111</sup> describes it:

“Honor your Son, so that the Son may honor you.” Son is here the “Son of Man” and the “Son of God,” he is the *bar enosh* and thus the one “like God,” as we always translated *hyios theou*. The hour is the fulfillment of God’s mission, which determines his whole essence. It is for the honor of God, which is the honor of the Messiah, as the honor of the Messiah is the honor of God. And the honor of God and the Messiah is Israel, namely Israel freed from the worldwide slave house of Rome.

Also (115) “the raising of Lazarus” can only be grasped if Lazarus is understood with Ton Veerkamp<sup>112</sup> as the “exemplary concentration” of Israel:

Lazarus is Israel, Israel in a state of death. The Messiah remains closely linked to Israel in life and death. In John, the Messiah is not a universal savior but remains the Messiah of Israel also for us, non-Jews.

In what way does Ton Veerkamp<sup>113</sup> describe the loosening of Israel in the image of Lazarus in detail with recourse to the Scriptures, Helmut Schütz has already quoted in detail in his commentary of your book *The Word in the World* on section 4.2 “John 10:1-5 in its context.” In any case, this is not simply about preparing “a place for the believers” in heaven.

When (116-17) you are meditating in detail that your own time is lacking “a belief in a life beyond the grave,” it shows again that *on this point* in my time, as Messianic Jews we agree with Rabbinic Judaism: God has the power to cover dead bones with flesh and have the righteous rise on the Day of Decision.

### 6.2.2 Tension between the Age to Come and Life Now

Finally (117), in this section you deal with the “the tension between future and realized eschatology” as expressed in 5:24-25, that is,

between the belief that eternal life pertains to some future period and the belief that we can experience eternal life even in our present earthly lives.

Ton Veerkamp<sup>114</sup> interprets this tension by relating it to revolutionary situations of later times:

5:25 Amen, amen, I say to you,  
an hour is coming

111 Veerkamp 2021, 337 ([The Prayer of the Messiah](#), par. 7).

112 Veerkamp 2021, 242 and 243 ([Lazarus](#), par. 4 and 9).

113 Veerkamp 2021, 251-54 ([“Untie him and let him go,”](#) par. 4-15).

114 Veerkamp 2021, 139 and 141 ([Interpretation of the Parable: “And this is now,”](#) par. 1 and 7).

—and that is now—  
when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of GOD,  
and those who hear will live.

The dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. “And this is now”—the pathos of revolution. All who ever proclaimed the revolution, 1776, 1789, 1848, 1917, etc., said of all the promises of revolutionaries, “This is now.” It is coming, and it can come only because it is already there—now. To the woman at Jacob’s well he had said, “Woman, the hour is coming—and this is now!” The hour of overcoming that history of murder, manslaughter, and destruction between Judea and Samaria—now!

So your following sentence is true, although your otherworldly understanding of eschatology is not the same as mine (117):

In this way, the Beloved Disciple may be enjoining his readers to live in the present, imperfect moment as if it is already the future eschatological era.

You discover a parallel

in the Jewish view of the Sabbath as the “foretaste of the world to come.”<sup>115</sup> The Sabbath is the weekly opportunity for mortal creatures to experience, if only briefly, the quality of relationship, to ourselves, to others, and to God, that will be the norm in the anticipated future age.

Why do I “not urge Sabbath observance” on my readers? I have to take this reproach seriously. In my eyes, neither for the Messiah nor for the God of Israel himself the time of final rest has yet come; the liberating works of God must continue to be done. Jesus makes this clear in 5:17, as Ton Veerkamp<sup>116</sup> translates and explains:

5:17 Jesus answered them,  
“My FATHER is working until now,  
and I too am working.”

“My FATHER works until now” can only mean that creation is *not accomplished*. John can read the first sentence of the Scriptures only presently, “In the beginning (*in principle!*) God creates heaven and earth, and the earth is *tohubohu* ...” Therefore God does not yet “rest,” and still less “solemnly”; there is no reason yet to celebrate Shabbat; rather, it is a matter of “doing works” (*erga-zesthai*). The theme is taken up in the introduction to the bread speech (6:28). The theme also appears in the story about the man born blind (9:4). Shabbat is only, when all works are done, when all men are healed, and

115 (181, n. 43) This concept is explored eloquently and in detail by Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Harpers, 1966).

116 Veerkamp 135 and 138 ([The Shabbat](#), 1 and 8).

they are finally what they are: the image of God. Until now men are anything but the image of God; they are not what they are—the image of God—and they are what they are not: mutilated, broken people; there is nothing to celebrate. At least that is what these Messianists think.

However, you correctly see (117) that I too know “the experience of living simultaneously in two eras” and you rightly point (118) to the anointing of Jesus’ feet with “expensive perfume” (12:3) on the occasion “a dinner at the Bethany home of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha”:

Through Mary’s act, the dinner became an occasion for anticipating a future time that would inaugurate the return of the Son to the Father and hasten the coming of the eschatological age. A similar transformation occurs during the last dinner that Jesus shares with his disciples. Jesus arises from the table, removes his outer robe and ties a towel around his waist. He then pours water into a basin, and washes the feet of the disciples.

But the way you interpret Jesus’ washing of the disciples’ feet (13:1-17) at the second meal as merely anticipating the forgiveness of sins misses the crucial point of this central event:

When Peter questions his actions, Jesus declares, “Unless I wash you, you have no share with me” (13:4-8). This washing symbolically cleanses the disciples, that is, removes their sin, in anticipation of the period between Jesus’ resurrection and final ascension, when he returns to the disciples, breathes the Holy Spirit into them, and gives them the power and authority to forgive or to retain the sins of others (20:21).

You miss the fact that Jesus here, as *ho kyrios kai ho didaskalos*, “the Lord and Teacher,” serves the disciples as *doulos*, “slave,” thus giving them an example of *agapē*, “solidarity,” through which they are to confront the world order of lies and deceit.

This action, as indicated by the word (*dia*)*zōnnyein*, which I use only in 13:4-5 and 21:7, 18, anticipates two scenes from the appendix of my Gospel. Peter (21:7) girds himself with the outer garment to swim toward Jesus, whom he recognizes as his Lord; now he is determined to follow him. Jesus (21:18) can now gird Peter—who earlier girded himself for Zealot battle with the sword—for the same solidary service that he gives to his disciples in 13:1-17.

### 6.2.3 Visiting the World Actually Inhabited by the Beloved Disciple

Finally (118), you draw the following conclusion to this section:

Even as a sympathetic reader, I cannot live within the imaginative world that the Beloved Disciple creates through his cosmological tale. What I can do, however, is visit, and compare it with the worlds within which I live. In doing

so I appreciate the profundity of his struggle with the concept of death and his attempt on behalf of those who accept his gift to overcome this ultimate truth of human existence.

That you cannot live in the cosmological tale of my Gospel as constructed by yourself, I accept unreservedly, since I myself could not either. I am curious whether you might also visit me in the world in which I actually live and how you would assess it.

### 6.3. Sympathetic Reading of the Ecclesiological Tale

As a part (118) of your sympathetic reading of my gospel, you also “discern certain patterns and tensions in the relationships among the various characters within the historical tale” that “point to issues at stake within the community of believers who formed the Beloved Disciple’s earliest audience.”

#### 6.3.1 The Authority of Women in the Johannine Community

Exciting and highly sympathetic toward me, I find your discussion of the way I describe women in my Gospel. Indeed (119), they “have a role in bringing others to faith or to greater understanding of Jesus and his salvific significance”—though I would speak of *trust* in Jesus and of his *liberating* significance.

The central importance of Jesus’ mother includes (2:5) instructing those on duty at the Messianic wedding “to obey Jesus.” In this respect, she represents that Israel which is ready to listen to Jesus as the Messiah. By asking me to take his mother *eis ta idia*, “into that which is my own,” Jesus confirms what he had already indicated in 2:19, 21 and 14:2-3, 23, that the temple of his body, our Messianic community, should be the *monē* as the “place of permanence” where he wants to gather all Israel around him anew, as Ton Veerkamp<sup>117</sup> explains:

“From that hour on, the disciple took her to his own, *eis ta idia*.” This hardly means something like “taking her home,” and it certainly does not mean the bodily care of the old and defenseless mother. That would be pious kitsch. The writer of the prologue says, “It [the word] comes into its own (*ta idia*), yet its own (*hai idioi*) do not accept it.” “The own [*hai idioi*]” are the children of Israel, the Judeans, but they have not accepted the word, 1:11. These people are the very milieu of the word, precisely the “own [*ta idia*].” This own is from now on the place where Israel will gather around the Messiah, the Messianic community. She, the new Messianic Israel: *Mother of the Messiah*!

I find it interesting that in your consideration of Mary Magdalene you now draw attention to the fact (119) that I present her as “a true disciple who recognizes the resurrected Jesus as teacher,”<sup>118</sup> while you described her above as Jesus’ lover.

117 Veerkamp 2021, 374 ([Second Scene: Mother and Son](#), par. 8).

118 (181, n. 45) Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Recon-*

You are absolutely right in your skepticism (120) about “women’s leadership ... in the Fourth Gospel.” While I see women as disciples “understood broadly as referring to followers of and believers in Jesus as the Christ and Son of God,”<sup>119</sup> (121) they do not belong to the “small number of his closest associates ... who accompanied Jesus on his travels and were his most regular audience,” who are called in 1:35-51 and witness “Jesus’ final meal, his farewell discourses, and his passion” (the latter until his capture).

Basically, I go so far as to say that all five women who exercise supporting roles in my Gospel, Jesus’ mother, the Samaritan woman, Mary, Martha, and Mary Magdalene, as disciples of the Messiah, understand in different ways even more of Jesus the Messiah than his male disciples, let alone his brothers. But it would be anachronistic to interpret the reality in the community to which I belong in terms of the feminism of your time. Ton Veerkamp wisely writes<sup>120</sup>:

There is no need to have any illusions about the position of women in the Messianic communities. The patriarchal shaping of all social relations in antiquity will hardly have stopped at the Messianic communities.

In plain language: leadership functions are only exercised by men in our congregation as well. This is indicated (121), as you note, that my remark in “21:14 enumerates Jesus’ appearance in Galilee as the third of the risen Jesus’ encounters with his disciples,” consequently Mary Magdalene does not belong to this circle. And (122) I see indeed “a considerable tension between her and that group.” That in 20:2 “Mary runs to Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple” to report to them “demonstrates her recognition of their authority, to which she is subordinate.”

However, I consider the authority of the disciples, whom I explicitly call “the Twelve” in only two passages (6:70-71 and 20:24), to be more of a *de facto* given leadership position within the Messianic movement; in any case, they do not have special leadership qualities, to begin with. While, in the conversation with the Messiah, I attest to women a marked ability to listen attentively and to recognize connections, male disciples are again and again obtuse or need several attempts of the Messiah to finally force themselves to an insight or an action.

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*struction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 333.

119 But (120) with the term *adelphoi*, “brothers,” I do not intend anywhere in my Gospel an inclusive meaning, rather I accentuate a certain group among the disciples of Jesus who are inclined to a Zealot-militant approach in the struggle with the Roman world order. Therefore, while *adelphoi* in Paul’s letters can mean “brothers and sisters,” for my Gospel I disagree with Sandra Schneiders as you quote her (181-82, n. 47):

Schneiders translates *adelphoi* in 20:17 as “brothers and sisters” (“John 20:11-18,” 161). She deplores the masculine form in 20:17, which reflects the androcentric character of the Greek language and the culture of the times, but argues that “in reading and translating it we should honor its obviously inclusive meaning” (p. 166).

120 Veerkamp 2021, 389 ([The Tomb](#), par. 5).

The fact that in all Gospels the resurrection message is first delivered by female and not male witnesses as in Paul's case (1 Corinthians 15:3-8) is explained by Ton Veerkamp<sup>121</sup> as follows:

The "male" tradition of the resurrection dates from the time before the *Judean War*, the "female" tradition from the time after. ... Those who were considered less than the male apostles in the Messianic communities here become the evangelists of the actual message. The leadership of the Messianic communities had failed before and in the great war, and they had no answer to the catastrophe of 70. Now others— women—become the promoters of the decisive message. They were the first to see "the honor of the Messiah," as Jesus announced to Martha at the tomb of Lazarus, of Israel, 11:40. ...

In the narrative about Jesus, all of a sudden, those play a key role, who otherwise were only intended for the minor parts. But now, there is a radically new situation, which is reflected by the time designation explained above. Now, not Kephas, the Twelve, the five hundred brothers, James, the brother of the Messiah, all the apostles mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15, and last of all the "misbegotten among the apostles" (1 Corinthians 15:8), Paul, play the role of the protagonists of the resurrection narrative, but the women known in all Messianic communities.

The Messianic movement was led by those mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15. The *Judean War* meant at the same time an existential crisis of the communities in the Aramaic-speaking area, Syria-Palestine. It could not continue as it was until then, and therefore the resurrection had to be told completely new and completely different.

At one point, I feel better understood by you than by Ton Veerkamp, namely by discovering (122) that "Mary's words" to the disciples "echo those uttered by Hagar in Genesis 16:13" and in this way show her "authority as messenger." Similarly, as Hagar says, "Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?", Mary announces to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord."

This parallel is particularly interesting because it is part of a similar progression, or conflation, of sensation. It is not stated that Hagar had seen the angel; the text refers only to hearing his words. Yet her conclusion is that she has seen the Lord, and she names a well after the experience. This suggests that her auditory experience is interpreted by her as sight. Similarly, Mary recognizes Jesus only after she hears him call her name. Yet she describes this event to the disciples and they have no discernible effect on their audience within the narrative. The disciples rejoiced at Jesus' return only after he has shown them

121 Veerkamp 2021, 389 ([The Tomb](#), par. 4, 6-7).

his hands and his side (20:21); a change in their own role occurs only after he breathes the holy spirit upon them (20:22-23).

In this, you find it remarkable (182, n. 52) “that Jesus does not explain again the content of the message that he had commissioned Mary to convey to the disciples.”

What you do not notice here is my consistently critical view of the male disciples.<sup>122</sup> Not only are they lacking any response to Mary’s message but they hardly react at all to whatever efforts Jesus makes to abandon their retreat behind locked doors “for fear of the Jews” and—doubly gifted with his “peace,” awakened from paralyzing torpor by his breath—to embrace his “inspiration of sanctification” and be sent abroad among people with a practice of forgiveness and solidarity. The only response noted is “joy” in 20:20, and in 20:25 they relay to Thomas, “We have seen the Lord,” but in doing so they do not even mention their joy. Instead of going out as apostles of Jesus, according to 20:26 they still remain behind locked doors, and according to 21:3 they even go back to their former profession as fishermen. Only when Jesus allows himself to be seen publicly by the disciples for the third time (21:14), a Messianic community led by Peter is constituted (21:15-17). Yet the formulation that Peter is girded by his Lord for solidary service and taken “where you do not want to go” emphasizes once again how difficult the community is in my eyes with being sent out by the Messiah.

From my point of view, I fully underline your concluding conclusion to this section (126):

The situation of women in the Jewish community, and in other religious systems, is a matter of urgency not only for women but also for men, and not only for humans but for the divine as well. We cannot know precisely what the role of women was in the Johannine community, nor can we rewrite history to shape that role into one that we ourselves would like to see. But both Jews and Christians have the power and, in my view, the responsibility to think critically about the sources that have been used to relegate women to a secondary role and keep them there.

### 6.3.2 The Race between Peter and the Beloved Disciple

Despite your impression (126)—which goes back to the repeatedly expressed new commandment of *agapē*, by which I rather understand what you call in your time by the word “solidarity”—that “the Johannine community was a democratic group,” you rightly assume that “the rivalry” between Peter and me, which is clearly evident in the Gospel (127), when “read as a reference to the Johannine community, points to problems in negotiating leadership.”

122 See the reflection by Helmut Schütz: „[Ostern im Lockdown](#)“ [“Easter in Lockdown”].

However, you suggest that this relationship of rivalry “is, finally, left ambiguous” because you do not understand why, of all people, “Peter, while flawed, is entrusted with the care of Jesus’ sheep” although “the Beloved Disciple does no wrong; he makes no false moves, offers no occasion for rebuke, and is placed in the most intimate relationship with Jesus.”

On the solution proposed by Raymond Brown<sup>123</sup> that there was a “controversy over Christology” within our community between the disciples close to Peter and to me (128), you leave aside whether “this case can be supported or not.” I tell you: It cannot be supported because (127) nowhere in my gospel it is about that I would claim “a more complete understanding of Jesus’ role” insofar as I would have “perceived his preexistence and his origins from above.”

No, the conflict is about something else. Our grouping is a lateral current within the larger Jewish Messianic movement led by Peter.<sup>124</sup> We do have a lot to criticize about the behavior of Peter and the other leaders of the Jerusalem community, especially their tendency toward militant Zealotism, but also their flight from Jerusalem in 70, abandoning sheep entrusted to them.<sup>125</sup> I do not now enumerate all the passages in my Gospel that point to such criticism of Peter and the brothers of Jesus.

How great our own self-confidence has been at times is shown (19:25-27) by Jesus’ last will and testament on the cross, in which he entrusts his mother and me to each other in the presence of two witnesses<sup>126</sup>; on this Ton Veerkamp critically remarks<sup>127</sup>:

123 (182, n. 59) Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist, 1979), 84-85.

124 I leave out of consideration here the many other Messianic currents, including the since long growing communities from the school of Paul, composed of Jews and Gentiles; see Veerkamp 2021, 374-76 ([Scholion 9: Peace among the Messianic Communities](#)).

125 On the interpretation of 10:12 see Veerkamp 2021, 229 ([The Interpretation of the Comparison](#), par. 18):

So it is about the political leadership of Judea in the years before the Judean War and during the war. Who abandoned the sheep? Some think of Yohanan ben Zakkai, who, according to the founding legend of Rabbinical Judaism, left the besieged city and went into the care of the Romans. If we are considering the flight of Zakkai, we should also think of the flight of the Messianic community of Jerusalem, led by the “brothers of the Lord.” They also abandoned the children of Israel. We know from 7:2 ff. that John had a low opinion of Jesus’ brothers—and that means of the community in Jerusalem. Finally, we are told about the disciples themselves, “You will leave me (Jesus) alone,” 16:32 (here and there *aphiesthai*). Here John enlightens his Messianic community about the total failure of the priestly leadership of the people at that time and the leadership of the Messianic communities as well.

126 Veerkamp 2021, 372-74 ([Second Scene: Mother and Son](#), par. 1, 6-8).

127 Veerkamp 2021, 375 ([Scholion 9: Peace among the Messianic Communities](#), par. 3-4).

We know from John himself that he did not think much of the brothers of Jesus, 7:1 ff. This aversion is clearly a rejection of the Messianic community in Jerusalem, in any case of its claim to leadership, which James, “the brother of the Lord,” raised, see Acts 15:13; Galatians 2:12 ff. John’s community, in which the mother of John must have played an important role, must therefore have taken precedence over the community in Jerusalem, for the mother of John was also the mother of James, “the brother of the Lord.”

The whole thing points to a kind of ranking competition between the different communities. The Synoptic Gospels vehemently reject this ranking, “Let it not be so among you,” they admonish their communities (Luke 22:24 ff., Mark 10:42 ff., Matthew 20:25 ff.).

But as already with the topic of the leadership function of women, we have to see realistically: We are a marginal splinter group; our sectarian language even leads us to cower behind closed doors at the end (20:19, 26) “for fear of the Jews.” In the long run, though very late, we come to realize that public effectiveness is only possible for us if we join the larger Messianic group around Peter. I could not express it better than Ton Veerkamp<sup>128</sup> has formulated it in the following sentences about chapter 21:

The whole chapter has only one theme, “Simon Peter.” This figure represents a particular type of Messianism represented by the three Synoptic Gospels, each in its own way, and distinct from the Pauline type. Luke documented this difference and attempted mediation between the two types. After the death of Simon Peter, John’s group (6:67-71; 13-17; 20:19-29), originally completely isolated, sought and found a connection with this Messianism. The “sons of Zebedee” appear in John’s Gospel only here. They play an important role in the Synoptic Gospels. The fact that they appear here of all places shows how the group found the connection to the synoptic Messianism. The document of this connection is this chapter; it is at the same time the document of the break out of the sectarian isolation. For dating purposes it is unsuitable; first, we do not know when Simon Peter was put to death; second, we do not know when chapter 21 was added to the Gospel. In any case, this chapter documents the process of how the group went from being a sect to being part of a comprehensive movement, but its text went from being a sect paper to being the basic document of a movement and then to being an “ecclesiastical” document. That there must have been heated discussions in the group around John about the future of the group is documented by the Epistles of John. John 21, therefore, became an integral part of this Gospel, because this chapter turned John’s Gospel from a text of an isolated sect into the basic document of a Messianic movement.

128 Veerkamp 2021, 404-05 ([note 567 on the translation of John 21:1-24](#)).

This explains why Peter is given the leadership of the community by Jesus in the appendix of my Gospel, although my Gospel from beginning to end puts my own testimony of Jesus the Messiah in the foreground. In this, by the way, I would not claim, as you do, that I am not to blame in any respect; after all, the sectarian sharpness of the remarks I put into Jesus' mouth here and there contributed to the isolation we seek to overcome at the end by joining Peter.

Even before this unification of the communities, I reflect my relationship with Peter (20:3-4) in the narrative of the race to the tomb of Jesus, which I myself engage in as "the other disciple" with him. I get to the tomb first, but give way to Peter, even though I am faster than him. The sight of the empty tomb (20:8-9) makes me trust, though I admit that I still need time to understand from the Scriptures (Isaiah 53:9 ff, for example) what the resurrection of the Messiah means for us. Mary understood more than all of us men in this regard from the beginning.

Incidentally, Ton Veerkamp<sup>129</sup> discovered that our race is not simply a "nice and vivid description of the events." He rightly states that in my case "you need not jump to conclusions about incidental details for the sake of pleasing literary embellishment":

There is a strange narrative in the Second Book of Samuel. The rebellion against David had been put down, and Absalom, the author of the rebellion, had perished. Ahimaaz, the son of the priest Zadok, presented himself to Joab, the commander of the army; he would like to bring to David the "gospel" of the victory (*'avasera, euangeliō*, "I will proclaim," 2 Samuel 18:19). Joab strongly advised him not to. Instead, Joab sent the Ethiopian mercenary to bring the message to David. The Ethiopian ran, but Ahimaaz ran after him and faster than him. The "gospel" of victory over Absalom was indeed "good news," but not only. To David, whose kingship was saved, the victory came at an almost unbearable price, the death of his beloved son, "My son Absalom, my son Absalom. What would I have given if I had died in your place, Absalom, my son, my son," 2 Samuel 19:1. The "gospel" (*besora*) was not just "good news"; nor is the *besora* of the empty tomb just "good news."

The message is joyful because through the ascent of the Messiah to the FATHER it is made clear once and for all that death does not have the last word. However, not in the simple way that Jesus now leads a peaceful life in heaven, in which all who believe in him can also participate after their death. No, it is actually about the overcoming of the powers of death connected with the ruling world order on this earth. This is reason for a joy that can be expressed in the courage to practice *agapē*, solidarity, to which Jesus called us. But this joy cannot simply wipe aside the mourning for the murdered Messiah, nor does it immediately overcome the "fear of the Jews."

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129 Veerkamp 2021, 391-92 ([The Tomb](#), par. 20-21).

Unfortunately, I must confess, this fear soon gave rise to an unforgivable hatred that is totally inconsistent with the new commandment of love commanded by Jesus.

Back to your discussion of the issue of church leadership, within which you raise the fundamental question (128):

What happens in a community when its leader dies? The Beloved Disciple in fact deals with two different cases related to this question.

First, I would like to address the second case you cite here, namely (128-29)

the death of the Beloved Disciple. What must surely have been a crisis in the community is only mentioned, and then in a confusing and unsatisfying manner, at the very conclusion of the Gospel (21:21-23): “When Peter saw him [the Beloved Disciple], he said to Jesus, ‘Lord, what about him?’ Jesus said to him, ‘If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!’ So the rumor spread in the community that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, ‘If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?’”

You are right, these verses reflect a confusion that was already running rampant in the communities at the time they were written. I can assure you: Since I have since died, although Jesus has not yet returned to earth, the rumors that arose at that time are groundless.

The meaning of verse 21:21 should be very easy to understand—but to err is human! It deals with the problem of what actually happens, as Ton Veerkamp<sup>130</sup> puts it, “to the independent and probably also quite stubborn group around John within the unified Messianic movement?” We need to see ourselves “as part of an overall movement, but at the same time” want to hold on to our “own identity, which is different from the Messianic mainstream.” To this, Veerkamp continues:

The question of Simon to Jesus, “What about that disciple,” does not primarily concern the death of that disciple, but his relationship to him. The question then means, “Shall he continue to go his own way?” For the passage was introduced with the remark that Peter sees the disciple following Jesus. So it is about the particular way in which the group follows the Messiah. The narrator, the spokesman of John’s group, has Jesus reply harshly, “If I want him to persevere until I come, what is it to you? You follow me!” Unity is not to consist in dogmatic uniformity, but in following the Messiah.

The inclusion of the Johannine community, the opening of its isolation, is one thing, the independence of the group within a movement is another thing. In the worldwide Messianic movement, there should be different forms of disci-

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130 Veerkamp 2021, 415-16 ([“Follow me,”](#) par. 2, 4, 5-6).

pleship. The Messianic movement is a political movement, but not a political party and consequently, there is no party discipline in the Messianic movement. The appendix of John 21 was read with great care by the ancient and later Roman Catholic church, but apparently only up to v.19. Had they read further, they would have used the *anathema sit* [„let him be accursed“] more sparsely.

### 6.3.3 The Paraclete as the “Inspiration of Fidelity” of the God of Israel

The other case (128) of the leader of a congregation whose dying leads to the problem of his succession, I treat under a new subheading because, in the end, it comes down to problems which I address over your head mainly to Christian readers of these lines, but which might be of interest to you as well. This is about

the death, or at least the physical absence of Jesus from the community after the Easter event. The Gospel addresses this issue by proclaiming the advent of the Paraclete or Spirit of truth who “will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you” (14:26).

This paraclete is not a person who could take over the leadership of the community, rather he represents the standards to which any community leadership that appeals to Jesus must adhere. What I mean by this is explained by Ton Veerkamp<sup>131</sup> in connection with 14:16-17, and I quote him at length:

What comes now has given rise to a wealth of speculation as well as useless and therefore unscientific discussions: Who is the figure that John calls *paraklētos*, the Paraclete? We translate “advocate” according to his function in the court (16:7 ff.).

The word can mean “comforter” because it comes from *parakalein*; this verb originally meant “to summon” and in a derivative sense “to comfort, to encourage.” It derives from the Hebrew root *nacham*. In this sense, it is often used in the apostolic and evangelical writings, as is the related word *paraklēsis*, “comfort, encouragement.” The word group is missing in John, except for the word *paraklētos*, which in turn is missing in all other writings of both testaments. The word is found only in John and only if the world order is spoken of.

And John explains it: It is “the inspiration of fidelity,” which “the world order cannot accept or adopt.” One—the inspiration of fidelity—excludes the other—the world order of deceit—because the latter neither considers nor recognizes the former (fidelity is not an element of politics, not until today) and recognizing is *to act following knowledge* in the Scriptures.

131 Veerkamp 2021, 299-300 ([The Second Objection: “Show us the FATHER, and it is enough,”](#) par. 8-11).

Whatever or whoever the “Paraclete” might be, it or he is, in any case, the absolute contradiction to what is common practice in the world order of Rome. That is why this inspiration stays continuously with the disciples. *Paraclete* is what makes fidelity the center of all political practice. You don’t have to picture it as a “figure”; in this tradition, imaginations (“images”) is impossible. If you know that fidelity is downright an apolitical category to Rome (Pilate, “What is fidelity?” 18:38) and that *paraklētos* or *pneuma* has just fidelity (*alētheia*) as its essence, then you know enough. The *advocate*, the *inspiration of fidelity*, is given when the commandment of solidarity with the Messiah and with one another is kept. The place of solidarity, the Messianic community, is inspired *by fidelity* and is thus the counterdraft to the ruling world order.

That is, Ton Veerkamp understands *pneuma tēs alētheias*, which is usually translated as “spirit of truth,” as the “inspiration of fidelity” of the God of Israel, and he writes on the interpretation of 15:26<sup>132</sup>:

The advocate (*paraklētos*) is sent by Jesus “from the Father.” He is the “inspiration of fidelity”; the adherence to God’s fidelity to Israel and to that exemplary concentration of Israel, which is the group (“the Twelve,” 6:67) inspires the disciples. The inspiration comes from the God of Israel; it does not bring a new world religion, but what is said and done with the word FATHER = God of Israel. This needs to be explained in more detail, and John does this in 16:13-15. Now it is about the testimony: That which comes from the God of Israel testifies of Jesus. And to this testimony, the disciples are enabled, “inspired.”

Finally, on the interpretation of 16:13-15, Veerkamp adds an explanation of what he calls my “Johannine Trinity”<sup>133</sup>:

Inspiration does not speak of itself, it does not invent a new religion of the spirit. What it hears is the word of the Messiah; “this is what it will announce.” The word of the Messiah is the word of the FATHER. So what the inspiration announces is the word of the FATHER, which is also the word of the Messiah. The one word is the God of Israel, the Messiah of Israel, the inspiration of the Messiah of Israel. This is the Johannine Trinity.

... If we want to rethink the central tenet of Christianity, the dogma of the triune God, at all, then we must begin with this Johannine Trinity.

This understanding of Trinity is very different from the elaborate definitions of Trinity that were later adopted on the occasion of the Christian councils, based on Greek philosophical terminology.<sup>134</sup>

132 Veerkamp 2021, 316 ([“When he comes, the advocate, the inspiration of fidelity,”](#) par. 2).

133 Veerkamp 2021, 324-25 ([“When that one comes, the inspiration of fidelity,”](#) par. 6, 9).

134 See Veerkamp 2021, 13-15 ([On the Translation of John](#), par. 7-13) and thoughts of

## 6.4 The Beloved Disciple: Respected and Respectful Colleague

The way in which you address me (170) “as a colleague, that is, a peer who struggles with similar issues in similar ways” is very sympathetic to me. I too feel that I now understand you better in many respects and can also “respect the struggle, as well as the differences between us.” However, the exclusion of “the issues that divide us” must create “some distance” that “avoids conflict and allows the relationship to continue on indefinitely without either of us making considerable demands upon the other.” Therefore, you now want to add to the “sympathetic reading” also “an ethical engagement with the Beloved Disciple as a friend.”

## 7 The Beloved Disciple as the Other

You call your (131) “fourth and, for the time being, final attempt at friendship” with me “an engaged reading,” that is, you want

to engage seriously and directly with the fundamental content of the Beloved Disciple’s gift as well as with my own inability, or, if you like, unwillingness, to accept it.

The remark “for the time being” at the beginning of this paragraph encourages me to make another attempt to befriend you, on my own initiative, by presenting to you what I am writing here. This, too, I can only call an “engaged” reading, based, however, on the fact that the cosmological tale you discovered in my Gospel is supplemented by its political dimension or replaced altogether by a political-cosmological tale.

### 7.1 Engaged Reading of the Historical Tale

You state quite correctly (131) that “in telling the historical tale,” my aim “is not simply to inform readers of the events of Jesus’ earthly life,” but I am actually concerned with “the identity of Jesus, the self-revelation of Jesus as Christ and the Son of God.” However, in this, I understand the terms “Christ” and “Son of God” from the Jewish Scriptures and not Christian dogmatically in the post-Nicene sense. In my view, it is not “Jesus’ role” to be sent “as the incarnate Word and Son of God ... into the world for the salvation of all humankind,” but to bring all Israel together in the community of the Messiah Jesus to be liberated from the oppression of the prevailing world order.

This is not to say that Jews could more easily choose Jesus as a Messiah in the Jewish political sense than as a cosmological world redeemer. Only concerning myself, I can say that I would also have “the greatest difficulty in accepting the message” in this otherworldly sense, while the *loudaioi* of my Gospel deny Jesus’ Messiahship at all. However, what in my time is still an inner-Jewish dispute about the question of whether Jesus is the Messiah and how Jews have to behave towards the Roman world order, already a few decades later turns into a front between two opposing religions<sup>135</sup>:

Beginning in the middle of the 2nd century, with a dispute between the Christian Justin and the Jewish scholar (348) Tryphon “about the legitimate reading of Scripture ... two fundamentally different readings of the Grand Narrative” begin to emerge. With Talmudic Judaism and Christianity, two different Grand Narratives are developing. “The construct of *salvation history* was the lens through which Christians began to read the Grand Narrative of Israel.”

### 7.1.1 Encounter of Jews and Christians: Dialogue or Mission?

The (132) resulting gulf can certainly not be bridged by a dialogue, as handed down in “Justin Martyr’s Second Apology,” in which both sides try to convince each other “to accept Judaism” or “to believe in Jesus as the Christ” (133):

The mode of discourse recorded in Justin’s *Dialogue with Trypho*, though well attested throughout the centuries, is not a paradigm I wish to follow in my attempt to engage with the Beloved Disciple. In the first place, I am not open to persuasion. Second, the Beloved Disciple, as a metaphorical rather than real friend (or even a literary friend as is Trypho to Justin), is not in a position to be persuaded by me.

In contrast, you see a dialogue between the Jew Pinchas Lapide and the Catholic Christian Karl Rahner from your time,<sup>136</sup> “two people who are each committed to the dialogue and are prepared *a priori* to give the most serious attention to the view of the other,” as an example of “an attitude that in my view truly does leave open a way to friendship across a great christological divide.” Here is important that the dialogue can continue precisely because, according to Rahner, “each one confess the difference in the convictions,” which refers mainly to Jesus as, according to Lapide, “a contradiction that none of us can resolve before the final redeemer comes.”

The (134) document “*Dabru Emet*. ‘A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity,’” published in 2005 “by the National Jewish Scholars Project of the Institute for

135 Thoughts of Veerkamp 2013, summarized by Helmut Schütz in [From the Pastoral Epistles to Justin and Ignatius](#), par. 3.

136 (183, n. 6) Pinchas Lapide, Karl Rahner, *Encountering Jesus—Encountering Judaism: A Dialogue* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 96-97.

Christian and Jewish Studies, and signed by dozens of Jewish scholars,”<sup>137</sup> regards this contradiction as just as insurmountable but at the same time “asserts the need of mutual respect”:

“Jews can respect Christians’ faithfulness to their revelation just as we expect Christians to respect our faithfulness to our revelation. Neither Jew nor Christian should be pressed into affirming the teaching of the other community.”

Following the statement just quoted from *Dabru Emet* you write:

Nowhere, however, does it detail the reasons why Jews do not believe Jesus to be the Messiah.

Not all Jewish groups are evasive on this issue. For example, Christian claims for Jesus as Messiah are addressed, or more accurately, strongly refuted, by a group called “Jews for Judaism.”

Although at first glance this might look as if you are now again advocating mutual persuasion attempts, after all, the opposite is the case. You do not think much of the attempts of “Jews for Judaism” to “show why and how Jesus could not possibly be the Messiah” with the help of “proof texts from both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament.” However, you think that such forms of “prooftexting may serve a purpose in the trenches, in which some Jews see themselves as battling the onslaught of Christian missionary activity.” And the group<sup>138</sup> mentioned here is in fact precisely opposed to “the multi-million dollar efforts of deceptive missionary and cult groups that target the Jewish community for conversion,” for example by “groups like ‘Jews for Jesus,’ which engage in intensive missionary activity particularly among Jewish college students.”

### 7.1.2 Is Jesus “More than a Human” or Is He the Messiah in the Jewish Sense?

As (135) a “guide in considering Jesus” you choose Samuel Sandmel’s book *We Jews and Jesus*.<sup>139</sup> According to him,

there are two points that are axiomatic to most Jews. One is that Christian views that regard Jesus as more than a man should be rejected as being “in-

137 <https://www.jcrelations.net/statements/statement/dabru-emet-a-jewish-statement-on-christians-and-christianity.html>.

138 (183-84, n. 9) See their home page: [www.jewsforjudaism.org](http://www.jewsforjudaism.org). Though the tone of the description is alarmist, my own experience tells me that many Jews, particularly in large cities, have been personally targeted at one time or another. I remember well the pamphlets distributed in downtown Toronto on the campus of the University of Toronto particularly around the High Holidays, Hanukkah, and Passover. These pamphlets initially looked like Jewish information but upon closer reading turned out to be “Jews for Jesus” tractates.

139 (184, n. 10) Samuel Sandmel, *We Jews and Jesus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965, 2d ed., 1973).

consistent with Judaism and uncongenial to Jews.” The second is that the virtues ascribed to Jesus as a human being should be recognized as characteristic Jewish virtues. This Jewish Jesus “may well have been a good and great man—a prophet, a rabbi, or a patriotic leader—but he was not better or greater ... than other Jews.” [vii].

Measured by these two axioms, I would consider myself a Jew since Jesus is no more than a human to me either and no better than other Jews in terms of his virtues. But I confess him as the Messiah of Israel, who in his “flesh,” that is, as this concrete Jewish man, is commissioned by the God of Israel to embody his liberating NAME and to overcome the *hamartia*, the political “aberration” of the world order from the Torah ways of freedom, justice, and peace, by handing over the “inspiration of fidelity” to those who trust in him.

I also agree with Sandmel rather than with later Christianity on another point, namely the significance of Jesus’ crucifixion. I, too, understand “Jesus’ crucifixion ... not as an atoning death” but as the hour of overcoming the Roman world order. You have to look very carefully at how I talk about Jesus’ death, which Scriptural passages I refer to, in which context these are situated. Ton Veerkamp<sup>140</sup> describes it like this:

The hour in which the Messiah goes to where he had come from, to his God, who is the God of Israel, is the hour of union with God, not the hour of abandonment of God.

The Synoptics interpret the death of the Messiah as the sign of God’s people’s abandonment of God: Their sanctuary destroyed, their city annihilated, their land taken possession of by foreign powers. John rejects this depressive account of Mark. He knows Psalm 22 and interpreted it as the soldiers distribute the clothes of Jesus among themselves: the Messiah is abandoned by his people. But he is not abandoned by God.

John does not have the Messiah pray the first line of Psalm 22, “My God! My God! Why have you abandoned me?” Rather, he says, “I thirst.” Jesus prays a different psalm. The commentaries all refer to Psalm 69. In v.22 we hear, “They put poison in my food; they quench my thirst with vinegar.”

The bystanders hear the word “thirst” and fulfill the Scriptures by soaking a sponge with sour wine and handing it to Jesus; Barrett<sup>141</sup> rightly notes that the bunch of hyssops is not appropriate for the presentation of the sponge. The hyssop served to smear the blood of the Passover lamb on the door so that the angel of death would pass by the houses of the Israelites, Exodus 12:21 ff.

140 Veerkamp 2021, 378-79 ([Third scene: “The goal has been achieved,”](#) par. 3-10, 13-14).

141 Charles K. Barrett (Das Evangelium nach Johannes [KEK], Göttingen 1990, 531.

Mark does not have this connection, for he has the sponge attached to a cane (15:36). John, according to Barrett, altered Mark's account to portray Jesus as the true Passover lamb. But this interpretation is difficult because there is no mention of blood in this passage. Otherwise, hyssop is an element in the purification ritual (Leviticus 14, Numbers 19, Psalm 51:9). We do not find a really plausible explanation for the use of hyssop. But one must also think of Psalm 42:2-4,

As the deer pines for the brook of water,  
so my soul pines for you, God.  
My soul thirsts for God, for the divinity of life.  
When may I come, may I be seen before the face of God?  
Tears have become my bread, day and night,  
because all day long they say, "Where is your God?"

Thirst, like hunger, has a special meaning in John's Gospel. We heard the word in the conversation with the Samaritan woman, John 4:13 ff, in the speech about the bread from heaven in the synagogue at Capernaum, 6:35, and in the speech of Jesus during the feast of *Sukkot*, 7:37. The thirst for God fills Jesus. His whole life was never anything but the thirst for his God, the God of Israel. John reminds us of both Psalms. Psalm 69 ends like this (vv.36-37),

For God will liberate Zion, he will build up the cities of Judah;  
They will return there, they will inherit them.  
The seed of his servants will have them as their property,  
those who love his name will dwell there.

The death of the Messiah will be the liberation of Zion and the rebuilding of Judah. That is why Jesus, "having taken the sour wine, says, *tetelestai*, the goal has been achieved." ...

It was all about this moment. The Messiah achieves the goal that Psalm 69 indicates: the liberation of Zion. His death is neither the end nor the accomplishment of Jesus; this death is the end of Rome. Through Jesus' death, "the leader of this world order is cast out," 12:31. Jesus has a future in and through this death because his death means that he passes on his inspiration. This inspiration will ensure that Jesus will be spoken of as Messiah (Christ) throughout the millennia and that people will "do works" in his name and through this inspiration that will be "greater" than Jesus' works, 14:12. Rome, however, no longer has a future.

This is what John says and hopes.

Ton Veerkamp has tried to reconstruct my message of the Messiah Jesus from the Jewish Scriptures; whether he has succeeded or whether this really corresponds to my thinking, you will probably doubt. And even if you consider this interpretation,

you may think it a completely absurd idea. With it, you would be in good company, namely of those who estimate us, at that time, as mere cranks and troublemakers.

Sandmel most certainly also would not accept the idea of “the saving death of Jesus” in the political sense reconstructed by Veerkamp since he writes (135):

To us Jesus is never more than a man, and deeply as some of us Jews are able to sympathize with the tragedy of his life and death, we do not see in it any special working of the divine [48].

As I said, he is not “more than a man” to me either. However, to me, he is the Messiah sent by God, and therefore God indeed works in him, even if I see this completely different than the later Christians.

In no way, I would consider Jews in general as “Christ-killers” or even “God-killers” [45-46]. It was the Romans who killed Jesus. However, in my eyes, there were very particular Jews in the leadership of Judea, who were interested in his death for political calculation. I criticize these leading circles in similar severity as the prophets of Israel and Judah condemned the kings of their time.

I fully agree (136) with Sandmel urging

his readers to situate the early Christian views about Jesus within the context of second temple Jewish messianism. He argues that the assertion that Jesus was “the Son of Man,” for example, was expressed fully within the framework of segments of Judaism:

once the followers of Jesus were convinced that he was resurrected, there was nothing inconsistent with their Judaism in conceiving of him as the heavenly Son of Man. On the other hand, those who did not believe that he was resurrected denied that he was the Son of Man, not so much because they disbelieved in the idea, but because they did not believe in this particular identification [35].

With this, Sandmel exactly meets the conviction that I hold about Jesus as the Son of Man. And he describes exactly the way in which we in our group as Jews understand Jesus from the Jewish Scriptures as the Messiah, as the Son of Man, and as one like God, that is, a Son of God in the Jewish sense.

With Sandmel’s view “that matters of faith cannot be decided by prooftexting or any other mode of rational discourse” you are “in strong agreement”:

I do not believe that one can either prove or disprove that Jesus is the Son of God, that he rose from the dead, or that believing in him is essential for salvation, just as one cannot prove the existence or nonexistence of God, or that Moses received the Ten Commandments, the entire Torah, and/or the Oral Law at Mount Sinai. These are faith questions that are beyond rational comprehension or logical proof. In facing the Beloved Disciple on this issue, I pre-

fer to see us acknowledging our different faith perspectives without attempting to persuade one another.

But I also agree with Sandmel because I cannot prove to one who does not trust in God or the Messiah that God exists or that Jesus is the Messiah. And what of all you are listing here do I really believe in the way you understand it? The way I search the Scriptures and ground the truth of what I proclaim from them proceeds from the trust in God's fidelity. And my conviction that Jesus is the Messiah sent by God is revealed to me by the correspondence of all his speech and action—his word deeds and deed words, *devarim*, his signs, *sēmeia*—with the will of God as recorded in the Scriptures of Israel. That is, I am not arguing about religious ways to redeem the soul or about the truth of biblical facts, but, similar to what Moses and the biblical prophets did, about the appropriate way to lead Israel out of social and political bondage. And our slave house is no longer called Egypt, Assyria, or Babylon, but *Pax Romana*: world order, *kosmos*, allegedly of peace, in reality, worldwide slave house.

I agree with you completely,

that Jesus was a human, historical figure about whom his followers made various claims that are comprehensible against the background of first-century Jewish messianism but ultimately are not accepted by the majority of Jews.

In contrast, I feel thoroughly misunderstood in the following sentences (136-37):

But this approach does not help very much in coming to terms with the Jesus presented by the Beloved Disciple. Even a cursory reading of his Gospel makes it clear that the human side of Jesus, while acknowledged, is not a focus for the implied author. The mere notice of him weeping at Lazarus's graveside, the only emotional act attributed to Jesus in the Gospel, is not enough to establish his human identity and characteristics. His human side virtually disappears beneath the christological weight of the Son of God/Son of Man designations.

It is true that in my eyes Jesus subordinated his whole life and death to the will of God. In that he was able to do this, I see the miracle of his mission by the God of Israel, and this miracle I can only express by viewing him from the Scriptures as the Son of Man, as one like God, as the prophet who is to come, as the Word, the Life, the Light, the Bread, the Shepherd, even as the one who embodies the *egō eimi*, the liberating NAME of God, "I-WILL-BE-THERE," and performs the works and signs, *erga kai sēmeia*, of this God. Jesus is all this, however, precisely not as a demigod or god-man in the sense of Greco-Roman mythology, but by being fully human, *sarx egeneto*, as it says in 1:14, Jewish flesh, rooted in the people of Israel. By calling him *monogenēs*, "only begotten," I understand him to be the second Isaac, the beloved son whom Abraham had to sacrifice as his own son and was given back as the first-

born son of God. Regarding the expression I use in 1:18, *monogenēs theos*, Ton Veerkamp writes<sup>142</sup>:

The subject of the second part of the final sentence is called *monogenēs theos*, “only begotten, divine.” We shouldn’t wonder to have problems with this. Those who in the first centuries passed down our text had problems as well. Some inserted the definite article, thus: *the* only-begotten God. Others replace the vocable *God* with the vocable *Son*. The latter goes very well together with the orthodoxy of the 4th and 5th centuries. Then the thought reads as follows: “No one has ever seen God, the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the FATHER (orthodox: the Son who is coessential, *homoousios*, with God), has ...” They used an orthodoxy that, two or three centuries after the wording of our text, tried to solve its problem. This method cannot scientifically be justified.

The key probably lies in the baffling expression “*who is in the bosom of the FATHER*.” Let us hear Numbers 11. The people in the wilderness remembered the beautiful days in the house of slavery where there was fish to eat at no cost (*chinnam*), and “cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, garlic,” at that! Moses was fed up with leading this people. He complains to the God of Israel about this task. Then the word is, Numbers 11:11-12,

And Moses said to the NAME:  
 “Why do you treat your servant so badly?  
 Why have I not found favor in your eyes,  
 that you lay the burden of all this people on me?  
 Was I pregnant with all this people,  
 did I give them birth,  
 that you should say to me,  
 carry them in your bosom  
 as a nurse carries an infant...?”

The relationship between an infant and its caregiver is one of complete dependence. The same is true for the relationship between Moses and the people that he has to lead and that is dependent on him. Moses says to his God, “They are not my people, but yours. Carry them in your bosom!” Actually, this only-begotten *divine*, uniquely determined by God, can be called “the one in the bosom.” He is the exemplary concentration of Israel, he is “in the bosom of the NAME/FATHER,” completely and utterly determined by God, just *divine*. The God of Moses answered Moses’ voice. Like an infant in his bosom, he carried this beaten and murdered Messiah as the representative for the beaten and desperate people of the Jews.

142 Veerkamp 2021, 42-43 ([A Postscript](#), par. 15-18).

Seen in this light, your following sentences are in a sense correct again (139):

Thus, try as I might, I cannot meet the historical Jesus in the historical tale, or, for that matter, in any of the tales told by the Beloved Disciple. Rather, the Johannine Jesus seems to me to be a mouthpiece for the implied author, so that the words and attitudes ascribed to him in the text reflect not an assessment, even a faithful and fully engaged assessment, of Jesus but rather the viewpoint of the Beloved Disciple himself. This impression is gleaned from the fact that the Johannine Jesus speaks in the same idiom as the implied author. Indeed, there are sections of the Gospel where it is difficult to distinguish between them, as, for example, in John 3, where the discourse of Jesus slides imperceptibly into that of the narrator... These observations do not entirely absolve one of the need to consider Jesus, since he is presented to us as a character separate from the Beloved Disciple if astoundingly similar to him in his truth claims. Nevertheless, the Johannine Jesus is a figure who is singularly difficult to grasp.

This is true insofar as I am really not concerned with creating a historically coherent picture of the person of Jesus of Nazareth. I am not a historian like Josephus. One may indeed accuse me of portraying Jesus according to my convictions, of putting my words into his mouth. However, I do this to the best of my knowledge and conscience, as I have just presented it, because I really let myself be convinced by the Scriptures of Israel that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel.

### 7.1.3 Jesus in Jewish Novels: Emotional Human or Almighty God?

Exciting I find the way (137) Norman Mailer<sup>143</sup> deals with the person of Jesus and with my Gospel in his novel *The Gospel According to the Son*. He is right that I gave Jesus “words” he “never uttered” for reasons I have just explained, but “as gentle” instead of “pale with rage” I do not portray him. At the cleansing of the temple, which has become a pagan department store, Jesus overturns tables (2:15), zeal for the house of God consumes him (2:17), or at the tomb of his friend Lazarus, who symbolizes the people of Israel enslaved to death under the world order of Rome, I describe him as *embrimōnenos*, “snorting with rage” (11:38).

That (138) Mailer is “focusing on Jesus’ human side” and thus “implicitly denies any claims concerning Jesus’ perfect knowledge and understanding of himself or others,” I find very sympathetic because, as just explained in detail, in my eyes he is precisely not a demigod to be understood in Greco-Roman terms or a superhuman miracle man, but entirely *sarx*, flesh, a Jewish man with a specific mission in 1st-century Israel, the Messiah of Israel.

143 (184, n. 20) Norman Mailer, *The Gospel According to the Son* (New York: Random House, 1997).

Mailer (139) is very close to my understanding of the ascension of the Messiah to the FATHER by considering

the possibility, or even the likelihood, that his Father did not in fact vanquish Satan after all but that Jesus lives on in the hope and love that lightens the lives of human beings. This conclusion sounds like an interpretation of resurrection that emphasizes a sense of spiritual continuity over the physical fact of resurrection...

In two respects, however, I would accentuate this differently: First, I hope that the inspiration of fidelity that Jesus, when dying, passes on to those who trust in him and their practice of *agapē*, solidarity, will not only “lighten” people’s lives a little, but will actually free their lives in the long run from the ruling world order that weighs on them. And secondly, precisely in this, I view the FATHER’s victory over *sa-tan*, i.e. the emperor of the world order, that the latter—by crucifying the Messiah sent by God—is tearing off its mask of an alledged peace order from its face and reveals its faithlessness and murderousness.

Another “Jesus story of sorts” is told by Philip Roth in his short novel “The Conversion of the Jews”<sup>144</sup> in which a young boy named Ozzie Freedman (140) forces the members of a synagogue congregation, through blackmail, “to kneel and to say that they believe in Jesus.” In your eyes,

Ozzie’s question about the power of God, though simple and perhaps simplistic, opens a door, if not to faith, then at least to a way of providing space for the Beloved Disciple in an expansive view of God and God’s powers of creation. The Beloved Disciple does not offer us much of a human Jesus, nor does he show us a Jesus filled with self-doubt and uncertainty, but he does show us a God who can do anything: create light, turn his Word into flesh, send him into the world, allow that flesh to be crucified, and welcome him back again to rest in his bosom (1:18).

But this is precisely not the way I understand the creative power of God and his Messiah! All that you enumerate here corresponds to the later Christian triumphal misunderstanding of my depiction of the Messiah.

God creates light in driving away the darkness of human machinations of deceit and worldwide oppression. This is not done by the violent means which the world order knows to apply skillfully to put down bloodily the pitiful attempts of the rebellion of Zealot messianists. It is done precisely by the liberating Word of God taking flesh in Jesus and seemingly failing. Not a Messiah victorious by force of arms is overcoming the world order but the degraded, flogged Son of Man, executed on the cross of

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144 (184, n. 27) Philip Roth, *Goodbye, Columbus and Five Short Stories* (London: Corgi Books, 1959), 99-114.

shame of the Romans, who thus attains his honor, is ascending to the FATHER, and in the course of this ascent, which is not finished until your days, is handing over the commandment of solidarity to those who trust in him. Through this departure, not through a triumphant victory as Ozzie Freedman might imagine it, the Messiah defeats a world order that can think only in terms of hatred and violence, lies and deceit, pressure and blackmail.

Your formulation that God “can do anything” by allowing “that flesh to be crucified, and welcome him back again to rest in his bosom 1:18)” turns everything I say about the flesh of the Messiah on its head. No, Jesus is not simply tricking his way through human life by a divine sleight of hand, only apparently a human, in reality, a God to whom the suffering, hatred, and violence on this earth can do no harm, because after the crucifixion he returns to the bosom of the Father. No, no, and no: Jesus is truly man, and he embodies the beaten and desperate people of the Jews, whom God takes pity on by lifting them to his bosom.

Doesn't Jesus, as I portray him, know any “self-doubt and uncertainty”? According to 12:27, his soul is shaken up to the question of whether he should ask the FATHER to free him from the hour of his departure, of his going to the FATHER on the way of crucifixion. And before this hour has come, Jesus hides from those who persecute him, 12:36. In any case, Jesus is not strong and sure of himself as a human, but he speaks only what and how the FATHER has told him (12:50).

## 7.2 Engaged Reading of the Cosmological Tale

In reading my Gospel (140) as the “cosmological tale” constructed by you, “the historical tale and its protagonist have meaning only because of their place in the eternal and universal relationship between God and humankind.” Following Wayne Booth,<sup>145</sup> you want to “evaluate the macro-metaphors” of this narrative by considering my “quality ... as metaphorist.” You wonder what “kind of person” you would become in taking my “metaphorical world” as your own. In doing so, you want to (140-41) “look not so much at the content of the cosmological tale as at its rhetorical structure, that is, the way in which human realities are constructed and presented within it.” To this end (141), you state:

The compliant, resistant, and sympathetic readings have emphasized the fundamentally polarized way in which the cosmological tale views reality and the human condition. People choose light or darkness, good or evil, faith or unbelief, and on the basis of these choices are destined for eternal life or for eternal damnation. Thus the Beloved Disciple employs a rhetoric of binary opposition in telling his cosmological tale. He consigns humankind and human reali-

145 (184, n. 32) Wayne Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 370.

ties to one of two opposing and mutually exclusive groups and does not provide room for any mediating possibilities. It is the dichotomous structure of the cosmological tale that ultimately banishes the Other—the ones who do not choose the positive side as advocated by the Beloved Disciple—to the negative pole of human existence.

Again, I must reiterate here that the “dichotomous structure” of my Gospel does not involve an otherworldly destination “for eternal life or for eternal damnation.” Such a history of salvation, which becomes a history of doom for all who do not believe in Jesus Christ, has only been read from my Gospel by the Gentile Christian church.

I myself am concerned, as already often emphasized, with political-social contrasts, a Karl Marx from your days would speak of class struggles, the prophets of Israel spoke of the struggle of the liberating NAME of the God of Israel against false gods and goddesses like Baʿal and Asherah, under which Israel was enslaved or had parts of its own people fall into poverty and misery.

In this respect, I may only conditionally be called a “religious author to present exclusive truth claims.” Already the truth claims “in many texts” of “the Hebrew Bible” are not to be referred exclusively to a religious level of spirituality, but they are about the liberating and right-creating God of Israel, who resolutely opposes every kind of oppressive rule, be it of humans or also of foreign, false gods.

After all, you call it “unrealistic to expect” me “to anticipate and adhere to a post-modern ethos that values diversity and multiplicity.” But it also does not correspond to my reality and my self-understanding as a Jewish Messianist to read my Gospel through the lens of later Christian salvation-historical dogmatics.

### 7.2.1 Jesus as the Only Son of God or as the Embodiment of Isaac, the *monogenēs*?

Let’s take a closer look at the point of conflict that you consider the “greatest stumbling block to friendship with the Beloved Disciple,” namely the “clash between the Beloved Disciple’s exclusivism and my own value system, molded in North America in the post-Holocaust period.”

It is true that I have “a profound commitment to the uniqueness and completeness of the revelation through Jesus.” Uniquely, Jesus is the Messiah of Israel. In him is embodied the Word of the God of Israel, his liberating NAME to gather all Israel and free it from the yoke of the world order.

At first, you look at the uniqueness of Jesus from the term *monogenēs*, which I use in 1:14, 18 and 3:16, 18, and relate it, as the Christian Church does later, to Jesus being the only Son of God. But his status as God’s Son is precisely not unique; he shares this with the kings anointed on God’s behalf (Psalm 2:7) and especially with the people of Israel itself as the firstborn Son of God (Exodus 4:22)!

What *monogenēs* means in my Gospel has already been explained above in connection with 1:18. In 3:16 I offer to this, as Ton Veerkamp<sup>146</sup> puts it, “a midrash ... about the ‘binding of Isaac, the only one,’ Genesis 22.” What does it mean that God gives the “only one,” that is, Jesus as the embodiment of Isaac?

There Abraham is demanded to raise his son, “his only one,” as a sacrifice. Then the messenger of the NAME said to Abraham, Genesis 22:11 ff.,

The messenger of the NAME called to him from heaven . . .  
 Abraham said, “Here, I!”  
 He said:  
 “Do not send your hand out against the lad,  
 do not do anything to him;  
 now I realize:  
 you are in awe of God,  
 for you have not kept your son, your only one, from me.”  
 Abraham raised his eyes,  
 he saw how a ram got caught in the undergrowth with its horns.  
 Abraham went, he took the ram,  
 exalted him as a sacrifice of exalting in place of his son.

With the word *monogenēs*, *yachid*, John invokes this passage of the Scriptures. Christians always think of the dogma of the Trinity, Jesus as the eternal Son of the FATHER, *genitum non factum*, “begotten, not made.” No; here the Son is not the figure of Daniel 7, but the representation of Isaac. Abraham had waited a lifetime for this son; he is his future. The God of Abraham must make it clear to Abraham in a wickedly drastic way that this Isaac is not the son of Abraham, but the son of his God, the FATHER of Israel, the people destined to be the firstborn one among the nations. If Isaac does not stay alive, Abraham has no future. He must remain alive, but only as of the son of God.

John here introduces Jesus as the representation of Isaac. Like Isaac then, Jesus is now the future. In the Hebrew text, it says that Abraham must “exalt” his son as a “sacrifice of exalting” (*haʿala le-ʿola*). It did not come that far; the binding of Isaac is dissolved, the slaughter of Isaac is prevented, because Abraham demonstrably no longer sees his son as his own particular future, but recognizes him as the future of “God.” God’s solidarity with Abraham was evident at that time in the prevention of Isaac’s sacrifice. In John, the God of Israel must do something that was never demanded of Abraham. Here Jesus/Isaac is exalted, bloodily. Here the God of Israel goes all the bloody way with the world of humans because there is no other way to solidarize with them.

146 Veerkamp 2021, 89-90 ([“You are the teacher of Israel, and you do not understand this?”](#), par. 37-44.

John alienates the narrative of Isaac's binding. Abraham's future is accomplished by the release of the binding of Isaac, but here the future requires the slaughter of the Messiah, thus brutally you have to interpret the word *edōken*, "gave, surrendered." "God" goes all the bloody way down, because the world order forces the God, so to speak, to have "his only one" killed.

I need to quote Veerkamp even more in detail to make clear what I mean in this context by reliance on the Son, *pas ho pisteuōn eis auton*, and by *zōē aiōnoios*, the life of the age to come:

The meaning is that everyone who trusts will receive the life of the age to come. Isaac, i.e. Israel, has a future. The small verse John 3:16 is nothing else but the attempt to cope with the defeat of Jesus in the year 30 and the catastrophe for the whole people in the year 70. It wants to insist that the order of the *world*—come what may—is not to be an order of *death*, but an order of *life*. With the slaughter of the Messiah, all hopes end to find a place and thus a future for Israel within the valid order. Life is only possible in the age to come. To trust (*pisteuein*) despite and because (!) of the slaughter of the Messiah is the condition.

While Genesis 22 was already an imposition to all listeners of the word, John 3:16 is all the more unbearable. The central political thesis of the Gospel of John is: Only through the defeat of this One and Only, the liberation of the *world* from the *order* that weighs upon it is possible. This thesis is perpendicular to everything that was—and is—conceivable as a political strategy. The strategy of John is world revolution, even if it is not on the agenda. This is precisely what is unpolitical about him, and this is what tempts the generations after him to internalize, to spiritualize, to depoliticize his Messianism.

World revolution is certainly not world damnation. John is a child of his time; he knows the world condemnation of Gnosis. World condemnation is rejected here. We are dealing here with an anti-Gnostic text. The *world* is not to be judged, but to be liberated from the world *order*.

### 7.2.2 Intra-Jewish Dispute about the Messiah or Christian-Jewish Antagonism?

In similar detail (142) I could also quote Veerkamp on the unique identification of Jesus with the "Son of Man" (3:13)<sup>147</sup> and with the "bread from heaven" (6:32)<sup>148</sup> or on

147 Veerkamp 2021, 86-88 (["You are the teacher of Israel, and you do not understand this?"](#), par. 20-30), see from this only one sentence, 88 (par. 29):

John alienates Daniel's *bar enosh* [Son of Man] into a human child tortured to death and perishing miserably.

148 Veerkamp 2021, 162-64 ([No More Hunger, No More Thirst. The Decisive Day](#), par. 5-14).

the sentence of Jesus (14:6) that no one comes to the FATHER except through Jesus. I limit myself to two paragraphs on the latter passage<sup>149</sup>:

The God of Israel is “way, fidelity, and life” for Israel. Jesus is the way of God for Israel, he embodies the fidelity of God and is, therefore, the life for Israel. As the NAME happened by sending Moses—and Moses is the Torah—so the NAME happens today through the Messiah Jesus, 1:17. Moses proclaimed the way, fidelity, and life that God is for Israel. Now, Jesus is the only embodiment of the way of God, the fidelity of God, and the life that God promises.

Here is a contrast, but Christianity has turned it into an antagonistic contradiction: Moses or Jesus. The contradiction is not absolute, but conditional. It is the new conditions that suspend the old conditions and ask new questions. They demand a new answer: this is the basic view of all Messianic groups of all tendencies. Without this new answer, nobody comes to the FATHER.

What follows from this for the discussion with you? I want to make clear to you that my Gospel actually has its place in an inner-Jewish dispute about the validity of the Torah under the conditions of the Roman world order. I do not stand against Moses and the Torah, but I am convinced that God sent his Messiah Jesus so that the FATHER’s fidelity to Israel could come to its fulfillment under the new conditions.

The antagonistic contradiction between faith in Jesus and Judaism, which Christianity has read from my Gospel, I reject as firmly as you do! Understood as evidence (142) of such a “macro-metaphor,” all the verses just quoted from my Gospel are “not only unpleasant but also dangerous, even fatal.”

Given a certain set of historical and political circumstances, the exclusion of one or all other groups from a macro-metaphor can be taken as a mandate to expel them from one’s midst, or to annihilate them altogether. This is not to lay the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, and the Holocaust on the Beloved Disciple’s shoulders, but rather to draw some comparisons between his worldview and other totalizing views whose consequences can be measured directly. I would not be standing alone in making such an evaluation; the Beloved Disciple’s exclusive truth claims are troubling not only to Jewish readers but also to many Christian interpreters of this Gospel.

You are fair not to blame me for the dire consequences of my Gospel (in its erroneous Christian interpretation). But if I had known what it would be used for, I would rather not have written it at all! I never intended this totalitarian meaning in the sense of a condemnation of Judaism and all Jews in my sentences about the uniqueness of the Messiah Jesus.

149 Veerkamp 295-96 ([The First Objection: “We don’t know where you are going,”](#) par. 10-18), here quoted 296 (par. 16-17).

### 7.2.3 Does *agapē*, Love, Solidarity, Tone Down a Totalitarian Claim to Absoluteness?

How do you now deal (142) with this totalitarian claim to absoluteness in my gospel that you have stated? You

can envisage three possible ways of engaging with the Beloved Disciple on this question. One would be to search the Gospel itself for passages that in effect subvert the explicit content of the cosmological tale, or, minimally, that could be used as the innertextual starting point for a critique of theological exclusivism.

You rather do not see the love commandment in 15:12 “as a challenge or corrective to exclusivism,” since its “scope is limited” as “the distinguishing sign of the Johannine community.” In this respect, I must indeed be accused—also by Ton Veerkamp and Helmut Schütz—of a contradiction in my preaching. For in itself the commandment of *agapē*, as interpreted by my evangelist colleague Matthew (5:44), should also refer to the enemies. To this, Veerkamp<sup>150</sup> writes:

“This is my commandment: that you are in solidarity with each other.” For the group around John, which is going through a most difficult phase—the people are running away from it, 6:60 ff., they are quarreling and hereticizing each other, 1 John 2:18; 2 John 10; 3 John 9—the group’s coherence is vital. Solidarity is entirely focused on the group itself. As I said before, there is no trace of universal charity or philanthropy.

The move into sectarianism rubs off on Jesus himself: No one has greater solidarity than putting in his soul for his friends, he says, calling the disciples “friends” and no longer slaves. This should be compared with Romans 5:7 ff., where this commitment in its most extreme form—the giving of one’s life—is not for the sake of friends but for the sake of those who have gone astray! The friendship of this tiny circle with the Messiah is based on the fact that Jesus “made known to them what he had heard from his FATHER.” They are the preferred—and at first the only—addressees of this announcement. ...

Once again we draw attention to the very narrowly defined area in which solidarity is effective. We can hardly imagine it. To us, the disciples are simply the placeholders for all Christians. Since Christianity has at times been presented as congruent with the whole of humankind, solidarity among the few friends becomes a general virtue. But this makes it impossible to understand our text correctly. We have called solidarity a combat term and interpreted it analogously to the solidarity in the labor movement of the 19th and 20th centuries.<sup>151</sup> In the sectarian milieu of the Gospel of John and the Letters of John,

150 Veerkamp 2021, 310 ([The Parable of the Vine. Solidarity](#), par. 20-23).

151 In the interpretation of the First Epistle of John, Ton Veerkamp, *Weltordnung und Solidar-*

*agapē* was primarily an in-group virtue. Only when the sect broke through its isolation and John became a church text, Johannine solidarity could become politically fruitful. Admittedly, in church use, solidarity, as a Messianic virtue par excellence, became general human love and thus lost its political power. It was once coherence in the fight against the world order of death. It became the general philanthropy sauce that was poured out over the world order of death. Such moralization is foreign to John.

Ton Veerkamp<sup>152</sup> also reproaches me for overruling the central commandment of love for God by focusing the *agapē* on solidarity among people:

This inner solidarity of a political underground group seemed so urgent to John that he, the *Judean*, repealed Deuteronomy 6:5, “You shall love the NAME, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your passion.” It says, for the Rabbinical Judeans as well as for the Messianists, “Where I am going, you cannot come.” God—to whom the Messiah goes—is *inaccessible* to men. This is a basic insight of the Scriptures, “The human cannot see ME and live,” Exodus 33:20. But according to Rabbinical Judaism, “love” for God is not only a possibility but an unconditional obligation of Israel. In John there is the solidarity (“love”) of God and the Messiah with humans, but not vice versa. For humans only solidarity among themselves is possible—but then this is an unconditional obligation as well. Solidarity with (“love” for) the Messiah is to follow his commandment, we will hear this emphatically, 15:1 ff. In this way and only in this way God is *honored*. No double commandment in John.

At this point, you will certainly disagree with me as I express myself in my Gospel. If I put myself in the perspective of your 21st century, then in retrospect of the Holocaust and all the evil consequences of the totalitarian interpretation of my Gospel, I ask forgiveness for having limited Jesus’ demand of *agapē* to our own community operating underground. With all his anger at the enemies of Israel’s liberating God and their collaborators, Jesus would certainly not proclaim hatred against Jews as such. I would like to discuss with you the question of whether *agapē* could at least also be understood in the sense of solidarity against unjust conditions and not only as interpersonal charity.

#### 7.2.4 The Opposition of Absoluteness Claims Runs into the Void

Second, (144) you might try to counter my exclusivity with “an alternate macro-metaphor.”

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*ität oder Dekonstruktion christlicher Theologie. Auslegung und Kommentar* (= Texte & Kontexte 71/72 (1996)), 35ff.

152 Veerkamp 2021, 291 ([The New Commandment](#), par. 10).

Yet this approach too seems to lead nowhere. To argue for the “truth” of Judaism over against the “truth” of the Beloved Disciple’s belief in Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God strikes me as futile, for two reasons. One is that an adherence to a different exclusivity, like my rejection of belief in Jesus, is grounded not in rational judgment but in faith, tradition, and emotion. Thus logical argumentation, which presupposes the potential efficacy of logic and reason, seems an inappropriate mode of discourse on this issue. Second, as my resistant reading of the cosmological tale has shown, the taking on of an opposing exclusivism simply reverses the terms of the Beloved Disciple’s cosmological tale while reproducing its dichotomous structure. The engaged reading that I am attempting in this chapter is explicitly intended as a way of countering the rhetoric of binary opposition in which both the compliant and the resistant readings are mired.

More tempting to you seems the possibility of being able to say what you “really believe: that plurality is ‘better’ than unicity, and diversity is ‘better’ than homogeneity.”

Rather than arguing for a different exclusivity, of course, I might offer the Beloved Disciple a different worldview, macro-metaphor, or cosmological tale, in which plurality and the acceptance of difference are valued above the possession of exclusive truth. ...

I do not know whether plurality and diversity lead to salvation or eternal life, but I believe that they are a better basis for peace, harmony, and mutual understanding at least in this world, and perhaps also in the next.

However, you see problems “to argue this out with the Beloved Disciple.” You don’t want “an either/or type of discourse, a verbal tug-of-war in which one side will win and the other will lose.” (144-45)

If my main problem with the Beloved Disciple’s worldview is its exclusion of the Other, then I am challenged to engage with his cosmological tale in a way that does not similarly negate him by arguing only that his view is dangerous, wrong, or outmoded. That is, I must find an alternative approach within which I can maintain my critique of his macro-metaphor while at the same time making room for it within my own.

To meet this challenge I will focus not on the content of the cosmological tale but on its dichotomous structure and the rhetoric of binary opposition through which it is articulated. That is, I will not attempt to explain why the Beloved Disciple is wrong, but to consider why he might have framed his views in such a radically exclusivistic manner.

As (145) a “working hypothesis,” you first assume that I frame my “cosmological tale in opposition to an alternate tale” that I associate “with the Jews.”

This Jewish tale stands in diametric opposition to the Beloved Disciple's own tale, by asserting that the Jews are God's covenantal people and the Torah alone is God's word.

However, I fully disagree with this working hypothesis. To me, the Torah remains God's word, and precisely in it, I find manifold evidence that Jesus is the Messiah sent by God to initiate the liberation of all Israel (including Samaria and the Jewish Diaspora) from the yoke of the world order. *A fortiori*, God is by no means abandoning his chosen people of the Jews.

But I accuse those Jews who reject Jesus as the Messiah or—as the leading class of priests—even hand him over to the Romans in the interest of their privileges, in a similarly sharp way as in former times the prophets attacked their contemporaries in Israel and Judah for their aberration from the Torah. Here also is the reason you were looking for (144) as to why I formulate my “views in such a radically exclusivistic manner.” I wonder if we could fruitfully argue about which way might be the best to overcome the injustice and bondage still prevalent around the world, even in your time, and whether trust in Jesus the Messiah might play a role in that?

You (145) immediately abandon the working hypothesis you just considered because it, too, could be “an expression of the Disciple's rhetoric of binary opposition.” Instead, you ask yourself whether my

exclusivism is conceived not in response to an equal but opposing exclusivism but in the face of a worldview in which an exclusive theological truth is not the core value.

You want to test this “hypothesis” in view of two examples from your own time.

### 7.2.5 Christian Positions Attempting to Overcome Exclusivism from Within

Your first example (145) is the “Declaration ‘Dominus Iesus’ on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church” from September 5, 2000. I admit that the generalized reference to “the” church is a bit irritating to me, knowing that in your time, there are hundreds of different churches, all referring to Jesus and at odds with each other (which I don't understand because Jesus prayed in my Gospel for the unity of all those who trust in Him).

However, after everything I have said so far, you will already have realized that I am extremely skeptical of what the Christian churches have made of my Gospel anyway. That is to say: I simply cannot do anything with the fact that the churches have turned my Messianic message of overcoming the prevailing world order through the *agapē* of Jesus into a religion that argues with other religions about which one offers the right path to salvation for the soul. A little bit it seems to me like the dispute of the different mystery cults and Gnostic systems of my time. Shouldn't we leave it up to God to decide what will be after death?

Like the Pharisees, the Rabbinic Jews, I think God will raise the dead. But this question of the salvation of the soul, if we want to call it like this, does not depend on trust in the Messiah Jesus, but on whether one has any trust in God at all.

Certainly, it does not correspond to my idea that the souls of people go to heaven. Heaven stands for God's inaccessibility. Nor do I mean the ascending of the Messiah to the FATHER as Jesus arriving in heaven as his eternal abode; it is a metaphor for the completion of the works of the God of Israel, the overcoming of the prevailing world order, the dawning of the age to come. The death of the Messiah on the cross is a beacon of condemnation of every unjust world order and at the same time a rejection of every Messiah who tries to fight an unjust world order with the same means of violence and injustice. The raising of the Messiah, his ascending to the FATHER, shows another way, namely that the inspiration of the fidelity of the God of Israel in the form of the *agapē* is given to all those who, trusting in the Messiah, work to overcome the world order of hatred.

By formulating it in this way, I would certainly meet with as much incomprehension and rejection from many church members and their leadership as from you, albeit for different reasons. In view of your further considerations, you may be surprised that I say quite relaxed about religious salvation in the hereafter: Since I leave everything to God what comes after death, I do not attach any importance to church claims about the only true way to this salvation. Jesus is not a Savior of souls, but the Liberator of the world from the world order that weighs on it. He teaches the way of solidarity with those who live in the darkness of oppression and injustice. I admit, however, that in my days it does not even occur to me to concern myself greatly with what, for example (143), "other religious traditions" say about the "Logos," that is simply beyond my scope of vision, since, as a Jew, I address Jews and vehemently promote the recognition of Jesus as the Messiah of Israel.

So now briefly to the declaration "Dominus Iesus." Its (146) "exclusivist macro-metaphor" is indeed influenced by my Gospel, but, as just explained, by no means "virtually identical" with the trust in the unique Messiah Jesus, which I represent. As to the proclamation of the head of this Church—who, strangely enough, presumes to be called "pope" like the FATHER—"that heaven is open to all as long as they are good," I only object to the metaphor of heaven where souls go, as just explained. But the criterion of judgment also to me (5:29) is the practice of the good (*ta agatha*) or the foolish (*ta phaula*), not the belief in one religion or another.

The view of the Christian exponent "of a more inclusive theology," Paul Knitter<sup>153</sup> that (147) in your days "the uniqueness of Jesus can be found in his insistence that

153 (185, n. 38 and 39) Paul F. Knitter, "Five Theses on the Uniqueness of Jesus," in *The Uniqueness of Jesus. A Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter*, ed. Leonard Swidler and Paul Mojzes (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997), 3-16.

salvation or the Reign of God must be realized in this world through human actions of love and justice” is sympathetic to me in that it comprehends redemption not purely otherworldly and spiritually but also in political terms. From the presuppositions of thought in the Judaism of my time, I see this uniqueness founded in the unique mission of the Messiah Jesus by the God of Israel. I leave it to this God to decide in which people, movements, religions he allows his inspiration of fidelity to work at your time.

I find it interesting to deal with Walter Brueggemann<sup>154</sup> who assumes “that the Bible speaks of God in a plurality of ways” and that this fact “must reflect God’s own pluralizing character” (148):

If people are made in the image of God, then people too must be characterized by pluralities and ambiguities.

In fact, I am aware of how differently even we Messianists think about God’s will, if, for example, Matthew wants to teach the entire Torah to the nations, while Paul and Luke only demand that the *goyim* trust in the Messiah Jesus, and our group is fundamentally more skeptical about this general devotion to the peoples. That there are also discussions within our group is clearly noticeable in my Gospel. At the time we join the larger Messianic movement led by Peter, we make a point of continuing to maintain our separate identity (21:21-22).

### 7.2.6 Inner-Jewish Controversy about Pluralism and Exclusivism

In (148) the “Jewish scene” of your time, you find a “second example of the dynamic interaction between exclusive and more pluralistic macro-metaphors.” While in “1997, the ultra-Orthodox Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the United States and Canada, in Hebrew known as *Agudath HaRabonim*,”<sup>155</sup> (149) condemns the Jewish “Reform and Conservative movements” as being no “legitimate branches or denominations of Judaism,” the “Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the Synagogue arm of the Reform movement,”<sup>156</sup> bases Reform Judaism’s “legitimacy” on “the richness of our Jewish lives, the strength of our communities and synagogues, and our own deep commitment to God, Torah and Israel.” To this controversy, you state:

Here too the language is polemical. Like the Fourth Gospel, this text proceeds by vilifying the other and excluding the other groups from the purview of “true” Judaism.

154 (185, n. 41) Walter Brueggemann, “‘In the Image of God’ ... Pluralism,” *Modern Theology* 11 (1995): 455-69.

155 See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union\\_of\\_Orthodox\\_Rabbis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_of_Orthodox_Rabbis).

156 See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union\\_for\\_Reform\\_Judaism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_for_Reform_Judaism).

Without wanting to go into whether this dispute is comparable in content to our dispute between Jewish Messianist followers of Jesus and Rabbinic Jews, this example shows very clearly that even in your time there are intra-Jewish disputes carried out in the sharpest form. Why are you not able or willing to imagine that our Messianic group also sees itself as Jewish and attacks Rabbinic Judaism sharply but not for the purpose of condemning all Jews to hell?

In fact, even in our time, Judaism is “a religion that can comprehend diverse and even opposing theologies,” and already Josephus<sup>157</sup> informs his readers about different parties among the Jews, such as the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots.

Regarding the aforementioned intra-Jewish dispute (150), you further refer to Irving Greenberg<sup>158</sup> who attributes concerns about pluralism to the fact that it is “correlated with a loss of intensity of religious spirit.” He himself insists “that pluralism is grounded in the deep structures of Judaism and of religious life,” appealing, like Brueggemann, a Christian, “to the fundamental idea that humankind is created in the image of God.” To Greenberg, however, “pluralism does not mean relativism”:

Pluralism ... leaves room to say “no” to other religious faiths and moral value systems. Pluralism does not mean that there cannot be genuine disagreement and conflict between faiths. Pluralism does not rule out as legitimate the conviction that the other faith system incorporates serious errors or mistakes. Pluralism includes the possibility that some value systems and some religious systems are indeed not legitimate; therefore, they should not be validated within the framework of pluralism. ... If human life is sacred, for example, then Nazism as a faith is not legitimate [389].

Other Orthodox Jews, such as Menachem Kellner<sup>159</sup>, while (151) arguing “strongly that non-Orthodox Jews are nonetheless Jews,” reject “both pluralism and tolerance.”

### 7.2.7 Does Johannine Exclusivism Respond to a More Tolerant Judaism?

Only now it becomes clear to me that the examples given in the last two paragraphs are meant to help answer the question of whether with the exclusivism of my Gospel I am perhaps responding to what I assume to be too much tolerance within Judaism of my time. For you write (151):

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- 157 Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.1.2 to 18.1.6, where he describes the activities of the Zealot party but does not refer to it by that name.
- 158 (185, n. 50) Irving Greenberg, “Seeking the Religious Roots of Pluralism: In the Image of God and Covenant,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 34 (1997): 386.
- 159 (185, n. 55 and 56) Menachem Kellner: *Must a Jew Believe Anything?* (London: Vallentine Mitchell & Co., 1999), 110.

These examples suggest that exclusivistic rhetoric can emerge not only or not necessarily in the face of a different but similarly exclusivistic worldview, but also in response to a macro-metaphor that presents a non-exclusivistic model of the world. In the examples we have looked at, this dynamic may be described not only as a debate with the other but as a confrontation between competing versions of the same macro-metaphor. Both the Vatican document and the types of Christian views to which it is opposed accept the same set of basic beliefs and scriptures, and consider themselves to be living according to the same macro-metaphor; Orthodox Jewish theologians as well as theologians from non-Orthodox Jewish movements relate to similar texts, symbols, life cycles, and other elements of the Jewish macro-metaphor.

It is similar in my Gospel:

whereas the Beloved Disciple views Jesus as the vehicle for God's revelation and salvation, the Jews deny this view. But the Disciple's macro-metaphor has much in common with that of his opponents, insofar as it posits a single, creator God who cares about humankind, has entered into human history, provided the Torah, and anticipates a time of final salvation.

Completely to the point, you remark on this, although somewhat hidden in an annotation (185, n. 57):

That Johannine "Christianity" shares many of the same symbols and fundamental beliefs with Judaism is taken by many scholars as evidence that the conflict between them is an inner Jewish dispute.

With this, you are on the track of what my Gospel is really about. It (152) "is responding not to a diametrically opposed macro-metaphor, as one would gather from the rhetoric of the Gospel itself, but rather to another version of its own." But what version do you think that might be?

It would be anachronistic to label this other version a "more liberal" one. But our knowledge of the variety of Jewish groups and theologies in the first century suggests that insofar as there was an overall Jewish macro-metaphor, it was one that differed from that of the Beloved Disciple in that it placed less emphasis on a system of belief, beyond the fundamental adherence to monotheism and the covenantal relationship between God and Israel, than on a system of behavior. This meant that messianism and soteriology, that is, a doctrine of salvation, were not at the core of the Jewish macro-metaphor as they were for the Beloved Disciple. To put the matter more provocatively, we may entertain the possibility that the polarized conflict between Jesus and the Jews in this Gospel may in fact concern the place of messianism within the overall understanding of the covenantal relationship between God and humankind.

You've never been this close to the heart of what I am burning for. Except that you still misunderstand the soteriology of my Gospel as a salvation of souls to other-worldly heaven, whereas my concern is the liberation of Israel from bondage under the Roman world order. And in the dispute with various Jewish groups, especially Rabbinic Judaism, but also the priests, who have long since been deprived of their power by the time of my Gospel, and the Zealots, who are still active for a few decades, it is indeed about the correct understanding of Messianism and, of course, about the question of whether Jesus actually is the Messiah sent by God.

### 7.3 Engaged Reading of the Ecclesiological Tale

By a re-reading of the ecclesiological tale, you want to answer the questions just raised. I am curious as to whether this will succeed and bring both of us closer together.

#### 7.3.1 Intra-Jewish Dispute in John's Gospel about the Central Significance of Jesus' Messiahship

About the (152-53) "now-familiar version of the ecclesiological tale," you write again that in this

the conflict between the Johannine community and the Jewish community should be seen as an intra-Jewish controversy rather than a controversy between two separate religions, "Johannine Christianity" and "Judaism."<sup>160</sup> But whereas the consensus view would see the conflict between these two related groups as focused on Christology as such, that is, on the specific nature of the claims that the Beloved Disciple makes about Jesus, my hypothesis suggests that the differences between them may have concerned the role that messianism itself should play in covenantal self-definition. According to this construction, therefore, the complaint that the Beloved Disciple had against the nonbelieving Jews was {153} that while messianism was an aspect of their belief system, it was not the central component around which all else revolved.

Correct (153) is your assessment in that the main conflict in my Gospel is not solely about whether and to what extent Jesus is the Messiah. It is also about the meaning of messianism as such. However, this meaning is not seen uniformly even in the different groups with which Jesus deals in my Gospel. Most Pharisaic or Rabbinic Jews insist on their sonship with Abraham, on the One God as their Father, on the validity of the Torah of Moses, especially on "Sabbath observance," and are skeptical of any

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160 (185-86, n. 58) See, e.g., James D. G. Dunn, "Let John be John: A Gospel for Its Time," in *Das Evangelium und die Evangelien*, ed. Peter Stuhlmacher, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 28 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Siebeck], 1983), 309-39.

messianism; in any case, they see no Scriptural evidence for Jesus' Messiahship. A Pharisee like Nicodemus is open to messianic ideas, but does not dare to openly profess Jesus, nor does he fully comprehend him. Zealot circles, on the other hand, want to kidnap Jesus to make him king; Jesus' brothers, also leaning toward Zealotism, try to coerce him into public action against the Roman world order on the occasion of the Feast of Tabernacles.

Therefore, I deny that your following conclusion is true for all people from the Jewish people in my Gospel:

To be sure, the Jews had various conceptions of the Messiah: as a king (6:14), a prophet (1:21), a descendant of David (7:42), and a worker of signs (10:41). But there is nothing to suggest that these messianic views were central to their self-understanding as Jews.

The already mentioned dialogue of Justin with the Jew Trypho proves in your eyes that the Jewish "objections to Christianity stem primarily from the Christians' lack of observance of divine law." But this writing has no probative force against my Gospel in that within these few decades Christianity already begins to separate itself from Judaism as a religion in its own right by opposing Christianismos as an alternative Christian way of life to Jewish *halakha* as *loudaimos* to be rejected.

In contrast to Justin's rejection of Jewish rituals in his Dialogue with Trypho, in my Gospel it is precisely the celebration of the Jewish festivals that is central for Jesus; that he reinterprets them in a Messianic way does not mean a devaluation or even their abolition. Also, the Sabbath is not abolished, but the Messiah must do works on the Sabbath to make possible the celebration of the final Sabbath of the completion of creation. The issue of circumcision is not problematized at all in my Gospel. Nor is there any opposition between a Jewish "obedience to the commandments," on the basis of which alone one may expect "some good thing from God," and Christian "salvation," which one receives "only on the basis of faith"—see 5:29!

An example (153-54) you cite "from the Mishnah, the first codification of Jewish law, dated to the early third century," Mishnah *Sanhedrin* 10:1, emphasizes that "All Israelites have a share in the world to come," thus, according to you, it "allots salvation to all Israel and indeed would not exclude even most Christians." With this, you obviously want to prove that the exclusion of Christians or Messianists in the coinage of my Gospel did not start from the Jewish side.

Again you point out (154) the difference, which is important for you, that the central conflict in my Gospel

is not over faith or lack of faith in Jesus, but rather over the centrality of faith in a Messiah to their respective world-views, salvation schemes, and modes of religious self-definition.

In the latter case, “each side” need not “view itself as separate from the other” from the outset, rather

the Jewish community would have continued to view Johannine believers (of Jewish origin) as full members of the community as long as they continued to observe and hence to participate in the dominant ethos of the community. Beliefs in Jesus as the Messiah as such would not have excluded them. Only efforts to persuade Jews to reconstruct their own macro-metaphor in order to place messianism, and belief in Jesus, at the core would have done so.

I agree with this insofar as the crucified Messiah Jesus has indeed become the focus of our entire life, trust, and public commitment, and we have also campaigned with a vehement zeal that trust in him alone can bring about the overcoming of the Roman world order. If we had simply treated trust in Jesus as our own personal affair and nobody else’s business, we would certainly not have attracted attention as troublemakers, and no cause would have been seen for the status of the community as a permitted religion to be endangered by us.

However, you do not interpret my Messianism in this way as a call to trust in a Messiah who could be classified as a politically dangerous troublemaker, but as a missionary call, if not compulsion, to religious faith in a Messiah who guarantees the eternal salvation of the soul in heaven. You want to prove this view by looking at “the role of women” in our community.

As to (155) the story of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha in Bethany, you wonder whether my “single-minded focus on Christology and on the person and identity of Jesus may have blinded” me “to some of the implications of” my “own story,” namely,

that the binary opposition that the Beloved Disciple sees as fundamental was not in fact reproduced or present in the (hypothetical) experience and world-view of the community itself. That is, it is possible that the believers in Jesus were able to live their lives fully supported socially within the Jewish community. This would imply, on the one hand, that the Jews accepted the Bethany siblings as being part of their own community and also accepted their faith in Jesus without excluding them from the community even if the Jews themselves did not accept that faith. Conversely, the story may suggest that it was not a hardship for the Bethany siblings to live among Jews who did not accept their beliefs in Jesus.

As I said, such a scenario would be conceivable if my Messianism were actually, as you assume, the private matter of a number of religious sectarians, with no implications for the synagogue community and the polity in which these Jews live. But I am concerned precisely not with a religiously defined binary opposition of salvation and damnation in the case of belief or non-belief in Jesus, but with keeping alive Messianic political hopes for overcoming the Roman world order. While we have radical-

ly renounced Zealotism, even an *agapē* Messianism directed at a Jesus who had been executed by the Romans could be perceived as a politically dangerous provocation.

The scenario you sketch (204) allows you to speculate whether Christ-believing women like Mary and Martha may have performed “a possible missionary function that they could fulfill while remaining within their communities,” and that is also “suggested by the story of the Samaritan woman, who returned to her community after her encounter with Jesus and encouraged them to encounter Jesus for themselves.” Similarly, you even interpret in this context “the behavior of Jesus’ mother at the Cana wedding,” who “managed to orchestrate a situation in which” everyone who was present “could experience Jesus’ power in their midst.”

Alternatively, however, you also consider the possibility (155-56)

that in remaining within their communities these women did not necessarily see themselves as beleaguered and at odds with their neighbors but rather as an integral part of their communities despite their faith in Jesus as the Christ and Son of God. Although the Beloved Disciple may have emphasized Christology as the crucial element in his self-identification, it is possible that this emphasis was not shared by those who adhered to his belief system. Perhaps the faith of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus was not an obstacle to their full social relations with the nonbelievers among whom they lived. They may have been tolerated despite their beliefs in Jesus as the Christ, or perhaps their beliefs simply were not considered overly important since their identification with the Jewish community and their life within that community may have been centered on other common elements.

### 7.3.2 Identification with the Beloved Disciple as the Other

These considerations now lead you to a conclusion that surprises me (156):

The engaged reading with which I have experimented here helps me better to account for the nature of the Beloved Disciple’s polemic. In placing messianism and Christology at the core of his macro-metaphor, the Beloved Disciple was on a collision course with Judaism that would inevitably lead him to feel excluded and repudiated by those many Jews who did not similarly construct their covenantal identities.

So you interpret my alleged “insistence” on a “particular set of beliefs” as “the only way to maintain a covenantal relationship with God,” as an “otherness” that helps you “in clarifying the basis” of your “own Jewish identity” without directly addressing the “Jesus question.” You also experience this “otherness” as a permission

to identify with the Beloved Disciple as Other and as excluded. Even if I believe that he may well have excluded himself, I must still recognize that his

feelings of otherness within his social situation might be just as painful as the feelings of otherness that his Gospel creates in me.

Friendly as your offer is to identify with me in this way, I must gratefully decline it. For I neither define you as Other in the sense in which you feel I define you nor do I know myself to be rightly defined as Other in the way you define me. True, you are a Jew who does not trust in Jesus as the Messiah of Israel, and we certainly get into political disagreements arguing in my days about the ways of overcoming the Roman world order or trying to survive in a niche of Roman society. But I do not consider you personally or Judaism as such worthy of condemnation. And I do not see myself as a poor victim of Jewish opponents who do not appreciate my missionary efforts, but as a part of a solidary community of underground fighters who, trusting in Jesus, try to counteract the Roman system of oppression and violence, deceit and hatred, and who unfortunately cannot count on the support of Rabbinically oriented Jews.

Wayne Meeks'<sup>161</sup> essay *The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism*, in which you recognize a "powerful and ... convincing formulation of the otherness of the Beloved Disciple," is anything but accurate in describing my attitude. For the motif "of the descent and ascent" of the Messiah does not have a mythical function in my Gospel; rather, it refers to a variety of elements in biblical tradition, from Jacob's ladder to heaven via the exalted serpent in the wilderness through to Daniel's Son of Man. Rightly, Meeks "argues that the Fourth Gospel is the product not of a lone genius but of a community or group of communities that persisted with some consistent identity over a considerable span of time." Wrongly, however, he asserts, as you put it (157):

The Gospel, as well as the letters of John, depicts a small group of believers isolated from "the world" that belongs intrinsically to "the things below," that is, to darkness and the devil [68]. The story describes the progressive alienation of Jesus from the Jews. At the same time, those who do respond to Jesus' signs and words are drawn into intense intimacy with him and become similarly detached from the world.

This interpretation is based on the misunderstanding that our community represents an enmity towards the material world as such, as Gnosis does. No, our struggle is against the Roman world *order* and its leader, whom I call *diabolos*, adversary, in the sense of the Jewish Scriptures, and this world order is "from below" in that it is the antithesis of the liberating and equitable order of the Torah of the God of Israel.

Alienation from Rabbinic Judaism is indeed taking place, but for political reasons, as it views our Messianism as dangerous troublemaking that could compromise Judaism's status as a permitted religion. Also contributing to isolation is our provocative,

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161 (186, n. 60) Wayne Meeks, "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91 (1972): 44-72.

sectarian vocabulary; experiences of exclusion from the synagogue accelerate our “being detached from Judaism” and can lead to subversive underground living.

So Meeks is partly right in considering me “as representative of a community that gradually isolates itself.” However, he misjudges the background of this isolation for the time it occurred. Only a few decades later, when my Gospel is no longer read in Jewish-political but in Greek-salvation-historical terms by the new religion of—Gentile Christian dominated—Christianity that has emerged in the meantime, the metaphors I use are devastatingly reinterpreted in the sense of a fundamental hostility to the Jews.

#### **7.4 The Beloved Disciple: a Friend across the Boundaries of a Monomyth?**

Could the (157) “engaged reading of the Fourth Gospel” presented in this chapter help us to understand each other as friends? In my eyes, you have not understood my “deepest convictions” so far, so that I also do not know exactly to what extent “our most profound differences” assume.

The (158) “two major issues” that stand between us can be outlined by the keywords “Christology” and “exclusivity.” You cannot accept that Jesus is the Messiah, and, therefore, through a “rhetoric of binary opposition” in which you, “as someone who identifies with the Other in the Gospel narrative, have no place.”

The challenge inherent in befriending the Beloved Disciple is to find a way around the contradiction between addressing these difficult issues head-on, through confrontation, and making room for the Beloved Disciple as one to whom I am Other and who is simultaneously Other to me. The paradox lies in the fact that the very act of confrontation, that is, opposing my own views to that of the Beloved Disciple, requires me to consign the Beloved Disciple more firmly to his role of Other.

So how, you ask, can you “allow space” for me in “a less direct, less confrontational route to an engaged reading”? After all, we “do not agree on the truth and value of the gift” that I offer through my Gospel, and you remain concerned about the “dangers inherent in the polarized way in which the gift is expressed.” In your “sympathetic reading” you try “to circumvent the obstacles,” in your “involved reading” you want “to go through, behind, or within the obstacle.” But this way, too, must ultimately fail on “the issue of Christology” since

Christology is a matter of belief or lack of belief and thus is not subject to logical persuasion. What is called for, rather, is respect for the belief of the Other and the awareness that such belief may have value for others.

In the end, you arrive at the insight that my “exclusivistic worldview” leads to the fact that I myself must also feel “profoundly Other,” both to you and “to most of the world” around me.

You try to deal with this (159) by referring again to thoughts from Booth's book, *The Company We Keep*, cited earlier. He suggests, on the one hand, "that all statements of truth are partial" [344] and "blindly inherited or freshly invented mono-myths may at some moments in human history serve life better than critically appraised myths," but assumes, on the other hand, that "most of us in our time are so thoroughly entangled in rival myths that only a rigorously pluralistic ethical criticism can serve our turn." [350] From this, you meanwhile conclude

that a radical plurality such as that expressed by Booth in fact must also acknowledge the presence and the value that can be inherent in at least some mono-myths. The fact that mono-myths may be powerful and have value for those who formulate and adhere to them, however, does not in my view alleviate the danger inherent in transposing them from the conceptual, cosmological level to the real world and using them as a basis for interactions with others.

Regarding this, I want to ask two questions:

1. If I do not originally stand for a cosmological anti-Jewish monomyth at all, but an inner-Jewish, politically radical Messianism, could we then better agree, though not of course politically?
2. If the position I stand for has been transformed within a few decades into an anti-Jewish monomyth that we both reject as abhorrent, should we not dare, after two millennia, to try to unmask this altered reading as false?

## 8 Conclusion: Friendship with the Beloved Disciple

Actually (160), you have said goodbye to me after your meeting with me. And on your way home, you want to reflect once again in peace "about the words spoken and not spoken." I allow myself to accompany you also on this way. You ask:

How have we changed, or not changed? Have I indeed succeeded in befriending the Beloved Disciple?

"As a compliant reader," you "shadowed" me. In doing so, the "attraction to the promise of eternal life through faith in Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God was overshadowed by my strong discomfort with the anti-Judaism which the compliant reading seemed to require." (161) "As a resistant reader," you "gave voice to the Johannine Jews and credence to their reasons for refusing Jesus' message." In doing so, you sat with your back to me, watching me "carefully in the mirror and reversing" my "every move." In the other two readings, you encountered me as the person you are yourself "rather than through one or more of the characters" within my Gospel. (162) "As a sympathetic reader," you (213) "looked for points of commonality" with me and viewed me

as a colleague of sorts, someone different from myself in important respects, but engaged in the types of struggles with which I am familiar in my own context. ... We sat beside each other, facing the same direction, talking but not looking into each other's eyes.

"As an engaged reader," finally, you "sat across the table" and "stared directly" at me

and also allowed myself to see my own reflection in his eyes. The gaze was disconcerting, for it forced me to acknowledge, finally, that some of the differences between us will never be overcome. I will never accept his gift, and he will never accept, condone, or even understand the fact of my refusal. But the effort was not wasted, for I began to construct a different way of understanding his perspective, including those elements that are reprehensible to me. And I faced the challenge of opening up my own understanding of the world to include someone like him without at the same time abdicating my right to judge the ethos, and the ethical criteria, that he and his Gospel support.

If you read what I have written up to this point, you know by now what my response must be. It may be that you have seen your reflection in my eyes, but you have not seen me myself. What you have seen is the image that Christians have made of me and my Gospel since the 2nd century, detached from the richness of the Jewish Scriptures, detached from the political-social conflicts of the 1st century in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria.

I don't know whether a friendship could develop between us if you would perceive me as who I am, a sectarian Jew who, trusting in Jesus the Messiah, fights to overcome the Roman world order.

Nor do I know how you deal with the fact that, through the mediation of your contemporary Helmut Schütz, citing Ton Veerkamp's interpretation of my Gospel, I do not, after all, remain "fixed within" my text and respond to you "in words other than those that represent the unchanged content of the Fourth Gospel." You may consider this interpretation inappropriate and a preoccupation with it a waste of time.

I understand (163) that

all in all I do not find a strong basis upon which to attribute to the Beloved Disciple a more open, tolerant, accepting worldview than the one he explicitly espouses within the Gospel as it stands.

Nevertheless, I would like to suggest that you frame my intolerance differently—not in a condemnable cosmological-anti-Jewish setting, but in the sharp inner-Jewish dispute about the appropriate political attitude towards the Roman Empire.

Your attempt "to get behind or beyond the rhetoric of binary opposition, to construct the 'backstory,' that is, some justification in the life, experience, or attitude of

the Beloved Disciple within which his views, including his anti-Judaism, make sense” was bound to fail because you cannot (at least so far) imagine any other setting within which, say, the designation of the father of certain Jews as *diabolos* could make any sense other than a despicable demonization.

That in your eyes “our relationship nevertheless has deepened” and that you “have learned from, and enjoyed the exchange enough to want to continue,” leads me to hope that you will not only seek to explore my Gospel more thoroughly in terms of your four different readings but might also engage with the Jewish Messianic political reading of the Gospel that I lay to your heart.

Such a pursuit (164) certainly touches on the “question of the place” that a Johannine community might have occupied “within the context of late first-century Diaspora Judaism” and on (164-65)

the broader issues that are of concern to the study of early Judaism and early Christianity and to Jewish-Christian dialogue more generally. In particular, they pertain directly to our understanding of the “parting of the ways,” the process by which Judaism and Christianity became separate religions, and to the ways in which scholars are currently rethinking the historical relationship between Christianity and Judaism.<sup>162</sup>

Decisive for the understanding of my Gospel is certainly whether one locates its origin already beyond the fork in the road of this separation, as you seem to do, or whether it was composed as inner-Jewish Messianic writing and acquired a completely different meaning after Christianity branched off from the Jewish path.

Definitely, you are correct in not wanting to reconstruct my “hypothetical Johannine community” as a Christian church community yet. It does not have “solid walls, ... wooden pews, stained glass windows, and a bell tower,” but is rather to be understood as a group of Messianic activists who prefer to gather in a synagogue, or, if that is impossible, underground behind locked doors (20:19, 26).

By approaching (166) my Gospel as a Jewish woman, you see yourself

fundamentally as an outsider, as a reader for whom the text is neither sacred nor authoritative. I can take it or leave it; I do not base my life upon it nor do I participate in a religious community for which it has authority.

It would be more difficult for you to read, for example, “the biblical ‘Texts of Terror’<sup>163</sup> in which women are silenced, victimized, raped, and sacrificed, as a compli-

162 (186, Conclusion, n. 1) Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999).

163 (186, n. 2) This term is used by Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

ant, resisting, sympathetic, or engaged reader,” since these belong to your own Jewish tradition and

any negative ethical judgments of certain stories or passages will cause me to reevaluate their authoritative nature for me personally and also might lead me into controversy with my own community in which such reevaluation has not yet taken place.

However, I am convinced that Christians of your time will also benefit from dealing with your criticism of my Gospel, precisely because its anti-Jewish reading, which has prevailed since the 2nd century, does not correspond at all to the *agapē* proclaimed by Jesus. Whether it is easier for these Christian readers to say goodbye to such a reading by engaging in the Jewish-Messianic reading that I originally intended, I must leave to each and every one of them to decide for themselves. It is my wish that Jesus is finally understood from the Jewish Scriptures instead of considering a so-called Old Testament from Jesus as obsolete and disinheriting Judaism as the people of God.

On the last page of your book (167), you “admit that in the final analysis, I have not succeeded fully in befriending the Beloved Disciple.” But you end your text with the sentence:

Despite the gap in worldview and in ethical sensibilities, I look forward to future meetings with the Beloved Disciple, and to ongoing conversation.

I am eager to see if you are willing to read my text and engage in conversation with me.

With respectful esteem

The disciple with whom Jesus was friends