

**Between Jew and Hellene:
The Emerging Christian Community of the Gospel of John**

TERMS

Christology--the study of various perspectives on the enduring significance of the person and work of Jesus (Powell 169). There are two kinds of christology, "low" and "high." "Low" refers to the use of Hebrew bible or intertestamental terms applied to Jesus, such as Messiah, prophet, servant, Son of man. None of these titles imply divinity. "High" christology is an understanding of Jesus as divine, as in such titles as Lord and Son of God.

docetism--the belief, ultimately deemed a heresy, that Jesus only seemed to have a human body and to suffer and die on the cross

eschatological--pertaining to the end time. In Christianity, that time will be marked by Jesus's return as judge

eucharist--the ritual Christian meal involving bread and wine, instituted by Jesus the night before his death (Powell 170)

gnosticism--another ultimately heretical belief; gnostics believed that matter is evil and that salvation comes through esoteric knowledge

incarnation--the Christian doctrine that God became a human being in the person of Jesus (Powell 171)

Logos--Greek for "word" (see the prologue to John)

parousia--a Greek technical term for the expected visit of a high official; in Christian terms, it means the expectation of the imminent return of Jesus as the Son of Man

Q = Quelle (German for source); refers to a set of sayings and stories of Jesus that perhaps were used by Matthew and Luke

synoptic--from "synoptikos," meaning "seeing the whole together." This refers to the Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke since they can be directly compared.

DATES

29-33	Crucifixion of Christ
46-48	Paul's first missionary journey
50	Q source circulates in Galilee
57	Paul's letter to the Romans
59-60	Paul's journey to Rome
70	The destruction of the Temple; context for <i>Pirke Avot</i>
80-90	The Gospel of Matthew
81-100	Book of Revelation
85-115	The Acts of the Apostles (Luke)
90-100	The Gospel of John

OUTLINE

I. Groups within the Jesus movement / early Christianity (adapted from Perrin)

A. The Palestinian Jewish Jesus movement

They shared with the Jews an emphasis on Torah and Law, the conviction that they were an occupied people under the Romans, and that this condition would only end with the intervention of a Messiah. They differed from the Jews in believing that Jesus was the Messiah, that he fulfilled law and prophecy, and that in rising from the dead, his spirit continued to guide the community. Text: the Q source.

B. The Hellenistic Jewish Mission

Found in Diaspora areas as well as in Palestine. They emphasize a “high” Christology, i.e., they see Jesus not just as a human Messiah but as a divine being. Texts: Acts and Paul’s letters

C. Gentiles and the Jesus movement

They emphasized Jesus as a divine figure who undergoes initiation, sacrifice and spiritual immortality. Texts stress philosophical type instruction rather than the sayings and stories of Jesus. Text: Paul’s letter to the Romans has elements of this model as does the gospel of John. You may want to compare this model to the figure of Lucius in Apuleius’s *The Golden Ass*.

D. The Jesus movement after the Destruction of the Temple

The destruction of the temple renewed apocalyptic expectations, expectations that became increasingly problematic when the world didn’t end and Jesus did not return in judgment. The problem of the so-called “delayed parousia” was solved differently by each of these overlapping communities.

E. The Johannine community— see below.

II. Authorship of the Gospel of John

III. History of the Johannine Community (see Brown)

A. **Phase One:** Origins (mid-50s to late 80s)

1. Originating group--traditional Palestinian Jews, including followers of John the Baptist who see Jesus as a Davidic Messiah
2. Second Group--Anti-temple Jews, including Samaritans, who understood Jesus as a second Moses. This group joins the first group and acts as a catalyst for the development of a "high" christology. Jews accuse the Johannine Christians of making Jesus into a second God and have them expelled from the synagogues. As compensation for their expulsion, the community emphasizes a realized eschatology.

3. Inclusion of Gentiles within the community

B. **Phase Two:** Gospel (ca. 90-100)

Community may have moved from Palestine to Diaspora to teach the Greeks. Emphasis on universality as well as a continued fight against the Jews and others who rejected their teaching. Community is defined by Jesus' commandment to love one another.

C. Later Phases (second and third centuries)

Further fractures in the Johannine community give rise to differences in understanding that lead some to embrace views ultimately considered heretical like gnosticism and docetism while others accepted an assimilation into the church hierarchy which embraced John's emphasis on incarnation.

IV. John and the Synoptic Gospels (taken from Powell 113)

A. Examples of material unique to John

Miracle at Cana (water into wine), 2:1-12
 Conversations with Nicodemus, 3:1-21
 Samaritan Woman at the Well, 4:7-26
 Healing of Man at Pool of Beth-zatha, 5:1-18
 Raising of Lazarus, 11:1-44
 Washing the Disciples' Feet, 13:1-20
 The "High Priestly" Prayer, 17:1-26
 Resurrection Appearance to "Doubting Thomas"

B. Examples of material absent from John

No stories of Jesus' birth, baptism or temptation
 No transfiguration
 No parables
 No exorcisms
 No predictions of Jerusalem's downfall
 No references to repentance
 No institution of the Eucharist
 No references to a parousia

C. Examples of material notably different in John from the Synoptics

References to three Passovers indicates ministry lasts three years, 2:13; 6:4; 11:55
 Jesus' ministry overlaps with that of John the Baptist, 3:22-24; Mark 1:14
 Anointing at Bethany is by Mary, sister of Martha, 12:1-8; Mark 14:3-9

V. The Structure of John (taken from Perrin)

- A. Introduction: Prologue and Testimony, 1:1-51
- B. The Book of Signs, 2:1-12:50
- C. Farewell Discourses and Prayer for the Church, 13:1-17:26
- D. Passion Narrative, 18:1-20:30
- E. Epilogue: The Appearance in Galilee, 21:1-25

VI. The distinctive features of John's theology

- A. Jesus is both human and divine.
- B. Christ is the Word Incarnate, i.e., the Word or God made flesh.
- C. Realized eschatology (the future is now).
- D. Jesus is the Paraclete (Greek for "the one called beside"; usually translated as counselor, advocate or helper).

Suggests that the risen Christ "is spiritually present to the believer as that believer wrestles with the problems of Christian existence in the world" (Perrin 243). See John 15:1-16:15.

E. Community is based on the commandment to love one another.

Selected Bibliography

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