"GENDER AND DISCIPLESHIP IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH"

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER

1. INTRODUCTION

2. OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH 13
   2.1 Literary Criticism and the Gospel of John 22
   2.2 Works on Characterization in John 26
   2.3 Studies on the Women of John 28
   2.4 Modern Research on Gender and the Hemispheres of the Brain 32
   2.5 Bilateral Asymmetry and the Gospel of John 37

   3.1 Defining the murmurers 51
   3.2 “He knew what was in a man” 58
   3.3 John’s male figures 73
   3.3.1 Nicodemus 84
   3.3.2 Peter 88
   3.3.3 Pilate 92
   3.3.4 Judas Iscariot 94
   3.3.5 The Disciples in General 96

4. JOHN’S FEMALE CHARACTERS OF LIGHT 110
   4.1 Mary the Mother of Jesus 112
   4.2 The Samaritan Woman 118
   4.3 Martha 126
   4.4 Mary of Bethany 131
   4.5 Mary Magdalene 136
   4.6 The Woman Taken in Adultery 141

5. THE STRATEGIC CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN TO JOHN’S MAJOR THEMES 150
   5.1 Women and Issues of Marginality and Antisociety 151
   5.2 The Primary Issue of Response to Jesus 164
   5.2.1 Responding to Jesus with Genuine Faith 165
   5.2.2 Responding to Jesus by Worship 167
   5.2.3 Responding to Jesus by Knowing the Hour, Experiencing Revelation and being Open to the Holy Spirit 179
   5.2.4 Responding to Jesus by Creating Community 181
   5.2.5 Responding to Jesus by Abiding 182
   5.2.6 Responding to Jesus in Love 183
   5.3 Implications for Women in Ministry 185

6. CONCLUSION 191
BIBLIOGRAPHY 209
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The question of the difference between the male and female figures of the Fourth Gospel lies behind this dissertation. Why does the author give such surprising prominence to his women? Why is it that rather than Peter emerging as the chief apostle, as in the synoptic gospels, with the paramount expression of faith, here Martha verbalizes the fullest expression of the faith of the early Christian community? Why is Mary Magdalene the primary witness to, and herald of the resurrection? What has become of the Peter of Luke’s gospel, running to the tomb, “bending over” in a unique curiosity and going away “wondering to himself what had happened” (24:12) or the two male disciples on the Emmaus road? (24:12-35). Is Mary of Bethany not John’s most identifiable model of true discipleship? Such questions address the problem of the author’s purpose: why is it that, as Robert Kysar says, the Fourth Gospel “honors female characters with major roles in the narrative”?1

Such honor does not come without raising a number of perplexing questions. Certainly the women of the synoptic gospels are treated with dignity by Jesus in all their afflictions, even in the face of male opposition (Lk 13:10-17), evoking his compassion and eliciting his response. They exercise uncommon faith in the incarnation narratives (Lk 1:38-45), by reaching out to touch Jesus’ robe (Mt 9:21) or enduring a rather rude rebuff (Mk 7:28). The synoptic records elevate the position of women in Jesus’ teaching on divorce (Mk 10) or in the parables (Lk 18). Indeed, women may demonstrate an uncommon level of devotion in the synoptics, by giving out of extreme poverty “all she
had to live on” (Mk 12:44) or anointing Jesus with expensive perfume in such an act of devotion as to be “told in memory of her … wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world” (Mk 14:9) or by sitting at Jesus’ feet in contemplative devotion while others are busy with service (Lk 10:42). In Luke, women stand by the cross (Lk 23:49) and wail on the via dolorosa (Lk 23:27). True, a Marcan woman is capable of such extreme wickedness as to ask for the head of John the Baptist on a platter (Mk 6:24), but on the whole, the synoptics treat women favorably.

The difference between them and the Fourth Gospel lies in their “major roles” in John. Here women interact with Jesus in profound dialogue, each producing a deeper understanding of who Jesus is, a more profound revelation of his person and mission. The synoptics bestow upon women no such roles. Apart from the Magnificat of Mary in the first chapter of Luke, the voice of women in the synoptics is largely silenced.

In my view, scholarship has not exhausted the significance of this “feminine edge” in John. While it is argued that behind the Fourth Gospel is a community of faith which is characterized by mutuality, one in which women were able to exercise influence, one in which converts would be encouraged by a depiction of Jesus’ concern for the marginalized, what has not been explored at sufficient length is the more basic textual matter of response to Jesus. If, as Kysar and literary critics maintain, John's characters “remain undeveloped in order to keep attention focused on Jesus,” and basically “share a single function,” each representing “a kind of response to Jesus,” the response of these women would seem to merit more attention than it has received. I suggest that it is precisely here that the women of John leave their male counterparts behind. In terms of the Prologue, these women “believe, receive and become.”
Looking at these women individually, we see true discipleship modeled: holding out for a revelation of Jesus' "glory" even against her son's rebuff (Mary the Mother); abandoning a water jar on the spot and running off in a spontaneous outburst of witness (the Samaritan woman); creating by her silent act of anointing, in the face of a male rebuke, a sacred space, a holy place of worship, as though to confirm that "the time ... has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth" (4:23), that as Marianne Thompson says, "John presents Jesus as the indestructible eschatological temple"^4 (Mary of Bethany); creating the setting for the climactic, death-defying sign by her tenacious faith and confession (Martha); lingering, clinging, standing by the tomb like a forsaken lover, and receiving in return the supreme revelation of the risen Jesus (Mary Magdalene) – all of John’s women create special effects by the strength of their response to Jesus. And they elicit the primary revelations of the Gospel. Indeed, it is not too much to say that "they pop up at all the crucial places ... their discipleship is central to the Jesus story" and that they are "models of faith."^5

If one were to look at them as characters in a drama, they would be seen as richly nuanced, rather than as stock characters or mere representative types. These women advance the story as no male characters do. They are able to verbalize the struggle of faith in a context of skepticism. This enables them to draw out new levels of meaning and insight as the story unfolds. Their devotion to Jesus seems of a higher order. They tarry when others leave. They leave open the possibility of a "sign" when others seem to close that door. They are interactive and spontaneous while their male counterparts are terse and guarded. As they confess what faith they have, they are led to new dimensions of faith. They are willing to transgress accepted social norms in order to achieve a
higher, spiritual end -- and here they always find in Jesus a kindred spirit. All of the
above makes John's women crucial to our understanding of the Fourth Gospel. Remove
the strength of their response to Jesus, and we are left without the fullest expressions of
discipleship.

The question which calls for further research is, what is it about women
specifically that makes the response of these women so much superior? Is there
something about the female gender itself that is essential in a full discipleship?

I suggest that the author of John wants to make two major points. First, it seems
the Evangelist is intent on pointing out that a full response to Jesus, true discipleship, is
only possible to those who approach him with the openness and responsiveness of these
women, that true genuine faith, a major concern in John, must be at least "whole brain,"
to use modern terminology, involving both male and female qualities, and will certainly
not flourish without female responsiveness. Moreover, what John puts before the reader
is a comprehensive model of discipleship. His women point the way when it comes to a
proper response to Jesus. When it comes to true worship, knowing the "hour",
experiencing revelation, being open to the Holy Spirit, creating community, "abiding" --
it is clear that the truly "beloved disciple" is "whole brain" in John -- and is best
understood by a study of the Gospel's female characters. What makes this model so
comprehensive is the fact that the responses to Jesus depicted here are not one-sided.
Rather, they are more rounded, more all-inclusive, more integrated. It seems that the
author wants to convey the message that the female responses to Jesus are on target
because they are not one-sided.
Secondly, I will suggest that their inferior status in the ancient world placed women in a unique position to convey the Evangelist’s concern with marginality. If the Johannine community is seen as severely marginalized by its exclusion from the synagogue and established religious systems, a point around which there is much scholarly consensus, one may see in John's female characters symbols of that community. Though disparaged and marginalized by the religious establishment, they have an alacrity of faith which puts others to shame. It is as though John is saying, "Here is true discipleship! This is the true community!" They are open to the Spirit. They "seek" the Lord wholeheartedly. They share their faith. They are blessed by the Lord.

The uniqueness of the approach taken here is as follows: I wish to make some use of the findings of modern brain research and apply them to the discussion of gender in John. Such an interdisciplinary approach to the Fourth Gospel has not been attempted before. And it seems to shed considerable light on the male/female tensions in the Gospel. I believe this is an original contribution to Johannine research. And it is one which brings a fresh perspective to the gender issues in John. To me, it is helpful to allow the Left Brain/Right Brain asymmetry of contemporary research to inform, in a new way, the essential differences between the genders in John. Ultimately, I suggest, this kind of innovative, interdisciplinary research can illumine the nature of faith – which may be the major concern of the Fourth Gospel. If it is evident that feminine qualities are part of John's component, it must be of help to be able to define these qualities more fully with the help of modern research: that women tend to put relationships over theories, for example, and have great interest in metaphors and conversation. On the other hand, if there are aspects of the male psyche which inhibit faith, things like rootedness in "what
has worked before", something very evident in John's Jews, I will argue that modern research provides a means to help us identify these as impediments to genuine faith. It is the application of such modern discoveries in the area of gender research that makes the approach undertaken here unique.

Both male and female characters will be examined with respect to their functions in the narrative itself as well as they way they define one another. The study will use a literary critical approach, with an emphasis on characterization. On the primary level, my aim is to study men and women in the Fourth Gospel with the specific goal of understanding the significance of gender identity in Johannine characterization. Thus, on this level, this study aspires to further the work of literary criticism of the Gospels, incorporating gender issues as part of such analysis.

On the broader scope, the manuscript proposes to address the why questions: why does the author give such prominence to his female characters? What is there about their response to Jesus that gives them an edge in the area of faith? Beyond faith, do these women in fact have roles that suggest apostolicity and primary ecclesiastical functions? How does this relate to the community's interest in marginality? Does this not suggest that the marginalized, as in the members of the Johannine community, are somehow especially equipped to respond to Jesus correctly? Here I will make use of social-scientific criticism and reflect upon John's characters within the context of what we know of this primitive community, following the track proposed by Vernon K Robbins of bringing literary criticism and the social sciences together. Further, is there something about maleness, beyond Judaism, which is seen to inhibit response to the Gospel? Why
are the traditional "heroes" of the Synoptics eclipsed by women in John? Is the Beloved Disciple in fact one who incorporates both male and female responses?

The dissertation will proceed as follows. Chapter two will provide the necessary background for the project, situating the study within 20th Century Johannine scholarship, the works which have as their subject women in the Fourth Gospel, and literary critical analysis of the Gospel. The importance of literary criticism to this study will be stressed, in that its development alerted us to literary techniques, characterization and the way in which narrative functions. Such studies provide a necessary background to my own treatment of the topic. Looking at characters as a literary feature, I will discuss techniques of characterization that are particular to biblical texts. R. Alan Culpepper and Robert Alter will contribute their discussions of the subtle means by which the biblical writers adumbrate their characters and how gender can function in character analysis.

The importance of an overview of recent scholarship in this area lies in the fact that (1) the prominence of the women of John has been a subject of interest and considerable helpful commentary in Johannine studies, much of which will inform my discussion; and (2) gender will be seen not to function as simply a given for the author of the Fourth Gospel, but as a deliberate component of Johannine characterization; and (3) an overview of twentieth-century research on the hemispheres of the brain justifies its use here, as it indicates how much such studies have contributed to our growing understanding of male and female.

Chapter three provides the "male backdrop" for the study. Here the identity of "the Jews" will be examined, particularly with reference to their unrelenting contentiousness -- an aspect not often considered in descriptions of them. It will be
argued that this backdrop of male grumbling provides a necessary foil for the winsome
discipleship of John's women. It will be observed that the disciples, as Raymond E.
Brown understates in *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, “do not seem to embody
the fullness of Christian perception.”\(^7\) Also, we shall examine several male characters
individually in this chapter, looking for exceptions to the general pattern of dullness and
unbelief.

Chapter four provides a contrast with John's male obduracy. Here his five female
“characters of light” will be considered in five different scenes. My goal will be an
analysis of these characters on several levels: immediate functions; how they contribute
to meaning in the narrative as a whole; how they appear in relation to other characters; in
what ways the individual characters are related to other systems of meaning; any patterns
evident in the presentation of these characters which may shed light on gender categories
in John; and how these characters are informed and illuminated by modern gender
research into theories of moral development and the hemispheres of the brain. The
disputed passage on the woman taken in adultery will be seen to contribute to issues of
gender in John, perhaps indicating that in a later era than the Johannine, patriarchal
attitudes toward women had not changed much.

Chapter five will summarize the investigation and draw conclusions related to the
major themes and concerns in John. It will suggest that true discipleship in this context
cannot happen without the qualities depicted by John's women. They are his vehicle to
deal with issues of marginalization. By their actions, they demonstrate a whole range of
responses to Jesus which might be defined as paradigmatic discipleship. Seen together,
they make a statement about leadership issues in John’s community of faith.
Chapter six will conclude by stating that the two major gender-related points which we observe in John's Gospel are in fact borne out: (1) that full, "whole brain" discipleship is in fact modeled by the female characters; and (2) that these women seem to function as symbols of the Johannine community, expressing a vital faith in the midst of marginalization. Some suggestions for further study will be put forward, along the lines of redressing imbalance between male and female in church leadership and an expanded understanding of the concept of faith in John.

3 Kysar, John the Maverick Gospel, 149.
5 Kysar, John the Maverick Gospel, 148-149.
7 Raymond E. Brown, The Community of the Beloved Disciple (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1979) 84. For Brown, the primary contrast is between the disciples in general, with Peter as their spokesman, and the Beloved Disciple, a contrast he sees carrying over into the Apostolic Churches toward the end of the first century and the more enlightened community of John. “Simon Peter denies that he is a disciple of Jesus... a particularly serious denial granted the Johannine emphasis on discipleship as the primary Christian category; and so he needs to be rehabilitated by Jesus who three times asks whether Peter loves him.... No such rehabilitation is necessary and no such questioning is even conceivable in the case of the Disciple par excellence, the Disciple whom Jesus loved. Closer to Jesus both in life ... and in death... the Beloved Disciple sees the significance of the garments left behind in the empty tomb when Peter does not...; he also recognizes the risen Jesus when Peter does not.... The Johannine Christians, represented by the Beloved Disciple, clearly regard themselves as closer to Jesus and more perceptive than the Christians of the Apostolic Churches.”
CHAPTER 2
OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH

At this point an overview of recent scholarship in the areas related to our theme is called for. Here we recognize that (1) social scientific research into the Johannine community greatly informs our understanding of the Fourth Gospel. Also, (2) the prominence of the women of John has been a subject of interest and considerable helpful commentary in Johannine studies, and this will inform my discussion; and (3) gender will be seen not to function as simply a given for the author of the Fourth Gospel, but as a deliberate component of Johannine characterization; and (4) an overview of twentieth-century research on the hemispheres of the brain indicates how much such studies have contributed to our growing understanding of male and female. This expanding body of information is an important part of my argument.

A brief review of issues at the top of Johannine research in twentieth century begins with the emergence of interest in the Johannine community over past 3 decades. Much of this stems from the work of Rudolph Bultmann who proposed a coherent solution to nineteenth century discussions on the authenticity and integrity of the text with his interest in the history of religion behind the Gospel. His careful source critical work, combined with an often astute theological interpretation combine to make his study on John a kind of watershed. He puts forward four distinct sources at the disposal of the evangelist as the Gospel was crafted: a "semeia" source, a collection of revelation discourses originating within pre-Christian Gnostic community; passion and resurrection
stories; and some additional synoptic-like traditions. At a later stage, Bultmann posits an ecclesiastical redaction to align it with Christian orthodoxy. Thus, according to Bultmann, the evangelist interpreted and even demythologized the sources as he wove them into his unique version of the Jesus story. The original form of the Gospel was unaccountably lost, but it has been the object of at least two serious efforts at restoration. The first was undertaken, according to Bultmann, by the ecclesiastical redactor, but with only limited success. The second was the work of Bultmann himself, who in a real sense created the text he was commenting on. His reconstruction entailed both large-scale and miniscule rearrangements of the traditional text as well as the elimination of some passages deemed the creation of the redactor. D. Moody Smith, who helps make Bultmann accessible in his Composition and Order of the Fourth Gospel: Bultmann's Literary Theory says,

that Bultmann never offers an explanation for the destruction or, indeed, the defective restoration of the text is a deficiency in his work. I have come to question the significance of such a historically based criticism given Bultmann's hermeneutic. The text stimulates the interpreter, but the interpreter with the proper Vorverstandnis then understands better than the (author of the) text what the text is about. Why should the interpreter not then improve upon the text -- within the resources provided by the text -- to bring its Sache to clear expression?... Such a procedure is the logical extension of his hermeneutical program.²

While the inevitable challenges followed, especially to his "pre-Christian gnostic redeemer myth" behind the discourses, Bultmann's ideas remain the starting point for much twentieth century discourse about the composition of John.

One theory of composition which has drawn much attention is Bultmann's "primitive signs source." In the seventies Robert Fortna, W. Nicol and W. Teeple each built on this theory to identify other sources. More skepticism about Bultmann's theories
followed from Raymond Brown and B. Lindars, who opted for more of a developmental theory of composition.

Also, Bultmann's assessment of the history of religion behind John has brought much debate, especially his view that Johannine Christology actually influenced 2nd Century gnostic thought. These days, scholars are more interested in stressing the Jewish background of the Gospel, though a highly syncretistic Judaism.

The Gospel's links to gnosticism were considerably expanded by Bultmann's student Ernst Kasemann in The Testament of Jesus. As Marianne Meye Thompson puts it,

whereas Bultmann takes as the theme of John's Gospel "the word became flesh" (1:14a) Kasemann locates the substance of the Gospel's witness in the subsequent confession, "and we beheld his glory" (1:14b). Whereas Bultmann stresses the sheer humanity of the Revealer, Kasemann stresses the Revealer's glory -- that is, his divinity -- supremely attested in the church's confession of the Word as God.... On the one hand, then, Bultmann speaks of seeing the divine glory in the man Jesus; the presence of God's glory in no way effaces Jesus' very real humanity. On the other hand, Kasemann concludes that the Johannine Christology of glory verges on the brink of Docetism and the denial of Jesus' true humanity.

Kasemann's study brought forward a strong challenge to Bultmann on the essential shape of Johannine theology, especially as it relates to Christology and the Gospel's connection with Gnosticism. He seems the first to argue that the Gospel's uniqueness is an indication of a Christian community whose views diverged from "orthodox Christology. According to him, behind the Fourth Gospel is a "conventicle" exhibiting a "naive doceticism" in its conception of Jesus.

Scholarly work on Jewish background and composition history, raised concerns about historical setting. Here, the influence of J. Louis Martin's History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel was large. Martyn provided the first redaction critical study of the
Fourth Gospel with emphasis on the community of John. He concentrates on stories of conflict in chapters 5, 7, and 9, attempts to separate tradition from redaction, and seeks to identify both the historical situation of the Johannine church and the theology guiding the community. Miracles for Martyn are an einmalige event in life of Jesus, but also reflections of events occurring in life of Johannine church. Thus, the healing of the man born blind and his subsequent expulsion from the synagogue relates to the formal historical banning of Jewish Christians from the synagogue and the ostracizing of the members of the Johannine church. Martyn's work offers a plausible and widely-accepted explanation for the Jewish-Christian tensions in John. And his approach to the distinctiveness of John is one which many subsequent studies of the gospel have found helpful:

One thing, at least, is shared by all New Testament authors ...: none of them merely repeats the tradition. Everyone hears it in his own present and that means in his own way; everyone shapes it, bends it, makes selections from among its riches, even adds to it. Put in other terms, everyone reverences the tradition enough to make it his own.³

Martyn's enduring influence remains in the area of Jewish-Christian conflict in John. The recent work of Jerome S. Neyrey, Ideology of Revolt: John's Christology in Social Science Persepective builds on Martyn's portrayal of the tensions in the Gospel.⁶ And it is Martyn's analysis that enables Wayne A. Meeks to assert:

the rupture between the followers of Jesus and "the Jews" is at the center of attention. It has manifestly shaped the Johannine groups' language and their perception of the world. These features of the Johannine universe have become so widely recognized in recent scholarship that there is no need ... to rehearse the evidence.⁷

The present manuscript will work with an understanding of the Johannine Community along the lines described by Raymond E. Brown, in The Community of The
Beloved Disciple and C. K. Barrett in his noted commentary. Brown shows much
dependence upon Martyn for his methodology, and his views that John must be "read on
several levels." His Anchor Bible Commentary on John suggests that the Gospel was
written after and as a response to the expulsion from the synagogue, brought about by the
publication of the Twelfth Benedicitation of the shemoneh Esre. Brown proposes a four
phase rendering of the history of the Johannine community: the pre-Gospel era; the life
situation at the time the Gospel was written; the life situation of the divided communities
when the Johannine epistles were written; the dissolution of the two Johannine groups
after the epistles were written.

Similarly, in his original commentary on John, long regarded as the standard
English-language commentary on the Greek Text, C. K. Barrett points to a link between
the Birkath ha-Minim and the Gospel, an understanding of origins which he expands on
in his second edition. Like Martyn, Barrett maintains that the Gospel originated out of
the synagogue wrangle between Christ-confessors and other Jews. While subscribing to
a "moral certainty" that John was not written by John the son of Zebedee, Barrett leaves
open the possibility that John was written out of a familiarity with Mark (ca 70AD), in
which case a date of composition between 80 and 90 AD would seem likely. Yet Barrett
builds on the fact that "John seems to envisage circumstances in which Jewish Christians
were 'put out of the synagogue' (9:22; 16:2)." In that we are able to give the date at
which the well-known test to exclude heretics was introduced into the Synagogue service
by rabbi Simeon the Less (at about AD 85-90), a date for John somewhere between AD
90 and 110 would work well.
Robert Fortna, Martyn's student at Union Theological Seminary followed with his own source-critical analysis of the Fourth Gospel. The Gospel of Signs in the Martyn-Fortna thesis becomes the evangelistic tract that formed the basis of the missionary efforts by believing Jews in synagogues. Fortna's work expands Martyn's by showing how the narrative content of John, as well as the signs, is linked to the synagogue controversy. Fortna's debt to Martyn is stated in his more recent work:

I find highly persuasive the detailed reconstruction of Martyn in his History and Theology, in particular his proposal that the expulsion of the Evangelist's Christian community from the synagogue has occasioned many of the differences between source and extant gospel.  

Such scholars represent the dominant movement within Johannine studies in recent years. The search for the historical community of John continued into the late twentieth century. In 1975 R. Alan Culpepper states, "Today most scholars are convinced that John was written in and for a definite community.... One of the cutting edges of Johannine research is to learn more about this community." On a similar note, David Rensberger devotes the opening chapter of Johannine Faith and Liberating Community to the change in modern perceptions about John, from a "spiritual Gospel" which coalesces around the dominant ideas of the evangelist, to the concept of John as a socially and historically determined work which calls for social analysis: "We have barely begun to realize what the awareness of John's communal setting may mean for our understanding and appropriation of Johannine theology." Rensberger makes use of Bryan R. Wilson's Magic and the Millennium: A sociological Study of Religious Movements of Protest Among Tribal and Third-World Peoples to support the view that "it is the attitude toward Judaism and the outside world as a whole that seems most sectarian in John's
gospel." Is Johannine Christianity built along lines of an "introversionist" sect which sees the world as utterly and irredeemably evil, where the members separate themselves from it in an act of renunciation, the community itself becoming the centre of all salvation and all that is good? Rensberger seems right in rejecting such an "introversionist" model for the "revolutionist" and "conversionist" model. Here, there is still the element of separation and withdrawal from the world, but the group is conversionist, looking for public witness from its members in bearing witness to "the truth" and expecting new recruits. Rensberger notes the parallels between such sects and the apocalyptic forms of Judaism which provided part of the cultural-religious setting of John. That John's gospel connects with such sectarianism is seen in the fact that it offers both "the promise of a change in external reality at some future time" and "the prospect of the individual's transfer to another sphere." Along similar lines, Wayne A. Meeks designates the distinctive Johannine community as a sect, with "a sectarian consciousness, a sense of exclusiveness, a sharp delineation of the community from the world," an approach that has gained support from research on the similarities between the sectarian Qumran material and the Johannine tradition.

Of course, some reject much of this pursuit of a Johannine community as speculative and unwarranted. Mark Stibbe contends that social-scientific criticism of the gospels tends to infer too much from little evidence. Similarly, Thomas Brodie begins his "literary and theological commentary" on John with the caution:

It may seem at first that the gospels and epistles provide ample material for writing a social history, but that is debatable. If a text is primarily theological or rhetorical, then it is not easy to use it as a basis for reconstructing social conditions. The present-day endeavor to write the social history of the early church is a variation on the nineteenth century endeavor to write a life of Jesus,
and it may end the same way -- with a realization that the key documents are not adequate for the task.\textsuperscript{17}

Brodie articulates the two main objections to social-scientific criticism of the New Testament: first, it is argued that the socio-economic evidence about New Testament communities is far too thin to form the basis for any sustainable sociological analysis. And second, it is faulty methodology to apply theories developed through studying late nineteenth- and twentieth-century industrial societies to communities that existed nearly two thousand years ago.

Perhaps a good response to such objections, and one which will govern much of the approach taken in the present manuscript, is expressed by Robin Gill in his introduction to \textit{Theology and Sociology}:

If it is still objected that the socio-economic evidence is never going to be complete and that, as a result, the scholar will never be sure that modern sociological theories are entirely appropriate, it can be responded that certainty is not a feature of any other area of biblical research. The scholar will have to make some imaginative assumptions.\textsuperscript{18}

Indeed, Bruce Malina seems entirely right in his insistence on the ongoing quest for the Johannine community if New Testament interpretation is to present a fully rounded picture. Assessing the work of Bultmann and his successors, Malina says,

While these scholars came up with some fine insights, most often their assessment of the social situations available to early Jesus Messiahists mirrored the situation of the modern church and its concerns rather than situations and concerns of the first-century Mediterranean society. Consequently, if we seek to understand what John's Gospel meant to its original audiences, our question should be: What sort of situation and what set of concerns might adequately explain the scenes presented in the ... Gospel of John?\textsuperscript{19}

Malina makes a daring leap and draws from modern sociological studies on prison populations, the underworld, and street gangs, to fashion an "alternate reality" set up by
the alienated members of John's group. These were early Christians who used
"anti-language" to "resocialize" their members, according to Malina:

We insist that meanings realized through documents inevitably derive from a
social system. Reading is always a social act.... Because this is so, understanding
the range of meanings that were plausible to a first-century Mediterranean in-
group reader of John requires the contemporary reader to seek access to the social
systems available to the author's original audience. One of these is the dominant
social system of the eastern Mediterranean in antiquity; the other is the antisociety
of John. Moreover, in order to recover these social systems... we believe it is
essential to employ adequate explicit, social-scientific models of society and
human behavior that have been drawn especially from circum-Mediterranean
studies. Only in this way can we fill out the written documents as considerate
readers who, for better or worse, have imported them into an alien world.\textsuperscript{20}

Thus, while recognizing the shortcomings of historical criticism, Malina gives Bultmann
his due in stressing \textit{Sitz im Leben} in his historical writings.

It is in the last twenty years that the social sciences have emerged as a systematic
methodology for biblical scholars. Robin Gill's \textit{Theology and Sociology}, provides a
helpful sampler of various New Testament scholars who are using the social-sciences to
Israel" states the objectives of this approach:

"Sociological study of ancient Israel aims at grasping the typical patterns of
human relations in their structure and function, both at a given moment or stage
(synchronics) and in their trajectories of change over specified time spans
(diachronics). The hypothetically 'typical' in collective human behavior is sought
by comparative study of societies and expressed theoretically in 'laws',
'regularities', or tendencies' that attempt to abstract translocal and transtemporal
structural or processual realities within the great mass of spatiotemporal
particularities. In such terms, the tribal phase of Israel's social history is greatly
illuminated by a theoretical design of social organization.... Sociological inquiry
recognizes people as social actors and symbolizers who 'perform' according to
interconnecting regularities and within boundaries or limits (social systems). If we
wish to reconstruct ancient Israel as a lived totality, historical method and
sociological method are requisite complementary disciplines.... In order to
approximate comprehensive reconstruction of the Israelite social system,
sociological method depends upon literary and historical criticism to undertake
their tasks in a similarly comprehensive and systematic way"\textsuperscript{21}...
Along similar lines, Robin Scroggs writes in the “Sociological Interpretation of the New Testament”:

Language, including theological language, is never to be seen as independent of other social realities. *Thus, theological language and the claims made therein can no longer be explained without taking into account socioeconomic-cultural factors as essential ingredients in the production of that language.*

Similarly, Wayne A. Meeks insists that while no one is in a position to write an empirical sociology of Johannine Christianity, “nevertheless, it has become abundantly clear that the Johannine literature is the product not of a lone genius but of a community or group of communities that evidently persisted with some consistent identity over a considerable span of time.”

On that basis, he advocates the process of using the social sciences to help us understand more about the Johannine community:

For one’s ‘world’ in the sociology of knowledge is understood as the symbolic universe within which one functions, which has ‘objectivity’ because it is constantly reinforced by the structures of the society to which it is specific. Faith in Jesus, in the Fourth Gospel, means a removal from ‘the world’, because it means transfer to a community which has totalistic and exclusive claims. The Fourth Gospel not only describes, in etiological fashion, the birth of that community; it also provides reinforcement of the community’s isolation. The language patterns we have been describing gave the effect, for the insider who accepts them, of demolishing the logic of the world, particularly the world of Judaism, and progressively emphasizing the sectarian consciousness. If one ‘believes’ what is said in this book, he is quite literally taken out of the ordinary world of social reality.

Such scholars would concur with John H. Elliott who argues convincingly that "the conventional historical-critical method must be outfitted in a social-analytical capacity."

2.1 Literary Criticism and the Gospel of John

Another approach to John which arose out of dissatisfaction with the limitations of historical-critical analysis is the literary critical approach. As early as 1911, British
scholar F. R. M. Hitchcock advocated a more literary reading of John which recognized its integrity as a piece of literature, as opposed to the partition theories which were developing in Germany at the time, and which took account of the superior narrative style which set it apart from the Synoptics. In 1932, James Muilenburg observed similar things in John: "the dramatic element obtrudes itself so obviously... the chief end of analysis should be perception of the literary unity in which one gains a sense of form, a central purpose, and if possible, the occasion which inspired the narrative." Perhaps it was unfortunate that such early interest in literary criticism of John was eclipsed prematurely by the ensuing interest in source criticism generated by Bultmann.

It was not until the 1970's that interest in literary analysis was revived with David Wead's *Literary Devices in John's Gospel.* Here the author explores the Gospel via such literary devices as point of view, double meanings, irony and metaphor. Along similar lines, G. W. MacRae described "Theology and Irony in the Fourth Gospel." Wayne Meek's study on the ascent/descent motif in the Gospel includes such literary critical approaches as John's use of symbolic language in characters like Nicodemus:

First he comes to Jesus 'by night', a detail hardly necessary to the story, but also not merely a random bit of color, for the evangelist takes pains to remind his readers of it later on, in a note which in fact characterizes Nicodemus as "the one who came to him previously by night" (19:39). This casts a certain suspicion over him because of what is said in the dialogue itself about the division between people who come to the light and those who remain in darkness (3:19-21).

Much of Meek's work actually combines sociological observations with literary critical analysis.

Along similar lines, Marinus de Jonge prefaces his 1977 work, *Jesus: Stranger From Heaven and Son of God* as follows:
Behind these studies lies the assumption that the Fourth Gospel is a meaningful whole, highly complicated in structure with many paradoxes and many tensions in thought and syntax, but yet asking to be taken seriously as a (more or less finished) literary product in which consistent lines of thought can be detected.... Much emphasis is laid on the composition and structure of the Fourth Gospel as a whole, and the separate narratives and discourses are treated as literary units within the framework of the Gospel. 31

De Jonge delineates the shift in criticism that was taking place at the time by adopting a "consistently redaction-critical approach" as opposed to source-critical theories. With him, there is a refreshing stress on the unity of the text, rather than on its disunited elements of composition. For him the need is to deal with both redactional and traditional elements as component parts of a new literary artifact, something which deserves to be studied on its own in that it was used as a whole by people who were unaffected by how various sources contributed to its composition.

This approach was strengthened by the influence of "New Criticism" upon literature as a whole, an approach which downplays the role of the author in favor of the literary artifact itself.

Then R. Alan Culpepper wrote his influential, The Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design. 32 Culpepper distinguishes literary criticism from historical criticism by the metaphor of the text as "mirror" rather than as "window." Whereas historical criticism has tended to use texts as windows through which to glimpse the community behind them, literary criticism attempts to find meaning in what is reflected back from the text to the reader in the experience of reading the text as a whole. Thus the main objective of the Gospel narrative is to "reflect back to the readers the world created by the text that challenges their perception of the 'real' world." Culpepper responds to the
charge that literary criticism sweeps aside the considerable gains of historical critical methodology:

Appeals to general historical considerations regarding the age of the story, the culture it assumes, and the meaning of the words with which it is told are, of course, necessary if one is to understand the dynamics of the narrative, but using historical data as aids to interpretation is quite different from using the gospel story for historical reconstruction. On the other hand, our effort to set aside interest in the Johannine community or the historical Jesus should not be interpreted as a denial of any historical core or matrix of the gospel. Once the effort has been made to understand the narrative character of the gospels, some rapprochement with the traditional, historical issues will be necessary. Questions about how the story is told inevitably raise interest in why it is told and why it is told as it is.33

Without doubt, Culpepper greatly helps with the first step, analyzing the point of view of the narrator, the Gospel's narrative time, its plot, characters, implicit commentary, misunderstanding, irony and symbolism and its implied reader. This work demonstrates that literary analysis can not only be sustained throughout the text, but adds much to our understanding. Indeed, D. Moody Smith points out that Culpepper's work is "seminal" in that his literary criticism of John creates a new awareness of audience which leads to a fuller understanding of the sources for the gospel itself. While beginning with a text, literary criticism ends up shedding much light on extra-textual concerns.34

More recently, narratologists have made "narrative criticism" a new way of speaking about literary criticism of the Gospels. David Rhoads first used the term in his "Narrative Criticisms and the Gospel of Mark," looking to structures and literary devices within the text and their impact upon the reader to derive an interpretation. Paul Duke builds on Culpepper's approach in writing Irony in the Fourth Gospel. Gail O'Day's study, Revelation in the Fourth Gospel also deals with literary conventions such as irony to convey the evangelist's message. Jeffrey Staley's The Print's First Kiss: A

Such literary analysis adds much to our understanding of the Fourth Gospel. And it will inform much of my work in this manuscript, especially the "integrative" approach of Mark Stibbe who seeks to integrate the synchronic and diachronic aspects of Johannine criticism:

John is a *multi-story* phenomenon calling for a multi-disciplinary narrative methodology. We cannot properly appreciate John's storytelling art unless we are prepared to expose his story to a comprehensive exegetical approach which has room for historical as well as literary questions.... Narratives are crucial not only for aesthetic purposes but also for the social reconstruction of history.

2.2 Works on Characterization in John

In "The Representative Figures of the Fourth Gospel," Raymond Collins looks for clues about the Gospel's background and history in the individual characters themselves. Collins sees the individualism of the Gospel as the key to its interpretation in that it provides "a basic insight into the meaning of the Gospel, the tradition that lay behind it, and the purpose for which it was compiled." For Collins, the characters of John are actually "personifications of homiletic material that the Evangelist was drawing on." From this point of view, the evangelist and final redactor would have compiled these characters as types which can serve to support the basic theme of his Gospel. This is the "homiletic provenance theory" expounded by Barnabus Lindars in *Behind the Fourth Gospel*. In other words, the characters of John are representative figures in whom a particular feature can be seen in relation to Jesus. For Collins, at least fifteen Johannine characters have been typecast by the evangelist to teach his readers about saving faith.
Collins is by no means alone in his view that many of John's characters have a representative role, serving as examples of proper response to Jesus. Culpepper's treatment of characters is along similar lines. Indeed, Culpepper finds that the characters "represent a continuum of responses to Jesus which exemplify misunderstandings the reader may share and responses one might make to the depiction of Jesus in the Gospel". Thus the Jews represent rejection; Nicodemus stands for acceptance without commitment; the lame man for acceptance of Jesus as a signs worker; the Samaritan woman for belief in Jesus words; the disciples for commitment in spite of misunderstanding; the beloved disciple for paradigmatic discipleship; Judas, of course, for defection. For Culpepper, character as a literary element is the thing, how characters function within the narrative. Contemporary literary theory informs his treatment of characters, along with E. M. Forster's classic work on the novel with its three types of characters: protagonist, intermediate characters and background characters. Culpepper also draws on the more recent work of W. J. Harvey, who sees protagonists as vehicles by which the most interesting questions are raised; they evoke our beliefs, sympathies, revulsion; they incarnate the moral vision of the world inherent in the total novel. In a sense they are what the novel exists for: it exists to reveal them.

All of which leads to reflection on Jesus as the protagonist in John, and contemporary theory is of considerable help in interpreting the Johannine Christology.

As for intermediate characters, Harvey sees them as ficelles, typical characters easily recognizable by the readers. Here one thinks of the Jewish High Priest and his colleagues in their fervid "all is lost" discussion after the resurrection of Lazarus. Dramatically speaking, they are stock comic characters. Still, according to Harvey, they serve some function in the narrative, helping to reveal the strengths of the protagonist by
contrast and carrying a great deal of "representative or symbolic value." Minor
characters also help us see the literary architecture of the Gospel. As they interact with
other characters, the theme of the work is expounded and strengthened.

I prefer the approach of Craig Koester, who bases his analysis of Johannine
characters more upon antiquity than contemporary theories. Koester sees characters
functioning as symbols and representatives in the first place, without denying their
individual vitality or their distinctive traits: "Johannine characters may function for the
reader in more than one way. They may indeed play a representative role, standing for a
particular response to Jesus... But their characterization may also allow them to emerge as
individuals in the mind of the reader."

In short, previous studies on characterization reveal considerable interest in the
subject in the Fourth Gospel and encourage further research. Certainly, these studies in
Johannine characterization indicate that characterization is a major literary device in the
Fourth Gospel, allowing the author to elaborate on the various shades of response to
Jesus and encourage his readers to develop proper responses themselves.

2.3 Studies on the Women of John

On the topic of women in John's Gospel, Raymond Brown's 1975 article raises
several important themes. He addresses the issue from the context of ministry concerns
within the Catholic Church and the apostolic role of women. If Mary Magdalene is to be
seen in something like an apostolic role in this Gospel, it must be, concludes Brown, that
the Johannine community accepted such ministry from women. Martha's preeminence
over Peter suggests that for John's church, ecclesiastical authority was not of primary importance in true discipleship.

Eugene Stockton's essay in *Faith and Culture* stressed the typological significance of John's female characters, rather than their historical relevance. Then Sandra Schneiders' 1982 study on men and women in John took up the question of how John's characters contribute to the contemporary debate on women's ecclesiastical roles. Drawing upon Brown with regards to women's roles in the Johannine community, Schneiders sees the women of the Gospel as "positive", multi-dimensional characters who fill unconventional roles:

> All the women in the Fourth Gospel are presented positively and intimate relation to Jesus. No woman is shown as resisting Jesus' initiatives, failing to believe, deserting him or betraying him. This is in sharp contrast to John's presentation of men.... John's positive presentation of women is neither one-dimensional nor stereotypical. Women do not appear as bloodless representatives of the 'eternal feminine'. On the contrary, John's women appear as strikingly individual and original characters....

Here Schneiders takes discussion of Johannine character to a fuller and, to my mind, more satisfying level which I believe accounts for the enduring appeal of not just the women of John, but of the fourth gospel as a whole. On such grounds, Schneiders argues for an author who "had remarkably rich and nuanced understanding of the feminine religious experience:"

This knowledge could have been the product of an active literary imagination, but it is more likely that it was the result of actual experience of Christian women who played prominent roles in the community of the Fourth Evangelist. If women Christians in John's community had been restricted to the domestic and religious roles of women in the Jewish world of that period it is very difficult to imagine where the evangelist got his extraordinarily rich insights into the relationships of women with Jesus.

Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza builds on the idea of an alternative Johannine
Community characterized by relationships of equality -- a community of friends in which special leadership roles, like that of the Twelve, are downplayed. For Fiorenza, John's women serve as paradigms of women in apostolic discipleship as well as leaders in the Johannine community. While her study does not take up extensively the thematic importance of women for the Gospel, Fiorenza acknowledges that John places women at crucial points of plot development and confrontation: "It is astonishing that the evangelist gives women such a prominent place in the narrative."\(^51\)

John Rena shows interest in the narrative role of the women in the Gospel in a 1986 article. Building on Raymond Brown's reconstruction, he argues that John uses his female characters as part of his polemic against anything that threatens the lordship of Christ. This includes authority figures symbolized by the Twelve, who come out poorly when set against the women in John.\(^52\) And, indeed, recognition of Jesus' Lordship makes these women stand out.

More recently, Robert Kysar points out that the strategic placement of scenes involving women, at the beginning, middle and end of gospel, conveys the unspoken message that women are equal to men as disciples. In their interaction with John's males, they are models of faith. No doubt, says Kysar, such literary structures arose from an egalitarian community where both genders fill key ministry positions.\(^53\)

In his *Sophia and the Johannine Jesus*, Martin Scott also points to Jesus' encounters with women as key moments of revelation.\(^54\) For Scott, women in the Fourth Gospel are depicted as disciples of Sophia, as in Proverbs 9:3, or her "handmaidens." Just as the Wisdom figure of Proverbs has influenced John's description of Jesus, for Scott it retains a strong role in the development of these female characters as well.
Again, leadership roles for women in the Johannean community seem to flow from the author's findings.

Moving away from the socio-historical perspective, Turid Karlsen Seim contributes a study on the internal role pattern of the text itself. Like Kysar and Scott, she sees strong evidence that gender is of considerable significance to the Fourth Gospel. Women in John are not found in passing, but in large and complex passages which are among the highlights of the Gospel. They seem to share a single purpose, unlike John's scattered males, and act with intent and decisiveness. For Karlsen Seim, gender is a more important category in John than even Jew and Gentile. The predominance of the Greek γυναικεία in 2:4; 4:21; 19:26; 20:13, 15 is taken to show an interest in women that finds no parallel among John's males.  

Martinus C. de Boer adds to the discussion in *Women in the Biblical Tradition.* De Boer argues that no single critical approach can fully deal with passages such as Jesus encounter with the woman at the well, but that narratological, historical and theological approaches must all be implemented. For Jane Kopas, in her article on "Jesus and Women," Jesus' conversations with men capable of the most obtuse misunderstanding (as in chapters 3, 13, 14, 20), make his encounters with women all the more appealing.

On such a basis, one might argue that there are good grounds for further work on the subject of the role of women in John. Some of the foregoing studies seem limited to an assessment of the place of women in the Johannine community. Others tend to read the characters of the Fourth Gospel as representatives of some real women behind the text. Equality becomes a key concept in feminist criticism, but perhaps without close enough attention to the males with whom the women are deemed equal.
For my purposes here, an attractive way forward is to ponder the striking difference between the women and men of John's gospel and ask what such a contrast says about authorial intent. One might hope to advance the argument with the endorsement of Jeffrey Staley, who says, "The role of women in the fourth gospel, its relationship to the Johannine portrayal of salvation and its implications for feminist theology, has not yet been adequately investigated ..."\(^58\)

2.4 Modern Research on Gender and the Hemispheres of the Brain

To a large extent, the uniqueness of the present treatment of the women in John lies here. I wish to bring to the discussion of male and female characters in John the distinction between male and female thinking posited by modern psychology and the scientific breakthroughs in studies of bilateral asymmetry in the brain.\(^59\) My support for doing so would lie with Social-Scientific critics like John H. Elliott, who defines the social sciences as "that branch of modern science which specializes in the study of human societies, social systems and their component parts, social behavior and social processes." What they provide for the New Testament scholar is the means "to penetrate into ancient social and cultural life and gain clearer understanding of the who's, hows and whys of the behavior and beliefs of biblical peoples." I concur with Elliott's assessment of Gerd Theissen's cross-disciplinary *Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology*, that it "demonstrates how fresh questions regarding the correlation of belief and behavior, ideas and material conditions, theological symbols and social relationships can generate new
perspectives on old texts and revisions of previously 'assured results'." I aspire to a similar process here.\(^6\)

My thinking is thus: it seems evident that John's women respond to Jesus in different ways than John's males, and that this is more than simple stereotypical thinking of ancient roots. For example, it is not just that women are more "emotional" in their responses than men. John is bringing to us, in these characters, larger issues. Indeed, as one follows the activities of John's characters, one senses an awareness in the ancient world that there is a difference between male thinking and female thinking that \textit{parallels} the discoveries of modern research on sex and lateral asymmetry. As Ned Herrmann says in his much-read \textit{The Creative Brain},

Our preferred mode of knowing is the one we are most likely to use when faced with the need to solve a problem. A \textit{left-brain} approach would be fact-based, analytic, and step-by-step, favoring words, numbers, and facts presented in logical sequence. A \textit{right-brain} strategy... would seek out insight, images, concepts, patterns, sounds, and movement, all to be synthesized into an intuitive sense of the whole. If we strongly prefer one mode, we may actually reject another. For some fact-based learners, even the idea of intuition is suspect, whereas for an intuitive person, factual data can seem distracting or boring. Thus, someone who strongly prefers to function in one mode usually finds it difficult or impossible to problem-solve in the other.\(^6\)

One cannot help but wonder if Herrmann might have looked to the ancient writings of the Fourth Gospel to corroborate his modern findings!

Moreover, right-brain thinking tends to predominate among women. At least this is the view celebrated by John Gray in \textit{Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus}:

Men's and women's values are inherently different...: (1) men mistakenly offer solutions and invalidate feelings while women offer unsolicited advice and direction.... (2) Men tend to pull away and silently think about what's bothering them, [women] feel an instinctive need to talk about what's bothering them.... (3) Men are motivated when they feel needed while women are motivated when they feel cherished....Our greatest challenges: men need to overcome their resistance to giving love while women must overcome their resistance to receiving it. (4)
Men and women commonly misunderstand each other because they speak
different language... Men and women speak and even stop speaking for entirely
different reasons. (5) Men and women hide feelings differently and need help in
communicating feelings to each other.63

Gray’s approach is to clarify the areas of difference and help men and women relate to
one another in a more informed way.

In a more scientific approach, neurologist Sally Springer brings out this difference
in *Left Brain/Right Brain*. In a chapter called “Sex and Asymmetry” she says,

The evidence suggests that females, on average, are superior to males in a wide
range of skills that require the use of language, such as verbal fluency, speed of
articulation, and grammar. Women also tend to be faster than men at tasks
involving perceptual speed, manual precision, and arithmetic calculation. Males,
on the other hand, perform better on average in tasks that are spatial in nature,
including maze performance, picture assembly, block design, mental rotations and
mechanical skills. In addition, males do better than women in mathematical
reasoning and in finding their way through a route.64

Springer allows room for various interpretations of the growing body of late twentieth
Century data, and notes the tremendous variation from patient to patient, even within one
sex, in the effects of unilateral brain damage. And sometimes “differences observed in a
study are interpreted as real when in fact they are due to chance.” Indeed, she concedes
that “some women have better spatial abilities than most men, whereas some men have
better verbal skills than most women”. Still, she notes as “intriguing” the findings that
the abilities which differ by sex are “roughly the same ones” that differentiate the
hemispheres in terms of function:

The frequency as well as the consistency of reports of sex differences in cerebral
organization leads us to accept their reality, at last as a working hypothesis. The
strength of the case ... rests on the diversity of methodologies (clinical studies,
behavioral work, neuro-imaging) that point to the same conclusion: females are
less lateralized than males.65
In other words, they are not as restricted as males to one side of the brain for control of dominant functions.

How this may have come about is a matter of considerable debate and conjecture. Jerre Levy has suggested an evolutionary basis for sex differences: whereas females were likely to have been involved in child rearing throughout, requiring language skills, social sensitivity and facility with nonverbal communication, males have always been the hunters. Their primary needs were good visuospatial skills. Levy proposes that greater bilateralization of function may facilitate the skills needed by females, because those skills appear to require a blending of the specializations of the hemispheres. On the other hand, stricter separation of function would be necessary to ensure the high level of visuospatial skills in males that was needed for hunting.

In a similar look to the distant past, Springer herself indulges in some evolutionary speculation:

"Assume that complex visuospatial capability preceded the evolution of language in humans.... One can then postulate that in men only the left hemisphere became involved in language, leaving visuospatial functions intact in the right, whereas in women language was established in both hemispheres, crowding visuospatial capability. If this in fact occurred, "more lateralized" would be better for visuospatial function, whereas "less lateralized" would be better for language."  

For Ned Herrmann, such evolutionary processes include the "performance-praise-preference" feedback loop: as our behavior is positively reinforced by our mentors, our favored pattern of mental response is strengthened. The pattern is strengthened over time creating "a powerful preference for one cognitive mode over another."  

Nor should the effects of cultural conditioning be omitted from such discussion. Herrmann speaks in his introduction about "the costly rise of the left" (quite apart from politics):
Today pre-industrial nations still reward skills that have to do with intuiting and sensing growth — the ability to nurse a sick animal, to understand the ecology of a forest, or to know where game can be found. Healing arts, nurturing land and beasts, sensing the currents and moods of the sea, finding the way across the trackless arctic ice — all these take on enormous importance in societies that live closer to nature .... In modern Western society — the developed world — the pendulum has swung to the other side as society has increasingly demanded and reinforced left hemispheric skills. As industrialization replaced agriculture, our civilization ... rewarded the left-brain cognitive mode — orderly, replicable, and verbal — which serves these interests better than the spontaneous, less structured right models.... The left brain's cognitive focus on fact, rationality and verbal communication eventually earned it a position of power over the quiescent modes of the right brain. It has done so within each of us, within most of our social institutions, and in all of our business organizations. The left-brain models have become especially entrenched in our educational system.69

While the two hemispheres of the brain are typically cooperative in motor skills, according to Herrman, "in terms of thinking... the right and left brains are in a constant state of competition. Our two minds tend to be divided against each other."70

Along similar developmental lines, Deborah Waber proposes that sex differences of the sort alluded to by Springer are attributable not to sex per se, but rather, to differences in the rates at which males and females develop.71 The development process is also critical to Carol Gilligan's thinking:

For boys and men, separation and individuation are critically tied to gender identity since separation from the mother is essential for the development of masculinity. For girls and women, issues of femininity or feminine identity do not depend on the achievement of separation from the mother or on the progress of individuation. Since masculinity is defined through separation while femininity is defined through attachment, male gender identity is threatened by intimacy while female gender identity is threatened by separation. Thus males tend to have difficulty with relationships, while females tend to have problems with individuation.72

Summing up, Springer says that matter of sex differences in brain organization is of considerable significance. And she asks the pertinent questions: If sex differences are
real, what is their adaptive advantage? How does brain organization relate to patterns of higher mental function? Do sex differences in child-rearing practices affect brain asymmetries? How is ability related to extent of lateralization? Does greater lateralization for a given function imply superior performance for that function? Is the spatial ability of males better than that of females because males seem to rely more on one hemisphere to process spatial information? One senses that this is in many ways an emerging science which builds upon its discoveries while continually pointing to the need for ongoing research:

"There is, of course, no logical reason to expect that great lateralization necessarily leads to superior ability. In fact, we have to assume the opposite to explain the superior verbal ability of females.... Women appear to be less lateralized for language functions, yet as a group they are superior to men in language skills. And... mathematical talent may be related to greater bilateralization of function as well."^{23}

2.5 Bilateral Asymmetry and the Gospel of John

I maintain that all of the above relates directly to John's treatment of the genders and accounts for the enduring appeal both of the fourth gospel and its characters. In short, this drama is played out by men and women who are true to life in a way that non-canonical characters of the same era are not. While it is no doubt too simplistic to identify John's males with left brain thinking and his women with right, these categories do seem suggestive enough to warrant investigation. For example, one comes away from current research on sex and asymmetry wondering if by his use of metaphor, John's Jesus is inclined to appeal to right brain thinking. And does he not seem to push his linear hearers, like the stereotypical scribe Nicodemus, to more of a right brain approach, more intuitive and imaginative? For that matter, are not all the people who get furthest with
Jesus those who receive him as only the right hemisphere can? Who can doubt, for example, that John's Jews epitomize what Herrmann describes as left-brain Quadrant A?

A Quadrant Preference means the person favors activities that involves analyzing, dissecting, figuring out, solving problems logically and getting facts. In making decisions, the person relies on logic based on assumptions, combined with an ability to perceive, verbalize and express things precisely. This person favors reducing the complex to the simple, the unclear to the clear, the cumbersome to the efficient. Facts are crucial underpinnings for verbal statements.74

One thinks again of Nicodemus, who simply cannot connect with Jesus' metaphorical language on wind, water and new birth; or the larger crowd of Jews engaging Jesus in their interminable disputes. Herrmann adds additional qualities of this “Quadrant” type:

"whatever the issue, saving time is the rule, so do it the faster way." The point is, the whole logical structure must hang together in order to satisfy the Quadrant mentality.... A-only is a master of logic and reason: at his best he is constantly processing new information, even if it assails the validity of a treasured formula. The definition of reality is of prime importance, and no fact should long lack explanation for its existence. A-Only's output takes the form of principles, mathematical formulas, and conclusions about where to go next. His abilities to generalize from the specific and verbalize those generalization make him an ideal technical problem-solver.

When A-only does something ... he figures out the most efficient way of doing it so he can conserve effort, especially repetitive effort. He also calculates the odds, and if they're excessively high, he won't move. In business... he honors argument above personal experience, facts above intuition.... He tends to avoid emotion altogether.... If he believes in God, it may be only because facts and logic have taken him to that conclusion, rather than because of any intuitive knowing or revelation. .... Because he is not an emotional person, he appears cold, aloof, and arrogant. He tends to discount the importance of human feelings, boredom, fatigue and need for beauty and refreshment. His solutions while logical, are often impractical because he has ignored the very real barriers of, say, dealing with human inertia or fixed attitude. And because his thinking is linear, he may embody the ultimate in logical brilliance, but his logic chains him to the ground: he can't make the creative leap required to set a new direction. His possibilities are limited by what is already known.75

One can hardly read of “honoring argument above personal experience” without thinking of the Pharisees wrangling with the man born blind in John 9:

‘Give glory to God,’ they said. ‘We know this man is a sinner.’
He replied, ‘Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!’ (9:24-25).

It is also very tempting to read John’s Jews into left brain linear thinking with logic that “chains it to the ground”:

... Jesus declared, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.’

‘How can a man be born when he is old?’ Nicodemus asked. ‘Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!’ (3:3-4).

Also on the left brain side are those Herrmann describes as Quadrant B:

They both take a linear approach and reject ambiguity .... Both distrust emotions and intuition. They tend to control their environment and themselves, mainly by imposing thought over reality. They are also both efficient. But whereas A-Only focuses on facts, loci and here-and-now, B quadrant left-brainers only want to know what has worked in the past. ‘If it has worked before, it will work again.’ A-Only people devise formulas; B-Only test them down to the last jot and tittle. B-Only is basically action oriented and may have little patience for intellectual complexities that A-Only likes. Can we verify it? B-Only wants answers. Let others ask interesting questions. B-Only’s heaven is a world where there is a rule and a place for everything... neat dependable world, decisions made according to long established procedures. 

Speaking of “jot and tittle,” Matthew’s Gospel come to mind on the Pharisees:

‘Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices — mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law — justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel’ (23:23-24).

And is not their main problem with Jesus in the Fourth Gospel this very inclination toward long-established Mosaic traditions? Indeed, obsession with "a rule and a place for everything" practically defines the law-ridden Judaism of John’s time.

Also in this quadrant, Herrman lists the following:

If something has worked before, keep it working. “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” This left brain quadrant preserves the tried and true, and is a bit anti-progress. B-Only’s strength is getting things done. They focus on one thing at a time, finish
it, put it down, pick up another.... Like the tortoise, they often win through persistence. B-Only gives perfection in details. He is rigorous and demanding toward self and subordinates. Procedure and precision are sacred. Keep things safe and predictable. He rejects ambiguity of any kind... eliminating the sensual, feeling and intuitive. Others tend to see B-Only as domineering and small minded, boring insensitive and anti-social. He fears loss of control.... One may write him off as dense. But not true! He is a genius for bringing order out of chaos. Starting with smallest pieces of big pile, he can create neat categories or classifications, plus a procedure for keeping them classified.78

In terms of John's Jews, it is interesting that Hermann raises the matter of "handling change" in this context:

When faced with change B-Only (1) narrows perceptions to see only those portions of life that are still controllable, and ignore or deny those parts that are changing. Or (2) he may work harder to establish interim order until the new one becomes apparent. He can help in transition by carrying out those activities people rely on and testing formulas to see if they actually work, and provide feedback.79

On the other hand, there are the Right Brain people who Hermann describes as Quadrant C. At this point Hermann's genders change:

Her primary modes are emotional and spiritual. Her comfort with her body tends to give her an essential sense of belonging in this world. She seems to have an innate sense that a Creator exists who cares for all of us, that we belong to a spiritual family, and that we're here on earth to help each other be tender grow and change. Goals mean nothing if they violate human process. She has faith in groups and is open to the contribution of each person to a process or goal. Personal satisfaction is a prime measure of the success of anything. She is spiritual, empathetic, nurturing and musical. She is sensitive to mood, atmospheres, attitudes, and energy levels. She is a moment by moment barometer of what's going on with the people around her. She is as concerned with reality as AO, but it is a very different reality, consisting not of words, but of emotional currents. CO are the most sensitive and receptive.... When an individual or group changes, CO is immediately aware of the change and is ready to respond to it, usually in a soothing or conciliatory way.80

Here, the Samaritan woman comes to mind in her discussion of the religious issues which divide her from the Jews, with "an innate sense that a Creator exists" and that we all
belong to a “spiritual family.” Mary Magdalene shows her “faith in groups” in sharing her resurrection morning discoveries with the disciples. Mary of Bethany is sensitive to mood and changes and to the kairos moment. The women of John seem quite at home in this timeless female community which "tends to be kinaesthetic … perception and communication are experienced as a free flowing sequence of body sensing and movement, more than of visual or verbal information. She is not in the least linear in her functions, so has little time for logic or theory. For her, theory is something removed from reality, whereas experience is reality."81

It seems safe to say that virtually all of John's women belong to such a category, valuing experience over theory, whereas the Johannine males work in exactly the opposite camp. And many of John's right brainers are conversationalists:

Communicating is very important to her. It is rare to find a taciturn C. The problem is that most of what she's really talking about is very hard to verbalize, so the conversation flow -- the connection -- becomes more important than the content. Like B quadrant people, these C's have a preoccupation with the past, but in a different way. Bs wants to know what worked before he can stay safe. C's revere traditions because of their emotional value. They conform and inspire people. Others tend to see C-Onlys as agreeable, nice to have around, supportive of harmony and beauty, always people oriented82

As for D quadrant of the right-brainers, Herrmann says, "When you first meet, you don't understand her much":

'Most of her conversation would be in metaphors, introduced by “its like…” but she would provide no translation of how the metaphor helps make "it" clear or even what the "it" is. Once in a while you catch a glimpse of what she is seeing and you might be blown away by the sheer original beauty or wildness of it. D-Only thrives on the excitement of new ideas.83

One hesitates to put the woman at the well in this category, effective as she is as an apostle to the Gentiles; but she definitely shows some welcome excitement with Jesus' new ideas!
She likes to explore “possibilities... variety, oddities, incongruities and questions that sound obvious but actually go to the heart of the matter. Surprises, non sequiturs, and uncertainties are all possibilities.... With lots of that kind of grist for her mill, she tends to be a true visionary, in the best sense. The visions may be just that: images of ideas in metaphoric terms. D-Onlys have their own language; they often don’t understand each other or even themselves. But that’s okay because to them, as to C-Onlys understanding is less valuable than experience. That they understand!

D-Only does not like structure because she feels it slows or stops the flow of ideas and energy. Words do the same. Logic also impedes free flow, based on assumptions already past. She doesn’t even want to pay attention to the here and now. It gets in her way....

Ultimately, I maintain that applying these general distinctions between male and female responses seems to inform the social and spiritual dynamics of John’s Gospel. I suggest they may even inform discussion on the nature of faith, perhaps the major topic in John. To use the terminology of modern psychology, is faith a right-brain activity? And if so, how are left-brainers to be helped to take "the leap?"

Perhaps the author of the Fourth Gospel had an objective similar to that described in modern psychology as “bringing the two hemispheres together.” As has been noted, there is a predominance of left-brain thinking in the post-industrial West. Wayne State's Gisela Labourvie-Vief expresses the issue thus:

Historically the two modes had become identified with gender, logos being associated with the masculine, mythos with the feminine. And just as mythos was a devalued mode, so it had been attributed to the devalued "feminine" pole of human functioning. This association has resulted in several positions regarding the minds and natures of men and women.

The traditional position, and one still widely influential, has been to take this association between mythos and the feminine as proof that women's intellectual status is inferior to that of men. As women's participation in the intellectual and educational life of modern culture has become more apparent, however, the notion of basic and hierarchical differences in the mental capacities of men and women has been almost completely discredited. Instead, a second position has been proposed by several recent writers. Here the suggestion is that mythos, though a feminine mode of thinking, is an important one in its own right and by no means inferior to logos. This position actually was prefigured by Jung, whose
insistence that the "feminine" be re-evaluated and upgraded had been one of the reasons for his famous break with Freud.\textsuperscript{85}

Thus the author sets herself the task of \textit{bridging the splits} between masculine and feminine, between \textit{logos} and \textit{mythos} as "an important aspect of mature functioning":

The concept of an integration of \textit{logos} and \textit{mythos}, often personified by the image of the marriage of the masculine and feminine, thus offers an important new metaphor for the mind and its development.\textsuperscript{86}

Hermann calls for a similar integration, "to move beyond this mental conflict to a more integrated wholeness, reflecting a smoother collaboration among the specialized parts of the brain:

On average... men have clear advantages in rational, fact-based functioning and women have clear advantages in intuitive, emotionally oriented functioning. Put the two together in a cooperative way... and you have the potential for tremendous iteration and, therefore, genuine synergy... Men and women in business need each other..."\textsuperscript{87}

Thus, he concludes his book by providing various examples of how companies, marriages and other institutions function best when they are "whole brain."

Such modern research seems quite applicable to the literary objectives of the Fourth Evangelist. It is an appealing possibility to think of an integrated or "whole" brain discipleship, with both creative responses stemming from the right and at the same time logical, linear thinking stemming from the left. Indeed, one wonders if by giving women such prominence as they receive in the Fourth Gospel, the author may not have been calling for a shift away from hierarchical, patriarchal structures to something more "whole brain." And would this not be a fundamentally New Testament concept? Even though the brain is specialized, \textit{no part works as fully or creatively on its own as it does when stimulated or supported by input from the other parts}. Of course the other parts can also act competitively, as neurologist Roger Sperry's split-brain, twentieth-century
experiments have shown. But *each part truly needs the others if it is to function at its best*.

Of course, all of this is particularly modern research and can only be brought to the ancient world with the understanding that the "battle of the sexes" has always been with us. The modernity is seen in the fact that it is the work of French Physician Paul Broca at the beginning of the 20\(^{th}\) Century which is seen as foundational. Indeed, his contemporary, German neurophysiologist Carl Wernicke, pioneered studies on speech deficiencies and *aphasia* related to brain damage. None of this research is older than one hundred years. Later, in the 1960's there was the split-brain research conducted by Roger W. Sperry and his associates at the California Institute of Technology whose studies earned Dr. Sperry a Nobel Prize in 1981. The hemispheres were seen as specialized in function and sensing, motor controls distributed to one hemisphere or the other. Ultimately, the two hemispheres were found to serve different functions and to have emotional and value differences as well.

Thus, many of our specific mental abilities were discovered to be *lateralized*; that is, carried out, supported and coordinated predominantly in one hemisphere of our dual brain or the other. Speaking reading, writing and thinking with numbers are now known to be carried out mostly in the left hemisphere for most people, while spatial perception, geometry, mental map-making, and our ability to rotate shapes in our mind are performed predominantly in the right hemisphere. Sperry's work was followed in the early 1970's by psychologist Robert Ornstein who was among the first to demonstrate that hemispheric specialization could be identified and measured in all of us. Hence the concept of *brain asymmetry* -- the idea that the two sides of the normal brain are
different, naturally. In time, Ned Herrmann moved to the Quadrant Concept, which specializes the functions of the hemispheres more precisely. Here he says that no quadrant exerts exclusive influence over any person. According to his tests, 7% of respondents are single dominant, 60% double dominant, 30 percent triple dominant and about 3 percent quadruple dominant.

Other experts on gender issues seem to arrive at similar conclusions via different routes. Agneta H. Fischer contributes much to the discussion in her edition of Gender and Emotion: Social Psychological Perspectives. In four parts she leads us through psychological studies on the difference between emotional responses in women and men. Part I has to do with "Culture, Gender and Emotional beliefs" and Fischer herself describes the prevailing sense of Western dichotomy in "The Relation between Gender and Emotions in Different Cultures":

Western cultures share the stereotypical belief that women are more emotional than men. This stereotype has long featured in Western philosophy, where a binary opposition between emotion and reason has been closely associated with the opposition between masculinity and femininity. The stereotype of the "emotional woman" and the "rational man" was fueled by the increase of sex segregation in the public and private realms which went hand in hand with the industrialization of Western societies from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards. Women were seen as the keepers of the heart. Their strong intuitions and sensitivities to the needs of others made them especially suited to the task of raising children and proving both children and husbands with affectionate and secure relationships within the home.

The current stereotype still holds that emotionality, and particularly emotional expressiveness, is the core of the differences between the sexes. Femininity and female roles are associated with the ability to experience, express, and communicate emotions to others, and to empathize with others' feelings, whereas masculinity and male roles are defined as the ability to suppress and control one's emotions.

Fischer goes on to argue that while these things vary somewhat from culture to culture -- something of great interest for our investigations in New Testament -- "women in all
countries reported more intense emotions, and of a longer duration, and that they also expressed their emotions more overtly than men" (71).

In the same volume, Stephanie A. Shields deals with issues of power:

Power is the capacity to get what one wants, to achieve one's own goals. The exercise of power is aimed at restoring, maintaining or acquiring what one values. Where gender is concerned, what is at stake is the status quo of social arrangements that inequitably benefit one sex over the other. Gender and emotion can be agents of social change or sever the status quo. Emotions for which greater female expressivity seems to be the rule, such as sadness, anxiety and fear, can be regarded as powerless in the sense that the situation is experienced as one that one is powerless to change. 91

Here one might think of Mary Magdalene weeping outside the tomb. Shields concludes, "stereotypically masculine emotions such as anger, pride, and contempt ... reflect an attempt to gain or regain control over the situation."

For the purposes of this thesis, I suggest that such research offers a plausible approach to the male/female issues in the Fourth Gospel. That greater emotional response is ascribed to women is very much a part of John's handling of the genders. Issues of powerlessness, related to the Johannine concern with marginality, are best expressed by John's women. The focus on relationships and conversation and readiness to believe – all are confirmed by the female characters John puts before us. It is by such things that they are set apart. I suggest that it is such qualities that qualify them to deliver the Gospel's central message. And yet the overall intent may be very close to that expressed by Ned Herrmann, to redress a patriarchal, apostolic imbalance, to affirm in ancient language that "each part truly needs the other if it is to function at its best."


13 Rensberger, 28.


20 Malina & Rohrbaugh, 19.


24 Wayne Meeks, Theology and Sociology, 309.


33. Culpepper, Anatomy, 11.
43. R. Allan Culpepper, Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel.
49. Schneiders, 42.
50. Schneiders, 44.
65. Springer and Deutch, 218.

67 Springer and Deutch, 218.

68 Ned Herrmann, 20.

69 Ned Herrmann, 23.

70 Ned Herrmann, 23.


73 Springer and Deutch, 218.

74 Ned Herrmann, 79.

75 Herrmann, 80.

76 Herrmann, 80-81.

77 Norman R. Petersen's description of the central conflict between the disciples of Moses and the disciples of Jesus in John carries some similarities to a typical left brain/ right brain conflict: "The critical factor in this anti-language... is the image of Moses maintained by his 'disciples,' for many of the key terms in John's characterization of Jesus are derived from key terms in the image of Moses against which John reacts. The anti-language is 'anti' because its terms are derived from the image and transformed in contrastive... ways. For example, Moses is said to have ascended and descended, but Jesus first denies this and then inverts the order of verbs, claiming that he has descended and ascended." The Gospel of John and the Sociology of Light: Language and Characterization in the Fourth Gospel (Valley Forge: Trinity, 1993), 6.

78 Ned Herrmann, 83

79 Ned Herrmann, 83.

80 Herrmann, 83-84.

81 Herrmann, 83-84.

82 Herrmann, 83-84.

83 Herrmann, 85.

84 Herrmann, 85.


86 Gisella Labouvie-Vief, Psyche and Eros, 20.

87 Herman, 137.

88 Herrmann, 57.


90 Fischer, 71.

91 Fischer, 15.
CHAPTER 3

A FOUR-FOLD INDICTMENT: THE JEWS, MAN, MEN –
AND MALE DISCIPLES

"This is the condemnation..."

Clearly the bright players in this drama, the characters of wit and insight and spontaneity, people of spiritual sensitivity, are set against a backdrop as dark as night. This backdrop seems entirely male. And it is not silent. Bruce Malina describes this Johannine dualism:

"Thus, in-group members have hearts full of light. They have been born of God’s power and are Spirit-filled, really alive and truthful and open to God.... Members of the topside out-group, on the other hand, have hearts full of darkness. They have been born of human desire, and they are simply human. For all practical purposes, they are already dead. They speak only falsehoods, are tied to earthly experiences and are deceived by Satan and succumb to his loyalty tests."

The writer of the Fourth Gospel seems intent to get these contrasting elements of light and darkness in place early. The Prologue itself wastes no time in establishing the contrasting polarities. What remains is for the contrast to be presented as stark. This drama will lose much of its impact if there are shades of gray between the extremities. What is needed is a very dark backdrop against which the characters of light play out their roles: a standard piece of dramatic technique.

John accomplishes this with admirable speed, by (1) dashing the bright, early expectations about the advent of the “true light” in no uncertain terms. This sky becomes
very black in a hurry. Then (2) he masses the forces of darkness cumulatively so that there is hardly a shaft of light left.

3.1 Defining the Murmurers

Defining the disputatious “Jews” of John has been a matter of considerable dispute in itself. Malina identifies this crowd with the Judeans in all 69 instances where “the Jews” appears, with nothing of the modern connotations of ‘Jew’. Judea is a territory, identified with the Jewish establishment. Fortna joins Malina in asserting that John uses IOUSHIOΣ in the sense not of ‘Jews’ but in the sense of Judean and he elaborates on the “attitude” connected with location.

Others see these dark characters somewhat differently. Adelle Reinhartz, for instance says they are Jews as a race and the fourth gospel is clearly anti-semitic. “This is a cosmological account in which the Jews are the diabolical villains of the cosmological tale…. The readers would identify the Jews as the villains who crucified Jesus.” She calls for a reading strategy which would enable one to sympathize with the implied author without identifying with his perspective on the world, to read this gospel with appreciation and steer clear of the antisemitisms by focusing instead on “the inner struggles of building a community, the leadership struggles within the community, with issues of human authority in a community of peers.” Along similar lines, Tina Pippin says, “the act of demonization is not unique to Christianity, but is the Johannine message fuel for polemic and violence against the Jews?” She says there is no escaping the anti-Jewish tone of John, that the Jews are demonized and that the high Christology of the gospel leaves the reader with no options.
Schnackenburg puts forward five possible meanings to “the Jews” in John: (1) an ethical term used by non-Jews; (ii) a historical, straightforward term; (iii) the same historical term, but one from which the writer dissociates himself; (iv) the same, but with overtones of unbelief; (v) a “designation for hostile… unbelievers among influential classes and responsible authorities.” Similarly Grasser has five categories of Ἰουδαῖος: the Jews as “the people”; the Jews in contrast to the Gentiles; the contemporaries of Jesus with their customs and feasts; the Jews as opponents of Jesus, especially those in authority; and the people as opponents of Jesus. And he concedes that in John it is sometimes hard to distinguish between the five.

Urban C. Von Wahlde’s extensive study on “the Johannine ‘Jews’” leans heavily toward identifying the term with the religious authorities after careful analysis of the texts which make use of the phrase. As he points out, defining the term bears on the Sitz im Leben of the Fourth Gospel: “If the polemic of the gospel as indicated by the ‘Jews’ passages is directed exclusively at the authorities, the context of intra-Jewish debate remains a possibility. If on the other hand, the Johannine Jews comprise both authorities and common people, we may reasonably assume a context of greater hostility and alienation in which there was perhaps little hope of continuing dialogue.” Von Wahlde’s conclusion is that there is much persuasive evidence that John’s hostile “Jews” were Jewish authorities. And there is almost no evidence for seeing the “Jews” as common people. The exceptions are only 6:41 and 52, and Von Wahlde suggests editorial activity here. “If we speak of the meaning intended by the original author, they are probably religious authorities exclusively…..”
A couple of observations seem to follow. Firstly, if the predominant number of Johannine references to “Jews” pertain to the religious authorities of Judaism, authority in general is cast in a bad light. Indeed, the fourth gospel’s egalitarian flavor, to say nothing of the antisociety framework stressed by Malina and Petersen, might come largely from this. It is the power structures of the ancient world which have set themselves in opposition to the fledgling church of the Johannine community. In Paul’s context, they “killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out” (I Thes 2:15). It seems such sentiments are shared by the author of John. Power is an issue in this gospel. This becomes increasingly significant as the powerless ones come to the fore.

Secondly, there is much in the “Jews” language of John that suggests what Bultmann would classify as “unbelievers in general.” In his commentary on John, the Jews are seen as symbolizing the state of the human heart, entrenched in unbelief.9

A third point relates to the matter of γνωμον, or “murmuring.” In 6:41 and 43 the Jews are labeled as “murmurers,” something which by no means surprises the reader at this point. According to Kittel, the onomatopoeic word goes back to a letter in 240 BC meaning “to be dissatisfied,” “to express dissatisfaction,” or “to express displeasure.” It is also used in the same time frame combined with ἀντιτίθεντες for “a sense of active opposition, verbal protest against distasteful action.”10 Marcus Aurelius uses the word in 170 AD for “grumbling at disappointed hopes”:

In non-Jewish and non-Christian Greek... it carries... the thought of a legal claim and the view that no satisfaction... was being done to this claim. Both the claim and the opinion are... objective.11

With Marcus Aurelius it becomes “opposite of fitting thankfulness to the gods, perhaps even imputing injustice to the gods....” Behind γνωμον stands man in his totality. It
describes a basic personal attitude, and the external conduct governed by the temperament and situation of the individual. It seems that a strong word was needed to describe the prevailing attitude of the people of Israel in certain situations. Ἰννυζειν "always carries the element of censure… is not seemly… is a trait which even on Greek soil marks one as ἀμαρτολος." This word governs our relationship to God. It does not merely depict a person, but condemns that person. In the LXX, the word is used 15 times for the deficient trust of the people and their disobedience. According to Isa 29 it seems to be ascribed as the traditional national sin:

"No longer will Jacob be ashamed…. Those who are wayward in spirit will gain understanding; those who complain will accept instruction" (22-24).

Murmuring and obedience are absolute opposites. Numbers 11:1 is talking about more than mood and carries the note of guilt:

“When the people complained, it displeased the Lord: and the Lord heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the Lord burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp.”

Here we see the theological character of the term: Ἰννυζειν is more than mere dissatisfaction; it is closer to rebellion. It has to do with a fundamental mindset that it anti-God. It signifies an ungodly attitude on the part of man.

In Ex 15-17, Ἰννυζειν is the attitude of the people when delivered from Egypt but not yet in the Promised land, discontented with their lot: “And the people murmured against Moses, saying, ‘What shall we drink?’” (Ex 15:25). The outbursts of discontent are always based on real hardships and seem somewhat justified. After all, these are God’s “chosen people.” They are free from Egyptian bondage because of God’s gracious election. But the inclination of the people is to make of their chosenness a claim, to be
cared for in every respect, to be brought to the goal without pain. Thus their murmuring is that justice had not been done to their claim. It is a wholly subjective murmuring, based on expectations of divine obligation.

Such an attitude reduces God to human standards and it robs him of his sovereignty. Thus ὀντοχύσω is tempting God: “Why do you put the Lord to the test?,” asks Moses when the people quarrel with him over water (Ex 17:2). Similarly, in Numbers 14:11 the Lord asks,

“How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them? I will strike them down.... Not one of the men who saw my glory and the miraculous signed I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times — not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers. Not one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it” (11-24).

Murmuring is more than words: it is the attitude of the whole person. Hence it merits guilt and punishment. Ancient Israel demonstrates that a right attitude means not murmuring, but rather, “unconditional acceptance” or "obedience" and "hearkening.” In this Old Testament context, the word ὀντοχύσειν has a spiritual dimension which is not known in the Greek world. Here God is brought under judgment and condemnation by the very people He has elected in grace. What they owe in return for their choseness is trust, gratitude and obedience: what they deliver is an attitude of criticism and condemnation. As a result, the word implies God’s judgment on murmurers.

In the New Testament, “murmuring” is set against an Old Testament background of censure. Paul picks it up in connection with Old Testament guilt:

“We should not test the Lord, as some of them did — and were killed by snakes. And do not grumble as some of them did — and were killed by the destroying angels. These things happened to them as examples and were written down as
warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” (I Cor 10:10-12).

The apostle transfers the full import of ancient Israel’s national sin to the New Testament community. New covenant people must be on their guard against an old covenant sin. In the gospel of John, the disputation Jews take *υποτιθεν* to its ultimate expression with their continual murmuring. In 6:41 and 43 murmuring seems synonymous with the rejection of Jesus by the Jews and at 6:61 for the skeptical attitude of the disciples. At 7:32 the word draws in the *αξιωσις* in the speculation of the common people about whether Jesus is in fact the Christ: “The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering such things about him.” In the *πιστευουσιν* of his own disciples, Jesus seems to see all the dangers of the old covenant sin, in this case against him:

Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to the, “Does this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe” (6:61-64).

It is a question of faith. They must eat his flesh for eternal life. The fact that such language does not conform to their expectations is something they must rise above. But the disciples cannot make this stretch. And some turn away from him at this point. The same hardness of heart is here which has been observed in the Jews. Like them, they assess Jesus in light of their own expectations; and they “murmur.” The dissatisfaction they express amounts to much the same as Old Testament criticism of God and dissatisfaction with Him, especially in the light of Jesus’ self-designation as the “Son of Man” in v. 62. These disciples reach the same conclusion which their forefathers reached in the wilderness. Their murmuring is not an acceptable option. It is no accident that *οι ου πιστευουσιν* choose to depart from Jesus when the murmuring
abates. And for those who remain? Their \( \gammaο\nu\gamma\zeta\epsilon\iota\nu \) must give way to confession.

There is no place among the followers of Jesus for disputatious darkness.

But it is with the Jews that John is most at pains to underline this point:

At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven.' They said, 'Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven?''

'Stop grumbling among yourselves,' Jesus answered. 'No-one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.'

(6:41-43).

The hearers measure Jesus by their own familiarity with his background and reject him on this ground.\(^{13}\) In so doing, they display the same attitude as that of their Old Testament ancestors. \( \text{Kittel underlines this connection:} \)

Yet the author is... indicating that the attitude of the hearers derives from a 'Jewish mode of thought.' He is particularly influenced... by the connection between \( \iota\omega\delta\alpha\iota\iota\iota \) and \( \gammaο\nu\gamma\zeta\epsilon\iota\nu\epsilon\iota\sigma \) which is so familiar to him from the history of the Jewish people. The Galilean hearers of Jesus show themselves to be \( \iota\omega\delta\alpha\iota\iota\iota \) by the fact that they are murmurers and that they withhold faith at the decisive moment. The Evangelist thus sees disaster overtaking the people a second time, because it cannot resolve to recognize God as God but insists that God must be guided by itself, its own opinions and expectations. This thought runs through the whole Gospel, from 1:11 onwards. It helps us see why \( \iota\omega\delta\alpha\iota\iota\iota \) is selected to sum up and to delineate the circles which treat Jesus with chilly reserve or even with open rejection.\(^{14}\)

It seems that John 7:32 is to be viewed in the same light, as the common people murmur concerning who Jesus is. \( \text{Comparison with 7:12 shows } \gammaο\nu\gamma\zeta\epsilon\iota\nu\epsilon\iota\sigma \text{ is not merely discussion of Jesus or secret approval of his claim but vacillation. It is ironic that the religious leaders find this dangerous. The } \sigma\zeta\lambda\sigma\sigma \text{ could turn from them! It seems that the general sense of } \gammaο\nu\gamma\zeta\epsilon\iota\nu \text{ stands because wavering uncertainty is not acceptance – and is not ultimately different from the rumbling rejection of the Jewish leaders.} \)

Vacillation, like open criticism, falls under the same divine judgment. And the story of the relationship between Jesus and the \( \sigma\zeta\lambda\sigma\sigma \) up to the cross provides extensive
justification for ascribing Old Testament πεφυσιος to these vacillating hearers. This becomes more obvious as characters who are anything but vacillators take centre stage.

3.2 “He knew what was in a man” (2:25)

It should come as no surprise that "the Jews" receive a great deal of critical interest in John, if for no other reason that that the appellation occurs seventy times -- as opposed to one in each of Matthew and Mark and three in Luke. What one might find more surprising is the lack of commentary on a more universal target of the fourth evangelist, humankind as a whole. Of course this is not exclusively male terrain. When John says that "men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil," the reference is to the fallen state of humanity. For our purposes it is sufficient merely to note the generic "man" in this respect. As Rudolof Schnackenburg says, “Everything that is necessary for this end (of bringing men home to God’s world of light), the giving of revelation and life, the banishment of the darkness of sin and guilt, the moral behavior which conquers evil works... and lusts..., is part of the light which the Logos radiates.”15 I concur with Grant Osborne’s comment on the prologue, that “every man receives the light and is responsible to reject (v.11) or accept (v.12) it...,” while noting at the same time that John's males depict this fallen state more readily than the females.16 The women of John are no doubt just as fallen as the men: it just seems that they are always associated with the light and in transition towards it. On the other hand, the men seem more entrenched in their fallenness. They are unable to activate their wills toward faith and receiving Jesus. Indeed, we will argue that their incapacity for faith shows some
particularly male characteristics: seeking favor from one another; concerns of status and power; lack of openness to new, spiritual concepts.

It is not just "his own" that did not receive the Word made flesh: it is "the world" (1:10). It is not just "the Jews" who loved darkness rather than light, but "men" (3:19). This more universal indictment is, I maintain, significant in a gospel that presses for belief. The evangelist is intent to show, it seems, not just the hardness of the Jewish heart, but that of the human heart. Generic "man" is his concern. Indeed, John seems every bit as interested in universal depravity as Romans. It is the universality of unbelief that makes any transition toward faith in John, usually seen among the female characters, remarkable. In this sense, John's males fit well with the state of the human heart in Luther's Bondage of the Will:

Now let us come to John, who is also an eloquent and powerful scourge of 'free-will.' Right at the outset, he assigns to 'free-will' such blindness that it does not even see the light of truth, so far it is from being able to strive after it. He says: 'The light shineth in darkness, but the darkness comprehendeth it not' (John 1:5). And straight after: 'He was in the world, and the world knew him not; He came unto his own, and his own knew him not' (vv.10-11). What do you think he means by 'world'? Will you exempt any man from being so called, save him that is new created by the Holy Ghost? The use of this term, 'world' is characteristic of this Apostle; and by it he simply means, the whole human race. So whatever he says of the 'world' must be understood of 'free-will', as being the most excellent thing in man. According to this apostle, then, the 'world' does not know the light of truth; and 'world' hates Christ and His; the 'world' neither knows nor sees the Holy Spirit; the whole 'world' is set in wickedness; all that is in the 'world' is the lust of the flesh and of the eyes, and the pride of life... John himself speaks of the 'world' antithetically, so that the 'world' means whatever is not taken out of the world to be under the Spirit.17

Not uncharacteristically, Luther seems to overstate his case here. It is quite possible, I believe, to hear the Fourth Evangelist declaring humankind in general "under wrath," and at the same time give due weight to the various appeals that are made to the will.

Thinking along Bultmann's lines, when one sees the Jews as symbolic of "unbelievers in
general" one is faced with the centrality of the "will": "you will not come to me...you chose for a time..." (5:35). Such passages argue against an easy predestinarianism which leans too heavily on the sovereignty of God. True, there must be a divine initiative in "drawing" unbelievers to Jesus. And Jesus makes it clear in his dialogues with his hearers that without this divine enabling, they cannot believe. In Luther's terms, the human will is so immobilized by sin that without grace faith is impossible. Yet at the same time, Jesus seems to call upon his hearers in John to activate what little will they can summon and make an effort in the direction of faith. This is the strategic role of the will in John, and it seems an important component in the Gospel. As Grant Osborne maintains in his study of soteriology in the Gospel of John, "few biblical books maintain a better balance between divine sovereignty and human responsibility than John.... John is an 'encounter' Gospel, as Jesus forces every person he meets to consider the claims of God and to make a choice."18 Such passages as 10:26f emphasize divine election and assurance:

you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand (10:26-29).

At the same time, in the dialogue which follows immediately, Jesus calls the same listeners to the response of faith: "Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father" (10:31-39).

Why was Jesus rejected? This seems the great question before John's reader. The "glory" of the Word made flesh has been clearly revealed. In the Prologue's terms, the
eternal, divine Creator has come into the world and εἰκόνεσθαι among us. As in the language of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Son is presented as the "radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (1:3). From the outset, he is presented from the divine side: the Logos was "with God" and "was God," not unlike the Old Testament "name" of God which "usually signifies an action of God in self-revelation."19 He is seen as the agent of creation, the source of all that exists. The great assertion of the role of the λόγος in creation is that "πανταξίων came through him" (v.3) and "the world came to be through him" (v.10). Here the prologue ascends to Christological heights of Colossians 1:16 and Hebrews 1:2. To mankind, he is "light" (1:3-4) and "life", meaning the "right and power to bestow activity, to make alive."20 Not only does the Logos make alive, as at creation, but he also brings illumination, the capacity to perceive and comprehend -- so that he can later declare, "I am the light of the world" (8:12).

One comes out of the prologue with a sense of awe about the Logos. While one might not share Kasemann's sense of "naïve docetism," one must concur with his overall impression, that this is God walking among men, that the theme of the Fourth Gospel is not so much "the Word became flesh" (1:14a) as "we beheld his glory" (1:14b).21 While Bultmann emphasizes the humanity of the Revealer, Kasemann stresses the divine glory of the Revealer, "the Word" as "God." Bultmann is concerned to point out that the divine glory which rests upon Christ in no way overpowers his complete humanity. Kasemann, on the other hand, argues that Johannine Christology is so elevated that it tends toward Docetism and does compromise Jesus' true humanity.22 In any case, the language of the Prologue is the language of awe. One hears awe in such phrases as "He was in the world and the world was made by him..." (1:10). The Creator walks among human beings.
"And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us..."(1:14). This is the language of wonder. Here is a prologue which asserts the pre-existence of Christ in the strongest terms, with echoes of Genesis 1, "in the beginning." And yet at the same time John declares that he walks upon the earth.

Part of the uniqueness of John's prologue in the absence of a post-incarnation ascent into glory. This hymn magnifies the \( \lambda o\gamma o\sigma \) before creation and in the process of creation -- and then shifts to what Robert Kysar calls "exaltation in creation." Unlike the hymn of Philippians 2, here we have an exaltation of Christ which says nothing about his ascension and exaltation "at the Father's right hand." It seems that for this author, the earthly life and ministry of Jesus is in itself the full presence of divine glory upon earth. Nor is this inconsistent with the picture of Jesus one sees in the Fourth Gospel as a whole. As Kysar puts it, "The Jesus of the Fourth Gospel is one who walks among humans as a human yet with the majesty and power of the divine.... Even his passion is not the humiliation of the death of a victim; for the passion narrative of the gospel presents Jesus not as a victim, but as Lord of the situation. Pilate has no authority over him."^24

Thus, when one looks at the Fourth Gospel as literature, one picks up the strong expectations of a glorious God-man, or to use Malina's term, a "Sky Man" being created in the early sections: expectations of the numinous, of reverence, of worship, of awe.\(^{25}\) This narrator is describing his supreme wonder in hushed tones and wants the audience to share his point of view. Apart from a forewarning verse or two, nothing is allowed a place in the early sections which will detract from the overwhelming brightness of the incarnation, the splendor and grandeur of the cosmic event: "we beheld his glory...."^26 Expectations are created in the prologue that verge on the Pauline phrase, "one degree of
glory to the next." The transition to the present tense in 1:5 stresses the present reality of the light and that John has been commissioned to bear testimony to light here and now, "so that through him all men might believe" (1:7). This change of tense also seems an early indicator that "the work of the invisible Logos is the same as the work of this same Logos incarnate in the Lord." 27

Although the incarnation of the Logos is not explicitly mentioned until 1:14, yet St. John wishes his readers to understand several of the earlier verses as a description both of the permanent work and functions of the Logos and of the Lord's historic life and work, since His historic life and work, as St. John will show in the course of his book, reproduce these permanent relations of the Logos with the world. Rightly understood, the Lord's ministry is, as it were, the relations, written small, of the Logos with mankind. 28

This Word made flesh makes clear to every person the meaning of life (1:9) Moreover, he participates in the very humanity which he has created. The realm of flesh will not be empowered to fulfill God's original purpose for it. Thus the phrase "the Logos was made flesh and dwelt among us" has been described as John's great subject in itself. While the word eσκυπτο or "pitched his tent" suggests that this was a temporary visit, something brought out periodically and poignantly in this Gospel, still it was long enough for the eyewitnesses to behold "his glory" -- and, one might expect, summon the appropriate response. 29

Unlike the Synoptics, and especially Mark, where the secrecy of the Lord's identity is stressed, God incognito, concealed from the eyes of men as long as they live in this world -- here there has been a full disclosure about his person in word and deed. For John the incarnation and passion are not described as a great parabola of humiliation, as in Philippians 2, but rather as the full revelation of the glory of the Father and the Son. While early on in Jesus' ministry the statements about his person are indirect -- "destroy
this temple and in three days I will raise it up" (3:19) -- his revelation of himself becomes increasingly open. To the Samaritan woman he says, "I who speak to you am he" (4:26). This full disclosure of his identity is recalled when he stands before the high priest at the end and says, "I have spoken openly to the world... I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret" (18:20).

Not only has his majesty been declared in word. Throughout the fourth gospel, word and deed are combined and interwoven as though to present the most effective teaching method. In each section, a discourse accompanies a "sign" and explicates it. At the same time, the "signs" do not stand on their own merit but to illustrate a teaching. Some commentaries underline the complete unity of seven signs in the gospel, and of seven major discourses. And the signs are awesome and dramatic demonstrations of divine majesty, each with a message about Jesus. John uses σημεῖα for the miracles of Jesus, unlike the synoptic Gospels which prefer διαμαρτυρία. Such deeds are not ends in themselves but point beyond themselves. They teach spiritual truths. They originate with God and point people to God. In Lightfoot's terms, "the contrast... is not so much between present and future, as between seen and unseen, external event and internal truth." For Leon Morris,

it is not surprising that they ... result in faith.... Indeed, John can speak of his whole Gospel as an account of 'signs' recorded that men might believe (20:30f).... In accordance with this, people who saw the signs but refused to believe are blamed for that very reason (12:37). So concerned are the Jewish leaders about the compelling force of "signs" that they deduce, "all men will believe on him" (11:47). And people do come to Jesus over signs (6:2; 12:18) and even achieve a kind of faith (6:14).

It seems that John uses 'sign' in a way that is unique. For him the miracles were significant events, carefully selected from the sources of Jesus' ministry. They presented
spiritual truths behind the miracle. Thus the Evangelist arranges the healings and wonders done by Jesus in a way that addresses a variety of human needs. The turning of water into wine may be seen as revealing human insufficiency in the face of even the normal demands of life. The healing of the nobleman's son and of the man who had been lame for thirty-eight years address the sicknesses and disabilities that afflict humanity. The feeding of the five thousand relates to the futility of mankind to address the great needs of the world. Walking on the water and entering the disciples storm-tossed boat contrasts man's helplessness in the face of the awesome forces of nature with the supremacy of Jesus' power. The opening of the eyes of the blind man shows man's failure to cope with either physical or spiritual impediments, while it also shows Jesus to be the light of the world. The raising of Lazarus from the dead reaches a climax in showing the triumph of the power of Jesus even over the final enemy. Each of the signs is meaningful in itself. They have the potential to lead the observer to faith. These are the great signs. Jesus transforms the water of Judaism into the wine of the gospel; when you receive him into your vessel, you are immediately at shore; he calls things that do not exist as though they do. Such signs demand a response.

The majestic signs are accompanied by the great "I am" statements of John: "I am the way, the truth and the life"; "I am the door", "the light of the world", I am the Good Shepherd"; I am the bread of life"; I am the resurrection and the life;" I am "the vine". One is reminded that Jesus' own disciples have never seen God -- no one does except the son who makes him known. In John to "see him" is to "see the Father." Jesus is "the Revealer." The "I am" statements form part of the description of Jesus' great revelatory role. Marianne Meye Thompson comments:
The images used to interpret his significance focus on Jesus' role as the means of revelation and salvation (e.g., wisdom, word, lamb, bread, light); on his role as the place or locale of revelation (the heavenly ladder, the temple); or, on various agents (e.g., Moses, Messiah Son of Man the Prophet) who mediated the message and judgments of God to the people. Together these images conflate the roles of the mediator, the agent and the means through which God is made known and manifested, in the person of Jesus. Never do these means or intermediary figures take the place of God: the temple is not worshiped; Moses and the Prophet are commissioned and empowered by God; and, while wisdom and word may impart God's very thought, they are always explicitly expressions derived from God.

The concentration of all these revelatory entities in the person of Jesus is an argument for the singularity and unity of the mediator and, hence an argument for the unity of God. Means, place and time of revelation come together in the person of Jesus, and the concentration of all these functions in the person of Jesus depends upon the assumption of the unity of God. The life which Jesus offers is the very life of God. To see Jesus as the means of genuine worship in the Fourth Gospel is one aspect of John's 'agency Christology' and coheres with those christological affirmations which designate him as 'the Word and Son of God, which speak of his union with and dependence on God, and which argue that he manifests God's glory. All these formulations underscore Jesus' roles as the means of revelation and salvation. The Son is the means of creation, the means of revelation, the means of God's manifestation and presence.  

Indeed one might say that there is "fullness" about this divine revelation as in Colossians 1:9 "all fullness dwell in him." John will convey such a sense in 10:10; 15:11; and 16:24, but he does so preeminently in 1:14, "full of grace and truth." The first term has to do with kindness, mercy and favor. The second has to do with God's faithfulness; he will fulfill his word. The law thus can be seen as a praeparatio evaangelica.

How this "fullness" is lived out, and why it is rejected, is the subject before us. His most used title in this gospel is 'the Son' and his deeds are seen as the activity of one who ministers out of a most intimate union with his Father. He is governed only by one objective, to fulfill the mandate which the Father has given him (19:28). He is mindful that he has come from God and returns to God (13:3; 16:28). He knows that the Father has placed all things in his hands (3:35; 13:3). He is not surprised by the cruel twists of fortune that come upon him, but is aware of them in advance (18:4). Nor is he taken
aback by human rejection, because he can read the human heart and has an absolute knowledge about all men (1:47-48; 4:17-18; 5:42; 6:64). One might conclude with the words of Lightfoot, "From beginning to end this gospel is a compact whole.... The Lord is revealed as giving Himself, in smaller or greater degree, throughout; and His manifestation of Himself, in both work and word, becomes steadily clearer, greater and more personal, in proportion as the opposition to Him and to His work and teaching increases."\(^{35}\)

Such stress does John put on the "glory" of the Son, one wonders if there was something in the cultural setting from which John emerged that called for this. Indeed, the hypothesis articulated by Rensberger and others seems well founded, that the expulsion from the synagogue created in the Johannine community such a sense of superior calling that they used a more exalted christology to proclaim their distinctive.\(^{36}\)

It has been posited that the absence of the humiliation theme in the Christology of the prologue might offer a correction to Jewish opponents who considered a crucified Messiah hardly an object of worship. On the contrary, says John. This gospel begins with a hymn which exalts the pre-incarnate and incarnate Son. It is followed by what might be called his "glorious ministry." The majestic hymn which opens the gospel refutes any undue stress upon a humiliated Messiah. Robert Kysar stresses the uniqueness of John's prologue:

"Perhaps the hymn is conditioned by its gospel setting. That is to say that the hymn is to be understood in the context of the life and ministry of Jesus. The thrust of the hymn is therefore functional. It is not concerned primarily with the ontic nature of Christ but with the existential impact of the life and ministry of that one person. The mythology of the logos with God, of the logos incarnated and of the logos revealing God to humanity is concerned to say that in the work of Christ one encounters truth which is of such importance one can only apply it to the beginning. The prologue makes the salvific emphasis in a unique way,
namely by introducing a document which professes to be a narrative proclamation of the good news.\textsuperscript{37}

But what does it mean for the gospel that it is introduced with a Christological hymn? It seems that the evangelist wanted the reader to see that the Christ story has not ended but is re-expressed in the songs of the faith throughout all time. The Jesus of history, then, is no different from the living Christ of faith affirmed in the prologue. Thus the Fourth Gospel can move with ease between the life and ministry of the historical Jesus and the community which is called by his name.

In light of all the above, we return to the question of rejection. In Lightfoot’s view it is a question of fallenness, the fact that “the world” is in a state of non-receptivity to the divine:

If it is asked how, in view of the open revelation of Himself by the Lord, the multitude and the Jews can have played the parts assigned to them in this gospel, possibly St. John would have reminded the questioner that the world, as such, although it is the object of God’s love (3:16) and the Lord was sent to save it (3:17, 12:47), cannot recognize or know the truth; as such, it cannot see or enter into the Kingdom of God (3:3-5).\textsuperscript{38}

And one is reminded, with Lightfoot’s summary, that by becoming flesh the Logos necessarily abandoned all those qualities of divinity which might have compelled belief.\textsuperscript{39}

And yet, there is an inescapable question of culpability in this gospel. It does not seem adequate to put a "no comment" over the issue, as Lightfoot does:

the questions ... why men chose or choose to identify themselves with the darkness rather than with the light are not answered by St. John, and should not be raised. All that can be said is that in religion, whenever such a word as light is used in a metaphorical sense, the presence, or at least the possibility, of its opposite, darkness, is also always implied.... And the moral life is always conscious, if not of a struggle, at any rate of the need for choice between possible alternatives. Accordingly, if men are given the possibility of walking in the light, in accordance with the law of their origin through the Logos, this very possibility implies also their ability to choose to walk in the darkness, in obedience not to the
law of their origin, but to a law of their own making. For them life does not, as it should, also signify light.\textsuperscript{40}

It is precisely this Johannine dualism that is used to stress the culpability of "man" in his resistance to Christ. Throughout this gospel, the \textit{world does not know} the \textit{logos}; even his own people (\textit{Iē̂a}) did not receive him. It is not just the cross, in John, the embodies the rejection of Christ. The climax is no different from the course of his ministry. There is a fundamental resistance to truth here. The \textit{λογος} has confronted humankind with divine claims, and been rejected. And unbelief has a dramatic and dualistic profile.

Incorporating the light-darkness dualism into the prologue gives the hymn a polemic tone which is not found in the other Christological hymns of the New Testament. The author wants to establish early a very strong emphasis upon the rejection of Christ.

Light/darkness, good/evil, divine/flesh -- it is as though John's universe is fractured and best represented by two opposite realities. The prologue reminds us that "light" and "life" broke forth at creation at God's command. Everything that was created was God's work: the triumph of light over darkness, the separation and ordering of creation, the right to dominion ascribed to mankind -- God made it and pronounced it good. Similarly here, man is the recipient of divine grace: "In him was \textit{life} and the life was the \textit{light} of men."

But such blessings call for a response: "Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die" (11:26). In order to enter into that divine life, there are steps that must be taken, a will that must be activated. The promise of life is held out to those who \textit{come} to Christ (5:40); to those who "hear", "accept", "obey" his word (5:24; 8:51); those who "eat his flesh and drink his blood" (6:54); those who drink that water that he gives (4:14; 7:37); those whom he chooses (5:21); those who follow him wherever he goes (8:12).
Yet none of these steps of acceptance are simple. John's Gospel takes time to highlight the things that hinder a person from faith and which one must make an effort to overcome: "How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?" (5:44). This concern with gaining the favor of others is highlighted again later: "Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God" (12:42-43). First, then, there is this concern with public opinion, which is a particularly male characteristic, according to John Gray. In terms of male-female differences, men are concerned with power and achievement which bring recognition from their peers. In terms of the Fourth Gospel, such male attitudes impede faith. Secondly, there is the pride of Judeans which treats Galilee and all it produces with contempt (7:41). Third, there is the very male concerns with social status and position: "If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation" (11:48).

A fourth impediment to faith may also be seen as predominant in males, that of trusting in established dictums without being open to their opposites: "Jesus' brothers said to him, 'You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world.' For even his own brothers did not believe in him" (7:3-5). This concern with wanting to become a "public figure" relates to Gray's description of the male fascination with power and public esteem. But beyond
that, these men show that *familiarity with trusted dictums* can be an impediment to faith.

Here Ned Herrman's description of left-brain dominants seems to apply:

> But whereas A-Only focuses on facts, loci and here-and-now, B quadrant left-brainers only want to know what has worked in the past. ‘If it has worked before, it will work again.’ A-Only people devise formulas; B-Only test them down to the last jot and tittle. B-Only is basically action oriented and may have little patience for intellectual complexities that A-Only likes. Can we verify it? B-Only wants answers. Let others ask interesting questions. B-Only's heaven is a world where there is a rule and a place for everything... neat dependable world, decisions made according to long established procedures.42

Along the same lines, the rootedness of John's Jews in religious tradition is a major impediment to faith in Jesus.

Connected with such rootedness is a fifth impediment to faith, *ignorance* of the larger context of the Old Testament writings themselves: "Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee" (7:52). How much less likely is it that Nicodemus, who does "not understand these things" can shift from a linear, left-brain thinking pattern to radically new concepts? The mystery of the divine Son as the "bread of life" calls for something more than the grumbling of the Jews: "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?" (6:41-42).

John's "mankind" simply seems less capable of *spirituality* than his women. "You are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the son of Man will give you... " (6:26-27). This concern might be termed "this-worldly" as described by Jesus: "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do
not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins" (8:23). Morris points out that there is a difference between the first twelve chapters of the Gospel and the last nine in the use of this word κοσμίωσις. When we distinguish the positive and negative use of the term, the division is 18 to 9, positive to negative, in the first twelve chapters of the Gospel, and 7 to 30, positive to negative, in chapters 13 to 18. It seems the second part of the Gospel is concerned with the situation of the community in the world after Jesus’ departure; all the emphasis falls on the actual response of the world to the message of Jesus and of his disciples after him; this response is negative, and equally negative is the judgment upon this response. God is concerned with the world; this is why Jesus came and why the disciples also are sent forth into the world. But in the actual confrontation with Jesus it becomes evident that he brings about a division. Many people say no; those who say yes are the exception: thus... the coming of the light signifies a separation, because men love darkness rather than light. This is the way the world is, in John’s gospel, and the outcome is obvious. The rejection of Jesus by the world is declared, not explained.

In some texts, however, the devil is brought into the picture, and this may be the evangelist’s final statement on the falleness of mankind. Just as faith and good deeds are ultimately to be traced to their divine origin, unbelief and evil works are traced to their devilish origin. "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him" (8:44). This crowd can hardly claim that "the only Father we have is God himself" (8:41). This description of the origin of evil is developed further in 1 John 3:4-12 where the evil men are literally of the evil one. But in Jesus' elevation and
glorification it is clear that the reign of the prince of this world is coming to an end (12:31; 16:11). He has no power over Jesus (14:30). The disciples can rest assured: "I have overcome the world" (16:33).

As if to make the process easy, John puts the puts in verb form the many different ways a person can "believe." One can "receive" (1:12). One must "hear" (5:24). Other things one can activate: "come" (6:35); "learn" (6:45); "eat" (6:51); "drink" 7:37; "follow" 8:12; "hold" 8:31; "keep" (8:51); "acknowledge" (9:22); "worship" (9:30); "enter" (10:1). All verbs. Such a list of verbs connected with faith suggests, as Lightfoot says, that believing is connected with action:

"We have no right ... to use the substantive belief and knowledge. In each case the evangelist carefully avoids the noun, but on the other hand, in each case he uses the verb freely, in the case of the verb pisteuein, 'to believe', nearly a hundred times. He thus indirectly, but unmistakably, emphasizes that the religious belief which is set forth in this gospel, and to which he wrote it, is no passive or unchanging state, still less a formal adherence to a set of propositions: it is a life of energy and growth, in which, although the end is implicit in the beginning, there is always more in front of the believer than he has been granted, or has been able as yet to make his own; and in this process, which is throughout a matter of believing, knowledge itself can never dare to case to learn; from time to time it also dies to live.... Both faith and knowledge are processes which cannot be more than partial and preliminary in human experience, and in the light of the Christian revelation nothing is too good to be true. The foundation of the truth has indeed been laid once for all... but the truth itself, although present, is always in advance."44

3.3 John’s Male Figures

A third indictment is levied by the fourth evangelist, and that is specifically the world of "men." Their failed response to the Messiah is the backdrop against which the women's response of faith is played out. This is seen both in their general attitudes and in their specific delineation as characters.
The glory of the Word made flesh continues to fill the stage with the witness of John the Baptist and the drawing to Jesus of the first disciples. Within the first few chapters we have the splendor and supremacy of the Christ established in bold but deft strokes: he is the “Lamb of God.” The Holy Spirit “abides” upon him (1:32). He himself is the “baptizer” in the Holy Spirit (1:33). He has penetrating discernment into the hearts of all people (1:47). A village wedding provides the setting for his first miraculous sign. He then demonstrates the invasive nature of his coming as he drives from “my Father’s house” those who have turned it into “a market.” “Light has come into the world” in no uncertain terms with the crash of the money-changer’s tables!

But more than merchandise will be shattered. These bright expectations connected with wonder, adoration and worship have been raised only to be dashed to pieces. This “glory” must not shine unimpeded or the drama goes nowhere. This is clearly the author’s dramatic intent. Even though we have early intimations that light will ultimately prevail, this will only happen after darkness has filled the entire stage. This awesome coming of light, this presence of the divine “in the world” will evoke not worship but wrangling; not adoration, but attack.

The backdrop of darkness in John is the darkness of a midnight marketplace, full of the rumble of contentious debate. It is fundamentally disputatious. Indeed, it seems entirely appropriate that John’s cleansing of the temple is an early one in that it seems to symbolize the invasion of a dark, haggling marketplace by divine light. This could be seen to symbolize the whole event in John’s gospel. “Do not make my Father’s house a house of merchandise.” What is an οἶκον εμπορίου if not a marketplace filled with sheep, oxen, tables for money-changers – and the sound of haggling? From the protests
of the moneychangers onward, the *haggling* in John never ceases. The darkness murmurs throughout. Putting this drama on stage, one would want to have a continual background rumble, the murmur of human voices, ever contending, ever ceaselessly muttering, ever indignant with protest and threat.

Indeed, this disputatious darkness of Judaism raises its voice as early as chapter one, when the Jews send priests and Levites from Jerusalem to interrogate the Baptist. Bultmann sees the event as the “standard seeking” of the Jews. But Craig Koester juxtaposes this interview with the more faith-driven one of the first disciples and stresses the contrast:

The Jerusalem delegation presents a striking contrast to John the Baptist and his disciples.... John replied with the startling statement, ‘Among you stands one whom you do not know” (1:26). His remark suggests that their messianic expectations did not adequately prepare them to recognize Jesus. It also raises the question of how one does recognize Jesus as the coming one.

The rumble of complaint becomes louder in the next chapter, protesting over the cleansing of the temple: “What sign do you show?” From the outset, Jesus takes this disputatious darkness to its lethal limits and speaks of “destruction” as a sign: “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up” (2:19). It is as though he sees in their inquiries something more than words. Behind the protestations lies malevolence. This is not simply disputation. These are not seekers after truth. This is contentiousness with a deadly streak. This is the midnight marketplace: “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?” (2:20). There is an obdurate literalism about this crowd that cannot relate to the antilanguage of John or to the *double-entendre* of the speaker. These contentious ones hardly camouflage their
virulence with bits of pious inquiry. This disputatious darkness is deadly, out to destroy the “enemy.”

Having established its deadliness, the author proceeds to stress its tenacity. He uses his brush liberally to create a backdrop of ever-present darkness, unbroken, expanding, intent on eclipsing the light.49 Symbolically enough, Nicodemus comes to Jesus out of the night as an ἀρχηγὸς τοῦ λογίαν, with more questions (3:2). The interview provides the setting in which Jesus can expand on the light/dark polarity: “This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil” (3:19). Nicodemus is stumped over Jesus’ metaphorical language early on, and the dialogue becomes a monologue. As the lights fade on a Jewish leader, it is clear that there is judgment involved in this light/darkness polarity. It is a life and death struggle in more ways than one. There is the question of our human preference, even passion, for evil. While one hears often in John a strong note of sovereignty and predestination, this is not without appeals to the will: “you will not come to me…” says Jesus. This tension between human free will and divine sovereignty is established early. (3) And as the monologue proceeds, the personal pronoun “you” gives way to the universal “men.” This takes the topic beyond the Judeans or even the “Jews.” This drama is also concerned with humankind.

Thus the conversation with Nicodemus brings into early focus one of the recurring tensions in John, between divine sovereignty and free will. Jeffrey A. Trumbower describes the theme thus:

“the dualism of John… divides human beings into two antithetical groups of people: those from God and those from the devil…. The belonging to one or the other groups is based on God’s predeterminaton. ‘Whoever is from Truth hears my voice,’ says the Fourth Gospel (18:37); it certainly does not say, ‘He who
hears my word and obeys it, he is a man of Truth,’ but rather if he is from the
truth, then he cannot help but hear. He who is from below cannot hear at all,
cannot believe, but can only be rebellious against the message of God’s salvation
in Jesus. What a person is and what he does is determined by his whence — either
from below or from above.”

Bultmann sees this matter of origins somewhat differently, as something which can be
broken by new birth:

“For it is one of the basic ideas of Johannine Anthropology … that man is
determined by his origin, and determined in such a way that, as he now is, he has
no control over his life. Moreover, the goal of man’s life corresponds to his
origin. If the way is to lead to salvation, it must start from another point, and man
must be able to reverse his origin, and to exchange his old origin for a new one.
He must be reborn!”

Here Trumbower argues that “the evidence from the Fourth Gospel itself will not support
him,” that while the gospel does hold out the prospect of change, it is “only those who
believe” who undergo such a change: “then the gospel speaks in great detail about the
origins of various human beings as an explanation for why some have believed and others
have not. When it does so… it has in view fixed origins which manifest themselves
through correct and incorrect responses to Jesus, and that these origins cannot change or
be exchanged.”

Grant Osborne seems to bridge this dichotomy successfully in his “Soteriology in
the Gospel of John:”

Certainly there are two groups: the children of God and the children of Satan…
but there is no absolute dichotomy. The world is at one and the same time the
scene of rejection and the scene of Jesus’ saving activity. The Jews are called to
faith and judged for their unbelief. Divine election and human decision are
compatible and resolvable…. The world is indeed totally depraved and always
chooses to reject Christ, but at the same time God seeks the salvation of all the
world…. God is an ‘equal opportunity’ convicter who, in drawing all to himself,
makes it possible to make a true decision to accept or reject Jesus…. Those who
accept are ‘chosen’ and ‘give’ to Christ. That decision is not possible without
God’s drawing power, but it is a free moral decision without irresistible coercion.
Election is still theologically true but is not absolute.”
With Nicodemus, Jesus shows that this matter of making a choice for or against him is not as easy as it might seem. Indeed it has to do with ones' nature and predisposition to evil: “For everyone that does evil hates the light ...” (3:20-21). The words seem out of place in a courteous evening exchange between religious figures. For the second time, Jesus imposes the language of antagonism and violence upon these discussions. It is as though we are not dealing with mere contentiousness here, but hatred. We are not dealing with a preference for evil, but doing evil. Moreover, the chapter concludes with a statement about the large life-and-death stakes involved: “He that has the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him”(3:36).

Two signs and a discourse follow, before more rumblings appear from the dark corridors of John’s Judaism. “The Jews said to the man who had been healed, ‘It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat’” (5:10). At this point, disputatious darkness has become the stuff of caricature, for all its deadliness. We are reminded of the strategy of laughter which the gospels often bring out as Jesus’ primary weapon against the Pharisees:

“With the Pharisees, the strategy of laughter was more appropriate and effective... for bigotry is peculiarly vulnerable to ridicule.... Christ’s major weapon against the Pharisaic attack was laughter, and he used it fully. The point at which they were most vulnerable was their manifest self-righteousness.” 54

How is that these Ιουδαίοι could be so locked in to their world view that they are blinded to all else? To be obsessed in miniscule regulations about the Sabbath with a cripple of 38 years stands before their eyes whole is utterly risible. This, indeed, is to “strain at a gnat and swallow a camel!” Yet the author’s satirizing of these men does not dissuade the audience about their deadliness. By the end of this scene, they have taken
their disputatious darkness to a new level: “persecuting” Jesus, they “sought to slay” him because he had done these things on the Sabbath. Jesus responds, “My father works hitherto and I work” (5:17). “Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him...” (v.17-18).

By this point the battle lines between darkness and light are militantly drawn, a mere quarter of the way in! This backdrop of grumbling blackness against which the characters of light must play their parts is filling the stage. Chapter 6 broadens the parameters and implicates not just the Ἰουδαῖοι, but the common men of Palestine who want to make Jesus king (v.15). These men are debased and utterly unenlightened, the ὄχλοι of the gospel. Their concerns are entirely this-worldly. In Paul’s terms, “their god is their belly.” John’s version: “You are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill” (6:26). And the deepening shadows of Judaism soon reassert their presence: “What signs do you show?”... (6:30). Jesus again raises larger issues: inveterate sinfulness and the incapacity of some of this crowd to change – something which by this point does not surprise the reader. John paints such a dark backdrop that the very notion of a penetrating shaft of light seems alien. “All that the Father gives me will come to me,” Jesus says (v.37). There is a transaction in the spiritual world that must take place before any of this crowd can “come.” And clearly, this has not happened for these “children of the darkness,” obsessed as they are with their disputes. These Ἰουδαῖοι ἐγνωρίζον at him. Jesus responds, “Stop grumbling among yourselves... ” (v.43). Everything depends upon the Father’s “draw,” upon whether or not one is among the “given.”(v.65). But murmurs lead to “strife”(v.52) and even some disciples turn away. Jesus adds some extreme
sacramental language that is too much for some. His own brothers are added to the list of unbelievers (7:4) with their ironic “no man does anything in secret…” By this point, “Jesus went around in Galilee, purposely staying away from Judea because the Jews were waiting to take his life” (7:1). The effect of deserting disciples and disaffection within Jesus’ family is to make a kind of spiritual night almost all-encompassing among the males characters. Not only have these spokesmen for darkness filled the stage. With their contentious presence, they have now pushed “the light” to the fringe.

Chapter 7 brings very dangerous encounters, beginning with wonder from among the Jews (v.15), their denial of the accusation of malevolence (v.20); and their attempt “to seize him” (v.30). The Jewish leaders send the temple guard to arrest him. But they are captivated instead, by words like which “no one ever spoke” (7:46). Again these Jewish males are blocked by their plodding literalism: “Where does this man intend to go that we cannot find him? Will he go where our people live scattered among the Greeks?” (v.35). A top level meeting follows (v.45f) in which Nicodemus intervenes: “Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him…?” (v.51). It seems the man remains fascinated with Jesus’ person, whatever his commitment to faith. One tends to agree with David Rensberger, that his intervention here can hardly be seen as a confession of faith: “On the contrary, though it properly disputes the legality of Jesus’ condemnation, Nicodemus’ reply remains confined to the realm of Pharisaic legal debate….” For Rensbeger it is significant that Nicodemus speaks of “our law” … “for in John the law is always the law of the Jews or of Moses, never of Jesus or of his disciples. Nicodemus thus remains the world-be ‘teacher of Israel’ who cannot bring himself to a real confession of faith in Jesus.”
By this point these shadowy males characters are somewhat pathetic. Blocked by their endless disputations, darkened by spiritual blindness, they miss the larger meanings, the καίρος moment that is around them. “I am only with you for a short time,” warns Jesus (v.33). How damning does their spiritual darkness appear! A magic moment has been given. A καίρος opportunity. Yet, in chapter eight we have more disputation about adultery, which on these lines is not a bad placement for the story. And the interrogations continue: “Where is your father?... Who are you?” (8:19, 25).

Jesus’ main concern seems the same, to warn them about the καίρος moment before them: “I am going away, and you will ... die in your sins”(8:21). “Will he kill himself?” they ask (v.22) Jesus draws on spatial polarities: “You are from below, I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world” (v.23). While some Jews actually believe here (8:30), more disputation follows: “We are Abraham’s descendents…”(v.33). Jesus takes them back to deeds, and the strongest language ensues: these men are “children of the devil” (v.44). More querulous words: “Aren’t we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?”(v.48) Finally, when Jesus makes an “I Am” statement about preceding Abraham, “they took up stones” (v.59).

The lone exception to this rumbling darkness that continues to fill the stage is the man born blind in chapter 9. This a key chapter with its blind and sight, light and darkness motif: “As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (9:4-5). Again a great “sign” gives rise to a caricature portrait of the λουδαίος. From
their pompous appearance on stage, they are the stuff of comedy. And of course it is the Sabbath day! This author has an indomitable sense of humor.⁵⁶

There is no illusion about disputatious dark by this point. When they ask the blind man how he had received sight, it is certainly not a question based on spiritual interests. And their stock answer comes immediately: “The man is not from God” (v.16). But how else could he heal? A division arises — and where have we seen such vain striving before? They dispute the healing. Their virulence is so powerful that the parents deny any knowledge of the matter: “ask him,” they say, for fear of “being put out of the synagogue.” “Give glory to God,” say the Jews with typical religiosity. “We know this man is a sinner” (v.24). When the eyes-wide-open man argues from experience that this is unlikely, they ask, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” (v.26). But these are not the questions of faith. Even the poor, unschooled man loses his patience with this crowd’s inveterate, contentious obduracy, and poses two of the most ironic questions in the Gospel: “I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?”(v.27) This man has become almost a Christ figure, the great exception to the dominant tenor of male dullness that pervades John. With contemptuous pride, they miss the point again: “We are disciples of Moses!…as for this fellow, we don’t even know where he comes from” (v.28-29).⁵⁷ The newly healed man mocks their posturing as religious authorities with more wonderful irony: “Now that is remarkable! You don’t know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes.” (v.30). Utterly outwitted, all they can muster is more hostility to the light (v.34) — and they “threw him out.” The passage closes with the timely, summarizing words of Jesus: “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind
will see and those who see will become blind” (v.39). And the effect is to intensify the darkness on stage. We now have a double darkness: blind men walking in the dark.

By chapter 10, they again “take up stones” and try again to “take him” (v.39) but he escapes beyond the Jordan. Their hostility continues to push Jesus to the fringe and thus make the light more scarce. Similarly, another council in chapter 12 results in pushing the light further aside, with more caricature figures, men posturing as defenders of truth, whose only real concerns are selfish: “if we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation” (12:48). A final touch is the ironic figure of Caiaphas the high priest filling the most unlikely role of prophet: “You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish” (v.49-50). They disperse after fresh counsel on how to dispatch this light from the world (v.53), shutting themselves off still more into their own darkness in that “Jesus no longer moved about publicly among the Jews. Instead he withdrew to a region near the desert, to a village called Ephraim, where he stayed with his disciples” (12:54). It is as though they generate their judgment. So intent are they with self-preservation, they are prepared to eliminate not just Jesus, but Lazarus as well! (12:10). Such wrongheaded, self-seeking characters cannot escape the author’s satirical flourishes: “What are we accomplishing? … everyone will believe in him” (11: 47-48). By the time Jesus and the disciples reach the upper room, and Judas goes out into the night, the man of darkness departing while the Son of man is glorified, a great contrast has been established. The glow of the upper room is like a flickering candle against a very dark night as Jesus prays, “the world has
hated them... keep them from evil..." (17:14-19). By chapter 18 we are ready for an intrusive arrest under, of course, the cover of night.

When John’s male characters are examined as a group, one thinks that Sandra Schneiders’ summary is quite correct: they are "vain, hypocritical, fickle and obtuse, deliberately unbelieving or thoroughly evil." It remains to be seen whether or not they fare better as individuals.

3.3.1 Nicodemus

The late-night dialogue with the shadowy Nicodemus is often seen in contrast with the mid-day meeting with the Samaritan woman. An initial contrast might be seen in the fact that Nicodemus "seeks" Jesus out, for his late night encounter, whereas Jesus "seeks" the woman. The former is Nicodemus at his finest, responding to the "signs" that he has observed in exactly the appropriate steps, by allowing them to point him to Jesus. So much the more unexpected is the apparent fruitlessness of the encounter! In Nicodemus' case, "seek and you shall find" does not seem to apply -- at least for the moment. That such "seeking" is a great virtue is clear throughout John. It's lack is the great shortfall of the Jews, a non-seeking spirit. And 6:26 brings out the fact that ζητεῖτε in response to miraculous signs is a virtue, although it must be with the right motives:

I tell you the truth, you seek me not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.

So Nicodemus' introduction to the drama is not entirely negative.

He arrives as an archon of the Jews. Whether this means that he was a Synagogue leader or a full-fledged member of the Praetorium, which seems to be
indicated later, the gulf between this man and the woman of Samaria could not be larger. Nicodemus' tone indicates that he is fully aware that he comes to Jesus on at least equal footing, as a fellow expounder of truth, though some see a note of hierarchical superiority in his posing as a judge of truth: "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him"(3:3). Jesus rejects flatly any position of authority which the man would like to assume. And one wonders if it is not his refusal to accept such a "put down" which makes Nicodemus' visit seem so unfruitful.

Nicodemus is associated with the powerful and wealthy elite, coming to Jesus in the fine evening attire of a gentleman of standing in the community. He appears on stage as a man of impeccable morality, one of the observers and teachers of Jewish law. For Robert Karris the man is a "marginalizer" who becomes a "disciple." In his early appearance, he is "also a representative of the 'the rich' who become disciples of Jesus." His conversation with Jesus is an example of the frequent Johannine pattern of (i) an opening question; (ii) a mysterious and non-committal reply; (iii) confusion; (iv) a clarifying monologue:

(N) "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God..." (v.2)

(J) "... non one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (v.3)

(N) "How can a man be born when he is old?..." (v.4)

(J) "...no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit" (v.5)

(N) "How can this be?" (v.9)
"You are Israel's teacher... and do you not understand these things?"

(v.10)

One is unsure of how the conversation ends or where Nicodemus disappears. Perhaps on a stage, the lights would simply dim on him and he would disappear into the dark from which he came. While one would not wish to be excessively severe with the man's queries or rule out the impression of some that a man of clear logic and perfectly rational queries is treated somewhat unfairly and is quite rightly mystified by responses that seem from another world, it still seems appropriate to observe that his three unperceptive comments do not advance the conversation. In effect, this is a monologue by Jesus.

There is a wooden-ness about Nicodemus in his interaction with Jesus. He is stumped early by the metaphors of water and wind, and pretty much goes home dumbfounded. Nicodemus misses expanding revelation. Is he even present for John 3:16? It is like the lights have dimmed on him by this point. To Jesus' queries, the man has no reply. It is as though the final word has been spoken. As a teacher of Israel, he has come up short.

Nicodemus comes on the scene in quintessential Jewishness. For him and his associates, there was very little world of importance outside of his own. Little wonder that Nicodemus has little or no witness to his people throughout this gospel. True, he rises to Jesus' defense before the Sanhedrin. And he contributes largely to Jesus' burial. But there is no sign of an effective witness as a Christian in this Gospel.

Like the Samaritan woman, Nicodemus is a minor figure in the Gospel, here for a moment, then gone. Their lack of significant presence in the drama speaks to the kairos nature of every human's encounter with Jesus. These moments have the nature of once-
in-a-lifetime about them. They need to be maximized. The darkness is ever present in John. In the words of Jesus, "walk in the light while you have the light." Considering Nicodemus' final appearance in the narrative of Jesus' death and burial, Paul D. Duke writes:

We know that Jesus will be raised; Nicodemus clearly does not.... The image evoked is of two remorseful half-disciples sadly piling a mountain of embalming materials onto a body they obviously think is going nowhere. The sound reader, alerted by hyperbolizing imagery... is prompted to leap once more to the post-Easter vantage point of the author. From that height is foreseen a tomb wherein certain lavishly anointed linen cloths lie alone eloquently unnecessary.  

Indeed, one wonders if Nicodemus is capable of wholehearted discipleship. Alan Culpepper's reading of him with Joseph of Arimaethea as "representative" of the uncommitted seems close to the mark:

"another of the 'secret disciples' who feared the Jews (19:38).... represent those who believe but refuse to confess lest they be put out of the synagogue (12:42). He remains, therefore, 'one of them,' not one of the children of God. Like the scribe in Mark 12... Nicodemus is 'not far from the kingdom of God,' but he remains outside."  

In terms of modern studies in asymmetry, Nicodemus may be seen to represent something more. Perhaps he suggests the linear thinking, the logical formula's which Ned Herrmann connects with the Left Brain. Left Brain people are very focussed on "has this worked before?" People in this hemisphere like to work with proven quantities. Thus Nicodemus comes to Jesus saying, "We know you are a teacher from God, because...." He has a litmus test for God-sent teachers. It has been proved before. On that basis he can draw his Left Brain conclusion.

Moreover, people from the Left tend to be concerned with the logical and sequential ideas. This is very much Nicodemus: "How can this be?" Interestingly, Herrmann says that Left Brainers hate metaphorical language. For a man who is steeped
in Left Brain thinking to be confronted with talk of “second births” is bad enough, let alone a double entendre in the word αυτόθεν which includes the idea of “from above.”

For vintage left-brainers, such language is simply foreign. When this is followed by allusions to “water” and “wind” there is only one response: "How can this be?"

It is also interesting that "men go to their cave," in the words of John Gray. They tend to be taciturn and simply do not have the ease of conversation that women have:

When a man is stressed he will withdraw into the cave of his mind and focus on solving a problem. He generally picks the most urgent problem or the most difficult. He becomes so focused on solving this one problem that he temporarily loses awareness of everything else. Other problems and responsibilities fade into the background.

At such times, he becomes increasingly distant, forgetful, unresponsive and preoccupied in his relationships. For example, when having a conversation with him at home, it seems as if only five percent of his mind is available for the relationship while the other 95 percent is still at work.... His mind is preoccupied, and he is powerless to release it.53

That such a tendency is discernable in Nicodemus is even more strongly suggested when one compares his very limited exchange with Jesus to that of the Samaritan woman— with whom he is somewhat juxtaposed.

3.3.2 Peter

In the Fourth Gospel, Peter seems forever on the verge of falling back. While Martha, with whom he is somewhat drawn in contrast, is being pushed to ever greater heights of faith, this man has to be propped up so that he will not capitulate. "You will be called Cephas," says Jesus when Peter first turns up (1:41). By the conclusion of this gospel, such a prophecy seems a long way from being fulfilled!
Like Martha, Peter is a leader and an initiator. He is the spokesperson, the one who takes initiatives of faith. He is the one who promises to lay down his life for Jesus (13:37). Peter is the one disciple who takes up the sword to defend him (18:10). And he responds to a general question, "You do not want to leave too, do you?" with a personal answer: "Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (6:68). But unlike Martha, Peter shows little indication of a growing faith in John. Indeed, his portrayal is so diminished from that of the synoptics that the fourth gospel seems anti-Petrine. We see little of this wholehearted engagement in Peter in the Fourth Gospel. While, like Martha, he has occasional queries -- "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" (13:6) -- he is inclined to follow them up with imperatives: "You shall never wash my feet." (v.8). He lacks perception and openness to new ideas. In this he is indeed rock-like! Peter attempts to represent the twelve when he responds to Jesus' question about going away in the first person plural:

Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God (6:68).

The first part of the confession affirms the person and teaching of Jesus in a way that echoes back to his teaching earlier in the chapter. The second part has few parallels in the New Testament and is not as strongly messianic as one might expect. Susan Schneiders seems right in her view that it "lacks the fullness of Johannine faith."64 Nor is it allowed to stand on its own, as in Martha's case. Rather, Jesus follows it with the sobering words, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!" (6:70). Here, Peter has acted as spokesman for the Twelve and voiced a confession of faith. But it is a dubious confession. It uses non-traditional terms for Jesus and it is voiced in the
context of twelve chosen disciples whose loyalty, to say nothing of their faith, is very much in question. Gail O'Day brings out the contrast with Martha's faith:

Instead of embracing Peter's confession, Jesus raises again the question of election and choice.... Even election into the select group of the Twelve is no guarantee of a faith response because one member of the Twelve is a devil.... Election is no substitute for the decision of faith.65

All of the above raises questions about authorial intent in John. If this evangelist had one or more of the Synoptics before him, why does Peter not emerge with the confession ascribed to him there: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt 16:16)? How is it that almost that exact confession is here expressed by Martha? Suffice it for us to say that whether or not the Johannine confessions are anti-Petrine, they certainly celebrate faith -- and it is Martha's not Peter's.66

Moreover, if in the synoptic tradition Peter's confession of faith bestows on him some kind of primacy, there is no hint of that in John. Rather Martha's faith achieves the most singular height in the Fourth Gospel. On the other hand, Peter's confession of faith is weak -- and is followed by an outright denial. To find him warming himself by a fire "with the soldiers" (18:25) reminds one of Judas who had stood with the same soldiers in the garden of betrayal. "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?", asks the woman at the gate. Peter's response is ouk eimi (18:17). When questioned again, he gives the identical response. A third denial follows, to a relative of the man he recklessly attacked with a sword -- and the cock crows. John's Peter does not even shed tears over his capitulation, as in the Synoptics. The scene simply closes with his final denial of ματητεύω, a word which John's version repeats: "You are not one of his disciples, are you?" (18:17,25). In John, discipleship is very much the issue and it is precisely here that Peter comes up short.
Also in contrast to Martha, Peter in John is a one-dimensional character who simply has no concept of service. When Jesus assumes the role of a slave or a woman in washing the disciple's feet, Peter protests with an ultimatum: "You will never wash my feet" (13:8). When he finally consents it is because to refuse means Jesus' repudiation. Still, Peter misunderstands the fact that followers of Jesus must be prepared to sacrifice. Jesus follows with a two-fold prediction: "Where I am going you cannot follow me know; but you will follow afterward" (13:36). Indeed, at this point Peter is incapable of following Jesus. The necessity for Jesus' death escapes him completely. And without that understanding, his denial of discipleship under pressure is almost inevitable. Nor is one surprised to see him returning to his own home after visiting the empty tomb, without understanding the Scripture (20:9-10). Without the reinstatement of chapter 21, John's Gospel would conclude with a very unflattering picture of Peter and no inkling of a future role in the church. Fortunately, from a literary point of view, there is satisfactory ending for Peter. His youthful desire to follow Jesus would indeed be realized. His early devotion would be manifested in a life of loving service among Jesus "sheep." And there would be a martyr's death, bringing him into the closest identification with his Lord (23:19).  

The contrast between Martha and Peter is not glaring in the Fourth Gospel. Basically it is in the area of public confession, the woman expressing a stronger and fuller understanding of Jesus – and commitment to him. Yet when these two characters are juxtaposed, larger questions about gender are raised. Indeed, when Peter is set off against Martha, it seems that here the Fourth Gospel comes close to saying that women are more committed, understanding disciples than men, or, in Martin Scott’s words, are
"paradigmatic disciples." This is further elucidated by modern studies in asymmetry.

Juxtaposed with Martha, Peter reminds one that women are more integrated in their processing than men. Or as Ned Herrmann would put it:

Women are, on average, more whole-brain oriented, more intuitive, and less fact-based, more open to new ideas than to status quo, more people-oriented than thing-oriented. Therefore they perceive their surroundings more sensitively, manage the innovative process more comfortably and respond more rapidly to changing environmental circumstances.... Women want a more whole-brain environment and have mental preferences that give them advantages in creating it.  

3.3.3 Pilate

Another male close-up takes the reader inside the Roman Paetorium. Jesus is taken from Caiphas to the Procurator, Pilate. As in the Synoptics, Pilate is badgered by the Jews until he caves in and condemns Jesus to death. But in John, the man's character and role are explored in more detail through seven scenes, alternating between inside and outside.

Catering to the Jewish refusal to enter the praetorium over religious scruples, Pilate goes out to them and promptly refuses to hear the case (18:31). He picks up the Jew's accusation against Jesus and asks him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" (18:33). When Jesus replies, "Is that your own idea, or did others talk to you about me?", Pilate retorts, "Am I a Jew?"

Wayne Meeks notes that Pilate's early retort, "Am I a Jew?," in his opening salvo with the Jews, "is just the question posed by the trial situation, for the Jews represent in John the disbelieving world. Indeed, Pilate shows himself to be part of this world, seeking to be rid of the Redeemer." Raymond Brown has a more sympathetic Pilate
typical of “the many honest, well-disposed men who would try to adopt a middle position in a struggle that it total.”

Yet, in light of the other characters in this Gospel, John’s Pilate seems more than a fence-sitter. He rejects the mission and revelation of Jesus. There is no final difference between him and the Jews. He too is linked to the dark side of Johannine dualism. And like the Jews, he is the object of Jesus’ disdain: Jesus shows no more respect for Pilate’s claims to power than for Nicodemus’ claims to knowledge. As in the case of the man born blind, the protagonist is thrown into confrontation with the Jews. Unlike the Man born blind, Pilate ends up on the side of the Jews -- a very ironic ending indeed. From early on, the issue is not really the innocence or guilt of the accused. What is at stake is whether or not Pilate is able to stand up against the Jews and defend Jesus. Failing to evade his responsibility to deal with the case, he has Jesus whipped as a compromise. After Jesus is duly scourged and abused by the soldiers, Pilate again pronounces him innocent (19:4). But like his earlier attempts, this one fails to secure Jesus’ release. “You take him and crucify him,” he says. “As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him” (19:6). Clearly this is a man with no sensibilities left. For him, an unjustified crucifixion is alright – as long as it is not his responsibility.

Perhaps Pilate fits the picture of the “Martian” male described by John Gray:

Martians value power, competency efficiency and achievement. They are always doing things to prove themselves and develop their power and skills. Their sense of self is defined through their ability to achieve results. They experience fulfillment primarily through success and accomplishment. Everything on Mars is a reflection of these values. Even their dress is designed to reflect their skills and competence."
3.3.4 Judas Iscariot

Judas is devoid of any acts of devotion in John. To think of him as emotionally connected with Jesus calls for a great leap. James Brownson's four lines of development in his study of Judas seem appropriate:

(1) Judas is presented as the paradigmatic betrayer and defector; (2) Judas is identified with false believers who, though they are at first seemingly sympathetic to Jesus, nevertheless reject the christological claims made in the fourth gospel and become hostile to Jesus; (3) the diabolical character of Judas' defection is highlighted, thereby vilifying his behavior and placing it in the realm of the impenitent and irrational; and (4) Judas is portrayed as under the control of God and Jesus, by which strategy the evangelist creates a narrative world in which such betrayals cannot pose an ultimate threat to the community established by Jesus. 73

Unlike Mary of Bethany, with whom he is thrown into contrast, this man cannot see much beyond the concerns of thrift and avarice. While she pours out what she has in loving spontaneity, Judas is a type of the pragmatists and mercenaries who find such gestures offensive. But Jesus does not just endorse the woman's gesture: he commends the extravagance, and rebukes Judas. Perhaps this is a recognition in John that an unspeakably marvelous incarnation like that of the Prologue calls for exactly the response of Mary of Bethany. Unfortunately, it leaves men like Judas out in the cold. This man has no concept of the motivation behind an act of worship which perceives that a tomb is imminent. Judas totally lacks such spirituality and insightfulness. He is crass and this-worldly.

Of course one must concede that Judas does show some parallels with his female counterpart. Like Mary, he shows a willingness to act independently of the other disciples and plot his own course, to forge his own unique response to Jesus. Perhaps
Judas is the lone exception to the male disciples in John in his willingness to "think outside the box." Unfortunately, this does nothing to raise the general standing of John's males. Is it possible that the only time they think in an unconventional way is in order to betray? Judas falls under Jesus' condemnation throughout the gospel, rebuked here, set apart as "a devil" elsewhere. Like the anointing woman, Judas is immortalized in the Synoptic tradition — but for all the wrong reasons, a man for whom not being born would have been a good! In Mary of Bethany, a woman has stooped to the perfect occasion. This is fitting. Finally, it seems, Jesus has evoked the appropriate response. On the other hand, it seems most appropriate that Judas, who epitomizes the opposite of true discipleship, should be the one to object to that response. Mary seems to be in the category of those who are entirely free of all lesser concerns as she worships Jesus. To borrow a Pauline phrase, she practices "undistracted devotion to the Lord" (I Cor 7:35). On the other hand, Judas stands as the opposite of "worshiping God in the Spirit." He has no sensitivity about the greater purposes of God in the dramatic events that are unfolding around him. According to him, Mary's anointing could have amounted to a life's savings, thus sometimes seen as an act symbolic of pouring out one's whole life in devotion to Jesus. In this sense, Mary's act would resonate with the call to "deny oneself" in the Synoptics. And it adds to the sense that this self-sacrificing devotion is exactly what Jesus should evoke in John. On the other hand, self-preservation and self-seeking seem to epitomize John's Judas and stand as exact opposites of laying down one's life.

In the Bethany scene, one thinks of Judas in terms of Herrmann's left brain people, valuing money greatly and in great detail, recording transactions with running
totals up to date, remembering prices and exacting maximum value from every purchase. On the other hand, right brain people “consider money important mostly as a support to people’s sense of well-being ... as a means to an end... employing it whenever a great idea demands it...”74 Throughout the gospels there are male protests over such anointing scenes by women. For Sandra Schneiders, they show “how early the attempt of men to control the discipleship and ministry of women began in the Christian community.”75 But perhaps the question of response to Jesus is more to the point: why do the women of John seem so much more attuned to the καταρχή moment, so much more willing to make large and wholehearted gestures of faith -- in short, why are the women of John are so much more loving in their response to Jesus than the men?

3.3.5 The Disciples in General

Apart from the enigmatic “beloved disciple,” the male followers of Jesus seem dull and unperceptive in John. Raymond E. Brown’s hypothesis seems well-supported in the narrative, that they represent “Apostolic Christians” who, while they have a “reasonably high christology... do not reach the heights of the Johannine understanding of Jesus.” Thus they service the author’s purpose in depicting the “one-upmanship” of the Johannine community which had come to understand not only that Jesus is God’s Son, but “is ever at the Father’s side... not belonging to this world... but to a heavenly world above....”76

The early calling of the first disciples conveys the sense of alacrity of response in faith to Jesus that is most commendable. Peter’s brother Andrew is one of two disciples of John the Baptist who leave to follow Jesus when they hear him designated by the
Baptist as “the Lamb of God” (1:36). In a gospel where “abiding” is a great virtue, they ask ποῦ μενεῖο; Jesus responds, “Come, and you will see.” They do so. Andrew is so taken by the time spent with Jesus, that he seeks out his brother as the first thing: “We have found the Messiah.” And he brings Simon Peter to Jesus: “Jesus looked at him and said, ‘You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas’ (which, when translated, is Peter)” (1:42). Needless to say, Peter is anything but rock-like in John’s Gospel. But in these early scenes the designation is applied. And the circles of early followers grows as Philip finds Nathaniel with a fuller confession of faith: “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law and about whom the prophets also wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (1:45). Jesus cuts through Nathaniel’s contempt for Nazareth and Galileans with a statement about the man that reveals omniscience: “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.” This is so convincing to Nathaniel that he confesses: “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel” (1:49).

These early scenes are permeated with faith and responsiveness, and carry no hint that the disciples will be surpassed in these areas by others as the Gospel unfolds. Because they have “followed” Jesus, they are in a position to witness the first sign, the turning of water into wine: “He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him” (2:12).

Moreover, they are on hand for an early cleansing of the Jewish temple and “remembered that it is written: ‘Zeal for your house will consume me’ (2:17).

It is in the fourth chapter that the disciples fall somewhat from grace, going into town en masse to buy food at a time when there were much larger issues at stake. When they return, they are “surprised” to find Jesus talking with the Samaritan woman, having no inkling it seems that their master is one who will insist on crossing social and class
boundaries. Yet their surprise does not issue in the kind of question the Samaritan woman was engaging in, the inquiry which increases revelation. Indeed, the narrator comments: “But no one asked, ‘What do you want?’” or “Why are you talking with her?” (4:27). This crassness and ignorance leaves the disciples open for an early rebuke: “I have food to eat that you know nothing about” (4:32). Such ignorance can only be removed with a lifting up of the eyes for an expanded vision:

“I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life…” (4:35).

The fourth sign, the feeding of the five thousand, involves the disciples directly. There is a certain shortcoming in Philip’s response to Jesus’ “test” question, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” (6:5). He replies in only the sphere of physical realities: “Eight month wages would not buy enough…!” (6:7). On the other hand, Andrew is cast in a more favorable light by at least observing that a boy is present with “five small barley loaves and two small fish,” while he observes, “but how far will the go among so many?” (6:9). Yet Jesus employs these men in seating the people, in distribution, in collecting the pieces left over. The impact of the feeding is not recorded on the disciples. Yet it is so great upon the multitude that they recognize Jesus as “the Prophet who was to come into the world.” They want to make him king by force on the spot.

Nor is the impact on the disciples recorded in the fifth sign where the disciples are rowing for three miles into a strong wind in the dark. Jesus approaches, “walking on the water; and they were terrified” (6:19) –

“But he said to them, ‘It is I; don’t be afraid.’ Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading” (6:21).
Here is a sign that is very symbolic: they “receive” Jesus into the storm-tossed boat and “immediately” reach their destination. It reflects strongly one of the Evangelist’s central messages, that Jesus presents us with someone to be “received.” When Jesus is “received” the receivers are immediately at safe harbor. The disciples are at the centre of this very symbolic act.

Obviously, John’s gospel has more disciples than the twelve. And a number of these are caught up in the “grumbling” of the larger religious world over Jesus’ extreme sacramental language in chapter six (6:60). Indeed, “from this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him” (v.66). The Twelve remain, albeit somewhat ambiguously. Peter’s confession of faith comes up short; and Jesus’ response puts the commitment of the entire group into question: “Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!” (v.70).

In the sixth sign, the healing of the man born blind, the faith of the disciples pales in comparison with that of the healed man himself. They open the scene with a question which might have come from one of Job’s comforters: “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (9:2). Such a question reveals a pre-Wisdom understanding of sickness as punishment and is corrected by Jesus, albeit in a correction that some see as of small help.77

At the raising of Lazarus, the final sign, the disciples show their devotion to Jesus by being willing to go back to Judea “that we may die with him” (11:16). Thomas is spokesman for them here. But in the scene that follows, Judas seems to speak for them all in casting reproach on Mary of Bethany’s act of worship (12:4). At the triumphal entry, “the disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they
realize that these things had been written about him...” (12:16). Later in the same chapter, Philip and Andrew act as intermediaries to bring the Greeks to Jesus. This seems to be a role which Andrew fills more than once in the gospel, bringing people and Jesus together.

And then we are into the upper room, where Jesus begins by washing his disciple’s feet. If they have disappointed him with their vacillation and weakness thus far, there is no sign of it here. Their master simply wants to express his love for them as his final act. Peter objects. And Satan “entered into” Judas. “What you are about to do, do quickly,” says Jesus to Judas. “But no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him” (13:28). This lack of insightfulness characterizes the disciples throughout the upper room discourse: 13:36; 37; 14:5; 8:22; 16:17, 18; 29. Put together with the prediction of Peter’s denial – “before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!” (13:38) – it provides strong need for Jesus’ high priestly prayer:

I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word....I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.... And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name... so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe.... None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.... They are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world (17:6-19).

In the betrayal scene that follows, it is Judas who leads the detachment of soldiers, “carrying torches lanterns and weapons” for the arrest (18:3). In contrast to the complete composure of Jesus, “Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s
servant, cutting off his right ear” (18:10). Another rebuke awaits for Peter: “Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?” (18:11). Peter’s denial follows, artfully interspersed with the trial of Jesus scene before the high priest. Otherwise, the disciples are pretty well invisible up until the resurrection appearance.

And John seems intent on eliminating the male disciples from the first resurrection appearances. While Mary Magdalene went to the tomb in the early morning darkness, she stands in contrast to the bulk of the male disciples who seem to have vacillated and fled the scene. It is Mary Magdalene who informs them of the event: “She came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, ‘They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him’” (20:22). These two disciples then also run to the empty tomb. But these men are mute throughout, whether believing or not believing, and they contribute nothing to the dialogue. It is as though the author of John has not given his male characters speaking roles! Moreover, Peter and the Beloved Disciple return home from the tomb quite empty-handed. They leave as hastily as they have arrived, possibly for fear of “the Jews.” Unlike Mary, we do not have tears of sorrow from these men, just as we have not had tears of remorse from Peter in John. These males seem incapable of profound emotion. This seems to be exclusively female terrain. Mary’s tears, her stooping over to look, stand in striking contrast to the other two disciples who have returned home before the first appearance of the risen Lord. Mary enacts John’s great truth that Jesus is to be “received,” that a bonding relationship is to be established with him. This is in absolute contrast to the male disciples. And it is Mary who is commissioned to share the great announcement with the other disciples. She is “the apostle to the apostles.” For a
woman, as opposed to the male disciples, to be given such high calling and responsibility is a unique Johannine perspective.

It seems evident that the fourth evangelist wants to move away from any hint of authoritarian structures associated with the Twelve. He seems to deliberately eschew any hint that they are in a unique and favored position when it comes to Christian service and revelation. We find them, “the doors locked for fear of the Jews” (20:19). Then, “Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’” Thomas’s refusal to believe “unless I see” provides an occasion for teaching on faith: “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe” (20:27).

And then there is the final restoration of Peter.

3.4 Summary

Here then is the disputatious darkness against whose backdrop the characters of the light must act. This dark world is male. It is very contentious. It is often laughable. And it is very deadly. Lest the audience should have missed this deepening obscurity, the author provides a summary explication with a quote from Isaiah as to why “they could not (δούναμαι) believe”: –

“He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes nor understand with their hearts, nor turn—and I would heal them” (12:40).

Blindness and hardness – at this point one is not inclined to “argue” the point.

To sum up John’s description of the garrulous darkness which is his male world, several points can be made. First, one must avoid the temptation to apply to Jesus’ male Jewish audience what may be more universal. One senses, for example, that the mix of
characters among Jesus’ disciples simply makes them a random sample of humanity, with all of its vanity, weariness and failure. And so with the larger Jewish audience. An honest reading of the Fourth Gospel seems to call upon us to step back from questions of gender and ethnicity enough to appreciate a universal message: that humanity is fallen and distanced from God; that the voice of God will not be heard without divine assistance. This is the larger point which the author is at pains to make: “He was in the world, and the world was made by him and the world knew him not” (1:4). It is stated at the outset, it is amplified in the remainder of the text. The Word has become flesh and revealed his glory. But on the whole, humanity was found in such a state of perverseness, it could not receive this gift. In other words, the human race as a whole is indicted in John. This darkness is so overwhelming that the reader cannot help but ponder the reasons for such blindness and hardness of heart. At times it seems to be the question that the author wants to force upon his audience. How is it possible that people can be that closed to new ideas? Is there so much stigma to coming from Galilee? Is this a case in point for Martin Luther’s views on depravity? Is this a true picture of humanity, not just of the Jewish religious establishment of the ancient Mediterranean world – so utterly depraved? There is a continual sense of urgency in this Gospel that forces the question of \( \text{κατάρασσω} \) upon this darkness. Several pointed warnings invade the dark grumbling world of the Jews: “Yet a little while is the light with you…” This is most poignant in John, the indifference of Jesus’ hearers to the crucial opportunities for faith they are provided. But the shortcoming seems to encompass a much larger body than the Jewish establishment, the disciples, or the other males of John’s world. It seems to engulf humanity. And this makes the lament of John 1:10, \( \text{o κόσμον αυτον οὐκ ἐγνω} \)
the initial impulse of the Gospel. This is the wonder, this is the formidable fact which the author wants to explore. Ultimately, the fourth gospel is a study on human hardness of heart.

Secondly, having said that, there seems to be something about male unbelief in John that is particularly resistant to new revelation: it is fundamentally contentious; it is all about power and control. On this point these males seem almost united and somewhat stereotypical. In the words of John Gray, they “value power, competency, efficiency and achievement. They are always doing things to prove themselves and develop their power and skills.”78 Superior knowledge and its related pride seems a large factor with John’s Jews and Jesus is continually up against their claims to superior knowledge. There is something about the male obsession with pragmatism and efficiency about this crowd. Does it work? This is the concern when they say, “We could lose our position!... The people will go over.” The impression is that whatever the concerns with spirituality among the populace, following Jesus simply cannot work for these leaders.

Indeed, if this is one of the prevailing points about John’s men as opposed to his women, that they have no individual richness of character, no departing from the stereotypical, does this not imply that there is something about maleness itself in John that tends to resist the claims of the Messiah? Do these male characters demonstrate a defensiveness which one must lay down, a pride in knowledge in power, a valuing of results over relationships, an obsession with pragmatism and efficiency – do they not demonstrate qualities that must give way to truth and higher values if one it to be a true disciple? Is John not saying that men need to look to the female side of their humanity for help on religious questions?
These are questions which the Fourth Gospel seems interested in exploring, especially as the female children of light are brought into the picture. This Evangelist seems to enjoy portraying a contrast between his female characters and shadowy males like Judas and Nicodemus. It is this contrast which I wish to keep in mind as we examine the five women of John.

I believe that questions of gender shed considerable light on this author's intent. By affording his female characters the prominence that he does, he makes them the means to convey his central concern: "the world did not recognize him." This for the Evangelist is the formidable fact. By and large the Word becoming flesh has been ignored and rejected.

Albeit, there are a few, a despised minority of people, who do respond to Jesus with faith and receptivity. They are represented by John's women. While this is not exclusively female terrain in John, as has been noted, the prominence of the women is too striking to be overlooked. One wonders if it is possible that well before his time, the writer of this gospel was aware of something like the hemispheres of the brain and gender inclinations toward one side over the other. Certainly one hears a repeated reminder in John that we reject the female side of humanity to our great loss. Indeed, does John not say that there can be no adequate response to Jesus without the female dimension, that what is called for, at the very least, is something like whole-brain discipleship?

\[2\] Malina and Rohrbaugh.


12 Adelle Reinhartz says much of the complaining from John’s Jews is perfectly justified from a traditional Jewish point of view: “Furthermore, the beliefs and practices attributed to the Johanneine Jews, though frequently coded negatively in the Gospel’s rhetorical structure, are by and large not only recognizable but acceptable, not just as description of first-century Jews ... but to committed Jews today. These include the centrality of the Torah and the prophets in Jewish belief and religious life, the importance of the Sabbath, and the participation in the festivals of Passover, Tabernacles, and Dedication....” *Semeia* 77 (1997) 177-193.


14 Gerhard Kittel, *TDNT*, 1: 728-763.


16 Grant R. Osborne, “Soteriology in the Gospel of John” in *The Grace of God, the Free Will of Man: A Case for Arminianism* ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1989) 243-260. Osborne makes a sizeable contribution to this volume in his analysis of John as an appeal to humankind as a whole: “However, the exact delineation of the process of salvation in John, namely the interaction between the divine sovereignty and Human responsibility, is hotly debated. No New Testament book maintains a better balance, and both Calvinists and Arminians have extensively used the Fourth Gospel to support their positions. Only Romans 9-11 has a greater stress on divine predestination than does John.... At the same time, John has the greatest stress on God’s universal salvific love in such phrases as “savior of the world” (4:42) and “Savior of all men” (1:7; 5:23; 11:48; 12:22). Is faith-decision an act of free will or the result of God’s irresistible grace in drawing the elect to himself? This is the issue.” (244)

17 Martin Luther, *The Bondage Of The Will* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), 303.


19 R. H. Lightfoot, *St. John’s Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956), “If ... we ask how the Logos can be said to be God, fully divine, and yet to be also in relation to God, we may compare with due caution the language here used with that of certain Old Testament passages, which speak of the name of God. In these passages the name of God seems to be conceived as a manifestation of the being of God, distinct from but not independent of Him (cf. Ex 33:21, Dt 12:5, Ps 54:1, and especially Is. 30:27). The term usually signifies an act of God in self-revelation; and the first words of Jon. 1:14 describe the full, complete action of God in the revelation both of His nature and of His character” (79).

20 Lightfoot, 80


22 Marianne Meye Thompson develops these polarities in her introduction to *The Humanity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 2. She presents an effective rebuttal to Kasemann’s “docetic” interpretation of Johanneine Christology: “By beginning with chapter 17, Kasemann focuses on what is peculiar or unique to John. He thereby overlooks aspects of the portrait of Jesus which are also characteristic of the Gospel and therefore must equally be taken into account. Many of those things which are characteristic of John’s description of Jesus may be related specifically to the consideration of Jesus’ humanity... his parents and brothers... at the well in Samaria he is weary... and asks for a drink... he has friends... and is moved at the death of one of them... and his life ends in death.... These ... events and references... must... be called characteristic of the Fourth Gospel” (4).
24 Kysar, Christology and Controversy. 353-354.
26 Tina Pippin, "For Fear of the Jews," 81.
27 Pippin, 81.
28 Pippin, 81.
29 Lightfoot stresses that this is not mere eyewitnessing, but the seeing that comes from belief. (84-85).
30 Leon Morris, The Gospel According to John. The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971). "It is characteristic of [Jesus' signs] not so much that they arouse wonder and are hard to explain, nor even that they are demonstrations of the divine power, but rather that they point us to something beyond themselves. They show us God at work. They are meaningful." (185). Morris highlights the water into wine sign at Cana: "Jesus' manifested his glory. This is very important for the Evangelist. His declared intention in writing his Gospel is to show that Jesus is the Christ" (20:31). This involves the clear recognition that He is fully man, it is true, but also involves bringing out the truth that He is more. Throughout the first chapter he has shown us both aspects." (185).
31 Lightfoot, 22.
32 Leon Morris, John, 686.
33 David Rensberger interprets the sign as pointing to the Johannine community: "The blind man... symbolizes the Johannine Christians. They have received their sight, as he does, from the one who is the Light of the World, and they have suffered, as he does, for their confession of Him. His conduct... stands not only for what has been done but for what should be done under such circumstances. His attitude before the Pharisees is daring to the point of insolence, in obvious contrast to the behavior of his own parents and that of Nicodemus.... Indeed its nearest parallel is Jesus' demeanor before the high priest.... The blind man... represents what is both possible and necessary, for the individual and for the community, when facing the synagogue authorities.... The Pharisees of the story... possess full official power over the Jewish community.... Such a role for the Pharisees, like the threat of excommunion with which it is connected, would be quite anachronistic in the context of Jesus' lifetime but no doubt represents the actual state of affairs, at least locally, at the time of the Gospel's writing." (Johannine Faith and Liberating Community, 42-43).
35 Lightfoot, 19
36 Rensberger suggests that "if it was their confession of Jesus that had caused them to be expelled from the synagogue, their expulsion drove them to an ever more radical confession of him. Jesus became the center of their new cosmos, the locus of all sacred things. Not only the messianic fulfillment of scripture but also judgment and eternal life, the religious observances now closed to them, and Deity itself were all centered on him. His rejection by the world symbolized their own alienation, and the correct confession of Jesus became for them the touchstone of truth." (Johannine Faith and Liberating Community, 28).
37 Robert Kysar, "Contributions of the Prologue"
38 Lightfoot, 63.
39 Lightfoot, 85
40 Lightfoot, 80.
41 John Gray, Men Are From Mars, 12
42 John Gray, 80-81.
43 Morris, John, 185.
44 Lightfoot, 25
47 Malina and Rohrbough speak of the "antilanguage" of John as an "in-group dialect that only the enlightened can grasp" (Social Science Commentary, 31).
48 In his article on double meanings and irony in John, E. Richard brings out the "variety of literary structures the author is wont to associate with any given technique. John 7:5—2 provides several noteworthy features.... Grammatically, the unanswered question of v. 51 ("Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?") would require a negative response. The
Christian reader, however, is obliged to give an affirmative one. Besides, the real answer to Nicodemus' question will be given later during the trial where Jewish law is totally disregarded" ("Expressions of Double Meaning And their Function in the Gospel of John," NTS 31 [1985]: 96-112). 45 Urban Von Wahlde does not agree with this expansive darkness concept, at least on the highest level of John's Judaism: "there is no sign of an increase of hostility throughout the gospel; rather, their reaction is unified and monolithic.... The authorities described by the term 'Jews' never show the slightest hint of anything but unanimity in their assessment of Jesus" ("The Johannean 'Jews': A Critical Survey" NTS 28 [1982]: 33-60).

48 Trumbower, Born From Above, 10.
51 Rensberger, 39.
52 Rensberger sees the "frightened babbling" of the man's parents as "almost comic, but not quite. It is remarkable that commentators regularly take note of the parents' motivation - they were, as John explains, afraid of 'the Jews,' who had decreed expulsion from the synagogue for anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah - but not of what it is that they do.... It is not their protestations of ignorance to which John draws attention; rather he emphasizes that in their fear they said, 'He is of age, ask him' (v. 23). The terrible perfidy of this remark is perhaps the most shocking thing in the entire story. The parents have not only tried to shield themselves from scrutiny, they have deliberately turned the inquisitors' attention back upon their own son, knowing full well that he will be subject to the very sentence that the themselves are afraid to face.... Indeed, if the stakes are as high as the social scientists would insist, the comic element is considerably reduced. As Rensberger puts it, "the Christians who were expelled [from the synagogue] would have been cut off from much that had given identity and structure to their lives. Expulsion would have meant social ostracism and thus the loss of relationship with family and friends, and perhaps economic dislocation .... What was threatened was the entire universe of shared perceptions, assumptions, beliefs, ideals, and hopes that had given meaning to their world within Judaism" (26-27).
53 Norman R. Petersen in The Gospel of John and the Sociology of Light makes much of the contest between the disciplines of Moses and the disciplines of Christ: "all the critical terms in John's character of Jesus are anti-structurally derived from the image of Moses" (Valley Forge: Trinity, 1993), 104.
55 Rensberger observes that "he speaks to Jesus in the plural, and Jesus likewise addresses him in the plural: Nicodemus says, not 'I know,' but 'We know that you are a teacher come from God' ... and Jesus subsequently tells him, 'You people must be born again.' .. Jesus is speaking to you people of earthly and heavenly things, which you people fail to believe.... Nicodemus evidently does not stand for himself alone but for some specific group, which is rather negatively portrayed." Rensberger includes "covert Christians" in this "specific group" and says, "John's opinion of these believers is not good: they prefer the glory that comes from human beings to that which comes from God... and it would seem that Nicodemus must be ranked among them" (38-39).
59 John Gray, Men Are From Mars, Women are from Venus (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 40
62 David Rensberger seems right in focusing on a high Christology as the main reason for the expulsion of the Johannean Christians from the synagogue and for a growing alienation from Christians of the apostolic tradition as well. "His rejection by the world symbolized their own alienation, and the correct confession of Jesus became for them the touchstone of truth. The failure of some Christian Jews in their environment to make this open and forthright confession evokes a sharp reproof from the Fourth Evangelist..." (28).
67 Ruth B. Edwards suggests that “the whole chapter is an editorial addition by a member of the Johannine school who had stronger ecclesiastical interests than the author of the main Gospel.” (“Ministry and Church Leadership in the Gospel of John,” 134).
71 Raymond Brown, *John*
73 James V. Brownson, “Neutralizing the Intimate Enemy: The Portrayal of Judas in the Fourth Gospel,” *SBL*, 43 (1992), 49-59. Brownson concludes by bemoaning the Johannine world of black and white and aspiring to a world in which shades of gray are tolerated: “When those who have already shown some allegiance to Jesus, such as Judas and those like him, reject the truth which lies at the center of the cosmos, this behavior can only be understood as the numinous expression of a malevolence deeply rooted in the cosmos…. For those communities today who continue to use the fourth gospel as part of their sacred Scripture, the great challenge will be this: Is it possible for the world projected by the fourth gospel to be informed by the perspectives of other New Testament documents in such a way that its integrative power can be preserved, while at the same time allowing for a genuine dialogue among divergent expressions of allegiance to Jesus? Can there be a community in which there are more than only true believers and diabolical traitors? Can we live in the brilliant light of the fourth gospel, and still accommodate the grayness of life?”
74 Ned Herrmann, 96
75 Sandra M. Schneiders, 40.
76 Raymond E. Brown, *Community of The Beloved Disciple*, 84-85
77 David Rensberger comments, “Despite a hopeful beginning, as theodicy this is really worse yet it seems to say that God did not even blind the man for his entire lifetime in order to punish some wrongdoing; he did it merely to show off his own power by finally sending Jesus around to heal him.” On the other hand, Rensberger correctly points out that theodicy is the disciples’ interest, not Jesus’, and that by his response “he changes the man’s blindness from a result to a cause. The disciples’ question, and the viewpoint behind it, are rejected altogether. They see suffering as an occasion for moralizing about the victim. Jesus sees it as an occasion for doing the works of God…. The world is blind, and it is God’s work to heal it” (*Johannine Faith and Liberating Community*, 44).
78 John Gray, *Men Are From Mars*, 20
CHAPTER 4

JOHN’S FEMALE CHILDREN OF LIGHT

Against this male backdrop of increasing moral darkness, John’s stage is brightened by selected children of light, Venusians all, to use John Gray’s term. As Robert Kysar points out, “the Gospel of John is remarkable for its intentional presentation of women as models of faith... they pop up at all the crucial places.... involved in the beginning, the middle and the conclusion of the Johannine story...”.¹ Kysar asks the pertinent question:

What is the subliminal message in this design? First, women were among Jesus’ disciples – of that this Gospel allows no doubt. They are the equals of the male disciples. Second, their discipleship is central to the Jesus story. Without them it would be hard to tell the Johannine version of Jesus’ ministry. Finally, the reader is directed to female (as well as male) figures to witness the models of faith.²

Similarly, Robert J. Karris says “John’s Gospel is unique in the amount of space he give to ... women” and notes that Johannine scholars have thus been prompted “to ask what in his community situation, theology and cultural setting led the Fourth evangelist to give such special roles to women...”

Implicitly at least, they are asking what God’s revelation in John’s Gospel might be saying to us in our situation in which women are seeking and assuming greater responsibilities in the church and in which some ecclesiastical communities are not in favor of the ordination of women.³

For Karris, the central concern is with marginalization and he finds the intent of the author of John along those lines. Why such prominence for women?

I have argued that the evangelist’s purpose was missionary and exhortatory rather than apologetic and polemical. He was not concerned to combat the apostolic churches which flew the flag of Peter’s leadership. Nor was he concerned to put
in their places male chauvinists within his own community. His concern was to be faithful to Jesus’ concern for the lowly and thus to bring the good news of Jesus Christ, Son of God, to another group of marginalized – women. Within the Johannine community these marginalized would enjoy co-equality of discipleship with men and would exercise leadership roles. To them Jesus’ mother, Martha of Bethany, Mary of Bethany and Mary of Magdala were heroines and representative of what they were called to be.⁴

According to Turid Karlsen Seim, investigating the roles of women “genuinely coincides with an explicit interest of the Gospel of John itself,” and is “very visible on its textual surface”:

The relevant material is extremely rich and consists of large, literary and theologically complicated passages to be reckoned among the highlights of the gospel.... Women are main actors in scenes that are quantitatively dominating and of great theological importance. Furthermore, they are presented as having a remarkable singleness of purpose, acting with a kind of striking intentionality and decisiveness.⁵

For Karlsen Seim, the Evangelist’s intent has to do with Johannine “inclusiveness” where women and men function together as examples of a complete, well-rounded discipleship.

Sandra M. Schneiders issues a similar qualifier: “As a representative figure ... Mary must be assigned the same universality as the figures of the Beloved Disciple and Judas. The historical Judas was a male, but this does not imply that men are more typically the locus of unbelief and betrayal than women. The historical Beloved Disciple was also a male, but men are not more called to the ideal of discipleship than women. The same must be said of Mary as a model of conversion and discipleship.”⁶ Still, Schneiders observes the prominent roles of women in John and deduces the following:

Women Christians in at least one of the earliest communities, John’s, were fully participating and highly valuable community members.... The evangelist considered such feminine behavior as fully according to the mind of Jesus who is never presented as disapproving of the women... and defends the women from... male objections.⁷
While noting various aspects of their uniqueness, Schneiders touches on the area of response to Jesus:

They evince remarkable originality in their relationships with Jesus and extraordinary initiative in their activities within the community. They are the privileged recipients of three of Jesus' most important self-revelations: his messiahship, that he is the resurrection and the life, and that his glorification is complete and its salvific effect given to his disciples.⁸

It is on the basis of such widespread recognition of the central role of women in John that one proceeds to examine the scenes which involve them. I will argue that they serve the author's intent very well. They demonstrate that while "the world did not recognize him," some did. Could it have been something about their gender that made such a response possible?

4.1 Mary the Mother of Jesus

John's Prologue is barely concluded and the first disciples gathered when the first woman appears on the scene, Mary the mother of Jesus. She will appear again, at the crucifixion (19:25-27). Thus, it seems that the Evangelist places her strategically in his Jesus story, at the beginning and the end of Jesus' ministry. In both cases there is a revelation of Jesus' glory. Her role is minor at a wedding party in an obscure village. Possibly because she knows the family, she hears about the embarrassing end of the supply of wine and informs Jesus. When this is met by what sounds like a refusal to get involved in what is not their concern, she turns to the servants and says, "Do whatever he tells you" (2:5). And out of that issues Jesus' first miraculous sign, the turning of water into wine.

The significance of Mary's role here seems to be in the area of faith. She demonstrates a steady confidence in Jesus that refuses to be dissuaded, even by a
somewhat rude rebuff. In Kysar’s words, “it is the confidence and trust that foreshadow faith. The first woman character in the drama is an example of the way faith is first experienced and expressed.”\textsuperscript{9} Indeed, faith is at issue in 2:1-11 and one might well see Jesus’ mother as an example of complete faith in a Jewish context.

In this passage, Mary is “the mother of Jesus” (2:1) and “woman” (2:4). Unlike other scenes involving women, her name is not used. For Raymond Brown, this may have to do with the use of an honorable title for a woman who has borne a son.\textsuperscript{10} In this sense, it may be that Mary’s role as mother is her primary characteristic in John. Given the prominence that Mary would later assume in Catholic dogma, it is perhaps noteworthy that at this her first appearance in John, biological connections to Jesus were secondary to the response of faith. As Karris says, “even the one closest biologically to Jesus, his mother, who as a Jewess expectantly waits for God’s fulfillment of messianic promises, must have faith in her son.”\textsuperscript{11}

As with some Synoptic women, Mary’s faith shows some tenacity in the face of adversity. Indeed, Jesus’ response to his mother’s report that the wine has run out seems to close the door to any involvement. The problematic τι εὑρίσκεις καὶ σοι carries a note of rudeness which is surprising. The question usually conveys a note of hostility or unpleasantness. Moreover, Jesus calls his mother γυναῖ. While this may be ameliorated in translation, as in the NIV’s “Dear woman, why do you involve me?”, it remains a most unusual form of address between a mother and a son and one which is potentially offensive. For a mother to be addressed as “woman” is to be presented with her least hoped for prospect, that of distance from her own son. Indeed, much scholarly opinion builds on such a division, between the divine Jesus and his human mother, between the
heavenly and the earthly: "if Jesus does act... he will act in accordance with his own conscious purpose. He will not act... on the basis of... human need and the like." It is suggested that for Jesus, with his strong words, a clear division has been created between the will of the Father and the will of his mother. Indeed, it seems the Evangelist want to draw attention to Mary's gender rather than her maternal role. Then Jesus adds the words, "my ὄμορφος has not yet come." This seems to refer to his final hour of crucifixion and glorification (as in 7:30 and 12:23) and strengthens Jesus' rather brusque rejection of his mother's request for involvement.

It is this setting that makes Mary's faith all the more remarkable. She is not in the least dissuaded by Jesus' retort. Without missing a beat, she turns to the servants and says, "Do whatever he tells you" (2:5). It is as though she has a mother's intuition that beneath an austere demeanor, Jesus is prepared to act with compassion. It is here that she demonstrates a faith which is not unlike that of the importunate widow of Luke 18. This is a determined woman who can issue commands when needed. And far from accepting a kind of distanced and subsidiary role, she ignores her son's refusal altogether – as mothers everywhere are wont to do! Indeed, Mary's role is vital in bringing this miracle about. She advises the servants, as an authority figure at the occasion, to be prepared to follow Jesus' instructions. Her steady resolve, her superior knowledge, her will to see something good transpire – these are the qualities which the text gives prominence to.

Even if Mary's role is seen as relatively minor, it should not be overlooked that the miraculous sign which she evokes is not. Indeed, as "the first" of Jesus' "miraculous signs" in which "he thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him"
(2:11), the turning of water into wine may be seen as the most important sign of the Gospel. The Evangelist conveys this sense of significance by the deliberate use of detail: the number, type and size of the jars, the detailed directions to the attendants at the feast, their meticulous obedience to Jesus' words followed by the elaborate comment on the miracle by the master of the banquet. There is the symbolism of water needed for Jewish rites of purification (2:6). For such water to be transformed into new wine by Jesus seems to establish the Evangelist's anti-Jewish polemic from the outset: it is Jesus who creates abundant and "the best" wine, and not Jewish rites of purification. All of the messianic expectations of abundant life are to be found in him. All that is needed to access such abundant life is the simplicity of expectant faith, faith which looks to Jesus as the giver of messianic gifts.

In short, Jesus' mother has advanced the narrative and the intent of the gospel quite considerably by her intervention of faith. She has refused to be dissuaded by an initial rebuff. Such is her spiritual insight that she can be said to encourage her son to act according to the Father's will. And the results are considerable. Not only does the best wine flow in abundance, the disciples "believe" on him, making them the first people to be identified as children of God. Lightfoot's comment is that it would be a mistake to understand these words as suggesting that the Lord's disciples were won to belief in him by His astonishing action:

Wonder has indeed its place in religion, but it was not the purpose of the Lord to arouse men's wonder and no more. Rather the words of 2:11 imply that his disciples understood this, the first action of his ministry in changing water into wine as a sign of the revelation which he was now bringing, that is, of his glory of triumph and of the union of God and man in and by his life and death. At a later stage, the Lord will reveal himself as the true or real vine from which the vineshoots draw their life. In the course of the gospel, the content of belief is variously described: we read of belief in the scripture 2:22 or in Moses 5:46
[and]... in reference to the Person, the word, and the work of the Lord. In this connection it implies obedience (3:36, 7:17) and wholehearted devotion; the believer is convinced that the Father has sent the Lord (17:8), that the Lord is in the Father and Father in Him (14:10). And the highest expression of belief in this book may be the confession of Thomas, "My Lord and My God" (20:28).^{13}

In this regard, Jesus' use of ἱναι takes on added significance. The Evangelist is highlighting gender at this early stage of the Gospel, a term he will pick up again with Jesus' mother at the crucifixion (19:26), with the Samaritan woman (4:21) and Mary of Magdala (20:13). It is as a woman that Mary gives her vital expression of faith. It is as a woman that she demonstrates superior awareness of what Jesus' "hour" is and what needs to be done with the opportunities before one. We shall see such feminine insight again.

Jesus' mother appears again at the crucifixion (19:25) along with other women standing "near" the cross, a proximity unmatched in the Synoptics. To his mother Jesus says, "Woman, here is your son." To the beloved disciple, "Here is your mother." The narrator follows the statements with the comment, "From that time on, this disciple took her into his home"(v.27). On the literal level, Jesus is seen as providing for the future of his mother by putting her in the care of a friend after his death. In a broader sense, Mary is variously seen as a symbol of Jewish Christianity, Judaism, the people of God, the Church, the new Eve, those who seek salvation including receptive Israelites and the spiritual mother of all believers. Karris speaks for a widely held view:

through his death Jesus has created a new family, made up of men and women who have faith in his sovereign power to give life through his death. It is faith and not biology which is constitutive of relationships in Jesus' new family. ... Representative of those within Judaism who have carried on the life-giving tradition of Jewish faith and have faithfully waited for God to fulfill God's messianic promises, Jesus' mother gives life to the multi-ethnic Johannine community, represented by the beloved disciple. And both Jesus' mother and the beloved disciple "go home," to start anew and to be "at home" with one another.^{14}
In other words, this scene gives the impression of a new family of God on earth which will carry on with the mission of Jesus. Again, Jesus' mother has a crucial role in the process, contributing to the establishment of the family of God. In this sense, her role is every bit as vital as in the opening scene at Cana. She serves to align events with the larger purposes of Jesus' mission. It is along such lines that this scene may be seen as the culmination of Jesus' mission. Indeed, the following verse says, "knowing that all was now completed"(v.28). If indeed the establishment of a family of continuity and the crucifixion is seen as the completion of the mission, it follows that the mother of Jesus is crucial to the completion of Jesus' mission, just as she had been to its inception.

From the standpoint of modern research into gender and the hemispheres of the brain, some features of Mary, the mother of Jesus, stand out. For one thing there is intuition. She senses, as no one else does, that this is the καιρός moment to bring a need to Jesus. In Ned Herrmann's terms, "she is spiritual, empathetic, nurturing .... She is sensitive to mood, atmospheres, attitudes and energy levels. She is a moment by moment barometer of what's going on with the people around her."15

Secondly, for this woman linear time, goals and objectives are secondary to relationships. At Cana, she seems to have a relationship of influence with the bridal couple. And she serves as a mediator between Jesus and the servants in order to make things happen. As Herrmann would describe it, such people are "agreeable, nice to have around, supportive of harmony and beauty, always people oriented."16

Paramountly, Mary is a woman of faith. Like her sisters in this Gospel, she is not dissuaded by male rebuff. Her spiritual insights are independent and unconventional. As a right-brain person, "her primary modes are emotional and spiritual. She seems to have
an innate sense that a Creator exists who cares for all of us, that we belong to a spiritual family, and that we're here on earth to help each other be tender, grow and change."{17} For such qualities, Mary may speak to the modern reader along the lines suggested by Karris: "prospective Gentile and Jewish converts would see in these stories of Jesus' mother the lesson of faith. It is faith, and not blood line, which determines participation in Jesus' community."{18}

4.2 The Samaritan Woman

Jesus has his next encounter with a woman as he walks away, appropriately enough, from a dispute with the Jews in Judea. And this mid-day dialogue with the Samaritan woman is placed hard on the heels of the late night dialogue with the shadowy Nicodemus. With the Samaritan woman we are out of the realm of shadows. Here is transparency at last. Here is conversational interaction of the highest order – at centre stage.

An initial contrast might be seen in the fact that Nicodemus "seeks" Jesus out, for his late night encounter, whereas Jesus "seeks" the woman. Not only is there the suggestive phrase, "he had to go through Samaria", but there is the conversation itself. In this case, Jesus is the initiator and the seeker. And the results are much more fruitful than in the exchange with Nicodemus. Thus, the author seems to allow for some variation on this theme of "seeking." That it is a great virtue is clear throughout John. It's lack is the great shortfall of the Jews, who seem more infatuated with their own knowledge and tradition than in seeking new insights: "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains (9:41). And 6:26 brings out the
fact that ζητεῖτε in response to miraculous signs is a virtue, although it must be with the right motives:

I tell you the truth, you seek me not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.

The surprising factor in Jesus' "seeking" of the Samaritan woman has to do with social distance. There is the matter of race which drove these characters apart. As the narrator himself comments, "the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" (4:9), a long and entrenched social disparity which separated the two races. Usually it is ascribed to the fact that the Samaritans were racially mixed, re-settled into the area north of Judea by the Assyrians after the conquest, part Assyrian, part Jewish, universally despised. As Malina and Rohrbaugh put it, "Judeans considered the Samaritans' Israelite pedigree to have been bastardized due to intermarriage with Assyrian colonists before Judean elites were exiled by Babylonian conquerors (586 BC). Since in antiquity people and their land were organically connected, it followed that both Samaritans and their land were unclean or impure in Judean eyes."¹⁹

Moreover, the social distance between these two characters is emphasized by the question of gender. As Peter Stearns points out in his study of women in the ancient world, societies became patriarchal in the Mediterranean valley shortly after they shifted from hunting to agriculture.²⁰ By New Testament times, the gulf had widened to such an extent that the disciple's surprise at this male/female conversation, which might well have occasioned a rejoinder like "Why are you talking with her?," (4:27) would have been standard. It is not the racial component that shocks the disciples. It is the fact that this is a woman. Turid Karlsen Seim seems right in her analysis of the scene:
… we learn a) how very unusual and almost shocking it has been to behave towards women as Jesus does ... implying a new role pattern for men and women; b) that some even within the community of disciples have reacted against this, but c) that it has been secured by the indisputable authority of Jesus himself.\textsuperscript{21}

Philo of Alexandria describes the social distance between the genders in the ancient world thus:

Market-places and council-halls and law-courts and gatherings and meetings where a large number of people are assembled, and open-air life with full scope for discussion and action -- all these are suitable to men both in war and peace. The women are best suited to the indoor life which never strays from the house, within which the middle door is taken by the maidens as their boundary, and the outer door by those who have reached full womanhood.\textsuperscript{22}

Thus, for a man and woman to interact as Jesus and this woman do was highly unconventional. Veils were not uncommon during the first century and women simply did not talk to non-family males when in public. Wayne Meeks notes how difficult it was for women who wanted to move beyond conventional roles -- usually by an upwardly-mobile marriage:

"Upwardly mobile women must have been constantly reminded that they were crossing boundaries that a good part of the society held sacred. The hierarchical pattern of the family, in which the male was always superior to the female, as surely as parents to children and masters to slaves, was deeply entrenched in law and custom and its erosion constantly deplored by the rhetorical moralists and the satirists.\textsuperscript{23}

The contrast to Nicodemus is further developed: this woman of Samaria has none of the social status of Nicodemus. On the contrary, she is a symbol of the weary and dusty poor women of the world who spend much of their lives drawing water and hewing firewood. Also, on the level of morality, quite unlike the scrupulous Nicodemus, this woman breaks at least the seventh commandment with impunity! She has none of the sense of moral high standing that we see in the ruler of the Jews. But the greatest
contrast is in the nature of the conversations which ensue. Unlike Nicodemus, and other male characters, the woman does not settle for the frequent Johannine pattern of (i) an opening question; (ii) a mysterious and non-committal reply; (iii) confusion; (iv) a clarifying monologue. After Jesus initiates the conversation, a fascinating exchange follows. To Jesus' seven statements, this woman responds with six of her own. This free interaction indicates that, whatever her awareness of social and racial disparities of the time, the woman is very able to rise above them.

(J) "Will you give me a drink?"

(W) "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?"

(J) "... if you knew... you would have asked him...[for] living water."

(W) "Sir, you have nothing to draw with... Where can you get this living water?"

(J) "... whoever drinks of the water I give... will never thirst."

(W) "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming..."

(J) "Go, call your husband and come back"

(W) "I have no husband."

(J) "You are right... you have had five... the man you now have is not your husband."

(W) "Sir, I can see you are a prophet..." She changes subject to worship sites.

(J) "...you will worship the Father ... in spirit and truth."
(W) "... the Messiah is coming... will explain everything to us."

(J) "I who speak to you am he."

Throughout the exchange, she demonstrates wholehearted engagement and a full range of emotion. There is an openness here that has not been seen thus far in this Gospel. A relationship builds. Moreover, this woman seems to extract maximum worth out of the encounter by exploring the metaphors and pushing the argument to its logical conclusion. To her every rejoinder or question, Jesus responds with additional light. The end result is one of the brightest statements of self-revelation in the entire gospel.

For our purposes, it is of note that the inadequacies of Nicodemus' response to Jesus is made glaring when set against the woman at the well. It seems that the author has used the dramatic technique of juxtaposing these characters in adjoining scenes to great effect in chapters three and four.

Let it also be observed that the engagement, full and transparent of this woman in interaction with Jesus stands as one of the brightest exchanges in this gospel: there is contrast not only with the easily stumped Nicodemus who we have just seen in conversation with Jesus, but with the disciples as well, puzzled and offended over this conversation. They dare not ask, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her." Their concern with the mundane matters of buying food seems to preclude the kind of interaction with Jesus which the Samaritan woman takes to its full potential. It will not be the last time that the disciples as a group are shown up badly in contrast with one of John's females. These women are interactive and engaging – "seekers" of truth.

Unlike Nicodemus, for her insightful rejoinders the Samaritan woman is rewarded with a statement which ranks as one of the key thematic Johannine verses: "Believe me,
woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.... when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth" (4:20-24). Such a comment on "true worshipers" draws in the woman herself. All the traditional exclusivism permeating the Jewish temple system is swept away in a stroke. The "Father seeks" true worshipers. This verse may well be one of the key texts of John, addressing as it does the dearth of true worship - which the Gospel brings out in the wake of the magnificent splendor of the Prologue. The statement opens the door to the central theme of worship, a door which Mary of Bethany will enter later.

Also, it is this wholehearted engagement that leads the Samaritan woman to ask a key question: "Where do you have this living water?" While it is intriguing to look at her language as coquettish and freighted with sexual puns, there is no denying that this is also a profoundly spiritual question which goes to the heart of who Jesus is. Indeed, this is the question that leads directly to the fullest messianic identification in the gospel: "I am He." Unlike Nicodemus, she is not alienated or offended by the greatness of Jesus' claims. On the contrary, she is a most eager respondent, whatever the limitations of her understanding. Indeed, the Evangelist seems to make the point with her that limited understanding, even Samaritan ignorance of truth, need not impede full revelation of the glory of Jesus. She says, "Sir, give me this water, so I shall not be thirsty" (4:15). Perhaps at this point she has not caught the full weight of Jesus' "living water" metaphor. On the other hand, if she is already speaking what Malina calls the "antilanguage" of John, and recognizing the spiritual values that lie behind terms like these, her sense of
spiritual emptiness comes to the fore in the kind of expression of need which Jesus will not refuse.

Moreover, she is not put off by the omniscient insight into her personal life and various marital arrangements. For her, any embarrassment is overshadowed by startling evidence that Jesus is a prophet. Unlike the males of John, there is no defensiveness about this woman. On the contrary, she puts her own independent curiosity into this conversation as though to say, "If the man is a prophet, he must handle problems: where is the proper site for worship?" Indeed, both Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman are put in awkward positions by Jesus' questioning: "Are you a teacher of Israel... and do not understand these things?" "Go, call your husband...." From the woman, the question brings a rejoinder which leads to fuller revelation: from Nicodemus, there is no reply.

Unlike the male inhabitants of the Jewish world, this woman has an expansive sense of the world. On one level her question on sites of worship may seem simple evasion: "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem" (v.19). But beyond evasion, it shows that this woman is bright and informed and has a social conscience. She raises the issue that was at the heart of the Jewish-Samaritan conflict and wonders out loud about how such barriers can be overcome.

One might say that it is her responsiveness that sets this woman apart. As her revelation of who Jesus is expands, she responds with alacrity, "leaving her water jar" and going off to share her discovery with her townspeople. The immediate response to Jesus puts her in the same category as the synoptic disciples who "left their boats and
followed." It is left to a Samaritan woman to demonstrate the wholehearted response to Jesus which in this Gospel is very scarce.

Unlike Nicodemus, this Samaritan woman emerges from her encounter with Jesus with a dynamic witness indeed -- and she is thus connected with a second major theme of the Gospel. She looks for her townsfolk and calls them to discipleship with words of invitation heard elsewhere in the gospel: "Come and see..." It is a tentative witness, perhaps, "Could this be the Christ?" Yet it is compelling enough that they come to Jesus (v.37) and "many of the Samaritans believed in him..." -- and they press him to stay for two more days. Finally there is the full confession from the villagers, "we know that this man really is the Savior of the world." (v.42). Here is one town that becomes John's symbol of the Gentile world. And it is evangelized by a most unlikely woman apostle.

Like Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman is a minor figure in the gospel: here for a moment, then gone. Their lack of significant presence in the drama speaks to the \textit{kairos} nature of every human's encounter with Jesus. These moments have the nature of once-in-a-lifetime about them. They need to be maximized. The darkness is ever present in John. In the words of Jesus, "walk in the light while you have the light."

For all the subtlety and individuality of the Samaritan woman, perhaps she is like Nicodemus in standing as a type. One might even suggest that for John, these two characters stand as types of femaleness and maleness in interaction with Jesus. On the male side is the linear thinking, the logical formulas which Ned Herrmann connects with the Left Brain. Men tend to be taciturn and simply do not have the ease of conversation that women have. On the other hand, women tend to be more attuned to the Right hemisphere of the brain. They are loquacious. This is the Samaritan woman. Once the
conversation is initiated, it is an open invitation for her to keep on talking. One gets the impression of a person who has much to say but has been perhaps ostracized socially. She can only come to the well at midday, the most uncomfortable time, when no one else will be there. And she has much pent-up conversation to share. In Herrmann's terms, "communicating is very important to her. It is rare to find a taciturn C.... the conversation flow -- the connection -- becomes more important than the content."\(^{24}\)

People in this quadrant also tend to value experience over theory. Indeed, perhaps the only thing that can be said in favor of five husbands is "experience"! In Herrmann's categories, "she sops up experience like a sponge."\(^{25}\) Also, Right Brain females tend to be intuitive. They pick up the drift of conversations and read between the lines. They are sensitive and can read metaphors. In this sense it is entirely plausible that the Samaritan woman might engage in sexual puns early on, only to shift to spiritual values later.

Moreover, such people are sensitive and value people over theories. Their first question is always, "how will it impact people?" Thus, the Samaritan woman can raise the issue of Jews and Samaritans and the appropriate site of worship. She has her finger on the primary source of irritation that stood between Jews and Samaritans. She knows the pain of social disparity. And she has thoughts about how to resolve it.

4.3 Martha

A third woman illumines John’s stage, Martha of Bethany. She appears in the pivotal chapter 11 where the “Book of Signs” transitions into the “Book of Glory.” As Robert Kysar says, “Martha takes the leading female role in chapter 11 and Mary in 12. These two chapters are the grand turning point of the story. Jesus’ wondrous act in
chapter 11 evokes the plan to have him put to death (11:45-54) which is put into action in chapter 18. Mary's anointing of Jesus (12:1-8) prepares him for his death and opens the chapter that constitutes Jesus' final public appearance before his passion.**26**

If the woman of Samaria epitomizes wholehearted response, this woman embodies faith. In this, Martha seems to parallel Peter, although they do not appear together in the same scene. Just as their public confessions are different in scope and nature, their entire discipleship is different. Whereas Martha conveys an image of a fervent, faith-filled disciple achieving ever greater heights in her following of Jesus, Peter seems forever on the verge of falling back.

Like Peter, Martha is a leader and an initiator. When her brother Lazarus takes sick, she is quick to inform Jesus that "the one you love is sick." (11:3). Then she is the first to meet Jesus when he arrives at Bethany after Lazarus has died. There is reproach in her words, "Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (11:21). Yet she does not neglect the expected social greetings as the dramatic funeral event unfolds. Perhaps behind Martha's note of reproach, already faith is growing. She reasons on the basis of her knowledge of Jesus, that he could have prevented Lazarus' death. This seems more than an expression of disappointment over mere social embarrassment.

Moreover, Martha's faith is of such quality that she leaves the door open for a miracle even in the face of death: "Even now, God will give you whatever you ask." The extremity of this family's plight in Bethany makes such a statement striking. Lightfoot points out how the interchange brings fuller revelation. Martha affirms that,

So great is his power that even now, at His request, the delay may be made good.... Martha speaks of a boon to be obtained from God, and dispensed by the Lord, the Lord himself being, as it were no more than an intermediary in the matter. In reply the Lord appears only to offer comfort by reminding Martha of
the Jewish hope of resurrection, a comfort which had no doubt been already offered by her other friends.... Martha acknowledges her acceptance of the doctrine, but implies also that it does not restore her brother or assuage her present grief; the last day is a long way off. Hereupon the Lord, in correction of her thought, offers her Himself; He is the resurrection and the life; let her concentrate her thought on Him. She had spoken of a boon to be obtained by Him from God; He replies that the boon is a personal communication of the Lord Himself, who has taken human nature upon Him, precisely in order to be able to impart this gift. Accordingly for those who believe in Him, that is, who see in Him the divine Word become flesh on their behalf, death has lost its sting; so far from having power to destroy, it has become the gate of life. 27

Martha looks death in the face and still confesses her strong faith. By speaking the word "ask," she verbalizes a key which Jesus will stress in the upper room discourse, an act of dependency that unlocks divine resources in any situation, to be articulated often in the final discourse with the disciples (14:13; 15:7; 16:23). Indeed, one wonders if a key role of the women in John may not their readiness to ask -- quite unlike their male counterparts, who show definite limits here and are always more inclined to answer!

Also, this woman is not afraid to move the conversation forward, tentatively enough to be sure, building on what she knows: "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (v.24). Like the Samaritan woman, Martha builds upon her religious tradition and ventures an opinion. To the best of her knowledge, the resurrection is entirely future. But once again a woman is rewarded for this kind of seeking, inquiring, tentative, honest engagement. Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live..." (v.25). Again, the limited understanding of a woman and her queries produces a further self-revelation of Jesus.

Moreover, with expanding revelation comes a challenge, a further testing of Martha's faith: "Do you believe this?" It seems that when Jesus sees faith expressed in its simplest terms, he is ready to call forth more of the same, to stretch the woman's faith
further and lead it to new heights. It is like a fulfillment of the parabolic statement, "To him that has, more shall be given." Quite in contrast to the interaction with the Johannine males, which is more distinguished by the slamming of doors, Martha opens doors by her simple expressions of faith. Whereas with Peter, the recalcitrant, Jesus is trying to shore up an eroding faith throughout the gospel, the issue with Martha is movement toward a faith which is mature and full, achieved at the very grave of her brother. There can be no greater test of faith. And the woman passes the test admirably, right up to the moment of moving the stone.

Martha's response to Jesus' challenging question is the subject of much critical analysis: "Yes Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ the son of God, who was to come into the world." (28). Here is a three-fold confession of faith that is left untouched and unqualified by the narrator. While some see it as lacking, in that similar words were voiced by the crowd's question earlier, it may be seen as the fullest confession of the primitive church -- and it is on the lips of a woman. She uses the perfect tense for the titles she ascribes to Jesus. The titles are the most elevated and comprehensive of the fourth gospel: ὁ Χριστός, ὁ νικός του θεοῦ, ὁ εἰσ τοῦ κόσμου ερχόμενος. Martha's confession altogether exceeds Peter's in its scope. Here is a member of the Jewish community who sees in Jesus the "Coming One," the fulfillment of the hopes of Jewish eschatology. This is exceedingly rare and unique in John -- and it shows another woman's independence of mind. As with the Samaritan woman, a unique and radical confession (4:42) is left to stand on its own by Jesus. These women, of independent insight and spiritual sensitivity are in touch with spiritual realities.
All of the above raises questions about authorial intent in John. If this evangelist had one or more of the Synoptics before him, why does Peter not emerge with the confession ascribed to him there: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt 16:16)? How is it that almost that exact confession ascribed to Peter in Matthew is here expressed by Martha? Suffice it for us to say that Martha’s faith achieves the most singular height in the Fourth Gospel. This is what Sandra Schneider calls “primacy of faith.” Its centrality in John is to be seen in the fact that 20:31 looms as the raison d’etre of the gospel: “These things are written that you may believe…” In such categories, Martha could even be seen as the evangelist’s preeminent disciple.

Also in contrast to Peter, and more clearly to Thomas, Martha’s faith is expressed before the sign. She rises to great heights in the realm of faith, not on the basis of the raising of Lazarus, but on the basis of the words of Jesus. In this she becomes the majesterial example of genuine faith in John’s gospel.

Martha is also thought of as a type of the mature disciple who integrates all of life in the service to Jesus. In the Synoptics she is known as a woman of service, of διακονια, who serves table when people come together in contrast to her more contemplative sister, Mary. Indeed, “Martha served” in John 12 at the supper meeting with the disciples and the resurrected Lazarus. In its narrowest sense διακονεω means to wait on a table, serve at dinner. More generally it means to do someone a service, care of someone’s needs” (Mt 4:11). This is Martha. And yet this same Martha has insights of faith which are of the highest order in John. Here is an integrated disciple, much like the seven deacons of Acts who are to come.
Whether in all of the above the Fourth Gospel reveals a conviction that women are more attuned to matters of faith than men would be a matter of dispute. But a study of Martha inclines one in such a direction. And there are a few indications in modern studies of asymmetry that suggest that gender itself has a role in faith. First, according to studies on asymmetry, women are inclined toward spirituality. In Herrmann's terms, "their primary modes are emotional and spiritual." Thus, it should not seem surprising to see her with a clear advantage over Peter here. Here is a woman who senses that spiritual realities are primary. As host of a meal which brings the Jews and Jesus together, it is evident that Martha "has faith in groups and is open to the contribution of each person to a process or goal."

Perhaps of larger significance, in the light of Martha's leadership capabilities, is the modern trend in business, noted by Ned Herrmann, of women becoming business owners or Chief Executive Officers of companies. Martha seems as close as any New Testament woman to showing these kind of tendencies:

They bring to their leadership positions an enhanced capability that results from their larger, faster, and earlier maturing corpus callosums, brain chemistry and enculturation differences. All these differences help women to be potentially more inter-hemispheric in their processing than are men. Thus, women are, on average, more whole-brain oriented, more intuitive, and less fact-based, more open to new ideas than to status quo, more people-oriented than thing-oriented. Therefore, they perceive their surroundings more sensitively, manage the innovative process more comfortably and respond more rapidly to changing environmental circumstances.... Women want a more whole-brain environment and have mental preferences that give them advantages in creating it.

4.4 Mary of Bethany

A fourth woman graces John's stage, Martha's sister Mary of Bethany. Here is another woman connected with Jesus' concern that "they who worship God must worship
him in spirit and in truth.” When she goes to welcome Jesus upon his arrival at the bereavement scene she “fell at his feet”(v.32) in a position of humble veneration which she will assume more than once in this chapter. Such small gestures of devotion set Mary apart. This is a woman of intense, whole-hearted devotion. And when she weeps, Jesus acts: “When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ‘Where have you laid him?,’ he asked” (v.33-34). She points the way to a heart-felt devotion, an intensity of worship which receives Jesus’ strong condemnation.

Second, there is Mary's most memorable moment in this gospel, her silent act of worship. In a gospel filled with wrangling argumentation of all sorts, it is a striking contrast to see this woman reach the high point of worship in John without a word: “Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured in on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume”(12:3). This three-stage act can be seen as a “sign” which Jesus interprets: “It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial.” Unlike Judas, she sees far beyond the concerns of thrift and money management. She pours out what she has in loving spontaneity. Perhaps it is the spontaneous nature of the act that sets her apart so strikingly from Judas, the calculator. "Why wasn't this perfume sold and given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages" (12:5). The last thing on Mary's mind is assessing cost. For her an excessively generous, spontaneous act of worship is entirely right. This is a year’s wage that has been poured out on Jesus’ feet. Jesus endorses the gesture and commends the extravagance.
Also, this act seems to be more than devotion. Mary's act of worship shows prophetic insight. She has anticipated the looming cross. She foresees the coming passion of her Lord. She is intuitively aware that his "hour" has come. In this awareness of an opportune moment and the "kairos" nature of the hour, she stands in stark contrast to the insensitive world surrounding Jesus most of the time. Alone among the gathered guests at Bethany, Mary has perceived that a tomb awaits. It is this premonition and prophetic insight which motivate her most memorable act of sacrificial worship. Mary is open to the Holy Spirit.

Also, not unlike the Samaritan woman and Martha, Mary shows strong individualism and independence of spirit. There is no sign of seeking permission from the presiding dignitaries. She says nothing. She simply performs an unconventional act of worship. And Jesus affirms this unauthorized and most unconventional act in the most unqualified way. For him, such an original religious initiative seems exactly the sort of thing that must be commended and defended. She has assumed the right as a disciple to decide what form her ministry to Christ will take. On the other hand, Judas falls under Jesus' condemnation throughout the gospel, rebuked here, set apart as "a devil" elsewhere. It is not recorded in John, but the other gospels include a fuller commendation of a similar act of worship: "Wherever this gospel is preached this shall be a memorial of her" (Mk 14:9). The possibility of a connection between the anointing at the home of Simon the Leper and this anointing in Bethany raises the question: Was Mary of Bethany immortalized by her extravagant act of worship? Was there something about her wholehearted response to Jesus that epitomizes exactly what should happen when people
hear the good news? Answering such questions in the affirmative seems to be as much
the intent of John as of the Synoptics.

Moreover, it is the quality of true discipleship that Mary of Bethany may be said
to embody. If the most devoted disciple in the book of the ‘Beloved Disciple’ is Mary of
Bethany, this may be for more reasons than the way she prefigures the foot washing of
chapter 13. Quite apart from Jesus’ words, “You ought also to wash one another’s feet,”
this woman’s extravagant, unconventional worship stands out. It is like a pent-up
response to Jesus that has heretofore been totally lacking in John. Though it is late, this
extravagant act by Mary of Bethany is very satisfying to the audience. It says, “Here it is,
finally.” A woman has stooped to the occasion. This is fitting. Finally, it seems, Jesus
has evoked the appropriate response.

One wonders if something like this act might embody the worship in Spirit and
truth which the Father seeks (4:22). Could not this woman be said to be “in spirit” as she
worships Jesus this way? The awareness of the cross and burial, which only the Holy
Spirit could impart, the homage, the cherishing, the sense of the Καιρός moment –
perhaps Mary of Bethany models what it is to “worship in spirit”. Moreover, as one
looks at Mary, there is an obliviousness to the audience, a genuineness of response, a
heart-felt worship, that suggests “truth.” The lack of ulterior motive, in contrast to the
duplicitious Judas; the freedom from any posturing or desire to please people – such
things speak of a wholehearted response.

In the categories of modern brain research, Mary speaks for people of the Right
Brain, predominantly women, who are emotional and attached, spontaneous and loving.
While love is one of the great themes of the Fourth Gospel and the noun άγαπη occurs
seven times in it (as opposed to once each in Matthew and Mark and not at all in Luke) and the verb \textit{αὔξανα} occurs thirty-six times (compared to thirteen, eight and five in Luke, Matthew and Mark respectively), and the writer is known traditionally as "the apostle of love", Mary of Bethany is one of the few characters who help us to see what it means to "love the Lord." Indeed, her anointing at Bethany is often paralleled with the Lucan anointing by a penitent woman, who is said to have "loved much."\textsuperscript{32} As Bultmann puts it, "this extravagant act of love, even when contrasted with reasonable and purposeful beneficence, has its own special value."\textsuperscript{33}

Yet this is a love \textit{expressed in worship} in a unique and singular fashion. Mary of Bethany seems to speak of worship preeminently, in a Gospel that is largely devoid of it. And she reminds us that women are particularly attuned to the intimacy which true worship demands:

"Traditional spirituality offers us a model of the individual self in a solitary struggle for salvation. By contrast, women generally view the self as essentially social and look for value in relationships.... The journey metaphor prevalent in traditional Western spirituality conflicts with women's view of spirituality because inherent in the metaphor is the notion of a goal. Women's experience in motherhood places value in the process, not in a final goal."\textsuperscript{34}

In the model put forward by Ned Herrmann, Mary would seem to express the categories of the right brain, C quadrant, showing little interest in the more linear, male concerns with tradition and normal procedure. For her at this moment, relationship is all that matters. To maximize this moment for a spontaneous act of worshipful anointing is to express an entirely right brain response. The clear contrast drawn with Judas indicates the author's point about true discipleship, that it cannot happen without this feminine dimension, which is sensitive to mood and connected to a different reality, consisting not of words but of emotional currents.
4.5 Mary Magdalene

The fifth scene remains. After the clouds of darkness have gathered round the cross and eclipse the light of the world, indeed, "while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb." We have met Mary Magdalene by the cross in 19:25. She stands in contrast to the bulk of the male disciples who seem to have vacillated and fled the scene. We know from the Synoptics that she has experienced a life-saving personal deliverance from seven devils with the exorcising power of Jesus. Perhaps we are not surprised to find her at the tomb. How is such a woman to say good-bye, to part with her Savior? But "alone" in the darkened graveyard? It seems another woman is being most unconventional and independent in her expression of devotion.

She acts with an impulsive haste we have seen before among John's females when she discovers the open tomb: "She came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him'" (20:22). These two also run to the scene after they have been informed by Mary.

Not unlike her Johannine sisters, she articulates the problem. And she is the first to use the phrase, "The Lord" in John, perhaps the first to recognize the appropriateness of this title of sovereignty. On the other hand, the other disciples are mute, whether believing or not.

Unlike Peter and the Beloved Disciple, who return home empty-handed, possibly for fear of "the Jews," Mary Magdalene "remains", στέκετ, around the tomb. One might detect an intensity of devotion here that cannot release the object of affection. One also senses a fearlessness as she remains at the tomb weeping. In a gospel where "remaining"
and "abiding," the μενο word, is so central, it is most interesting that Mary "stood" by
the tomb while Peter and the Beloved Disciple return home. For Paul, of course, the
word "stand" has overtones of spiritual stability, unmov ed under duress. No doubt the
author of John wishes to make a similar point here. Indeed, it is such qualities in Mary
Magdalene, as evidenced by her tears, that set her apart in the resurrection sequence
(21:11, 13, 15).

Mary's are the only tears at losing Christ. In turn, she experiences the fulfillment
of Jesus' promise very specifically: "you shall weep, but your sorrow shall be turned to
joy" (16:19-21). Perhaps this tearful woman shows the way of Christ, a time for tears
and sorrow which are turned into joy! Thus it is fitting that the first inheritor of the great
promise that "sorrow shall be turned to joy" should be Mary Magdalene. Only John's
women seem to perceive the depth of pathos involved in the passion of Jesus:

Through her tears Mary sees two angels who ask, "Woman, why are you crying?"
"They have taken away my Lord," she said, "and I don't know where they have
put him." At this she turned around and saw Jesus standing there... (v.14).

Once again, a woman receives a preeminent self-revelation of Jesus in John. This seems
to be exclusively female terrain. Her tears, her stooping over to look, stand in striking
contrast to the other two disciples who have returned home -- and yield great results.

Like the dialogue and questions of her Johannine sisters, this woman is not easily
dissuaded or turned back. As she continues to pursue her departed Lord, she is rewarded
with expanding revelation. When the risen Jesus asks, "Woman, why do you cry? Who
is it you look for?" the accent falls on "woman" once again in John, γυναικι. Here, it is as
though to underline that "woman" has access to information that "man" does not,
showing again Evangelist's interest in the female gender.
Mary responds out of limited understanding and ignorance, but there is great readiness to demonstrate her undying devotion to Jesus. This is a faithful loving disciple speaking, who refuses to release her hold on Jesus: “Sir if you have taken him, show me, I will take him.” It seems the strength of that devotion itself is enough to bring the blessing of further revelation her way: “Mary!” Here the proper name, in contrast to “woman” evokes all the intimacy of 10:3-4 where “he calls his own sheep by name.” And she responds with the familiar title, “Teacher.”

As she “takes hold” of him, (απολιπτρωσ) or moves in that direction, an ironic scene unfolds. In this gospel, the male enemies of Jesus have been spending much time trying to “take hold” (απολιπτρωσ) of him, in the sense of “capture.” This woman also wants to “capture” Christ, to keep him. They want to take hold to destroy: Mary wants to take hold of Jesus as a branch clings to the vine. She enacts John’s great truth that he is to be “received,” that a bonding relationship is to be established with him. Again, the women of John are the only ones who move in this direction, in absolute contrast to the predominant males.

No doubt there is much here that depicts a special relationship with Jesus. And one sees in John's women a living out of αγάπαω as one of the great concepts of the Fourth Gospel. Yet there is so much antagonism in the Gospel, one wonders where the concept is truly lived out. I would argue that it remains for the women of John to demonstrate this quality the strongest. Jesus' "new commandment... that you love one another , as I have loved you... By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (13:34f) -- truly one picks it up in Mary Magdalene as strongly as anywhere. The novelty of this commandment seems to lie in the fact that this
is a new community that has been created by the work of Christ. As Leon Morris puts it, "There had never been a community redeemed in this way, and to have been saved by a sacrificial love means that one is brought into a situation where love is the all-important thing."\(^{35}\)

But this is uncharted terrain. She is about to "hold" one who is in a transitional state, not in his completed resurrection form. This makes Mary Magdalene's experience of the risen Lord unique, different from that coming to Thomas, or the other disciples. It seems this woman is accorded a unique and mysterious privilege -- of witnessing the resurrection at its earliest stage.

Moreover, she is accorded a unique commission (v. 17). In a gospel with no Great Commission section, it is noteworthy that a woman receives the call to "go... to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'..." (v.17). In John, this amounts to Jesus announcement of a completed mission. The Christ is ascended. The parabola is completed. The disciples of Jesus now have the power to become the children of God on the basis of his finished work upon the cross. They now share the same Father as he. His God is their God. Now he ascends to the Father. And Mary Magdalene is commissioned to share the great announcement with the other disciples. She is "the apostle to the apostles." For a woman, as opposed to the male disciples, to be given such high calling and responsibility is a unique Johannine perspective. Clearly the writer wants to move away from any hint of authoritarian structures. He seems to deliberately eschew any hint that the twelve are in a unique and favored position when it comes to Christian service and revelation.
Once again a woman shows no hesitation in responding to the divine call. She "hastens" to the disciples and delivers the message. She mediates between the risen Lord and the disciples, a role not assigned to Peter or the Beloved Disciple. It is the testimony of Mary Magdalene that prepares them to receive the risen Lord. Thus Mary is closely associated with the "hour" of Jesus. She is the only one to witness his return to the Father.

In sum, Mary Magdalene is another woman whose expressive devotion is rewarded. She abides by the grave as she has stood by the cross, and weeps. In her great devotion to the departed Lord, she is unmovable. She is rewarded with the first appearance of the risen Christ and she is rewarded with an apostolic commission to bear the good news. She carries a woman's testimony, hardly valid in Jewish tradition, yet fully endorsed and sponsored by Jesus as valid and effective in John. Mary Magdalene experiences the first Christophany! She has the first declaration about the disciples being "children of God" being made by the Risen Lord in fulfillment of the mission of the one sent in to the world in the Prologue. She is the first one to hear the words of the New Covenant, "my God is your God… my Father is your father." Until this momentous encounter, only Jesus had the New Covenant spirit (7:37). Now the Holy Spirit has come to the disciples (16:7; 19:30). And Mary Magdalene receives the news. All is accomplished. "She is the primary witness of the resurrection and the guarantor of the apostolic tradition. She has as sure a claim to apostleship as Peter."36

As apostle to the apostles, Mary Magdalene seems to fit the C-Only category of Ned Herrmann's model. Here, communication is very important. And taciturnity is very
rare. Here too, the content of what she is talking about is very hard to verbalize, whereas the conversation flow, the connection becomes the important thing.

4.6 The Woman Taken in Adultery

Of course there is much to be said for omitting the story of the woman taken in adultery and brought before Jesus for judgment from our consideration here (7:53-8:11). Not only is there strong scholarly consensus that would exclude the pericope adulterae from the text of the Fourth Gospel and ascribe it to a later era, there is the view that it presents a view of women which is not in agreement with the passages highlighted above. For example, in his Sophia and the Johannine Jesus, Martin Scott cites the absence of this passage in the earliest textual witnesses and enlists “further grounds” for omitting it from consideration: “it is unlike the other stories about women in that it has nothing to do with the overriding theme of discipleship” and “there is no evidence of influence from Sophia tradition in the verses.”

Still, a brief note on the passage might well be warranted here. If nothing else, there is the observation of Paul K. Jewett that the story demonstrates well the prevailing prejudices of men against women in the New Testament world: “they incidentally betrayed their prejudices in that they laid hold of the woman and not the man; she was the sinner who should be a test case.” And while Jesus admonishes the woman not to continue in her life of sin, Jewett seems right in saying that “we should not so dwell on his admonition to female folly as to forget his rebuke to male arrogance.” Such an observation seems very much in keeping with the tenor of the fourth gospel as a whole. It may well be that the passage comes from a later era than the Johannine, in which case it
would indicate that patriarchal and oppressive biases toward women did not change in the ensuing decades. One might incline toward the view that though this passage is omitted from the oldest manuscript, it may be an authentic account whose proper location has been lost. And yet, one notes a rather smooth sequence of events from what has preceded: “And each one went to his own home. But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gather around him, and he sat down to teach them” (7:53- 8:2). Here we transition from the last “great day” of the Jewish feast of Tabernacles to the dispersal of everyone to his own house. This is very much in keeping with the eighth day of the feast referred to in Leviticus 23:39 — “the eighth day is also a day of rest.”

Among those who return to their homes are the Jewish leaders who chide Nicodemus for his call for due process in dealing with Jesus: “Are you from Galilee too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee” (7:52). As has been noted above, there is something quite appropriate about Jewish leaders showing ignorance and prejudice in their response to Jesus. The irony of their comments lies in the fact that they themselves are guilty of insufficient investigation into the Old Testament writings:

“Nevertheless there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulon and the land of Naphthali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan. The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned (Isa 9:1-2).

How fitting that John’s Jewish leaders should remonstrate against a “prophet” coming out of Galilee when in fact “the light of the world” was coming out of Galilee, as the ensuing I am statement of 8:12 will make clear.
Next day, Jesus arrives at the temple early, in the semi darkness of early morning, ἀργνα ἐπὶ τὸ ἱερὸν ... βαπτιστήριον, and finds enough pilgrims about the temple courts to sit down and teach them. A rude intrusion of his contentious antagonists follows: "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the groups and said to Jesus, ‘Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?’" (8:3-5). In a Johannine touch, the narrator adds, "They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him." It seemed that they had indeed caught Jesus on the horns of dilemma. He must either come out against the Roman authorities who reserved the right to impose capital punishment, or he must overrule the law of Moses.

Appropriately enough by this point, Jesus gives his interlocutors no response at all: he "bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, 'If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her'" (6-7). As we have noted, John’s Jews share a good measure of what we have called Israel’s national sin of "murmuring." To have a finger writing on stone in the context of a dispute over the ancient Law is very suggestive. One suspects that the Evangelist is bringing to mind the idea that the Law had been "inscribed by the finger of God" (Ex 31:18) only to be rejected by rebellious Israel (Ex 32). Divine judgment ensued, mercy was extended and a re-written law given: "The Lord said to Moses, ‘Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets...’" (Ex 34:1). It seems that the author is making an allusion here to the divinity of Jesus as well as the intransigence of the Jews.
The one they address as “Teacher” is, to our author, the author of the very law to which they appeal. It brings to mind the previous exchange: “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life (5:39-40).

Moreover, there are implications of mercy related to the giving of the law at Sinai. After Israel’s rebellion with the golden calf, Moses intercedes for them and “the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened” (32:14). Similarly, it is implied, Jesus is in a position to extend mercy here.

This he does, after dismissing the woman’s accusers. To be “without sin” in the absolute sense was surely more than Moses demanded of those called upon to stone adulterers. It seems rather that ἀναμαρτητὸς here refers to sinlessness in the specific sin of adultery and that Jesus points to the inconsistency of an adulteress being stoned to death by adulterers. This is fitting, in that the offending male was not brought forward as Deuteronomy called for: “you shall take both of them to the gate of that town and stone them to death” (22:24). In any case, at this they file out “one at a time, the older ones first” (v.9).

Looking at the story in its dramatic setting, there is something suggestive about the fact that it begins in the faint light of early dawn and unfolds during increasing light. Zane Hodges captures the nuance of this:

The sun was rising in the east and its warm rays were rapidly dispelling the shadows from the Court of the Women. Since Jesus had entered the Temple at ‘deep dawn’, [the incident] could well have transpired in but a few short moments of time. The conspirators... found themselves extremely discomforted. The whole incident... was then being played out under a rapidly brightening sun. And somehow they stood in the ... Light that was greater than the sun – and was Its own more hopelessly revealing than natural sunlight could ever be.... They had to
leave!... Somehow their guilty past was as open ... as these courts were then open to the light from above.”

The attractiveness of such an interpretation is that it rises from the passage’s dramatic setting and connects nicely with the preceding and succeeding sections on unfolding light.

The woman, on the contrary, finds no discomfort in such increasing light. Not unlike the Samaritan woman, who interacts with Jesus in the bright light of mid-day, “the woman still standing there” does not seem in a hurry to leave. “Jesus straightened up and asked her, ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’”

‘No one sir,’ she said.

‘Then neither do I condemn you,’ Jesus declared. ‘Go now and leave your life of sin’” (v.11). When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (v.10-12). Again, Hodges develops the final scene dramatically:

The woman left the Court of the Women by its entrance on the east. In doing so she walked directly in to the blazing Palestinian sun which then lit her path. Out of the shadows of darkness she had been roughly dragged to stand in shame before Jesus and before others. But with His words of compassion and direction still ringing in her ears, a new ‘day’ had truly begun for her and she walked out into it!”

One is left with the impression that in fact the incident fits rather nicely with other women scenes in John. The contrast between light and dark, male and female – it is not out of keeping with other encounters which have been mentioned. Most attractive, for our purposes, is the expanding revelation that ensues from an encounter between Jesus and a woman. In the Fourth Gospel this is absolutely to be expected. And this passage does not disappoint, in that it is followed immediately by an ego εγώ saying: “I am the
light of the world” (8:12). In keeping with the Old Testament nuances of the passage, Jesus uses the distinctive affirmation “I am” as a form of the Divine Name. Moreover, as Martin Scott suggests, this self-designation carries overtones of divine wisdom as personified by Sophia in Proverbs 8: “I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began... I was there when he set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep, when he established the clouds above...”(23-28).

The first command of the Creator in Genesis is, “Let there be light” (1:3). Thus, one might be justified in seeing Jesus’ expanding self-revelation in that context. When one adds notes from the Wisdom of Solomon, where Sophia is equated with everlasting light and Philo’s treatment of light in De Somniis, one tends to agree with Martin Scott:

There is, then, sufficient evidence within the Wisdom tradition to suggest that Sophia could be equated with light. The Johannine assertion is once again that Jesus is the true light (1:9), and this is graphically illustrated in the healing of the blind man in ch.9. If Sophia was true light, that function is now accorded to the Logos/Sophia, Jesus, the embodiment of the same tradition.

Still, one might have hoped that Scott had included in his study of Johannine women the woman taken in adultery in that the dramatic sequence fits so well with the theme of Sophia and light. If Jesus is supremely the “revelator,” as Gail R. O’Day persuasively shows, a passage closely connected to the “light of the world” statement merits careful, if not unqualified, consideration. As Wayne Mecks says, “the book functions for its readers in precisely the same way that the epiphany of its hero functions within the narratives and dialogues.” And in the words of O’Day, there is an “interplay between narrative mode and theological claim.... Any study of Johannine revelation that ignores the form, style, and mode of Johannine revelatory language will always miss the mark. The mode of revelation is not incidental but essential to the Johannine theology of revelation.”
Thus, I suggest that the inclusion of the \textit{pericope adulterae} is helpful in study of Johannine women. It demonstrates again, whatever its source, that discrimination against women is not at all consonant with Jesus. As with the women of Bethany and the Samaritan woman, Jesus is shown interacting with women freely and with no sense of hierarchy. The passage reinforces the view that Jesus "broke through the barriers of tradition and custom in a way that put women completely at ease in his presence." So much is this the case that practically from the outset of his public ministry Jesus is followed by a faithful group of women as well as the Twelve. According to Jeremias, this is an unprecedented happening in the history of that time.... Jesus knowingly overthrew custom when he allowed women to follow him.... Jesus was not content with bringing women up onto a higher plane than was the custom; but as Saviour of all, he brings them before God on an equal footing with men." The story of the adulterous woman is very much in keeping with this egalitarian discipleship.

More important, perhaps, is Jesus’ response to the male accusers: he first ignores them, then reproves them pointedly, not unlike his interaction with males throughout the Gospel, from the self-assured Nicodemus to the judgmental Judas. Jesus here raises the call for self-examination among the society’s religious leaders. It is not difficult to see the passage as an important scene in the development of the Evangelist’s theme. No doubt Gentile and Jewish women converts would see in it a strong message of affirmation: that the community of Jesus is made up of both men and women; that both genders stand before God in equality; that grace is to be found here, an acceptance which transcends the world’s injustice and discrimination.
4.7 Summary

To sum up, the women of the Fourth Gospel stand out in bright contrast to their male counterparts. This is so because their response to Jesus is more “whole brain,” to use the categories of modern research. They are able to exercise faith in the face of rebuff. They are able to perceive spiritual realities in the language of metaphor. They demonstrate conversational ease in their interaction with Jesus and a curiosity which results in increasing revelation. Their spontaneity propels them into mission, acts of worship and public confession. It seems the author of the Fourth Gospel is intent on giving them primacy of place in discipleship. Moreover, as the following chapter will indicate, their role is central to our understanding of the Fourth Gospel as a whole.

2 Kysar, 149.
4 Karris, 95.
5 Turid Karlsen Seim, “Roles of Women in the Gospel of John,” 57.
7 Sandra M. Schneiders, 130-131.
8 Schneiders, 142.
9 Robert Kysar, 149.
11 Karris, 79.
16 Herrmann, 84.
17 Herrmann, 83.
18 Herrmann, 80-81.
19 Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 98.
22 Malina and Rohrbaugh, 169.
24 Herrmann, 83.
25 Herrmann, 83.
26 Kysar, 148.
27 R. H. Lightfoot, St. John, 221.
28 Schneiders, 142.
29 Herrmann, 83.
30 Herrmann, 83.
31 Herrmann, 135-136.
36 Schneiders, 142.
37 Martin Scott, Sophia and the Johannine Jesus (Sheffield: JSNT, 1992), 239.
38 Paul K. Jewett, Man As Male and Female: A study in Sexual Relationships From a Theological Point of View (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 96.
39 Jewett, 96.
41 Hodges, 49.
42 Raymond H. Brown, John, I, 535-38.
43 Scott, Sophia, 120-121.
44 Meeks, "Man from Heaven," 69.
45 O'Day, 47.
46 Jewett, 97.
47 Joachim Jeremias, Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus, 376.
CHAPTER 5

THE STRATEGIC CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN TO JOHN’S MAJOR THEMES

As the lights dim on Mary Magdalene, one is left with admiration for these female characters of the light, the women of the Fourth Gospel. Truly, they are always in intimate relationship with Jesus. Indeed, they show the qualities most desirable in discipleship. As we have seen, they are richly portrayed individual characters who assume key roles in the narrative by their qualities. And those qualities suggest some of the predominately female characteristics found in a growing body of research in the modern social-scientific community.

Yet the full significance of this lies not just in the fact that the Fourth Gospel portrays authentic and credible female characters. This author is also intent on using these characters to advance his major themes in several crucial ways. One cannot consider the major issues of John without recognizing how vitally his women contribute to them. This raises the question: if the author of the Fourth Gospel had Mark before him, what possible motivation would he have for this thrust of women to foreground and the relegating of men to the shadows? This is not a subtle reversal. Peter’s confession is clearly subdued in John, while Martha’s sparkles at centre stage. The resurrection appearances to Peter and the beloved disciple are overshadowed by Mary Magdalene at the tomb. An new woman becomes the “apostle to the Gentile world.” The great dearth of worship in the gospel is only truly counterbalanced by one person, a woman, who anoints Jesus’ feet with costly perfume. With Mark in hand, there are signs of a clear
redaction in favor of a feminine edge. Without Mark, John's Gospel is still a remarkably pro-feminist piece, unique in the profile he gives to women. Indeed, if John was written in support of the ministry and leadership of women in the Christian church, it is hard to imagine that the author could have made his case any more voluminously.

I suggest three levels on which the women of John's gospel have an indispensable function in advancing the theme. (1) There is the issue of power and antisociety and the marginality of the Johannine community. These women contribute much to that issue simply by their status in the ancient world. (2) There are the larger themes of John's gospel, especially the great themes of faith and worship. These women respond wholeheartedly to Jesus -- and without their roles the author's theme would not be conveyed with its present power. These characters do not just speak faith and worship, they live out such responses. They also demonstrate effective discipleship and witness as no other characters do. And (3) surely these women speak to the question of the role of women in Christian leadership, especially in the Johannine community. Thus we give further consideration to this feminine edge in John from the standpoint of marginality, larger themes in John and implications for the ministry of women in the church.

5.1 Women and Issues of Marginality and Antisociety

Is there something about John's portrayal of women that pertains to the historical marginalization of Jewish Christians at the end of the first century? Does the disempowerment and ostracizing of the church by the Jewish establishment somewhere around 90 AD, affect John's selections of stories and characters? Had the Johannine community been pushed to the absolute fringe of Jewish life and developed what Bruce
Malina calls an antisociety stance? Does the author’s portrayal of women contribute to this theme of marginalization? These are the questions before us. In addressing them, one might aspire to the approach of J. Louis Martyn, and see various passages in John as paradigms through which to view the historical realities of the Johannine community, "take up residence in the Johannine community… see with the eyes and hear with the ears of that community… develop a sense of the crises to that helped to shape the lives of its members … listen carefully to the kind of conversation in which all of its members found themselves engaged."

Firstly, there is little argument about the increasing marginalization of the primitive church by the end of the first Century. Even if one sees little evidence of a full fledged birkat ha-minim at the time of John, that curse against heretics incorporated into the Jewish liturgy and used as a stern measure against Jewish Christians in the first Century, it seems likely that the expulsion of Johannine Christians was at least a local measure. Such a malediction would not only exclude Jewish Christians from synagogue worship, but from the entire social interaction in the Jewish community. Thus, in John, the man born blind would become a social outcast as the price of his discipleship. And his parents would have strong reason to demur in their interrogation by the Jews for “fear of the Jews… because… the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue” (9:22). That such an expulsion is a concern behind John seems a strong possibility in light of its repetition in 12:42 and 16:2. Indeed, it seems plausible that it is highlighted in John because exactly such a process was the governing historical reality and that John’s church had been expelled from the synagogue and driven to the fringes of Jewish life.
In such light, it follows that the very negative portrayal of the Jews in John would be partially a response to persecution. As Gail R O’Day puts it, “the contemporary reader understood that this was going on”\textsuperscript{2} Similarly, Raymond Brown speaks of John’s “polemical attitude.” The Jews have by this time heard the gospel. They have decided for or against Jesus. “So when Christians speak of the Jews without qualification, they refer to those who had rejected Jesus and remained loyal to the synagogue”\textsuperscript{3} As Sean Frayne puts it, “as a Galilean protest movement both Jesus and his followers showed an extraordinary detachment from the established signs of acceptability and divine blessing in Palestinian life -- wealth, possession and family -- and pursued a lifestyle of protest \textit{within} the society, not opting out of it like the Essenes....”\textsuperscript{4} Similarly, Norman Petersen in his \textit{Gospel of John and the Sociology of Light} says, “The single most important factor about John’s community is that his people have been rejected by a society of which they had been a part.”\textsuperscript{5} Their challenge was to resocialize the “society of light.” Thus Wayne Meeks speaks of “Johannine sectarianism” and points out that the Johannine community had become a powerless minority which had to live off its own resources.\textsuperscript{6}

It follows that such a process of systemic marginalization would produce a sense of alienation among these early Christians. And to define such a body as an "antisociety," as Malina does, seems appropriate:

John is indeed different from the other Gospels.... John writes for persons actually living in an alternate society embedded in a larger society – the society of “this world” and of “Judeans”.... The document does indeed point to an audience comprised of individuals who emerged from and stand opposed to society and its competing groups.\textsuperscript{7}

Moreover, such a society might well have a level of internal communication which the outside world would not relate to. These early Christians would have associations built
around words like "light" and "receive" and "door" and "vine" which would escape the
dominant culture. Such language would help to acclimatize new believers to the
Christian community, allowing them to feel that there is an internal system of meaning
that more than compensates for the one from which they have been ostracized. In
sociological terms, it would contribute to their resocialization. And this new language of
the church might well become a battle cry, uniting it in its opposition to the values of the
unbelieving and hostile world they had left behind. In Malina's terms,

... John's antilanguage is a form of resistance to this range of competing
groups... set up in opposition to some established... perception.... John's gospel
points to people being resocialized, for antilanguage exists solely in the context of
resocialization.... expresses an interpretation of reality that is inherently an
alternate reality, one that emerges precisely in order to function as an alternative
to society at large.... Both Judean society and the Johannine group share the same
overarching system of meaning.... Yet they stand in opposition to and in tension
with each other.  

In sociological terms, here is a form of communication that pulls the adherents of a
sectarian group together in times of adversity, providing an emotional anchor.

Antilanguage enables members of the group to reinterpret social realities on their terms
and consolidate one another in their new, shared life experience. The sectarian nature of
such a process is underlined by Wayne Meeks:

It is especially important that the antilanguage facilitate the process of
establishing strongly effective ties with both the reputed legitimate authority, who
is the central influence in the collectivity and also with significant others in the
group.... It must be geared to the individual group member.  

For such marginalized groups, new values not shared by the larger world must arise and
be implemented. There must be a clear demarcation of what it means to belong to the
group, a sense of social definition and reinforced identity. Information and knowledge is
grapsed and conveyed in new ways. There is a sense of antagonism as oppositions and
values are defined in terms of what they are not (the "not... but" construction is seen
twelve times in John).

Such social-scientific analysis enhances our understanding of the people who
embodied faith in Jesus in the first century Mediterranean contexts. As Malina and
Rohrbaugh put it, "we insist that meanings realized through reading documents
inevitably derive from a social system... [in this case the] dominant social system of the
eastern Mediterranean in antiquity... the antisociety of John. ... Insight into the social
system in which John's language is embedded is basic to understanding the writing
itself." There are indications of behavior typical of alternate societies as they distance
themselves from their original mooring in temple-based Israelite faith, and make an
interpersonal commitment within their group. Social analysis highlights the special
problems facing such individuals and their groups in an alternate society, an impermanent
arrangement within a broader culture. Such groups do not continue unchanged. They
must face the prospect of eventual return to the larger world.

Conversation plays a key role in such an understanding of a culture, and
"resocialization conversations" are something in which John's Gospel specializes. Jesus
speaks to his conversation partners as individuals, not participants in some larger groups -
- as frequently occurs in the Synoptics. He also loves to use the personal pronoun
"you", which is superfluous in the Greek: "you" occurs some 60 times in John as
compared to 18 in Matthew. These personal exchanges are extended and significant,
laden with the Johannine metaphors. If the dialogue eventually becomes a monologue, it
is so that the reader herself is addressed by Jesus. The conversations are informal and set
in a significant context. They take place with characters like the Samaritan woman with
whom the reader can empathize. This allows the reader to feel like a full participant and enjoy the "resocialization" that was part of the process for the original readers.

That being said, the larger question remains: how does John’s characterization of females bear upon the interests of his community; upon antilanguage and resocialization; upon their self-distancing sense of alienation; upon their sense of interpersonal closeness within the group? From what we have already seen, women are governing players in this gospel. Such is their strategic function in that if their values and roles did not contribute to the antisociety theme, one would be more inclined to discard the latter than the former.

First, there is the public/private, secular/sacred space issue connected with the woman at the well. For people who had been pushed out of the synagogue, or were in the process of being similarly marginalized from Jewish society, this would be a welcome scene. The domain of woman was generally expected to be in the private sphere in John’s world, whereas males were free to assume more public roles. Gender segregation was a constant. According to Sarah B. Pomeroy, “Given the limitation of women’s education,... most women did not have any training beyond the traditional household skills.... Females, even in important households, were used only for domestic service and did not hold positions of influence.”11 In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus treats such social conventions with absolute disinterest. For him, it seems, the right time to talk to a needy person is anytime, anyplace. As Paul K. Jewett observes,

The most celebrated instance of his speaking to a woman who was in the wrong class altogether is recorded in John 4. This woman was not only a woman, not only a sinful woman, but a sinful Samaritan woman. Some Jews would not even travel through Samaria, let alone fraternize with the despised half-breeds that lived there. Hence one can understand that when Jesus asked this woman for a drink of water, she was more surprised than anyone.... And when his disciples
returned they were simply amazed.... Here, as perhaps nowhere else, we see that Jesus conceived the commandment to love one’s neighbor as knowing no boundaries of the sort that prejudice erects.  

For the Johannine community, this must have been a very reassuring message. First, for the community itself, the fact that they were ostracized from the synagogue was by no means their exclusion from God. Indeed, standing outside the establishment was to increase one's chances of standing within the interests of the Almighty. As in James, “God has chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith” (2:5). Jesus clearly contravenes the idea that there is sacred, spiritual space detached from the secular.

Marianne Meye Thompson underlines the importance of this shift in understanding of the place of worship in her analysis of John's cleansing of the temple:

To be precise ... the text does not say that if the Jerusalem temple is destroyed it will be replaced by another temple, but rather that if the temple of Jesus' body is destroyed it will be raised up in three days. By referring Jesus' word regarding the destruction and rebuilding of the temple to his own death and resurrection, John presents Jesus as the indestructible eschatological temple. The argument is not that Jesus' followers do not need a temple, but rather that in him they have a temple which cannot be destroyed.  

Secondly, for the women of this community, Jesus' contravention of established mores was truly significant. Even in the menial course of daily routines, the Samaritan woman is progressively led from being an outsider who misunderstands, to becoming an enlightened insider. It is like John gospel wants to say something about marginal people who are outside of the prevailing establishment. They are important to God. The unconventional, publicly improper ones, like Mary of Bethany, are blessed. Malina and Rohrbaugh draw a striking analogy between this process in John and the resocialization that takes place in the modern street gang! Even in the menial tasks of womanhood, in the territory deemed to be women’s private domain, Jesus engages in personal
demonstrates a high level of acceptance: he engages as an equal a woman who was trebly ostracized.

In short, this Samaritan woman clearly advances John's thought regarding the antisociety issues. Her interaction with Jesus reinforces the values and sense of worth in this fledging community. Here Jesus clearly transcends social conventions and renders them secondary. What matters is openness and responsiveness. In no sense are minorities of lesser importance. And those who might be deemed of least importance in the community may be considered, to borrow Paul's phrase, of "greater honor."

The sisters Mary and Martha of Bethany are also part of this resocialization and antisociety theme. They host the meal which brings Jesus and his disciples into the closest intimacy. For John's group, the scene would surely have carried reminders of their own meals and the love feasts which may have been the internal glue of their new social reality. On the same occasion, Mary of Bethany anoints Jesus' feet, assuming more the role of a slave that the owner of a house. Here, it seems, is the true disciple. And here is John's call for interpersonal care in the Christian community, for serving one another.

When Mary moves outside accepted conventions and wipes Jesus' feet with her hair, she speaks the language of an antisociety that is also well outside social conventions. That this would be encouraging to the women of John's community, inferring that they are no more to be bound than was Mary's hair on the occasion, does not seem unlikely. The Christian community has internal love relationships which transcend in value anything in the outside world. These people have care for one another.
And their unconventional, antisociety stance receives divine endorsement. They may well be seen as sectarian. They may be demeaned by name-calling. But Jesus endorses them. What could matter more? Moreover, even the least of them, like Mary, is privileged to have the greatest possession: revelation. They are the society of "light."

Martha also contributes to the sense of an antisociety in John at the funeral setting, where part of a loving home that has been torn away. Here, members of John’s antisociety might be reminded that no separation is final, that negative events such as funerals can result in radical reversals from death to life, that feelings evoked by death can be turned into joy for those believing in Jesus. The faith-filled language of resurrection was no doubt perfectly timed for this community, especially if as a community they identified with Lazarus. And Martha’s faith is a key ingredient in making the account relevant. Here is a woman that can express a growing faith even outside a sealed tomb -- and it is faith not based on "signs", but on the word of Jesus!

Martha also touches something about divine delay, even while she reproves Jesus for his. The matter of a delayed parousia became a major issue in primitive Christianity with the elapsing years. As Martha laments Jesus’ delayed arrival, John’s readers might well realize that inexplicable divine delays in response to their plight were not without higher significance. How often they must have identified with the psalmist, “How long, O Lord?” Martha brings to them great encouragement in a converse manner, lamenting a late arrival and yet continuing to express her faith.

Moreover, Martha departs from the other female mourners to go to Jesus. She takes an initiative that breaks out of the circle of helplessness and grief. There is
something to be done! Miracles are possible. Her active discipleship would be seen as an encouragement of members of an ostracized antisociety not to succumb to fatalism, but to be proactive about their situation and live out their faith.

Also, Martha gives an expression of faith that produces the great revelation: "I am the resurrection and the life." Like the Samaritan woman, she builds upon what she knows and receives further illumination as a result. No doubt, the Christians of John's community needed such assurance: they could build upon what they knew and had experienced. They belonged to Christ. They could wait upon him. He would show the way forward.

Her hesitancy to have the stone, the symbol of death, moved is natural enough. But she leaves an important lesson for the primitive church: no matter how imprisoned and entombed it might appear, these great immovables associated with death are not final. It might seem that as a movement they are dead and buried and wrapped in grave cloths. But they should take heart. To Martha's delight,

people can now see that where there was death there is a living being. Faith now entails a faith in never dying... undoubtedly filling all members of John's group with trust in their undying relationship with Jesus.19

Also, there are honor issues here. In the ancient Mediterranean world, to be delayed in arriving at a friend's funeral was contribute to the breakdown of civility, to contribute to an unsatisfying departure of a loved one, to allow someone to be buried without key friends in attendance.20 Jesus not only rescues Lazarus, but he removes the shame factor as well. With shame and dishonor so much a part of marginalization, one senses the strong reassurance in such scenes for John's community. Martha voices the
disappointment. Martha also experiences the full vindication. Concerns about shame and honor somehow are eclipsed by a greater revelation of the Christ.

In short, Martha speaks to John’s antisociety concerns, and speaks loudly. This woman has been placed in a position of extreme insecurity by her brother’s death. God seems to be moving very slowly to act on her behalf. She seems to depict the extremity of this antisociety of John. Yet out of that helplessness, she is able to draw forth the greatest, most universal self-revelation of Jesus. How could such a message of infinite consolation possibly be surpassed for the community of John? Through a woman’s faith their greatest hope is expressed. It is as though she calls forth the greatness of the Son of God by her confessions. Within this loving ostracized community there is still the essential living kernel, a lively faith, that can break off the stranglehold of death itself -- and live!

In the case of Mary Magdalene a woman confronts the final enemy again. And the situation is hopeless indeed. The setting of a lone woman in the dark in front of a tomb could well describe the desperate plight of the marginalized in the community of John. But Mary’s energetic, impulsive response as she discovers an empty tomb and a risen Lord would greatly inspire such a community. Even alone and a woman, she might say, God may entrust one with a message of great and urgent import! Indeed, God may call his people back to the primary task, which is not polemic and anti-Jewish rant, but witnessing to all people about the risen Christ. Would it not be akin to Paul’s great call in Philippians, “But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice"
(1:18). In the darkest of circumstances, it is still important to respond with haste to primary callings and mission.

Mary Magdalene is also a symbol of courage, standing outside waiting, while the other disciples go home. She speaks of perseverance when others go into hiding, of waiting for the Lord, of tarrying for fresh revelation and empowerment. She tarries, she weeps -- and good things happen. This scene, like Martha's, conveys something about powerlessness. Sometimes all the church can do is follow Mary in the darkened morning and be there. The forces arrayed in opposition may be huge. But God honors those tears of powerlessness, the tears of loss.

Then there is the woman’s probing curiosity, bending over to look. Can this not call John’s group to keep on seeking expecting, turning over stones as it were? Tears can be turned to joy. This disenfranchisement may be an opportunity in disguise. God specializes in such things. Tears are shed for a by-gone era, an era of acceptance and glory. Trouble has now come. But the global expansion of the faith awaits. This is the fullness of time! The best days for the Christian community are very much ahead.

Like Martha, this woman has a limited perspective: “Thinking he was the gardener, she said, ‘Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him and I will get him’” (20:15). Here she might speak to the church of John about limited vision. No doubt John’s group had similar misperceptions. Their interpretations of events was no doubt unduly colored by the power of surrounding hostile structures. Mary seems to say, Christ is among you incognito! This is not the time to wait desperately for some kind of intervention by the *deux ex machina* but the time to recognize his presence in the here and now; no longer to ask, in Paul's words, “Who will
ascend into heaven (that is to bring Christ down)...?" (Rom 10:6). He is near you, in your present context of faith!

No doubt there is also a strong anti-hierarchy note in the fact that Mary gets to see the risen Christ in his liminal state, to experience the first theophany and carry an apostolic commission to the disciples. Surely this confirms that apostolic commissioning is open to any believer that God calls.

Thus, the women of John's Gospel have a great deal to contribute to the theme of marginality and ostracization which were so much a part of Johannine polemic. Indeed, it seems safe to say that the message to the marginalized would not carry near the import that it does without the contribution of John's female characters. One could go further and say that women are the perfect vessels for such a theme, being severely marginalized themselves in the ancient world. To see such socially marginalized figures assuming roles of absolute centrality is one of the great achievements of John's gospel. If the author selected them to function as types of the Johannine community, there is no doubt that the Fourth Gospel is a literary success. Yes, they are powerless. Yes, they have been subject to systemic abuse and disempowerment. Yes, they are somewhat helpless in the face of insurmountable male power structures. But they are precisely the people that experience the greatest revelations of Jesus and the greatest commissionings to follow.

5.2 The Primary Issue of Response to Jesus
But there are other levels beyond polemic and the tensions of marginalization in John where these women have a decisive influence in advancing the author’s concerns. John’s women demonstrate the wholehearted response of true discipleship. I suggest six areas of discipleship, beginning with faith, where these female followers simply overshadow their male counterparts at every turn.

5.2.1 Responding to Jesus with Genuine Faith

One might also consider the central concerns with faith and unbelief in John and the connection between faith and seeing Jesus’ signs. My thesis would be that the women of John are somehow endowed with a superior insightfulness when it comes to faith.

Craig Koester takes a literary approach to the gospel in its present form, like R. Alan Culpepper, “focusing on the characters who are representatives of various types of faith.” According to Koester, not only does the evangelist use these characters “to attract readers to positive exemplars of faith,” he juxtaposes them as an “interpretive tool.” Thus the Jewish delegation in chapter one is set against John the Baptist, and so on. Interestingly enough, in every one of Koester’s juxtapositions involving the fairer sex, the women come out on the right side on the faith issue. In chapter 2, “Jesus’ mother was confident that Jesus could do something about the lack of wine, but she did not demand that he act in a specific way. She told the servants ‘Do whatever he tells you.’ In contrast, the bystanders in the temple insisted that Jesus demonstrate his authority by performing a miraculous act or ‘sign’ and expressed skepticism when Jesus refused to conform to their expectations by doing a miracle.” Similarly, Nicodemus and the
Samaritan woman are seen to be “exact opposites.” Nicodemus was one of the people who believed in Jesus because of the signs (2:23; 3:2), but when Jesus made unexpected comments about being ‘born anew’ Nicodemus became completely baffled. Simply acknowledging Jesus’ signs was not enough to lead to genuine faith.

Koester’s point is well taken: there is a difference in John between a superficial faith based on seeing signs, and deep down genuine faith based on hearing the word of God. This gospel concludes with the macarism of 20:29 “blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” It does not deny that the disciple who saw the resurrected Jesus and then believed was blessed. But "genuine faith according the Fourth Gospel is engendered through hearing. The evangelist makes clear that Jesus actions are rightly perceived only by those who already responded with faith or trusting obedience to what they had heard from Jesus.”

In such categories, one again ascribes an edge to John’s women. They consistently demonstrate this capacity for genuine faith. While it is not perfect in every instance, to be sure, it clearly rises above the plodding literalism of the male figures. The capacity of these women to believe the words of Jesus and respond to it wholeheartedly is simply superior. No doubt John's women embody a Pauline concept of faith which has much to do with response. These women know how to rest one’s faith upon the promises of God, Abraham style, a trusting without reservation, without confirming “signs” -- even in the face of evidence to the contrary. Could it not be said of all of these women that in the face of human lack, even death, that “against hope they believed in hope?” (Rom 4:18 KJV).
In terms of modern gender research and the hemispheres of the brain, one is tempted to conclude that faith seems to thrive on the female-predominant right side. Whereas A-Quadrant literalists like Nicodemus have to take a huge "leap" of faith in order to receive the blessings offered by Jesus, C-Quadrant figures like the Samaritan woman seem at home in the realm of faith from the outset. Indeed, one might say that a "leap" of faith is unnecessary for people who have that stronger and more developed bridge between the hemispheres known as a "corpus callosum" and are thus "less lateralized." For them figurative language is the stuff of everyday speech. They are by nature intuitive and spiritual. It should not surprise us that they come to "saving faith" with relative ease.

5.2.2 Responding to Jesus by Worship

Another area where the women of John seem altogether strategic and superior is in worship. As Mariane Meye Thompson has pointed out, this is a central theme in John, especially as it revolves around the earlier words of the Samaritan woman: "God is spirit and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth..."24 As Thompson explicates, "Jesus is indeed the true temple and what is at stake is God's presence and glory and dwelling in him... the living bread of heaven."

It is not so much a matter of Jesus replacing Jewish festivals and rituals, but that he is the locus and mode of God's presence... thus re-centering the worship of God.... Jesus and his adversaries... differ over how and where God's presence is manifested.... The Gospel assumes that God's presence is manifested in the temple — now, however, reconstrued as Jesus himself.... Therefore John argues that worship ought to be directed to God in the realm of that temple ... in ways which remember the deeds of God through Jesus, and by directing honor to the one who gives life thorough Jesus.25
Thus Jesus replaces the Old Testament institutions of worship in John. The divine presence is no longer bound to the temple, but the Word who was with God “in the beginning” and who “was God” has become flesh and taken up temporary residence or “pitched his tent among us” (1:14). This terminology brings to mind the language of Ex 25 where Israel is called to make its tent-sanctuary. This is to be the sacred place for God’s presence to dwell on earth. Later the same dwelling would be in Zion, God’s holy hill, or in the temple.

Yet ultimately, as the prophets were intent to show, God would “make his dwelling” (katakenomou) in the midst of his people for ever: “Then you will know that I, the Lord your God, dwell in Zion, my holy hill” (Joel 3:17).

“Shout and be glad, O Daughter of Zion. For I am coming and I will live among you,” declares the Lord. “… I will live among you and you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me to you. The Lord will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land and will again choose Jerusalem. Be still before the Lord all mankind, because he has roused himself from his holy dwelling” (Zech 2:10-13).

In John, there is little doubt that these promises have been fulfilled in the incarnation of the eternal Logos. The people of God have seen the glory of God again, no longer associated with Mount Sinai, the temple or the tabernacle but in the Word become flesh. The vision of Ezekiel has been fulfilled in Christ. The glory of God has filled the restored temple. In the prophet's terms, “I looked and saw the glory of the Lord filling the temple of the Lord, and I fell facedown” (44:4). In the language of John, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (1:14). God has erected another tabernacle in the flesh of Jesus. His glory is again visible. Indeed God himself, God the Word is dwelling with his people. As the one “full of grace and truth”,
Jesus demonstrates the combination of mercy and faithfulness in the climactic self-revelation at Sinai: “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished....” (Ex 34:5-6). Even the greatest of Old Testament prophets fell short of full revelation of God, “but God, the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known” (John 1:18). As the exalted confessions about the person of Christ mount up in chapter one, Jesus’ words to Nathaniel read as a climax: “I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man” (1:51). The language is suggestive enough of Jacob’s dream in Genesis 28 to present Jesus the Son of Man as the new Bethel, the “house of God,” the new meeting place between heaven and earth.

Thus John places a temple cleansing at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. The author is intent on bringing out the theme that Jesus is the one in whom the religion of the Jews finds ultimate fulfillment. In driving out the money changers and following up the action with a statement about raising up a new temple, Jesus becomes, in John, the true temple, the house of prayer for all nations, by means of his death and resurrection. The prophet Zechariah depicted a temple-cleansing in the end times, when God would be glorified in the pure worship of his people (14:21). This is recalled in the strong words of Jesus: “Get these out of here! How dare you turn My Father’s house into a market!” (2:16) – and suggests that his purge of the temple was bringing about the fulfillment of that end-time vision. Just as the turning of water into wine symbolizes the replacement of the customs and feasts of Judaism by the new wine of the gospel, here a messianic sign points to the replacement of the temple by Jesus. The disciples witnessed the temple
cleansing and "believed the Scriptures" -- such scriptures as Psalm 69:9 -- "for zeal for your house consumes me, and the insults of those who insult you fall on me." As a prophecy of Jesus' death, it suggests that Jesus' concern to establish the purpose of God for Israel, Jerusalem and the temple would destroy him. But Jesus would take up his life again. In John's terms, the glory of God is ultimately manifested in the death of Jesus on behalf of the world, so that he might raise up those that believe to share the new life of the kingdom with him.

In short, the incarnation makes possible a manifestation of the glory of God surpassing anything experienced in the Old Testament. Yet this manifestation will not be in the triumphalist terms of messianic expectations, but in the hour of the Son's death. Here is where his ultimate glory is revealed, as believers from every nation gain access to eternal life (12:23-26). Here is where he completes the task of glorifying the Father. The temple, which had stood for revelation and purification, for both the meeting place of heaven and earth and the place of sacrifice for sin, has found its fulfillment in the incarnation and sacrifice of Christ. The coming of the "Greeks" to Jerusalem in John 12 marks the beginning of the predicted pilgrimage of the nations to Zion. It may be seen as an indicator that the hour of his glorification through death had come (v.20-33). His "lifting up" from the earth would be the means by which nations would be drawn to himself. This is the temple of the new age in John's gospel: not a restored Jewish temple, not even the church; but the crucified and resurrected Son of God.

The dialogue on worship sites with the Samaritan woman in John 4 forms an important part of this theme. Once again, a woman is party to a key revelation: Old Testament institutions reach their fulfillment in the person and work of Christ. Here,
Jesus fulfils the ideal of the holy mountain where God can be encountered. Having demonstrated his prophetic capacity to read into the woman’s checkered history, Jesus is led by the woman into a discussion of a controversial issue: “Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem” (4:20). Beyond evasion, the woman was showing awareness of the expected Taheb in the Samaritan tradition, “the one who returns.” He was expected, among other things, to restore proper worship.

One sees something more, beyond her awareness of Samaritan religious tradition, however, and the contentious social issues of the day. Perhaps this is another of John’s crucial scenes where Jesus’ "glory" is revealed. The revelator has addressed her personal life on a level that no stranger could ever touch. As she describes it later to her townsfolk, he "told me everything I ever did" (4:29). Obviously she is deeply impacted, calling Jesus a "prophet" and steering the conversation towards the worship theme. It is this latter turn in the conversation that suggests a rare intuition, something that only the women of John seem capable of, that the proper response to Jesus is worship.

Clearly, Jesus is more concerned with the essence of worship than its locale:

Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth (4:21-24).

This is to say, firstly, that Samaritan worship was inadequate, based as it was on a faulty understanding of God. Yet even Jewish worship, which was based on fuller revelation, was to be surpassed. By including the phrase, “has now come,” the evangelist underlines again the fulfillment of all such expectations of restored worship in Jesus. The ministry
of the Son ushers in a totally new way of relating to God. Of course the “hour” of Jesus
in John relates to his passion. With his death and resurrection and ascension, the new
temple is to be raised up and the Spirit poured out. But in the meantime true worship is
possible in association with the ministry of Jesus. In him, and only in him, can true
worship take place. He is the ultimate temple: “Jesus answered them ‘Destroy this
temple, and I will raise it again in three days.’ The Jews replied, ‘It has taken forty six
years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?’ But the temple he
had spoken of was his body.” (2:19-21).

Interestingly, Jesus uses the word αληθινοι for the “real and genuine” worshipers
sought by God. While the Jewish worship of the Old Testament was not “false,” in the
sense that Samaritan worship was, it fell short of the genuine item desired. One might
say that it functioned more like a “shadow of the good things to come” (Heb 10:1).
True worship is to be εν πνευματι και αλεθεια. In John, both of these are embodied in
Jesus. Being born again by the Spirit is what enables one to see the kingdom of God and
experience the blessing of eternal life (3:1-8). In other words, the Father begets true
worshippers through the Spirit, whom Jesus makes available by means of his saving
work. It is the Holy Spirit who regenerates, brings new life and confirms believers in the
truth (15:26-27; 16:13-15). Spirit and truth are God’s gifts. They come through Jesus
and are the means by which he sustains us in genuine relationship with himself.

In that Jesus is the “truth” (14:6) and the revelator of the character of God and his
purposes (8:45; 18:37), true worshippers are those who relate to God through him. He is
the giver of living water; he gives ultimate revelation; he provides the life-giving Spirit.
In the context of a well in Samaria, Jesus is the means by which the Father obtains true worshippers from every nation.

At the beginning of this dialogue, "worship" clearly refers to the customary worship of God, as practiced by Jews or Samaritans. As the discussion proceeds, "worship" is taken to a higher level and the term is used in conjunction with other terms to describe the relationship with God. Only Jesus makes this possible. This has nothing to do with an earthly place or cult. The Samaritan woman must grasp the central theme of the Fourth Gospel, that Jesus himself fulfills the prophetic hope of the temple as the centre for the universal worship of God in the end-times. Such worship is only possible for those who recognize the true identity of Christ (4:25-26, 42) and yield him their worship. In effect, the exalted Christ is now the “place” where God is to be acknowledged and honored. He, rather than a renewed temple in Jerusalem or on some other holy mountain, is the “place” of eschatological pilgrimage for all the nations. The Father cannot now be honored unless Jesus is given all the honor due to him as the Son (5:22-23; 8:49).

Thus, Jesus in the fourth gospel does not hold out the hope of the restoration of the existing temple in a new and more glorious form. Rather he seems intent on transferring the significance of the temple from the building in Jerusalem to another entity, himself. For Jesus this replacement was not primarily to be in the messianic community, although his commitment to the fellowship of believers is made clear in the upper room discourse. It is his own person and work that are to become the new temple. Indeed, he is to be the heart and soul of true worship: the presence of God would be more fully manifested in the person of Jesus than it had ever been in the tabernacle or temple.
And as the church emerged, the presence of God through Jesus would naturally be linked with his "flock."

Moreover, Jesus is to become what only the most enlightened Old Testament spokesmen had expressed about the temple, the source of life and renewal for the world. He is to be the centre for the ingathering of the nations. His person and work accomplish all that the temple was intended to do for Israel and for the world. He brings God and humankind together. He imparts divine revelation to those who sit in darkness. In John's terms, he is at one and the same time the ultimate means of relating to God and is himself the object of homage or worship. Like the Samaritan woman, unbelievers will become true worshipers only when they recognize who he really is and receive from him the life that he offers. It is in that process that God brings people to himself and they yield themselves to him through the work of his spirit in their lives.

Thus, the fourth gospel, and particularly the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman, reminds the Christian community to keep pointing to Jesus as the one in whom alone the nations can be united in worship. It is only by such a focus on the person of Jesus that genuine discipleship can be fostered. No focus on sites of worship or diverse rituals can eclipse the centrality of the character of Jesus. His promises and commands, his achievements for humankind -- all are the hope of the nations.

No doubt it was exceedingly liberating for the first readers of John to see such concepts addressed to a woman by Jesus -- and a Samaritan woman at that. For the disenfranchised women of the ancient church to be assured that, in the new order, true worship was not confined to sacred space but to Jesus himself was very good news indeed. And beginning with the Samaritan woman, John's women seem to grasp this
truth and run with it. They are always seen in close association with Jesus. They seem to recognize the vital nature of that relationship and no other of John's characters do: they stand at the cross; they wait at the tomb, they fall at his feet; they anoint him.

Mary of Bethany seems to give practical expression to these principles of worship when she falls at Jesus feet at the burial of Lazarus, and later anoints his feet with the costly perfume. There is much dispute about her anointing of the feet, and not the head. But only Mary seems to recognize his kingship. To me this is homage, pure and simple, that all too rare recognition that in John "among you stands one ... the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie" (1:26-27). Like John the Baptist, Mary focuses on the feet of Jesus as though to confess that the lowest, most menial member of his body is still to be highly exalted above herself. This is a rare insight in John. Through Mary of Bethany John's great point is made: in Jesus there is a new locus. In Jesus there is a new temple. Thus it is entirely fitting and appropriate to be unconventional and extravagant in worship of him.

Mary's gestures of worship express perfectly the obeisance connected with προσκύνεω, John's word for worship in 4:21-24. With the literal sense of "to kiss toward", the word conveys a strong sense of homage and reverence. It is in keeping with the Old Testament shachah, "to prostrate oneself," "to bow down or stoop before the one you are worshiping." One might say that biblical worship carries the meaning which no one expresses better than Mary of Bethany, "to crouch, to prostrate oneself in homage, to reverence and adore to the extent of kissing the hand." There is a sense of respect in worship that goes beyond that expressed toward a monarch, a sense of bowing down. In Return To Worship, Ron Owens points out that this deep obeisance escapes citizens of
modern democracies by and large, in that they never use terms like "Your Highness" for Presidents or "Your Worship" for judges:

Yet that is the exact attitude of heart found in this word worship. The accepted protocol is to bow or even kneel. Throughout the Old Testament we find people bowing in worship. Young David bowed before King Saul. In Joseph's dream, he saw his brothers' sheaves bowing down before his sheaf. ... "Moses ... bowed his head toward the earth, and worshiped" (Ex 34:8). According to Scripture, then, worship must necessarily involve a bowing, specifically a bowing of the heart before our God. 26

Thus, it seems appropriate to see Mary's act of anointing as a central moment in John's drama. Certainly if worship is one of John's central themes, Mary's act of worship must comprise a central scene. It occurs at the crucial point of the raising of Lazarus. Whereas Martha takes the leading female role in chapter 11, Mary stoops to the occasion in chapter 12. These two chapters may be seen as a kind of turning point in the narrative: the miraculous raising of Lazarus in chapter 11 has led directly to the machinations of the Jewish leaders to destroy Jesus, a plan which is carried out in chapter 18. Thus Mary's anointing of Jesus anticipates what is to follow: he is being prepared for his death and the public appearances which he is about to make will be his final ones.

No doubt her gesture is a simple act of love and thankfulness: here is the one who has just brought her brother back from the dead. She recognizes Jesus as the resurrection and the life and expresses her gratitude with a costly sacrifice. But, as Robert Kysar points out, her act is more than an expression of thankfulness: "hers is a prophetic gesture -- one that says more than she knows -- for it is the anticipation of the grand exaltation of Jesus." 27

For our purposes, the central importance of this scene lies in the way it depicts the "missing response" to the grand event which the evangelist is describing -- "the Word
became flesh.” In this Gospel, it is the role of women to capture the response of worship. Yet throughout the Gospel only *expectations* of the same have been created. The signs, the revelations of Jesus’ glory, his teachings – all evoke in the reader the kind of response which Mary of Bethany finally brings forward. It is the total lack of worship throughout the Gospel that makes this scene so compelling.

One my see Mary’s act in terms of Carol Ochs’ work, *Women And Spirituality* and the observations she makes on ecstasy.²⁸ Whereas traditional spirituality has been suspicious of experience and looked instead the role of reason to bring us to God, Ochs calls for renewed consideration of the experiential concept of ecstasy to fill out our understanding of spirituality, in that, as we all know, reason *alone* is not adequate to our full humanity and that we need our full humanity to achieve spirituality. Recognizing that all of are touched from time to time by what Plato calls ”divine madness,” Ochs suggests that we need to celebrate such experiences as part of our bedrock faith. While theologians are traditionally wary of the excesses of ecstatic experience, and label it ”enthusiasm,” they must face the call to join the rest of the Christian community in recognizing that our theological tenets are built upon spiritual experiences which were deeply felt. The state of ecstasy, as Ochs describes it, has to do with standing outside of oneself (ex *stasis*) so that the ”normal self”, which includes our usual ways of thinking, judging, and evaluation, is displaced as we are touched by the divine. In the words of Plato, ”Ecstasy implies a passing beyond all the conceptual thinking of the discursive reason.”²⁹

The feeling can be described as an awareness of otherness that is beyond our ability to control. It is a force pitted against us, a force that is alive and imbues our own life with meaning. The feeling may come in the sudden anticipation of a loss or at the moment a loss if fully grasped …. Initially…the cause for ecstasy is the
anomalous or the unexpected. As we grow more open to reality, more willing to hold in abeyance our normal concepts of thinking and judging, the ecstatic experience comes more frequently and the causes are less and less extraordinary. Society meanwhile considers the experience of ecstasy to be dangerous. It frightens us. This awareness of danger results in societies trying to tame and control the experience by creating safe outlets for it and situations in which it can occur. But all attempts to control and tame what is essentially uncontrollable and seemingly possessed of a life of its own carry a risk...of (a) controlling something other that what was intended and (b) perhaps more dangerous, deadening the source of life.30

The anointing scene involving Mary of Bethany seems to involve a kind of ecstasy. She seems quite oblivious to the other guests at the meal. Considerations about decorum and propriety under the circumstances grow strangely dim in a grand gesture of obeisance.

It seems that Mary has a prophetic insight into the person of Jesus. Indeed, her act of veneration is one that is ordained by God. For her to "guard" this perfume against common use in order to reserve it for her Lord is a grand gesture, something divinely inspired. Only she perceives the supreme significance of the moment. Only she does the appropriate thing. Only she can rise above the mundane concerns of the man of this world to truly worship the one who will die and be buried in a propitiatory sacrifice.

In this sense, Mary is drawing from a level of understanding that has totally escaped Judas, who can only offer indignation at such a sacrificial act. Not unlike other of John's males, the man can only tabulate the sum total of the hard facts before him. So much expensive perfume equals so much money; so much money could then be used for "other ends" -- not excluding his own! "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages" (12:5). On the other hand, Mary works with a growing understanding of who Jesus is and of the imminence of his "hour."
seems that this heightened understanding has reached its climax as she pours the pint of pure nard on Jesus feet and wipes his feet with her hair.

Ultimately, Mary of Bethany seems to demonstrate what it is to worship "in spirit and in truth." Her superior sensitivity and responsiveness are strongly suggestive of a right brain person in the categories of modern studies in asymmetry, with powerful tendencies toward the emotional and the spiritual. For her, things that violate "human process" or relationships must not stand in the way of expressing one's affection or devotion. She is sensitive to mood, atmosphere, energy levels -- and especially to the opportune moment.

5.2.3 Responding to Jesus by Knowing the Hour, Experiencing Revelation and Being Open to the Holy Spirit.

Related to the above is the primacy of women in recognizing of the eschatological "hour" which Jesus has brought and the urgency of responding in kind. Of course, this is a recurrent theme on the lips of Jesus, that one must seize the moment. There is an strong sense of kairos in John (7:6, 8; 5:4) though the word itself is not overused. Light is in the world for only a short time. It is vital that people respond by walking therein. One seize the moment by responding with wholehearted alacrity as the Samaritan woman does in leaving her water jar and running off to communicate her great discovery, or as Mary Magdalene does on the morning of the resurrection. Again, one seizes the moment when one extracts the full blessing of the occasion, like Mary of Bethany, recognizing the kairos nature of an encounter of the times and anointing at one last fortuitous opportunity. Or the Samaritan woman, transforming secular space into sacred. For her,
the sun-drenched noon-hour well became a sanctuary. These women display a very heightened understanding of the kairos nature of the hour and that lesser things must simply give way for the primacy of the moment. In this they are simply unparalleled in John. Lesser things must give way to the primacy of Christ.

Also, one seizes the moment by cherishing. There is something about these women that cherishes the presence of Christ in a way practically foreign elsewhere in John. Hosting him in home; anointing his feet; standing with him in his passion; touching him. All of this is made possible because of superior illumination. It seems most apt to think of Jesus as supremely the revealer in John. If this is so, the women of the gospel are supremely the receivers of revelation. Most often this is stressed by contrast. While the woman of Samaria cherishes her fleeting moments with Jesus, the disciples "had gone into town to buy food." And when they return, it is the question of perception which is laid before them as top priority: "Do you not say, 'There are yet four months... lift up your eyes..." (4:35). An even more striking contrast is between the same woman and Nicodemus, the man becoming stumped and lost early in the metaphorical conversation with Jesus, which the woman proceeds from one insight to the next. And so with Mary of Bethany and the crass disciples, especially Judas, who protests her sacrificial and extravagant act of worship. Judas seems to function as a type of the children of darkness for whom anything poured out on Jesus is a waste. Not only does such a man not have illumination about the kairos nature of the hour and what lies ahead, he is oblivious even to the sacredness of the moment he shares in. The issue is the prophetic nature of what Mary does. In John it seems to connect with feminine intuitiveness. Modern research would not be surprised to see this polarity with Judas.
There is little doubt that these women are simply more open to the Holy Spirit than their male counterparts. They bring to mind Paul’s exhortations to be “led by the Spirit (Gal 5:18) and to “walk in the Spirit” (v.16, 25), the one expression passive, the other active. As John Stott puts it, “it is the Spirit who does the leading, but we who do the walking.”

As our ‘leader’ the Holy Spirit takes the initiative. He asserts His desires against those of the flesh (verse 17) and forms within us holy and heavenly desires. He puts this gentle pressure upon us, and we must yield to his direction and control…. But it is a great mistake to suppose that our whole duty lies in passive submission to the Spirit’s control, as if all we had to do was to surrender to His leading. On the contrary, we are ourselves to ‘walk’, actively and purposefully, in the right way. And the Holy Spirit is the path we walk in, as well as the guide who shows us the way.31

Perhaps this is the combination that the women of John demonstrate. They seem to have the passivity to be in tune with the Spirit’s leading without sacrificing the response of obedience.

5.2.4 Responding to Jesus By Creating Community

A fourth theme in John greatly enhanced by his female characters, the importance of community, the early Johannine ecclesia. It is noted that “love for enemies” is not apparent in John.32 Rather the gospel focuses on internal dynamics, typical of a community under duress perhaps, loving one another, washing one another’s feet. That being granted, it is the women, the occupiers of private space in ancient world, who do most to create community in John. They host a dinner. Their home provides respite for Jesus. They cultivate a close relationship with him.

At the same time, as Via points out, there is an external side of this Christian community as well.33 If there is crossing of boundaries in John’s world, welcoming
people into the new antisociety of light, John's women are strategic. Mary of Bethany introduces Jews to Jesus and many believed. The Samaritan woman becomes John’s apostle to the Samaritans, symbolic of the evangelizing of the Samaritan world. And Mary Magdalene is an apostolic witness to the resurrection. One might even posit a softening of the anti-semitic tone by these women in what they do.

5.2.5 Responding to Jesus by “Abiding.”

The verb for remain (μενο) is used 40 times in John’s Gospel but only 12 times in the Synoptics. According to Malina and Rohrbaugh, "It is used three times in 1:38-39 and is another part of John's antilanguage. John uses the world to indicate loyalty or deep attachment, suggesting here that while the loyalty of these two disciples to John the Baptist... and his group may have been marginal, their new attachment to Jesus and his antisocietal group is not. ... Since antisociety membership implied a sharp break with the dominant social order, loyalty was always a matter of concern."34 Indeed, Մեռու is one of those Johannine words that appears in John with a variety of meanings according to the context. It is used to describe the relationship between the Father and the Son. Because the Father abides in the Son, the Son can be said to abide forever (8:35; 12:34; 14:10). The Spirit is said to abide (μενο) on the Son. This relationship is as bound together as a branch with the vine: "Remain in me and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me" (15:3-4). When the abiding is disrupted, a fiery judgment of the branches ensues. And Jesus relates it to the love relationship between himself and his disciples: "As the father has loved me, so have I loved you; aide in my love. If you keep my
commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love (15:9-10). To abide is to love. To love is to abide. In John's terms it has to do with dwelling where Jesus lives, with food that endures (μετέχων) unto eternal life. The opposite of this abiding it to have the wrath of God "abiding" upon one. Thus when Jesus uses the enigmatic word about the Beloved Disciple at the end, he seems to refer to more than the physical survival of disciples whom Jesus loves. Rather, any disciple of Jesus will "abide... until I come" (21:22). We do not treat this concept adequately when we simply apply it to some apocalyptic cosmic event. The "coming one" is the Lord, the Truth and Life. And he comes to those who are "his own" because they have received him and have a relationship with him. The purpose of his coming is reunion, so that beloved disciples may be united with their Lord for eternity.

Abide in me and I in you -- it seems safe to say that this mystical note of abiding in Christ is a major theme. Clearly the women epitomize what it is to "abide." They provide the home. Jesus abides periodically there. It is a place of "abiding" for the one who had no place to lay his head. They abide by the cross when the others have fled the scene. No doubt they rise to great danger to so abide. Thy engage in conversations with Jesus while other disciples are about other business. Their priorities are right. They stand by the tomb after others have fled for fear. For them relationship is everything.

5.2.6 Responding to Jesus in Love

If love is a strong enough theme of the Fourth Gospel that John is known as the "apostle of love," one looks for signs that it is lived out in the narrative. Here, the women
seem to carry the day. Mary of Bethany bestows upon Jesus an anointing that in Luke is associated with a woman who "loved much." And Mary Magdalene shows every indication of being a lost lover by the empty tomb.

In her book *Gender and Emotion*, Agnetta Fischer includes a chapter on "positive emotions." Highlighting various studies on the genders, the findings could be summed up as follows:

women have been found to report more intense warmth, love and concern for others than do men.... Men and women have been found to differ in the way they experience romantic love, with women emphasizing intimacy and passion more than men and men emphasizing sexuality more than women.... Men and women differ on a number of factors associated with emotional expression. Women report that they express greater intimacy than do men in interactions with others, women self-disclose more than do men, women appear to be more skilled in communicating love to others, and women report more confidence, or self-efficacy in their ability to express love, liking and affection than do men. These findings are consistent with women expressing love more frequently and intensely than men.35

Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene live out as much as anyone the great command of Jesus, "If anyone love me, he will keep my word... he who does not love me does not keep my words" (14:23-24). If we take this command to mean "that the response of love to love is to do the things that are pleasing to the beloved," these women show the way.

Perhaps they grasp as no one else in John that,

Christ's people are those who have been purchased at great cost the cost of a perfect life laid down in perfect love. The love he has shown calls forth an answering love, and that love is shown in an eagerness to do the things Christ has prescribed. John is telling us that love is always costly. It cost Christ his life at Calvary, and it costs us our lives in surrender to him. Living carelessly is not an option for those who have been dies for.36
On the other hand, Peter needs to be called back to the primacy of love in John 21. Three times Jesus asks, "Do you love me?" as though that were all that ultimately mattered. Peter's commissioning takes the form of Peter confessing his love.

To sum up these larger themes in John, we say with Alan Culpepper that the reader identifies with these characters of light. They point the way for right response. They are key personalities. For Paul, "there is no male or female" in Christ. John goes further: women have not only equal privileges but superior insights. How is it possible to ignore the implications of the same? It is as though John is saying that without the feminine principle, response to Jesus will be inadequate at best. Indeed, one reading of John might even be that women have a distinct advantage over men in areas of responsiveness and that all would-be disciples need to seek those attributes, seeking female-likeness much like one pursues childlikeness in the Synoptics.

5.3 Implications for Women in Ministry

There seems little doubt that the community behind the Gospel of John took women and their giftings seriously as full-fledged and equal members of the church. For Wayne Meeks, in The First Urban Christians this was more likely in a newly-formed religion like Christianity than in something more traditional and longer-established:

What seems most likely is that some of the newer cults, especially in the years before they become part of the municipal establishments, allowed considerably more freedom for women to hold office alongside men than did the older state cults. This freedom in turn fueled the invective of opponents, who portrayed foreign superstitions as an insidious threat to the proper discipline of the household, and therefore to the fabric of the whole society. No doubt as a cult became more visible and better established, drawing its adherents from higher strata of the city, it would feel pressure to counter such attacks by emphasizing its
agreement with traditional values. It has been suggested that the effect of the early Christian communities on the surrounding culture would have been suppressed early. But the text of John seems to bear this out. There is little doubt from such texts as 4:1, 6:66-67 and 19:38 that Jesus had many followers and that, as Martinus C. de Boer says, "members of both sexes can be counted among Jesus' disciples." Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza argues quite convincingly that the term "disciples" in John is gender-inclusive. Raymond Brown's earlier article on "roles of women in the fourth gospel" takes a social-scientific approach to such texts as Martha serving at table (διάκονια) in 12:12 --

On the story level of Jesus' ministry this might not seem significant; but the Evangelist is writing in the nineties, when the office of διάκονος already existed in the post-Pauline churches... and when the task of waiting on tables was a specific function to which the community or its leaders appointed individuals by laying on hands (Acts 6:1-6). In the Johannine community a women could be described as exercising a function which in other churches was the function of an "ordained" person.

So with the Samaritan woman's missionary function. For Brown it suggests a quasi-apostolic role for women in John's community. Similarly, when Mary Magdalene and Martha assume roles traditionally ascribed to Peter, it may be seen to indicate, in Brown's terms, that "at a time when the twelve apostles (almost personified in Peter, as in Acts) were becoming dominant in the memory of the ministry of Jesus and of church origins, John portrays Simon Peter as only one of a number of heroes and heroines and thus hints that ecclesiastical authority is not the sole criterion for judging importance in the following of Jesus." Johannine scholars are not always comfortable with the tendency "to relate some individual features of the text too easily to an estimated socio-historical situation of congregational life." Chapters 13-17 are seen to indicate the preparation of the apostles for future leadership positions in the church, just as 20-21 are understood to bestow the
mantle of church leadership upon male apostles who were to be the great source of an ordained ministry which was hierarchical, with the power to bind and loose, having little common ground with the ordinary membership of the church. In that no women were present at either of these commissionings, it has been argued that the ministry of women in John is relegated more to the private sphere than to the public and official.\textsuperscript{43} Still, Ruth Edwards seems on quite safe grounds to state that "a key note in this Gospel is 'witness' (μαρτυρία) seemingly borne by women and men alike in delightful informality. The emphasis here is on individual faith, obedience and love, and on the role of the Spirit. It is no wonder that this Gospel has been seen as one of free, charismatic individualism." And her conclusions seem entirely well-founded when one considers the thrust of John as a whole: that the disciples are learners with a calling to follow Jesus closely and be in close unity with him; that the successor of Jesus after his departure is the Paraclete, not a hierarchy of apostles; that openness to the Spirit is the great criteria of discipleship; that 'Jesus' breathing into the disciples on the evening of Easter Day is the Johannine equivalent of Pentecost ... applying to the followers of Jesus collectively, not just their would-be leaders; that the entire community is called to witness to the world in John, without distinction between the witness of women and men.\textsuperscript{44}

As for the role of women, the Gospel of John gives no support to those who would exclude them from ministry, containing as it does shining examples of their witness.... Nor should the absence of women from the Twelve be pressed as justifying their restriction to an informal or private ministry. The twelve play only a minor role in the Gospel, and no distinctions of rank or ontology are made between them and Jesus' wider circle of friends in Jerusalem and elsewhere. Both groups bear witness in confessions of faith, and it is often hard to tell whether or not certain individuals are to be numbered among the Twelve.\textsuperscript{45}

It remains for Sandra M. Schneiders to extrapolate the full implications of John's Gospel for the ministry of women in the church. Building upon her analysis of both
general impressions in John and particular passages about women, she says that we are supplied "with a picture of a first century community in which original and loving women played a variety of unconventional roles which the Fourth Evangelist presents as approved by Jesus and the community despite the grumblings of some men." Her call for objectivity in exegesis is one with which I concur:

If the material on women in the Fourth Gospel were released from the shackles of a male-dominated exegesis and placed at the service of the contemporary Church, there is little doubt that it would help to liberate both men and women from any remaining doubts that women are called by Jesus to full discipleship and ministry in the Christian community.

To me it is very much in the spirit of John to take to heart Schneiders' reminder "that the Word of God given to us in the New Testament is a word of liberation not only for first century Christians but for each succeeding generation of believer who will faithfully and creatively address new questions to the text in the well-founded expectation that this Word is indeed living and active."\(^{46}\)

In sum, we maintain with Martin Scott that the women of John’s Gospel demonstrate paradigmatic discipleship in John. In them we see what a genuine response to Jesus entails: an initial positive encounter; a decision to follow; a witness to others; a growing intimacy with Jesus; a public confession of faith; a ministry of service. While one might wish to alter Scott’s list of stages of discipleship somewhat, his concluding point seems quite right: “while some of these features are sketched briefly in the opening chapter of the Fourth Gospel, the major illustrations are made in the body of the Gospel through the example and practices of the Johannine women.”\(^{47}\)
8 Malina & Rohrbaugh, 10-11.
10 Malina & Rohrbaugh, 19.
12 Paul K. Jewett, Man As Male And Female: A Study in Sexual Relationships From a Theological Point of View (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 101.
14 Malina & Rohrbaugh, 100.
15 Malina & Rohrbaugh, 99.
16 Malina & Rohrbaugh, 207.
19 Malina & Rohrbaugh, 201.
20 Malina & Rohrbaugh, 194.
21 Craig Koester, "Hearing, Seeing and Believing," 327.
22 Koester, 332.
23 Koester, 348.
24 Mariane Meye Thompson, "Reflections on Worship," 328.
25 ibid, 328.
26 Ron Owens, Return To Worship (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999) 5.
29 Ochs, 6.
30 Ochs, 8.
34 Malina and Rohrbaugh, 55
41 Brown, "Role of Women," 693-694.
45 Edwards, "Ministry." 140.
47 Scott, *Sophia*, 236.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

We have sought to bring out two major points about gender in John. First, we have indicated that genuine faith and true discipleship in John's Gospel is only possible to those who respond to Jesus with the openness and intuitiveness of the female characters. We have demonstrated this by following John's women through a series of scenes in which they greatly outshine their male counterparts. This is whole brain discipleship, carrying an element of trust that works its way conversationally through skepticism and male rebuff. It also carries an alacrity of response which we associate with early disciples of Jesus who "leave all to follow him." Such discipleship is more than ready to share its faith in acts of witness and public confession. It is worshipful and devoted. It perseveres when others turn away. And in John it stands in stark contrast to the male world of power and contentious religiosity, where response ranges between murmurs of protest and murderous plots. We have looked at this overwhelmingly favorable attitude toward women and their responses through the paradigm of modern brain research. Our conclusions have been that there is something about female ways of knowing that are very much conducive to faith and discipleship as described in John. Labourvie-Vief has defined this as mythos and called for an integration with the masculine logos in an important new metaphor for the mind and its development. For our purposes, this has been seen as whole brain discipleship. Modern science has been seen to confirm that from early development of the corpus callosum, females are able to transfer from fact-based functioning to the intuitive, emotionally oriented functioning with ease. We have
seen that John's Gospel confirms this. We have seen that it meets with ringing endorsement. We have seen this as a significant aspect of the Fourth Gospel's message about genuine faith.

Secondly, we have considered John's women as symbols of the marginalized Johannine community, much examined through the social sciences in contemporary research. We have seen that they offer attractive models of discipleship for such a community in that they, like it, were ostracized from the religious establishment and not taken seriously by the "mainstream." Here I believe we have contributed to what is perhaps the central theme of the Christian faith: that out of the despised and rejected ones come the message of salvation. Moreover, our study of the women of John demonstrates the strength of social scientific criticism. If this Gospel came out of the kind of "sectarian" community described by the social scientific school, it follows that women would offer very attractive models of faith to inspire such a community. I believe the social sciences help us to understand what is happening in the narrative.

Finally, we add some observations on further study:

(1) I believe there is room for further literary-critical research into biblical character studies. I maintain that our analysis strengthens the sense that Johannine characters ring true. The figures who make up this Gospel are not the stock characters of ancient fiction. Nor are they stereotypical types cast along predictable lines to represent a single outlook. Our approach has parted company, in an initial way, with the view that Johannine characters function as mere personifications of homiletic material that the Evangelist was drawing upon, or the view that these figures have been typecast by the author to teach his
readers a simple message. Rather, these figures read like real people interacting with the historical Jesus. Such are the dynamics of their interaction with Jesus, that one is drawn into the ancient world of Judea and Samaria. It is the authentic feel of the male responses in John that makes the men of the Gospel so instructive in matters of faith and unbelief. It is the spontaneity and intuitiveness of John's women that makes them credible examples of wholehearted discipleship to the modern reader.

Related to this, it is the credibility of the men and women of John that grants them the power to persuade us toward the author's values, either directly or conversely. Without the genuineness of his characters, the author's literary achievement would be lessened considerably. But such is their authentic "ring" as male and female figures that one is simply compelled by the conversations in which they engage and the actions they undertake. If these characters functioned in keeping with the homiletic provenance theory and nothing more, their responses would be predictable and the force of their presence in the drama muted. They would be mere stock characters, mouthing expressions of faith and unbelief which were current in the Johannine context. Our approach, by stressing the authenticity of their male/female responses, sees in them far more. We would particularly concur with the view that John's females appear as arrestingly individual and original characters expressing a full range of emotions and views. It is this broad range of responses confirmed by modern research that makes them credible. And it is this "ringing true" that enables them to speak with force to John's issues.

All of this we may appreciate instinctively, in a fresh reading of the Fourth Gospel. We may well come away admiring a great piece of literature, authentically and
creatively drawn by an author who had a profound understanding of the human process. Yet we would lack confirmation of our impressions. What the application of the findings of modern brain research adds is just that: scientific confirmation. This is not unlike the confirmation provided by modern archeologists for the existence of Ninevah. It says something about the historical integrity of the documents. The Gospels simply deal with people who ring true, who "come alive" in their interaction with Jesus on the pages of Scripture.

A further point: the genuineness of these characters augments and heightens our surprise at the prominence given to women in John. It is to genuine women that this gospel gives such distinction, such prominence. If the male and female figures of John were somehow removed from the normal course of humanity, one might conclude that the women are favored due to some out of the ordinary piety or the males put aside out of their extraordinary weakness. But this is true to life humanity that is being portrayed. And out of that common currency, the women emerge superior in matters of faith. This allows the reader to reflect on the ageless battle of the sexes and the point which John seems very intent to make. "Machismo" does not go very far in following Christ. On the other hand, humility and faith do. Moreover, a point often seen in the history of the church, women often emerge as the select vessels of mission during times when men are vacillating or rebellious. For John to make such a point in a patriarchal setting is striking. For him to do it in the face of a male hierarchicalism which tended to magnify the Twelve out of all proportion and to eclipse female disciples is a daring literary achievement. But clearly the evangelist understands the nature of the genders well enough to make his point compellingly. And it leaves us with little doubt that for the
author to make such a radical statement in the Johannine context, issues of gender
equality among the disciples of Jesus must have been very pressing. He can offer a great
corrective to patriarchal attitudes. And he accomplishes the feat with male/female
characters who win the readers assent by their authenticity.

Again, if John’s characters were not true to life, the reader might have no reason to
hope that out of her own common humanity Christ can fashion a great disciple. But
because these Johannine figures ring true, one identifies with them. One hears the
apostolic benediction. One can believe in a calling and commissioning that reaches even
the lowly and the marginalized. One tends to appropriate key roles in the church without
recrimination. Here the key text of John comes to mind: “But these are written that you
may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have
life in his name” (20:31). In fact, John’s Gospel does generate faith on many different
levels, one of which is a positive outlook towards one’s own life. The reader tends to
come away from John 4 with a fresh will to believe in a radical personal discipleship. If
such a woman as this Samaritan can show authentic whole brain responses of faith to
Jesus’ comments, seated by a dusty well in the heat of the day, if she can abandon a water
pot on the spot and run off in spontaneous witness to her village community, why should
her modern counterparts not take courage to do the same? The Samaritan woman rings
true. She is a sample of the ordinary clay of our common humanity. Yet this is the very
substance from which great disciples are fashioned.

Moreover, there are implications for John’s Christology. If in literary terms Jesus is
the protagonist of this drama, why should his character be any less compelling than that
of Nicodemus or Peter? If the author of John was able to portray the men and women of
his day with deft strokes which recognized their full and genuine humanity, would it not follow that he would do the same for his hero? Such a view flies in the face of the “docetic” Jesus of much interpretation. True, the Christology of John is high. But as Marianne Meye Thompson has convincingly shown, so is Jesus’ full humanity.\textsuperscript{1} Jesus’ common origins provide a constant offence to his interlocutors. He is weary. He weeps. The Jesus of John is “sympathizes with our weaknesses” (Heb 4:15). And is it not this full humanity that makes him accessible to his modern disciples? We see nothing of the typical male fascination, in Jesus, with what has worked before, with linear thinking. It is interesting to reflect on Johannine Christology with the idea of whole brain response to God in view. Perhaps in the Nicodemus interview, Jesus models what it is to transition from hemispheres with ease. And with the woman at the well. His preference for metaphorical language. His comfort with displays of emotion. There is the way that he assumes the role of a woman or of a slave in the footwashing scene, humbling himself to model the servanthood of true discipleship, quite contrary to the expectations of John’s males. To cut through the male world of managerial concerns is second nature to this protagonist. When his skeptical brothers tell him to “go to Judea” and demonstrate his miracles there in kind of a public display, Jesus replies, “The right time for me has not yet come; for you any time is right” (7:4-6). I suggest that the crowning literary achievement of this gospel is in it presentation of a Jesus with whom all disciples, male or female can identify. As in the declarations of the creeds that he is fully God and fully man, in John he fully expresses the sentiments of humankind, as perceived and expressed by all the quadrants of the brain!
Yet at the same time, this is by no means to deny his supremacy or uniqueness as portrayed in the Fourth Gospel. He towers above the male figures of the gospel in various ways: his ability to look at issues whole; to make transitions from physical to metaphorical and back in conversation. He demonstrates what true humanity can be, at its fullest expression, “full of grace and truth.” One thinks of Ned Herrmann and the key role of “the Boss, the person in a corporation most likely both to appreciate the advantages of whole-brain functioning and to see that it gets implemented in a balanced way...” So key is he to the development of whole-brain functioning that Herrmann develops his profile:

One CEO talent that tends to manifest automatically... is the ability to translate ideas from the language of one quadrant to that of the next. This translation comes naturally to the multidominant CEO.... It’s a crucial ability when the time comes to translate ideas into action, advance facts toward conclusions, articulate concepts, incorporate human factors into those concepts, and synthesize many ideas into a few. The power to communicate clearly for a variety of internal “tribes” so they can work together is absolutely essential.\textsuperscript{3}

In the world of John’s Gospel, one thinks of the Johannine Jesus and his ease of movement from one mode to another. As Paul K. Jewett puts it, “It is not only the intimacy and openness of Jesus’ relationship to women that was so significant (and offensive to his contemporaries) but also the social breadth of that relationship. Women came to him from all classes and stations of life.... When they were in his presence the unheard-of happened. He spoke to them in a way that they could understand; he treated them as the real persons they were.”\textsuperscript{4} Herrmann takes this thought a step further:

The CEO... not only shows preferences that are quite evenly distributed through all four quadrants; he also has, in many instance, stronger right-mode preferences than any other single member of the staff, regardless of function. It is these preferences... that provide vision, global thinking, a bridge to the future, and the ability to conceive a business strategy in holistic terms.... The mental quality
distinguishing the policy maker from the implementor is the ability to access and use the D quadrant.\textsuperscript{5}

Here one is reminded of the feminine characteristics that some have noted in the Johannine Jesus. Of course this is most extensively developed by Martin Scott in his \textit{Sophia and the Johannine Jesus} where he traces the similarities between the female personification of wisdom in Wisdom literature and the protagonist of the Fourth Gospel. In drawing his comparison, Scott rejects an even stronger identification of Jesus with the feminine by J. C. Engelsmann who claims that the Fourth Gospel “can be characterized as the most feminine of the Gospels” and that “John continually portrays Jesus as a caring, nurturing person in a way that is evocative of the great virgin goddesses Demeter and Isis.”\textsuperscript{6} Scott makes a compelling case for the similarities between Lady Wisdom of \textit{Proverbs and the Johannine Jesus}. And one sees this as not out of keeping with Herrmann’s “whole-brain management… not just right mode or left mode. While this form of management is more holistic, strategic, communicative, able to deal with ambiguities, and far more humanistic in its approach, it is… carried out with the understanding that not all employees share any given preference in terms of their own preferred modes of knowing. Whole-brain participatory management affirms all operating modes.”\textsuperscript{7}

This amounts to yet further evidence that John’s gospel is portraying real people that \textit{ring true}, even though one is the God-Man, the Word made flesh. It is an area which I believe warrants further study.

(2) I would suggest that there is potential here for further work in the area of feminist concerns with redressing gender balance in the Christian community. There is the
question raised by various Johannine scholars: what if the author of the Fourth Gospel was concerned about hierarchical structures and values becoming entrenched in the early church and wanted to “redress the balance” by arguing for more gender equality in leadership, for more openness to change and innovation? Would his issues not be very similar to those described by Ned Herrmann in The Creative Brain where the author offers not just an analysis of the hemispheres and quadrants of the brain, but the prospect of expansion from one preferred mode of thinking to another? In the business world, for example, he detects an “important move to whole-brain management”:

As essential as left-brain modes are to business success, they spell slow death for a company when used without the right-brain modes. Left modes... resist change, but the right modes... frequently stimulate it, welcome it, produce appropriate responses to it.... In order to compete effectively in a world characterized by change, business managers must function in all four of the brain’s different modes, right as well as left.... Heterogeneous groups produce more creative, effective solutions than do homogeneous groups.... Creative or innovative functioning can be effective only if all four quadrants collaborate to contribute their specialized modes. The left-brain modes increasingly dominate an organization as it ages unless leadership consciously cultivates and encourages the right.... Fear gives special power to ... the leftward lean. Their clarity alone makes them powerfully persuasive... a major reason many elements of our society... have become so left-brain oriented.8

In this case, the context of the Fourth Gospel, it would not just be the Johannine Jews that demonstrate intransigence, but the Petrine school, “a left brain mode that increasingly dominates an organization as it ages.” By giving females such a high profile in the Gospel, the Evangelist unconsciously argues for full admission of the “right modes” which “stimulate” change, “welcome” change and “produce appropriate responses to it.” Thus John's gospel would take its present form around a concern about "slow death" as the Christian movement came of age because an increasingly hierarchical leadership was proving intransigent and resistant to change. Such a concern would call for a more
heterogeneous approach to leadership, one which might welcome change and even stimulate it.

In the light of the ecclesiastical history which was to ensue, such an awareness would have been prescient indeed: to recognize that the church could suffer a slow death by resisting change and becoming left-brain dominant -- such insights would give the author of John a truly prophetic stature among the writers of the New Testament! Could he possibly have discerned that centuries of hierarchical thinking awaited the church, that reform movements would write their tenets in the blood of their leaders, that the accepted response to calls for change would be to close ranks? From Tertullian and the Montanists to the Franciscans, voices of protest would be raised throughout ensuing history against entrenchment, intransigence and the accompanying decadence of the church. Calls would be raised for a return to the leading of the Spirit, to the simplicity modeled by Jesus and his first disciples. But the church would prove incredibly resistant to such appeals. Reform movements would be granted token recognition at best. As the joint pressure of persecution from without and heresy from within mounted, the church would be thrown back upon dogma. While this is to be expected in times of crisis, still, as Herrmann observes, fear gives power to a left-brain inclination, to the forces of self-preservation and the status quo. Surely the church's experience at its various councils demonstrates the truth of Herrmann's point that "their clarity alone" gives the spokesmen for left-brain conservatism great influence.

History tends to repeat itself, especially in the life of the church. Thus it behooves the church of the modern world to learn from the lessons of its forbears, and indeed the voice of the Fourth Gospel. Voices that stimulate, welcome and respond to
change need to be welcomed as the Spirit of God speaks through its multitudinous members. One way to extend that welcome is to grant full expression to the ministry of women within its ranks.

For Herrmann, this does not mean de-emphasizing the left brain modes, or “putting the ... right-brain modes into exclusive ascendance.” This would be to suggest that in the world of John the author wanted to give female modes an exclusively superior status. Rather, it seems a more likely and more plausible explanation for John’s treatment of women that the evangelist envisioned a happy “marriage” of both modes of thinking in the church. As Herrmann puts it,

The human brain functions at its most innovative, productive best only when all four quadrants engage situationally and interactively in the process.... In mental terms, this means no organization that restricts its mental options to A and B quadrants alone can hope to prevail over the organization that uses A, B, C, and D and maximizes the number of potential responses these can make. To compete effectively, companies... need to employ all four quadrants.... To open up the highest potential for innovation and synergy, it’s important to assemble an innovative project team that comprises a composite whole brain. Ideally, the group includes at least one person with a preference in each quadrant....

To put this in the New Testament context, Paul’s analogy of the “body” comes to mind, where “God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other” (I Cor 12:24-25). This fits nicely with John’s celebration of community and the unity within diversity that it provides. One thinks of the upper room discourse and Jesus’ words of integration and mutual respect: “Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet”... “A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (13:14, 34). This is all the more appealing in that is pulls
together that eclectic and diverse band of followers of Jesus, the Twelve, as well as the other disciples. If they were to remain united after the trauma which awaited them, they were going to need each other. Indeed, this seems the primary focus of the upper room discourse, a love that is directed inward rather than outward, that encompasses the disciples, not so much the world, as though to say that the integration of the Christian community itself must precede any impact upon the world.

Again, the evangelist seems far ahead of his time here. He recognizes the strength that the Christian church was to find when it drew together its diverse members in one "body of Christ." Unfortunately, the church which followed would not often live out this mandate. All too often it would be characterized by intolerance and judgmentalism. From the blood of Cyprian, the Carthaginian bishop, to that of John Hus, there would be a trail of human sacrifice testifying to John's great truth, that diversity within unity is very important. "To open up the highest potential for innovation and synergy" was not something that the church would often achieve.

One senses in John the same resistance to whole-brain discipleship as Herrmann envisages in the modern world. To move in the direction of integrating varied responses is to "swim against the cultural tide" and can be "costly." Although Herrmann advocates "only a moderate behavioral shift in situational functioning – toward the increased use of C and D quadrants as warranted by the situation – the cultural shift is nevertheless profound. Some of ... society's anti-right attitudes are deeply rooted."

He delineates three "barriers to whole-brain functioning":

The first barrier is ignorance. Although writers have popularized the right brain/left brain dichotomized model of the brain in relation ... to the difference between artistic activity and the analytic aspects of accounting, many very savvy people ... are simply not informed.... Closely related ... a safekeeping frame of
reference about business that arises from the B quadrant... firmly grounded in what has worked in the past, new, improved ideas look to risky to tolerate. Individuals with this safekeeping frame of reference may well consider any new idea unfounded/ungrounded ivory tower stuff that is draining energy which would be put to better use elsewhere.... The last barrier is widespread tribalism.... Our various modes are frequently at odds... exacerbated by tribal patterns.... Achieving better working relationships between traditional adversaries within companies is more likely to be a bonus at the end of the move toward whole-brain management than an impetus to begin it.\textsuperscript{11}

Of the first two barriers to a more integrative, whole-brain discipleship, one sees plenty in the Johannine Jews. One thinks of Jesus’ note of surprise at Nicodemus’ ignorance:

“You are Israel’s teacher... and do you not understand these things?”(3:10) and his not-so-gentle reminders to the Pharisees that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing: “but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains”(9:41). Along such lines, it is interesting to consider the possibility that the real target of John’s polemic is Jewish believers, rather than the Jews in general, claiming special status within the Christian community.

Yet the Fourth Evangelist may have his sights on another foe, that of a male hierarchicalism within the church that continued to discriminate against women disciples. Such a “tribalism” would impoverish the church as much as the modern corporation.

And this seems very much to the point in John. The fourth gospel would surely see such a mindset as counter-productive and out of keeping in the community of faith. Not only are the gifts and ministries of women to be recognized. In John, they are indispensable. The possibility of a full discipleship unfolding without the response of women is, in John, a very remote one indeed. Thus it seems right to read behind John a great unease with hierarchy built around a patriarchal tradition of the Twelve, a “tribalism” that sought to disqualify other disciples, especially females, from major influence and leadership.
One takes heart in the modern world, that for all the impediments to whole-brain functioning, there are signs of this more integrated approach. Ned Herrmann is decidedly upbeat about the implementation of the same in corporate America. He speaks of “the wave” of the four-quadrant model which, once understood, is “like the tide – almost irresistible. People get hooked when exposed to it and to even just a small sample of the creative empowerment it facilitates.”

Perhaps such a “wave” became active in the Johannine community, pulling together the members of an innovative and integrated church. Certainly, this is akin to the vision of John’s Gospel. While perhaps not as upbeat about the prospects as Ned Herrmann, the author seems interested in “redress.” Indeed, Jesus in John may be seen as prodding people like Nicodemus to “creative thinking”, in Herrmann’s terms, expanding from their preferred mode to another. So much more is it lamentable that such entrenched characters seem incapable of making the transition:

One of the most thrilling shifts is the one from the B to the D quadrant. When B dominant people choose to make that leap – and a leap into the unknown is definitely what it feels like initially – they can experience enormous liberation and power. The power comes because, having established an ordered, reliable base of operations as a foundation, they can often function with extraordinary effectiveness in intuitive and artistic modes.

This is the same appeal as the formerly-blind beggar makes to his know-it-all interrogators: "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!... You don’t know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes...” (9:25, 30). Here is an appeal to left-brain thinkers to open themselves up to the world of experience. Along the same lines, Herrmann advocates “Right and Left expansion”:

Resistance to the other half tends to be especially high for people whose two primaries fall in either the right or the left modes. In addition to the negative values concerning opposing modes, there is a disinclination to move out of the
internal experience of pleasant, reassuring mental harmony that comes from staying with just one side of the brain. Shifting to include opposing modes disturbs that harmony by intruding thinking that feels out of sync or discordant, and that can take great effort to learn to integrate...

The good news is that shifting into opposing modes heightens creative power dramatically, because it makes full iteration -- and therefore whole-brain creativity possible.\textsuperscript{15}

Another way of describing the same process, according to Herrmann, is "zigzagging":

Fact-based knowledge is accumulated in the analytical A quadrant, home of fact-based knowledge, logical processing, and rational thinking. Imagination, on the other hand, takes place in the D quadrant home of integration, intuition and imagination. Settling on a creative response can therefore be described as the synthesis of knowledge and imagination. This is the synergistic "zigzag lightning... that the massively interconnected brain makes possible."\textsuperscript{16}

In terms of John's gospel, for Nicodemus, such a "zigzag" may be seen as precisely the problem. On the other hand, the Samaritan woman seems able to make such transitions with ease.

In the end, one senses more optimism about change in Ned Herrmann than in John. One would like to believe in "community" possibilities as they are outlined by Herrmann in his conclusion, "one of the most significant outcomes of applying the whole-brain concept... a group of individuals who have learned how to communicate honestly with each other, whose relationships go deeper than their masks of composure, and who have developed some significant commitment to rejoice together, mourn together, and delight in each other, make others' conditions our own." Unfortunately, one does not come away from the Fourth Gospel with any such sense of enormous good news. Rather the overriding impression is that some people "never change."

Still, there is much encouragement in John to people whose superior giftings are not recognized by the church. To me, the Fourth Gospel says, "the balances are in fact redressed by Jesus." In other words, \textit{leadership structures are not significant here}. What
matters is the functioning of the heart, of the "whole brain." If one has an edge there, this
gospel maintains beyond doubt, she has a position of great influence. Quite apart from
the trappings of the men in robes, such whole brain disciples lead the church. Their faith
sets the pace. Their witness is compelling and influential. Their worship calls for
universal commendation. Their perseverance achieves for them an apostolic function.

This might well be seen to take some of the pressure off the demands of Christian
feminists for more prominent offices for women within modern church hierarchy. One of
the messages of John is surely that the last thing that matters is church hierarchy. Indeed,
it is beyond that sphere, among the marginalized, that the glory of the Son is manifested.
For me the unconditional affirmation of John's women by Jesus calls for a measure of
contentment on the part of his female followers. They are genetically empowered to be
whole-hearted and enthusiastic disciples. Their cross-lateral functioning gives them a
distinct edge in hearing and obeying the word of God. It is as though they have been
given the gift. Now they want to quibble about the ribbon? Perhaps modern women in
the church need to argue from the greater to the lesser the way Paul does in Romans: "He
who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all -- how will he not also, along
with him, graciously give us all things?" (8:32). In our case the argument would be: "If
God has already given you all you need for full, whole brain discipleship, a role that sets
the pace in the church in matters of faith and witness and worship, will he not also give
you the bishoprics as needed?"

(3) No doubt there are several other attractive starting points here for further
research. Questions of authorship, multiple and otherwise, come to mind, given the fully-
rounded approach to faith which is endorsed in John. Perhaps it is best to conclude by
recognizing again the great richness of the Gospel before us; and behind that Gospel, a message so great that "even the whole world" could not contain it.

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2 Herrmann, 130.
3 Herrmann, 132.
4 Paul K. Jewett, *Man As Male and Female* 101, 98.
5 Herrmann, 134.
8 Ned Herrmann, 125.
9 Herrmann, 126-127, 146.
10 Herrmann, 150.
11 ibid, 128-129.
12 Herrmann, 130
13 Malina and antilanguage.
14 Herrmann, 260.
15 Herrmann, 269.
16 Herrmann, 278-279.