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Expulsion from the Synagogue: J. L. Martyn's *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* Revisited*

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In *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, Martyn argued that John 9.22 concerns the formal expulsion from the synagogue of Jews who were confessing Jesus as the Messiah of Jewish expectation. Johannine scholars following Martyn have often claimed that a 'high' Christology must have provided the catalyst for this trauma, not the 'low' Christology posited by Martyn. For Martyn, however, a 'high' Christology was a subsequent development, leading to a second trauma, that of execution for blasphemously claiming that Jesus was somehow equal to God. Accepting Martyn's argument on 9.22 with respect to this issue, and leaving aside the debate about the relevance of the Birkat ha-Minim, this article seeks to determine why local synagogue authorities, evidently represented in John's narrative by the Pharisees, would have found the acceptance of Jesus as Messiah so offensive that they formulated a decree to expel fellow Jews espousing this new messianic faith. Analysis of John 5, 7 and 9 demonstrates that the Pharisees in the Johannine setting found this confession offensive because they regarded the behaviour of Johannine disciples on the Sabbath as thoroughly inconsistent with their own understanding of the Sabbath commandment and as significantly hindering their desire to play an authoritative role in determining what counted as acceptable behaviour on the Sabbath and what did not. In short, the specific catalyst for expelling Jews confessing Jesus as Messiah from the synagogue was their Sabbath observance, which the Pharisees in the Johannine setting came to regard as an unacceptable deviation from their own developing views on the matter in the period after 70 ce.

Keywords: Gospel of John, J. Louis Martyn, expulsion from the synagogue, *aposynagōgos*, Sabbath observance, Pharisees

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1. Introduction

The year 2018 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of J. Louis Martyn's ground-breaking study, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*.[1] However, the year 2019, when this paper was presented to the Society, marked the *fortieth* anniversary of the second, revised edition of 1979.[2] That year also saw the publication of a collection of three of Martyn's Johannine essays,[3] including 'Glimpses into the History of the Johannine Community'.[4] The latter essay was incorporated into the third edition of *History and Theology*[5] as its concluding chapter.[6] In other respects, apart from minor changes and the omission of appendices, the third edition is a reprint of the second edition.[7]

Martyn's influential monograph represents his 'attempt … to honor the confluence of Johannine history and Johannine theology'.[8] It is well known that the reference to an expulsion from the synagogue of Jews confessing Jesus to be Messiah (John 9.22; cf. 12.42; 16.2a) plays a crucial role in his attempt. I want to take a fresh look at this issue in this paper.

In the presentation that follows, I will take as correct, *first*, Martyn's assumption that the Gospel can be profitably likened to an archaeological 'tell' (mound), which is to say that the Gospel consists of 'numerous literary strata' that 'reflect communal interests, concerns, and experiences'.[9] This means that the Gospel's literary history provides useful clues to such communal interests, concerns and

1 New York: Harper & Row, 1968. Martyn's ongoing importance is attested by two recent major attempts to deconstruct his contribution, both published in the fiftieth anniversary year: A. Reinhartz, *Cast Out of the Covenant: Jews and Anti-Judaism in the Gospel of John* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2018), incorporating earlier publications, and J. Frey, *Theology and History in the Fourth Gospel: Tradition and Narration* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018).

2 Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1979^{2}.

3 *The Gospel of John in Christian History* (New York: Paulist, 1979).

4 Martyn, *Christian History,* 90–121. Martyn's colleague at Union Theological Seminary in New York, Raymond E. Brown, published his well-known *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* the same year (New York: Paulist, 1979). Brown was significantly influenced by Martyn's work though he went his own way in several respects.

5 Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003^{3}.

6 Martyn, *History and Theology*^{3}, 145–67. All subsequent references to 'Glimpses' are to the reprint in the third edition of the monograph.

7 All unmarked page references in the main text below, or in the footnotes, refer to the reprint in *History and Theology*^{3}, 25–143. (The first twenty-three pages consist of an essay by D. M. Smith, 'The Contribution of J. Louis Martyn to the Understanding of the Gospel of John').

8 Martyn, *History and Theology*^{3}, xiii.

9 Martyn, 'Glimpses', 145. Martyn ('Glimpses', 145 n. 1) refers in this connection to Brown's hypothesis concerning the composition history of the Gospel in R. E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John (i–xii)* (AB 29; Garden City, NY: Doubleday 1966) xxxiv–xl.

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experiences over the course of time.[10] *Second*, since the various strata exhibit 'a remarkable degree of stylistic and conceptual homogeneity', it can be concluded that 'the literary history behind the Fourth Gospel reflects to a large degree the history of a single community which maintained over a period of time its particular and rather peculiar identity'.[11] The Gospel in other words originated in, and was written for, what Martyn called 'the Johannine community' (29).[12] *Third,* the history of this community 'forms to no small extent a chapter in the history of *Jewish* Christianity'.[13] That is to say, the Fourth Gospel is largely the legacy of a (particular, perhaps even peculiar) *Jewish*-Christian community.

2. Martyn on Expulsion from the Synagogue

2.1 *John 9.22 as the Cornerstone*

Of the three passages in which an expulsion from the synagogue is mentioned, the first – John 9.22 – plays the central role in Martyn's book. That is clear from Part I (35–66), which contains two chapters. The first (35–45) gives Martyn's well-known reading of John 9 as a two-level drama.[14] Chapter 2

10 Martyn seeks 'to move from the relatively secure points in the document's literary history to reasonable hypotheses as regards the community's social *and theological* history' ('Glimpses', 146; emphasis added).

11 Martyn, 'Glimpses', 145.

12 I leave aside here the question whether it is appropriate to refer to the Johannine community as 'sectarian', as Martyn does; it is in any event the case that the Johannine language and idiom are remarkably distinctive with respect to other NT documents, including the Synoptics. On the Johannine community, see M. C. de Boer, 'The Story of the Johannine Community and its Literature', *The Oxford Handbook of Johannine Studies* (ed. J. M. Lieu and M. C. de Boer; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) 63–82; and M. C. de Boer, 'The Johannine Community under Attack in Recent Scholarship', *The Ways That Often Parted: Essays in Honor of Joel Marcus* (ed. Lori Baron *et al.*; SBL Early Christianity and its Literature 24; Atlanta: SBL, 2018) 235–65.

13 Martyn, 'Glimpses', 167 (emphasis original); repeated verbatim in J. L. Martyn, 'The Johannine Community among Jewish and Other Early Christian Communities', *What We Have Heard from the Beginning: The Past, Present, and Future of Johannine Studies* (ed. T. Thatcher; Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007) 183–90, at 187. Martyn's concern is to understand 'the Johannine community during a period in which it *remained a Jewish*-Christian church' (J. L. Martyn, 'Persecution and Martyrdom', *Christian History*, 55–89, at 56; emphasis original). He has argued that an active *mission to* gentiles (as opposed to a mission to Jews) does not play a significant role in the formative version of the Gospel composed by 'the evangelist' (J. L. Martyn, 'A Gentile Mission That Replaced an Earlier Jewish Mission?', *Exploring the Gospel of John: In Honor of D. Moody Smith* (ed. R. A. Culpepper and C. C. Black; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox) 124–44.

14 Cf. 40: 'the text [of John 9] presents its witness on two levels: (1) It is a witness to an *einmalig* event during Jesus' earthly lifetime. … (2) The text is also a witness of Jesus' powerful presence in the actual events experienced by the Johannine church.'

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(45–66) is devoted to exploring the significance of John 9.22 for achieving 'a clear picture of the situation in which John wrote his Gospel' (46). According to Martyn, it gives 'a fairly coherent picture' (49) of a formal agreement made by Jewish authorities (ἤδη γὰρ συνετέθειντο οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι) to expel Jewish confessors of Jesus as Messiah from the synagogue (ἵνα ἐάν τις αὐτὸν ὁμολογήσῃ Χριστόν, ἀποσυνάγωγος γένηται). Martyn then seeks to find 'a recoverable historical reference apart from John's Gospel' itself to substantiate and to confirm the plausibility of his reading of John 9.22 (49; cf. 78). As is well known, Martyn found historical corroboration in the Birkat ha-Minim (47–48, 56).[15] Having found historical corroboration, Martyn asserted that he could use John 9.22 as the fixed starting point for a reconstruction of the history of the Johannine community and its theology (cf. 69–71, 114).[16] The importance of John 9.22 for his project is reflected in the critique directed at Martyn's work, which generally focuses on John 9.22 and its relationship, or lack of relationship, to the Birkat ha-Minim.[17]

In my view, Martyn should have taken the reference to expulsion in John 16.2a as the starting point of his analysis.[18] John 16.2a occurs in Jesus' Farewell Discourse(s) to his disciples. In the immediately preceding verses, beginning with 15.18, Jesus makes predictions of persecution to come, in the time after *his departure* from the world. In 15.20, he says: 'If they persecuted me [cf. 5.16], they *will* also persecute you' (εἰ ἐμὲ ἐδίωξαν, καὶ ὑμᾶς διώξουσιν). That vague prediction becomes very specific in 16.2a: 'They *will* put you out of the synagogue' (ἀποσυναγώγους ποιήσουσιν ὑμᾶς, lit. they *will* make you people separated from the synagogue).[19] John 16.2a does not support the claim, used against Martyn, that 'the *aposynagōgos* passages … would have been read primarily in their context in the story of Jesus and would have been seen as having

15 A rudimentary form of Martyn's thesis about the relevance of the Birkat ha-Minim for the Gospel's three expulsion texts can already be found in Brown, *John*, xxxv, lxxiv–lxxv, lxxxv.

16 Also Martyn, 'Glimpses', 145–6, 147 n. 6.

17 I will not enter the debate about the relevance of the Birkat ha-Minim for the Johannine texts here, but see J. Marcus ('The Birkat ha-Minim Revisited', *NTS 55* (2009) 23–51), who renews and strengthens the case Martyn made for a relationship, and P. Alexander, '"The Parting of the Ways" from the Perspective of Rabbinic Judaism', *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways AD 70 to 135* (ed. J. D. G. Dunn; WUNT 66; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993) 1–25, at 6–11; P. Alexander, 'Jewish Believers in Early Rabbinic Literature', *Jewish Believers in Christ: The Early Centuries* (ed. O. Skarsaune and R. Hvalvik; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007) 659–709, at 673–4.

18 Martyn refers to 16.2 for the first time well into chapter 1, and then only in a footnote (43 n. 17), and sporadically further on in chapters 1 and 2 (45, 48, 51, 60 n. 69, 61 n. 71). The focus remains on John 9.22.

19 Notice the use of the third person plural in both cases, as well as in 15.25 ('their law'). On the meaning of the term ἀποσυνάγωγος in the Johannine context, see Martyn 48–51; S. Pancaro, *The Law in the Fourth Gospel: The Torah and the Gospel, Moses and Jesus, Judaism and Christianity according to John* (NovTSup XLII; Leiden: Brill, 1975) 247–8.

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extratextual referents in the life of the historical Jesus'.[20] That assertion could perhaps count for 9.22 and 12.42, but not, I think, for 16.2a, which is part of a discourse in which Jesus talks about events in the experience of his disciples[21] in the time *after his departure*.[22]

In short, if Martyn had started with John 16.2a, he could perhaps have forestalled two alternative explanations of the expulsion passages. The first of these explanations is that these passages are to be dismissed as concoctions or fabrications.[23] It is, I think, extremely unlikely that the prediction found in 16.2a would have been preserved or attributed to Jesus if it had not been fulfilled in the experience of the Johannine community after Easter. The *specificity* of the charge also makes the claim of fabrication an unlikely explanation.[24] Such a charge, if indeed false, could have been easily disconfirmed by the people right there on the ground at the time.[25] The second explanation comes from those who do not regard the expulsion passages as fabrications but, in contrast to Martyn, take them as reflecting historical events in the life and ministry of Jesus before Easter.[26] John 16.2a in

20 A. Reinhartz, 'The Johannine Community and its Jewish Neighbors: Reappraisal', *What is John?*, vol. II: *Literary and Social Readings of the Fourth Gospel* (ed. F. F. Sevogia; Atlanta: Scholars, 1998) 111–38, at 133.

21 The term 'disciples' (μαθηταί), which occurs some seventy-eight times in John, is the designation the Fourth Gospel favours for those who have come to believe in Jesus as 'the Christ, the Son of God' (20.30–1). The designation is not limited to the Twelve (cf. 6.60–71) nor, seemingly, to pre-Easter adherents of Jesus. See P. Trebilco, *Self-Designations and Group Identity in the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 208–46, esp. 240–1. The fact that the term is absent from the Johannine Epistles suggests that the designation functioned only in an earlier period of Johannine history. That earlier period is the focus of this paper.

22 Martyn recognises this of course (140).

23 R. Kimelman, 'Birkat ha-Minim and the Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Jewish Prayer in Late Antiquity', *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, vol. II (ed. E. P. Sanders; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981) 226–44, at 234; S. T. Katz, 'Issues in the Separation of Judaism and Christianity after 70 CE: A Reconsideration', *JBL* 103 (1984) 43–76, at 66 n. 88; R. Kysar, 'The Whence and Whither of the Johannine Community', *Life in Abundance: Studies of John's Gospel in Tribute to Raymond E. Brown* (ed. J. R. Donahue; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005) 65–81, at 71; A. Reinhartz, 'Building Skyscrapers on Toothpicks: The Literary-Critical Challenge to Historical Criticism', *Anatomies of Narrative Criticism: The Past, Present, and Future of the Fourth Gospel as Literature* (ed. T. Thatcher and S. D. Moore; Atlanta: SBL, 2008) 55–76, at 76.

24 For this reason, Schnelle's attempt to reduce John 16.2, including the reference to expulsion, to 'traditionelle Motive' without 'eine konkrete Auseinandersetzung' (U. Schnelle, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (THNT 4; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2016[5]) 322) is unconvincing.

25 Even more so if Reinhartz's argument is correct that everyone was welcome in the synagogue and that there was traffic back and forth between the Johannine community and the (local) synagogue (Reinhartz, 'Skyscrapers', 72–3).

26 E.g. H. N. Ridderbos, *Het evangelie naar Johannes: Proeve van een theologische exegese*, vol. I (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1987); E. W. Klink III, 'Expulsion from the Synagogue? Rethinking a

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my opinion also makes this explanation highly problematic and improbable.[27] So, if Martyn had started with 16.2a, instead of appealing to it later and somewhat incidentally to justify his two-level reading of John 9, I think he could have forestalled those alternative explanations and strengthened his argument for reading John 9 not only as a story about Jesus before Easter but also as a creative dramatisation of a traumatic event in the history the Johannine community *after Easter*.[28]

2.2 *The Significance of the Second Prediction in John 16.2*

Jesus makes a second very specific prediction in John 16.2: 'but an hour is coming when everyone who kills you will think that he is offering worship to God' (ἀλλ' ἔρχεται ὥρα ἵνα πᾶς ὁ ἀποκτείνας ὑμᾶς δόξῃ λατρείαν προσφέρειν τῷ θεῷ, 16.2b). On the basis of this text, Martyn sees an *escalation* of the conflict between the Johannine community of expelled disciples of Jesus (9.28; 19.38) and the authorities of the local synagogue. According to Martyn, Jewish authorities now needed to take a step 'against those *already excommunicated* who insist on evangelizing among the Jewish populace' (71; emphasis added), evidently with some success (Martyn appeals to John 12.11, 19).[29] A 'step beyond excommunication was called for, and in light of 16.2[b]', Martyn saw 'no

Johannine Anachronism', *TynBul* 59 (2008) 9–18; S. E. Porter, *John, his Gospel, and Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015).

27 There is, I believe, also no compelling Synoptic corroboration of such a drastic and formal step. Luke 6.22 comes closest but even here the following verse ('in that day') indicates that a post-Easter situation is in view. Moreover, as Martyn astutely points out, the contrast drawn between discipleship to Jesus and discipleship to Moses in John 9.28 'is scarcely conceivable in Jesus' lifetime, since it recognizes discipleship to Jesus not only as antithetical, but also as somehow comparable, to discipleship to Moses' (47). Cf. Brown, *John*, 380; J. D. G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways Between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (London: SCM/ Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991) 221.

28 Marcus points to 'the fear' that Martyn's reconstruction 'will also lend credence to the belief … that subsequent Christian persecution of Jews has simply been payback for what Jews did to Christians' ('Birkat ha-Minim', 526). He rightly adds: 'This fear is not entirely paranoid.' In my opinion, there is nothing in the Gospel of John, or in Martyn's reconstruction of the history of Johannine Christianity, that would in any way legitimate such a 'payback' mentality or the actions to which this mentality could lead (and has led), namely, the persecution, maltreatment or defamation of Jews. See M. C. de Boer, 'The Depiction of "the Jews" in John's Gospel: Matters of Behavior and Identity', *Anti-Judaism in the Fourth Gospel* (ed. R. Bieringer *et al.*; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001) 141–57.

29 I prefer the term 'expulsion' to Martyn's 'excommunication', which has ecclesiastical overtones; also J. M. Lieu, 'The Synagogue and the Separation of Christians', *The Ancient Synagogue from its Origins until 200 CE* (ed. B. Olsson and M. Zetterholm; Coniectanea Biblica, New Testament Series 39; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2003) 189–207, at 195.

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alternative but to conclude that this step was the imposition of the death penalty on at least some Jews who espoused the messianic faith' (71).[30]

Martyn saw further evidence for this step in John 5 and 7. He gives *a two-level reading of those chapters* in connection with this *second* step (69–89), arguing that the reasons indicated for seeking Jesus' execution (namely, that he makes himself equal to God)[31] actually disclose the reasons for seeking the execution of Johannine preachers in the late first century: Johannine 'Jewish-Christian evangelists [missionaries]' were being regarded as '*Mesithim* (beguilers)' who lead the people astray (πλανάω, 7.12, 47) into the worship of Jesus as a second god; 'on the basis of that identification, it [the Gerousia in John's city] is able to institute legal proceedings against them' (84).[32]

Because in the presentation of his argument Martyn's focal concern was with the *first* trauma, the expulsion from the synagogue, and then particularly as attested in John 9.22 and corroborated (so he argued) by the Birkat ha-Minim, Martyn's thesis concerning the second trauma has received much less attention and scrutiny, even though he devotes two chapters to it. But, just as in the case of the first prediction of 16.2 (expulsion), it is extremely unlikely that the second prediction found in 16.2 (execution) would have been preserved or attributed to Jesus if it had not been fulfilled in the experience of the Johannine

30 According to Martyn, the expulsion meant that 'an inner-synagogue *group of Christian Jews* now became – against its will – a separated *community of Jewish Christians*' (70; emphasis original). As a result, he has to wonder about the grounds on which the authorities could proceed to execution against members of this separated (Johannine) community. His answer is not strong: 'I can only suggest that this authority exercised over excommunicates was of a very peculiar sort carried out in light of what Jewish leaders regarded as extremely provocative activity on the part of Jewish-Christian evangelists' (75 n. 99). Given the continuing evangelistic efforts of Johannine preachers among Jews and the phenomenon of secret believers who feared expulsion from the synagogue (12.42), it is not so clear that the expelled Johannine believers *thought of themselves* at this stage of the conflict as a separated community rather than as an alienated group that still hoped for acceptance and reinstatement, even if their *religious* identity as Jews was already being called into question (9.28; cf. Alexander, 'Parting', 5). It is, then, perhaps more appropriate to speak of a community of Jewish Christians, fully separated from the synagogue, only after the second trauma had occurred, when all hope of acceptance and reconciliation had disappeared. J. Kloppenburg may thus be correct when he surmises that the term ἀποσυνάγωγος 'originally applied to a temporary, disciplinary exclusion' ('Disaffiliation in Associations and the ἀποσυναγωγός of John', *HTS Teologise Studies/Theological Studies* 67(1; Art. #962, 16 pages; DOI: 10.4102/hts.v67i1.962) 8).

31 Cf. 5.18; 8.53c, 58–9; 10.30–6; 19.7. This leaves Jesus open to the charge of blasphemy as happens in 10.33, 36.

32 On the death penalty for blasphemy and leading astray, see Lev 24.16; Deut 13.6–10; m. Sanh. 7.5, 10–11 (cf. John 19.7). Martyn finds historical corroboration for the second trauma in sources such as Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho* and certain rabbinic texts (78–82) which, he believes, attest 'a legal process according to which one who leads the people astray (to worship a god alongside God) is subject to arrest, trial, and execution' (78). In 'Persecution and Martyrdom', Martyn finds further support in the Pseudo-Clementine literature.

community after Easter.[33] It is even more unlikely if one takes 16.4a into account: 'I have said these things to you', Jesus reassures his disciples, 'so that when *their hour* [i.e. time] comes you may remember that I told you of them' (ταῦτα λελάληκα ὑμῖν ἵνα ὅταν ἔλθῃ ἡ ὥρα αὐτῶν μνημονεύητε αὐτῶν ὅτι ἐγὼ εἶπον ὑμῖν; cf. 48).[34] The specificity of the charge also, once again, pleads for historicity – historicity in the setting of the Johannine community after Easter.

In any event, consistent with Martyn's focus on 9.22 in the first part of his book, many Johannine scholars after him have tended to merge the second trauma with the first into something called 'conflict with the synagogue', or to see the second trauma as simply an aspect or an extension of the first.[35] The basic problem, so the argument goes, is the reliability of the claims about a formal expulsion from the synagogue in 9.22, and for that reason Martyn's whole proposal stands or falls with respect to this particular issue. Martyn himself, I think, contributed to this assessment of his argument not only through his focus on John 9 in the first part of his book but also by his placing the two traumas together in his follow-up 'Glimpses' article[36] into what he called 'the middle period',[37] instead of, say, allowing each trauma to inaugurate and to define a distinct period in the history of Johannine Christianity (both communal and theological).[38]

The collapsing of the two traumas into one, as just outlined, which Martyn himself seems to facilitate by his presentation in *History and Theology*, perhaps also partly explains why numerous Johannine scholars, such as Raymond E. Brown,[39] Andrew T. Lincoln,[40] D. Moody Smith,[41]

33 Cf. de Boer, 'Johannine Community under Attack', 233–4. After a review of the evidence from the first and second centuries, S. G. Wilson (*Related Strangers: Jews and Christians 70–170 CE* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 173) concludes that 'there is little reason to doubt that on some occasions some Jews took the opportunity to have [Jewish-]Christians put to death'.

34 On the importance of the fulfilment of Jesus' predictions, including that of expulsion in 16.2a, for the reliability or truth of his testimony, see A. T. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000) 200, 205, 269.

35 Martyn himself encourages such a reading when he alludes to John 16.2b as part of his two-level dramatic presentation of John 9 in chapter 1 of his monograph (45).

36 Martyn, 'Glimpses', 154–7.

37 This is the case despite the fact that he explicitly speaks of 'two major traumas' here ('Glimpses', 154). There are indications that Martyn was leaning in the direction of distinguishing more sharply between them in the second edition (and so also in the third edition) of *History and Theology* (60 n. 69, 71–2) than he had in the first.

38 Following Brown, Martyn posits that there were two editions of the Fourth Gospel by 'the evangelist' *after* the second trauma ('Glimpses', 157 with n. 38), with a final redaction after that, when John 21 was added (Martyn, 'Gentile Mission', 127). He does not, as one might expect, correlate the two editions by 'the evangelist' with 'the two major traumas' that overtook the Johannine community. See de Boer, 'Story', 75–6.

39 Brown, *Community*, 34, 43, 166.

40 Lincoln, *Truth*, 278.

41 Smith, 'Contribution', 21.

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John Ashton,[42] Jean Zumstein[43] and Jörg Frey,[44] have maintained that the development of a 'high' Christology among Johannine believers in Christ provided the actual catalyst for the *first* trauma, the expulsion from the synagogue.[45] Brown (writing in 1979!) even attributes this view to Martyn himself, since he criticises Martyn for failing to 'explain why the Christian Jews from the early period developed a Christology that led to their expulsion from the synagogue'.[46]

Though Martyn was perhaps not as clear about the matter as he could have been, Smith rightly observes that when all is said and done 'Martyn placed expulsion from the synagogue before, rather than after, the introduction of such a Christology'.[47] A high Christology does not play a role in Martyn's treatment of John 9.22 nor in his appeal to the Birkat ha-Minim as the historical background for 9.22. Rather, as we have seen, a high Christology provided the catalyst for the *second* trauma, that of execution for the seemingly blasphemous claim of Jesus' equality with God. What then was the reason for the first trauma in Martyn's view, and is his argument cogent?

2.3 *The Reason for the Expulsion according to Martyn*

On the basis of John 9.22, Martyn concludes that 'excommunication is clearly said to follow upon confession of Jesus as *Messiah*' (91; emphasis original), i.e. 'the Messiah of Jewish expectation' (98; cf. 57).[48] That judgement finds support, I think, in the course of the story of the man born blind in John 9. The man who has been healed of his blindness refers to his healer as ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὁ λεγόμενος Ἰησοῦς (9.11), and he regards the ἄνθρωπος who performs τοιαῦτα σημεῖα (9.16) as a προφήτης (9.17). John 9.22 subsequently implies that the healed man has come to accept his healer as Χριστός (cf. 7.31; 20.30), who as such is παρὰ θεοῦ, 'from God' (9.16, 33) – παρὰ θεοῦ arguably in the same 'low' sense that John the Baptist is said to be an ἄνθρωπος

42 J. Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007²) 23.

43 J. Zumstein, *Das Johannesevangelium* (Meyers KEK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016) 360–1.

44 J. Frey, 'Towards Reconfiguring our Views on the "Parting of the Ways": Ephesus as a Test Case', *John and Judaism: A Contested Relationship in Context* (ed. R. A. Culpepper and P. N. Anderson; Atlanta: SBL, 217) 221–42, at 236.

45 Zumstein is among those who argue that a high Christology developed 'sehr früh und ist vielleicht sogar an den Anfang der joh[anneischen] Entwicklungslinie zu setzen' (*Johannesevangelium*, 13). But the evidence of the Gospel seems to speak against this surmise (see below).

46 Brown, *Community*, 174; cf. 36.

47 Martyn, 'Contribution', 21.

48 In John 1.41 and 4.25, the Greek term Χριστός, used in 9.22, is given as the translation of the transliterated Aramaic counterpart Μεσσίας.

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ἀπεσταλμένος παρὰ θεοῦ in 1.6.[49] It is only *after* the man has been expelled (9.34) that he is led by Jesus himself to a much deeper understanding of who Jesus is, here ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, whom the healed man then proceeds to worship (προσεκύνησεν) (9.35–8; cf. Martyn 44–5). In short, the man has ostensibly been expelled from the synagogue for what amounts to a 'low' Christology, something Martyn also seems to assume concerning the Birkat ha-Minim when he writes that it represented 'a newly formulated means for detecting those Jews who want to hold a dual allegiance to Moses and to Jesus as *Messiah*' (66; emphasis added; similarly 70).

With respect to the decree to expel Christian Jews from the synagogue, then, it is specifically 'the issue of Jesus' messiahship' that 'stands at the center of the synagogue-church discussion' (91).[50] While the Messiah title is the primary one in this discussion, Jesus is also identified as a προφήτης, as he is by the man born blind (9.17; cf. 4.19; 7.52), or as ὁ προφήτης (6.14; 7.40; 7.52 in P^{66}),[51] an identification which is dependent on the promise of a prophet like Moses in Deut 18.15, 18 (cf. 1QS 9.10f.; 4QTestimonia = 4Q175). Martyn refers to this expected figure as 'the Mosaic prophet', and he argues that expectations related to the latter coalesced with those related to the (royal or Davidic) Messiah (97, 105–6), producing what Martyn dubs the expectation of 'the Mosaic Prophet-Messiah' (108). While 'the Davidic Messiah was not expected to perform signs, that is precisely what was expected of the Mosaic Prophet-Messiah' (108).[52]

Martyn posits that at some early stage, prior to the edict to expel, 'one of the preachers' of the 'inner-synagogue messianic group' composed 'a Signs Gospel'.[53] According to Martyn, this document sought in 'an uncritical, unsophisticated way'

49 The use of παρὰ θεοῦ in John 1.6 shows that a high Christology is not inherent in this or similar phrases.

50 Martyn appeals to such passages as 1.35–49; 2.23; 6.2 (with 11.45 and 12.18), 14; 7.31; 20.30–1. Cf. his discussion of 1.35–49 in 'Glimpses', 147–50. See now in support of Martyn, M. Novenson, 'Jesus the Messiah: Conservatism and Radicalism in Johannine Christology', *Portraits of Jesus in the Gospel of John*: *A Christological Spectrum* (ed. C. Koester; LNTS 589; London: T&T Clark, 2019) 109–23, at 117.

51 Martyn follows the reading of P^{66} (104 n. 155, 112 n. 175).

52 On the connection of the term σημεῖον with Moses (and the Exodus), cf. LXX Exod 4.1–9, 28–31; 7.3; 10.1; Num 14.11, 22; Deut 7.19; 34.11; Jer 32.20; Acts 7.36. The figure of Elijah (John 1.21) also plays a role in Martyn's discussion (97, 110 n. 172), but I leave that aside here. See Martyn, 'Glimpses', 149–50; Martyn, *Christian History*, 9–54; and M. C. de Boer, *Johannine Perspectives on the Death of Jesus* (CBET 17; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996) 87–9.

53 Martyn, 'Glimpses', 150. Martyn appeals to the work of his student R. T. Fortna in particular (*The Gospel of Signs: A Reconstruction of the Narrative Source Underlying the Fourth Gospel* (SNTSMS 11; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), without however adopting his results *tout court*. Fortna regarded this Signs Gospel as a *non-Johannine* 'source', but since Martyn ascribes its composition to 'one of the preachers' of the 'inner-synagogue messianic group', he evidently regards the Signs Gospel as basically a *Johannine* product which served as a *Grundevangelium* for 'the evangelist' and his community.

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to demonstrate that Jesus fulfils Jewish messianic hopes and expectations of the Mosaic Prophet-Messiah (114–15). In the Signs Gospel, which was eventually incorporated into what became the Fourth Gospel, 'a number of Jesus' miracles were narrated as messianic signs ... for use' in evangelism among Jews in the synagogue (69). It was 'expected that most Jews', when they heard the message of Johannine evangelists, 'would come rather uncritically to believe that Jesus was *the promised Messiah*'.[54] 'Far from abandoning Moses', then, someone convinced by the stories of Jesus' miracles as signs attesting his identity as the expected Messiah 'would simply have attached himself to the one of whom Moses wrote'.[55]

According to Martyn's analysis, and I am largely convinced by his argument, it is the confession of Jesus as the (Mosaic Prophet-)Messiah and not some blasphemously high Christology that lies behind the edict to expel.[56] When the formerly blind man considers that the one who opened his eyes may be a προφήτης (9.17),[57] he is evidently entertaining the possibility that Jesus is the Χριστός (9.22), which is to say, the Messiah who performs 'such signs' (τοιαῦτα σημεῖα) (9.16; cf. 7.31; 20.30).[58] In short, the reason for the expulsion was simply the embrace of Jesus as the Messiah of Jewish expectation, nothing more and nothing less.

This conclusion raises an obvious question, however: *why would the synagogue authorities in John's setting have found the embrace of Jesus as Messiah so offensive that they formulated an edict formally to expel those Jews making this confession?*

Martyn himself gives only passing attention to this question. He points to the dire situation of Jews and Judaism after the Romans conquered Jerusalem and

54 Martyn, 'Glimpses', 150 (emphasis added). Cf. John 7.31; 20.30.

55 Martyn, 'Glimpses', 155. Cf. John 1.45; 5.46.

56 In the period leading up to the edict to expel, according to Martyn, the authorities 'began to be quite suspicious of the rapidly growing messianic group, and both they and some rank-and-file members demanded that the group prove the validity of its *messianic* proclamation on the basis of exegesis. There ensued a number of midrashic debates' ('Glimpses', 154; emphasis added). See e.g. John 6.30–2 (on which see Martyn 119–23) and 7.45–52.

57 According to Martyn, and as others have noted, 'the absence of the definite article before the word "prophet" is by no means an infallible signal that the reference is to be taken in a general sense' (110 n. 72). See M. Labahn, *Jesus als Lebenspender: Untersuchungen zu einer Geschichte der johanneischen Tradition anhand ihrer Wundergeschichten* (BZNW 98; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1999) 351–2.

58 The threefold denial of John the Baptist that he is 'the Messiah', 'Elijah' or 'the prophet' in 1.20–1 becomes in 3.28 the single denial that he is 'the Messiah'. The latter title functions here as the overarching term encompassing motifs and expectations associated with the other two.

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destroyed the Temple in 70 CE.[59] With the Temple gone, 'the major threat to Judaism was that of disintegration', he writes (57). In this new situation, 'the Christian movement' came to be seen 'as an essential and more or less clearly distinguishable rival' (47). According to Martyn, the introduction of the reformulated Birkat ha-Minim into the synagogue service, effectively bringing about the expulsion of Jews confessing Jesus as Messiah, testifies to this need for 'stability and cohesiveness in the postwar period'.[60] This is not an implausible assessment of the post-70 situation (even aside from the validity of the claims being made about the Birkat ha-Minim), but instead of referring to 'the Christian movement' in general, Martyn should perhaps have asked about the *Johannine* movement in particular and why *it* came to be seen as 'an essential and more or less clearly distinguishable rival' in *John's* own setting.[61]

So, to repeat the question in slightly different terms: why would the local synagogue authorities, who are evidently represented in John's narrative by οἱ Φαρισαῖοι in particular (cf. 1.24; 3.1; 4.1; 7.32a, 32b, 45, 47, 48; 8.13; 9.13, 15, 16, 40; 11.46, 47, 57; 12.19, 42; 18.3),[62] have found the acceptance of Jesus as Messiah so offensive that they formulated a decree to expel those Jews espousing this messianic faith?

3. Expulsion from the Synagogue Reconsidered

3.1 *Belief and Behaviour*

As we have seen, according to Martyn, Jews confessing Jesus as Messiah in the Johannine setting were expelled from a local synagogue for their messianic faith. In all other respects, Martyn notes, they were evidently 'Torah-observant Jews'. 'One does not have the impression of a group which even dreamed of being free from Torah observance', Martyn continues. Moreover, in Martyn's considered judgement, 'the Birkath ha-Minim seems to have been directed against

59 Cf. S. J. D. Cohen, 'The Significance of Yavneh: Pharisees, Rabbis, and the End of Jewish Sectarianism', *Hebrew Union College Annual* 55 (1984) 27–53, at 27–8.

60 Martyn, 'Glimpses', 166 n. 53. For a similar analysis of the situation, see earlier Brown, *John*, lxxiv–lxxv. See further Alexander, 'Parting', 6–11; Alexander, 'Jewish Believers', 671–7; Wilson, *Related Strangers*, 193.

61 Martyn moves in this direction when he intimates that successful Johannine missionary efforts played a role in the separation: '*the local Jewish authorities* came at some point to view the growing numbers of 'believing' Jews as a stream of apostates that had to be stopped' (70; emphasis added). Cf. 'Glimpses', 155.

62 Five times John uses the expression 'the chief priests and the Pharisees' (οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ οἱ Φαρισαῖοι, 7.32b, 45; 11.47, 57; 18.3) whereby, as Martyn convincingly argues, John 'refers *simultaneously* to the Jerusalem Sanhedrin of Jesus' day and to the Gerousia of John's city' (86; emphasis original), 'the majority of whose members are (or appear to John to be) Pharisees' (86). The Pharisees are, then, 'for all practical purposes, the Gerousia' (88).

the confession of Jesus as the Messiah, not against discrete breach of Torah'.[63] These claims made Martyn's analysis vulnerable to a critique put into words by Adele Reinhartz. It was, she writes, 'unlikely ... that a confession of faith would have occasioned ... an expulsion rather than, for example, the abandonment of key Jewish practices such as circumcision and dietary laws, for which [she adds] we have no Johannine evidence'.[64] Along similar lines, Shaye J. D. Cohen declares: 'At no point did they [the early rabbis] expel anyone from the rabbinic order or from rabbinic synagogues because of doctrinal error or because of membership in some heretical group.'[65] If such observations carry weight, then the following question arises: did the confession of Jesus as Messiah become problematic *precisely because* Pharisees in John's setting believed that Johannine believers had indeed breached Torah? Put otherwise: did the acceptance of Jesus as Messiah lead Johannine believers to behaviour with respect to Torah that was unacceptable to the Pharisees in John's setting?

In 2011, John Kloppenborg published an article on the Johannine expulsion texts.[66] While it is true, he notes, that the Fourth Gospel presents the expulsion as a matter of Christology, as a matter of confession or belief (9.22),[67] that does not necessarily mean, Kloppenborg points out, that the synagogue in John's locale did so.[68] 'The practice of exclusionary discipline', he argues, 'is well attested in a variety of contemporary Judaean and pagan associations, and in virtually all instances disruptive or deviant behaviour was the grounds for exclusion, rather than holding to certain beliefs.'[69] Kloppenborg applies this insight to Johannine disciples in the Johannine setting. It is likely that 'behavioural practices ... precipitated their exclusion and eventual expulsion'.[70] This does not mean, Kloppenborg adds, that the Johannine disciples 'held no distinctive beliefs. It is to suggest that it was not until these beliefs were manifest in deviant behaviour that temporary exclusion or expulsion would have occurred.'[71] From the synagogue's point of view, however, it was the *behaviour* and not the beliefs that provided the actual grounds for 'exclusion and expulsion'.[72]

63 Martyn, 'Glimpses', 152.
64 Reinhartz, 'Skyscrapers', 71.
65 Cohen, 'Yavneh', 41.
66 Kloppenborg, 'Disaffiliation'.
67 Kloppenborg rejects the standard view that a high Christology lies behind the expulsion. He suggests that John's high Christology is 'a response to exclusion' ('Disaffiliation', 13) which was also Martyn's view.
68 Kloppenborg, 'Disaffiliation', 5.
69 Kloppenborg, 'Disaffiliation', 8.
70 Kloppenborg, 'Disaffiliation', 13.
71 Kloppenborg, 'Disaffiliation', 8.
72 Kloppenborg, 'Disaffiliation', 8.

Sabbath observance is one of the 'behavioural practices' considered by Kloppenborg in this connection. Though Kloppenborg himself rejects this possibility,[73] it is striking that Sabbath observance is explicitly indicated as an issue only in the three chapters that were crucial for Martyn's two-level reading of John: John 5, 7 and 9. This may be merely a coincidence, but it does lead me to *hypothesise* that Sabbath observance *was* initially the main (if not the only) problem for the Pharisees of the synagogue in the Johannine setting and that *this* issue has some bearing on the edict to expel in John 9.22.

According to Martyn, 'form-critical analysis clearly shows that references to breach of the Sabbath in 5:9, 10, 16, 18, and in 9:14, 16 belong to later strata, and the same is to be said of the discussion of circumcision and of breach of the Sabbath in 7:22ff.'[74] With respect to John 9, Martyn attributes the dramatic expansion in 9.8–41 of the original miracle story preserved in 9.1–7 to the person he calls 'the evangelist' (37–8).[75] The belated references to a breach of the Sabbath in 9.14, 16 are part of this expansion. Martyn pursues a similar argument with respect to John 5 (73–4).[76] It is certainly understandable that, as Martyn writes, 'feelings of suspicion, fear, or hostility toward the messianic group on the part of the Jewish authorities'[77] were absent from the earlier versions of the miracle stories. If the initial aim of recounting the miracles of Jesus as signs of his messianic stature and legitimacy (perhaps, as Martyn thinks, in a Signs

73 Kloppenborg rejects it because the two passages in which Sabbath observance is an issue (John 5 and 9) 'introduce the Sabbath dating almost as an afterthought (Jn 5.9; 9.14) rather than relating the stories as Sabbath controversies from the beginning'. This suggests to Kloppenborg 'that whilst Sabbath observance was a contentious issue, it was not the main problem for the synagogue' ('Disaffiliation', 13). Coming to a similar conclusion on similar grounds are W. A. Meeks ('Breaking Away: Three New Testament Pictures of Christianity's Separation from the Jewish Communities', *'To See Ourselves as Others See Us': Christians, Jews, and 'Others' in Late Antiquity* (ed. J. Neusner and E. S. Frerichs; Chico, CA: Scholars, 1985) 98) and Labahn (*Lebenspender*, 360). I think the evidence can be read differently and that is what I am proposing to do here.

74 Martyn, 'Glimpses', 152. Pancaro notes that 'there is no element whatsoever in the traditional healing story [of John 9] which would allow us to connect it with the Sabbath' (*Law*, 18). The same can be said for the story in John 5.

75 Martyn acknowledges that the text of the original miracle story in 9.1–7 has also been worked over, especially through the addition of 9.3b–5 (36 n. 14). The key point for Martyn, however, is 'the dramatic expansion' of the miracle story in 9.8ff. where *new* characters are introduced.

76 See also e.g. Pancaro, *Law*, 13; Schnelle, *Johannes*, 141–2, 222–3. Otherwise Brown (*John*), who regards the references to the Sabbath as already having been present in the Signs Source/Gospel or in the received tradition (also, among others, H. Weiss, 'The Sabbath in the Fourth Gospel', *JBL* 110 (1991) 311–21, at 314). But the belated mention of the Sabbath in the two chapters speaks against this; cf. E. Haenchen, 'Johanneische Probleme', *ZTK* 56 (1959) 19–54, at 48; C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963) 178, 185.

77 Martyn, 'Glimpses', 153.

Gospel) was to convince fellow Jews that the expected Messiah was indeed Jesus of Nazareth, then it would have been rhetorically counterproductive to focus on matters that would encourage resistance to this message, such as Jesus' offensive breach of the Sabbath. Problematic in my view is that Martyn nevertheless regards the conflict about the observance of the Sabbath as an issue that pertains only to what he calls the 'einmalig' level of the two-level drama that he discerns in both John 5 and John 9. That is, according to Martyn, the Sabbath issue pertains to the story of Jesus in the past ('back then')[78] and *not* to the situation of the Johannine church after 70 (42 n. 31 (John 9), 74 (John 5)). But why would 'the evangelist' have *added* this element of controversy unless it was indeed relevant to, or reflective of, his own community's situation?

A possible response to this question is that 'the evangelist', in incorporating received tradition (or, as Martyn believes, a written Signs Gospel) containing miracle stories presented as 'signs', has come to have access to one or more of the Synoptic Gospels, Mark in particular. Sabbath controversies play a significant role in the Synoptic presentations, especially Mark (see Mark 2.23–8; 3.1–6). In fact, according to Mark 3.1–6, after Jesus had healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath, 'the Pharisees went out, and immediately held counsel with the Herodians, how to destroy him' (cf. Matt 12.9–14; Luke 6.1–11; 13.10–17; 14.1–6). In other words, Jesus' breach of the Sabbath is connected to a plot on his life, as it is in John 5 (5.18). 'In the Synoptic tradition', however, 'Jesus [himself] is never explicitly accused of violating the Sabbath',[79] as he is in John 9.16 where 'some of the Pharisees' (ἐκ τῶν Φαρισαίων τινές) say 'he does not keep the Sabbath' (τὸ σάββατον οὐ τηρεῖ; cf. 5.16, 18). If the Fourth Gospel is indebted to Synoptic influence on this issue, it has done something with it that goes *beyond* the Synoptics, making the relevance of the question posed above all the more urgent.[80]

78 Whether John's depiction of the story of Jesus is historically accurate is of course another matter and one Martyn leaves aside. The 'einmalig' level is the Gospel's depiction of the earthly life of Jesus in the past.

79 So Pancaro, *Law*, 46.

80 Another possible explanation is to attribute the Sabbath controversy material to received tradition that was independent of the Synoptics (cf. Zumstein, *Johannesevangelium*, 210). This explanation seems to depend on an assumption articulated by Brown (*John*, 210): 'That Jesus violated the rules of the scribes for the observance of the Sabbath is one of the most certain of all historical facts about his ministry.' If so, it would not be surprising that the Jesus tradition available to the Johannine community also contained evidence of this violation (cf. Smith, 'Contribution', 18). E. P. Sanders, however, disagrees (*The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 1993) 222–3; cf. E. P. Sanders, *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah*: *Five Studies* (London: SCM/Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990) 6–23). Even with respect to the Synoptics, he makes a case for post-Easter retrojections of Sabbath controversies with Pharisees into the accounts of Jesus' public ministry (cf. H. Weiss, 'The Sabbath in the Synoptic Gospels', *JSNT* 38 (1990) 13–27; Weiss, 'Sabbath in the Fourth Gospel', 313–14).

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3.2 *The Sabbath Controversy and Expulsion from the Synagogue: Another Look*

3.2.1 John 9

Martyn writes that 'John 9 impresses upon us its immediacy in such a way as strongly to suggest that some of its elements reflect actual experiences of the Johannine community' (46). That is, the text is a witness not only 'to an *einmalig* event'; it is 'also a witness to Jesus' powerful presence in actual events experienced by the Johannine church' (40). As we have seen, Martyn does not apply that insight to the controversy over the Sabbath, which he notes more or less simply in passing (42). I wish here to apply it to the Sabbath controversy – without however committing the mortal sin of proposing that the text can be read *simply* as a mirror-image of historical events in the Johannine community,[81] or perhaps worse, as 'an allegory' of that Johannine community and its situation, a charge frequently directed at Martyn's two-level reading of the text.[82] My question is simply: does John 9 indicate that the Sabbath issue played a role, perhaps even a decisive one, in the decision to expel Jews confessing Jesus to be Messiah from their local synagogue in the post-70 period?

In the dramatic expansion of the miracle story in 9.8–34, the healer, Jesus, disappears from the stage, not returning until v. 35. Zumstein rightly calls this 'ein wichtiges Detail, da es sich dabei wahrscheinlich um eine Anspielung auf die nachösterliche Zeit handelt, die vom Konflikt zwischen den joh[anneischen] Gemeinden und der Synagoge gekennzeichnet ist'.[83] That must then also apply to the matter concerning the breach of the Sabbath, which is introduced as an issue during Jesus' absence (9.14). The man whose blindness was healed is the central figure, even if the discussion focuses on the identity and, even more so, on the *behaviour* of Jesus. In the opening scene (9.8–12) of the expansion, the healed man testifies to his neighbours and those who had known him as a blind beggar that it was indeed Jesus who had healed him (9.11). In the next

P. Alexander notes that it is in any case 'hard to say what would, or would not, have been an "acceptable" attitude toward the Torah of Moses' in the time of Jesus; there was then 'no normative base-line from which to measure Jesus' deviance from, or conformity to, Judaism in general, or the law in particular' ('Jewish Law in the Time of Jesus: Toward a Clarification of the Problem', *Law and Religion: Essays on the Place of the Law in Israel and Early Christianity* (ed. B. Lindars; Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 1988) 44–58, at 46, 58. As we will see below, the point is especially relevant with respect to Sabbath observance.

81 Cf. Frey, *Theology and History*, 43. However, Martyn does not regard the text 'simply' as a mirror of its external world; he argues his case with considerable care, caution and sophistication.

82 See discussion in de Boer, 'Johannine Community under Attack', 216–17. Martyn writes that 'John was neither playing a kind of code-game, nor trying to instruct members of his church about points of correspondence' (89).

83 Zumstein, *Johannesevangelium*, 358; cf. 360–1, 365, 370–1.

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scene (9.13–17), upon hearing the explanation of how the man had received his sight, 'some of the Pharisees' (ἐκ τῶν Φαρισαίων τινές) declare that 'this ἄνθρωπος [Jesus] is not from God (οὐκ ἔστιν οὗτος παρὰ θεοῦ ὁ ἄνθρωπος), because he does not keep the Sabbath (ὅτι τὸ σάββατον οὐ τηρεῖ)' (9.16a). The present tense of the verb τηρεῖ implies a practice or an ongoing activity. The charge is that Jesus does not keep the Sabbath habitually. The healing of the man born blind exemplifies for these Pharisees a wider problem. Others, however, ask: 'How can someone (ἄνθρωπος) who is a sinner (ἁμαρτωλός) perform such signs?' (πῶς δύναται ἄνθρωπος ἁμαρτωλὸς τοιαῦτα σημεῖα ποιεῖν; 9.16b).[84] This question shows that the charge that Jesus is a regular rather than an incidental or inadvertent violator of the Sabbath means that he is being regarded by some of the Pharisees (9.16a) as a ἁμαρτωλός, i.e. as someone 'scornful of the Law'.[85] For this reason, he is in their view 'not from God', οὐ παρὰ θεοῦ (9.16a), that is, not sent, authorised or commissioned by God.

The accusation that Jesus is a ἁμαρτωλός recurs in the second interrogation of the healed man (9.24–34). The Pharisees, who 'know [i.e. are sure] that God has spoken to Moses' (ἡμεῖς οἴδαμεν ὅτι Μωϋσεῖ λελάληκεν ὁ θεός, 9.29; cf. Ex 33.11), now say to the formerly blind man with some emphasis: '*we* (ἡμεῖς) know that this ἄνθρωπος is a ἁμαρτωλός' (9.24); they know this for sure because he is, in their view, a habitual violator of the Sabbath (9.16). The healed man pleads ignorance on this point: 'Whether he is a ἁμαρτωλός, I do not know' (9.25a). The one thing the healed man does know is that he was once blind and now sees (ἓν οἶδα ὅτι τυφλὸς ὢν ἄρτι βλέπω, 9.25b), thereby calling to mind the searching question of the ἄλλοι in 9.16b who had asked: 'How can an ἄνθρωπος who is a ἁμαρτωλός do such signs?' The man says later to his interrogators: 'We know that God does not listen to sinners' (οἴδαμεν ὅτι ἁμαρτωλῶν ὁ θεὸς οὐκ ἀκούει, 9.31), a view shared of course by his interlocutors, and he concludes, 'If this person were not from God' (εἰ μὴ ἦν οὗτος παρὰ θεοῦ), as 'some' (τινές) of the Pharisees have claimed in the first interrogation (9.16a), 'he could do nothing' (οὐκ ἠδύνατο ποιεῖν οὐδέν, 9.33; cf. 3.2). It is precisely then that they cast him out (9.34).

The two scenes in which Jesus is being talked about as a ἁμαρτωλός because of his violation of the Sabbath (9.13–17; 9.24–34) sandwich the tense interview with the man's parents (9.18–23) in which the decree to expel Jews confessing

84 If one understands ἁμαρτωλός as an adjective instead of as a noun, an alternate translation could be: 'How can a sinful human being (ἄνθρωπος ἁμαρτωλός) perform such signs?' There is little difference in meaning, since a sinful human being is of course a sinner. Similar alternate translations would apply to 9.24 and 9.25a below. The term is clearly used nominally in 9.31.

85 Pancaro, *Law*, 500; cf. 45, 47, 52.

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Jesus to be Messiah is explicitly mentioned.[86] The conclusion becomes apparent that the reason for the expulsion is that Jesus is being regarded as a ἁμαρτωλός because of his failure to observe the Sabbath in the way that the Pharisees of the narrative (9.13, 15, 16, 40) think it ought to be observed. In John 9, the Pharisees have difficulty with Jesus not because he makes himself equal to God (for which reason there is nothing here about a plot to kill him, as there is in John 5) but because he is (in their view) a habitual violator of the Sabbath, which means that he is a ἁμαρτωλός, who as such cannot be παρὰ θεοῦ, nor then the Messiah, as his disciples are claiming. It is for *this* reason that 'anyone confessing Jesus to be Messiah' is to be expelled from the synagogue.[87]

If we experimentally attempt to give a two-level reading à la Martyn of the story, 'Jesus' in John 9 can be read as playing not only himself 'back then', healing a man born blind of a physical ailment, but also a later Johannine preacher[88] who on a Sabbath has healed a fellow Jew not only of physical blindness but also of spiritual blindness so that he now sees the light that is Christ himself (φῶς εἰμι τοῦ κόσμου, 9.5).[89] It is this Johannine preacher who, speaking and acting in the name of the glorified Christ, is being charged with violation of the Sabbath in the Johannine setting and who is being regarded as a ἁμαρτωλός, just like Jesus in the story. In the narrative itself (Martyn's 'einmalig' level), the man who was healed of his blindness on the Sabbath 'went and washed' (ἀπῆλθεν καὶ ἐνίψατο) his eyes on the same day (9.7; cf. 9.11, 15), whereby he becomes complicit in Jesus' action of healing on the Sabbath. He then becomes Jesus' μαθητής (9.28), thereby indicating that he embraces as acceptable behaviour what the Pharisees, who call themselves 'disciples of Moses' (τοῦ Μωϋσέως ἐσμὲν μαθηταί, 9.28),[90] regard as unacceptable behaviour on the Sabbath. On the

86 The interrogators are here characterised as οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι (9.18, 22), which I take to be interchangeable in this context with οἱ Φαρισαῖοι mentioned earlier (9.13, 15, 16).

87 Cf. Dunn, *Partings*, 106: 'In the time of Jesus, to call a fellow Jew a "sinner" was both to condemn that person as effectively outside the covenant and to defend one's own identity and boundaries, the group's interpretation of what the covenant means.' This observation would still apply in John's time and is confirmed by John 9.28 and 34, where a Jewish disciple of Jesus is effectively placed 'outside the covenant' (cf. Alexander, 'Parting', 5), as understood by οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι. (John turns the tables on the latter in 9.40–1; cf. 5.45; 8.24, 34; 15.22–4).

88 Note the use of the first person plural in 9.4 (Martyn 39).

89 Martyn, 40. That miracles of healing were attributed to or claimed by early Christian preachers/apostles is attested in other New Testament texts, e.g. Matt 10.8; Acts 5.12; 9.34–40; 14.8–10; 2 Cor 12.12, and in rabbinic accounts such as t. Hull. 2 and y. Shabb. 14d, which are cited by Martyn (41 n. 28). Martyn remarks, however, that '[w]hether on the contemporary level of the text we are to think of physical as well as spiritual healing is not clear' (40 n. 24). In the narrative of John 9 as it now stands both seem to be involved, even though the emphasis shifts to the latter (cf. 9.3 with 14.12). The gaining of spiritual (in)sight is clearly indicated by 9.3–5 (cf. 26–7, 39–40). See Zumstein, *Johannesevangelium*, 355–6.

90 The Hebrew equivalent of this expression occurs in a *baraita* of b. Yoma 4a; cf. m. Aboth 1.1. See Trebilco, *Self-Designations*, 212–13.

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contemporary level, that of the Johannine community, the new Johannine disciple (9.28), who appears to speak not only for himself (cf. 'we' in 9.31), considers the activity on the Sabbath by the Johannine preacher (whom he may regard as a προφήτης who speaks for the glorified Jesus) as acceptable, indeed as tantamount to a σημεῖον legitimating the preacher's claims about Jesus as Messiah, and not sinful at all.[91] The Pharisees in John's setting clearly do not agree (cf. 9.34a), and the expulsion of Johannine disciples is the result.

If this interpretation of John 9 has some merit, then it follows that the observance of the Sabbath by Johannine disciples was *not* a contentious issue in the *early* period of Johannine history when Johannine disciples were still a group within the fellowship of the synagogue in John's locale. In the early period of Johannine history, the way in which Johannine disciples observed the Sabbath – whatever that may or may not have involved – was evidently tolerated as one of the ways Jews could legitimately observe the Sabbath, at least in one particular synagogue community. That changed after 70 CE, when Pharisees, who were known for their zealotry and strictness or precision (ἀκρίβεια) with respect to the interpretation of the Law (Josephus, *J.W.* 2.162; *Life* 191; Acts 22.3; 26.5),[92] became an increasingly prominent, influential and insistent voice in the synagogue of the Johannine setting (9.13, 15, 16, 40).[93] They evidently found the Johannine position on Sabbath observance to be deeply problematic, i.e. inconsistent with their own understanding of 'Moses' (5.45–6; 6.32; 7.19, 22–3; 9.28–9; cf. Matt 23.2; m. Aboth 1.1), and (given successful Johannine missionary efforts, as exemplified by the man born blind) a significant obstacle to their own role in determining authoritatively what was acceptable behaviour on the Sabbath and what was not.[94] And they decided to do something about it: they successfully agitated for the expulsion of Johannine disciples.[95]

91 John 9 can be read as providing a christological redefinition of sin (9.1–3, 34, 41; cf. 15.22–4).

92 According to E. P. Sanders, 'Rabbinic literature as a whole shows continuity with Pharisaism on this point' (*Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE – 66 CE* (London: SCM/Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992) 421; cf. Cohen, 'Yavneh', 36–8). Another significant indication that the traditionally posited link 'between Pharisaism and rabbinism still holds' is 'the emphasis on non-biblical traditions' (Sanders, *Judaism*, 413). Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 13.297.

93 The synagogue was not originally a Pharisaic/rabbinic institution and did not fully become so until the third and fourth centuries. See L. I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2000) 458–63.

94 In 9.34a, the formerly blind disciple is dismissed as an unlettered ignoramus (Martyn 44), as is Jesus himself in 7.15 (Martyn 118), whereby he is being regarded as someone not competent to enter into midrashic discussions or to make decisions based on them (Martyn 101–2, 112). In John 9, as elsewhere in John (7.40–52), the Pharisees are assumed to be experts in Torah ('Moses'), i.e. in its interpretation and application (cf. 3.10).

95 Alexander writes that 'the rabbis, though probably a minority party in Palestinian Judaism down to the mid third century CE, *aspired from the outset* to control every aspect of Jewish communal life and to bring it into conformity with their understanding of the Torah' ('Jewish

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In John 9.16c, there is a 'division' (σχίσμα) reported among the Pharisees about Jesus' action on the Sabbath. That could be a rhetorical device to show not only that some Pharisees were open to the Johannine proclamation (modelled by Nicodemus in 3.1–2; 7.50; 19.39), but also that they were themselves divided about what precisely constituted 'work' on the Sabbath. The Scripture is not that clear about the matter.[96] According to the Mishnaic tractate Hag. 1.8, 'the rules about the Sabbath ... are as mountains hanging by a hair, for [teaching of] scripture [thereon] is scanty and the rules are many'.[97] The many rules, as well as the differences of opinion concerning them, are given in the lengthy Mishnaic tractate Shabbat.[98] The Mishnah shows that among Pharisaic/rabbinic scholars the issue of what exactly constituted 'work' on the Sabbath was a contentious issue and had been in the century or more that preceded the publication of the Mishnah.[99] Interesting for our purposes is that Jesus' kneading of mud or clay to make a mixture for healing the man's eyes in John 9.1–7 (cf. 9.11, 14, 15) appears to be an example of the 'kneading' which is one of the thirty-nine works which evidently all agreed were forbidden on the Sabbath (m. Shabb. 7.2).

In short, the Pharisees' conviction that Johannine disciples of Jesus habitually breached the Sabbath commandment *as understood and interpreted by them (the Pharisees)* evidently became the reason for them to play an influential and ultimately successful role in bringing about the expulsion of Jesus' Jewish disciples from their local synagogue (cf. 12.42).

Believers', 676; emphasis added). To that end, according to Alexander, 'Rabbinic members of the congregation insisted on the *rabbinic* forms being observed, if necessary interrupting public prayer, to rebuke, or silence, or possibly correct any *sheliah ha-sibbur* who was following a non-rabbinic practice' ('Jewish Believers', 673; emphasis original). The rabbinic party or their immediate predecessors, the Pharisees, may have been able to develop such tactics because of the wide respect they evidently enjoyed among rank-and-file Jews (Josephus, *Ant.* 18.15–17).

96 Cf. Exod 20.8–11; Deut 5.12–15 (one of the Ten Commandments); also Gen 2.1–3; Exod 23.12; 31.12–17; 34.21; 35.1–3; Lev 19.3; 23.3; Neh 13.17–19; Isa 58.13–14; Jer 17.19–27.

97 Cited from Sanders, *Judaism*, 423.

98 Sanders observes that most of the *early* material in the Mishnah consists of '*debates*, not rules' (*Judaism*, 414; emphasis original).

99 Some of the traditions in the Mishnah go back to the first century CE. For those relevant to the interpretation of John, see J. C. Thomas, 'The Fourth Gospel and Rabbinic Judaism', *ZNW* 82 (1991) 159–82, relying on the conclusions of Neusner. On the importance of the Sabbath, see Philo, *Migr.* 91; *Spec. Laws* 2.249–51; *Mos.* 2.209–20; Jub. 2.17–33, 50.6–13; CD 10.14–11.18; Josephus, *Ant.* 11.346; *Ag. Ap.* 2.282. Cf. G. F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christians Era* (2 vols.; New York: Schocken Books, 1971 [1927, 1930]) II.21–9; Sanders, *Judaism*, 208–11, 425–8; J. M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE – 117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996) 440–2.

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3.2.2 John 7

The issue in John 9, just discussed, is not whether the commandment to observe the Sabbath is still valid for Johannine disciples but how to interpret and apply it in specific situations. We receive an interesting glimpse of Johannine reasoning on this matter in 7.22–4, where there is a reference back to the healing Jesus performed in John 5. Jesus responds to objections about his healing of a lame man on the Sabbath by pointing out that circumcision occurs on the Sabbath (7.22), even though such an action seems to violate it. But the commandment to circumcise a newborn son on the eighth day overrides the commandment to observe the Sabbath. According to the Mishnah: 'They may perform on the Sabbath all things that are needful for circumcision' (m. Shabb. 19:2).[100] The Johannine Jesus presupposes this view in his own defence: 'If on the Sabbath someone receives circumcision, so that the Law of Moses may not be broken [Lev 12.3], why are you angry with me because on the Sabbath I made someone completely well?' (εἰ περιτομὴν λαμβάνει ἄνθρωπος ἐν σαββάτῳ ἵνα μὴ λυθῇ ὁ νόμος Μωϋσέως, ἐμοὶ χολᾶτε ὅτι ὅλον ἄνθρωπον ὑγιῆ ἐποίησα ἐν σαββάτῳ; 7.23; cf. ὑγιής in 5.6, 9, 11, 14, 15). The argument of the Johannine Jesus is consistent with Pharisaic/rabbinic modes of argumentation (*a minor ad maius* / *qal wachomer*) and thus meets them on their own turf, as it were. One may compare b. Yoma 85b: 'If circumcision, which concerns one of the 248 members of a man, can displace the Sabbath, how much more must the whole body (if his life be in danger) displace the Sabbath.'[101] This passage, however, also illustrates why the Johannine argument would not have convinced Jesus' Pharisaic interlocutors: the life of the lame man in John 5 was not in danger, nor was that of the man born blind in John 9. Jesus could have performed both healings on a weekday (which may well have been the case in the original versions of the stories). It is also important to note, as numerous commentators have, that the argument for acting on the Sabbath in 7.23 involves 'humanitarian' considerations, not Jesus' authority to 'work' on the Sabbath because he is the (heavenly) Son of God, as is the case in John 5.17–18. As Kloppenborg observes, 'John 7.22–24 suggests that the Johannine partisans of Jesus might have developed a halakhic argument to justify their deviant Sabbath practice, long before they developed the highly Christological argument' found in John 5.[102]

100 For more texts and the antiquity of the principle, see Thomas, 'Fourth Gospel', 173–4; L. Doering, 'Sabbath Laws in the New Testament Gospels', *The New Testament and Rabbinic Literature* (ed. R. Bieringer *et al.*; Leiden: Brill, 2010) 207–53, at 246–7.

101 Cf. similarly m. Yoma 8.6; t. Shabb. 15.16. Moore comments: 'It may safely be assumed that this was an ancient commonsense custom' (*Judaism*, 2.30).

102 Kloppenborg, 'Disaffiliation', 13; cf. Weiss, 'Sabbath in Fourth Gospel', 321.

3.2.3 John 5

In John 5.9c–16, which follows the account of Jesus healing a lame man in 5.1–9ab, Jesus is initially absent, as he is from 9.8–34.[103] The focus falls on the person whom Jesus has healed and he is charged by οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι (5.10, 15, 16)[104] with violating the Sabbath: the man 'took up his pallet and walked' (ἦρεν τὸν κράβαττον αὐτοῦ καὶ περιεπάτει, 5.9b) and that, they say, is 'not lawful' (οὐκ ἔξεστίν) to do on the Sabbath (5.10).[105] But when the man has explained that the one who had healed him had told him to take up his pallet and walk, his interrogators want to know who this ἄνθρωπος (5.12) is, which the healed man initially and surprisingly does not know (5.11–13). After Jesus finds him in the temple, the healed man divulges Jesus' identity to οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι (5.14–15).[106] It is only then that a voice from offstage – akin to the voice from offstage in 9.22–3 – informs readers that 'because of this οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι were persecuting Jesus' (διὰ τοῦτο ἐδίωκον οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι τὸν Ἰησοῦν), i.e. 'because he was doing these things on the Sabbath' (ὅτι ταῦτα ἐποίει ἐν σαββάτῳ) (5.16). The imperfects as well as the word ταῦτα indicate that both the doing (ἐποίει) of such things on the Sabbath and the persecution (ἐδίωκον) that such activities elicited happened repeatedly.[107] As in the case of the healing of the man born blind, the case of the healing of the lame man is but an illustration of a recurrent issue, that of the proper observance of the Sabbath by Jesus – and by his disciples.

In 5.16, the closing verse of the literary subunit beginning at 9c, οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι are not said to be persecuting Jesus because he was propounding a 'high' Christology for himself. That only emerges as an accusation after he has claimed, in 5.17, that just as his Father continues 'working' (ἐργάζεται) on the Sabbath so does he. That this claim is not halakhic but christological is indicated

103 Following the lead of C. Keener (*The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (2 vols.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson 2003) I.634–45) and Schnelle (*Johannes*, 139–43), I discern three subunits in John 5: vv. 1–9ab (the story of the healing of the lame man), vv. 9c–16 (the Sabbath controversy) and vv. 17–18 (Jesus' claim of equality with God as the reason for the plot to kill him), with an extension in vv. 19–47 (Jesus' apologetic discourse in response to the accusation that he was 'making himself' equal to God).

104 In this context, these are arguably Pharisees, who are being labelled οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι by John as an ironic acknowledgement of their (the Pharisees') claim to be the authoritative arbiters of a genuinely Jewish identity (de Boer, 'Depiction', 142, 155), which was in turn based on their close study of Torah or 'Moses' (5.45–6; 9.28). See Cohen, 'Yavneh', 40–1.

105 Cf. Jub. 2.29–30; Jer 17.21–27; and Neh 13.15–19. The stress in these pre-rabbinic texts falls on not carrying burdens on the Sabbath or moving them from one domain to another. Cf. similarly m. Shabb. 7.2 (one of the thirty-nine classes of work forbidden on the Sabbath) and m. Shabb. 11.1–2, on which see Thomas, 'Fourth Gospel', 171–2, who, following Neusner, argues that this text preserves an early rabbinic tradition. See further Doering, 'Sabbath Law', 244–5.

106 Does he become an informant against Jesus in 5.15 (so Martyn 74–5) or a disciple and witness? See the discussion in Zumstein, *Johannesevangelium*, 216.

107 Zumstein, *Johannesevangelium*, 217.

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by the reaction attributed to οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι of the narrative: they understand the claim to involve Jesus' making blasphemous assertions about himself and his relationship to God (5.18b). It is 'because of *this*' (διὰ τοῦτο), the writer announces, that 'οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι were all the more seeking to kill him', namely, 'because he was not only abrogating the Sabbath (ὅτι οὐ μόνον ἔλυεν τὸ σάββατον) but was also calling God his own Father, making himself equal to God (ἀλλὰ καὶ πατέρα ἴδιον ἔλεγεν τὸν θεὸν ἴσον ἑαυτὸν ποιῶν τῷ θεῷ)'. In short, as Craig Keener argues,[108] the conflict escalates from 'persecution' for doing certain things on the Sabbath (5.16) to a plot on Jesus' life for his seemingly blasphemous claim of equality with God (5.17–18), whereby, so οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι believed, the Sabbath was effectively being nullified completely (ἔλυεν; cf. 7.23; Philo, *Migr.* 91).[109] Jesus' long apologetic discourse in 5.19–47 is a response to the issue of Jesus' seemingly 'making himself equal to God', raised in 5.17–18. The issue of Sabbath observance as such is entirely left behind and the focus falls wholly on Jesus' person and identity as functionally God's equal, especially in 5.19–30 (he judges and gives life to the dead, as God does).

In 5.16, however, the issue is still what Jesus 'was doing on the Sabbath'. In this particular case, what Jesus did on the Sabbath was to heal someone who could just as easily have been healed on the day after (cf. Luke 13.14). The man had already been ill for thirty-eight years; another day would not have made much difference. The issue in 5.16 is still halakhic, as it is in the verses that precede it, and as it is in 7.22–4, which (as we have seen) refers to the same miracle. If we take John 9 into account (or at least my foregoing argument concerning John 9!), John 5.9c–16 reflects the Sabbath issue that played a role in the expulsion of Johannine disciples. Moreover, as we have seen previously, in 15.20 Jesus tells his disciples that 'if they persecuted me' (εἰ ἐμὲ ἐδίωξαν) – referring directly back to 5.16 (ἐδίωκον οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι τὸν Ἰησοῦν), which contains the only prior instance of this verb – 'they *will* also persecute you' (καὶ ὑμᾶς διώξουσιν). The persecution being predicted is probably in the first instance the expulsion from the synagogue (16.2a) of those who were confessing as Messiah (9.22) someone

108 *Gospel of John*, 1.645.

109 There are passages in the Law that mandate the death penalty for intentionally violating the Sabbath commandment: Exod 31.14–15; 35.2; Num 15.32–6. See also Philo, *Spec. Laws* 2.249–51; *Mos.* 2.209–20; Jub. 2.27; 50.6–13. In the Mishnah, inadvertent breaches of the Sabbath require a sin-offering (m. Sanh. 7.8), but, according to Sanders, 'there is no direct evidence about what the Pharisees thought should be the penalty for intentional transgression of the Sabbath', in particular one that would 'require the death sentence' (m. Sanh. 7.8). Sanders speculates that probably only 'deliberate transgression, carried out in full view of others, with the intention of defying God', would count as a capital offence (Sanders, *Judaism*, 426). The charge against Jesus in John 5.18 implies that he was defying God in a radical way, for he is accused not simply of working on the Sabbath but of 'abrogating' (ἔλυεν) it with his claims about himself (5.17–18).

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who 'was doing these things on the Sabbath' (ταῦτα ἐποίει ἐν σαββάτῳ, 5.16), thereby causing those who benefited from his healing activity also to breach the Sabbath (5.10; 9.7). John 5.17ff. in turn reflects the issue of the supposed ditheism being propagated by Johannine disciples, an accusation that led on the contemporary level (that of the Johannine community) to the potential execution of Johannine preachers proclaiming such a 'high' Christology (16.2b).

John 5.1–18 (with 19–47) provides, I think, a window on three distinct phases of Johannine history. *First*, the miracle story underlying John 5.1–9b once served (in the early period, when Johannine disciples were a group within the synagogue) as a sign of Jesus' messianic stature and legitimacy. It was designed to convince fellow Jews that the expected Messiah is Jesus of Nazareth. *Second*, the account underlying the current form of John 5.9c–16 concerned the conflict that ensued when authorities in John's synagogue began to have problems with the way Johannine disciples of Jesus observed the Sabbath. This was the issue that, as John 9 shows, provided the catalyst to the decision to expel Jews confessing Jesus as Messiah from the synagogue. *Third*, the conflict underlying John 5.17–18 (and the extended discourse that follows) revolved around the claim that Jesus is the heavenly Son of God. The Johannine position on the Sabbath has now become radicalised. For Johannine disciples, Jesus could breach the Sabbath commandment because he was more than Messiah. He was the Son who works when his Father works. Different rules apply to him – and thus also to those who preach and act in his name. The Ἰουδαῖοι interpret that claim to mean, not unjustly, that the Sabbath is actually being abrogated. Johannine disciples believed that it was being christologically transformed.[110]

4. Conclusion

My primary question was: why would the Pharisees in John's setting have found the confession of Jesus as Messiah so offensive that they felt it necessary to effect the formulation of an edict to expel those Jews espousing this messianic faith? My answer has been that they found this confession offensive because of Johannine *behaviour* on the Sabbath, which deviated from developing Pharisaic views on the matter.

A question which this solution raises is: why was the focus on the Sabbath instead of other parts of the Law? Sanders notes that the Sabbath was one of 'three principal points of contention over the law within the early church and between it and the Jewish synagogue', the other two being food and circumcision (cf. e.g. Galatians 5–6; Acts 10–11, 15). However, food and circumcision were almost never at issue 'within a *Jewish* community', since in 'a village occupied almost entirely by Jews, … the question of eating pork would simply not arise.

110 Cf. Weiss, 'Sabbath in Fourth Gospel'.

There were not any pigs. Similarly, sons would be circumcised as a matter of routine.'[111] But because the Scripture is not so 'clear and specific about what counts as work' on the Sabbath,[112] 'it was possible to disagree [about Sabbath observance] even in places where there were no Gentiles'. While there was of course 'no disagreement about whether or not one should keep the Sabbath', there could be disagreement 'about the details, such as how far one could walk from one's property'. That meant that there was 'some variation in Sabbath practice within nearly any *Jewish* community'.[113]

The expulsion passages indicate that Johannine disciples of Jesus were once part of a *Jewish* community and thus Jews themselves. When they still constituted a group *within* their local synagogue, there was tacit agreement with other members of that community about such matters as circumcision and food laws, and these are in fact nowhere at issue in the Fourth Gospel.[114] At the same time, given the unclarity of the Torah about what constitutes 'work' on the Sabbath and what does not, there was probably some (tolerable and tolerated) variation in Sabbath practice. Sometime after 70 CE, the Johannine variation in Sabbath practice evidently became a focal point of contention between Johannine disciples and Pharisees, causing the latter to bring about the expulsion of the former from their local synagogue. This issue as it played out in the late first century was effectively retrojected into the Johannine story of Jesus.

111 Sanders, *Historical Figure*, 222–3 (emphasis original).

112 See again the quotation from m. Hag. 1.8, cited above.

113 Sanders, *Historical Figure*, 222–3 (emphasis added).

114 These considerations serve to confirm that the Fourth Gospel originated in a predominantly Jewish milieu and is, as Martyn argued, largely the legacy of a *Jewish*-Christian community.

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