

WHAT WAS FROM THE BEGINNING: SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION IN THE JOHANNINE EPISTLES¹

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'That which was from the beginning, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched, concerning the word of life' (1 John 1.1). However that claim to ear-, eye- and touch-witness is to be understood, there can be no dispute that for 1 John a claim to 'that which was from the beginning' is a linch-pin in the argument and in the theology of the letter. Yet the question of the use of Scripture in 1 John points further – to the relation between New Testament and Old, theologically and historically, but also to the origins and development of Johannine Christianity.

Both the problem and these comments are readily illustrated. In a recent survey of the range and variety of approaches to discerning the use and reuse of the OT in itself, in other Jewish literature and within the NT, D. A. Carson dedicates a 20-page-long chapter to 'John and the Johannine Epistles';² of this one third of a page is given to the Epistles. The first sentence of these few paragraphs bears quoting: 'The most striking feature relevant to our subject in these epistles is the absence not only of OT quotations but even of many unambiguous allusions to the OT' (256). C. H. Dodd's assessment illustrates the problem further – 'there is no other NT writing in which the Jewish colouring is so little significant as in the Johannine Epistles'³ – especially when set in contrast to J. A. T. Robinson's conclusion that the Johannine Epistles were directed to a hellenistic Jewish destination since in some respects they 'seem

¹ An earlier draft of this paper was given at the Seminar on 'The Use of the OT in the NT' at Hawarden in 1989, and in a fuller form at the Institut für Urchristentum in Tübingen in May 1990 during a year spent at the Evangelisches Seminar, Tübingen, as an Alexander von Humboldt research Stipendiat. I am particularly grateful to Professors O. Betz, M. Hengel and P. Stuhlmacher for their comments and suggestions.

² D. A. Carson in *It Is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture* (Fs B. Lindars, ed. D. A. Carson and H. G. M. Williamson; Cambridge: CUP, 1988) 245–64.

³ C. H. Dodd, *The Johannine Epistles* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1947) lii.

even more Jewish than the Gospel'.⁴ Between Dodd in 1946 and Robinson in 1960 of course came the discovery and publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls revealing an undeniably Jewish community living on Palestinian soil yet using language and ideas which once would have been called 'hellenistic'. Their impact on study of the Epistle is well evinced by J. C. O'Neill's argument that behind 1 John stands a series of pre-Christian, Jewish sectarian admonitions which has been expanded and adapted by a Christian editor.⁵ He reconstructs the Jewish substratum both on structural grounds and also by demonstrating the affinity of the fundamental thought patterns with Jewish sectarian thought represented by the QL and the *Testaments of the XII Patriarchs*. Even though his thesis has failed to win acceptance, the parallels cited clearly demonstrate the Jewishness of 1 John.

Yet the problem is not simply the result of the impact of the DSS on NT study giving new insights into the hellenistic possibilities of Judaism. Already before the turn of the century A. Clemen asserted that the absence of the OT shows that the Johannine Epistles belong to a time when the church had become estranged from its Jewish-Christian heritage, while only twelve years later E. v. Dobschütz, introducing the theory that 1 John is built round a source document, argued for the semitic cast of that source.⁶ F. Büchsel took this further in showing from the *Pirke Aboth* that both supposed source and homiletic expansion have Jewish parallels.⁷ Nevertheless a recent commentary can still describe the reference to Cain in 3.12 as 'the only conceivable reference back to the OT (der einzige denkbare Rückgriff auf das Alte Testament)'.⁸ The Jewishness of 1 John and the use of Scripture in 1 John, as well as the relation between those two issues, Jewishness and Scripture, are fundamental to 1 John itself.

Recent commentators have seen this presumed absence of the Old Testament as a dilemma to be solved. Carson himself suggests that the Epistles were provoked by disputes concerning the correct interpretation of the Fourth Gospel and not concerning the

⁴ J. A. T. Robinson, 'The Destination and Purpose of the Johannine Epistles', *Twelve New Testament Studies* (London: SCM, 1962) 126–38 (reprinted from NTS 7 [1960–1] 56–65), 138.

⁵ J. C. O'Neill, *The Puzzle of 1 John* (London: SPCK, 1966).

⁶ A. Clemen, *Der Gebrauch des Alten Testamentes in den neutestamentlichen Schriften* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1895) 158; E. v. Dobschütz, 'Johanneische Studien', *ZNW* 8 (1907) 1–8.

⁷ F. Büchsel, 'Zu den Johannesbriefen', *ZNW* 28 (1929) 235–41.

⁸ G. Strecker, *Die Johannesbriefe* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989) 179.

church's relation to the OT, thus prompting many allusions to that Gospel rather than to the OT – he does not comment on the Jewishness of 1 John. R. E. Brown takes a similar line but, acknowledging 1 John's Jewishness, decides that this is part of the letter's appeal to 'that which was from the beginning'; the beginnings of Johannine Christianity did lie in Jewish Christianity but these echoes of the origins of the tradition history should not be read into the final situation of the Epistles.⁹ Although he, like Carson, does see 1 John as essentially a dispute about the Johannine tradition found in the Fourth Gospel, he at least acknowledges that a problem is raised by the Epistle's failure anywhere to explicitly quote John; he suggests that because the Gospel is under dispute the author of 1 John avoids quoting it, appealing instead to the traditions to which all parties involved look back. We thus have the ironical situation where the OT is supposedly not quoted because it is not under dispute, while the Gospel is not quoted because it is! J. L. Houlden followed by S. S. Smalley take a fresh line introducing the important question of the reasons for which Scripture is used in the NT: 1 John is engaged in polemic against other Christians and for this a pattern of argument based on the OT had not yet been developed. Smalley also proposes that since paganism was the main inspiration behind the deviations with which 1 John grapples, an appeal to the OT would have been inappropriate.¹⁰ Yet that no OT based polemic should have been developed for use against other Christians seems inherently unlikely, especially since the Qumran community as well as other intertestamental literature reveals the rich 'Biblical' possibilities for internal polemic. And if (as seems unlikely) paganism did provide a major factor in the problems behind 1 John, the Scriptures would have provided as effective a weaponry as anything else.

However, the apparent contradiction between Jewishness and lack of Old Testament reference is surely more a failure of our perspective than of the text's own internal consistency. Undoubtedly, the use of quotation to point to its fulfilment is one of the most distinctive characteristics of Christian use of the OT; assessed by this measure 1 John does contain no italicised quotations in the Nestle-Aland text just as it nowhere uses fulfilment formulae with πληρώω, τελειώω or γράφω – the last is used only with reference to the letter itself. Yet if the quotation-fulfilment technique is in many

⁹ R. E. Brown, *The Johannine Epistles* (New York: Doubleday, 1982) 45, 97.

¹⁰ J. L. Houlden, *The Johannine Epistles* (London: Blacks, 1973) 97; S. S. Smalley, *1,2,3 John* (Waco, Texas: Word, 1984) 183–4.

ways peculiarly Christian it is not the only way of using the OT. Within the QL there are, for example, in the Community Rule (1QS) only 3 explicit quotations and in the War Scroll (1QM) only 5 (although some 30 in the Damascus Document), but no-one would deny that these writings are thoroughly Jewish and thoroughly soaked in the OT.¹¹ Scripture is used but it is often used in an allusive and in an anthological way. It is not surprising that the same is true of 1 John.

Exploring three key themes and passages of 1 John will show that the letter is not just 'Jewish' but reflects a tradition of Biblical interpretation and application.

1. SIN, CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS: 1 JOHN 1.9-2.2

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, so as to forgive us the sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar and his word is not in us. My children, I write this so that you may not sin. And if anyone does sin, we have a παράκλητος with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the ἰλασμός for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the whole world.

In this paragraph forgiveness is rooted in the character of God, but this certainty offers no grounds for making light of sin. At the same time forgiveness rests in Jesus Christ who is both παράκλητος – variously translated as 'advocate' (RSV) or as 'one to plead our cause' (NEB) – and also ἰλασμός – 'expiation' (RSV), or 'the remedy for the defilement of our sins' (an ugly translation by the NEB), or 'a sacrifice to atone for our sins' (REB).¹² The varieties of translation point to the uncertainty as to the image 1 John is offering his readers, and its background, as well as how the two, παράκλητος and ἰλασμός, fit together.

Leaving the text we shall explore instead the (or an) OT witness to the nature of God and to God's capacity for forgiveness. The key text here is Exod 34.6 where God passes before Moses on Mt Sinai and proclaims 'the name of the LORD': 'The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful (רחום) and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness (חַסֵּד וְאֱמֻנָה; πολυέλεος καὶ ἀληθινὸς LXX), keeping steadfast love (חַסֵּד; δικαιοσύνη LXX) for thousands,

¹¹ J. Fitzmyer, 'The Use of Explicit Old Testament Quotations in Qumran Literature and in the New Testament', *NTS* 7 (1960–1) 297–333.

¹² RSV: Revised Standard Version, 1946; NEB: New English Bible, 1961; REB: Revised English Bible, 1989. Translations into French or German reflect a similar variety of interpretations.

forgiving lawlessness and unrighteousness and sin (ἀφαιρῶν ἀνομίας καὶ ἀδικίας καὶ ἁμαρτίας LXX) but who will by no means cleanse the guilty.' Both in terms of the vocabulary used and form-critically this acclamation is widely recognised as highly distinctive, so that through these features a history of this confession can be traced through Scripture and Israel's understanding of God.¹³ For our present purposes the problem of the date of this confession and its inclusion in the Exodus 34 narrative can be ignored since it is the tradition it inspires or initiates which is significant. This tradition continues in Num 14.18–19 when God considers giving up on the faithless people who would rather return to Egypt than face the dangers of occupation, and Moses recalls God to the essence of God's own self-description in these terms, and in that strength appeals to God for pardon (√חלס). In various forms the confession also forms a basis for the prophets' message: for Nahum it establishes that this Lord 'will not clear the guilty' (1.3), while for Joel (2.13) the call to repent is grounded in the nature of God so known, who can therefore be expected to 'repent of the (threatened) evil'.¹⁴ By contrast, it was because Jonah knew God to be as described by Joel that he fled from his mission to Nineveh (4.2).¹⁵ This formula and understanding of God belongs equally to the praise and prayer to God in the Psalms (86.15; 103.8; in 145.8 God's concern so grounded extends beyond God's people to 'all he has made'); here too it joins naturally with the reliance on God as one who is 'good and *pardoning* (√חלס), abounding in steadfast love' (86.5; compare 103.3).¹⁶ Yet another 'actualisation' of the confession or address to God appears in Neh 9.17 where Ezra prays to God as the people remake their covenant; here, looking back to Israel's stubbornness reaching back even into the wilderness period, God's readiness to pardon comes to the very forefront, 'thou art a God ready to pardon (the unusual plural form סליחות), gracious and merciful . . .'. This development alerts us to the last

¹³ 'Merciful and gracious' (sometimes reversed) comes only in passages related to this formula and in Pss 111.4; 112.4; Neh 9.31; 2 Chron 30.9; 'slow to anger' used of God is restricted to this tradition; it is used of people in Prov 14.29; 15.18; 16.32. The same restriction is true of 'abounding in steadfast love' although a similar formula with a personal preposition is used in Isa 6.3; Ps 5.8; 69.14; 100.7; Lam 3.32; Neh 13.22 where the LXX uses a different translation. See R. C. Dentan, 'The Literary Affinities of Exod xxxiv 6f.', *VT* 13 (1963) 34–51; K. Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of Heseḏ in the Hebrew Bible. A New Inquiry* (Missoula: Scholars, 1978) 112–29.

¹⁴ 'The evil' is almost certainly intended eschatologically.

¹⁵ See E. Bickermann, *Four Strange Books of the Bible* (New York: Schocken, 1967) 41.

¹⁶ In Psalm 86.5 the characteristic (see n. 13) phrase 'abounding in steadfast love' anticipates the later use of the whole formula in v. 15.

echo of the tradition within the OT in Daniel 9.9, again in a prayer of penitence on behalf of a sinful people who now find themselves suffering the distress and punishment they have brought upon themselves: 'To the Lord our God belong mercy and pardon' – the same word just noted in Nehemiah. This term otherwise comes in the OT only in Ps 130.4 (in the sing.), 'But there is pardon with thee.' In different settings the tradition is used to declare God's faithfulness, and, with developing clarity, to appeal to God's readiness to forgive in the face of the people's unfaithfulness.¹⁷

The path does not end there and stretches into the praise and the debate of the following period. In the Hymns of Qumran the language of the formula has become a standard description of God, but what is most notable is that God's readiness to forgive seems to be becoming an integral part of it: 1QH 6.8–9, 'Thou wilt purify and cleanse them of their sin for all their deeds are in thy truth and in thy great loving kindness thou wilt judge them and in the multitude of thy mercies and in the abundance of thy pardon teaching them according to thy word.' The noun first noted in Neh 9.17 (סליחות), which comes only three times in the OT, appears at least ten times in the Hymn scroll as well as elsewhere in the Scrolls, each time in association with steadfast love (חסד) or merciful (רחום).¹⁸ The influence of the Exod 34.6 tradition is clear although what we have is not explicit quotation but a developing relationship to the tradition, perhaps liturgically mediated.

For debate we can turn to Sirach who calls on those who fear the Lord to look back on previous generations and see that none who put their trust in the Lord were abandoned, 'for the Lord is merciful and gracious and forgives sins' (2.11); but later he warns against taking God's readiness to pardon too lightly (we are coming close to 1 John again): 'Do not say, "I sinned yet nothing happened to me"; it is only that the Lord is slow to anger. Do not be so confident of pardon¹⁹ that you sin again and again. Do not say "His mercy is so great, he will pardon my sins however many". To him belong both mercy and wrath' (5.5).²⁰

¹⁷ See Sakenfeld, *Meaning of Hesed*, 128–9 for the importance of forgiveness in the understanding of *hesed* in this confession.

¹⁸ Outside the Hymns in 1QS 2.15; CD 2.4; 4Q400 1.18; 4Q491 4. See also J. J. Stamm, *slh*, *ThHAT* 2.150–60, who notes that the verb is less common than the noun in Qumran sources.

¹⁹ The Hebrew is *selihah* which the LXX translates by ἐξιλασμός, seen by A. Di Lella, *The Hebrew Text of Sirach* (London, Hague, Paris: Mouton & Co., 1966) 113 as evidence of the secondary character of the Greek.

²⁰ This final phrase is repeated in 16.11 where it is followed by: 'he is rich in forgiveness (Heb: forgiving and pardoning) and pours out wrath'; cf. 18.12.

In a new context Asenath looks back with regret on her pagan past and puts all her hope in what she has heard: 'But I have heard many saying that the God of the Hebrews is a true God and a living God and a God who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and fair, and does not reckon the sin of a person nor convict someone's lawlessness' (*Jos and Asen* 11.10). It seems probable that behind that unexpected 'fair' (ἐπιεικής) stands the tradition of God's readiness to pardon, since the LXX uses the same word in Ps 85.5 to render the Hebrew 'pardoning'.²¹ Manasseh too in the apocryphal prayer of repentance with which he is credited relies on God as a Lord who is slow to anger, full of compassion,²² abounding in steadfast love and repenting over the evils of humankind (v. 7).²³

This tradition, with all its rich possibilities, plays a surprisingly limited role in the New Testament. However, viewed from its development within the Biblical tradition it becomes clear that it has left its mark on the passage of 1 John with which we started. At the centre of course is the acknowledgement of God's character as the foundation of forgiveness. It is the latter which does not come in the superficially closer Deut 32.4, 'θεὸς πιστός καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀδικία, δίκαιος καὶ ὄσιος κύριος', although this verse may have helped influence the language used. Yet the similarity with the Exod 34 tradition does extend beyond fundamental idea to vocabulary. The juxtaposition of sins and unrighteousness and of the verbs to forgive and to cleanse ('to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness') also comes in Exod 34.6–7 and similar terms are particularly important in the Qumran passages.²⁴ In 1 John too we find, as in Sirach, a caution against the misuse of the tradition along with the demand to be serious about sin and the warning that forgiveness is no excuse to continue to sin. Most important, the tradition can throw light on the much debated description of Jesus as 'hilasmos'.

We have already traced 'readiness to pardon' as an increasingly important element of God's character as the tradition develops in and beyond the OT. While the LXX offers no consistent translation of the Hebrew root פָּחַח, 'ἰλασμός' is the only translation used for the

²¹ Ps 85.5 is explicitly echoed in *Ps.Sol* 5.12; that God is ἐπιεικής and slow to anger comes in *Jos and Asen* 12.14–15; *Aristeas* 188.3.

²² Εὐσπλαγχοῦς; cf. James 5.11.

²³ This strange phrase immediately recalls Joel 2.13; Jonah 4.2, and may go back to a mistranslation of a similar Hebrew which perhaps spoke of God's sorrow over evil.

²⁴ So 1QH 7.30; 11.9. Although 'forgive' is translated in Exod 34 by ἀφαιρῶ the same Hebrew verb can also be translated by ἀφίημι (so probably Sir 2.11) as in 1 John 1.9.

key term $\pi\eta\lambda\iota\varsigma$, namely at Dan 9.9 (Theodotion),²⁵ at Ps 130.4,²⁶ and also, although poorly attested, at Neh 9.17 where however the major MSS do not translate the term.²⁷ Sirach uses the related $\acute{\epsilon}\xi\iota\lambda\alpha\sigma\mu\acute{o}\varsigma$, a translation not otherwise used for the root by the LXX.²⁸ The Greek rendering of the root in the Psalms is less constant; we have already noted the use of $\acute{\epsilon}\pi\iota\epsilon\iota\kappa\acute{\eta}\varsigma$ at Ps 86.5, although Aquila and Theodotion read $\iota\lambda\alpha\sigma\tau\acute{\eta}\varsigma$, while $\epsilon\upsilon\iota\lambda\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\upsilon\omega\upsilon\varsigma$ is read at Ps 103.3 (Theodotion: $\iota\lambda\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\upsilon\omega\upsilon\varsigma$). Since the LXX does not use $\iota\lambda\alpha\sigma\mu\acute{o}\varsigma$ more regularly for any other Hebrew term, and there is also no other more frequent Greek rendering of the Hebrew root, the connection between ‘ $\acute{\iota}\lambda\alpha\sigma\mu\acute{o}\varsigma$ ’ and ‘pardon’ ($\pi\eta\lambda\iota\varsigma$) seems to be dominant.²⁹ $\pi\eta\lambda\iota\varsigma$ is predicated only of God in the Hebrew scriptures and so it is at once startling and natural that Jesus should himself be identified with God’s pardon: for 1 John forgiveness is rooted in the character of God and is embodied in Jesus even while remaining God’s own readiness to forgive.

Set against this tradition background, the day of atonement and the sacrificial cult do not provide the primary framework for interpreting Jesus the $\acute{\iota}\lambda\alpha\sigma\mu\acute{o}\varsigma$ as the means of forgiveness in 1 John despite the use of the term at Lev 25.9.³⁰ It may be possible that the author combines a number of images, including sacrificial ideas in the earlier reference to the blood of Jesus at 1.7, but his most significant heritage is a liturgical and literary tradition celebrating and re-applying the confession of God made known in Exod 34 – just as forgiveness or pardon belongs to God alone, Jesus now is that forgiveness actualised.

²⁵ Οἱ οἰκτιρμοὶ καὶ οἱ ἰλασμοί.

²⁶ In fact the link with Ps 130 was noted some time ago by A. Hanson, *Studies on the Pastoral Epistles* (London: SPCK, 1968) 91–5 where he suggested that the Psalm was interpreted by the early church as referring to baptism and that 1 John 1.7–2.5 was written with it in mind. He drew attention particularly to the theme of confession in the two passages; to the use of $\acute{\iota}\lambda\alpha\sigma\mu\acute{o}\varsigma$ which in 1 John is ‘with (πρός) the Father’ and in the Psalm is ‘with (παρά) God’, and to the final promise of the Psalm that God would redeem Israel ‘from all her lawless acts’ ($\acute{\alpha}\pi\omicron\upsilon\ \pi\alpha\sigma\acute{\omega}\nu\ \tau\acute{\omega}\nu\ \acute{\alpha}\nu\omicron\mu\iota\omicron\upsilon\omega\upsilon\varsigma\ \alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon\delta\omicron$). These contacts are important but probably not enough to establish that Ps 130 is alone or even chiefly in mind; rather that it belongs to a chain of passages which use a common vocabulary and meet a common concern and so provide the background to our passage.

²⁷ According to the edition of Brooke and MacLean ‘b’ reads $\iota\lambda\alpha\sigma\mu\omega\ \alpha\phi\iota\epsilon\iota\varsigma$ while $\alpha\phi\iota\epsilon\iota\varsigma\ \alpha\mu\alpha\rho\tau\iota\alpha\varsigma$, probably by assimilation to Exod 34.6, is also attested.

²⁸ $\acute{\epsilon}\xi\iota\lambda\acute{\alpha}\sigma\kappa\epsilon\sigma\theta\alpha\iota$, $\acute{\epsilon}\xi\iota\lambda\alpha\sigma\mu\acute{o}\varsigma$ are used for *slh* only at Sirach 5.5; 16.11 (where the Hebrew survives for comparison). See above n. 19.

²⁹ $\acute{\iota}\lambda\alpha\sigma\mu\acute{o}\varsigma$ is also used by the LXX at Lev 25.9 and Num 5.8 for *kippurim*, at 1 Chron 28.20 (no MT), Ezek 44.27 (*ḥata’th*); 2 Macc 3.35; and at Amos 8.14 (*’ashmah*).

³⁰ See n. 29. The question should not be confused with that regarding $\iota\lambda\alpha\sigma\tau\acute{\eta}\rho\iota\omega\upsilon\varsigma$ (Rom 3.25) which is never used for the *slh* root in the LXX.

A further image is Jesus as *paraclete*, and it remains uncertain how firmly the two are linked together. Comparison might be made with Moses, Ezra and Daniel who, in the passages discussed above, claimed God's forgiveness for the people; Jesus would be the one who both intercedes for and embodies that forgiveness. Yet the tradition we have explored does bring together God's pardon with God's comfort, for which the Hebrew נחם (Piel) is most commonly rendered by the LXX παρακαλῶ: so Psalm 86 closes 'because Thou O Lord has helped me and *comforted* me.' This too continues in the Qumran hymns: 'gladden the soul of Thy servant with thy truth, and cleanse me in thy righteousness, for I wait upon thy goodness and hope in thy mercy and by thy *pardon* thou shalt relieve my contrition and in my affliction thou shalt *comfort* me' (1QH 11.31; cf. 1QH 9.13). Whether or not the verbal form παράκλητος can itself mean 'the comforter',³¹ the traditional association of the language may have attracted it here.

There is of course one notable exception to the limited influence of Exod 34.6 in the NT. The prologue of the Fourth Gospel takes up the story of Exod 33–4 with the revelation of God by God fulfilled in 1.14, 'and we beheld his glory – full of grace and truth'. The Greek there (πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας), although not the language of the LXX, is a natural translation of the Hebrew $\text{רַב־חַסֵּד וְאֱמֶת}$ 'abounding in steadfast love and truth', in Exod 34.6.³² We find then that the first Epistle and the Gospel both reflect exegesis of the same passage but do so in totally different ways, sharing none of the same vocabulary or fundamental concerns.³³ This should not surprise us; it seems increasingly evident that the Johannine writings, while not denying the creative individuality behind them, were the result of a long period of what we might call school activity. That this activity should include exegesis and interpretation, and the blending of that study into new settings is only to be expected. In 1 John

³¹ See C. K. Barrett, 'The Holy Spirit in the Fourth Gospel', *JTS* 1 (1950) 1–15; O. Betz, *Der Paraklet* (Leiden: Brill, 1963) 157–8.

³² See A. T. Hanson, *The New Testament Interpretation of Scripture* (London: SPCK, 1980) 97–109.

³³ In the LXX the 'emeth' (truth) of Ex 34.6 is not translated by ἀληθεία as in John but by ἀληθινός. This is repeated in the other passages which take up Exod 34.6 and even added in Num 14.18 and Ps 103.8 (Alex) where it is lacking in the Hebrew. For both John and 1 John knowledge of God as ἀληθινός lies at the heart of Christian experience (John 17.3; 1 John 5.20). In the Greek OT this epithet used of God is restricted to the Exod 34.6 tradition and to some later passages which use it against the unreality of idols (3 Macc 2.11; 6.18; 1 Esd 8.89; 2 Chr 15.3 and Isa 65.16). However, while the Gospel may look back only to Exod 34.6 here, 1 John has combined it with this second OT tradition.

that blending is thorough, but its contribution is nonetheless real, and it is for this technique that we should look elsewhere.

2. CAIN, SIN AND RIGHTEOUSNESS: 1 JOHN 3.7ff.

In contrast to the indirectness of the first example, the reference to Cain in 1 John 3.12 is indisputably OT in origin even if mediated through a tradition of exegesis and interpretation: 'This is the proclamation which you have heard from the beginning, that we are to love one another. Not like Cain (who) was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his deeds were evil and those of his brother righteous.'

Once again the OT and its interpretation may be taken as a starting point, although in this case the ground is extensive and has been covered elsewhere, particularly by N. A. Dahl.³⁴ The narrative in Gen 4 gives no final answer to 1 John's question, 'why did Cain murder his brother?', pointing back only to God's, apparently unaccountable, preference for Abel's offering over Cain's and so, perhaps intentionally, leaving the question waiting to be asked (and answered). The most simple answer is that given by both Philo (*Quaest. in Gen* 1.59) and Josephus (*Ant* 1.2.1 §53) who label Cain as evil (πονηρός) and Abel as concerned for righteousness or as δίκαιος. The targums offer rather more help; taking advantage of a lacuna in the text or perhaps following an older form of it, Cain invites Abel out into the field and there a debate follows over theodicy. While Cain's position in the different targumic traditions varies, perhaps reflecting current disputes on the subject, the underlying theme is clear: Abel defends the compatibility of divine mercy with divine justice – mercy is not caprice as it may become when loosed from justice, and as Cain perceives it – and the exercise of both in the creation and governance of the world, and, in some accounts, the future judgement according to deeds (i.e. by justice). Abel's offering was accepted because his deeds were good and not out of divine favouritism. In that debate we hear current concerns about that very issue, love and justice applied to God.³⁵

³⁴ N. A. Dahl, 'Der Erstgeborene Satans und der Vater des Teufels', *Apophoreta* (Fs E. Haenchen; BZNW 30; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1964) 70–84; M. McNamara, *The New Testament and the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch* (AB 27A; Rome: Biblical Inst., 1978) 156–60, 299.

³⁵ See A. Chester, *Divine Revelation and Divine Titles in the Pentateuchal Targumim* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1986) 365; for the different problems reflected by the Targumic traditions, J. Bassler, 'Cain and Abel in the Palestinian Targums', *JSJ* 17 (1986) 56–64.

To answer the further question how, within the sequence of God's creation of humankind in Genesis, Cain came both to do evil and, most important, to conceive of evil in murdering his brother, PsJonathan reveals that Cain was not the child of Adam, the man created by God, but of 'the evil one': 'And Adam was aware that Eve his wife had conceived from Sammael the angel, and she became pregnant and bare Cain.'³⁶ Gnostic literature knows the same tradition – 'And he (i.e. Cain) was begotten in adultery for he was the child of the serpent. So he became a murderer just like his father and he killed his brother' (*EvPhil* 61.6–10).³⁷

God's response to Cain's earlier resentment at the rejection of his offering, translated in the RSV 'If you do well will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; its desire is for you but you must master it', offered further challenges for interpretation.³⁸ First, 'will you not be accepted' becomes a promise of forgiveness, based either on good works or (in TgOnk) on Cain's repentance; secondly, the Palestinian targum tradition introduces into the crouching sin the concept of the 'evil inclination' or the tendency to do wrong over which Cain (like all people) has control so that he is after all responsible for whether he chooses to do right or sin.³⁹ Similarly, at Gen 4.13 the Biblical tradition has Cain affirm that his sin is too great to bear, while the Palestinian targumic tradition picks up the second possible meaning of 'to bear' sin, i.e. to forgive it, and adds that God however does have the power to forgive: 'My guilt is too great to bear, but Thou art able to loose and forgive.'

Finally, in God's accusation 'the voice of the blood(s) of your brother is crying out to me from the earth' (v. 10), the use of the plural, in actual fact common with reference to slain blood, gains a greater significance: the voice is the voice of the blood of the righteous who were to rise from Abel. Cain is responsible not only for the death of Abel but also for that of his posterity who would

³⁶ See also the same Targum on Gen 5.3: Eve had born Cain who was not from him (i.e. Adam); also *Pirke R. Eliezer*, 'Sammael riding on the serpent came to her and she conceived'; so Cain was not of Adam's seed (21; 22).

³⁷ There is of course a problem of dating these traditions, especially as this one only appears in Targum PsJonathan. They may, however, lie behind 2 Cor 11.2–3 and 4 Macc 18.9; cf. A. Goldberg, 'Kain: Sohn des Menschen oder Sohn der Schlange?', *Judaica* 25 (1969) 203–21.

³⁸ See further G. Vermes, 'The Targumic Versions of Genesis 4:3–16', *Post Biblical Jewish Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 1975) 92–126.

³⁹ *Sifre Deut* 45 makes similar use of Gen 4.7 with reference both to forgiveness and to control over the 'evil inclination'.

have been righteous.⁴⁰ Before returning to 1 John we may follow this line of righteous posterity in a new direction.

Seth, born to Eve after the banishment of Cain (Gen 4.25), is, unlike either Cain or Abel, explicitly said by Gen 5.3 to be in the image and likeness of Adam as Adam was of God. While modern scholarship refers to the different literary traditions (P after J), the ancient commentators saw a richer meaning. Moreover, in the Biblical account Eve greets Seth's birth with the words 'God has appointed for me another child (lit. 'seed') instead of Abel, for Cain slew him' (4.25); here the word seed in both the Hebrew (זרע) and the LXX (σπέρμα) could carry a plural sense of 'offspring'. This enabled Seth in later Jewish and in gnostic tradition to become both a 'type' and the progenitor of a line, as too did Cain. For Philo Seth is 'a seed of human virtue' from whom is traced a line including Noah the 'righteous', Shem, Abraham and Moses (*De Post* 172–4). Yet Eve's words in Gen 4.25 also invite comparison with – and may consciously echo⁴¹ – God's judgement on the serpent in Gen 3.15: 'I will appoint enmity between you and the woman, and between your *seed* and her *seed*.' The text itself then 'invited' a continuing contrast and hostility between the seed of Cain or of the devil, and the seed stemming from God's creation of Adam which continues through Seth. Later Jewish and gnostic sources adopt this contrast,⁴² and, where the conflict predicted in Gen 3.15 was understood in a 'messianic sense', Seth acquired yet higher status as the bearer of the Messianic seed, even founding his own race of the elect in some Gnostic traditions.⁴³

While this is not to suggest that 1 John is an early witness to Sethian gnosticism, the letter does already betray a familiarity with some of these traditions. Cain's murder of his brother 'because his deeds were evil and those of his brother righteous' (3.12) uses the same adjectives (πονηρός, δίκαιος) as do Josephus and Philo, while the emphasis on deeds may echo the Targumic tradition of the brothers' dispute over the relevance of deeds in God's governance

⁴⁰ The interpretation is missing from Ps.Jon. Onkelos does not say 'righteous' but speaks of the 'seed'. This interpretation is reflected already in *m.Sanh.* 4.5.

⁴¹ J. Skinner, *Genesis* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1910) 126 argues a cross reference is intentional.

⁴² Cf. already Josephus *Ant* 1.2.2–3 (§65–9); *Pirke R. Eliezer* 21–2.

⁴³ See A. F. J. Klijn, *Seth in Jewish, Christian and Gnostic Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1977); S. O. Fraade, *Enosh and His Generation* (SBLMS 30. Chico: Scholars, 1984); B. Pearson, 'The Figure of Seth in Gnostic Literature', *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism* (ed. B. Layton; SHR 41; Leiden: Brill, 1980–1) 2.472–504.

of the world.⁴⁴ Yet the presence of Cain extends beyond 1 John 3.12 to cast its shadow over both language and thought of the whole chapter. This is a chapter which is, at least in the first half, markedly dualistic; it moves from the initial assurance ‘that we are children of God’ (v. 1) to an absolute contrast (found in this chapter alone) between those who are the children of God and those who are the children of the devil: ‘In this way are manifested the children of God and the children of the devil. Everyone who does not do righteousness is not of God, and the one who does not love his brother’ (10).⁴⁵ It is a division defined by doing righteousness or being righteous (7),⁴⁶ but also by being ready to or failing to love one’s brother. Cain was of course the prime example of the latter and on that basis 1 John can go on to say (v. 15), ‘Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer.’⁴⁷ This may not be so very different from *1 Clement* 4 where the story of Cain and Abel leads to the conclusion ‘So you see, brethren, that jealousy and envy bring about fratricide’ (*1 Clem* 4.1–7),⁴⁸ but 1 John goes beyond that tradition in labelling such behaviour as a mark of a diabolic origin. The dualist pattern means that to say Cain was of the evil one is not merely metaphor or rhetoric, indicating only that his deeds were thoroughly evil; in the words of the *EvPhil*, he was the child of the serpent, and, for 1 John, those who follow him are children of the devil. The theological problems such a reading could generate are obvious, although 1 John talks only of those who are born of God

⁴⁴ However it goes too far to say 1 John is particularly close to the Targumic tradition here as does M. McNamara, *New Testament and Palestinian Targum*, 159.

⁴⁵ Elsewhere the opposite of ‘being of God’ is ‘not being of God’ or ‘being of the world’ rather than ‘being of the devil’ (v. 8). Yet the Cain exegesis is unlikely to have created the language of ‘children of God’ which 1 John does use elsewhere. Perhaps it was this language and the image of being begotten of God already present in Johannine tradition which have attracted the exegesis, for Gen 4 starts with Eve’s response to the birth of Cain, ‘With the help of the Lord I have acquired a man’ – the verse which provoked all the speculation about his parentage and encouraged some later gnostics to claim that Cain stemmed from ‘a higher power’.

⁴⁶ This means that the NT tradition of Abel as righteous, also found in Heb 11.4; Matt 23.35, is an original part of the Abel tradition and not borrowed from Isa 53. In this section the righteousness of Abel is anticipated in v. 7 by the description of Jesus as ‘righteous’ and as a model for those who like Abel do righteousness.

⁴⁷ The word ‘murderer’ is an NT hapax coming only in 1 John and the related John 8, but Philo too calls Cain an ἀδελφοκτόνος – brother murderer (*De Cherub* 15).

⁴⁸ See K. Beyschlag, *Clemens Romanus und der Frühkatholizismus* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1966) 48–52; also *TBenj* 7.5 which uses the story as an example of envy and of hatred of brother. The story of the two brothers may here in 1 John prompt the author to address his readers as ‘brethren’ (3.13) and not as children as he does elsewhere. For the moment in this verse the Cain/Abel pattern speaks not of relations within the community but of the righteous Abel-community faced by the murderous Cain-hatred of the world. This is not the main concern of the chapter but it may be a more original application of the exegesis.

and never of some as *born* of the devil nor of their nature or being separately from their behaviour.

The startling, almost gnostic, affirmation (9), 'Everyone who has been born of God does not commit sin, because his seed remains in him, and is not able to sin because of having been born of God' has provoked a wealth of different interpretations. Yet within the tradition just explored it is clear that the 'seed' refers not (as usually suggested) to the word of God, or even to the Holy Spirit which protects the believer from sin; instead it recalls the theme within the Genesis narratives just explored of the seed of the woman and the 'other seed' which Eve acknowledges in the birth of Seth. This means that for 1 John the believer, like Seth, either carries the 'seed' of God's promise or is the 'seed', in contrast to those who like Cain are the children of the devil.⁴⁹ In another context this could become the 'gnostic' picture of different categories of people whose spiritual future is determined by their spiritual origins. It is only in the setting of the letter that it becomes instead a source of assurance for a community shaken by schism and a source of exhortation to live out 'in deed and truth' the divine begetting that is theirs.

However, rather than pursuing this further we may turn to the Fourth Gospel where the same tradition has left its mark in a very different way. 'Mark' recalls R. Mellinkof, *The Mark of Cain*,⁵⁰ which traces through subsequent history the effect of the application of the Cain narrative to the Jews. In John 8.44 Jesus says to the Jews, 'You are of the father the devil and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning and did not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks falsehood he speaks out of his own, because he is a liar and its father (? as is his father).' The Greek behind 'You are of the father the devil' is clumsy, implying some confusion or modification of the text. Probably correctly, patristic sources soon saw a reference to Cain who was the archetypal ('from the beginning') murderer – ἀνθρωποκτόνος, only here and 1 John 3.15 in the NT – who could claim the devil as father. The same tradition may lie behind the Jews' claim in v. 41 'We were not born of adultery, we have one father, God.' The charge that they do the 'desires' (ἐπιθυμίας) of their father (8.44) perhaps echoes the 'evil inclination' which Cain is to control in the Targumic interpretation of Gen

⁴⁹ Only P. Perkins, *The Johannine Epistles* (Dublin: Veritas, 1980) 45 comes close to recognising this.

⁵⁰ Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1981.

4.7.⁵¹ Indeed if 'desire' is a further element of the exegesis of the Cain narrative, it has also left another trace in 1 John 2.16: 'for everything which is in the world, the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes and the pride of life are not of the father'.

The parallel with John points to a new question. Here we have not simply a different exegesis and application of a single text, but a fundamentally different orientation – in 1 John against the failure to love and rather more in encouragement of the community as those who are 'of God', in John against the Jews.

3. DARKNESS, BLINDNESS AND STUMBLING: 1 JOHN 2.11

The one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness and does not know where he goes, because the darkness blinded his eyes.

Blindness is a natural metaphor for the failure to see what should be seen; it is also a well developed Biblical one.⁵² The most obvious Biblical text is Isa 6.9–10 where Isaiah is told 'to make the heart of this people fat, their ears heavy and their eyes shut, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn and be healed'. Not surprisingly the text caused problems for later readers – the LXX avoids the divine command to futility by rendering 'the heart of this people is fattened/dulled' and ends not with intransigence but with the hope, 'and I shall heal them', an interpretation followed by Matthew and Luke in quoting this verse (Matt 13.14–15; Luke 28.26–7). Yet difficult texts are often the most fruitful ones, providing inspiration for later writers to interpret new situations, to use the text to understand the present, or to re-present the text to offer alternative possibilities for the future. Thus Isaiah's language provoked a continuing tradition of reapplication even outside the Isaianic tradition (e.g. Jer 5.21; Deut 29.4).⁵³ Yet it was within the school of Isaiah itself that the richest exploration and reworking of the tradition took place: 'Stupefy yourselves and be in a stupor, blind yourselves and be blind! . . . For the Lord has poured out upon you a spirit of deep sleep, and has closed your eyes, the prophets' (Isa 29.10); even

⁵¹ On ἐπιθυμία as reflecting the Jewish *yetzer hara*/evil inclination see *ThDNT* III 170.

⁵² For the tradition of interpretation of the Isaiah text see C. A. Evans, *To See and Not Perceive: Isaiah 6.9–10 in Early Jewish and Christian Interpretation* (JSOT.S 64; Sheffield: JSNT, 1989). On what follows see further J. M. Lieu, 'Blindness in the Johannine Tradition', *NTS* 34 (1988) 83–95.

⁵³ See W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel* 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 269–70.

in exile in Babylon, 'Who is as blind as my servant, or as deaf as my messenger whom I send? . . . He sees many things, but does not observe them; his ears are open but he does not hear' (Isa 42.19–20); 'Bring forth the people who are blind, but have eyes, deaf, yet have ears!' (43.8).⁵⁴ Yet the prophet proclaims that there can also be hope for blind eyes and deaf ears, hope that God will reverse the judgement spoken through the prophet: 'I have given you as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind' (42.6–7) or 'In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see' (Isa 29.18). The language may be either metaphorical, as here, or literal as in 35.5 which plays such an important role in the NT: 'Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy.'

Two uses of the tradition demand particular note for comparison with 1 John: first, still from within the Isaiah tradition, the people who have been promised redemption, sight and hearing, and who feel themselves cheated of that hope because their sins are ever before them, lament 'We look for light, and behold darkness, and for brightness, but we walk in gloom. We grope for the wall like the blind, we grope like those who have no eyes; we stumble at noon as in the twilight' (59.9–10). Secondly, as I have argued elsewhere, the Dead Sea Scrolls show how these words could be re-used to speak not of the past but to the present: 'To the spirit of injustice belong greed – a blaspheming tongue, blind eyes, a deaf ear, a stiff neck, a stubborn heart causing man to walk in all the ways of darkness' (1QS 4.11).⁵⁵

Against this background 1 John's dependence on the tradition becomes clear. In 2.11 the final assertion 'the darkness has blinded his eyes' offers the clearest allusion to Isa 6.10.⁵⁶ Yet here it is neither God who has blinded their eyes (as in the Hebrew text), nor an unexplained process as in the LXX, but the darkness – perhaps a superficially easier answer but one that raises its own problems, for what is darkness and whence is its source? This is not so far

⁵⁴ On the tradition in Isaiah see R. E. Clements, *Isaiah 1–39* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1980) 260.

⁵⁵ 'Stiffness of neck' comes from Exod 32.9 etc.; for 'heaviness of heart' 1QS uses the language of the J tradition regarding Pharaoh's obstinacy (Exod 7.14; 8.11, 28; 9.7, 34; 10.1; also in 1 Sam 6.6 where Israel is compared to Pharaoh). This is probably because of the unusualness of the metaphor in Isa 6, 'fatness'.

⁵⁶ See Lieu, 'Blindness', 90–2; the Greek verb τυφλώω is not used in the LXX of Isa 6.10 but John 12.40 demonstrates its use within the Johannine school.

from 2 Cor 4.4 where the Gospel is veiled for those who are perishing, ‘among whom the God of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelieving’ – possibly another echo of the Isaiah tradition;⁵⁷ that such dualism is not foreign to Jewish thought can be seen from *TJudah* 18.6: ‘For being a slave of two passions contrary to the commandments of God he cannot obey God because they have blinded his soul and he walks in the day as in the night’ (cf. 19.4, ‘the prince of deceit has blinded me’).⁵⁸

It is in the Fourth Gospel that the source of the formula in the Isaiah tradition becomes clear; there the dramatic healing of a man blind from birth is made not only a miracle but a sign of belief and unbelief, judgement and salvation: ‘For judgement I came into the world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind’ (John 9.31). These words echo those of Isa 6.9; the quotation is finished in chapter 12 as Jesus turns from his public ministry to his disciples and his passion. He has been almost without exception met with unbelief, for ‘they could not believe, as Isaiah again says, “he has blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes and understand with their heart, and turn, and I shall heal them”’ (12.40 quoting Isa 6.10). John is not afraid of the apparent determinism that he, God or Jesus, has blinded their eyes, which 1 John avoids by the ascription of responsibility to darkness: the darkness has blinded their eyes. But the common form and particularly the word used to translate ‘blind’, which is not that of the LXX and other quotations of the passage, betray that both Gospel and Epistle reflect the exegesis of the same verse of Isaiah.

Yet the developing tradition of Isa 6.10 has a wider influence on 1 John; the lament of Isa 59.9–10 quoted above is of those who, like the one who does not love a brother in 1 John 2.9–10, walk in the gloom or darkness,⁵⁹ and who stumble as they go.⁶⁰ More curiously, they grope like those who have no eyes; the verb ‘to grope’ (ψῶγι) is found only here in the MT, and in the LXX is translated by ψηλαφάω. This of course is the startling verb in the prologue of 1 John: ‘That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at

⁵⁷ Evans, *To See*, 83–4.

⁵⁸ Lieu, ‘Blindness’, 87–8.

⁵⁹ Heb. *apheloth* translated here in the LXX by ἀωρία but by σκοτός at 58.10; the more common word for darkness, *hoshek*, is used in the first part of the verse.

⁶⁰ Heb. *kshl*, here translated by πίπτω but elsewhere by the σκάνδαλον root. The image of walking in darkness is of course a common one in the OT (e.g. Job 29.3; Isa 9.2 and the prohibition against putting a block in the way of the blind in Lev 19.14).

and our hands *have touched* – not the light touch of a stroke but the groping, feeling with the hands.⁶¹ Yet here it is not the blind who touch but those who *do see* with their eyes, and who go on to declare – ‘and the life was manifested and we have seen and bear witness and proclaim to you’. Here too it is the Isaiah tradition which is at work: ‘Having eyes they are as blind (τυφλοί), having ears deaf. Let all the nations collect together and their rulers assemble. Who will proclaim(ἀναγγελεῖ) these things? Who will proclaim to you that which was from the beginning (τὰ ἐξ ἀρχῆς)? Let them bring out their witnesses (μάρτυρας) . . . You are my witnesses . . . in order that you may know and believe (γνῶτε καὶ πιστευσῆτε) and understand that I am’ (Isa 43.8–10).⁶² This final goal is of course the goal of both the Johannine letter (5.13) and Gospel (20.31) although differently expressed and interpreted.

This brings us back to what was from the beginning, and suggests a way forward to drawing together the threads and finding the patterns in the tapestry which makes up 1 John. To say that the OT has played no part in the weave of that tapestry is clearly wrong. Once we are content to look not just for quotations but for allusions and for the reworking of Scriptural interpretation and study we begin to see their recurring presence within the pattern. This is not just the Jewishness of an early tradition which in reality has been left long behind and serves only as a rallying point which may unite a community grown apart. Scripture, or rather a tradition of interpreting Scripture, is part of the thought world which constructs the letter.

Since these patterns of interpretation have frequent parallels in contemporary Jewish exegesis there can be no tension between the letter’s Jewishness and its use of Scripture: the latter is part of the former. Yet there is little sense that the letter is soaked in Scripture in the way that the Dead Sea Scrolls are or that its use of Scripture betrays an acknowledgement of authority. By contrast, the Pastorals, which also contain far more allusions than quotations and whose use of Scripture also seems to be pre-digested,⁶³ do seem to know what they are doing and explicitly acknowledge the value of Scripture (2 Tim 3.16). This is hardly true of 1 John which is not interested in fulfilment, replacement or inheritance, except the

⁶¹ The LXX uses it for a different Hebrew root to describe the blind Isaac’s groping to feel Jacob who for the sake of a blessing has become suddenly hairy.

⁶² John 15.27 is another ‘exegesis’ of this passage.

⁶³ See A. T. Hanson, *The Pastoral Epistles* (London & Grand Rapids: MMS/Eerdmans, 1982) 139–41.

inheritance of what they have heard 'from the beginning' – and this bears no certain relation either to the Old Testament or necessarily to the Fourth Gospel in its final written form. The use of Scripture does not belong to the rhetoric of the letter – to its conscious literary construction. It is an open question whether the author assumes readers will note the Scriptural allusions and whether the argument would be less effective if they failed to do so. Although in the Targums Cain and Abel dispute over theodicy it is unlikely that the author intends any connection with the epistle's opponents and their views. What is true of its use of Scripture is true more generally of the 'Jewishness' of 1 John – it is not evocative or 'identity-creating' in the way of 1QS or 1QH despite all the parallels drawn. In the end this problem remains partly unsolved; much of the Jewish exegesis cited in relation to Cain has its closest parallels not in Christian but in gnostic sources where there is a similar problem about 'Jewishness' – it is not that 1 John is gnostic so much as that it is not always clear what 'Jewishness' means and by whom or where it would be recognised.

This relationship with contemporary Jewish exegesis is of course something 1 John shares with the Fourth Gospel, although the latter's use of Scripture is much richer and deeper. Inevitably this raises the question of the relationship with the Fourth Gospel for 1 John's 'failure' to use the OT is so often contrasted with its 'master'. All three of the examples explored above interpret passages of the OT also used in the Gospel. Indeed it is unlikely that we would recognise the use of Isa 6.10 in 1 John 2.11 were it not for the full quotation in John 12. This common resource points to the activity of the Johannine school about which so much has been written. That histories of that school can be written may be doubted, but that the study, exegesis and interpretation of Scripture played a central part in their life is certain. In different ways the depth at which Scripture lies within the text points to the intensity and richness of the study of Scripture in the light of present experience. Yet in each case the exegesis is developed differently. For the Gospel Exod 34.6 provides the background of the revelation of the glory of God in Jesus 'full of grace and truth'; in focussing on this Scripture for the question of divine revelation the Johannine prologue joins other writings (including Sirach) and also includes other elements such as Wisdom traditions of which there is no trace in the Epistle. For 1 John the Scripture points to the nature of God and God's readiness to forgive, while the reference is mediated through other passages and perhaps also through liturgical usage reflecting on that theme. As for Isa 6.10, the Gospel uses the

passage as it considers the unbelief with which Jesus was met and links that reflection with the miracle of healing the blind man in chapter 9. We may see how the Scripture has been used to reflect both on Jewish hostility but also on the mystery of unbelief itself wherever it is encountered. In 1 John there are closer links with 'hellenistic' Judaism and a dualistic framework which points to external forces as the agent of blinding, perhaps prompted by the greater mystery of division within the company of those who believe, and by the need to encourage those left that they do indeed see.

The most complex pattern of relationship comes with regard to the Cain text. In John 8.41–7 it is ostensibly the Jews who are the object of attack, and scholars debate whether some alleviation of the theological problem of NT antisemitism is found if we explain this as a consequence not of the hostility between Jesus and his contemporaries but of that between the Johannine community and the local synagogue which persecuted them, or even, in the light of the reference earlier in the chapter to the Jews who had put their faith in Jesus (8.31), Jewish Christians who would not openly confess Jesus as Son of God and so cut themselves off from their compatriots. 1 John's attention is again directed more to the dilemmas of the life of the community and so has avoided censure for the long inheritance of the Gospel's words. All this means that the Gospel and First Epistle are both heirs to the interpretation of certain passages of Scripture; we see behind them the struggle between interpretation and present experience – interpretation shaping the understanding of experience, experience seeking for new possibilities of interpretation. That may not be so bad a way of seeing the whole of the NT's relation with Scripture, or indeed the continuing task of relating Scripture to Scripture and to experience.