

**THE COMMUNITY
OF THE BELOVED
DISCIPLE**

Raymond E. Brown, S.S.



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CHART ONE
THE HISTORY OF THE JOHANNINE COMMUNITY

**PHASE ONE:
ORIGINS**
(mid-50s to
late 80s)

ORIGINATING GROUP: In or near Palestine, Jews of relatively standard expectations, including followers of JBap, accepted Jesus without difficulty as the Davidic Messiah, the fulfiller of the prophecies, and one confirmed by miracles. Among this group was a man who had known Jesus during the ministry and who would become the Beloved Disciple.

SECOND GROUP: Jews of an anti-Temple bias who believed in Jesus and made converts in Samaria. They understood Jesus against a Mosaic rather than a Davidic background. He had been with God, seen Him, and brought down His words to people.

The acceptance of the Second group catalyzed the development of a high, pre-existence christology, which led to debates with Jews who thought the Johannine community was abandoning Jewish monotheism by making a second God out of Jesus. Ultimately the leaders of these Jews had the Johannine Christians expelled from the synagogues. The latter, alienated from their own, saw "the Jews" as children of the devil. They stressed a realization of the eschatological promises in Jesus to compensate for what they had lost in Judaism. The Disciple made this transition and helped others to make it, thus becoming the Beloved Disciple.

**PHASE TWO:
GOSPEL**
(ca. 90)

Since "the Jews" were blinded, the coming of the Greeks was God's plan of fulfillment. The community may have moved from Palestine to the Diaspora to teach the Greeks. This contact brought out the universalistic possibilities in Johannine thought. However, rejection by others and persecution by "the Jews" convinced Johannine

GENTILE CONVERTS

Christians that the world was opposed to Jesus, and that they should not belong to this world which was under the power of Satan. Rejection of the high Johannine christology by Jewish Christians was seen as unbelief and led to a breaking of communion (*koinōnia*). Communications were kept open to the Apostolic Christians (see Chart Two) with hopes for unity, despite differences of christology and church structure.

The defensive concentration on christology against "the Jews" and the Jewish Christians led to a split within the Johannine community.

**PHASE THREE:
EPISTLES**
(ca. 100)

THE ADHERENTS OF THE AUTHOR OF THE EPISTLES: To be a child of God one must confess Jesus come in the flesh and must keep the commandments. The secessionists are the children of the devil and the antichrists. The anointing with the Spirit obviates the need for human teachers; test all who claim to have the

THE SECESSIONISTS: The One who has come down from above is so divine he is not fully human; he does not belong to the world. Neither his life on earth nor that of the believer have salvific import. Knowledge that God's Son came into the world is all important, and those who believe in this are already saved.

**PHASE FOUR:
AFTER THE EPISTLES**
(2nd century)

UNION WITH THE GREAT CHURCH: Unable to combat the secessionists simply by appealing to tradition, and losing out to their opponents, some of the author's adherents accepted the need for authoritative official teachers (presbyter-bishops). At the same time "the church catholic" showed itself open to the high Johannine christology. There was a gradual assimilation into the Great Church which was slow, however, to accept the Fourth Gospel since it was being misused by gnostics.

ROAD TO GNOSTICISM: The larger part of the Johannine community seems to have accepted secessionist theology which, having been cut off from the moderates through schism, moved toward true docetism (from a not fully human Jesus to a mere appearance of humanity), toward gnosticism (from a pre-existent Jesus to pre-existent believers who also came down from the heavenly regions), and toward Montanism (from possessing the Paraclete to the embodiment of the Paraclete). They took the Fourth Gospel with them; it was accepted early by gnostics who commented on it.