

- Brown, Raymond E. *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*. New York: Paulist Press, 1979. 204 pp. Paperback, \$3.95.
- Martyn, J. Louis. *The Gospel of John in Christian History: Essays for Interpreters*. New York: Paulist Press, 1978. viii + 147 pp. Paperback, \$4.95.

The two little books being reviewed represent a compressed statement on the part of each author concerning the history of Johannine Christianity and some of the major theological contributions this Christianity has made to the church at large. Both Martyn and Brown have established credentials as Johannine scholars. Their opinions, therefore, are taken seriously by their NT colleagues. Both introduce their books with elaborate disclaimers as to the degree of certainty with which they hold the positions they are publishing. Martyn explains that he is using the indicative but means the subjunctive (p. 92). Brown announces that if his "detective work" proves to be 60% accurate he will be most happy (p. 7). Both books are also similar in that both offer a scenario of Johannine Christianity in the first century—with some forays into the second. But the books are different in that while Brown's is a unitary account of the history of a community, Martyn's is made up of three independently published essays which now are being reissued together. This means that even though both books were published almost simultaneously by the same publisher, Brown had access to Martyn's conclusions.

Martyn's book is an update and a refinement of his earlier work *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (1st ed., New York, 1968; rev. ed., Nashville, Tenn., 1979; see my review of the first ed. in *AUSS* 8 [1970]: 193-194). There Martyn had proposed that the redaction-critical reading of the Fourth Gospel demonstrates that it tells two stories at once. At the *einmalig*-level the story tells what happened at the time of Jesus, but at the contemporary level the story provides information about the history of the church within which the Gospel had been written. The basic historical experience of the Johannine church, Martyn suggested in 1968, was the trauma of having been expelled from the synagogue in which these Christians had been at home while believing in Jesus as Messiah. The expulsion had been occasioned by the desire of the synagogue to consolidate itself along new lines after A.D. 70. Thus the Council of Jamnia regularized the liturgy and instituted the Eighteen Benedictions as a regular feature. Included in these was the *Birkath ha-Minim*, the Twelfth Benediction, which, Martyn argued, was especially designed to weed out of the synagogue those who believed in Jesus as Messiah.

It would be fair to say that ten years after Martyn's original proposal a considerable number of Johannine specialists have taken up his suggestion that the Fourth Gospel may be read at two historical levels. Many have also come to recognize that this Gospel's church was involved in a dialogue with a Jewish synagogue—rather than with Gentiles who were

influenced by the religiosity of the mystery cults (as most radically proposed by E. Käsemann in *The Testament of Jesus*). But Martyn's identification of the *Birkath ha-Minim* as the synagogue's device to flush out Christians in its midst was thoroughly investigated and rejected by most after very strong arguments against his reconstruction had been presented.

Two of his three essays in this book are a defense and an expansion of his original proposal. To bolster his argument he now appeals to the *Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions* 1.33-71 (*The Ascents of James*) as evidence. There he finds a parallel account of Christians being brought before a Beth Din for trial as theological seducers who are propagating a form of ditheism. According to Martyn, the Johannine church is to be seen in the mainstream of Jewish Christianity, basically concerned with what Paul called "the gospel of the Circumcision." Even the "sheep not of this fold," which will eventually join the fold, are not Gentiles but Jews of the dispersion who have also been excommunicated from their synagogues by the use of the *Birkath ha-Minim* on account of their Christianity. The "one fold" which the Fourth Gospel envisions is not the Great Church which the Acts of the Apostles represents as fully committed to the Gentile mission, but the church in which all are Jewish Christians.

According to Martyn, a perceptive reading of the Fourth Gospel allows for the identification of three periods in Johannine Christianity. The first is the period before the writing of the Gospel. During this time a group of Christian Jews were having an overwhelming success in convincing fellow Jews of the Messiahship of Jesus by an appeal to his "signs." As an aid in carrying out their mission, one of these Christian Jews prepared a "rudimentary gospel" by bringing together several representative samples of their messianic preaching. This original *gospel* Martyn identifies with the source reconstructed by R. Fortna as "the Gospel of Signs" (the work was done as a dissertation at Union Theological Seminary in New York under Martyn's direction). In this early period these Christian Jews lived happily and unmolested within the synagogue.

In the middle period, the success of the messianic group within the synagogue aroused the suspicion of the synagogue authorities. As a result, midrashic debates about the significance of Jesus became commonplace. But rather than resulting in a consensus, these debates created a spectrum of opinions about Jesus. It was to stop these divisive developments that the Twelfth Benediction was introduced and the Christians were excommunicated. This step stopped the active proselytizing, but not the flow of converts. Members of the synagogue continued to be "seduced" by the Christians, which prompted the leaders to arrest some of the messianic evangelists and eventually to execute them. The trauma of excommunication had now been compounded by the trauma of martyrdom. This new experience brought about a social dislocation which the community

worked out theologically by understanding Jesus also as a stranger among his own people. The christology of signs now gives way to the christology of the Logos hymn. The promise/fulfillment pattern of the midrashic debates gives way to the above/below pattern of two opposing worlds. The messianic group of Jews has found a new identity as Jewish Christians.

In the late period, the Johannine community holds it impossible for anyone to believe in Jesus and to remain in the synagogue. Now the Christians who had been tested and confirmed by the traumas just described make clear to their fellow Jews who believe in Jesus, but who have managed to remain in the synagogue, that their faith in Jesus, based as it is on signs, is not good enough. Thus in the late period the Jewish Christians of the Johannine community find themselves in tension with both their parent synagogue and their fellow Jews who wish to stay as Christian believers *incognito* in the synagogue.

Martyn's proposal suffers from its dependency on highly problematical evidence. The use of the Twelfth Benediction as a test to weed out Christians from the synagogue is quite doubtful. The identification of the Gospel of Signs as a rudimentary gospel has not won much acceptance. And the lengthy discussion of parallels between the Gospel of John and the *Ascents of James* is not at all convincing. Even Martyn's placing of the pertinent passages from both documents in parallel columns leaves one wondering how he could have come to the conclusion that the evidence "requires an explanation of the text of the *Ascents* which somehow involves the Fourth Gospel" (p. 80, italics his). As a matter of fact, the evidence presented in the parallel columns is extremely weak. Besides, one has to weigh also the fact that the *Pseudo-Clementines* are fourth-century documents, and the judgment that the *Recognitions* 1.33-71 are a "discreet" second-century source left pretty much unmolested by the fourth-century redactor is subject to evaluation on its own merits.

I would certainly agree with Martyn that the Fourth Gospel reflects the trauma of excommunication and persecution (see my "Footwashing in the Johannine Community," *NouvT* 21 [1979]: 298-325). But this close proximity to the synagogue does not necessitate the creation of a scenario for the Johannine Community in which its whole history is bound to Jewish Christianity. Martyn's lasting contribution to Johannine scholarship is his insight that the Fourth Gospel may be profitably read on two levels, and that what gave this Gospel its unique tone and vocabulary was a confrontation with the Jewish synagogue. The further details in the reconstruction of history that he now supplies are not quite convincing. Still, by comparison with Brown, Martyn is to be commended for making a modest proposal.

Brown uses Martyn's two basic contributions as his own starting points. From there he moves on to give a rather ambitiously detailed

reconstruction of the community's history. He also criticizes Martyn for being unable to give sufficient explanation.

Like Martyn, Brown finds the origins of the community in a group of messianic Jews who lived and worshiped in a basically Jewish setting. But Brown adds details. The group had a leader and founder: the Beloved Disciple. He had been an eyewitness of the ministry of Jesus, who in turn had previously been a disciple of John the Baptist, but the Beloved Disciple is not one of the Twelve (in his AB commentary, Brown had identified the Beloved Disciple with John the son of Zebedee). The community of the Beloved Disciple is, as much as any group of Jews could be in the 40s and 50s, within the mainstream of Judaism. Thus, like Martyn, Brown rejects the view that the group arose in the heat of a polemical confrontation, or out of heterodox, gnostic, or Gentile backgrounds. By means of the Beloved Disciple, Brown has explained the "John the Baptist connection." (He has taken seriously Culpepper's tentative suggestion that the Beloved Disciple may have been the founder of the Johannine School.)

Brown also provides the details to explain the "Samaritan connection." During this first phase, a second group united itself to the community. These were "Jews of peculiar anti-Temple views who converted Samaritans and picked up some elements of Samaritan thought, including a christology that was not centered on a Davidic Messiah" (p. 38). Thus the heterodox Samaritans together with what Oscar Cullmann (in *The Johannine Circle*) identified as Hellenist (= anti-Temple?) are not at the core of the community, but constitute its first addition.

Brown not only reads the Fourth Gospel "autobiographically" (p. 26); he also thinks that the sequence of materials in the extant Gospel represents the chronological sequence of events at the "contemporary level." Thus while the christology of the call of the disciples in chap. 1 speaks for the original group of Jews attached to John the Baptist, the christology of chap. 4 represents the entrance of the anti-Temple/Samaritan contingent. And the final title "Saviour of the World" testifies to the admittance of Gentiles into the Johannine group. Even though the community in this first phase is living unmolested within Judaism, it has its distinguishing characteristics. It already sees itself not as the renewal but as the replacement of Judaism and has changed the traditional final eschatology for a realized one. Thus, unlike Martyn, Brown finds that at this early phase the community has a sense of itself as "us" versus "them."

The second phase represents the time when the Gospel was written. Characteristic of this phase is that the community encounters unbelief on the part of Gentiles. Thus while chaps. 5-12 represent the opposition of Jews during the last part of the first phase, chaps. 14-17 represent the opposition of the world during the second phase. But the world is made

up of a whole spectrum of distinguishable dialogue partners of the Johannine community. Beside others, the followers of the Beloved Disciple are in dialogue with (1) Christian Jews within the synagogue (what Martyn has called Christians *incognito*, Brown refers to as crypto-Christians); (2) Jewish Christians with a low christology and an inadequate view of the eucharist; (3) Christians in the tradition of the Twelve, who do not accept a pre-existence christology and the Paraclete as the replacement of the earthly Jesus. Even though in the past Brown has argued quite strongly for the identification of the Johannine church with the apostolic church, he now concedes that there were sectarian elements in Johannine Christianity. But in spite of the existing tensions and the clear differentiation between the two, according to Brown, the two groups kept cordial relations. The community of the Beloved Disciple was not alienated from the apostolic mainstream. The language of the Johannine group was not a "riddle" to apostolic Christianity (as suggested by Leroy, Meeks, and others). As already mentioned, it was during this second phase that the Gospel was written.

Brown traces his third phase of the fortunes of the community through an analysis of the Johannine Epistles, which were written by a member of the "Johannine school of writers" (pp. 96, 99-101). This phase was marked by the presence of an enemy within. A secessionist group, defending a different interpretation of the tradition handed down by the Beloved Disciple, was causing a great deal of internal commotion. To defend their understanding of what the Beloved Disciple had taught, the leaders of the community began to claim for themselves ecclesiastical prerogatives, thus diminishing the teaching function of the Paraclete. Characteristic of the argumentation of the Presbyter against the secessionists is that he does not outright reject their views; instead, he qualifies them.

In the fourth and final phase of the community's history, the secessionists, representing the majority, have become gnostics (at the outset they had been neither gnostics nor docetists). The community led by the Presbyter, who wrote the Epistles, has been absorbed by the Great Church. Thus the failure of a Paraclete ecclesiology to prevent the success of schismatics eventually has driven the leadership of the community into the arms of the waiting bishops!

Brown's reconstruction, even though impressive for its cohesion, suffers from the weakness found at its methodological foundation. Even though Brown makes passing references to the text of the Johannine Gospel and Epistles, it seems that his argument is less dependent on the internal evidence than on an eclectic handling of modern proposals on Johannine history. Thus, even though he has relinquished the identification of John the son of Zebedee as the guarantor of the Johannine

tradition, he continues to defend a high view of the church and the sacraments in the Gospel. But this effort has failed to convince this reviewer that the Johannine community spoke a language that was understood by the apostolic church and was never too distant from it at any point in its history. I fail to see the logic that wishes to claim chronological validity for the story when read autobiographically, if clearly the same cannot be claimed for the story when read for the life of Jesus. Neither am I convinced that the history of the community flows smoothly into a "Johannine school of writers" who produced both the Gospel and the Epistles. Brown's repeated pointing to the Presbyter's appeal to "what was from the beginning" does not solve the problematical relation of the Gospel to the Epistles, relative to both their content and their sequence, and his appeal to the Epistles in order to solve a problem that affects only the Gospel is a *tour de force* that fails. His problem is to explain how a Gospel that was all along so close to apostolic Christianity is practically ignored by Ignatius and becomes, according to his own reconstruction, the "catalyst" for second-century gnostic Christianity. He points to the secessionist opponents of the Presbyter as the culprits, but the Fourth Gospel's being at first more influential among the heterodox than the orthodox of the second century is a fact that seems to be better explained by recognizing that it saw the light of day among Christians who were in the first century alienated from the apostolic mainstream.

Brown's effort to provide in such few pages a comprehensive picture with a wealth of detailed twists and turns will be hard to equal. Even if one disagrees with some of the major positions taken by him, one cannot fail to admire his command of the material he is handling; and whether or not one is convinced by his arguments, one cannot fail to learn from him. Whether Brown will prove 60% correct, as he hoped, it is too soon to tell. In fact, I have no idea how this could ever be assessed.

Saint Mary's College  
Notre Dame, Indiana 46556

HEROLD WEISS

Davidson, James West. *The Logic of Millennial Thought: Eighteenth-Century New England*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1977. xii + 308 pp. \$17.50.

To most people of the twentieth century, the interests, concerns, and way of thinking of those of the eighteenth century are difficult to comprehend. It is Davidson's purpose to discover for the reader the elements that made up the logic of that time—a logic that was based on concepts of the millennium of Rev 20 and especially on an understanding of the history of redemption leading up to the millennium.