JOHN'S REVELATION AND JOHN'S COMMUNITY

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When the late Professor T. W. Manson wrote his magisterial book, *The Teaching of Jesus*, he based his study, as is well known, on the evidence of the synoptic record. To justify his omission of the Johannine witness, he quoted in the introduction a dictum from Latimer Jackson to the effect that the Fourth Gospel belongs to another world; and he went on to conclude:

So it comes about that the very Gospel which seemed to Calvin to be the key to the other three has to be set apart as a special and highly complex problem on its own account.²

Since 1931, however, the face of Gospel analysis has changed considerably, and we are no longer able automatically to "set apart" the Gospel of John from the other three. Some scholars may still resist the increasingly accepted view that behind the Fourth Gospel there lies a tradition which is independent of the synoptic witness but parallel to it, and which is therefore historically respectable as well as theologically developed.³ But they cannot now ignore these suggestions. And once it is conceded, however tentatively, that the Fourth Gospel is not an isolated document in the New Testament, and that its account of the Jesus story must be considered seriously alongside that of the synoptists, a further question may be asked. Is there evidence to suggest that John's Gospel may be directly associated as well with other sections of the Johannine corpus? For if the Fourth Gospel came to birth in the context of a living community, and was addressed to the individual and corporate needs of such a circle (a conclusion which to my mind seems inescapable), it may be possible in this way to provide an immediate link, in historical,

¹ The Manson Memorial Lecture delivered in the University of Manchester on Thursday, 6 November 1986.
theological and literary terms, between at least the Johannine Gospel and Letters.

Nevertheless, even if we agree that John is a mainstream evangelist as well as a perceptive interpreter, and that his inspiration, reflected in both the Gospel and Letters, motivated the life and thought of a community gathered in some way around the beloved disciple, a third issue still needs to be raised. What about the Revelation, which also bears the name of John? Where in the Johannine corpus, if at all, does this apocalyptic work belong?

It must be said that even in these days of the "newest look" on John, when fresh status is being accorded to the Johannine Gospel and (to some extent) to the Letters, attention is seldom paid to the possible relationship between these documents and the Apocalypse; although a notable exception to this rule is to be found in the work of Professor Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, of Notre Dame University. My intention in this lecture, therefore, is to attempt to redress the balance to some extent: to consider John's Revelation in the light of the other New Testament documents associated with "John," and to investigate the possibility that behind the Johannine literature as a whole may be discerned a volatile circle with tensions and hopes of its own. By so doing I wish to join with my distinguished predecessors in this Lectureship to honour the memory of an outstanding New Testament scholar, whose work on the synoptic Gospels is timelessly significant, and provides a marker for all Gospel criticism today: including its Johannine version.

I

On any showing the Letters of John appear to be closer to the Fourth Gospel than are either the Gospel or Letters to the Apocalypse. A plausible case may be made for the common origin and even authorship of the Johannine Gospel and Epistles; but,


5 So S. S. Smalley, John, p. 40, n. 112.

allowing for its difference in purpose and literary genre, the Revelation seems at first glance to be as far away as it could be from the other parts of the Johannine corpus.

Let us take the Apocalypse and Gospel. In this discussion I shall concentrate on the links between these two main witnesses, without ignoring the testimony of the Letters, because the two longer documents provide evidence of a comparable weight. Revelation and the Fourth Gospel, for a start, belong to different literary types. Moreover, Revelation seems to be a very Jewish document, while the fourth evangelist evidently colours his account of the Jesus story with Hellenistic elements. The Apocalyptist's use of Greek has correspondingly been compared unfavourably with that of the Gospel. And while John's Revelation is pressed down, shaken together and running over with all the imagery and apparatus of futurist eschatology familiar to us from pre-Christian literature, the tense of salvation which may be said to characterise the perspective of John's Gospel is insistently present. Given such apparently marked differences between these documents, it is not surprising that Professor Raymond Brown, a leading specialist in this area, should conclude that the relationship between Revelation and the rest of the Johannine literature "remains puzzling." 7

But, on closer examination, some of the supposed variations between the Revelation and the Fourth Gospel become less formidable; and, conversely, some subtle but striking resemblances, at the ground level, emerge. I shall offer for your consideration five areas in which this proposal may be tested: ethos, theology, tradition, language and structure.

II

As long ago as 1922, Charles Gore expressed the hope that "the essentially Palestinian, not Hellenistic, origin and character" of the Fourth Gospel, "and its high value as an historical witness both to the events of our Lord's life and to His teaching may soon come to be regarded as an 'assured result' of critical enquiry." 8 It is significant that in our own day the opposite assumption of

critical orthodoxy, that there is a great distance, geographically and temporally, between the maturing of John's theology and what Paul refers to as "the beginning of the gospel" (Phil. 4.15), has been questioned so radically. The work of C. H. Dodd has, of course, been determinative in this respect. But John A. T. Robinson's challenging study, *The Priority of John* (London, 1985), provides us now with evidence of such gravity as to make the presumption of Johannine posteriority look very shaky, and to please the heart of any Charles Gore. Robinson argues that the links with "the beginning," in place and time, are sufficiently strong to suggest that the Fourth Gospel may take us as far back to source as any other. He also makes the further, more debatable, assumption that the Gospel comes directly from the apostle John himself; in which case it could take us back a good deal further.  

Robinson has proposed, then, that the ethos of the Fourth Gospel is primarily Jewish-Christian, and that its Hellenistic features derive from the environment in which the Johannine tradition was transmitted, rather than from the initial (Southern Palestinian) setting of that tradition. But the same is obviously true of the book of Revelation. The apocalyptic character of this work places it squarely and immediately within a Jewish-Christian context. So does its appeal to the Old Testament. We shall return to this point; but it is worth reminding ourselves at this early stage that the writer of the Apocalypse shares with the fourth evangelist an indebtedness to one particular and evocative Judaic theme: the Exodus-Moses motif, which appears occasionally but strongly in the Revelation. The use of such powerful Old Testament symbols as the ark (Rev. 11.19), the Lamb (12.11) and the Word of God (19.13) is a further testimony to the fact that Revelation and the Fourth Gospel are close together in their essential ethos, which is Hebraic and biblical, rather than Hellenistic and philosophical. If a Greek reference is present, and it is by no means as apparent in the Apocalypse as it is in the Gospel, it is there, as I shall argue later, because of the background of some readers in John's audience, and not because of the controlling character of his material.

12 Cf. Rev. 5.9; 8.9, 12; 10.1; 11.6; 12.13-16; 15.1, 3, 8.
III

A second way of exploring the suggestion that too sharp a wedge need not be driven between the Revelation and John's Gospel is by comparing their theologies. First, let us consider in both the approach to cosmology. The distinctive character of the fourth evangelist's theology may be located in his view that, since the Word became flesh (John 1.14), the physical and historical dimension has been invaded by the metaphysical in such a way that matter can become the carrier of spirit. In Jesus heaven and earth have been conjoined (John 1.51); and now the believer may participate, during this life, in the special blessings of eternity which have been made possible by the incarnation. Such is the characteristically "sacramental" nature of the fourth evangelist's thought.

One result of this world view is the fact that, in the Gospel, John (often with touches of irony) thinks and operates on two levels at once; so that the reader is not always clear whether the setting of the story is earthly, or heavenly, or both. There are obvious and explicit "two-level" statements, such as "the Word became flesh" (1.14), and the claim of Jesus that the Jews are "from below," whereas he is "from above" (8.23). But there is also a consistently allusive pattern of thought which is typical of the fourth evangelist. It appears in the use of verbs which can bear a double sense, such as "lifted up" (12.32), which can mean both "crucified" and "exalted"; in actions such as Jesus' "hiding" from the unbelieving Jews (12.36), which may be interpreted in a figurative as well as a literal manner; in innocent questions which carry on reflection a deeper connotation, such as the enquiry to Jesus from his new disciples, "Rabbi, where are you staying?" (1.38, using menein), or Pilate's worried interrogation at the Roman trial, "where do you come from?" (19.9). And, as Paul Duke has reminded us, it also appears in John's habitual use of irony (especially apparent in his sustained "trial" motif), as a means of ceaselessly alerting his

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16 Cf. John 15.4-7, et al.
17 See n. 15.
readers to the hidden significance of the drama which is being enacted before them.

This allusive quality of Johannine thought is exactly what we find in Revelation. The author of the Apocalypse also thinks and writes on two levels at once; for, as well as being a Christian, he shares with pre-Christian apocalyptists the Jewish (and not Platonic) idea that in heaven there exists a transcript of earthly reality, bad as well as good. So the seven churches addressed in chapters 2 and 3 belong at the same time to earth and heaven; in each case, it is the "angel" of the local community who is addressed. The seals, the trumpets, the dragon, the beasts, the plagues, the visions, the prophecies, which form the content of the seven major scenes of the Revelation, like Babylon and Jerusalem themselves in this book, carry throughout a double reference; their immediate and historical application, indeed, makes possible an interpretation beyond history. Furthermore, we should not miss the significance, and the irony indeed, of John's dual stance when it is characterised by such apparently ordinary statements as "the Lamb (in heaven) opened the seal, and there was a great earthquake" (6.12); or "I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven" (10.1). It reminds us, does it not, of the christological ascent-descent patterns of the Fourth Gospel?

In the intervals between the seven scenes of the Revelation this typically Johannine two-level thought is specially marked. There we read of the divine and the human, represented by the Father and the Son (Rev. 4-5), of the church triumphant and militant (7), of the prophetic witness attested both in heaven and on earth (10-11), of heavenly angels administering earthly plagues (15), of the world in the church (17-18), and of new life in the new Jerusalem in contrast to the old (21.1-8, the prelude to the seventh scene).

Allied to the cosmology of both the Gospel and Revelation of John is the dualism which is to be found in the two works. It is well known that the dualism of the Fourth Gospel is ethical, and not substantial. The conflict portrayed is that between good and evil; and good, in the persons of God (Father, Son and Spirit) ultimately and inevitably prevails. Such an outlook, the background to which may be located in the thought and literature of

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Judaism (rather than in any strict forms of gnosticism), belongs as well to 1 John. But it is also and entirely representative of the world of thought which dominates Revelation. There, throughout, good and evil, the church and the world, Christ and the Satan are locked into a struggle the victorious outcome of which is predictable and, indeed, known in advance (19.11-20.14, et al.).

We may conclude that the allusive thought patterns in the cosmology of the Apocalypse are typically Johannine, and echo those of the Fourth Gospel and 1 John.

IV

Secondly, the theological links between the Gospel and Revelation of John may be explored in terms of christology. The cosmology of the Gospel, with its distinctively “two-level” dimension, is directly informed by the fourth evangelist’s particular christology. For at the heart of John’s presentation of the identity of Jesus is a, balanced understanding of the person of Christ: that he is both one with man (14.28; 16.28a) and, in some sense, one with God (10.30; 16.28b). The Johannine Jesus shares the life of time and eternity, and thus enables his followers to do the same.

Such a balance is also typical of the christology in Revelation. Just as the new Jerusalem comes down out of heaven from God (Rev. 3.12; 21.2), so the exalted and triumphant Jesus promises to “come” to the churches of Asia (2.25; 3.3, 11), and is present with his earthly disciples (3.20). The one whose robe is inscribed with the legend, “King of kings and Lord of lords” (19.16), is a Lord who has been “crucified” (11.8). The Lamb has indeed been slain, but “from the creation of the world” (13.8). Take also the vision in Rev. 12 of the “woman clothed with the sun,” who brings the

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20 See S. S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John, pp. 81 f., 86 f.
21 In all parts of the Johannine corpus, however, the inevitability of victory in and through Christ cannot be detached from the inevitability and reality of his prior suffering.
22 An alternative translation of Rev. 13.8 associates “the creation of the world” with the written names of beast-worshippers, rather than with the Lamb; but to separate the modifier from its antecedent does unnecessary violence to the Greek syntax. See R. H. Mounce, The Book of Revelation (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1977), p. 256 and n. 22.
Christ to birth. It is tempting to think of her as the new Eve, the mother of Jesus. More probably, however, the reference is collective and corporate: she is not Mary, but the community from which Messiah comes. And his "birth" out of the church, in line with the thought of Psalm 2 (which is clearly in mind at 12.5, but underlies the whole passage 11.15-12.6), is regarded as occurring at Calvary (not at Bethlehem). Messianic sonship involves historical crucifixion. That balance is redolent of John's Gospel; and it links further with the fourth evangelist's soteriology, because just as he sees the death of Jesus as glorification, so St. John the Divine is well aware that the cross involves enthronement. "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and glory."

In the christological context we may briefly compare the use in John's Gospel and Revelation of three titles associated with Jesus: Word, Lamb of God and Son of man.

The name of the rider on the white horse in Rev. 19.13 is "the Word of God." Such a description might seem to link immediately with the reference to the pre-existent Christ as Logos in John 1.1, and with the tabernacling of the Word which is mentioned in John 1.14. However, the title as used in the Apocalypse is not directly related, as it is in the Johannine prologue, to the idea of God's self-disclosure in his Son. It has more to do with God's activity, the fulfilment of the divine purpose: and, in Rev. 19, this concerns the judgment of the nations. There is a more exciting connection which can be established between the Fourth Gospel and the Apocalypse in terms of "Word" christology, and this has to do with the identification of the "Voice" in Rev. 1.12 which the seer "turned round to see" (cf. verse 10). Professor J.H. Charlesworth has recently examined the use of "the voice" in Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature, and concluded that the "Voice" in Rev. 1.12 is intended as the designation of a heavenly creature or divine being. If Charlesworth is right, this means that the

24 John 17.1, et al.
25 Cf. Rev. 3.21; 5.6-14.
author of Revelation presents us at the outset of his work with a vision of the exalted Son of God (who is also like a son of man) which exactly parallels the disclosure about his person (pre-existent, but also incarnate) in John 1. Both writers are indebted to the development of the hypostatic Wisdom concept; but while one employs "Voice," the other uses Logos.

The second title for consideration is "Lamb." Four main areas of Jewish and Old Testament thought have been quarried as possible sources for John the Baptist's allusion to Jesus as "the Lamb of God" in John 1.29 and 36. These are the Passover lamb and the Tamid offering; the Aqedah; the suffering servant of Isaiah; and the lamb of the apocalyptic writings, perhaps messianic in character. In each case there are well-known difficulties; and this accounts for the fact that many commentators interpret the Baptist's confession in the light of a combination of some or all of these backgrounds. But it could be that the significance of Jesus as the "Lamb of God who bears away the sin of the world" is to be discovered not so much by appealing to individual Old Testament passages, as by acknowledging that the phrase is grounded upon a number of Jewish ideas, some of which may be apocalyptic; and this method of using the Old Testament is, in fact, typical of the fourth evangelist. Associations with the figure of the Lamb in Revelation are already beginning to emerge. Admittedly, the seer uses a different word (arnion) for Lamb, in distinction from the fourth evangelist's amnos. But the term arnion is used in Revelation exclusively of the resurrected and exalted Christ. He is the victorious Lamb who overcomes the forces of evil, and whose death removes sin. Nevertheless, his conquest has been achieved through earthly suffering, and his blood has actually been shed (Rev. 7.14). The amnos of the Fourth Gospel is potentially such a figure of victory, and probably not without the apocalyptic and messianic overtones to which reference has already been made. But historically, at the time of the Baptist's cry, the crucifixion and exaltation of Jesus had yet to take place; so that while the fourth evangelist also thinks theologically in terms of victory through suffering, the emphasis in John 1.29, 36 is perhaps on the sinbearing activity of the Lamb himself, rather

than on its final effect. Once more, the christology of the Fourth Gospel is close to that present in the Revelation.

A third phrase associated with Jesus, to be offered for consideration, is “Son of man.” The problems associated with this description are, of course, notorious; and I can do no more at this point than throw out a possible line of enquiry. The “Son of man” title (if such it be!) occurs only twice in the Apocalypse: at 1.13 and 14.14. On both occasions, however, the figure thus identified appears in a setting of judgment and vindication after suffering. And in this way the writer of Revelation exactly recapitulates, to my mind, the Son of man christology patterned in the Fourth Gospel, and indeed in the pre-Christian and primitive Christian tradition as a whole. Furthermore, the use of “Son of man” in Revelation by-passes completely the Son of man tradition in the Gospels, and goes back directly to Jewish apocalyptic; hence the Danielic form in Rev. 1.13, “one like (homoios) a son of man.” The primitive character of such a christological phrase in Revelation may well be relevant to the dating of that document; and to this matter we shall return.

V

Meanwhile, let us draw together our investigation of the possible theological connections between the two “Johns” by looking, thirdly, at their eschatology. This is likely to be one of the most impressive ways of separating the Gospel from the Revelation, since the fourth evangelist’s eschatology appears to be predominantly “realised,” while the Apocalypse seems to be

30 If so, the statement that Jesus is “the Lamb of God” is christologically important, since it speaks of the intimate relationship between Jesus and God; for it is a basic New Testament assumption that God alone can take away sin (so Mark 2.7; Rom. 3.21-26, et al.). In this way the understanding of Jesus as “Lamb” in John’s Gospel moves yet again towards that perception of his nature which is presented in the Apocalypse.
31 For a different view see B. Lindars, Jesus Son of Man: A Fresh Examination of the Son of Man Sayings in the Gospels in the Light of Recent Research (London, 1983).
34 See Dan. 7.13.
preoccupied with the end-time at the end of time. Given, however, that the literary forms of these two documents are different, and that one is precisely an "Apocalypse," there remain striking points of contact between them in terms of eschatology.

We may notice at once that, while the emphasis of the fourth evangelist's eschatology is realised, a future tense of salvation also belongs to it (cf. John 5.28-29; 14.3). Indeed, there is—as we should expect from John's "two-level" theological outlook—a characteristic tension in the Fourth Gospel between that which already exists and that which is yet to come. The visions of the Apocalypse, on the other hand, emphatically unfold the future. But, again, the scene is set on earth as much as in heaven, and what is to happen is explained within the dimension of time as well as eternity. As in the Gospel, the present points forwards to the future, and the future includes the present. So Jesus will come soon to the local congregations of Asia (2.16); indeed, he stands at the door already, and knocks (3.20). And after the seven visions of the distant future depicted in chapters 19 and 20, we still hear the exalted Lord—three times over—saying, "I am coming soon" (Rev. 22.7, 12, 20; see also 1.3). To this announcement the church's immediate response can only be, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (22.20).

Further light on this point may be shed by considering the concept of suffering in Revelation. Dr. James Kallas has argued that the view of suffering taken by the seer means that the Apocalypse is not in fact an apocalyptic book at all. It retains, he suggests, the language but not the content of primitive eschatology. According to Kallas, genuine apocalyptic (by which he means the understanding, common to Judaism, that suffering is something other than God, which he will quickly crush) faded as a result of the delayed parousia into non-genuine apocalyptic (that is, the belief, present in the teaching of Jesus and Paul, that suffering is the work of God, which he can use for correction). Thus the suffering of the seven churches in the Apocalypse, and all else that comes upon the Christian community, is regarded as being under the strict control of God and of the Lamb. Even the Satan himself, like the God-opposed forces represented in the

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36 Note, for example, the description of the fall of Babylon in Rev. 18.

Fourth Gospel, is seen as a tool in the hands of the omnipotent God.

In this study Dr. Kallas begs several questions. For example, I do not myself believe that the so-called “delay of the parousia” affected to any great extent the eschatological perspectives of primitive Christianity. But, if Kallas is at all correct, one of the most impressive potential variations between the Fourth Gospel and Revelation is again diminished. In both documents, it seems, a balanced but basically “non-linear” eschatology goes hand in hand with the theological view that God in Christ is in control of history and of the suffering which history may include.

VI

From our consideration of the possible associations between the Gospel and Apocalypse of John in the areas of ethos and theology, we pass to their putative common ground in terms of testimony tradition. We are particularly indebted to the work of C.H. Dodd and Barnabas Lindars for our present understanding of the “thematic” use of testimonia in shaping primitive Christian theology and influencing the substructure of the New Testament. We have also been made aware, in this context, that so far from there being in the early church one fixed rule of interpretation used for each Old Testament passage, different applications occurred at varying stages in the life and thought of the first Christians.

38 See S.S. Smalley, “The Delay of the Parousia.” J.B.L., lxxxiii (1964), 41-54.

39 A concept related to eschatology, and one which possibly supplies a further link between the Gospel and Revelation of John, is that of God’s wrath. Interestingly enough, Professor A.T. Hanson, in his book The Wrath of the Lamb (London, 1957, pp.178 f.), claims that the Fourth Gospel and the Apocalypse are associated in that they both consider “wrath” as the consequence of sin worked out in history and disclosed at the parousia, and also connect wrath with the cross of Christ (cf. Rev. 5.6 f.; 6.16 f.; John 3.35-36; 12.30-33; see also 1 John 3.14-16). It has to be admitted, however, that the idea and language of “wrath” are more clearly discernible in the Revelation than in the Gospel of John.


Now it so happens that the Fourth Gospel sometimes preserves the *earliest* and not the latest such application. John, like Paul, draws for his Old Testament quotation not on rabbinic exegesis but on the church's own stock of midrashic *pesharim*. He continues the tradition of interpretation in his own way, yet at the same time reveals that he is conscious of the living tradition (of passion apologetic, for example) from which his material derives. On occasions, therefore, he can reproduce the primitive apologetic with great accuracy.\(^42\) A good example of this is the one to which Dr. Lindars has drawn our special attention. The quotation at John 12.39-40 of Is. 6.9f. ("he has blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts...") is designed to account for the minimal response of the Jews to the person and work of Jesus (cf. verse 37). But, if Professor Lindars is right, this is in fact the original application of the Isaianic passage; and its use by Paul (in Acts 28.25-28) and Mark (at 4.11f.) represents a later shift of application from this question to others (why a mission to the Gentiles, rather than the Jews, became necessary; and why Jesus used parables).\(^43\)

The testimony tradition of the Apocalypse demonstrates a similar indebtedness to primitive scriptural exegesis. A single example must suffice here; and it is all the more intriguing since it includes a link with the Fourth Gospel. In Rev. 1.7, at the conclusion of the "address" and with reference (possibly in more than one sense) to the parousia of Christ, John introduces an adapted *testimonium* from Zech. 12.10, which is conflated with an eschatological phrase from Dan. 7.13: "Look, he is coming with the clouds (Daniel), and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn on account of him (Zechariah)." There are allusions to this text from Zechariah at Matt. 24.30 and John 19.37. Taking these three texts (from Matthew, John and Revelation) together, it is evident that Matthew and Revelation both have the conflation with Dan. 7.13, while John and Revelation include the non-Septuagintal *exekentēsan* ("pierced"). It is quite possible that the text behind Matthew once contained this same distinctive verb, and that all three New Testament passages were drawing in common, and independently of the Septuagint, on a piece of early passion.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., p. 285.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., pp. 17 f., 159-167, 265-272.
apologetic, adapted for their own purposes, which first accounted for the death of Jesus by crucifixion and later passed into the Christian apologetic tradition. This would have involved a shift in the application of the Danielic reference from the vindication of Christ's resurrection to that of his parousia and judgment; but such a shift would have been entirely natural for the writer of Revelation, if—as we have surmised—his eschatological viewpoint was truly Johannine.

In this area, then, it appears that the Fourth Gospel and the Apocalypse exhibit once more a striking and subtle affinity in the appeal which they both make to primitive exegetical tradition.

VII

The penultimate "test" area concerns language. One of the chief differences between the Johannine Gospel and Revelation, which has suggested to some that these two documents came to birth independently of each other, is the actual Greek employed by the writers. According to Dionysius of Alexandria, the Gospel and 1 John are written in "flawless" Greek, while the Greek of the Apocalypse is "inaccurate and barbarous." But is this fair? Bishop Westcott pointed out, a long time ago, that to speak of St John's Gospel as "written in very pure Greek" is misleading. The essential characteristics of its vocabulary and style, he maintained, are simplicity and directness. It is free from solecisms because it avoids all idiomatic expressions, and its grammar is that which is common to almost all language. The Greek of the Apocalypse is similarly direct. It is idiosyncratic, because the seer is thinking in Hebrew while writing in Greek. It has a grammar of its own; but this is at least clear and consistent, and it is not ungrammatical. The style of Revelation is the one which the writer chose to adopt for his own special purposes, and to my mind it is just as majestic, and poetic indeed, as that of the Fourth Gospel. The Greek of 1 John is also direct. But, as

44 Cf. G. B. Caird, Revelation, pp. 18f.
46 Quoted in Eusebius, H.E., 7.25.24-27.
every commentator on the Johannine Letters will appreciate, the notorious difficulties of some of the language in 1 John make it hard to accept the Dionysian commendation of its Greek as "flawless"!

Two further linguistic points may be made. The first concerns the "level" of the Greek used in the Apocalypse. When Old Testament quotations appear in Revelation, as they often do, the Septuagint version is rarely followed. Usually the writer, unlike the fourth evangelist, makes his own translation from the Massoretic Text. But when the Septuagint is used, its handling suggests at times that the writer does not know Greek very well. An example occurs in Rev. 2.27, where John follows the mistake of the Septuagint translator, citing Psalm 2.9, by imagining that the Greek verb poimainein (translated, "rule [them with an iron sceptre]") can carry the double significance, belonging to the Hebrew equivalent, of "rule" and "destroy"; whereas it can only mean the former. And in the context of Rev. 2.26-28 "rule" makes bad sense. This suggests that the writer of Revelation knew Hebrew better than Greek, but did not know his Greek as well as the fourth evangelist. Nevertheless, we should not forget that the author of John's Gospel was also a Jewish-Christian, and that he was in touch with sources which demanded a knowledge of Hebrew and, almost certainly, Aramaic. He knew Greek and Hebrew; and, with admittedly varying levels of expertise, the same was true of the writer of the Apocalypse.

Secondly, the Semitic element in the Greek of Revelation brings this work linguistically into line with the Jewish-Greek apocalypses such as the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. There are also interesting literary points of contact between Revelation and the Psalms of Solomon, written probably during the first century B.C. In other words, the Apocalypse originates from a literary, rather than spoken, milieu; and, despite the assessment just made about the writer's linguistic competence in relation to that of the fourth evangelist, St. John the Divine

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50 Cf. Rev. 2.27 and Pss. Sol. 17.26 (24); Rev. 21.24, 26 and Pss. Sol. 17.34 (31). Note also Pss. Sol. 7.5 (6) and John 1.14.
appears to have known other written forms of the language he uses. His Greek was not simply that of the market-place.\textsuperscript{51}

While it is possible, therefore, to argue that linguistically our two writers in some ways stand apart, there is no reason at all, in my judgment, to conclude from such disparity that they must have belonged to entirely unconnected circles.\textsuperscript{52}

\textbf{VIII}

The fifth and final way of comparing the strength or otherwise of the links between John's Gospel and the Apocalypse is in terms of their respective structures. Let me say at once that the common ground between these two documents is most obviously apparent at precisely this point. For both, in my view, are carefully constructed \textit{dramatic} pieces.

John's Gospel is presented not simply as a story with dramatic elements, but as a highly-wrought and sustained drama, by means of which the evangelist helps his readers to perceive the real significance of his message, and to respond to it. As I have argued elsewhere,\textsuperscript{53} two great Acts are basic to the construction of the Fourth Gospel. The first (John 2-12) unfolds the revelation of the Word to the world, and the second (chapters 13-20, basically the passion narrative) concerns the glorification of the Word for the world. At one end of the drama is the prologue (chapter 1 in its totality, introducing us briefly to all the main characters and ideas which are developed in the body of the play), and at the other end is the epilogue (John 21, setting out an agenda for the church in the future, on the basis of the exaltation of Jesus).

With consummate dramatic skill John thus expounds the theme of eternal life in and through Jesus, whom he shows his audience to be the Christ. He does so dramatically, within the overall structure I have just outlined, by selecting seven signs of Jesus,


\textsuperscript{52} The Gospel and Revelation of John also share some stylistic features and turns of phrase. Cf. Rev. 3.3 (using \textit{oun}) and John 7.6, \textit{et al.}; also 12.11 and John 15.13 (see 1 John 3.16); 14.12 and John 14.15; 15.9 f. (see 1 John 3.23 f.); 14.15 and John 4.35-38.

\textsuperscript{53} See S. S. Smalley, \textit{John}, pp. 192-203.
and associating these with seven discourses punctuated by seven “I am” sayings.\footnote{54}{Cf ibid., pp. 91 f.}

The careful and dramatic structure of John’s Revelation is no less apparent. Once more we have two major prophetic Acts (Rev. 1.9-11.19 and 12.1-22.5), divided into scenes which are made up of “sevens” (seven letters, seven seals and seven trumpets in Act 1; seven beasts, seven plagues, seven visions and seven prophecies in Act 2).\footnote{55}{There are, similarly, “sevens” in some of the subsidiary scenes in the Fourth Gospel: the blind man (John 9), for example, and the trial of Jesus before Pilate (18-19).} In between each scene the writer has provided intervals, frequently containing a hymnic response to the vision which has been unfolded. Some of these intervals are used deliberately by the writer both to reflect upon and to recapitulate the scenes immediately preceding them. Thus the second, third and fourth scenes (dealing with the seals, the trumpets and the beasts) delay the seventh part of their action through the interval to the next scene.\footnote{56}{Cf. G. Goldsworthy, The Gospel in Revelation: Gospel and Apocalypse (Exeter, 1984), pp. 54-57.} At either end of the Apocalypse, as of the Fourth Gospel, are to be found an introductory prologue (Rev. 1.1-8) and a prospective epilogue (22.18-21).

It must be acknowledged that there is a difference of scholarly opinion about the precise structure of Revelation, and also about the significance of that structure. Furthermore, as with John’s Gospel, we must resist the temptation to impose analytical schemes upon the material which do not arise naturally from it. Nevertheless, it cannot be doubted, to my mind, that (whatever its pre-history) the Revelation of John, like the Gospel, is now a structural unity which is intensely dramatic in both shape and character.

IX

We noticed at the outset that the Gospel and Letters of John stand reasonably close together, given (we may add) their difference of date and purpose. The persistent, if sometimes subtle, links between the Fourth Gospel and the Apocalypse which have just been drawn out now suggest that John’s Revelation need not
be isolated from the remainder of the Johannine corpus, but on the contrary that it forms an integral part of it.

If that proposal be accepted, we may ask in conclusion whether all three parts of the New Testament literature associated with the name of John are further connected in terms of a "church" which lies behind them. I am aware of the caution which is necessary whenever we move in these matters from literary and theological to historical considerations; and I am also aware that the existence of a Johannine community, as such, remains an hypothesis. But the available evidence appears sufficiently compelling as to force me to take the risk.

In my book on the Gospel of John, and in my commentary on 1, 2 and 3 John, I have argued for the existence of a Johannine circle which included members from both Jewish and Greek backgrounds. These two groups in John's church, I propose, had begun to "see" who Jesus was; but, unlike the more "orthodox" believers, neither had fully perceived his identity. The ex-Jewish Christians thought of him as less than God, and the formerly pagan or Jewish-Hellenistic believers found it easy to regard the Christ as other than man. Thus friction arose. I take it that the diversity of these christological estimates accounts for John's balance in his portrait of Jesus, of which we have already taken note: he is one with the Father, and also one with us; and accordingly he can be the Saviour of the world (4.42).

Before we review the possible result of John's teaching in the Gospel and Letters, punctuated as it is by his appeal for love and unity among the brethren, we may ask whether it is possible to uncover an audience of similar character behind the Apocalypse?

That a community of some kind gave rise to the writing of Revelation cannot be doubted. The seer is manifestly addressing some particular individuals and groups, rather than launching into a vacuum his exhortation and encouragement in the face of a present or future crisis. And I believe that we need look no further than the letters to the seven churches, in chapters 2 and 3, to discover something at least of the nature of that community.

57 For discussions about John's "community" see R. E. Brown, op. cit. (n. 7); also S. S. Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John, pp. xxiii-xxxi; S. S. Smalley "Keeping up with Recent Studies. XII St John's Gospel." ExpT, xcvi (1985-86), 102-108, esp. 105-107.

58 John 14.34; 15.12, 17; 17.20-21; 1 John 3.11, 18; 2 John 4-8.

59 The Letters to the seven churches of Asia form a distinct literary unit in
I see the seven churches as *Johannine* congregations, related to each other and to the "mother church," if such it may be termed, at Ephesus. (Naturally, therefore, the church at Ephesus is the first of the seven to be saluted.) The very fact that John is so direct, not to say abrasive, in the way he speaks to these groups of Christians suggests very strongly that he is intimately involved in their spiritual life. Having founded and nurtured them, that is to say, he is now writing out of responsible concern for them in a time of general anxiety and tension.  

These seven member-churches of the Johannine circle, moreover, appear to have included adherents of both Jewish and Greek descent. In Smyrna and Philadelphia there existed Jewish believers who were being subjected to active hostility from unconverted fellow-Jews (2.9; 3.9). At Pergamum, on the other hand, a section of the community (not just Jewish-Christian, necessarily) was well prepared to accommodate itself to the religious and social demands of the surrounding pagan society; hence, presumably, the reference to the "throne of Satan" in 2.13, to "the teaching of Balaam" in 2.14, and to "the doctrine of the Nicolaitans" in 2.15. (At Ephesus the Nicolaitan threat, whatever its character, was more readily resisted; cf. 2.26.) The problematic allusion to the "hidden manna" and the "white stone" with its secret (gnostic?) inscription, in 2.17, may also contain echoes which would find an equal response from those who had come out of both Hebraic and Hellenistic backgrounds. Finally, the vision of the church triumphant in Rev. 7 is of a body rooted firmly in the life of tribal Israel (verses 1-8). But it also consists in the end of an innumerable multitude from *every* nation and people and

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60 Cf. Paul and the Corinthians!
62 The Nicolaitan error may have been a (gnostic) heresy which gave rise to idolatry as well as immorality. If so, it describes a stance which was also typical of the heterodox members in the Johannine community at the time when John's Letters appeared. See S.S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, pp.xxiii-xxviii. See further C.K. Barrett, "Gnosis and the Apocalypse of John," in *The New Testament and Gnosis: Essays in honour of Robert McL. Wilson*, ed. A.H.B. Logan and A.J.M. Wedderburn (Edinburgh, 1983), pp. 125-137. Barrett reminds us that in any case apocalypticism and gnosticism are related.
language (verses 9-17). Doubtless the apocalyptic writer envisages the people of God, who will “spread his tent over them” (7.15), as a universal assembly of the redeemed. Perhaps he even regarded this church as the fulfilment, writ large, of the hopes which he entertained for his own community, in which Jewish and pagan believers together would be able to chant,

Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb (7.10).^{63}

If we are correct to assume that Revelation was addressed to a mixed community, to congregations characterised by different backgrounds, we may at this point remind ourselves of the diverse christology of the Apocalypse, to which attention has already been drawn. The balance between the portrait of the earthly Jesus and that of the exalted Christ is, as it happens, also present in the seven letters, each introduction to which echoes phrases from the opening vision of one like a Son of man, in 1.9-18, to describe the heavenly figure who walks among the lampstands, and is First and Last, and holds the sharp sword, and is the ruler of God’s creation. But this figure in glory is also the one who had died and is now alive, and who in the immediate as well as the distant future comes to his own in judgment and for salvation. In him, the seer acknowledges, human and divine, heaven and earth, time and eternity, are drawn together. Such a balance in the estimate of Christ’s person suggests that it was designed to meet the needs of a circle which was divided on this crucial issue.

I therefore conclude that John’s Revelation is indeed closely bound up with the life of John’s community. It appears to have originated from a circle with a life-setting and theology and incipient heterodoxy which connect in a remarkable way with those which I have already assigned to the Gospel and Letters of John. Where exactly, then, may the Apocalypse be introduced to the story? I shall end with my own proposals, which depend on the assumption that Revelation was the first document in the Johannine corpus to be written, not the last, and that it was composed by John the apostle.

^{63} See also the reference to the twenty-four (not twelve) heavenly thrones, surrounding God’s seat of sovereignty, at 4.4.
In my view the beloved disciple, whom I take to be John the apostle, moved to Ephesus with his followers in the 50s of the first century A.D. The reason for the move was doubtless persecution from the Jews. By that time, John had, in a Palestinian setting, handed on his own version of the Jesus tradition to his followers. At Ephesus one or more of these followers, the fourth evangelist or evangelists, then began to formulate this tradition within the Johannine circle, for purposes of worship and instruction, and also to interpret the tradition by means of seminal theological ideas, which we now recognize as distinctively “Johannine”.

But, before any written document had been formally approved or circulated, John the apostle was exiled to Patmos, some time during the 60s, as a result of the persecution under the Roman Emperor Nero. In the 70s John was released. He returned to Ephesus, where he began to write the Apocalypse, with its strong contrast between light and darkness, good and evil, and its pervading theme of salvation through judgment. These ideas, which would have been borne in upon the apostle during his imprisonment, were later to be taken up and developed in the Johannine Gospel and Letters.

Meanwhile, John’s purpose in writing the Revelation may be described as essentially that of encouragement. In a cosmic, as well as a local, context he writes to cheer the fellow-believers in his community, and to encourage their steadfastness in a situation of continuing imperial harrassment. As a brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance which were theirs in Jesus (1.9), John presents them with a vision of Christ in glory, through whom judgment on sin is mediated and the vindication of righteousness becomes possible. He shows them, in the face of a Jerusalem recently fallen, a vision of the new Jerusalem, and of God finally dwelling with his people. He reminds them that love is stronger than hate, and life more lasting than death.

But John’s encouragement has to do not only with standing fast in the faith. He is also concerned that those within his circle should maintain a right belief. The impending crisis of which he makes his readers aware is as much religious as political; and it recapitulates

For the Ephesian provenance of the Fourth Gospel see S. S. Smalley, John, pp. 148-149. For the stages of its composition see ibid., pp. 119-121.
the situation lying behind the apocalyptic literature of the Old Testament (notably Ezekiel and Daniel) to which John refers so often. For evidently there were incipient problems inside the community, as well as beyond it. And those problems seem to have been predominantly christological; although the ethical aberrancies which inevitably accompany wrong belief were not absent (so 2.14, 20; 3.17, et al.). John's balanced message and heartfelt appeal, addressed to each of the heretically-inclined parties within his church, were thus timely and relevant.

But, after his death, the writer's appeal needed to be restated and reinforced by his followers. So in the 80s the Gospel was finally edited and published by the Johannine church, as a means of undergirding historically the vision of Christ which had been transmitted by the apostle (most recently in the Apocalypse itself), and as a means of exhorting the faithful to go on believing that Jesus was both Christ and Son of God (John 20.31). By now the rage and conflict resulting from his Patmos experience, which the ageing John had worked out in the Apocalypse, had been transposed by the fourth evangelist himself into an atmosphere of peace and calm. On such a basis of resolved personal conflict the writers of John's Gospel and Letters were well fitted to address a situation of growing corporate tension.65

My suggestion is, therefore, that Revelation belongs to an early period in the life of the community for which it was composed, and that the history of John's circle may be traced from it through to 3 John. In that initial place, furthermore, the Apocalypse seems to fit naturally. Although structurally John's Revelation and Gospel are very similar, other features of the Apocalypse, in relation to the Fourth Gospel, are more primitive. Its ethos is less Hellenistic; its theology is less developed; its exegesis of Old Testament tradition is less advanced; and its use of the Greek language is less expert.

XI

It is, of course, impossible to be certain about the genesis of the apocalypse, the revelation, which was given to John so that he could show his servants "what must soon take place" (1.1). I have simply tried to draw out the immediate as well as timeless

65 I owe this suggestion in large part to Dr. Lawrence Measey.
significance of this apostolic vision, for John’s church as well as for ours, and to indicate my conviction that there is indeed a firm and important connection between John’s Revelation and John’s community.