

# One Fold

By Scott Kenney

## Other Sheep

Raymond E. Brown, a Roman Catholic professor of Biblical studies at Union Theological Seminary, and author of the two-volume *Gospel According to John* in the Anchor Bible series, identifies six religious groups in the Fourth Gospel: the Jews, Crypto-Christians, Jewish Christians, Christians of the Apostolic Churches, Johannine Christians, and Secessionist Johannine Christians. If Father Brown's analysis is correct, the popular Mormon tendency to schematize Christian history in white hat/black hat, saint/sinner, disciple/apostate stereotypes may have to be reexamined. And if he is right, we may learn historical lessons that bear on the extent to which theological and ecclesiastical diversity can flourish within "the body of Christ."

The Jews in John did not believe in Jesus. They put out of the synagogues all who acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah (9:22). They charged Johannine Christians (those through whom the Gospel of John was transmitted) with di-theism—of making Jesus a god. For their part, Brown points out that the Johannine opposition to Jewish cult and temple is "exceedingly sharp." "I think it is derivative from his high Christology that John contends that the most sacred cultic institutions of Judaism have lost their significance for those who believe in Jesus. . . . If the Jewish synagogues have expelled Christians, John's Christianity has negated and replaced Judaism. The believer in Jesus, for John, is the true Israelite."

The crypto-Christians were Christian Jews who remained within the synagogues, afraid to admit publicly

that they believed in Jesus. John attacks such believers in 12:42-43: "For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." From their standpoint, says Brown, the crypto-Christians may have considered Johannine Christians as "uncompromising and rigid fanatics determined on eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation . . . whose rudeness to synagogue authorities made expulsion a virtual necessity. Perhaps the crypto-Christians recalled that Jesus was a Jew who had functioned *within* the synagogue, as had James the brother of the Lord, as had Peter and other Christian leaders. Like the recipients of the Epistle to the Hebrews, they may have felt no necessity to have Jesus exalted over Moses, and to have their whole cultic heritage negated."

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The Jewish Christians were those who had left the synagogues because of their belief in Jesus, and yet whom John criticized because they retained Jewish tendencies and hesitated at his high Christology. These "believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men" (2:23-26). Later, in 6:53-66, the followers of Jesus divide over the question of the eucharist—whether Jesus can really give his flesh to eat. Brown believes this passage is a critique of Jewish Christian churches whose faith John considered to be inadequate.

In 7:3-5 the brothers of Jesus urge him to go into Judea to perform miracles,

"for neither did his brethren believe in him." John's is the only Gospel to say that the brothers of Jesus did not believe. "And this account was written after James, the brother of the Lord, had been an outstanding Christian who died for Jesus in Jerusalem." John's "opposition to the brothers may not be accidental; it may be part of John's polemic against the Jewish Christians, particularly those in Palestine who regarded themselves as the heirs of the Jerusalem church of James. And part of the savage language in 10:11-13 about the hirelings who are not really shepherds of the sheep, who do not protect the sheep against the wolves, may be his opposition to these Jewish Christian leaders who in his mind do not really protect the flock against the Jews." These, says Brown, were the Jewish Christians who balked at saying, before Abraham was, He is (8:25-59).

Christians of the Apostolic Churches are represented by Peter and the other Apostles at the Last Supper. Jesus prays for them, that they may be one. Later, they see the risen Lord. "Nevertheless, these disciples do not seem to embody the fullness of Christian perception. We see this when we compare them, and Simon Peter in particular, with the Beloved Disciple, who is the clear hero of the Johannine community, and whom [John] never lists among the Twelve. The others are scattered at the time of Jesus' passion, leaving him alone, while the Beloved Disciple remains with Jesus, even to the foot of the cross. John goes against all Christian tradition by insisting that there was one male disciple who never denied Jesus. And where Simon Peter denies that he is a disciple, there stands opposed to him, after his three denials, a Beloved Disciple who has not denied Jesus and who has not fled. . . .

"The Beloved Disciple sees the significance of the garments left behind in the empty tomb when Peter does not; he recognizes the risen Jesus when Peter does not. The Johannine Christians, represented by the Beloved Disciple, clearly regard themselves as closer to Jesus and more perceptive than the Christians of the Apostolic Churches. This oneupsmanship of Johannine Christianity is centered on

Christology."

Apostolic Christians, Brown points out, have "a reasonably high Christology." In John 1, four apostles recognize Jesus as the Messiah, the fulfiller of the Law, the Holy One of God, in fact, the sum of God. "But yet they are told they are to see greater things. And at the last supper, even though the representatives of the Apostolic Christians are there, the Johannine Jesus says to Philip, "Here I am with you all this time, and you still do not know me." And why does he not know Jesus? Because he doesn't know that if you have seen Jesus, you have seen the Father. He doesn't have the high Christology of the Fourth Gospel. . . . Even after the Resurrection, the scene with Thomas indicates that the faith of the Twelve can stand improvement." Some Apostolic Christians believe in Jesus as the Son of God through conception without a human father (the Gospels of Matthew and Luke), but Mark, Matthew and Luke show "no hint of pre-existence. They know a Jesus who is King and Lord and Savior from the moment of his birth at Bethlehem, but they give no signs of knowing a Jesus who says, Before Abraham was I AM."

In contrast, the Johannine Christians made several claims for Jesus beyond those made in the other Gospels: "He is the Word who is God's presence from the beginning; the only One who has heard God's voice and see his face. And now that he is descended

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## For John, Apostolic Christians do not seem to embody the fullness of Christian perception.

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from heaven, he is the exclusive means of knowing the Father. Indeed, he is one with the Father."

In ecclesiology, John "gives virtually no attention to the category of Apostle, and makes disciple the primary Christian category." Whereas other New Testament works,

especially Matthew, Luke-Acts, and the Pastorals, show an increasing institutionalization of churches, with interest in ecclesiastical offices, John relativizes the importance of institutions in favor of the living presence of Jesus in disciples through the Holy Ghost.

Brown also finds in Johannine Christianity a "nostalgic sense of estrangement." Jesus "came unto his own, and his own received him not." Only the Beloved Disciple, with whom the Johannine community undoubtedly identified, never abandoned Jesus. Consequently, he is "singled out as the peculiar object of Jesus' love," and "implicitly, the Johannine Christians are those who understand Jesus best, who are like him. They are rejected, they are persecuted, and they are not of this world, for in chapter 17 Jesus says, "You are not of this world, even as I am not of this world."

Nevertheless, in spite of their sense of estrangement and superiority, the Johannine Christians did not break fellowship with the Apostolic Christians, for at the Last Supper the Apostles are commanded "to love one another as I have loved you," and to be one. Consequently, Brown interprets the famous passage of John 10:16 ("And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd") as referring *not* to gentiles who were to come into Christianity, but "to the Johannine Christian attitude toward the Apostolic Christians. They are not of this fold, but they are the sheep of Jesus, they are his own, and they are to walk together so there will be one sheep herd and one shepherd."

"Secessionist Johannine Christians," on the other hand, followed the high christology of John to what they considered its logical conclusion: Jesus was not fully human; consequently, his death had no salvific import. They relativized the importance of earthly life and moral behavior, interpreting the freedom brought by Jesus "as a freedom from the guilt of sin." It is against the heresies of these secessionists that 1 John was written.

But, we may ask, in light of 3 Nephi 15 where the risen Lord tells

inhabitants of the American continent that *they* are the other sheep of whom he spoke, can Father Brown's interpretation stand? It can if we accept the idea that scripture can have more than one meaning, or that it takes on new meanings under new circumstances. It is no contradiction to assert that "other sheep" may have been understood as an admonition for unity among early Christian churches in Palestine, and as a connective image for American disciples as well—or, for that matter, as a reference to "other sheep" in the spirit world visited by Jesus after the crucifixion, according to subsequent Mormon doctrine.

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## The command was to love one another and to be one.

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If Father Brown's exposition of the diversity of Christian churches in the late first century is correct, we venture this inference for contemporary Mormons: early Christianity tolerated significant, strongly held differences of opinion without breaking fellowship. Had the Apostolic Christians lumped all Johannine Christians in with the secessionists and expelled them for their divergent views (emphasis on Jesus' pre-existence, neglect of the virgin birth, unusually high christology, and appeal to the Spirit as authority rather than to ecclesiastical office), we would have been deprived of one of the most sublime of Christian witnesses. One wonders if Mormons two millennia hence, with the advantages of hindsight we presently enjoy over the early Christians, will view twentieth century Mormons as an isolated enclave of sectarians, or as full participants in the body of Christ:

"For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. . . . For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of this: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you."

—1 Corinthians 12:12, 14-16, 21

## UPDATE

### Hebrew Christians

The American Lutheran Church recently suspended two New York congregations on charges that they have subordinated Christianity to Jewish religions and social customs. Ten to twelve years ago the two churches began a ministry to Jewish people, adopting Jewish rituals and calendar. They are now in the process of merging to form the "Church of Jesus the Messiah," adherents calling themselves "Hebrew Christians."

### Palestinian Support

The National Council of Churches has expressed condolences to the Palestine Liberation Organization on the murder of moderate PLO leader Said Hammami in early January. The NCC, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the American Friends Service Committee have called for an independent Palestinian state.

### Scholars Meet

At the December 28-31, 1977 annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, American Schools of Oriental Research, and Society of Biblical Literature in San Francisco, Institute teacher and professor at the UCSB Religion Department Gerald Bradford presented a paper on William James. Two LDS students from the Graduate Theological Union at Berkeley, and one from the Claremont Theological School attended the three-day conference.

Several thousand conventioners came from throughout the United States and from several foreign countries to hear eight hundred participants in lectures, seminars and group consultations. Topics ranged from "Feminist Imaging" to "The Nature and Function of the Motive Clause in Book 1 of the Hebrew Psalter," to "On Sufi Spirituality," and "Kantian Hermeneutics and Religious Ethics." One paper on "The Language of the Mormons: A Sociocultural Approach" was scheduled, but the author failed to appear.

### Anglican-Roman Catholic Consultation

Summarizing twelve years of bilateral ecumenical work, the Anglican-Roman Catholic Consultation in the United States recently concluded that the two churches are in fact "sister churches" and visible expression of their unity should be made. Though differences still exist on papal authority, the role of women and sexual morality, the report refers to the 1968 agreement of the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury that the two churches ought to strive for "unity by stages," and asks, "Must a closer relationship and even sacramental sharing [intercommunion] between us be delayed until all Anglicans and all Roman Catholics throughout the world agree on every point that the other thinks important . . .?"

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### Jehovah's Witness Decline

Jehovah's Witnesses report the first decrease in the number of active members since World War II. In 1977 U.S. membership dropped 2.6% to 530,374, and over the past two years the number of American converts has dropped 65%. Witness leaders had reportedly predicted the end of the world in 1975.

### Argentina

Fifteen Jehovah's Witnesses were recently arrested in Argentina, where they had been banned since 1976. They were later granted provisional liberty, though Jehovah's Witnesses, as well as members of the Hare Krishna movement and Divine Light Mission, remain banned by the military government as detrimental to national security or public order and morals. In February the government announced that all religions other than Roman Catholic would have to be registered.

### Gay Ordinations?

A United Presbyterian task force concluded a 15-month study in January and reported that there is nothing in the church's constitution which would prevent the ordination of homosexuals provided the candidate is approved by the ordaining presbytery. The report recommended decriminalization of private homosexual acts between consenting adults, and legislation prohibiting discrimination in housing, employment and public accommodations. A minority report suggests that homosexual persons should be encouraged toward reorientation or celibacy.

### Episcopal Schism

On January 28 four new bishops were consecrated to lead the "Anglican Church of North America," a traditionalist group protesting the Episcopal Church's ordination of women priests and modernization of the Prayer Book. The new church claims 100 parishes and 10,000 members.

### Catholic Lay Ministers

In "Lay Ministers for Tomorrow's Church" (*America*, February 4, 1978), Donald F. Brophy describes the increased activity of lay people in the Roman Catholic church since Vatican II: "Lay people are preaching, caring for the sick, administering some of the sacraments, serving as chaplains, instructing converts, leading prayer services, giving retreats and providing counseling and spiritual direction. In Brazil, the Philippines and the Dominican Republic, lay people are serving as pastors of parishes. They are not usually called 'pastors'; they have titles like 'president of the assembly,' but, for all real purposes, they are pastors . . . elected by their peers."

Brophy predicts "The 20th century may well be remembered in future church histories as the century of the lay person." He declares "priests must surrender any pretensions about having a higher or more perfect call within the church. The community itself is called, not just a few selected individuals."