“BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HAVE NOT SEEN”
(IN 20:29): JOHANNINE DRAMATIZATION OF AN EARLY CHRISTIAN DISCOURSE

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The relationship of the Gospel of John to early Jewish mysticism has been the focus of several previous studies beginning with W. Baldensperger who recognized the polemical nature of 3:3 and 3:13 and suggested that this polemic was aimed at Jewish mystics. H. Odeberg has followed suit, also arguing that the polemic contained within these verses was directed against Jewish visionaries who sought salvation through an ascent to heaven and visual encounter with God.  


Borgen believes that the polemic serves a more specific purpose: to
disseminate a doctrine in the Johannine community who maintained
that they were visionaries like Mses.3

Discussions of 1:18 have served to advance this investigation. C.
Rowland argues that the claim in this verse that only Jesus can make
God known must be recontextualized alongside the claims made by
Jewish mystics that they revealed the divine secrets. So the Fourth
Gospel contains several rebuttals against those mystics who claimed
that they knew God apart from the revelation of God in Jesus (1:18;
3:13; 5:37; 6:46).4 Rowland's discussion seems to have been influ-
enced by earlier works such as those by G. Quispel and A. Segal
who previously argued that 6:46 is a polemic against ascension and
theophany themes.5

The work of these scholars has made it clear that the Johannine
author was in dispute with mystical pre-mortem ascetic theology,
especially in verses 1:18, 3:3, 3:13, 5:37, and 6:46. To these pas-
sages, I would add the series of verses in John where Jesus proclaims
that he will not be able to be followed into heaven (at least not before
the Eschaton). No less than four times, Jesus repeats to different
audiences that "you will seek me... but where I am going, you cannot
come" (7:33-34; 8:21; 13:33; 13:36).

Indisputably, the Johannine author was discursing against the
ion of ecstatic pre-eschatological ascent and visionary experi-
ence. s to this idea that John is reacting when he makes the statements
1:18 no one has ascended into heaven except Jesus nor has anyone
seen the Father except the Son. But is it possible to further
ify the factions of this discourse from this textualized Johannine
vironment?

Developing upon the methodological model of R. Wuthnow who
 advanced our understanding of the process of articulation of
ual discourse as textual ideology,6 I suggest that in addition to
covering the ideology of the general religious environment to which
may be responding, we can also determine what I call the
igio-social horizon,” the specific religious community with which
in is in dispute, and the “discursive field,” the particular point of
ute between the two communities.

It must be recognized, however, that the religio-social horizon
presented in the Johannine text may only resemble partially the
ual community which is in dialogue with John. The actual discu-
urse will be masked due to the theoretical representation of the
ct. The articulation of the discursive field will be done on a
bolic level so that the actual features of the religio-social horizon
 incorporated at the textual level as symbolic acts and events. The
iposition between the factions is dramatized. Such dramatiza-
s provide a contrast to the religio-social horizon and evoke a space
creative reflection on the part of the author. The result of the
course between the two communities is the textualization of critical
ology which will have thematized particular features of the
izontal horizon.

In order to assist in recovering the discourse from its textual envir-
ment, three major passages will be analyzed: 14:3-7, 14:20-23,
20:24-29. This analysis will identify more precisely the discursive
ld as understood by the Johannine author and reveal the nature of
igio-social horizon. It must be remembered, however, that this
rizon will only be reflective of Johannine space and thus will only
r a relative relationship to the actual discourse itself. Common to
ese passages is the portrayal of (Judas) Thomas as the Fool who
ot have the correct understanding of the way to heaven or of the
ner of encountering God since he insists on visions.

3 Borgen, Philo, John and Paul, 103. There certainly were those who maintained
that Moses was divinized. See Quispel's comments on Eusebius' Tragedian in "Judaism,
udic Christianity, and Gnosis," The New Testament and Gnosis: Essays in Honour of
Clark, 1983) 48-52.


(Nederlands Historisch-Archeologisch Instituut in Istanbu 34; Istanbu Nederlands
istorisch-Archeologisch Instituut hist Nabije Oosten, 1974) 211. Segal, Two Powers,
213-214.

6 R. Wuthnow, Communities of Discourse (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University
The dialogue in the first of these passages, John 14:3-7, centers around the crucial term “the way (ὁ δρόμος):”

“And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may also be. And you know the way (ὁ δρόμος) where I am going.” Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way (ὁ δρόμος)?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way (ὁ δρόμος), and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also; henceforth you know him and have seen him.”

According to R. Bultmann, “the way” is a reference to the mythology that, when the soul separates from the body, it journeys to the sacred realm often guided by a superior being. In other words, it is the route to heaven and divinity.

A vivid instance of this in Christian literature is seen in the Syrian Odes of Solomon 39:9-13, where the Lord’s footsteps to heaven create a path for his own to follow and, in this manner, “the Way has been appointed for those who cross over after him, and for those who adhere to the path of his faith, and who adore his name” (39:13). In Ode 11, the hymnist tells us that “I ran in the Way in his peace, in the Way of truth” (11.3). This verse functions as the beginning of a song about the hymnist’s ascent to Paradise (11.16), his vision of the Lord (11.13), and his transformation into a light-being (11.11). The Lord caused the mystic odist to “ascend from the regions below” (22.1) and this is the Lord’s “Way” which is “incorruptible” (22.11).

This use of the concept “the way” as the heavenly route is already present in Judaism as evidenced in Philo. In De Migratone Abrahami 168-175, Philo explains that Exodus 24:1, “Come up to thy Lord, thou and Aaron and Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the Senate of Israel,” means that the soul must “come up” to “behold the Existent...

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7 R. Bultmann, John, 603f; where he refers to Hippolytus, Ref, 5.10.2, 5.16.1, 5.26.23; Exc. Theod. 38, 74; Irenæus, Haer. 1.13.6; 1.21.5; Epiphanius, Panarion, 36.2.5-25; Origen, Celsus 6.31; Acts Thom. 148, 167; Odes Sol. 39.9f; [ep. 7.3, 13f.; 11.3; 22.7, 12.13, 22.13, 35.4f.; 41.11]; Mand. Lit. 38, 77, 97f., 101, 132f., 134f.; Joh-B. 198.5f. 199.5f.; 239.14; Ginza 95.15, 247.6ff., 271.36f., 395.3ff., 429.16f., 459.14ff., 487.5ff., 523.23ff., 550.1ff.; C.H. 1.26, 1.29, 4.11, 7.2, 9.10, 10.21. He states that the parable usage of the way in the Old Testament (e.g. Ps 143:10; Is 63:14) is of little relevance here, 604 n. 5. Furthermore, he notes that “the way” belongs together with “the door” in 10:7 which mythologically represents the entrance into life or the world of light, 377-378 n. 7, 604 n. 5. Cf. idem, “Die Bedeutung der neuerchristlichen mittelalterlichen und mittelalterlichen Quellen für das Verständnis des Johannevangeliums,” ZNW 24 (1928) 100-146, esp. 135. Odeberg, Fourth Gospel, 519-527, convincingly argues that the expression “the door” in John 10:9 refers to the door or gate of heaven being opened and is in the same spiritual reality as described in John 1:51.


9 Philo, Migr. 171.

seen God is blessed but this visionary experience is not possible while one is in the body. One "must train his soul in this life, in order that, when it has entered the other world, where it is permitted to see God, it may not miss the way (δύος) which leads to Him."

Since the goal of the ascent and vision is to become divinized like Hermes, the way of Hermes is "the way of immortality (εως ημιτονεια)," the ascent to the ninth heavenly sphere (Disc. 8-9 63.10-14; cf. C.H. 10.7; 13.3). 11 So the Hermetics speak of the experience of becoming God (C.H. 13.3,10,14) by casting off materiality, ascending to heaven, and being absorbed into God (C.H. 1,24-26; 10.13; Disc. 8-9 57.28-58.22; cf. C.H. 11.20, 12.1; Asclep. 6.22). Thus, they explain: "If you ask about God, you ask also about the beautiful. Only one way (δύος) travels from here to the beautiful reverence combined with knowledge" (C.H. 6.5; cf. 11.22). 12

A passage from the Exerpt of Stobaeus 2B.3-8 contains a synthesis of this theology. Tat is taught about "the only road that leads to Reality (ἡ πρός αληθείαν δύος)" (2B.5). 13 This way is a "holy and divine way (δύος)" which is difficult to travel while the soul "is in the body" (2B.5). 14 The soul must feud against the vices and strive towards the Good (2B.6-7). Once the soul has won this contest, it is able to "mount upward" and begin the "journey to the world above" (2B.8). The soul yearns for the Good and must learn to know the Father so that the soul is freed and will not fail "to know whether it must wing its upward flight" (2B.3-4).

Connected to this is the discussion in Corpus Hermeticum 13 where Tat inquires about the way to be "born again" (13.3). Hermes explains that he is incapable of relating anything about this except to share a specific visionary experience when he left his human body and assumed "an immortal body (δυναμων ομοιωματος)" (13.3). 15 He goes on to describe a vision of his spiritual Self. He tells Tat that the Self must be cleansed of the twelve vices under the influence of the ten powers of God. Hermes, of course, is referring to the way of ascent through the planetary spheres, the removal of particular vices at each sphere, and the final absorption into the divine (cf. C.H. 1,24-26). Since this has happened, the new spiritual birth is possible and with it, divinity (13.10). Thus the road of ascent and vision is the way of birth. 16

It is significant that all these texts, whether describing pre- or post-mortem ascent, agree that δύος means the path that the soul will take when it goes to heaven. It is quite certain that the Johannine author employs the terminology the way in this technical sense. As Thomas' reply makes sense: "Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" (14:5). It appears that Thomas' answer reflects the popular association of δύος with ascetic heavenly ascents.

At the same time, the disciple Thomas is portrayed by the Johannine author as the fool in this discourse because of this ignorant remnant. Clearly, in this passage, the Johannine author attributes Thomas the confession that he and others with him are ignorant of the true way or route to heaven.

It is probable that here we see evidence of the textualization of course from the point of view of the Johannine community. The thorn, by deliberately characterizing Thomas as a fool in this passage, condemns the hero of Thomistic Christianity. Moreover, his inclination of the discourse points to a particular feature of the phrase: the journey or ascent to heaven. John tells us that such ascent is not necessary, that Jesus himself is the only "way" into heaven. This is stated in contradiction to the Thomistic belief which, from Thomas' answer in 14.5, appears to have encouraged proleptic heavenly ascents.

The next pericope which requires attention is John 14:20-23 where certain Judas who is distinguished from Judas Iscariot (Ἰωάννης οὗξ Ἰσαρίωτης) 6 is given the dunce cap:

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14 Ibid., 14.
16 C.H. Dodd, The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953) 44-55, discusses C.H. 13 and notes "expressions which recall the language of the Fourth Gospel and the First Epistle of John" including the notion of birth. He argues that there is "real similarity in thought" behind these verbal parallels.
18 The gloss, "not Iscariot," was probably added to this passage by the Johannine author since Judas Iscariot had left the scene earlier.
Judas is concerned about the method by which the followers of Jesus will be able to have a vision of Jesus when he is not in the "world" anymore. Judas has interpreted the phrase "manifest myself to him (ἐμφανίζομαι αὐτῷ ἐματυτοῖ)" to refer to a theophany since he demands to know how the followers of Jesus will be able to behold the manifestation while others in the world will not see it.

The word ἐμφανίζειν is used only in the New Testament in John 14:21-22 in this sense, but it is a word which is associated with the theophany in Exodus 33:13-18 which is quoted by Philo in Legum Allegoricae 3.101. He states that Moses represents the "mind more perfect and more thoroughly cleansed, which has undergone initiation into the great mysteries" and which lifts its eyes "above and beyond creation" and "obtains a clear vision (ἐμφασία) of the unseen One" (Leg. Al. 3.100). Thus Moses says in Exodus 33:13: "Manifest Thyself to me (ἐμφασίζομαι μοι αὐτῶν), let me see Thee that I may know Thee (γνωστός ἰδώ σέ)" (Leg. Al. 3.101). Philo exeges this passage, stating that Moses meant that he did not want God to be manifested (ἐμφασίζον θεοῦς) to him "by means of heaven or earth or water or air or any created thing at all" (Leg. Al. 3.101). He believed that one can only receive "the clear vision (ἐμφασία) of God directly from the First Cause Himself" (Leg. Al. 3.102). Thus Philo employs the term ἐμφανίζειν to describe the vision of God himself.

According to the Johannine author, it is actually a misunderstanding that Judas expects Jesus’ manifestation to be a theophany. When Jesus speaks of manifesting himself in the future to his followers, according to John, he intends to do this through a manifestation of divine love, not through a mystical visionary encounter such as that which Judas is anticipating.

The identity of this "Judas" is arguably linked with the Syrian Thomas tradition where the apostle Thomas has the unique appellation "Judas Thomas." Careful analysis of the use of this name in

ous Syrian texts suggests that, in addition to Judas Iscariot, there is a disciple of Jesus whose actual name was "Judas." In order to sanctiate him from Judas Iscariot, the nickname "Thomas" or "z&" was appended to Judas probably at an early date. Thus, "Judas Thomas" is preserved in the Syrian traditions. Eventually the word "Juda" fell out of favor because it was so closely linked to the betrayal of Jesus (how often do we hear of anyone naming their child "Judas" even today?). As the name "Judas" became inorable, "Judas" was dropped in some traditions and the disciple addressed by his nickname "Thomas" or "Twin." That John was aware of the fact that "Thomas" was only a title ringing "Twin" and not the actual name is evidenced in John's use of "ὁ λεγόμενος Διόνυσος" which is added to the name Thomas 1:16, 20:24, and 21:2 (cf. 14:5D). Moreover, the presence of the disciple's actual name "Judas" in 14:22 probably suggests that the author had performed a similar renaming of the other disciple as well.

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14:22 represents a very early layer of tradition belonging to the Johannine community about the disciple “Judas Thomas.” It is highly significant that the Johannine author has assigned the same role to Judas in 14:22 as he does to Thomas in 14:5 and, as we will see, in 20:25: that of a fool who misunderstands salvation as ascent and vision mysticism.  

Thus it would seem that, in the Gospel of John, there are preserved two of the stages in the development of the name “Thomas,” the earliest stage where this disciple was known by his actual name “Judas,” and the later stage where the disciple was beginning to be known by his epithet “Twin” or “Thomas.” This signals that the Johannine author was familiar with early Syrian Thomasine traditions and had some type of contact with the Thomasine community.  

In this story we see remnants of the discourse between these two communities. The discursive field, as articulated by the Johannine author, focuses on the question of visionary experience. Fragments of this discourse recovered from its textual environment tell us that the Thomasine tradition expected theophany experiences whereas the Johannine Christians did not. In textualizing the discursive field, the Johannine author has painted the hero of Thomasine Christianity as an ignoramus, a fool who repeatedly misunderstands salvation.

The third passage which merits analysis is John 20:24-29 which reads:

Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe.” Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing.” Thomas answered, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”

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23 Of interest as well is the foolish statement made by Thomas in 11:16. Thomas does not seem to understand that life is imparted through belief in Jesus as God’s Glory on earth and that Jesus’ journey to Lazarus’ tomb was intended to witness to this (11:15).

24 R. Schnackenburg, The Gospel According to St. John, 3 vols. (New York: Crossroad, 1968) 1.152, concludes that “the Johannine tradition, originating in Palestine, was subjected to Syrian influences before it reached Asia Minor (Ephesus), where it was fixed and edited.”

25 Contra: Charlesworth, Beloved Disciple, esp. 267.

26 Or, Blesed are those who have not seen” 391


29 Recently, C. Riley, Resurrection Reconsidered: Thomas and John in Corinth (Fortress, 1995).


In both of these models, we find at the finale of the sequences of functions, and thus at the conclusion of the narrative, a cluster of elements which are particularly significant for the present analysis of John 20. Greimas articulates them in the following manner:

16. unrecognized arrival of the hero
17. difficult trial versus success
18. recognition of the hero
19. exposure of the false hero versus revelation of the hero

In the episode where Mary encounters Jesus, we discover the actant, the hero, playing out his proper function at this point in the narrative: his incognito arrival. Function 17, the victory, has been ingeniously hinged by the author on element 18, the recognition of the hero. Jesus, by overcoming his death, is successful in his trial. This victory is revealed through Mary’s exclamations, “Rabboni!” (20:16) and “I have seen the Lord!” (20:18). Thus, Mary, by recognizing Jesus, acknowledges his victory over death.

This cluster of functions is duplicated, and therefore emphasized and reinforced in the second episode when Jesus appears to the disciples who are in hiding. He shows them his hands and his side. Through this visionary experience, the disciples are able to recognize Jesus. The text reiterates the theme of vision: “The disciples were glad when they saw the Lord” (19:20). Here again the emphasis is on identification, through vision, of the hero Jesus who has arrived incognito. This identification is a celebration of Jesus’ victory.

A common topos in ancient Greek literature is the identification of a character through the exposure of his wounds and the touching of his body. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Odyssey when the disguised hero, Odysseus, arrives at his home. Eurykleia is asked to wash Odysseus’ feet after his long journey (19.357-360). Odysseus withdraws into the shadows in order to keep his identity secret (19.388-389). But alas, as she takes his feet into her hands, she notices a scar which a boar had inflicted on him years ago (19.392-394). Thus lines 457-475 read:

The old woman, holding him in the palms of her hands, recognized this scar as she handled it. She let his foot go, so that his leg, which was in the basin, ill free, and the bronze echoed... Pain and joy seized her at once, and both eyes filled with tears, and the springing voice was held within her. She took a board of Odysseus in her hands and spoke to him: “Then, dear child, you are really Odysseus. I did not know you before; not until I had touched your hand all over.”

Special connection between identifying the hero and touching him right out here and goes a long way to explain John 20:17 where Jesus and exclaims, “Rabboni,” as she recognizes him. A generic topos spilled over into literature about the dead so site often the dead are found displaying their wounds to the

For instance, when the murdered Clytemnestra appears in the scene in Eumenides, she cries out, “Do you see these wounds πληγάς ταῦτα?” (103) as a way to identify herself and her death, and to elicit pity for her dreadful fate. There are scenes in Virgil’s Aeneid which speak to this end, scenes in Aeneas is able to identify several of the dead by their death. For example, the Trojan hero stops by the side of the woman He sees “her wound still fresh,” “recognizing her dim form in kness.” In that instant he wept and spoke softly to her, “So the hey brought me was true, unhappy Dido? They told me you led and had ended your life with the sword” (6.450-458). In this, he sees Deiphobus standing there, “his whole body red and his face cruelly torn. The face and both hands were in The ears had been ripped from the head. He was noseless and s” (6.450-458). Perhaps the most vivid example is Aeneas’ of the dead Hector found in 2.272-273, 277-279:

A dream, behold, before my eyes most sorrowful Hector seemed to be esent and be weeping copiously, as of old dragged by [Achilles’] chariot.

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30 Ibid., 225.
31 My thanks to Dennis MacDonald who reminded me of this story in his response to my presentation of this paper at the 1995 SBL Annual Meeting in Philadelphia.

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1, 148.
black with gory dust, and pierced in his swollen feet with thongs...wearing a squalid beard and hair clotted with blood, and those many wounds he received around the walls of his fatherland. 37

Thus the ancient readers of the Gospel of John would have understood the display of the death marks in the second pericope to be his badge of identification. So the story emphasizes that Jesus showed them his hands and side. This display revealed his true identity and celebrated his victory over death. Thus the story builds on the premise that the disciples identified Jesus by seeing him.

Finally, in the crucial third episode, the climax of the narrative, we find Thomas “the Twin,” the one who is reported to have missed the resurrection appearance of Jesus to his disciples (20:24), singled out. The reader expects Thomas to receive the third vision in a row and identify Jesus on this basis, following the pattern set up in the two previous encounters. The reader may even be waiting for Thomas to finally be absolved from his past misunderstandings since he has been chosen for his own special vision of Jesus.

Thus the narrative functions of the first two episodes are triplicated here. They are amplified to the extreme. Thomas does not believe the reports of the others that they have seen the Lord (20:25). He must see for himself Jesus and the death wounds.

Therefore, Thomas’ statement in 20:25, “Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe,” is a rhetorical intensification of the storyline begun in 20:20 when Jesus showed his death wounds to the other disciples in order to reveal his identity to them. Like Ulysses in the Odyssey who did not recognize Odysseus until she had touched his scar, Thomas must handle the death wounds before he recognizes Jesus and is able to proclaim his identity.

So the story may surprise the reader when Jesus appears to Thomas and rebukes him, “Do not be faithless, but believing” (20:27), because Thomas confesses his belief that Jesus is God on the basis of his vision of Jesus (20:28). The effect of this rebuke has a dyadic function in the narrative. First, the Johannine author has written Thomas into the role of the actant, the false hero, and has forwarded the movement of the narrative so that we find function 19 being articulated: the false hero is exposed through the revelation of the hero’s identity. By identifying the specific actor, Thomas, with the nt, the false hero, the Johannine author is driving home his point the hero of the Thomasine Christians is really no hero at all. 38

Second, the Johannine author has created space for his own message for his critique of the visionary experience and his praise of the experience. The exposure of the false hero erupts in the climactic narrative in verse 29 where Thomas is admonished by Jesus that visions in art are not necessary for belief: “Have you believed because you have seen me? (Ὅτι ἐδάκρυσέ με πεπιστεύκατε) Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe (μακάριοι οἱ λέγοντες καὶ ἐφοράντες) (20:29). Clearly, a conflict is set up here between the false hero, Thomas, who insists that a visio Dei is necessary, and the hero, Jesus, who rebuts this in favor of faith.

The Johannine story, therefore, should not be confused with the post-resurrection narratives. It was not meant to be understood as a demonstration of the corporeality of Jesus’ resurrection. It should be noted that ancient readers were familiar with the notion that the dead soul could interact with the living. It could be had, and even made love to. 39 So for the dead Jesus to appear and push was not necessarily a demonstration of his corporeality. 40 Luke has to inform his readers that Jesus’ appearance was not appearance of his spirit as they supposed, but of “flesh and bone”: “See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have” (Luke 24:39). How different from John’s statement in 20:25, where Luke’s subjective qualification: “for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have,” does not appear.

The Johannine scholar, J. Ashton, in his balanced monograph on the Gospel of John, warns us against plunging into a morass when perusing this story, of reading beyond the intent of the author as the statement of B. Lindars: “According to the Jewish idea of a bodily resurrection presupposed by John, Jesus is touchable, and only able to invite Thomas to handle him.” 41 Ashton reminds us to keep the author’s point of the story foremost in mind: “If John stated this story, as there is every reason to believe, it was not,

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37 Ibid., 148.

38 For a summary of the ancient texts, see Riley, Resurrection, 51-58. In this discussion he makes obvious the dispute among the ancient Greeks over the palpability of the dead soul.

surely, to stimulate his readers to reflect upon the tangibility of risen bodies, but to impress upon them the need for faith.\footnote{41}

Based on this reading of the gospel, I therefore disagree with G. Riley’s suggestion that John 20:24-29 represents a dispute between the Johannine community and the Thomasine Christians over the issue of bodily resurrection.\footnote{42} Aside from the fact that the intent of John 20:24-29 is not to confirm a fleshly resurrection but to criticize visionary experience in favor of faith, it must be noted that nowhere does the Gospel of Thomas mention resurrection as a spiritual raising.

In Locus 51, it is said that the “rest of the dead” has already happened, but the nature of this resurrection is not discussed. It is clear that many early Christians including Paul held that the resurrection had already started with Jesus’ own resurrection. Some of these Christians, especially those who espoused an encratite lifestyle like the Thomasites, interpreted Luke 20:34-36 as evidence for the fact that their life on earth now was part of this new era, the age of the resurrection. They believed that they had to imitate the angels in the way that they conducted their lives (Clement of Alexandria, Strom. 3.12.87).\footnote{43} But nothing is delineated regarding the nature of this resurrection.

Thus I maintain that this story is not about bodily resurrection and must be distinguished from Luke 24:36. Rather the impetus of this story for the Johannine writer is encapsulated in the climatic saying attributed to Jesus which blesses those who have faith in Jesus even though they have not had a visionary encounter (20:29). Behind this articulation we can reconstruct the discursive field. For Johannine Christians faith in Jesus was the basis of their salvation, whereas for the Thomasine Christians, the mystical visionary encounter was paramount. The discource between these communities on this subject is preserved here from the perspective of the Johannine community which presents its “correct” version of soteriology that developed as a result of the discourse.

Clearly, in each of these three scenarios, Thomas is the actant, the false hero, a fool who misunderstands the path of salvation. In the words of C. Barrett: “Thomas...appears in John as a loyal but dull disciple, whose misapprehensions serve to bring out the truth.”\footnote{44} According to John, Thomas’ misunderstanding is that he believes that in order to achieve life, one must seek the “way” to Jesus, the route of ascent into heaven, and a visio Dei.

The methodology of articulation when applied to the Gospel of John has borne results. It has revealed a discourse between the Thomasine and Johannine Christians.\footnote{45} The discursive field has emerged as a dispute over soteriology, specifically over the validity of prophetic visionary flights to heaven. The assumption of this methodology is that the Johannine author is not painting an arbitrary picture of the apostle Thomas, the hero of Syrian Christianity, when he portrays him as a false hero whose mystical soteriology is corrected by Jesus. Thus he creates his discursive field by dramatizing actual features of the religio-social horizon and incorporating them at the textual level. The articulation certainly mirrors Johannine space and perspective, reflecting only partially the historical discourse itself.

These conclusions become more than provocative because they can be substantiated by the Gospel of Thomas itself, which promotes a visionary scheme of salvation. There is evidence that the Thomasine Christians were mystics seeking visions of God for the purpose of immortalization.\footnote{46} Such a scheme defines Jesus’ role as the esteemed model mystic and mystagogue. Each individual becomes responsible for saving himself. It may be against this consequence of the Gospel of Thomas’ soteriology that John reacts so harshly.

In any event, John disparages this system and, in response, articulates his own system which centers around the transforming essence of faith experience. This experience is more than cognitive belief. It is experiential. In Jesus’ absence, the Paraclete or Spirit has descended to earth. Now the divinity of Jesus is encountered through the Spirit, particularly in the two sacraments, Baptism and the Lord’s

\footnote{41}{J. Ashton, Understanding the Fourth Gospel (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991) 514.}
\footnote{42}{Riley, Resurrection, 107-125.}
\footnote{44}{Barrett, The Gospel According to St. John, 382.}
\footnote{45}{The implications for dating the Thomas tradition and perhaps even the Gospel of Thomas are paramount. Since the Johannine tradition is connected with Palestine and Asia Minor (see N. 29), it is quite possible that the author was familiar with the lyran Gospel of Thomas. If John is writing in response to the Gospel of Thomas itself rather than traditions associated with it, this would suggest a first century date for the composition of the Gospel of Thomas probably around 70-80 CE. This lends support to S. Jefferies’ recent and convincing arguments for a 70-80 CE date for Thomas; refer to his discussion in The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus (Syracuse: Polebridge, 1993) 113-120.}
\footnote{46}{On this see A. D. De Conick, Seek to See: Ascend and Vision Mysticism in the Gospel of Thomas (VCSP 53; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990).}
Supper. But how John develops this ideology is a subject for another essay.\(^7\)

I leave this essay, however, with a few comments on a passage from the Acts of John 90:

He took us three (John, James, and Peter) likewise up the mountain, saying "Come with me." And again we went; and we saw him at a distance praying. Then I, since he loved me, went quietly up to him, as if he could not see me, and stood looking at his hinder parts; and I saw him not dressed in clothes at all but stripped of those <that> we (usually) saw (upon him), and not like a man at all. (And I saw that) his feet were whiter than snow, so that the ground there was lit up by his feet; and that his head stretched up to heaven, so that I was afraid and cried out; and he, turning about, appeared as a small man and caught hold of my beard and pulled it and said to me, "John, do not be faithless, but believing, and not inquisitive."

This was written in Syria shortly after the Gospel of John\(^48\) and preserves a story in which John, not Thomas, is rebuked by Jesus: "John, do not be faithless, but believing." And what provoked this rebuke? That John went up a mountain (which is a metaphor for ascent), and was afraid of the vision he had of Jesus as the Glory?\(^49\)

It is plausible that this represents the theoretical construction of continued discourse between the mystic Christians of Syria who applauded Thomas and those who continued to follow John. Here they remind the Johannine Christians that visions of God are essential to the Christian faith experience. So they remember and portray not a Doubting Thomas, but a Doubting John.

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\(^7\) I will take up this subject in a paper to be delivered at the 1996 Annual SBL Convention in the Early Jewish and Christian Mystician Consultation: "He who sees me sees him who sent me" (Jn 12:45): The Johannine Theologian and Early Christian Mysticism." See also my forthcoming Faith Mysticism in the Gospel of John: The Johannine Community as a Community of Discourse, to be published by Sheffield in the Supplements to JETS.
