

A Life of Jesus as Testimony: The Divine Courtroom and the Gospel of John

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Legal disputes, trials and vindication before the divine judge all play their part in early Christian lives of Jesus. Each of the Synoptic Gospels relates how during his mission Jesus of Nazareth was engaged from time to time in controversy with groups such as the Pharisees and Sadducees about the interpretation of Torah and how at its end he was arrested, tried by a Jewish council and then by the Roman procurator, Pilate, before being crucified by the Romans. Each also claims that, despite this ignominious conclusion of his mission, he would be vindicated as the Son of Man in the divine courtroom. But one Gospel, the Gospel of John, stands out from the others, as it adapts this traditional outline, elaborates on its forensic language and themes and makes the notion of a divine courtroom with its metaphor of a lawsuit or trial on a cosmic scale one of the major ways in which it interprets the life of Jesus and its significance.¹

1. Divine Courtroom Imagery in the Gospel of John

Initial appreciation of the distinctiveness of the Gospel of John (GJ) in its appeal to divine courtroom imagery can be gained through observing what it does with the Synoptic outline sketched above. It has the most extensive Roman trial scene, which it makes the centrepiece of its passion narrative and in which the issue of who is the real judge in this trial is highlighted (cf. 19:13).² A final trial before a Jewish council in Jerusalem is omitted and replaced by a short interrogation by Annas, and instead the major part of Jesus' public teaching mission is formulated as an extended trial before Israel and its religious authorities (cf. 5:1-12:50). In place of the brief controversies in the Synoptics about such matters as sabbath observance and purity

¹ This paper is a version of an essay that will appear in eds. S. Holtz and A. Mermelstein, *The Divine Courtroom in Comparative Perspective* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, forthcoming). Participation in the symposium that preceded this publication provided the opportunity to revisit and reflect again on some of the issues originally explored in Lincoln 2000. Given the constraints of this paper, readers will need to indulge its author when they are referred on occasion to the much fuller treatment of some of its observations in that earlier monograph.

² Interpreters of 19:13 differ only about whether its wording indicates that the irony of who is judging whom is implicit, with Pilate taking the judgment seat, or is explicit, with Pilate seating Jesus on the judgment seat. See e.g. Meeks 1967: 73-76; Lincoln 2000: 133-35; Kensky 2010: 239-40; Parnsenios 2010: 38-39.

laws, which culminate in a memorable pronouncement by Jesus, there are long disputations or mini-trials with the opposition the GJ frequently and notoriously designates as ‘the Jews’ as its equivalent to the Synoptics’ ‘this generation’ or ‘this evil generation’ (cf. e.g. Mark 8:12; Matt. 12:39,45; Luke 11:29).³ In GJ’s controversies the issues of the Synoptic Sanhedrin trial, particularly Jesus’ messianic claim, his talk of himself as Son of God and his alleged blasphemy, are already thrashed out and attempts made to arrest and kill him (cf. esp. 10:22-39).

The frequency of forensic language in GJ is another indicator of its distinctiveness. The noun ‘witness’ or ‘testimony’ (μαρτυρία) occurs fourteen times in comparison with four times in the three Synoptics together and the verb ‘to witness’ or ‘to testify’ (μαρτυρεῖν) thirty three times in comparison to twice in the three Synoptics. The verb ‘to judge’ (κρίνειν) is employed nineteen times in GJ as opposed to six times in Matthew and six times in Luke. Although the noun ‘judgment’ (κρίσις) occurs eleven times in John as compared with four in Luke, its use is not quite as striking, since it is also a characteristic term in Matthew where it appears twelve times.⁴ Legal proceedings aim to establish the truth and this forensic sense is one of the major connotations of the term ἀληθεία, which occurs twenty five times in this Gospel as opposed to seven times in the three Synoptics together. The adjective ἀληθής, ‘true,’ is found fourteen times in John as compared with once in Mark and once in Matthew and its cognate ἀληθινός features nine times in comparison with once in Luke.⁵

But these bare statistics cannot tell the full story. Whereas in the Synoptics John the Baptist is primarily characterized as the herald of a coming judgment and the forerunner of the Messiah, in GJ he is portrayed almost exclusively as a witness to Jesus, and this Gospel introduces a major figure, who does not appear in the Synoptics at all, the Beloved Disciple, who, because of his intimate relationship to Jesus, serves as the ideal witness. Reference to the

³ Throughout this paper ‘the Jews’ refers to this corporate character within the narrative. Some of GJ’s references to ‘the Jews’ have no negative connotations and are simply neutral or descriptive, others indicate that this group has a divided response to Jesus, but just over half have in view those Jews who have an unbelieving or hostile attitude to Jesus and therefore function as the main opposition. For discussion of this phenomenon from a variety of approaches, see e.g. Bieringer et al. 2001: esp. 229-356.

⁴ On the divine courtroom aspects of judgment in Matthew, see Kensky 2010: 210-23.

⁵ Parsenius 2010: 49-85, adds ‘to seek’ (ζητεῖν) as indicative of GJ’s forensic language, making a substantial case that the verb takes its force both from Jewish Wisdom traditions and from Greek legal rhetoric and that hostile seeking of Jesus is a form of legal investigation.

testimony of John twice interrupts the Gospel's prologue (1:6-8,15) and in its epilogue the narrative as a whole is attributed to the true testimony of the Beloved Disciple (21:24; cf. also 19:35). In this way the notion of testimony provides an *inclusio* that frames the Gospel as a whole and indicates that it is itself to be seen as the written testimony in a legal process. Whereas in the Synoptics Jesus is presented as the agent of God's claim upon the world in terms of inaugurating God's rule or kingdom, in GJ's testimony that claim is now depicted in terms of God's salvific judgment, which, through Jesus as its unique agent, inaugurates 'life' or 'eternal life.' In the Jewish Scriptures God's righteous judgment and God's salvation are often paralleled and frequently the setting for appeals to divine judgment was that Israel was experiencing injustices and oppression and crying out for God to intervene and provide for Israel's well-being. For God to establish justice was for God to right wrongs and to restore the conditions necessary for life to flourish. The divine courtroom functions in GJ as part of its claim that God's end-time judgment for life has begun ahead of time in a decisive way through what took place in Jesus. Its protagonist is characterized as himself both a witness and a judge. Major statements of Jesus' mission are formulated in these terms. In 18:37 he tells Pilate, 'For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth' (cf. also 3:11,31-33; 7:7; 8:14,18), while earlier in 9:39 he says, 'I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind' (cf. also 5:22,27-30; 12:47,48). Not only his words but also his deeds contribute to these roles. The miracles or signs serve as testimony to his significance (5:36)⁶ and, through their bringing of life and well-being in abundance, function as present realizations of salvific judgment.

2. Deutero-Isaiah's Divine Courtroom Scenes as Source

There can be little dispute that this metaphor of a cosmic trial is pervasive in GJ's depiction of Jesus and his significance.⁷ But what led to this author's shaping his biography of Jesus in such a

⁶ For elaboration of the role of the signs as forensic evidence, see esp. Salier 2004: 34-39; 44-45; 75-76; 117-19; 146-47; 169-70; 173-77 and Parsenius 2010: 87-128.

⁷ For a review of previous scholarly engagement with this theme, see Lincoln 2000: 4-6 and now for updates the secondary literature in Köstenberger, 2009: 436-56, Parsenius 2010 and Kensky 2010: 223-42. Mention should also be made of Asiedu-Peprah 2001, which contains helpful exegetical analyses of the controversies associated with the sabbath in John 5 and 9. Although it begins its analysis with discussion of 'the OT *rib*' (11-24), this is unfortunately skewed by an

fashion? Apart from the elements already present in the Synoptic tradition that were conducive to this treatment, there appear to be two primary candidates for having fuelled his imagination in elaborating the tradition in terms of the divine courtroom. The first consists of literary and cultural influences in the Hellenistic world of Second Temple Judaism and the second, to be considered later, is the specific set of circumstances from which he is writing. As regards the former, in his recent monograph, *Rhetoric and Drama in the Johannine Lawsuit Motif*, George Parsenius has helpfully explored how this Gospel's forensic themes resonate with the world of Graeco-Roman legal rhetoric and Greek tragedies, where there is indeed a close and mutually influential relationship between the discourse of the lawcourt and the dramas of writers such as Euripides and Sophocles.⁸ It is certainly illuminating to read GJ in the light of this material, yet, as Parsenius concedes, apart from the likelihood that its author would have been affected by the 'theatricalization of ancient culture,' it is impossible to know how much of this material he would have known or read. 'We can know almost nothing with certainty about what he read, apart from the Old Testament.'⁹ It is indeed the Jewish Scriptures in Greek translation, particularly Deutero-Isaiah, that provide the major literary catalyst for the evangelist's use of the lawsuit motif.

insistence on treating this only as a historical phenomenon, which, it is claimed, was a two-party juridical controversy rather than a trial. There is no discussion of Deutero-Isaiah or indeed of any of the prophetic adaptations of the pattern, including its use as part of controversies with the nations, and so a recognition of how the *rib* -pattern functions in new ways in such literary contexts as part of a broader metaphor is completely missing. Correspondingly, the analyses of the two sections of the Gospel fail to interact with the Jewish Scriptural use of the *rib* -pattern and are inadequately related to the overall use of the controversy metaphor in GJ as a whole. Bauckham 2006: 384-411 also recognizes the importance of the cosmic lawsuit, though he employs it to pursue his argument that the testimony of GJ is that of a reliable eyewitness.

⁸ Parsenius 2010: *passim*; see also Brant 2004: 140-49, linking the *agōn* of tragedies to the controversies in GJ, and Kensky 2010: 63-118, a chapter entitled 'The Divine Courtroom After Life: Order and Chaos in Greek and Roman Literature,' which underlines that Greek drama put the question of the justice of divine activity on stage to be judged before the same audience that regularly attended trials and lawsuits.

⁹ Parsenius 2010: 28. Parsenius 2010: 44-45 makes clear that he sees his own work as supplementing rather than displacing any connection between John and biblical models.

We know that the evangelist read this part of Isaiah's prophecy, because he quotes from it three times (LXX 40:3 in 1:23; LXX 53:1 in 12:38; and LXX 54:13 in 6:45).¹⁰ And it is in this part of Isaiah that the *rib*-pattern, the prophetic or covenant lawsuit, with its frequent references to judgment and witness is dominant. Although there is scholarly debate about whether the passages in which this pattern is found should be seen as a discrete genre and whether they should be designated as disputations or trial speeches, there is broad agreement that in particular Isa. 42:18-25; 43:22-28 have features of a lawsuit between YHWH and YHWH's people, and that, in an extension of the motif, Isa. 41:1-5; 41:21-29; 43:8-13; 44:6-8 and 45:18-25 have the characteristics of trial speeches of YHWH against the nations.¹¹ In other prophetic oracles too there are the questions and assertions associated with disputations (e.g. 40:12-31; 44:24-28; 45:9-13; 46:5-11; 48:1-15; 49:14-26; 50:1-3). When disputation and trial speeches are the form in which YHWH's sovereign purposes and actions on behalf of Judah and Israel are disclosed, the divine throne room and its heavenly council of Isa. 6:1-5, the nerve centre of the universe, is also being seen as the location of the divine judge, as the heavenly courtroom. In the context of exile in and return from Babylon the contests with the gods of the nations dominate, Israel's God serves as both judge and prosecutor, and the purpose of the contests is to show that although Babylon appears to control history, the real ruler is Israel's God with the immediate issue being whether or not YHWH is the cause of Cyrus' advent and Babylon's downfall. Interspersed with the trial scenes of the nations are oracles of salvation and assurance for Israel, indicating that even in the contest with the gods of the nations, it is Israel that is being addressed. In Isa. 43:8-13, for example, the nations are called to bring into court the witnesses for their gods who will establish and speak the truth (ἐπιπάτωσαν ἑλθῶν - LXX 43:9). When no evidence is forthcoming on behalf of the gods, Israel is called to testify in this contest of truth. 'You are my witnesses (LXX – μάρτυρες)... and my servant whom I have chosen' (43:10,13). In both 43:10 and 43:13 the LXX has two witnesses, adding God's witness (κὼγω μάρτυς) alongside Israel's, so that God's role in the courtroom involves judging, prosecuting and witnessing. The truth to be established is that YHWH is the only God whose fulfilment of predictions demonstrates

¹⁰ On the use of explicit Isaiah citations in GJ, see Williams 2005: 101-16; 2006: 107-24.

¹¹ Cf. e.g. Westermann 1969: 15-18; Schoors 1973: 239; Melugin 1976: 43-63; Nielsen 1978, though there is some disagreement among these and other scholars about the precise delimitation of these textual units. Goldingay and Payne 2006: e.g. 135-36 are content to call such passages 'court scenes.' On the divine courtroom in Deutero-Isaiah, see also Kensky 2010: 36-39.

sovereign control of history. In this contest of truths Israel is being addressed, as can be seen when both its ability to be the witness and the content of that witness are summed up in the clause – ‘so that you may know and believe and understand that I Am’ (LXX 43:10 – ἵνα γνῶτε καὶ πιστεύσητε καὶ συνῆτε ὅτι ἔγω εἰμι).

The courtroom scenes involving YHWH and Israel make clear that YHWH has become the defendant, the one accused by the Judeans in exile and those remaining in Jerusalem. The accusation is that YHWH has abandoned the people and been blind to their fate and deaf to their cries (cf. also 40:27). So in 43:26 YHWH invites the people to the courtroom – ‘Let us come to a judgment (LXX – κριθῆμεν); set forth your case, so that you may be proved right (LXX – δικαιωθῆς).’ YHWH, however, is ready for this invited move, having already turned the people’s accusations back on them and delivered an indictment. They are the ones who are deaf and blind, because of their failure to perceive why their plight has come upon them (cf. 42:18-20). YHWH has not been inactive but is indeed the one who has brought about their plight as an expression of justified wrath at their disobedience (cf. 42:22-25). This use of courtroom scenes and motifs, however, is made within an overall context of reassurance where salvation oracles ensure that indictment is not YHWH’s last word. Indeed, Deutero-Isaiah begins and ends on a note of assurance – ‘Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God’ (40:1) and ‘For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands’ (55:12). An invitation to this salvation is even extended to the nations, those from the ends of the earth (LXX – οἱ ἄπ’ ἄσχατου τῶς γῆς), if they will turn to YHWH (45:22,23).

Terms and themes from the divine courtroom scenes spill over into the rest of Deutero-Isaiah. In the LXX the noun κρίσις, ‘judgment,’ occurs in 40:27; 42:1,3,4; 49:4,25; 50:8,9; 51:4,7; 53:8; 54:17, and the verb κρίνειν, ‘to judge,’ in 49:25; 51:22. The ἔγω εἰμι, ‘I Am,’ formula for YHWH’s self-predication as the one true God is frequently employed. In addition to four occurrences in trial speeches (cf. 41:4; 43:10,25; 45:18), the formula in this absolute form is also found in 46:4 (twice), 48:12, and 51:12. Elsewhere ἔγω εἰμι is used with a predicate, for example, ‘I am the Lord’ (45:8,19), ‘I am God’ (45:22; 46:9), ‘I am your God’ (48:17), ‘I am the first’ (48:12), ‘I am he who comforts you’ (51:12), or ‘I am he who speaks’ (52:6). In the courtroom scenes the evidence for YHWH as the one true God who is sovereign over history is provided by the continuity between God’s predictive word and its fulfilment. This notion also

appears in 42:9 and 46:10,11 and is reinforced at the end in 55:11 – ‘. . . so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.’ For this reason YHWH can be said to proclaim the truth (45:19) and the function of witnesses is to experience and perceive the correspondence between YHWH's word and YHWH's deed so that they can confirm the truth of that word (41:26; 43:9). Israel's role as servant-witness entails bringing forth judgment to truth (LXX 42:3 – εἴς ἡλήθειαν ἕξει κρίσιν). YHWH's identity as the one God who speaks the truth, which the courtroom rhetoric establishes, is seen elsewhere as a concern for establishing YHWH's glory, the honor of his reputation. Indeed the claim is that YHWH has acted or refrained from acting for the sake of his name and will not give its glory to any other (cf. e.g. 42:8; 48:9-11). Yet YHWH will also choose to give glory to Israel, since thereby YHWH will be glorified – ‘You are my servant, Israel, and in you I will be glorified’ (LXX 49:3; cf. 44:23; 45:25; 49:5; 55:5). The servant's witness is to be a light to the nations, exposing darkness and curing blindness (42:6,7; 49:6,9). In this calling of bringing justice the divine spirit will be upon the servant (42:1) and it can be said that God has sent both the servant and the spirit (LXX 48:16 – καὶ ἐν κύριος ἐπέσταλκεν με καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα ἀποστολῆς). Not only have the claims of YHWH been under dispute but also the vocation of the servant will be a contested one. According to 50:6-11, the servant will face abusive opposition and the language of the courtroom returns with adversaries who will confront, contend and condemn. The servant is nevertheless confident that the courtroom is ultimately that of YHWH who will provide vindication. Though justice from humans is denied him (LXX 53:8 – ἡ κρίσις ἀποστολῆς ἔρηθη), the servant will be lifted up and glorified (LXX 52:13 - ὑψωθήσεται καὶ δοξασθήσεται) and this will be with a glory not from humans (LXX 52:14 – ἡ δόξα . . . ἐκ τῶν ἀνθρώπων).

3. Reworking of Deutero-Isaiah's Divine Courtroom Themes in the Gospel of John

These themes from and associated with Deutero-Isaiah's courtroom scenes are all replayed in GJ and in the process reconfigured. The cosmos remains the theatre in which the divine judgment proceedings are in play and the courtroom motif becomes even more of an overarching framework as Jesus' life and significance are depicted. In GJ the two controversies – between God and the nations and between God and Israel – are brought together, as the former becomes God's judgment process with the world and the latter is treated as an integral part of this, in

which in fact those Jews who respond negatively in the new judgment process function now as major representatives of the unbelieving world.¹²

Whereas Deutero-Isaiah's courtroom scenes and their rhetoric function largely as metaphors for God's dealings with the nations of the world and with Israel that are meant to shape the imagination of the readers, in GJ the forensic metaphors are also linked to judicial and quasi-judicial events being played out in the actual lives of Jesus and his followers. The cosmic trial informs the narration of specific controversies between Jesus and 'the Jews' that function as mini-trials during his public mission, of a court scene at the Jewish council where a sentence is passed on Jesus in his absence (11:47-53) and of Jesus' trial before Pilate, where the Roman proconsul, as the chief representative of the nations, and the Jewish religious leaders, as the representatives of Israel, come together as the unbelieving world's opposition to God's agent and the truth of his witness. In this way the narrative involves an intricate mix of literal controversies and courtroom scenes and the corresponding judicial metaphor of a cosmic trial in which God is enacting salvific judgment. For GJ the latter provides the true perspective on the former and, through the use of the extended metaphor, God's lawsuit is not confined to human courtrooms or public sites of disputation but the divine courtroom, with the exposure of ultimate allegiances that it brings, invades the whole of human life.

It is the overarching metaphor, drawn from Deutero-Isaiah, that allows the various stages of controversy in GJ's narrative world to be seen as integral to the one judgment process of God putting the world on trial. This cosmic trial unfolds in two main stages – through the life of Jesus and then through the continuing witness of his followers and the Spirit. The first stage itself has two parts: the ongoing controversies or mini-trials with their failed attempts at carrying out an unofficial sentence during Jesus' mission¹³ and then the culminating trial before Pilate and the death sentence that this time is effected. It is this first stage that is the decisive one, since, through Jesus' death as his hour of glory and through the further vindication of the resurrection, God is to be seen as having already rendered the verdict that the judgment at the end of history will confirm (cf. 5:28,29; 12:48). But in the meantime, there is a second stage that extends

¹² On this relationship, see esp. Kierspel 2006.

¹³ The proposal of Parsenius 2010: 70 that the controversies during Jesus' mission should be seen as an investigation and that the only trial is that before Pilate does justice neither to the force of the overall metaphor nor to the attempts to enforce a sentence (cf. e.g. 5:18a; 7:1b,25,44,45; 8:59; 10:31,39), which go well beyond investigation.

beyond the narrative into the time of the readers. During this time God's lawsuit continues through the witness of Jesus' followers and its case must still be argued in a world that has yet to recognize the authority of the verdict already rendered.

In the overall trial God is still, of course, the supreme judge but is represented now by Jesus as God's uniquely authorized agent. Jesus repeatedly employs the language of agency, describing himself as sent by God or the Father or speaking of God as the one who sent him, and in such contexts the verbs πέμπειν (25x) and ἐποστέλλειν (17x) are used interchangeably. People's response to Jesus as the sent one is therefore also their response to God as his sender (cf. 5:23,24,38; 12:44; 13:20). But for GJ this sending is not simply on a par with that of the prophets or other human agents of God; it is an extension into history of an intimate pre-existent relationship between the Logos and God, between the Son and the Father (cf. e.g. 1:1,2,18; 17:5). In his representation of God as judge, Jesus' mission statement about judging (9:39), cited above, is to be coupled with the one that follows in 10:10 – 'I have come that they might have life and have it in abundance' - because the goal of such judging is the positive verdict of life. Since in his judging Jesus is doing the will of the one who sent him (cf. 5:30; 12:48,49), responsibility for judging can be attributed to either Jesus or God or both. Jesus can say that the Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son or the Son of man (5:22,27) but then state that God is the ultimate judge (8:50) and he himself judges no one (8:15). Immediately the latter statement is qualified by the dynamics of the sending relationship – 'even if I do judge . . . I am not alone, but it is I and the Father who sent me' (8:16). Similarly, the witness of Jesus' words is formulated in terms of his unique relationship to God and his sending by God. As the fully authorized agent, he speaks the words of the God who has sent him (cf. 3:33,34). Like all human witnesses, Jesus speaks of what he has seen and heard, but there is a striking difference, because what Jesus has seen and heard and what becomes the content of his witness are heavenly things, the proceedings of the divine courtroom (3:11,12). On occasion Jesus accedes, at least formally, to the legal demands that there should be more than one witness in his case (cf. 5:31; 8:17). But even such instances serve to highlight that ultimately Jesus is testifying about himself and his relation to God. Despite the law, such testimony is to be deemed to be true and self-authenticating because of Jesus' unique identity (8:14). At the same time the complete dependence of the Son as agent on the Father as authorizer enables their witness, like that of YHWH and the servant in LXX 43:10, to be depicted as a collaborative one – 'I am the one who witnesses about myself and the Father who sent me witnesses about me' (8:18). And it is because Jesus'

witness has this status that his words can also function as the criterion of judgment, either for condemnation or for eternal life, on the last day (12:48-50). In this way too Jesus takes on the various roles YHWH played in Deutero-Isaiah's courtroom scenes – judge, prosecutor or accuser but also defendant or accused. In both the trial scenes of 5:19-47 and 8:12-59 with their disputations and interrogations he begins by having to defend against an accusing opposition the witness of his deeds or words and the claims they represent but then moves to counter-accusation and judgment. The latter include echoes of YHWH's accusations against Israel – 'you have never heard' (5:37b, cf. LXX Isa. 48:8) - and employ similar tactics of turning the tables on accusers as both Abraham and Moses, who have been used against him, are employed to indict the opposition (5:45-47; 8:33-40).

Because this Gospel views Jesus as the divine Logos become flesh, in his witness he is not only the divine representative but also takes on the role Israel was meant to have in the contest of truth as servant-witness and as light to the world, exposing darkness and opening the eyes of the blind (cf. 1:9; 3:19-21; 8:12; 9:1-12; 11:9,10; 12:35,36). Just as the witness of Deutero-Isaiah's servant would be contested and lead to abuse, suffering and death but be vindicated in the divine courtroom, so it is in the case of Jesus. Indeed, in one of its distinctive formulations GJ employs the 'lifting up' language of the servant's vindication with a new double meaning that combines suffering and glorious vindication. In a threefold passion prediction Jesus asserts that as Son of man he will be lifted up in Roman-style execution on a cross that will also be his exaltation (ἄψώω - 3:14; 8:28; 12:32-34). In the juridical setting of Deutero-Isaiah the divine glory or honor was seen to be at stake, a glory that would be bestowed on Israel, as YHWH would be glorified in the servant, in a way that enhanced YHWH's own glory. Similarly, in GJ Jesus can state just before his passion, 'Now the Son of man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him' (13:31). Because of the unity between Jesus and God, in this narrative's judgment process both God's glory and Jesus' glory are at stake. Its prologue indicates that this divine glory was present throughout Jesus' mission for those with eyes to see it ('we saw his glory' – 1:14). In his public mission the witness of the signs in particular manifest Jesus' glory (cf. 2:11; 11:4,40) and towards its end there is the announcement that the hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified (12:23). During the mission Jesus asserts that it is the Father who seeks his glory and indeed glorifies him (8:50,54) and the reason the divine prerogative of judging is delegated to Jesus is that all may honor the Son. So bound together is the honor of Jesus with that of God that 'anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the

Father' (5.22,23). The second half of the main narrative then depicts Jesus in the hour of his glory and invites its readers to see his departure from the world in death by crucifixion, which in normal evaluation would be seen as the greatest humiliation and shame, as in fact the supreme moment of that glory (cf. 13:31,32; 17:1). The glory accompanying the vindication of Deutero-Isaiah's servant was not 'from humans' and failure to see Jesus' glory is attributed to the opposition's judgment which has become so influenced by human conceptions of honor and glory that it does not employ the right criteria in evaluation and therefore cannot see divine glory when it is before their eyes (cf. 5:44; 7:18,24; 12:43). In GJ's perspective the Logos does not lay aside divine glory in taking on flesh and in suffering; rather in Jesus his incarnation and death become vehicles for its expression.

The functions of Deutero-Isaiah's servant-witness and judge come together again in one of the more remarkable features of GJ. As witness, Israel was to believe, know and testify to YHWH's being 'I Am.' Now the language found in LXX 43:10 is taken up as Jesus in his witness calls for his audience to believe (πιστεύσητε - 8:24) and know (γνώσεσθε - 8:28) that I am (ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι). The difference is that this divine self-predication has become the witness' reference to himself. The narrative leaves no doubt about the significance of this formula on the lips of the main character, because immediately after the next of these pronouncements of ἐγώ εἰμι without a predicate in 8:58 there is the attempt to stone Jesus for blasphemy. Similarly, the possibility of simply taking the 'I Am' of 18:5 as a straightforward identification of himself by Jesus to Judas and the accompanying police and soldiers is removed by the depiction of the latter's response, 'they stepped back and fell to the ground' (18:6) - the typical response to a theophany. Significantly, this incident is the fulfilment of the other earlier saying that employs the absolute ἐγώ εἰμι when Jesus predicts his betrayal - 'I tell you this now, before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I Am' (13:18,19). In this way, as in Deutero-Isaiah, the evidence for the claim rests on the reliability of the claimant's predictive word and its correspondence with what ensues. In having Jesus utter the divine self-predication, GJ indicates that witness and divine judge are to be seen as sharing the same identity.

Deutero-Isaiah depicts the divine Spirit as having been placed on the servant (42:1), promises a pouring out of the Spirit on the servant's descendants (44:3) and speaks of the sending of the Spirit alongside the sending of the servant (48:16). The writer of GJ elaborates on this sending of the Spirit by linking it more closely to the courtroom theme, elaborating on the Spirit's forensic roles

in 13:31-16:33, the so-called Farewell Discourse, in which Jesus prepares his followers for the second stage of the cosmic trial. They are to continue his mission as servants (13:14-17; 15:20) and as witnesses - ‘You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning’ (15:27). Like that of Jesus, their witness will be contested, and Jesus tells them that they will face the hatred of the world, expulsion from the synagogue and even death (15:18-16:4). But the disciples will not be alone as they carry out their vocation; the Spirit will accompany them. On four occasions this Spirit is designated in a way distinctive to GJ, as ὁ παράκλητος, ‘the Paraclete’ (14:16,17; 14:26; 15:26; 16:7-15), and on three of these is further designated as ‘the Spirit of truth’ (14:17; 15:26; 16:13). In this way the Spirit’s function is highlighted as advocacy for the truth of Jesus’ cause in the cosmic trial. In legal contexts παράκλητος has a clear primary connotation of advocacy (it became a loan word in Hebrew and Aramaic with similar force). It referred not to a professional legal office but to a person of influence, a patron or sponsor, who could be called into a court to speak on behalf of defendants or their cause.¹⁴ The most likely background for the term is in the Jewish Scriptures and Second Temple Judaism with their interest in intercessory figures who functioned as advocates, sometimes in the heavenly court, and whose advocacy could sometimes take the form of counter-accusation. A similar role for the Spirit in relation to Jesus’ followers is to be found already in the context of trials in the Synoptic tradition (cf. Mark 13:9-11; Matt. 10:17-20; Luke 12:11,12) and that tradition is likely to have been the catalyst for the more explicitly forensic depiction of the Spirit here in GJ. In the first reference, in 14:16, Jesus calls the Spirit ‘another Paraclete,’ underlining that his own mission has involved advocating both God’s and his own cause and that the Spirit, who will be sent, will be his successor, continuing his forensic role in the ongoing trial. Through that role the double witness required by the law will also be continued, because ‘When the Paraclete comes, . . . he will testify on my behalf’ (15:26). Just as Jesus was accompanied by the witness of the Father, so now his followers are accompanied by the witness of the Spirit. This divine Advocate will aid disciples in their witness to the truth, because, as the Spirit of truth, he will guide them into all truth (16:13,14; cf. also 14:26). He will maintain and enhance the reputation and honor

¹⁴ Brown 2003: 170-234 rejects forensic connotations for the term ‘Paraclete’ in favor of a core meaning of broker or mediator as part of the patron-client model she applies to analysis of GJ. There is no doubt that the role of the Paraclete does have this broader mediating function but in a courtroom setting this clearly becomes more specifically one of advocacy. Brown’s insistence on ruling this out leads to a strained interpretation of 16:8-11, which fails to see that the world remains on trial before the divine judge.

of Jesus that has been at stake, since ‘he will glorify me’ (16:14). As was the case with Jesus, the Spirit in his advocacy can move from witnessing to prosecuting, as he presses home the divine verdict in the trial, convicting the world about the issues in the trial and overturning its values and the criteria for judgment that it has used (16:7-11).¹⁵

4. Social Function of the Divine Courtroom and the Gospel of John

If we press further our earlier question as to why this biography of Jesus is shaped by such pervasive forensic features and why therefore the courtroom metaphors of Deutero-Isaiah had such an appeal to its author, we need to venture into the disputed question of the setting from which GJ emerged. The move from a text to its historical and social context is fraught with hermeneutical difficulties and a certain amount of inevitable circularity, especially in the case of an ancient text where there is also a paucity of supporting external data. What we are in search of here, then, is the most plausible hypothetical reconstruction of the broad contours of GJ’s setting that can be derived from clues provided by its narrative. The major clues are to be found in the nature of GJ’s Christology and the terms in which opponents within the narrative’s intra-Jewish debate dispute this and in the three references to followers of Jesus being expelled from the synagogue (9:22; 12:42; 16:2). In Deutero-Isaiah’s courtroom scenes, when the accusers, whether the nations or Israel, are invited to present their case, no case is forthcoming. In contrast, on various occasions in GJ the opponents of Jesus express their accusations or the narrator supplies them (cf. 5:18; 7:12,27,42,52; 8:13,48; 9:16,24,29; 10:21,33). Most frequently the accusations arise from Jesus’ statements about his relationship to the one who sent him, whether these are Messianic claims or, more particularly, assertions about being Son to the Father that indicate, in the view of the opposition, that he is making himself equal to God and therefore, in terms of the Mosaic law, show him to be a blasphemer and sinner who was leading the people astray. Explicit claims by Jesus to this effect during his mission together with attempted refutation of them are all but absent from the Synoptic tradition. The debate makes sense only when Jesus’ followers came to such convictions about him as a consequence of their belief in his resurrection and were met with resistance from other Jews. In this way the controversies of a later period are read back into the story of Jesus.

¹⁵ On the various forensic roles of the Paraclete, cf. also Kensky 2010: 230-32.

The first mention of Jesus' followers being made ἑπισυνάγωγος in 9:22 illustrates this perspective. Whereas in the farewell discourse Jesus predicts expulsion from the synagogue as a future event for his followers after his departure (cf. 16:2), here in the case of the man born blind (9:35), and then later in 12:42, this excommunication is depicted as already taking place. The narrator explains the unwillingness of the blind man's parents to identify Jesus as his healer as motivated by fear of the religious authorities – 'for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue.' This appears to be anachronistic on all counts.¹⁶ It requires that during his lifetime people in general and not just an inner group of disciples were confessing Jesus as Messiah and doing so in such numbers as to upset synagogue authorities. It then requires that those authorities had come to an agreement about how to act in such cases and that such action should take the form of expulsion from the synagogue. Furthermore it suggests that believing someone to be the Messiah would in itself be sufficient reason for such action, when, as the example of R. Akiba, who held Simon bar Koseba to be Messiah, attests, this belief might have been controversial but did not run the risk of expulsion. Holding this belief about someone who was perceived as a lawbreaker and as having died a shameful death doubtless made it more controversial but in fact what gave offense, as the rest of GJ's narrative makes clear, and what would have activated disciplinary measures for blasphemy and apostasy is the claim about the nature of this particular Messiah as the Son of God who was one with God the Father.

External evidence, beyond other New Testament texts, for such expulsionary action to have been taken against a group of Jewish Jesus-followers in the first century CE is disputed. It appears far more likely, however, that the nature and intensity of the controversies with opponents in GJ's narrative reflects the experience of such a group than that, as a few hold, these references are rhetoric meant to justify the voluntary withdrawal from the synagogue on the part of Jesus-followers. It is also far more likely that there were a range of synagogue responses to claims for Jesus that varied from toleration to antagonism and that the experience reflected was in one particular location rather than the result of a general ban formulated at Jamnia and linked to the twelfth of the Eighteen Benedictions. It is also likely that the experience was a traumatic

¹⁶ Despite the recent attempt of Bernier 2013 to argue for a plausible setting in the life of Jesus by taking "synagogue" as a reference to the municipal assembly in Jerusalem and proposing that a Jerusalem elite used their informal influence in order to expel from this assembly those attracted to Jesus and holding messianic hopes for him.

one that had involved interrogation and trial and that, since excommunication was a substitute for the earlier death penalty for apostasy and blasphemy, this decision entailed not only being cut off from the synagogue's meetings but also a much broader social ostracism and shaming. The detailed justification for such historical conclusions cannot be provided here.¹⁷ All that is needed for the present discussion is the plausible assumption that, whatever the actual history, the social memory of GJ's writer and those he represents (cf. the communal 'we' in 1:14,16; 3:11; 21:24 and the reference to 'the brothers and sisters' in 21:23) recalls its recent past in terms of intense controversy within the synagogue resulting in their excommunication. No doubt the synagogue leaders would have had their own version of this past but this is how it was experienced and remembered by those this Gospel's writer represents. This collective memory has continued to have a major impact on his imagination and has significantly shaped his re-telling of the life of Jesus.

Gemser opened his seminal article on the *rib*-pattern by placing the lawsuit in the context of the frequency of quarrelling and disputes in Israelite life.¹⁸ This particular presentation of the life of Jesus emerges out of just such quarrelling and disputing. The impact of such factors on the genre of ancient biography should occasion no surprise. As Cox explains, 'Biography was from its inception a genre that found its home in controversy. Biographers . . . were self-conscious mediators of specific traditions, and their works had both apologetic and polemical aims, apologetic in defending, affirming, and sometimes correcting opinion about a hero; polemical in suggesting by the strength of the defense, and sometimes by outright attack, the unworthiness of other traditions by comparison.'¹⁹ It is also therefore no great surprise that GJ's author would find the metaphors of the *rib*-pattern as developed in Deutero-Isaiah congenial to his depiction of the significance of Jesus that had provoked this fierce first century CE dispute. For those on the side of the dispute from which GJ emerged and whose group memory included expulsion from the synagogue the divine courtroom metaphor served a similar rhetorical function as did that of Deutero-Isaiah for those who were affected by exile from Jerusalem and Judea. For the latter, their experience had called into question YHWH's promises of salvation and well-being for

¹⁷ See the discussion and interaction with secondary literature in Lincoln 2000: 263-85. On what expulsion from the synagogue in the first century CE would have entailed, see also the dialogue between Reinhartz 2007: 333-42 and Lincoln 2007: 353-72, esp. 360-69.

¹⁸ Gemser 1955: 120-22.

¹⁹ Cox 1983: 135.

Israel and with them YHWH's claim to be the one true God whose just purposes were being worked out in history. The courtroom scenes, in reaffirming and establishing YHWH's identity and reliability and giving a new perspective on Babylon as oppressor, functioned as part of Deutero-Isaiah's overall message of consolation and reassurance. For those whose memory was of ostracism and excommunication from the synagogue and therefore from the majority group to which they had previously belonged, the author's reworking of the divine courtroom motif provided a means of reaffirming the identity of the God they believed to have been revealed decisively in Jesus, despite the consequences of this belief. It served to legitimize this conviction through the rehearsal of witnesses' arguments in a way that drew the sting from the opposition's counter-arguments, to give a higher court's judgment on the perceived miscarriages of justice in the case not only of the one in whom they believed but also of their experience, to reassure them, whatever the drawbacks of that experience, that life, well-being, and security were to be found in their relationship with Jesus rather than any other source, and to strengthen their resolve to continue in their own witness. Highlighting the theme of glory or reputation in this forensic context also enabled a new perspective on the humiliation of Jesus' death by crucifixion and on their own shaming through expulsion and ostracism. Through the divine judge's verdict, reversing human evaluations, both could be seen as a participation in divine glory.²⁰

5. The Divine Courtroom, Readers, Judgment and the Gospel of John

If the appeal to the divine courtroom functioned in this way for the writer and those he represents, what can be said about its impact for those for whom the GJ was written, its final audience or readers?²¹ Throughout her perceptive and wide-ranging monograph Meira Kensky highlights that, despite the literary divine courtroom having God or the gods as judge and humans on trial before them, the texts engage readers in critical evaluation of God's judgment so that inevitably the reading process becomes a judging process in which God is tried in the court of the reader.²² Hence, 'when man is tried, it is truly God who is on trial.'²³ She makes clear, of

²⁰ On believers in Jesus sharing divine rather than human glory, see 5:44; 12:26,43; 17:10,22; 21:19.

²¹ The question assumes, of course, a distinction between the circle in which the Gospel was produced and the broader readership for whom the final product was intended.

²² Kensky 2010: e.g. 4-6, 9-12, 224, 343-46. See also Lincoln 2000: 173-76 for discussion of recipients of rhetoric and of GJ's rhetoric in particular as jurors and judges.

course, that authors do their utmost to take into account their intended readers' perspectives on the issues and to persuade them to accept the point of view of their own presentations of the case but stresses that readers can be awkward customers who 'do not always follow the text's directions, however manifold.'²⁴ In the case of GJ this tension between the implied reader²⁵ and the real reader is worth pursuing briefly.

The communicative purpose of this interpretation of Jesus' life and significance is made explicit in 20:31 – 'so that you may believe [or continue to believe] that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.'²⁶ The use of the divine courtroom imagery in the presentation has been meant therefore to produce or reinforce a judgment about the identity of Jesus that the narrative has conveyed from the start. The specific consequences of such a belief for those whom the author represents are now in the past, however recent the source of this memory, but the cosmic trial metaphor allows the presentation to transcend any particular setting and to attempt to reinforce this conviction about Jesus for all its implied readers. Although the narrative presents a division of opinion about who Jesus is and depicts the disputes surrounding him, the narrator's point of view has already been made explicit in the prologue – Jesus is to be identified as the Logos who is one with God and has come as the light of life in salvific judgment of the world's darkness (1:1-9; cf. also 3:19-21). In order to appreciate the unfolding story, implied readers are expected to share this point of view and to have it confirmed by the time the narrative reaches its conclusion.

One of the major means of sustaining implied readers in the narrator's own judgment is the device of irony. As Jesus is interrogated, involved in judicial controversies, tried, sentenced and executed, as various characters voice their ignorance or misunderstanding, as double entendres are employed, implied readers can only appreciate what is really going on in the narrative if they are willing to accept the superior information that the narrator has supplied. Irony thrives on such distinctions between appearance and reality and between the elevated

²³ Kensky 2010: 5.

²⁴ Kensky 2010: 344.

²⁵ The implied reader is, of course, already the product of the real reader's attempt to reconstruct from the clues provided by the author's persuasive techniques how his intended recipients are meant to respond most sympathetically to these techniques.

²⁶ On πιστεύητε as the better attested reading and therefore the probability of the intention being that implied readers be encouraged to continue in their belief, see Lincoln 2000: 177-78.

perspective of the readers over that of the characters in the narrative. In GJ these distinctions are closely associated with the divine courtroom metaphor. In the words of its protagonist, ‘Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment’ (7:24) and ‘You judge according to the flesh . . . my judgment is valid; for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me’ (8:15,16). The narrative depicts Jesus in terms of ‘above’ and as descending and ascending (cf. e.g. 3:31; 6:33,62; 8:23) and associates the opposition with ‘below’ or this world or merely human standards (cf. e.g. 8:15,23; 12:31; 18:36). The reworking of the metaphor of the cosmic lawsuit from Deutero-Isaiah provides a major part of this perspective from above, which is also provided in the witness of Jesus. ‘The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, yet no one accepts his testimony’ (3:31,32; cf. also 8:14). Knowing that in his testimony Jesus also represents the divine judge (e.g. 5:22; 9:39) and knowing the purposes of the divine courtroom enable implied readers to see the disputes, interrogations and decisions of this world’s courts in the appropriate perspective. Frequently that perspective involves dramatic ironic reversals of the judgments of characters in the narrative. These occur throughout but can be seen clearly at the end in the trial before Pilate and in the carrying out of the sentence of death.

It is the perspective of the divine courtroom that enables implied readers to pick up the clues in 18:28-19:16a that, while ostensibly Jesus is the accused before ‘the Jews’ and Pilate, facing the charges that he deserves to die because, contrary to the law, he has claimed to be Son of God (19:7) and that he is an insurrectionary who is a threat to Caesar (19:12), from the narrator’s point of view, in reality it is the Jewish religious leaders and Pilate, who find themselves accused and condemned before Jesus as judge and his witness to the truth (cf. 18:37,38; 19:11,15b).²⁷ The reversal here is not simply the establishing of Jesus’ innocence in contrast to the guilty verdict of human judges. Because of the nature of the charges on which Jesus was found guilty, it is a reversal of the evaluation of who Jesus is. The reworking of Deutero-Isaianic motifs reinforces that it is not merely forensic issues of guilt or innocence that are in view but a verdict about Jesus’ identity.²⁸ In

²⁷ On the reversals in the trial before Pilate, see e.g. Lincoln 2000: 25-26, 123-38; Larsen 2008: 173-80; Parsenios 2010: 37-39; Kensky 2010: 233-41.

²⁸ My focus on the lawsuit motif has apparently led some to misinterpret my earlier work as having dealt exclusively with issues of the guilt or innocence of Jesus and to ignore its major

the scene of crucifixion and death (19:16b-37) Jesus' last word, in keeping with GJ's presentation of his crucifixion as glorification, is τετέλεσται, 'it is completed,' an assertion of achievement, signifying the completion of his mission, the work he had been given to do (cf. 17:4). Contrary to appearances, the perspective from the divine courtroom means that Jesus' witness to the truth about God and God's purposes for humanity is to be seen in his martyr's death. In a supreme reversal God is revealed in this death that appears to be most ungodlike and God's glory and reputation are displayed in the shame and humiliation of this crucifixion. Contrary to appearances, the metaphor of the divine trial means that Jesus' work of judging is accomplished as the judge becomes the one who is judged. Jesus' death is not simply the world's negative judgment on him but also God's positive judgment on both him and the world. By absorbing the negative verdict of death, Jesus is shown to be the source of the positive verdict of life, as blood and water flow from his side and as the Beloved Disciple adds his testimony to this truth (19:34,35). Within the frame of reference of the Gospel, both Jesus' blood (cf. 6:53,54) and Jesus as the source of water (cf. esp. 7:38,39) point unmistakably to the theme of life, seen here as God's salvific verdict on the death of the one who has been presented as the divine agent in his mission of witnessing and judging.

Implied readers are clearly expected to share this divine judgment on Jesus, his identity and his mission. But what of real readers? The judgments of the truth of this written testimony by the jury of real readers will be as varied as the jurors themselves and will inevitably be shaped by the variety of influences, including the prior allegiances, life experiences, worldviews, cultural settings, commitments to particular communities, elements of trust or suspicion, they bring to their reading. Interestingly, there is a sense in which, whatever their judgment, real readers are in a similar position to those characters in the narrative who, in cross-examining Jesus in order to judge him, find themselves exposed and judged. In having to make a judgment on GJ's witness they are also being judged, as their own basic allegiances are revealed by the nature of their readings and they become aware that, if that witness is not accepted, some other verdict about God, justice and life is being

emphasis on how coming to a true recognition of Jesus' identity is integral to the use of that motif. In particular, my critique of one aspect of Culpepper's early work on recognition scenes in the plot – its reliance on Aristotle's definition of recognition – has been misread as a complete dismissal of this important aspect of the Gospel (e.g. Brant 2004: 234; 2011:11; Larsen 2008:15n45; Parsenios 2010:91). Parsenios 2010:90-94 has now provided a helpful treatment of the compatibility of the lawsuit motif with the various aspects of recognition scenes that are reworked in the narrative.

preferred and endorsed. Adele Reinhartz, as a Jewish New Testament scholar, envisages four readerly stances in relation to GJ – compliant, resistant, sympathetic and engaged – and provides readings from each, while recognizing that the first two are to a large extent scripted by the text, that actual readers may well move between all four in the process of reading and that, for her, the last entails the inability to accept this Gospel’s Christology and rhetoric of binary opposition.²⁹ As a Christian New Testament scholar, I have advocated a judgment of GJ’s witness in terms of a critical appropriation, which, while eschewing the notion of the autonomy of critical reason and an accompanying disdain for any knowledge based on testimony, sees itself in the context of faith seeking understanding. In that context such a judgment is part of an ongoing tradition of theological debate which, in appropriating its canon’s core witness to Jesus Christ for new and different settings, is engaged in critical discrimination between that witness and the particular formulations, including those of GJ, in which it originally came to expression.³⁰ In this context, then, judging is not a zero-sum game. Both aspects – divine judging of humans and human judging of God in response – can be fully operational at the same time without detracting from each other. Human judging becomes the means of cooperation in the divine dialogue that constitutes God’s communication with the world.

This is not the place to pursue and engage in dialogue between particular readerly judgments, but the mention of ongoing debate appropriately leads into some concluding observations about the reception of the testimony of GJ. For later Christian theological reflection on Christ and the triune God this Gospel, emerging from a setting of passionate intra-Jewish disagreement about one group’s convictions about Jesus and in all probability having its eventual presentation of those convictions honed, sharpened and intensified in the light of that conflict, arguably turned out to be the most influential New Testament document. In such later interpretation the original contested nature of its Christology and its explicit framing of the life of Jesus and its disputed significance in the imagery of the divine courtroom were largely neglected. The divine courtroom featured much more as part of the presentation of a future end-time judgment, with writings such as the Gospel of Matthew and Revelation being particularly significant in shaping Christian thought. As regards the present impact of divine courtroom imagery, GJ was to be eclipsed by the influence of Paul’s thinking about humans being justified before the divine judge through faith in Christ. In another sense, however, the fierce dispute that colors GJ’s central message about the identity of Jesus has

²⁹ Reinhartz 2001.

³⁰ Lincoln 2000: esp.181-82, 339-40, 354-69.

continued to surround its interpretation so that in effect, even among those who recognized its authority, its true witness was judged to be a decisive but by no means final word. Almost immediately, in fact, its Christology became a matter of dispute in the circle from which the Gospel emerged. As the author of the letters of 1 and 2 John indicates, a group, which in his view deviated from the received tradition, seceded from the majority owing to a refusal to confess that Christ had come in the flesh (cf. 1 Jn. 2:18-23; 4:2,3; 2 Jn. 7). The witness of the Gospel had assumed the full humanity of Jesus of Nazareth (indeed the prologue's 'the Word became flesh' makes this assumption explicit) but, because of the nature of the dispute that lies behind it, had focused instead on his divine identity. It is plausibly held that the secessionists took this latter emphasis even further, and, without sharing the Gospel's presuppositions, held the view that Christ's humanity was unimportant for salvation and that he only appeared to be human. Later, in the second and third centuries CE, Irenaeus and then others engaged in controversy with Gnostic writers such as Valentinus and Ptolemy over the latter's appropriation of Johannine vocabulary and Christology to their views of pleromatic aeons and syzygies.³¹ In the fourth century GJ was again the site of controversy as both sides in the Christological disputes appealed to it for textual ammunition before its language eventually shaped the creedal statements resulting from the controversy both at Nicea in 325 and Constantinople in 381. For contemporary Christians the testimony of GJ to Jesus of Nazareth, framed in and molded by the divine courtroom metaphor, continues to be a major source both of their distinctive religious identity and witness and of further disputed judgments about its implications. What is to be made of its seemingly exclusive claim that God is to be known decisively through Jesus? How does one coherently hold and articulate that this particular Jew could be fully human and yet fully one with God? Does belief in Jesus as the incarnation of God redefine or break the bounds of Jewish monotheism? In what sense was his death that of 'the crucified God'? Are supersessionism and anti-Judaism the inevitable accompaniments of a high Christology? Do Jews and Christians still worship the same God despite their profound differences about the significance of Jesus? With these and other questions readers of the GJ's witness under very different circumstances still find themselves drawn into the divine courtroom and confronted not only with its remarkable claim that in the life and death of Jesus the divine judge was judged in order to provide

³¹ This is not to be confused with the now debunked view that, owing to its capture by Gnostics, GJ had become controversial and fallen into disuse until rescued by Irenaeus and the orthodox, see Hill 2004.

life but also with the necessity of making their own judgments about such a claim and its implications.

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