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Can Everyone be Wrong? A Reading of John 11.1–12.8

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Reading John 11.1–12.8, focusing upon the roles of Martha, Mary and 'the Jews', suggests that widely held positions concerning Martha's expression of faith in 11.27, the function of 'the Jews' across the narrative as a whole, and Mary's relationship to Jesus, especially in the light of 11.2, 31–3, 45; 12.1–8, should be questioned. The death and the raising of Lazarus manifest the glory of God and are the means by which the Son will be glorified (11.4, 40). Consequently, the passage summons Johannine readers to transcend understandable sorrow and pain generated by the menacing realm of human mortality (11.19, 21–2, 31, 33, 39) by means of belief in Jesus, the resurrection and the life (11.25–6).

There is a whimsical double edge to the question concerning 'everyone' in the title of this study.[1] I will suggest that none of the characters *in the story* of John 11.1–54 come to an appropriate expression of belief in Jesus, and thus everyone 'gets it wrong'. Consequently, I will further suggest that the majority of interpreters *of the story* 'get it wrong' when they read John 11.1–54.[2] Another widely held position to be questioned is that the characterization of 'the Jews' in John 11 lacks the negativity that it has elsewhere.[3] In a final, but not as widely contested, act of

1 This paper was originally delivered as my Inaugural Lecture as the Katharine Drexel Professor of Religious Studies at the Catholic University of America, Washington, DC, on 22 April 2003. It has been greatly enriched by the participants of the Society of Biblical Theologians, who responded to an earlier draft at Princeton on 8 March 2003, and by comments from the anonymous Reader for *New Testament Studies*.

2 I will discuss the characters in the narrative in the text of the paper that follows. Discussion and documentation of my disagreement with majority interpretation, which I am also suggesting 'gets it wrong', will generally be found in the footnotes.

3 See, for example, R. E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John* (2 vols; AB 29–29a; New York: Doubleday, 1966–70) 1.427–8. Brown claims that 'the Jews' in this section of the Gospel seem to represent the ordinary people, and uses this as an indication that chaps. 11–12 were added to an original account of the ministry that ended at 10.40–2. Against this, see U. Schnelle, *Antidocetic Christology in the Gospel of John: An Investigation of the Place of the Fourth Gospel in the Johannine School* (trans. L. Maloney; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 125. For a more ambiguous, but still positive, understanding of 'the Jews' in the passage, see A. Marchadour, *Lazare: Histoire d'un récit, récit d'une histoire* (LD 132; Paris: Cerf, 1988) 116–17.

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contrariness, it appears to me that major issues raised by 11.1–54 remain unresolved until the reader associates them with the events reported in 11.55–12.8. There the same characters, 'the Jews', Mary, Lazarus and Martha, continue their association with Jesus. John 11–12 must be read together, as the author uses these chapters to bridge the accounts of Jesus' ministry (1.19–10.32) and his death and resurrection (13.1–20.31). Read together, chapters 11–12 lead the reader to focus more intensely upon the Johannine understanding of Jesus' death by crucifixion. The Lazarus account broaches the cross as 'the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it' (11.4), and 12.23 announces: 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.'[4]

However dualistic the Fourth Gospel may be in its cosmology and ethics,[5] the theme of 'insiders' and 'outsiders' plays no part in the narrative, however present it may be in the Synoptic tradition, influenced by the Markan theology of discipleship.[6] The reader *in the story* and the intended readers *of the story* are not 'in' or 'out'.[7] They believe that Jesus is the Christ, but are consistently instructed on the limitations of their belief. I accept the present tense of the verb πιστεύειν in

4 See F. J. Moloney, *Signs and Shadows: Reading John 5–12* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) 200–1. A division is sometimes made between 11.1–54 and 11.55–12.8. See F. F. Segovia, 'The Journey(s) of the Word of God: A Reading of the Plot of the Fourth Gospel', *Semeia* 53 (1991) 44. Using the criterion of motion, he divides the material into 11.1–54 (journey to Bethany), 11.55–12.10 (second journey to Bethany), and 12.12–17.26 (final journey to Jerusalem). See his structure on pp. 50–1. B. Witherington, III, *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville, KY. Westminster John Knox, 1995) 198–9, divides the story into 11.1–12.11 ('Family affairs', p. 196), a passage which closes a major section of his structure, and 12.12–50 ('The return of the king and his last audience', p. 217), a passage which opens the first phase of the passion narrative (12.12–17.26). Similarly, L. Schenke, *Johannes Kommentar* (Kommentare zu den Evangelien; Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1998), regards 10.40–11.54 as the seventh major portrait in the Gospel, followed by 11.55–12.36 as the eighth. However, on pp. 232–3 he points to the links ('Rückverweise/Wiederaufnamen/Echos') made above. For a sensitive reading of 11.1–12.11 as a literary unit, see D. A. Lee, *The Symbolic Narratives of the Fourth Gospel: The Interplay of Form and Meaning* (JSNTSSup 95; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994) 191–7; idem, *Flesh and Glory: Symbolism, Gender and Theology in the Gospel of John* (New York: Crossroad, 2002) 198–200. For an excellent setting of John 11 as a bridging episode between the ministry of Jesus and the passion, see Marchadour, *Lazare*, 99–110.

5 On the cosmological and ethical dualism of the Fourth Gospel, see the excellent summary of R. Kysar, *John, The Maverick Gospel* (Atlanta, GA. John Knox, 1976) 47–64.

6 On the importance of this theme in Mark, see, among many, the important study of J. Marcus, *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God* (SBLDS 90; Atlanta: Scholars, 1986).

7 I am not questioning the κρίσις generated *within the narrative* by the opposition between light and darkness, characters who accept Jesus and characters who reject him, etc. That is part of the Johannine rhetorical appeal to *readers of the narrative* who should not be regarded (or regard themselves) as 'in' or 'out', but asked where they stand. This, of course, is a Christian reading, and at odds with some of the presuppositions of the excellent recent study of A. Reinhartz, *Befriending the Beloved Disciple: A Jewish Reading of the Gospel of John* (New York: Continuum, 2001).

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20.31, and its consequence, that the story is written for believing readers who never quite make it. The narrative, its author tells its readers, is to help them further in a journey of faith *that still lies ahead of them*.[8] The story of Jesus they are reading asks more of them than they are prepared to give. There are, of course, several characters in the story used by the author as examples of authentic Johannine belief: John the Baptist, the mother of Jesus, the Samaritan villagers, Peter and the Twelve at the end of chapter 6, and the man born blind.[9]

On the other hand, the use of the expression 'the Jews' is almost always applied to people who reject the gift of God, offered in and through Jesus. But scholarly focus upon the expression οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι should not ignore the fact that Jesus was 'a Jew' (4.8; see 4.22), and that many of the original readers of the Gospel of John were probably also Jews. There is an interesting focus in this Gospel on 'the people' (ὁ λάος) and 'the nation' (τὸ ἔθνος), especially in 11.49–52. We need to stand back from our close attention to the narrative function of 'the Jews', to understand the use of the expression within the narrative theology of the Gospel as a whole. Within the social and religious turmoil of post-70 CE Judaism, the former nation and people of God, once called by the name 'Israel', has been transformed by means of Jesus' gathering a new nation and people, and is still called by the name 'Israel'. It is possible to misunderstand the full potential of Jesus' revelation to Israel, in an attempt to make him a 'King of Israel' (1.49; 6.14–15; 12.13) because Jesus exercises his kingship in a fashion that is not of this world (18.36–7). He is lifted up on a cross (3.14; 8.28; 12.32–3), drawing everyone, Jew and Gentile, to himself (10.16; 11.51–2; 12.11, 19, 24, 32–3). Enthroned as king, he establishes a new family of God, a union of faith and love (19.25–7), gifted with the Spirit (19.30), and marked with the life-giving blood and water that flow from the pierced Jesus (19.34–5). It is a believing community, a Christian church that gazes upon the pierced one (19.37). The members of the people of 'Israel' within the Johannine narrative must make their decision for or against this revelation. If they decide against God's action in and through Jesus, they remain Israel, the people and nation of old (see 1.49; 11.47–50; 12.13). In the light of subsequent Christian and Jewish history, it is unfortunate that the author calls them 'the Jews'. For John, they are locked within a closed religious system that knows that God has spoken through Moses, but are ignorant of who Jesus is and where he comes from (9.29). On the other hand, acceptance of Jesus' revelation of God 'gathers' people from

8 On the textual problem found in 20.31, and its importance for the interpretation of the Gospel of John as a whole, see F. J. Moloney, *Glory not Dishonor: Reading John 13–21* (Minneapolis. Fortress, 1998) 179–81.

9 However much one may or may not be able to reconstruct a historical background for these characters in the story (and John the Baptist is particularly important in this regard; see F. J. Moloney, 'The Fourth Gospel and the Jesus of History', *NTS* 46 [2000] 42–68), the author's concern is not *primarily* to inform his readers about the past.

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all national and religious backgrounds – Jew and Gentile – to form a new Israel, a new people and a new nation (1.31; 11.51–2; 12.11, 19, 32–3; 19.25–37).[10]

Thus, set within the overall narrative strategy of the Gospel, even the use of the expression 'the Jews' can be seen as part of the author's larger strategy: to summon Jew and Gentile to believe that Jesus is the unique and saving revelation of God (20.31).[11] The author is not primarily interested in reporting the faith or non-faith of characters in the story, but uses various characters *to address readers*.[12] This is the case, of course, with any narrative. However, among the four Gospels, the author of the Gospel of John makes his intentions very clear. He provides his readers with his theological and christological point of view in 1.1–18, and (via 19.35) returns to his readers in 20.30–1, informing them that he has collected material from many available traditions, and told them the story of 1.19–20.29, that they may go on believing (20.30–1).[13]

Can everyone be wrong?

The above list of characters used by the evangelist to express true Johannine faith – John the Baptist, the mother of Jesus, the Samaritan villagers, Peter and the Twelve at the end of chapter 6, and the man born blind – does not mention Martha. Yet she utters the words of 11.27: 'I have always believed that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who is to come into the world.' Given the

10 For a fuller development of this argument, see F. J. Moloney, ' "The Jews" in the Fourth Gospel: Another Perspective', *Pacifica* 15 (2002) 16–36.

11 The 'you' (plural) addressed by the narrator in 20.31 were neither exclusively Jewish nor Gentile. They were both. On the tendency of the Fourth Evangelist to 'move from ethnic and synagogal boundaries into the world', see P. Borgen, 'The Gospel of John and Hellenism: Some Observations', *Exploring the Gospel of John: In Honor of D. Moody Smith* (ed. R. A. Culpepper and C. C. Black; Louisville, KY. Westminster John Knox, 1996) 112–14. For the citation, see p. 114.

12 On this, see Moloney, *Glory not Dishonor*, 153–81.

13 The clumsy English expression 'that they may go on believing' is an attempt to highlight the durative meaning of the present tense of the Greek expression ἵνα πιστεύητε in 20.31. Both 19.35 and 20.30–1 have been subjected to serious scrutiny by scholars. Many have linked 19.35 with 21.24, and regard it as a late editorial addition: see, for example, R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray; Oxford: Blackwell, 1971) 678; Brown, *John*, 2.945; Becker, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (2 vols; ÖTK 4/1–2; Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn/Würzburg: Echter, 1979–81) 2.600; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (WBC 36; Waco: Word, 1987) 354. But the need to ask *what it means* in its final context remains. There must have been a reason for the addition, if it was added by a later redactor. It is possible that the use of the verb 'to believe' in 20.31 is aorist and not present – see above, n. 8. Both 20.30–1 and 19.35 are essential indicators of the author's point of view as the narrative took on its final shape as the Fourth Gospel. For further comment on 19.35, see Moloney, *Glory not Dishonor*, 147–8.

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close (but not identical) relationship that exists between 11.27 and 20.31, the majority position, taken for granted by almost all interpreters of the Fourth Gospel, accepts that Martha expresses authentic Johannine belief. But a close reading of John 11.1–44 suggests to me that this may not be the case.[14]

For the purposes of the reading that follows, eight stages in the narrative can be outlined. Whatever sources the evangelist may have had at his disposal, the final product reflects the plotting of a careful storyteller.[15] The eight stages can be outlined as follows:[16]

1. vv. 1–6: an introduction to the action that follows;
2. vv. 7–16: two decisions are made, one by Jesus and the other by the disciples, in the words of Thomas;
3. vv. 17–27: the encounter between Jesus and Martha;
4. vv. 28–37: Jesus, Mary, and 'the Jews';
5. vv. 38–44: Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus;
6. vv. 45–54: 'the Jews' and Jesus;[17]
7. vv. 55–7: the Passover was at hand;
8. John 12.1–8: six days before the Passover. Jesus, Mary and Judas.

Each of these eight stages contains exegetical issues that call for re-examination.

14 I have argued this case on a number of occasions. See F. J. Moloney, 'The Faith of Martha and Mary: A Narrative Approach to John 11.17–40', *Bib* 75 (1994) 471–93; idem, *Signs and Shadows*, 154–77; idem, *The Gospel of John* (SP4; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1998) 322–46.

15 For surveys of scholarly discussion of the development of the traditions that may have shaped the passage, see Marchadour, *Lazare*, 33–63; J. Kremer, *Die Geschichte einer Auferstehung: Text, Wirkungsgeschichte und Botschaft von Joh 11.1–46* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1985) 82–109; B. J. Byrne, *Lazarus: A Contemporary Reading of John 11.1–46* (Zachaeus Studies: NT; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1991) 69–83. On the Johannine nature of the finished product, see C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1963) 232; R. A. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 73, and especially Marchadour, *Lazare*, 54–63.

16 Other divisions of the material are possible, of course. The textual markers of change of character, time and place determine what follows. Ending the division at 12.8 is artificial, as the narrative runs on until 12.36. Only in 12.37–50 does the narrative change its character, as the evangelist introduces his own (vv. 37–43) and Jesus' (vv. 44–50) summary of the ministry. The involvement of Lazarus, Martha and Mary in 12.1–8 links what follows with 11.1–57. The events of 12.1–50 have already been introduced by 11.55–7. For more detail, see Moloney, *Signs and Shadows*, 178–9.

17 Rightly does Schneiders comment on the use of 'the Jews' across John 11: they 'serve to lace the story tightly into its narrative context' (S. M. Schneiders, 'Death in the Community of Eternal Life: History, Theology and Spirituality in John 11', *Int* 41 [1987] 45). See also Schenke, *Johannes*, 224: 'Die gesamte Szene wird von vornherein durch ihre Anwesenheit bestimmt.'

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1. *The introduction (vv. 1–6)*

When the characters are listed in 11.1, the order is Lazarus, Mary and finally Martha. This is followed by a statement from the narrator that looks like a reminder to the reader. The use of the aorist participles of verbs 'to anoint' (ἀλείψασα) and 'to wipe' (ἐκμάξασα) takes it for granted that the reader already knows of the event reported in v. 2. 'It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill' (v. 2). But such is not the case. In the Johannine story of Jesus, this event has not yet taken place. The reader asks when and how did Mary anoint Jesus and wipe his feet with her hair, an event that has not yet been reported in the story? This 'reminder' of an event that has not yet taken place must be regarded as a gap in the narrative.[18] The use of this literary technique rouses the reader's curiosity and gives energy to the reading process, as the resolution of this indeterminacy must be sought further on in the narrative. The naming of Mary before her sister Martha (v. 1), and the indication that she was the one who anointed Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair (v. 2), instruct the reader on the importance of Mary for the story that is being introduced. The reader must keep an attentive eye on Mary. She is an important character.[19]

Another crucial moment in vv. 1–6 is Jesus' explanation of the significance of the illness of Lazarus in v. 4. Jesus sets the theological and christological agenda for the events that follow: 'This illness is not unto death; it is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it' (v. 4). The focus of the reader's attention must not be upon the fact of death (οὐκ ἔστιν προς θάνατον), but upon the revelation of the glory of God (δόξα τοῦ θεοῦ) and the beginnings of a process that will lead to the glorification of Jesus, the Son of God (ἵνα δοξάσθη ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ δι᾽ αὐτῆς). Jesus, the most authoritative character in the narrative, has set the tone for all that follows by raising two crucial themes associated with the Johannine understanding of the crucifixion. The incarnation (see 1.14) and, subsequently, the ministry of Jesus (see 2.11; 11.40; 17.4, 6–8) make God known. As once the δόξα of God could be seen in the gift of the Law, now the δόξα of God is made visible in the person and works of Jesus of Nazareth (see 1.17).

The events about to be reported will continue this revelation of the glory of God, culminating in Jesus' revelation of God in his being 'lifted up' on the cross (3.13–14; 8.28; 12.32; 13.31–2).[20] However, they will also lead to the glorification of the

18 On the function of 'gaps' (also called 'blanks' or 'places of indeterminacy') in narrative in general, see W. Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978) 182–7 and *passim*.

19 See the telling remarks of C. M. Conway, *Men and Women in the Fourth Gospel: Gender and Johannine Characterization* (SBLDS 167; Atlanta: Scholars, 1999) 137.

20 See F. J. Moloney, 'Telling God's Story: The Fourth Gospel', *The Forgotten God* (ed. A. A. Das and F. J. Matera; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2002) 107–22, esp. 116–21.

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Son. They will set in motion a process by means of which the Son will be glorified (11.4: δι᾽αὐτῆς), and return to the glory that was his before the world was made (see 17.5).[21] This process, for the Fourth Evangelist, is 'the hour of Jesus' (see 2.4; 4.21–3; 5.25; 7.30; 8.20; 12.23, 27; 13.1; 16.21; 17.1; 19.27).[22] As a consequence of the raising of Lazarus, 'the Jews' will decide that Jesus must be slain (11.49–50, 56–7). Immediately following that decision, on hearing that Greeks want to see him, Jesus announces: 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified' (12.23), and he proceeds to delve into the significance of that 'hour' (vv. 24–36a), the final victory over the prince of this world, the moment when he will be lifted up, and draw everyone to himself (vv. 31–2). The narrator adds a note to make it clear to the reader what this means: 'He said this to indicate by what manner of death he would die' (v. 33). The events reported in 11.1–54 are not 'unto death' (οὐκ ἔστιν πρὸς θάνατον); they will reveal the glory of God and initiate the process of Jesus' being lifted up on a cross, to return to the glory that was his before the foundation of the world.[23]

The words of Jesus in v. 4 thus set the agenda for the interpretation of the Lazarus story: God's design. This is the first, but unmistakable, hint that the non-Johannine agenda of the sorrow and pain that one experiences at the death of a loved one must be transcended by an understanding of the death of Jesus as the revelation of the glory of God and the means by which the Son of God will be glorified. This interpretation is further enhanced by v. 6. Judged by human standards, the juxtaposition of a description of Jesus' love for Lazarus and his sisters (v. 5) and his two-day delay when he hears of Lazarus's illness (v. 6) is extremely odd. This is not the way one behaves on receiving news of the fatal illness of a loved one. But on earlier occasions in the narrative Jesus' negative response to a request has led to unexpected consequences that transcend the intentions of the original request: his response to his mother at Cana (2.1–11), to the royal official, also at Cana (4.46–54), and his response to his brothers on the eve of the Feast of Tabernacles (7.2–14).[24] As in those earlier actions, Jesus' response cannot be measured by human standards. He responds to criteria greater than those

21 Very few commentators notice the importance of the δι᾽ αὐτῆς. See, for example, Brown, *John*, 1.423: 'Presumably through the sickness'. For the use of διά as 'the circumstances in which one finds oneself because of something', see BDF, 119, para. 223 (3).

22 The most comprehensive study of the Johannine use of 'the hour' is still G. Ferraro, *L"ora' di Cristo nel Quarto Vangelo* (Aloisiana 10; Rome: Herder, 1974).

23 As Conway, *Men and Women*, 138, rightly comments: '[T]he mention of glory in 11.4 points ahead to the Passion narrative, which in the Gospel of John is the "supreme manifestation of the glory of God in Christ"' (citing B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John* [NCB; London: Oliphants, 1972] 387).

24 'Governed by the Father's will, Jesus reverses his earlier decision. This makes clear that he is now acting, not in accord with worldly calculation or family pressure, but explicitly to carry out the demands of God's will; and in accord with the timing the Father has determined' (A.

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expected by the reader, necessarily conditioned by human expectation and behavior.

2. *Two decisions (vv. 7–16)*

The issues surrounding Jesus' delay in going to the ailing Lazarus are concluded with words from Jesus that indicate the *purpose of the miracle*, immediately followed by a misunderstanding. Jesus announces: 'Lazarus is dead; and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, *so that you may believe* (ἵνα πιστεύσητε). But let us go to him' (v. 15). As Jesus delayed, Lazarus had died in his absence. But this is what Jesus wanted, *so that the disciples might come to faith* (ἵνα πιστεύσητε). The issue of belief emerges as a further driving force behind the rhetoric of the narrative. Traditionally known as 'the resurrection of Lazarus', John 11 shows little interest in Lazarus.[25] The explanation for the delay, and for Jesus' happiness (v. 15: χαίρω δι᾽ ὑμᾶς) at not being present to help Lazarus in his ailment, or at least to accompany him in death, is because this illness might lead to true Johannine belief among the disciples. The response of Thomas to Jesus' words shows that he either has not heard what Jesus said, or that he completely misunderstands what Jesus is asking from his disciples. He replies: 'Let us also go, that we may die with him' (v. 16). But Jesus has not asked them to follow him to Jerusalem for martyrdom. He has asked them to set out for Jerusalem *so that they might come to faith* (ἵνα πιστεύσητε).[26] As so often in Johannine theologically motivated rhetoric, Thomas has missed the point completely, and so have the many interpreters of the episode who read v. 18 as a foundational biblical text for Christian discipleship.[27]

J. Kelly and F. J. Moloney, *Experiencing God in the Gospel of John* [Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2003] 171). See the important exegetical study of C. H. Giblin, 'Suggestion, Negative Response, and Positive Action in St John's Gospel (John 2.1–11, 4.46–54, 7.2–14, 11.1–44)', *NTS* 26 (1979–80) 197–211. On 11.1–44, see pp. 208–10.

25 On the lack of interest in Lazarus, see X. Léon-Dufour, *Lecture de l'évangile selon Jean* (4 vols; Paris: Seuil, 1988–96) 2.404–5; Conway, *Men and Women*, 136–7. However, Marchadour, *Lazare*, 126–7, and M. W. G. Stibbe, 'A Tomb with a View: John 11.1–44 in Narrative-Critical Perspective', *NTS* 40 (1994) 42–3, point out that he is the empty hole that drives a narrative that gradually fills the emptiness.

26 See Kelly and Moloney, *Experiencing God*, 240: 'Where Jesus, as "the light," is intent on the manifestation of glory and true life, Thomas and the disciples see only the dark threat of death awaiting them.'

27 Many Christian interpreters read Thomas's words in v. 16 as an invitation to all disciples of Jesus. See, for example, R. H. Lightfoot, *St. John's Gospel* (ed. C. F. Evans; Oxford: Oxford University, 1956) 220–1; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 189; T. L. Brodie, *The Gospel According to John: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (New York: Oxford University, 1993) 392; Marchadour, *Lazare*, 80–1; M. Labahn, *Jesus als Lebensspender: Untersuchungen zu einer Geschichte der johanneischen Tradition anhand ihrer Wundergeschichte* (BZNW 98; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999) 413–14. Labahn, who associates Thomas's confession with the warnings of

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3. *Jesus and Martha (vv. 17–27)*

The crucial Martha episode follows (vv. 17–27). Focus upon her confession in v. 27 must not distract us from recognizing that she confesses her beliefs on *three* occasions. Hearing that Jesus has come, Martha takes the initiative, leaves Mary in the house, goes out to meet him, and greets him with words indicating that she believes Jesus can work miracles because anything he asks of God will be granted. Lazarus would not have died if Jesus had come earlier (vv. 20–2). The two women respond to the news of Jesus' advent in different ways. One waits, the other takes the initiative.[28] Jesus corrects this view by announcing that Lazarus will rise (v. 23), but Martha, still determining the direction of the discussion, makes her second confession, informing Jesus what *she knows* (οἶδα). She accepts the relatively new idea in Jewish thought about life after death that Lazarus 'will rise again in the resurrection at the last day' (v. 24).[29] Jesus picks up Martha's reference to resurrection. Using a formula of self-revelation, by means of ἐγώ εἰμι he questions the need to wait till the last day for resurrection and life. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in him will have life, both here and hereafter. The living who believe in Jesus already have life, and those who have believed in Jesus, but have died, also already have life (vv. 25–26b). As he closes his self-revelation, he turns to Martha and asks her: 'Do you believe this?' (v. 26b: πιστεύεις τοῦτο;). Belief, as well as Christology, is at the heart of this encounter.[30] Martha responds in her famous words of v. 27. What must not be overlooked is that she opens her confession of Jesus as 'the Christ, the son of God, he who is coming into the world' with a verb in the perfect tense (πεπίστευκα), and this tense must be given its full grammatical weight. It indicates that her coming to faith *preceded* the words of Jesus in vv. 25–6.[31] Scholars have noticed the strange use of the perfect tense, but explain it away as a characteristic use of the verb

v. 8, traces stages of redaction to explain tensions in the narrative. Conway, *Men and Women*, 139, sees v. 16 (along with v. 8) as reinforcing the connnection between this story and the death and resurrection of Jesus. However, especially in the light of v. 12, she remarks that the disciples are 'somewhat obtuse'. Schenke, *Johannes*, 223, rightly looks back to v. 4 and v. 15 to point out that Thomas gets it wrong in v. 16. See also Byrne, *Lazarus*, 57. As Lee, *Symbolic Narratives*, 200, remarks, 'The structure of these verses points to life rather than death.' The above exegetical affirmation does not exclude the possibility that v. 16 may be used in an 'accommodated' fashion to address disciples. But one has the Gospel of Mark for such instruction!

28 This is often noticed. See, for example, Bultmann, *John*, 401 n. 4. But scholars (influenced by v. 27) give Martha all the credit, and portray Mary as behaving as one would expect from a person who is grieving (see Job 2.8, 13; Ezek 8.14). What follows will question this position.

29 For a full-scale discussion of this issue, see the study of H. C. Cavallin, 'Leben nach dem Tod im Spätjudentum und frühen Christentum', in *ANRW* 19.1 (1979) 240–345.

30 The verb πιστεύω appears three times in vv. 25–6.

31 For a parallel Johannine use, see 8.31. On the use of the perfect in this passage, see Moloney, *Signs and Shadows*, 103–4. See also BDF, 175–6, para. 340.

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πιστεύω in the Fourth Gospel.[32] Martha has always believed that Jesus is 'the Christ, the son of God, he who is coming into the world' (v. 27). *She is replying in categories that may sound Johannine (see 20.31) but do not respond to the question Jesus asked her.*[33] She affirms her long-held view that Jesus fulfills her messianic expectations. Her use of the perfect tense (πεπίστευκα) in v. 27 parallels her response to Jesus concerning the resurrection at the end of time in v. 24: she knows (οἶδα) these truths, and needs no further instruction. Repeatedly in the Fourth Gospel, the 'we know' of prior certainties about the identity of Jesus are mistaken (see 1.41, 45; 3.2; 4.25; 6.42).

Context determines meaning. In this context, Jesus has asked whether she believes that he is the resurrection and the life (v. 26). She has responded in terms that can be regarded as acceptable messianic categories: the Christ, the son of God (see Ps 2.7; 2 Sam 7.14), the one who is to come into the world. Earlier uses of these expressions (see 1.49; 6.14) have already reflected the limited faith of those who confess their belief in these terms.[34] In a fashion that parallels many others in the story who do not arrive at true Johannine belief (see, for example, the disciples in 1.35–49, when read in light of Jesus' reply in vv. 50–1), she is 'on the way' in her confession of faith.[35] But she does not acknowledge Jesus' self-revelation in vv. 25–6 as the resurrection and the life. Martha gets it wrong each time she articu-

32 See, for example, C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John* (2nd edn; London: SPCK, 1978) 396. The majority of commentators, however, simply ignore this surprising use of the perfect tense.

33 Among many, Labahn, *Jesus als Lebensspender*, 420–2, argues for v. 27 as a fully Johannine confession, and makes a close link with 20.31. See also Conway, *Men and Women*, 142. But text without context is pretext, and the context of 11.27 (an answer from a character in the narrative, beginning with a perfect tense, to a question from Jesus that has no direct relationship to the answer given) is very different from that of 20.31 (the climactic statement, from the evangelist, of the purpose for the writing of the Gospel). Also crucial, but not mentioned by Labahn, is the association of 'the one who is coming into the world' with 'Christ' and 'Son of God' in 11.27. This is not found in 20.31, but is found in 6.14 where it is clearly a misunderstanding of Jesus. Conway, *Men and Women*, 141–2, cites 1.41, 49 (but omits 6.14), claiming that '[n]owhere in these references is there a suggestion that the titles are not appropriate, or are inadequate for Jesus'. The opposite could be argued: they are inadequate confessions of faith. It is difficult to see the christological point of 1.50–1 if vv. 41 and 49 already confess the whole truth.

34 For a synthetic presentation of further documentation of first-century Jewish use of messianic terms, see J. J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1995). See also, for the Johannine context, F. J. Moloney, *Belief in the Word: Reading John 1–4* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 67–75; idem, *Signs and Shadows*, 37–8. Brown, *John*, 1.425, sees the link with the incomplete faith of the crowds in 6.14 but explains it away by suggesting that Martha uses the same expression, but with a different meaning, in 11.27.

35 See also 2.23–5; 3.2–11; 4.16–29; 6.14, where culturally acceptable and even messianic titles of honor are used to acclaim Jesus, but are rejected as falling short of authentic Johannine belief.

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lates her beliefs: in Jesus as a God-directed miracle worker (vv. 21–2), in the resurrection at the end of time as the explanation of Jesus' promise that Lazarus would rise (v. 24), and in a confession that reflects Jewish messianic expectation (v. 27).[36]

4. *Jesus, Mary and 'the Jews' (vv. 28–37)*

Martha's lack of faith is further reflected in her secret report to Mary that the διδάσκαλος is calling for her (v. 28). If her confession of v. 27 manifests authentic Johannine faith, it seems strange that she informs Mary that 'the teacher' is calling her.[37] Uses of διδάσκαλος, and the transliterated Hebrew–Aramaic Ράββι, earlier in the narrative always reflect an expression of

36 This understanding of Martha's relationship with Jesus, especially as it is expressed in v. 27, is at variance with almost all scholarly and popular assessments of John 11. R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St John* (3 vols; HTCNT 4/1–3; London/New York: Burns & Oates/Crossroad, 1968–82) 2.238, and B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (NCB; London: Oliphants, 1972) 396, regard Martha's words as the theological climax of the chapter, and Bultmann, *John*, 404, sees them as an expression of genuine faith. For R. E. Brown, 'Roles of Women in the Fourth Gospel', *TS* 36 (1975) 693–4, Martha replaces Peter as the one who makes the supreme confession of faith. See also S. M. Schneiders, 'Women in the Fourth Gospel and the Role of Women in the Contemporary Church', *BTB* 12 (1982) 41; E. S. Fiorenza, 'A Feminist Interpretation for Liberation: Martha and Mary, Lk 10.38–42', *Religion and Intellectual Life* 3 (1986) 31. Kremer, *Lazarus*, 70, presents a consensus of scholarship: 'Auf dem Höhepunkt und am Schluss des Gesprächs zwischen Marta und Jesus kommt diesem kurzen Credo ein besonderes Gewicht zu.' The list of commentators who adopt this position is long. See, for example, Barrett, Beasley-Murray, Bultmann, Becker, Brodie, Carson, Gnilka, Haenchen, Lagrange, Lindars, Marchadour, Marsh, Schnackenburg, Segalla, Stibbe. This interpretation continues to hold its place among most recent scholarship. See, for example, Reinhartz, *Befriending*, 42–8, 55; idem, 'From Narrative to History: The Resurrection of Martha and Mary', *Women Like This: New Perspectives on Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World* (ed. A.-J. Levine; Society of Biblical Literature Early Judaism and Its Literature 1; Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1991) 174–7; Conway, *Men and Women*, 141–3; Labahn, *Jesus als Lebensspender*, 420–2; U. Schnelle, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (THKNT 4; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1998) 190 (with appeal to 20.31); B. J. Malina and R. L. Rohrbach, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998) 199 (Martha now understands the antisociety's antilanguage); L. Schenke, *Johannes: Kommentar* (Kommentare zu den Evangelien; Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1998) 226 (with reference to 20.31). Scholars discuss its origins as a primitive creed (see Barrett, *St John*, 397), and even suggest that it had its origins in a baptismal confession (see G. Bornkamm, 'Das Bekenntnis im Hebräerbrief', *Studien zu Antike und Urchristentum: Gesammelte Aufsätze Band II* [BEvT 28; München: Kaiser, 1959] 191–2 n. 8). The Johannine context, read synchronically, not the possible credal background to Martha's words, when the passage is approached diachronically, must come first in the interpretation of John 11. On this, see Byrne, *Lazarus*, 65–7.

37 Another issue that calls for further thought is the need for her to report 'secretly' (v. 28: λάθρᾳ). The best solution is that, in the light of the concerns of the disciples in v. 8, the news of Jesus' presence needs to be kept from 'the Jews', who joined the sisters in v. 19 (see Brown, *John*, 1.425). But if this is the case, the presence of 'the Jews' in John 11 is not as innocuous as many (including Brown) suggest.

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belief conditioned by religious and cultural circumstances (see 1.38, 49; 3.2; 4.31; 6.25; 9.2; 11.8).[38] But that Jesus is 'calling for' Mary is a surprise as it is not in the text. What is even more interesting is the choice of the verb φωνέω rather than the expected καλέω to indicate this 'calling'. Later in the narrative the φωνή of Jesus will call Lazarus into life (see 11.43).[39] As Mary is drawn into the action, the reader recalls the primacy given to Mary in vv. 1–2. She was named before her sister, and her anointing and wiping of Jesus' feet was a textual marker that asked the reader to pay attention to this character. She responds to the call of Jesus' voice, falls at his feet, and confesses her trust in him.

Mary's actions and words differ markedly from those of Martha. Her prostration indicates an attitude of trust and worship (ἔπεσεν αὐτοῦ πρὸς τοῦς πόδας), and it also reintroduces her association with the feet of Jesus mentioned in v. 2. The 'positioning' of the two women generates a very different 'tone' to the words spoken, even if these words are (at first sight) identical. Martha has approached Jesus and addressed him face to face (see vv. 20–2). Mary is called by Jesus, and she speaks to him from a prostrate position.[40] She omits Martha's words about God's preparedness to grant Jesus everything he asks (see v. 22). Martha's expression of Jesus' authority as a God-directed miracle worker has been eliminated. She states simply '*if you had been here* (εἰ ἦς ὧδε) my brother would not have died' (v. 32). The fact that she repeats the words of her sister (see v. 21), but omits any further reason why she believes that Jesus' presence may have saved her brother (see v. 22), is promising. Given the marked differences in the way each of the sisters approaches Jesus, the position each of them adopts in speaking to him, and the subsequent 'tone' that can be heard behind their words, Mary's hesitant use of the verb 'to be' may indicate a better understanding of Jesus. He has revealed himself, under the rubric of the ἐγώ εἰμι statement in vv. 25–6, as the res-

38 Barrett, *St John*, 397, admits: 'The description is surprising after the exalted terms of Martha's confession of faith (v. 27).'

39 Space does not permit a more extensive treatment of the importance of the φωνή of Jesus in this Gospel. See 3.29; 5.25, 28, 37; 10.3, 4, 27; 18.37. See Moloney, *Signs and Shadows*, 163–4.

40 I am grateful to Dr Cleo McNelly Kearns, who pointed this out to me in her response to the earlier version of this study presented at the annual meeting, at Princeton Theological Seminary on 8 March 2003, of the Association of Biblical Theologians (see n. 1). She commented on the 'tone' of Martha's remark. I cite from her typewritten, but unpublished, response to my paper: 'It's the injured innocence, the resentment, the implicit rebuke to Jesus that I hear; I hear it as bordering on inappropriate, though permissable, perhaps, in a time of extreme grief and stress.' On Mary, Kearns notes: 'Mary's body language, as she utters the same affirmation, bespeaks a very different stance. She makes her affirmation from a position of prostration, which gives the same affirmation a very different valance.' I am grateful to Dr Kearns for allowing me access to her response. For stimulating further reflections on the impact of 'tone' in interpreting literature, see C. M. Kearns, 'Apocalypse and Wisdom: The Problem of Tone in T. S. Eliot's Poetry', *Christianity and Literature* 41 (1992) 121–39.

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urrection and the life. Maybe Mary's use of the verb 'to be' (εἰ ἦς ὧδε), without further explanatory comment, to suggest that Jesus' presence may have saved her brother (v. 32), transcends Martha's aggressive understanding of Jesus as a miracle worker and Messiah (vv. 21–2).[41]

This positive direction of the narrative changes sharply as Jesus sees her weeping 'and the Jews who had come with her also weeping' (v. 33ab). To this point in the story Mary has been introduced to the reader as the one who has anointed Jesus, wiped his feet with her hair (v. 2), responded to the voice of Jesus, and shown her trust in him. Nothing has been said of sorrow or tears on the part of Mary.[42] But she now joins 'the Jews' in their weeping.

Two issues call for examination: 'the Jews' (v. 33a) and the use of the verb ἐμβριμάομαι to describe Jesus' reaction to Mary's association with 'the Jews' (v. 33b). The reader, who is able to look back across the Johannine story to this point, recalls that 'the Jews' are the people whom the disciples indicated were seeking to stone Jesus (v. 8). Their active entry into the narrative shows that they respond to death in the expected way. They go to console those whom they would expect to be mourning (v. 19). But, coming from vv. 1–6, the reader is aware that this is a misunderstanding of the Johannine point of view. This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God and the means by which the Son of God will be glorified (v. 4). Jesus is glad that Lazarus has died, so that the disciples might come to true faith (v. 15: ἵνα πιστεύσητε). The narrative is designed to lead the reader away from mourning and weeping toward faith in Jesus as the resurrection and the life (vv. 25–6; see v. 26b: πιστεύεις τοῦτο;). Anything short of this is not good enough, but 'the Jews' are portrayed as characters who oppose Jesus (v. 8), and who go to Mary and Martha that they might console them over the loss of Lazarus (v. 19). In v. 33,

41 This positive assessment of Mary's initial response to 'the voice' of Jesus is also at odds with most interpretations of John 11. See, for example, Brown, *John*, 1.435: 'The scene does not advance the action; vs. 34 could easily follow v. 27, and no one would know the difference.' G. Rochais, *Les récits de resurrection des morts dans le Nouveau Testament* (SNTSMS 40; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1981) 143, regards vv. 28–31 as 'versets de remplissage'. M. Scott, *Sophia and the Johannine Jesus* (JSNTSup 71; Sheffield: JSOT, 1992) 206, comments that 'Mary's role ... is almost insignificant in comparison with that of her sister'. See also Marchadour, *Lazare*, 123–6. In general terms, Schneiders, 'Women', 41–2, and Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 140–2, regard Mary as a model disciple on the basis of 12.1–8. But 11.2, which prepares the reader for a sympathetic appreciation of Mary, and the further development of that theme in vv. 28–37, must be given their place. Schnackenburg, *St John*, 2.322, regards v. 2 as a gloss, and thus assesses Mary in vv. 28–37 as 'nothing but a complaining woman' (2.333).

42 Mary's remaining in the house in v. 20 is sometimes wrongly interpreted as her taking up a traditional position of mourning. This is to read into the text, as does, for example, Marchadour, *Lazare*, 124: 'Marie de bout en bout est marquée par une série cumulative des notions funèbres.' Her remaining behind (v. 20) is best understood as a narrative preparation for her eventual positive response to the voice of Jesus, who calls her. This differentiates her from Martha, who went to Jesus without invitation (v. 28).

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Mary, despite her good start, called by Jesus, prostrating herself at his feet, and modifying Martha's understanding of Jesus (vv. 28–32), has joined the weeping Jews. They are with her because when they observed that she was leaving the house they followed, thinking that she was going to weep at Lazarus's tomb (v. 31). The storyteller, therefore, uses 'the Jews' to model a mistaken understanding of the death of Lazarus. The narrative as a whole communicates that Jesus, the resurrection and the life (vv. 25–6), transcends expected human response to death (οὐκ ἔστιν πρὸς θάνατον). But Mary falters, as she joins the weeping 'Jews' in their inability to understand the significance of the presence of Jesus. She, too, cannot transcend the human pain and sorrow generated by the death of a loved one.

We must allow the verb ἐμβριμάομαι to have its correct meaning. Both the lexical meaning, and the few New Testament uses of the verb (Mark 1.43; 14.5; Matt 9.30), carry an idea of hostility.[43] The context of the passage, as I am interpreting it, allows the Johannine text to maintain the basic meaning of anger and hostility implied by the use of this verb. The depth of Jesus' disturbance is indicated by the use of another verb denoting a powerful emotional response, ταράσσω, and the locating of this anger and emotion at the depths of his being: τῷ πνεύματι. Jesus is angered and deeply disturbed emotionally – even to the point of tears – by the universal lack of faith.[44] His profound annoyance and emotional dis-

43 F. Danker's latest edition of W. Bauer's *Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, after two entries indicating the hostile nature of the word ('snorting' is involved), can cite only the Johannine use of the word in John 11.33, 38, to allow a third possibility: 'to feel strongly about'. See BAGD, 332, s.v. ἐμβριμάομαι. This is an example of how a widespread interpretation of a text can influence philologists. See also LSJ, 330, s.v. βριμάζω; 540, s.v. ἐμβριμάομαι. For an excellent survey of the use of the verb in classical literature, showing that it always reflects anger, see B. Lindars, 'Rebuking the Spirit: A New Analysis of the Lazarus Story of John 11', *NTS* 38 (1992) 92–6. For surveys of the discussion among exegetes, see Brown, *John*, 425–6, and Barrett, *St John*, 398–400. Attempts have been made in the textual traditions (e.g. P^{45}, P^{66} and Codex Bezae) to soften the anger implied by the use of the verb. Lindars, 'Rebuking the Spirit', 97–104, suggests that a Johannine source reported Jesus' angry rebuking of an evil spirit (as, for example, in Mark 1.43; 9.25–9). Thus, the original meaning of the word was present in the source. However, in John 11, not demons but death is overcome. In accommodating the source to its present context, John's use of ἐμβιμάομαι is conditioned by the accompanying use of ταράσσω, and thus comes to mean emotionally moved.

44 I take this position hesitantly in light of the close association of the verb ἐμβριμάομαι and Jesus' weeping. Jesus' tears reflect a profound *human* experience, and I do not wish to rob the text of that element. But the evangelist does not wish the reader to associate Jesus with Mary and 'the Jews'. At the Princeton meeting mentioned in n. 40, Cleo McNelly Kearns suggested a most interesting 'third possibility': 'that Jesus wept at the grief of his living friends, even though he knew that grief to be unnecessary, and that his resurrection of Lazarus was a response to his dawning perception of the depth of human despair, a depth he must "sound" even though he recognizes that it is due to a misperception'. I am again citing her typewritten response to my study.

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turbance lead him to tears, but the verb used to speak of Jesus' weeping (δάκρυω) singles him out from others who mourn the loss of Lazarus.[45] 'The Jews', and eventually Mary, were involved in wailing, reflected in the use of the verb κλαίω (vv. 31, 33 [twice]). Jesus does not join this wailing. However one interprets Jesus' weeping, it must be distinguished from the mourning of Mary and 'the Jews'.

John 11 is regularly used at Christian funerals, but Jesus is not weeping over the loss of his friend.[46] Such an attitude makes nonsense of his initial response to the news of Lazarus's illness in vv. 1–6, and his discussions with the disciples once his death is announced in vv. 6–16. But that is the way 'the Jews' misunderstand his tears. They read his emotional response in vv. 33 and 35 as an indication that he, like them, and Mary who has joined them, weeps at the death of Lazarus.[47] Their words, 'See how he loved him' (v. 36), may or may not be true, but they have not understood the thrust of the Johannine rhetoric. This is not a sickness unto death; it is for the glory of God and the means by which the Son of God will be glorified (v. 4). Jesus, the resurrection and the life, is angered, deeply moved, and he weeps, as all his attempts to lead his disciples, Martha and Mary into a true understanding of life and death meet failure. 'The Jews' also accept Martha's earlier assessment of Jesus as a miracle worker (see vv. 21–2). They look back to the cure of the man born blind in 9.6–8, and ask why, if he could open the eyes of a blind man, he did not cure his beloved friend Lazarus (v. 37). 'He is being understood only in accord with the exchanges of worldly love, or merely as a performer of signs and a worker of cures in a world still dominated by death.'[48]

5. *Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus (vv. 38–44)*

In the midst of his profound disturbance (vv. 33, 35) Jesus asks to be led to the tomb (v. 34). This request, closing a series of encounters during which he has met different responses from the two sisters and 'the Jews', leads the narrative into the dénouement of vv. 38–44. To this point in the story his word, summoning the characters in the story to belief (see vv. 4, 15, 23, 25–6), has failed (see vv. 16, 27, 33, 36–7). The miraculous climax of the account is at hand (vv. 38–44). Jesus will show that his word is confirmed by his deeds, but even here, his actions seek to arouse belief. He becomes the major agent in the narrative, as he moves for the first time since v. 17.

45 This is the only use of the verb in the NT. See the significant use of the noun δάκρυον in the christological statement of Heb 5.7.

46 I have no objection to the use of the passage at funerals. However, not Jesus' tears, but the Christology of vv. 25–6 speak to the Christian experience of death.

47 The use of different verbs, κλαίω and δάκρυω, should make it obvious to readers of the original text that Jesus does not, like 'the Jews', weep at the death of Lazarus. Whatever emotion is being expressed, it is different from that of Mary and 'the Jews'. This is noted by Byrne, *Lazarus*, 108.

48 Kelly and Moloney, *Experiencing God*, 242.

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The verb ἐμβριμάομαι returns in v. 38, as Jesus goes to the tomb and demands that it be opened. There is aggression here, as in v. 34 he asked where the tomb was situated, and is invited to 'come and see'. However, in v. 38 there is no indication that Jesus is led to the tomb; he 'came to the tomb' of his own initiative (ἔρχεται εἰς τὸ μνεῖον). But Martha, widely regarded by scholars as having confessed her faith in Jesus in a fully Johannine fashion in v. 27, objects: she is afraid of the bad odor that will come from the tomb of a person who has been dead for four days (v. 39). This is hardly what one would expect from someone who believes that Jesus is the resurrection and the life (vv. 25–6, 27).[49] Martha is still locked within her own world, that of tombs, death and sorrow. The anger of Jesus flows into words as he reprimands Martha in v. 40. He uses the singular pronoun and the singular form of the verbs 'to believe' and 'to see', pointedly asking her: 'Did I not tell you (σοι) that if you would believe (ὅτι ἐὰν πιστεύσῃς) you would see (ὄψῃ) the glory of God (τὴν δόξαν τοῦ θεοῦ)?'[50] The eyes of faith are needed to see in Jesus the δόξα of God (see 2.11).[51] This harsh rebuke, framed as a rhetorical question, suggests that she has not arrived at an expression of perfect Johannine faith in v. 27. The most authoritative figure in the narrative, Jesus, insists that Martha has not believed, and for that reason she is unable to see the glory of God, promised in v. 4. Allowing the context to determine the meaning of any single part of the text, one is forced to conclude that the Martha of vv. 39–40 has not come to an expression of full Johannine faith in v. 27.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the rhetorical function of John 11 is to

49 A. Loisy, *Le quatrième évangile* (Paris: Emile Nourry, 1921) 352–3, and Bultmann, *John*, 407 n. 7, point to the contradiction, but do not resolve it. Bultmann puts it down to a confusion of sources. Labahn, *Jesus als Lebensspender*, 429–30, also looks to sources to explain the conflict, but does not regard it as confusion. Some scholars struggle (unconvincingly) to combine this answer with Martha's expression of faith in v. 27. See, for example, Lindars, *John*, 399–400; Rochais, *Les récits*, 144; Kremer, *Lazarus*, 75. Others, for example Barrett, *St John*, 402; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 194; Schenke, *Johannes*, 229, ignore it. Witherington, *John's Wisdom*, 199, highlights the contradiction, and rightly concludes: 'In this story Martha clearly enough believes in Jesus, in particular in his healing power and messianic character, but she does not yet understand that Jesus *is* the resurrection and the life, who can give life even in the present.' Brown, *John*, 1.433, wants it both ways. He claims that v. 27 replaces the Petrine 'supreme confession of faith' (see above, n. 34), but when faced with v. 39 he withdraws this judgement: 'In vs 27 she addresses him with lofty titles . . . yet 39 shows that she does not yet believe in his power to give life.' For a good study that assesses v. 27 positively (belief, but still not perfect) yet explains Martha's faltering at the tomb (still discovering the full meaning of her confession), see Lee, *Flesh and Glory*, 215–19.

50 Schenke, *Johannes*, 229, bypasses the use of the second person singular address to Martha in v. 40 by claiming that Jesus' words are not only for Martha, but also for the reader. This does happen in the Johannine rhetoric, but is usually marked by a movement from the singular to the plural. See esp. 1.50–1 and 3.11–12.

51 See Kremer, *Lazarus*, 36–8; Schnelle, *Antidocetic Christology*, 134.

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summon readers to faith in Jesus, the resurrection and the life, to recognize that he transcends the apparent irresolvable tragedy of human death. 'The life of faith works on a deeper level than merely coping with grief.'[52] Jesus' prayer at the tomb almost reads like a last-ditch appeal to his Father that some might come to believe that he is the sent one of God. Jesus' oneness with the Father makes it unnecessary that he pray for himself, but there is a dire need for the gift of belief to those who have accompanied Jesus to this point in the story. In a way that parallels his words to the disciples in v. 15 (ἵνα πιστεύσητε), he prays 'on account of the people standing by [Mary, Martha and "the Jews"], that they might believe (ἵνα πιστευσώσιν) that you sent me' (vv. 41–2). The miracle follows (vv. 43–4), and the reader reads on, to see if Jesus' actions enabled any of the bystanders to come to belief in him as the resurrection and the life (vv. 25–6), the sent one of God.

6. *'The Jews' and Jesus (vv. 45–54)*

The consequences of the miracle continue to spell out the agenda set for the narrative by the words of Jesus in v. 4. The illness of Lazarus is not unto death, but for the glory of God and the means by which the Son of God will be glorified. The glory of God is revealed (see v. 40), and as so often in the Fourth Gospel, it produces a division among those who have witnessed it (see 7.31; 7.43; 8.30; 9.16; 10.19, 42). What must be noticed is that those who come to faith are closely linked with Mary. No mention is made of Martha. Most translations soften this association by rendering οἱ ἐλθόντες πρὸς τὴν Μαρίαμ as many of the Jews 'who had come with Mary' (RSV), but the use of the preposition πρός may reflect a more dynamic relationship. Whatever one makes of this, and admittedly, koiné Greek has generally lost many of the subtleties found in the classical use of prepositions,[53] it is the association of the believing Jews with Mary that is highlighted. As she received singular attention at the beginning of the story (v. 2), so she is featured as the person associated with those Jews who came to believe in Jesus as a result of the miracle at the end of the story (v. 45). The narrator continues to focus the reader's attention upon Mary.

But the other side of the σχίσμα manifests a lack of belief that, ironically, will lead to the crucifixion, the means by which the Son of God will be glorified (v. 4). Some of 'the Jews' present at the miracle report to the Pharisees what Jesus had done (v. 46). They only tell of the deeds that Jesus had done (v. 46: ἃ ἐποίησεν Ἰησοῦς). Nothing is said of his self-revelation as the resurrection and the life (vv. 25–6), or his prayer that they might come to faith in him as the sent one of the

52 Kelly and Moloney, *Experiencing God*, 247.

53 See BDF, 110, para. 203; D. B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996) 362–3.

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Father (v. 42). Faced with the difficulty of a rabble-rouser who might unsettle their established authority, the chief priests and the Pharisees gather the council (συνέδριον).[54] The misunderstanding of 'the Jews' continues as Jesus is judged as a miracle worker who is attracting the people (v. 47a). Something must be done to bring his activities to an end, or else 'everyone' (πάντες) will believe in him (vv. 47b–48). Ironically, the lack of faith on the part of some of 'the Jews' and the leaders of 'the Jews' is matched by the fear that Jesus' miracles might arouse universal belief in him.

The delicate balance between Rome and the local religious and political authorities at the time of Jesus lies behind the Sanhedrin's conclusion that popular, miracle-working figures, if left unchecked, will create havoc. The experience of 65–70 CE lies behind their words. 'The Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation' (v. 48). Into this debate steps Caiaphas, remembered as high priest in the year of Jesus' execution.[55] He accuses his fellow leaders of inability to think and plan correctly (vv. 49c–50), and takes a position that is at one level opportunist and at another an interpretation of the death of Jesus.[56] Caiaphas speaks of ridding the nation of a troublemaker, but in doing so recalls the tradition of the Maccabean martyrs, whose deaths gave life to the nation (v. 50). The narrator takes this comment further. Caiaphas, prophesying, as can be sometimes expected of a high priest,[57] rightly indicates that Jesus' death will be for the nation, but that it will also gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad (vv. 51–2; see 3.14; 8.28; 10.15–16). The significance of the death of Jesus, which opened the narrative (11.4), returns as it draws to a close (vv. 51–2). The death of Jesus for the nation, and also for the gathering of many, is set in motion (v. 53). The larger literary unit of 11.1–54 closes as Jesus goes into the wilderness, accompanied only by his disciples (v. 54).

54 The use of 'Sanhedrin' in this context is historically difficult. The difficulty is resolved by recognizing here a Johannine use of the expression to represent the assembly of those who have decided against Jesus as the Christ, the revelation of God. See W. Grundmann, 'The Decision of the Supreme Court to put Jesus to Death (John 11.47–57) in its Context: Tradition and Redaction in the Gospel of John', *Jesus and the Politics of His Day* (ed. E. Bammel and C. D. F. Moule; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1984) 297–8.

55 For this interpretation of the strange indication that Caiaphas was high priest that year, see Moloney, *John*, 343.

56 On this, see the valuable study of W. Grimm, 'Die Preisgabe eines Menschen zur Rettung des Volkes: Priesterliche Tradition bei Johannes und Josephus', *Josephus-Studien: Untersuchungen zur Josephus, dem Antiken Judentum und dem Neuen Testament. Otto Michel zum 70. Geburtstag gewidmet* (ed. O. Betz, K. Haacker and M. Hengel; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984) 133–46.

57 On the prophetic activity of the high priest, see Josephus, *War* 1.68–9; *Ant.* 6.115–16; 13.282–3, 299; Philo, *Spec. leg.* 4.191–2. See also Moloney, *John*, 344.

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7. ***The Passover was at hand (vv. 55–7)***

This following section of the narrative opens with another link with the death of Jesus: 'Now the passover of the Jews was at hand' (v. 55a). It serves as a bridge between the events surrounding the sickness, the death and the raising of Lazarus for the revelation of the glory of God and as the means by which the Son would be glorified (11.4) and the events of 12.1–36. The following episode, looking back to 11.55–7, opens with the indication: 'Six days before the Passover' (12.1). In 11.55–6 people from the country gather in Jerusalem for the Passover, perform their ritual lustrations, and ask idle questions about Jesus. But Jesus' violent end looms, as his arrest is promulgated by the chief priests and the Pharisees (vv. 55–7). The hour has come for glorification of the Son by means of his being lifted up on a cross (see v. 4; 12.23). The cross looms large as the reader moves to 12.1–8.

8. ***Six days before the Passover: Jesus, Mary and Judas (12.1–8)***

The unexpected reference to Mary as the one who anointed Jesus' feet in 11.2 is clarified by the narrative of 12.1–8, which must be read as a continuation of 11.1–57.[58] As the Passover draws near, Jesus, Lazarus, Martha and Mary share a meal (vv. 1–2). Mary, who had started so well, but who roused Jesus' anger when she joined 'the Jews' in their tears (11.28–33), lavishly anoints the feet of Jesus and wipes his feet with her hair (12.3a; see 11.2). The careful reader also recalls that she fell at his feet in 11.32. The anointing of Jesus' feet leads to the filling of the house with the sweet fragrance of the costly ointment of pure nard (λίτραν μύρου νάρδου πιστικῆς πολυτίμου).[59] Mary brings to closure a long series of episodes during which no one has understood the revelatory purpose of the illness and death of Lazarus (see v. 4). Two elements in 12.1–8 indicate that Mary, who has played a leading role across the narrative (11.1, 2, 28–37, 45), recognizes the importance of the death of Jesus, and anoints him accordingly (12.3). That this is the case is indicated by the odor that fills the whole house (v. 3b), and Jesus' correction of Judas's objection to the wasteful nature of the anointing (v. 7, in response to vv. 5–6).

Some scholars, following a rabbinic tradition, Ignatius and Clement of Alexandria, regard the remark about the spreading of the fragrance through the house as a Johannine interpretation of Mark 14.9: the spreading of the beautiful

58 In narrative critical terms, one would say that the 'gap' of 11.2 is filled by the information provided by 12.1–8.

59 It is impossible to identify the exact nature of this ointment. Yet it is mentioned by both Mark (14.3) and John. See the discussion in F. J. Moloney, *The Johannine Son of Man* (2nd edn; Biblioteca di Scienze Religiose 14; Rome: LAS, 1978) 164. The pleonastic description, however, indicates its costliness, as does Judas's suggestion that it could be sold for 300 denarii (v. 5).

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odor is a symbol of the spread of the gospel throughout the Gentile world.[60] Such readings are uncalled for. The gesture is a demonstration of love and dedication, and the spreading of the odor indicates extravagance.[61] However, it is more than that. It is a final moment in the contrasting presentation of Martha and Mary. Martha objected to Jesus' request that the tomb of Lazarus be opened, as this would produce an evil odor (11.39). In v. 40 Jesus responded severely to the lack of faith reflected in these words concerning the evil odor that comes from death. On the other hand, Mary's loving gesture fills the house with fragrance (12.3b).[62] A thief and the future betrayer objects to the gesture (vv. 4–6), but Jesus supports her, and explains what she has done as a recognition and acceptance of his imminent death (vv. 7–8).

Jesus' explanation, in v. 7, of the significance of the anointing is crucial but notoriously difficult.[63] The Greek ἵνα . . . τηρήσῃ αὐτό . . . should be translated: '*so that she might keep it* for the day of the preparation of my burial'. If this is what is meant, then Mary is to keep some of the ointment for the anointing of Jesus after his death. In Mark 14.3 the jar was broken, and thus none of the ointment remained, but this is not mentioned in John.[64] But, if the text is understood in this way, why was Judas able to complain about the loss of the ointment (v. 5)? It is also difficult to see how this jar of ointment would add to the 'hundred pounds' used for the burial of Jesus (see 19.39). It is better to understand v. 7, in the light of v. 5, as an explanation for the loss of the ointment. A major break can be made after the words, directed to Judas, 'Let her alone (ἄφες αὐτήν)'. But this renders the rest of the verse difficult. It leaves a freestanding sentence that opens with a ἵνα-statement. Following the suggestion of Brown, the rest of the sentence can be read

60 See *EcclesR* 7.1; *SongR* 1.22; Ignatius, *Ephesians*, 17.1 (*The Apostolic Fathers* [trans. K. Lake; LCL; Heinemann. Harvard, 1912) 191); Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 2.8 (PG 8.466–90). For this interpretation, see W. Bauer, *Das Johannesevangelium erklärt* (3rd edn; HTKNT 6; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1933) 159; E. C. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel* (ed. F. N. Davey; London: Faber & Faber, 1947) 415. Loisy, *Le quatrième évangile*, 362–63, goes further (see also Brodie, *John*, 407), suggesting that it symbolizes the Gentile church receiving the gospel message at the feet of Jesus.

61 Given John's focus on δόξα (see 11.4, 40), there may also be an allusion to the image of the cloud enveloping the tabernacle at the end of Exodus. In Exod 40.34–5 it is twice stated: 'the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle'. I am grateful to Professor William P. Brown of Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia, USA, for this suggestion.

62 This contrast is rarely noticed, but see Lee, *Symbolic Narratives*, 222 n. 2; idem, *Flesh and Glory*, 204–5; G. R. O'Day, 'John', *The Women's Bible Commentary* (expanded edn; ed. C. A. Newsome and S. H. Ringe; London: SCM, 1998) 299.

63 As C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1953) 370, rightly remarks, 'It seems clear that for John's purpose the significant point of the story comes in xii.7 with its reference to the burial of Jesus'.

64 For this interpretation, see, for example, B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel according to St. John* (London: John Murray, 1908) 178; Bauer, *Johannesevangelium*, 159.

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as self-standing, translating the ἵνα as 'the purpose was that'. Thus, the verse reads: 'Let her alone. The purpose was that (ἵνα) she might keep this for the day of the preparation for my burial.'[65] This solution brings its own difficulties, but it seems to suit the context better, as the day of preparation for burial is symbolically fulfilled at Bethany.[66] The passion is in view, and the anointing is seen as a preparation for Jesus' death. In the context, the symbol is clear: Mary's long-awaited anointing of his feet (see 11.2) is the day of preparation for the burial of Jesus. The passion has been set in motion as a result of the raising of Lazarus (see 11.49–53, 57), and Mary's action is preparation for the death of Jesus. 'The reader is invited to see in Mary's action a symbolic embalming of His body for burial.'[67] For the first time in the narrative, Jesus' proximate death is recognized. Mary is the first to accept that the illness and death of Lazarus will be the means by which the Son of God will be glorified (11.4). Jesus' supportive explanation of Mary's gesture in v. 7 indicates that, at last, one of the characters in the story has 'got it right'.

Conclusion

A reading of the Gospel of John should not divide characters in the story, and consequently readers of the story, into individuals or groups who are either *for* the Johannine presentation of the gift of Jesus *or* against it.[68] Although some of the characters in the text decide against Jesus, most of them fall somewhere between these two extremes, and all of them are used by an author to address the readers. The portrayal of the characters is not an end in itself. This is a significant example of the all-pervasive rhetoric of the Gospel of John. The original readers of this Gospel were summoned to move on from where they were, into a deeper commitment of faith. Occasionally, as in the case of Mary of Bethany, one of the characters 'gets it right', but such characters are not in the narrative so that we might look back at them in admiration. Similarly, in most instances 'the Jews' are portrayed as a group that has decided against Jesus, and thus they regularly 'get it

65 Brown, *John*, 1.449. See also Schenke, *Johannes*, 239–40. For full discussions of the difficulties and possibilities for v. 7, see J. A. Kleist, 'A Note on the Greek Text of St. John 12,7', *Classical Journal* 21 (1925) 46–8; W. Kühne, 'Eine kritische Studie zu Joh. 12,7', *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* 98–99 (1926) 476–7.

66 Brown, *John*, 1.447–9.

67 Lightfoot, *St John's Gospel*, 236. See also Moloney, *Son of Man*, 167–71. As Schenke, *Johannes*, 240, remarks, 'Sie weiss, was sie tut; als wahre Jüngerin weiss sie um das Heilssterben Jesu und stimmt ihm zu.' See also the excellent treatment of Lee, *Symbolic Narratives*, 218–22. Lee rightly concludes her study of 12.1–8: 'Mary's confession is greater than any previous confession' (p. 222). See now, Lee's further development of her reading of 12.1–8 in *Flesh and Glory*, 200–11.

68 In what follows, I am using categories developed by Reinhartz, *Befriending the Beloved Disciple*. For the possibility that the gospel can be divisive in this way, see pp. 17–31.

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wrong'. But 'the Jews' are not in the narrative so that we might look back at them in disgust.

As readers follow the struggle of characters in the story who sometimes 'get it right' and sometimes 'get it wrong', they are invited to join them in their journey. The author says this expressly as he closes the Gospel. He has made a selection from the many possible tales that he could have told from the life of Jesus (20.30), for a purpose. 'These things are written so that you may go on believing (ἵνα πιστεύητε) that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing (καὶ ἵνα πιστεύοντες) you may have life in his name' (v. 31). The 'you' of this conclusion have already been addressed directly by the prologue (1.1–18) and by the words addressed to them in 19.35. They are at all times the focus of the author's narrative rhetoric.

The above study of John 11.1–12.8 attempts to blend traditional historical-critical analysis of the passage with a more narrative-critical and rhetorical approach. Surprisingly, a much-studied and widely used text, read through these lenses, provides fresh questions for the Christian reader. An appreciation of this rhetorical strategy on the part of the author of the Gospel of John goes at least part of the way in resolving some of the dilemmas that face the interpreter of this Gospel. The author aims this narrative at *the readers*. Problems arising *in the text* – the unfortunate naming of the characters who regularly oppose Jesus as οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, certain historical inaccuracies that defy explanation (e.g. the use of 'the Sanhedrin' in 11.47), the logical non-sequiturs (e.g. the meaning of 12.7) – can be eased if we interpret them in the light of the author's use of the narrative to persuade readers *of the text*.[69]

A fundamental Johannine belief stands at the heart of the story of the death of Lazarus, negated by the tears of sorrow and the sense of loss shared by his two sisters, Martha and Mary, supported by 'the Jews' who weep with them. In Johannine thought, '[w]hile death is given its due as a human fact, it is shorn of its symbolic power. Human mortality is no longer a menacing realm of darkness enclosing the world in the domain of the "ruler of this world" (16.11), and causing those haunted by its power to seek a spurious life of worldly glory and influence.'[70] Across John 11 all the characters in the story 'get it wrong'. They fail to see that the illness and death of Lazarus is for the revelation of the glory of God and the means by which the Son of God will be glorified (11.4). Mary's extravagant preparation of

69 This suggestion, of course, is not new. It pushes further (into a 'third level'?) the 'two level drama' so excitingly proposed by J. Louis Martyn in 1968. Martyn has prepared a new edition of this book. A preface by D. Moody Smith takes into account the debates that this stimulating study has provoked: J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (3rd edn; The New Testament Library; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003).

70 Kelly and Moloney, *Experiencing God*, 128.

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Jesus' body for burial indicates that she has overcome the menacing realm of human mortality.

In the end, the Fourth Evangelist would be unhappy with any reader left unchallenged by all that is generated by this powerful narrative.[71] Such a reader would not have been stung into deeper commitment. The Gospel of John generates an engaged reader who must wrestle with all the implications of this story of Jesus.[72] I am aware that the above reading of John 11.1–12.8 is at variance with much that has been written and said about this famous passage.[73] Yet, I trust, it generates a reciprocity between reader and text where the reader may certainly shape the text, but especially where the text is permitted to shape the reader.[74] The evangelist wants the reader to rise from a reading of the Gospel of John 'engaged', challenged, and even threatened. His rhetoric insists that not even the noblest of human experiences and sentiments, such as those that surround the death of a loved one, can exhaust the all-surpassing experience of encountering our God and Father (see 20.17), made known in and through the person and message of Jesus Christ.[75] 'The emotional mood of the death-shadowed world – in which both life and love are precarious – is shocked into another level of reality. Another purpose is at work. It owes nothing to death nor social expectations flowing from our mortality. "This illness is not unto death; it is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it" (11.4).'[76]

71 Reinhartz, *Befriending*, 54–80, calls this reader a 'compliant reader', and is rightly critical of the limitations of such a reading.

72 See Reinhartz, *Befriending*, 131–59.

73 Thus my suggestion that not only the characters in the story 'get it wrong', but also most interpreters of the story 'get it wrong'. There is, of course, every possibility that this interpreter has also 'got it wrong'.

74 On this hermeneutical process, see F. J. Moloney, *'A Hard Saying': The Gospel and Culture* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2001) 259–79.

75 See Kelly and Moloney, *Experiencing God,* 239: 'As the Son is in the Father and the Father in the Son (10.38), a power greater than death, and a glory greater than human glory is to be made manifest.'

76 Kelly and Moloney, *Experiencing God*, 238.

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