

The Opening of John's Narrative (John 1:19–2:22)

Edited by
R. ALAN CULPEPPER
and JÖRG FREY

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Historical, Literary, and Theological Readings from
the Colloquium Ioanneum 2015 in Ephesus

Edited by
R. Alan Culpepper and Jörg Frey

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Recurring Characters in John 1:19–2:11: A Narrative-Critical and Reader-Oriented Approach

Christos Karakolis

Distinguishing between categories of characters in a complex narrative such as the Fourth Gospel can be helpful, although unavoidably generalising, and thus also simplifying to a certain degree.¹ A meaningful way of categorising the Johannine characters would be discerning between recurring and non-recurring ones.

Significantly, most of the important and recurring characters of the Johannine narrative are introduced directly or indirectly in 1:19–2:11. This textual unity clearly seems to possess an introductory character in the Johannine narrative as a whole,² based on the following observations:

- a) As already mentioned, 1:19–2:11 presents the Gospel's readers with almost all recurring individual protagonists of the narrative as a whole, i.e. Jesus (1:29), John the Baptist (1:19), Andrew and an unnamed disciple (1:37, 40), Simon Peter (1:40–41), Philip (1:43), Nathanael (1:45), and the Mother of Jesus (2:1). It also mentions all important group-characters, namely the priestly establishment of Jerusalem (priests and Levites as envoys of the Jews of Jerusalem in 1:19), the Pharisees (1:24), and indirectly the Jews as a whole (2:6).
- b) Apart from introducing the main narrative characters, 1:19–2:11 presents the readers with the first week of the narrative action almost day by day (1:19, 29, 35, 43; 2:11), beginning with John the Baptist's witness and ending with Jesus' first sign at Cana.³ After this first week, the evangelist accelerates time by focusing on Jewish festivals for a period of about three

¹ On the usual categories of characters see J. L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 121–32.

² Cf. A. Leinhäupl, *Rettendes Wissen im Johannesevangelium: Ein Zugang über die narrativen Rahmenteile (Joh 1,19–2,12 – 20,1–21,25)* (NTAbh NF 45; Münster: Aschendorff, 2003), 37–41.

³ Cf. T. Barrosse, "The Seven Days of the New Creation in St. John's Gospel," *CBQ* 21 (1959): 507–16; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (Pillar New Testament Commentary; Leicester: InterVarsity; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 167; M. W. G. Stibbe, *John* (Readings: A New Biblical Commentary; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 46.

years starting with the narrative's first Passover (2:13). He then once again starts counting time by days right before the last Passover (12:1), thus forming a kind of a temporal *inclusio* between the start and the end of Jesus' public activity.⁴

- c) This *inclusio* also has a geographical dimension focusing on Jerusalem as the beginning and ending, as well as the most prominent place of Jesus' public activity. In the Fourth Gospel, most of the narrative action by far takes place in Jerusalem.⁵ On the other hand, in 1:19–2:11 Jesus moves in Perea (1:28) and in Galilee (2:1).
- d) 1:19–2:11 introduces almost all of the important christological titles used or implied in the overall Gospel's narrative,⁶ namely ὁ χριστός (1:20), Ἡλίας, ὁ προφήτης (1:21), ὁ ἀμνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ (1:29), ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ (1:34), ὁ μεσσίας (1:41), βασιλεὺς τοῦ Ἰσραήλ (1:49) and ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου (1:51). Furthermore, allusions at Jesus' death and resurrection are also present in the formulations ὁ ἀμνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ αἴρων τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου (1:29, 36),⁷ οὐπω ἤκει ἡ ὥρα μου (2:4),⁸ and ἐφάνέρωσεν τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ (2:11).⁹
- e) While in 1:19–2:11 John the Baptist acts publicly, Jesus' activity remains private. He may receive John's witness in public (1:29–34, 36), but he is only followed by two of John's disciples to his private dwelling place (1:37–39). The call of his disciples takes place in private (1:35–51). Even when his mother indirectly asks him to perform a miracle (2:3, 5), he handles in a way that only a small group of people perceive his sign (2:9, 11).¹⁰ His first public appearance and the initiation of his revelation to the world and of his course towards the hour (ὥρα) of his elevation (ὑψωσις) and glorification (δόξα) takes place in Jerusalem when he cleanses the temple (2:13–17) and subsequently performs a great number of signs (2:23).

⁴ See on the various aspects of narrative time in John, R. A. Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (FF; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 53–75.

⁵ Cf. U. Schnelle, "The Signs in the Gospel of John," in *John, Jesus, and History*, Vol. 3: *Glimpses of Jesus through the Johannine Lens* (ed. P. N. Anderson, F. Just, and T. Thatcher; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 240–41.

⁶ With the exception of σωτήρ τοῦ κόσμου (4:42) and ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ (6:69); cf. G. Van Belle, "Κύριος or Ἰησοῦς in John 4,1?" in *New Testament Textual Criticism and Exegesis: Festschrift J. Delobel* (ed. A. Denaux; BETL 161; Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 170; R. Kysar, *John, the Maverick Gospel* (3rd ed.; Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 46–51.

⁷ Cf. M. C. de Boer, *Johannine Perspectives on the Death of Jesus* (CBET 17; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996), 277–83.

⁸ Cf. F. J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John* (SP 4; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1998), 71–72.

⁹ Cf. U. Schnelle, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (5th ed.; THKNT 4; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2016), 93.

¹⁰ Cf. R. G. Maccini, *Her Testimony Is True: Women as Witnesses according to John* (LNTS 125; London: Bloomsbury, 1996), 109.

Based on the above observations, it would seem that the evangelist deliberately collects and presents most of his recurring characters in this first, introductory part of his book. His aim is then to introduce these characters from the very beginning of the narrative in order to unfold their development as the narrative progresses. While after 2:11 in the Johannine narrative, non-recurring characters are more frequently introduced than recurring ones, from the point of view of character-development, they are usually not as important as the latter. Of course, the readers can find indeed intriguing, complex and dynamic non-recurring characters, such as the Samaritan woman and the man born blind. However, the non-recurring characters of 1:19–2:11¹¹ appear to be rather static,¹² although this characterisation should not be indiscriminately applied to them, at least from a reader-oriented perspective. The reason is that even if the narrator himself does not develop these characters, hints about their potential development still exist, which knowledgeable readers can trace down and effectively use to fully understand them.¹³

Nevertheless, in the following analysis I will be exclusively focusing on the recurring characters of 1:19–2:11. These have a much stronger impact on the narrative as a whole, as well as on the Gospel's intended readers, because their development is not just hinted at, but unfolded in the text itself, therefore becoming a more significant constituent of its overall plot.¹⁴

The common and dominating trait of all recurring Johannine characters is the way they view Jesus or respond to him. Usually in John, the characters'

¹¹ Differently from the first chapter, in the second chapter, some non-recurring characters are also introduced, namely the servants (2:5), the steward (2:8), and the bridegroom (2:9).

¹² On static characters see Resseguie, *Criticism*, 125–26 (n. 1).

¹³ Just to name an example, the bridegroom is only presented to listen to the steward's rebuke about keeping the good wine for the end of the feast. He does not answer or do anything else in the narrative. However, it is unimaginable for the bridegroom to just accept an inexplicable fact that has to do with his property and sense of honour. Therefore, he should be expected to address the servants and perhaps even the Mother of Jesus in this regard. The answer he would get should contribute to his development in regard to his attitude toward Jesus. While the evangelist does not seem to be interested in this character's development, he leaves behind some bread-crumbs for his readers to draw plausible conclusions about it. This probably applies to all non-recurring characters of the Johannine narrative who have the potential of further development in the world of the Gospel's readers, cf. C. W. Skinner, "Characterization," in *How John Works: Storytelling in the Fourth Gospel* (ed. D. Estes and R. Sheridan; SBLRBS 86; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 122.

¹⁴ This, of course, does not necessarily apply to the more sophisticated non-recurring characters that appear in later stages of the narrative, such as the Samaritan woman and the man born blind, whose dramatic development is fully and impressively portrayed in the Johannine narrative itself, cf. the relevant analysis of D. R. Beck, *The Discipleship Paradigm: Readers and Anonymous Characters in the Fourth Gospel* (BibInt 27; Leiden: Brill, 1997), esp. 35–106.

varied responses to Jesus are depicted by the use of the multi-meaning concept of faith, the significance of which cannot be stressed enough.¹⁵ To name just a few examples: John the Baptist's mission is to lead everybody to faith in Jesus through his testimony (1:7). Those who believe in Jesus can potentially become children of God (1:12) or in other words already have eternal life (3:36). At Jesus' first sign, his disciples behold his glory and believe (2:11). Furthermore, the Jews in Jerusalem (2:23), Nicodemus (3:2; 19:39), the Samaritan woman (4:19, 29), the royal official (4:50, 53), the lame man (5:15), the man born blind (9:17, 38), the Galileans (4:45; 6:14), and the Jews are all presented as reaching some level of faith in Jesus, even if in many cases this faith is superficial and/or temporary.

According to the Gospel's first epilogue (20:30–31), in which the evangelist summarises the christological content and the soteriological aim of his book, there is a significant analogy between almost all of the Gospel's characters and its readers. Both are expected to eventually believe that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God in order to have life in his name." The difference is that, while in the case of the narrative characters, faith may be based on witnessing Jesus' signs and words, the Gospel's readers should believe on the basis of the eye-witnesses' testimony, which is transferred to them through the text of the Gospel.

Because Jesus' interaction with his narrative audience is all about leading them to real faith in himself, and thus to eternal life,¹⁶ the Johannine narrative functions to a great extent as a reflection of what is or should be happening in the real world, outside of the narrative. At the same time, the narrative also aims at shaping the real world by proclaiming faith in Jesus Christ and the eternal life that results from it. Hence, the narrative characters' varied responses to Jesus' presence and work represent the equivalent, real or potential, responses of real-life people to the Gospel's narrative.¹⁷

According to the above mentioned, I will divide the recurring characters of 1:19–2:11 not according to such commonly accepted narratological categories as round and flat or dynamic and static,¹⁸ but according to their overall attitude toward Jesus as it unfolds in the Johannine narrative. Clearly, this criterion cannot be applied to Jesus himself, which is the reason for not including an analysis of him as a narrative character in the present study.

¹⁵ Characteristically, there is a total of 98 references of πίστις and πιστεύειν in the Gospel text.

¹⁶ Cf. for instance 3:16: οὕτως γὰρ ἠγάπησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν κόσμον, ὥστε τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ ἔδωκεν, ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτὸν μὴ ἀπόληται ἀλλ' ἔχῃ ζωὴν αἰώνιον.

¹⁷ Cf. R. A. Culpepper, "The Weave of the Tapestry: Character and Theme in John," in *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John* (ed. C. W. Skinner, LNTS 461; London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 18–35.

¹⁸ Cf. for instance Resseguie, *Criticism*, 123–30 (n. 1).

More concretely, I discern the following categories of narrative characters based on their attitude toward Jesus: the knowing, the opposing, the believing, and the fluctuating.¹⁹

1. The Knowing

In the Johannine narrative, knowing and believing are closely interconnected. Knowledge is the result of believing or, in other words, faith can eventually lead to knowledge (cf. 10:38). On the other hand, knowledge can also be simply a synonym of believing (cf. 17:8).²⁰ It is characteristic that in the Farewell Discourse, Jesus repeatedly uses both notions to portray the quality of the disciples' relationship with him.

However, the evangelist avoids applying this kind of semantics to either John the Baptist or Jesus' Mother. These two characters have a unique level of knowledge about Jesus, each one of them in his or her own way. This in itself differentiates them radically from all other Johannine characters.

1.1 *The Mother of Jesus*

Although the evangelist provides us with very little information about Jesus' Mother, we can observe some intriguing characteristics of her attitude in the account of Jesus' first sign at Cana (2:1–11).

Her remark to Jesus "they have no more wine" (2:3) is an implicit request to him for acting to somehow solve this unanticipated and grave problem.²¹ Mentioning the problem exclusively to Jesus who is just a guest (1:2) reveals that she knows more about him than what is expressly communicated. She obviously knows beforehand that Jesus is capable of providing a solution to an otherwise unsolvable problem or, in other words, that Jesus can perform miracles.²² Furthermore, she also knows that while she has no power over

¹⁹ Cf. Culpepper, *Anatomy*, 146–48 (n. 4), who distinguishes seven types of responses to Jesus in the Johannine narrative as a whole. Of course, such a categorization, as useful as it is, does not suffice to fully explain the complexity of the characters' multifaceted literary function in the Johannine narrative, cf. Culpepper, "Weave," 33 (n. 17).

²⁰ On the relationship between faith and knowledge see among others Kysar, *Gospel*, 107–8 (n. 6).

²¹ Lack of wine during a wedding banquet in the ancient Mediterranean cultures would shame the host, in our case the bridegroom, cf. B. Witherington III, *The Gospel Code: Novel Claims about Jesus, Mary Magdalene and da Vinci* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 28–29.

²² Cf. H. Räisänen, *Die Mutter Jesu im Neuen Testament* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 1969), 160; E. Haenchen, *Das Johannesevangelium: Ein Kommentar* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1980), 188; C. M. Conway, *Men and Women in the Fourth Gospel: Gender and Johannine Characterization* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 1997), 71.

Jesus, she is able to exert such influence on him that he ends up doing her favour (2:7–8) and handling the problem almost against his own initial will (cf. 2:4). There is no other similar case in the entire Johannine narrative.²³

Jesus seems to respond harshly to his Mother's request (2:4). However, he does not blame her for lack of faith, as is the case for instance with the royal official (4:48). He just states in a clear way that she has no say on the "hour" of the revelation of his glory (cf. 2:11). On the other hand, he acts exactly as she expects him to, namely by solving the problem through a miracle, thus conforming his own will to hers. At the same time, he keeps his "hour" intact by limiting the revelation of his glory only to the servants (2:9) and his disciples (2:11).²⁴

Accordingly, Jesus' Mother has an unparalleled level of knowledge with regard to Jesus, as well as a unique connection with him. As opposed to his own negative portrayal of Jesus' brothers and sisters (7:5), the evangelist avoids any criticism to Jesus' Mother. In the end, Jesus' Mother appears under the cross along with the Beloved Disciple (19:25), thus confirming her ongoing relationship with her son. This can be clearly seen in Jesus' care for her when he assigns her protection to the Beloved Disciple, who is to replace him as her son (19:26–27).²⁵

From the point of view of the Gospel's readers, it is noteworthy that the evangelist does not explain where this supreme knowledge of Jesus' Mother originates from. However, the Gospel's readers are at least expected to conclude that she knows and understands Jesus more, and is closer to him than any other narrative character, because she is his mother.²⁶ In this sense, the evangelist probably does not mean her to be a model for the Gospel's readers who will obviously never be able to be in her shoes. However, her closeness to Jesus reveals, *mutatis mutandis*, something of the quality of the believers'

²³ See the relevant analysis in C. Karakolis, "The Mother of Jesus in the Gospel according to John: A Narrative-Critical and Theological Perspective," *Analogia* 1 (2016): 7–12. In the cases of Martha's and Mary's request (11:3), Jesus does not handle against his own will since his "hour" has already been initiated. His delay reveals that he is in control of the situation and contributes to the greatness of the sign that will follow.

²⁴ Thus, the actual hour of the beginning of Jesus' public work does not change due to this miracle, but remains where it was planned to be from the beginning, namely at the cleansing of the temple in 2:14–22, cf. J. Zumstein, *L'évangile selon saint Jean* (1,1–12,50) (CNT 4a; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2014), 101–2.

²⁵ Cf. T. Thatcher, "I Have Conquered the World": The Death of Jesus and the End of Empire in the Gospel of John," in *Empire in the New Testament* (ed. S. E. Porter and C. Long Westfall; Eugene: Pickwick, 2011), 152, 159.

²⁶ This is the reason that the evangelist keeps her anonymity and describes her exclusively by her motherly relationship with Jesus. In my opinion, "Mother of Jesus" is not just a description, but actually a title of reverence equivalent to the one of the "Beloved Disciple," cf. Karakolis, "Mother," 2–7 (n. 23).

spiritual relation to Jesus as children of God (cf. 1:12) and as his own spiritual brothers and sisters (cf. 20:17).

1.2 John (the Baptist)

John the Baptist has a mission and clear instructions from God to make Jesus' way straight (1:23), to recognise and to proclaim him (1:29–34). He does not know Jesus personally before their first meeting (1:31, 33), but he possesses a plethora of trustworthy information about him, including his divine origin (1:15, 30, 34; 3:31, 34) and his salvific work (1:29; 3:36). When John's disciples point him to the fact that Jesus is becoming increasingly popular (3:26), while John himself is losing his appeal among the people, he fully accepts and justifies this development (3:27–30). In contrast to the synoptic tradition (Matt 11:2–3; Luke 7:18–19), he never doubts Jesus.²⁷

John the Baptist's attitude toward Jesus is unique. He is the only one to have received a divine revelation about Jesus' identity and origin.²⁸ Jesus appeals to John's witness (5:33–35), thus proving its truth. On the other hand, contrary to Jesus' Mother and eventually his disciples, John the Baptist does not belong to Jesus' family in a literal or metaphorical sense. He is only the friend of the bridegroom standing in the background and rejoicing upon hearing the bridegroom's voice (3:29).²⁹ Therefore, the Mother of Jesus and John the Baptist do not share the same level of connectedness to Jesus.³⁰ However, John's attitude toward Jesus also remains stable, since it is motivated by knowledge provided to him by none other than God himself.

This is the reason that just like Jesus' Mother, John the Baptist cannot be considered per se as a model of faith.³¹ However, his devotedness to Jesus

²⁷ The stability of the faith of John the Baptist is demonstrated by the fact that everything he said about Jesus proved to be true (10:41), which means that until his execution he did not say anything contradicting his initial statements about Jesus.

²⁸ Cf. C. H. Williams, "John (the Baptist): The Witness on the Threshold," in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John* (ed. S. A. Hunt, F. D. Tolmie, and R. Zimmermann; WUNT 314; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 60.

²⁹ Even if not in the initial intention of the evangelist, the Gospel's readers can connect 3:29 with 15:14–15 and eventually with 20:17. According to these interconnections, the believers can only become members of God's family after Jesus' resurrection. Before this event, they can only reach the status of a friend to Jesus, cf. P. F. Esler and R. A. Piper, *Lazarus, Mary and Martha: Social-Scientific Approaches to the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 90–91.

³⁰ Cf. on the multifaceted significance of Jesus' Mother, B. R. Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 89.

³¹ Cf. Williams, "John," 58–60 (n. 28); R. Zimmermann, "John (the Baptist) as a Character in the Fourth Gospel: The Narrative Strategy of a Witness Disappearing," in *The Prologue of the Gospel of John: Its Literary, Theological, and Philosophical Contexts. Papers*

can serve as an example for those of the Gospel's readers who are urged to base their faith and knowledge not on divine revelation but on the testimony of the eye-witnesses (cf. 20:28–31).

2. The Opposing

A great number of studies has been written about the fourth evangelist's devastating critique against the "non-believing Jews."³² However, the Jewish people as a whole seem to have a fluctuating relationship with Jesus throughout the Johannine narrative. Based on this observation, I will deal with this group-character in the last part of the present article.

In the Fourth Gospel, there is only one clearly and constantly non-believing character who always opposes Jesus, namely the collective character of the chief priests. Although they may not be present as such in 1:19–2:11, they are represented by the priests and the Levites sent by the Jews of Jerusalem to question John the Baptist in 1:19.³³

2.1 The Chief Priests

According to 1:19, the delegation sent to interrogate John the Baptist does not include any chief priests, but consists of priests and Levites sent by the "Jews of Jerusalem" – all non-recurring group-characters. However, the Jewish people of Jerusalem as a whole lack both the theological expertise and the authority and power to assign a priestly delegation with questioning John the Baptist and reporting back to them. Therefore, the reference to the "Jews of Jerusalem" has to be a reference to the Sanhedrin including both chief priests and Pharisees.³⁴ If 1:24 refers to a separate delegation sent by the Pharisees to question John the Baptist in their own right (1:25),³⁵ it would seem that the

read at the *Colloquium Ioanneum 2013* (ed. J. G. van der Watt, R. A. Culpepper, and U. Schnelle; WUNT 359; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 115.

³² See the critical presentation and evaluation of the problem in C. Bennema, "The Identity and Composition of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι in the Gospel of John," *TynBul* 60 (2009): 239–42; see also S. S. Cronin, *Raymond Brown, 'the Jews', and the Gospel of John: From Apologia to Apology* (LNTS 504; London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 154–73.

³³ Cf. Schnelle, *Evangelium* (n. 9), 74; M. Theobald, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes: Kapitel 1–12* (RNT 4a; Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 2009), 152.

³⁴ *Ibid.*; J. Zumstein, *Das Johannesevangelium* (KEK 2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), 91.

³⁵ Cf. M. Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts* (FRLANT 254; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 193–95. Most exegetes understand the ἀπεσταλμένοι of 1:24 as referring to the priests and Levites of 1:19; cf. for instance U. C. von Wahlde, "The Relationships between Pharisees and Chief Priests: Some Observations on the Texts in Matthew, John and Josephus," *NTS* 42 (1996): 519. However, from a grammatical point of view, 1:24 can also be understood as referring to a separate group if the

“Jews of Jerusalem” of 1:19 are exclusively the chief priests, the superiors of both priests and Levites. In any case, the collective character of the chief priests is indirectly introduced right at the beginning of the narrative.

The presence of the chief priests seems to be indirectly implied in 2:18, 20, right after the cleansing of the temple, the core of Judaism’s priestly establishment. There, the “Jews” question Jesus in a way similar to the questioning of John the Baptist in 1:19–28. Their indirect, but obvious rejection of Jesus’ authority,³⁶ as well as their argumentation against his response suggests that they are offended and threatened by his actions. Even if the Jews mentioned here are not limited to the priestly staff of the temple, they should certainly include the chief priests as well.³⁷ In any case, it is clear that these particular “Jews” are not willing to accept Jesus’ actions and words, as opposed to the πολλοί of 2:23 and Nicodemus (3:1–2).

Later in the narrative, the chief priests appear to continuously oppose Jesus.³⁸ This attitude culminates in their common decision along with the Pharisees (11:47) to have him killed (11:53; cf. 5:16, 18). Thus, when they finally interrogate him in Annas’s house (18:13, 19–24), their decision to convict him is already in place.

Remarkably, while three parties are directly involved in Jesus’ arrest, namely the Romans, the chief priests, and the Pharisees (18:3), the latter are never again mentioned, but seem to be totally absent from the Passion narrative as a whole.³⁹ Jesus is brought successively to the houses of the previous (18:13) and the present high priest (18:24), namely Annas and Caiaphas, and

word ἀπεσταλμένοι is understood as the subject of the verb ᾔσαν and not as forming the plusquamperfect of the verb ἀποπέλειν in the passive voice. Furthermore, from an historical point of view, it would seem very improbable that the Pharisees would be entitled to send priests and Levites without the authorisation of the chief priests, cf. D.-A. Koch, “Der Täufer als Zeuge des Offenbarers: Das Täuferbild von Joh 1,19–34 auf dem Hintergrund von Mk 1,2–11,” in *The Four Gospels 1992: Festschrift Frans Neirynck* (ed. F. van Segbroeck et al.; 3 vols.; BETL 100; Leuven: Peeters, 1992), 3:1972–73. The issue needs further analysis that cannot be undertaken in this paper, see the relevant discussion and bibliography in S. Brown, “The Priests and Levites: Identity and Politics in the Search for a Messiah,” in Hunt et al. (eds.), *Character Studies* (n. 28), 113 n. 15.

³⁶ Cf. D. F. Tolmie, “The Ἰουδαῖοι in the Fourth Gospel: A Narratological Perspective,” in *Theology and Christology in the Fourth Gospel: Essays by the Members of the SNTS Johannine Writings Seminar* (ed. G. Van Belle, J. G. van der Watt, and P. Maritz; BETL 184; Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 380; R. Sheridan, *Retelling Scripture: ‘The Jews’ and the Scriptural Citations in John 1:19–12:15* (BibInt 110; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 130.

³⁷ Cf. Bennema, “Identity,” 247 (n. 32); Zumstein, *Johannesevangelium*, 128 n. 61 (n. 34).

³⁸ Contra U. C. von Wahlde, “Narrative Criticism of the Religious Authorities as a Group Character in the Gospel of John: Some Problems,” *NTS* 63 (2017): 235, who is of the opinion that even the chief priests “are shown to be divided among themselves.”

³⁹ Cf. Bennema, “Identity,” 248–49 (n. 32).

from there to Pilate (18:28). The “Jews” present during Jesus’ Roman trial are not the Jewish people as a whole, but only the chief priests and their servants (cf. 19:6).⁴⁰ Even after Jesus’ final conviction, it is the chief priests who appeal to Pilate attempting to change the wording of the inscription of the charge against Jesus (19:21). On the basis of the above, the information that after Jesus’ death the disciples are afraid of the “Jews” (20:19) does not include all Jews, but rather the chief priests who have the authority and power to harm the disciples, as they did their master.⁴¹

In 12:42, the evangelist mentions that even many of the Jewish leaders (ἄρχοντες) believed in Jesus without, however, confessing their faith in him for fear of the Pharisees who would then cast them out of the synagogues (cf. also 9:22; 16:2). Clearly, 12:42 does not refer to the Gospel’s narrative situation but to the historical one of the evangelist and his community,⁴² when chief priests are no longer in power.⁴³ Therefore, at this point, the many believing ἄρχοντες can only be a reference to Pharisees or synagogue leaders of the evangelist’s time, not however to chief priests. Moreover, there is not one example of an individual chief priest believing in Jesus, while Nicodemus is such an example on the side of the Pharisees.

3. The Believing

In 1:19–2:11, the mentioned disciples are the only narrative characters who are presented as believing in Jesus. Andrew and the unnamed disciple follow Jesus after hearing the testimony of John the Baptist (1:37). Andrew invites his brother Simon to meet Jesus by proclaiming him as the Messiah (1:41). Jesus himself calls Philip to discipleship (1:43). Finally, Philip addresses Nathanael (1:45), who indeed believes and confesses Jesus as the Messiah after witnessing his omniscience (1:49).

Obviously at this stage of the narrative, faith in Jesus is acceptance of his messiahship. However, this is only the beginning on the way towards post-Easter faith, as it is exemplarily expressed in Thomas’s confession (20:28). The disciples are dynamic characters, as their relationship with Jesus and

⁴⁰ Contra *ibid.*, 248.

⁴¹ Cf. C. S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, Vol. 2 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003), 1200, who sees in the “Jews” of 20:19 the Jewish authorities, however not limiting them to the chief priests, but also including the Pharisees.

⁴² Contra Bennema, “Identity,” 253 (n. 32). See the classic study of J. L. Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (3rd ed.; NTL; Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 48–49; see, however, also the contemporary discussion in R. Hakola, *Identity Matters: John, the Jews and Jewishness* (NovTSup 118; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 41–86.

⁴³ Cf. for instance M. Davies, *Rhetoric and Reference in the Fourth Gospel* (JSNTSup 69; Sheffield: JSOT, 1992), 293–95.

their faith in him constantly develop in different ways throughout the narrative.⁴⁴

3.1 Andrew and Philip

Andrew and Philip appear alongside each other in three different narratives (1:40–48; 6:5–8; 12:21–22). In the first chapter, they both confess their faith in Jesus by the means of traditional Jewish messianic confessions. Although as Jesus' disciples they witness Jesus' glory and believe (2:11), in 6:5–9, they still fail to understand that no problem is insurmountable for Jesus.⁴⁵ This means that at this point, their faith has not yet reached the level of post-Easter knowledge and understanding of Jesus (cf. 20:28). In this regard, they are differentiated from both Jesus' Mother and John the Baptist. In 12:20–22, the two disciples act as mediators, introducing the Greeks to Jesus, a detail that reveals their closeness and trusting relationship with their master. Furthermore, in 14:9, Jesus admonishes Philip for not knowing him despite his time with the disciples.⁴⁶

Apart from being individual narrative characters, Andrew and Philip also belong to the group-characters of the disciples and the "Twelve," who – with the exception of Judas – remain in Jesus' following throughout the narrative up to the point of his arrest. Their faith is tested during the Passion, as they abandon Jesus⁴⁷ along with most of the disciples – apart from Peter and the Beloved Disciple – and hide for fear of the "Jews" (20:19; cf. 19:38). In the end, however, they witness the resurrected Jesus and receive from him the Holy Spirit (20:19–23). Thomas speaks his christological confession also on their behalf (20:28).⁴⁸ Along with all remaining disciples, they now believe and understand that Jesus is not just the promised Messiah of Israel, but more than anything "their Lord and their God." Possibly, their presence is also

⁴⁴ See on the development of faith and understanding in the Johannine portrayal of Jesus' disciples N. Farely, *The Disciples in the Fourth Gospel: A Narrative Analysis of Their Faith and Understanding* (WUNT 2/290; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), esp. 219–29.

⁴⁵ Cf. M. C. de Boer, "Andrew: The First Link in the Chain," in Hunt et al. (eds.), *Character Studies*, 146–47 (n. 28).

⁴⁶ Philip represents here the other disciples as well, Andrew included, cf. H. Thyen, *Das Johannesevangelium* (HNT 6; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 626.

⁴⁷ Although differently from those other disciples who are scandalised and distance themselves from Jesus after listening to his teaching about the "bread of life" (6:60–66), cf. Keener, *Gospel*, 696 (n. 41). In the case of Jesus' arrest, the disciples abandon him for fear and only after Jesus somehow releases them from any obligation to stay with him by saying to his persecutors, "let them go" (18:8).

⁴⁸ Cf. M. R. Hillmer, "They Believed in Him: Discipleship in the Johannine Tradition," in *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (ed. R. N. Longenecker; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 77.

implied under the reference to the “two other disciples” in 21:2.⁴⁹ If this hypothesis is correct, Andrew and Philip end up belonging not only to the remaining “Eleven,” but also to a narrower and more significant circle of seven disciples alongside Peter and the Beloved Disciple among others.

Interestingly, the development of the Twelve is portrayed in terms of household imagery.⁵⁰ In the Farewell Discourse, their relationship with Jesus develops from being slaves to becoming friends (15:15), a status similar with the one of John the Baptist (3:29).⁵¹ After his resurrection, Jesus calls them his brothers and God’s children (20:17). Thus, they eventually become members of Jesus’ family.⁵²

Summing up the above, Andrew and Philip start their relationship with Jesus by becoming his disciples, confessing him as the awaited Messiah of Israel, and believing in him upon witnessing his first sign at Cana. Although they remain devoted to him, their faith is neither stable nor adequate. In the end, however, because of their ongoing devotion and commitment, and despite their fear, they become Jesus’ spiritual relatives and reach the highest level of faith in him.

3.2 Nathanael

Nathanael is only mentioned in the first and the last chapter of the Gospel, while his character significantly develops from being doubtful to becoming a believer already in the first reference (1:45–49).⁵³ Initially, Nathanael doubts Philip’s witness (1:46) about Jesus being the promised Messiah (1:45). He also doubts Jesus himself and his words (1:48). However, after witnessing Jesus’ omniscience he believes and makes an impressive messianic confession (1:49). Subsequently, Jesus announces to him and to all other disciples (ὅμῃν, ὅψεσθε) that they will witness even greater things (1:50). As is the case with

⁴⁹ See C. Karakolis, “The Sons of Zebedee and Two Other Disciples: Two Pairs of Puzzling Acquaintances in the Johannine Dénouement,” in Hunt et al. (eds.), *Character Studies*, 671–75 (n. 28).

⁵⁰ Cf. R. A. Piper, “Glory, Honor and Patronage in the Fourth Gospel: Understanding the *Doxa* Given to Disciples in John 17,” in *Social Scientific Models for Interpreting the Bible: Essays by the Context Group in Honor of B. J. Malina* (ed. J. J. Pilch; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 304.

⁵¹ Even if in 3:29 the expression φίλος τοῦ νυμφίου bears the particular meaning of the bridegroom’s “best man” (cf. A. J. Köstenberger, *John* [BECNT 4; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004], 138), from a readers’ perspective combining 15:15 and 3:29 is plausible at least.

⁵² Cf. J. G. van der Watt, *Family of the King: Dynamics of Metaphor in the Gospel according to John* (BibInt 47; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 304–17.

⁵³ Contra S. A. Hunt, “Nathanael: Under the Fig Tree on the Fourth Day,” in idem et al. (eds.), *Character Studies*, 192 (n. 28), who maintains that Nathanael remains a flat character.

the previously mentioned disciples, the confession of Nathaniel should be understood within the boundaries of Jewish messianic expectations.⁵⁴ This is evident by his use of the expression “king of Israel,” a title that is never used by Jesus himself or the narrator, as Jesus’ kingdom is not of this world (18:36). Furthermore, Nathanael is one of the seven disciples who meet the resurrected Jesus at the Sea of Galilee in 21:2. As is the case with Andrew and Philip, as well as all other remaining disciples, Nathanael’s faith has in the meantime developed much further, compared to his narrative debut. As a witness of the Resurrected, he has now reached a much more substantial understanding of Jesus’ identity and believes both in his messiahship and his divinity (cf. 20:28). At the same time, he is now spiritually related with Jesus as his brother and one of God’s children (20:17).

3.3 Simon Peter

There is much more drama in the development of Simon Peter’s narrative character than is the case with the three aforementioned disciples. His faith in Jesus is presupposed right from the start, when he accepts the invitation of his brother Andrew to meet the Messiah (1:41–42). Furthermore, in 2:11 Simon Peter belongs to the disciples who behold the glory of Jesus and believe in him. Later on, he makes an impressive and brave confession of faith and trust in Jesus (6:68–69), while apart from the Twelve, all the other disciples seem to have just abandoned him (6:66–68).⁵⁵ In this confession, Peter acts as the spokesman of the Twelve,⁵⁶ confirming their faith in Jesus as the one who speaks “words of eternal life” and is “the Holy One of God.” However, his confession is rather obscure and definitely far from expressing a complete understanding of Jesus’ person and words.⁵⁷

Peter appears again during the last supper, expressing his profound devotion to Jesus. Apart from letting Jesus wash his feet in order to remain with him and contrary to his own personal sense of honour (13:6–9), he also states that he is prepared to sacrifice his life on behalf of Jesus (13:37). On the other hand, he clearly does not perceive Jesus’ words and actions in their true sense (13:7). In the end, instead of giving away his life for Jesus, he denies him three times in order to protect and save his life (18:17, 25, 27). Even after his denial, however, he remains in the group of the disciples (cf. 20:2), runs to the empty tomb (20:3, 6–7), repeatedly witnesses the Resurrected (20:19, 26;

⁵⁴ Cf. C. R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (2nd ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 40.

⁵⁵ Cf. Theobald, *Evangelium*, 495 (n. 33); contra L. Schenke, “Das johanneische Schisma und die ‘Zwölf’ (Johannes 6.60–71),” *NTS* 38 (1992): 110.

⁵⁶ Cf. for instance Keener, *Gospel*, 697 (n. 41).

⁵⁷ Cf. C. Dietzfelbinger, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes, Teilband 1: Johannes 1–12* (ZBK 4/1; Zurich: TVZ, 2001), 186.

21:7), and is finally reinstated by him (21:15–17). Not only his faith in Jesus, but also his devotion and love are confirmed in the final narrative of the Gospel.⁵⁸

In sum, Peter's faith, even if at times lacking or misplaced, eventually reaches its highest possible level, which is believing, understanding, and knowing who Jesus really is, while also following his instructions. Despite his denial, Peter is now a member of God's family as well, just like all other believing disciples (cf. 20:17).

3.4 *The Unnamed/Beloved Disciple*

In my opinion, the unnamed disciple referred to in 1:37 as following Jesus along with Andrew is in fact the Beloved Disciple, who only appears as such from the last supper onwards (13:23).⁵⁹ On this basis, the Beloved Disciple should be understood as following Jesus all along and developing as a character throughout the whole narrative. In this sense, what is valid for the disciples and the Twelve as group-characters is also valid for the Beloved Disciple, who obviously belongs with them.⁶⁰

Thus, even the Beloved Disciple does not fully believe in Jesus or completely understand him, although there is clearly a special relationship of trust and love between them, which surpasses that of all other disciples, Peter included (cf. 13:23–25).⁶¹ Contrary to the other disciples, he even follows Jesus throughout his trial (18:15) and crucifixion (19:26), while he never denies him as Peter does. In a way, he even replaces Jesus by becoming a son to his mother and taking her to his home (19:27). However, it is only when the Beloved Disciple enters the empty tomb that he really believes (20:8).⁶² On the other hand, his faith is superior to the faith of the other disciples who need to see the resurrected Jesus himself in order to believe (20:28), and even to Peter's faith, who still fails to believe although he likewise witnesses the

⁵⁸ See T. Söding, "Erscheinung, Vergebung und Sendung: Joh 21 als Zeugnis entwickelten Osterglaubens," in *Resurrection in the New Testament: Festschrift J. Lambrecht* (ed. R. Bieringer, V. Koperski, and B. Lataire; BETL 165; Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 220–29.

⁵⁹ See the relevant discussion in Schnelle, *Evangelium*, 81–83 (n. 9).

⁶⁰ The Beloved Disciple belongs to the Twelve because after the crisis in 6:66, only the Twelve remain with Jesus, see above; cf. also R. Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (14th ed.; KEK 2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956), 80 n. 4.

⁶¹ Cf. J. L. Resseguie, "The Beloved Disciple: The Ideal Point of View," in Hunt et al. (eds.), *Character Studies*, 549 (n. 28).

⁶² Although even at this point, it is not clear whether he reaches the final stage of faith as expressed in 20:28 or whether he just believes in Jesus' resurrection, cf. among others Schnelle, *Evangelium*, 381–82 (n. 9); Thyen, *Johannesevangelium*, 760 (n. 46).

empty tomb (20:6–7).⁶³ Finally, he is the first of the seven disciples in Galilee to sense and recognise the resurrected “Lord” from a distance (21:7).

In sum, the Beloved Disciple is the ideal model of faith and understanding.⁶⁴ He starts by being a disciple of John the Baptist (1:37), he then follows Jesus, he recognises him along with the other disciples as the Messiah of Israel (1:40, 45, 49),⁶⁵ he gradually believes more and more (2:11), he develops a special relationship of trust and love to him (13:23–25), he follows him even through the darkest moments (18:15; 19:26), he identifies with him by accepting Jesus’ mother as his own (19:27), and finally, he believes and understands (20:8, 28).⁶⁶

4. The Fluctuating

While the characters of the disciples develop a deep and stable relationship of faith and devotion to Jesus, other characters maintain an ambivalent and/or fluctuating attitude toward him throughout the narrative, thus leaving the question about the final direction of their development unanswered. These are the most interesting characters in respect to their relatedness to Jesus, as they possess complex traits and develop in the direction of faith or unbelief, often in an unpredictable way. In 1:19–2:11, this is the case with the Pharisees and the Jews.

4.1 *The Pharisees*

The Pharisees are introduced in 1:24–25, when their envoys question John the Baptist (1:19).⁶⁷ Although there are no further references to the Pharisees in the introductory passage 1:19–2:11, their development is presented in a very detailed way throughout the narrative.

⁶³ Cf. M. Labahn, “Simon Peter: An Ambiguous Character and His Narrative Career,” in Hunt et al. (eds.), *Character Studies*, 162–63 (n. 28).

⁶⁴ See the useful distinction between the categories of “ideal disciple” and “ideal perspective,” as applied to the Beloved Disciple, in Resseguie, “Disciple,” 537–38 (n. 61); cf. also the relevant discussion in R. Bauckham, “The Beloved Disciple as Ideal Author,” in idem, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History and Theology in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 82–91.

⁶⁵ The messianic confessions of Andrew, Philip, and Nathanael in the first chapter also represent the faith of Peter and the unnamed disciple, and generally of Jesus’ disciples as a whole.

⁶⁶ In this sense, I would agree with Resseguie, “Disciple,” 549 (n. 61), who speaks about a “static development of the Beloved Disciple’s characterization.”

⁶⁷ Whether or not these are different envoys from the priests and Levites mentioned in 1:19, 1:24 informs us that the Pharisees are behind these envoys either along the chief priests or on their own, see above, esp. n. 35.

In this regard, the case of Nicodemus being the only individual Pharisee of the narrative mentioned by name (3:1) is of great importance.⁶⁸ In 3:2, Nicodemus considers Jesus as a rabbi sent from God. At the same time, he obviously misses the true meaning of Jesus' teaching and activity (3:4). His faith is clearly inadequate, but nevertheless not rejected by Jesus. In 7:50–51, Nicodemus defends Jesus in the Sanhedrin, thus demonstrating that at least one Pharisee is not against him, as opposed to most other Pharisees and to all chief priests. Finally, in 19:39, Nicodemus's extravagant contribution to Jesus' burial probably shows that he now recognises him as the kingly Messiah.⁶⁹ At this point, Nicodemus seems to have reached the level of the disciples' faith in 1:41, 45, 49, although he does not express this faith by the means of a confession.⁷⁰ Because Nicodemus belongs to the group-character of the Pharisees, his development can be understood by the Gospel's readers as an open possibility for other members of this group as well.⁷¹

As a rule, apart from Nicodemus, the evangelist paints the Pharisees in rather dark colours. The Pharisaic members of the Sanhedrin are continuously opposed to Jesus and even send their servants to seize him (7:32) and blame them when they fail to do so (7:45–49). In the end, it is the servants of the Pharisees along with the servants of the chief priests, and the Romans that arrest Jesus (18:3). According to the Pharisees, the witness of Jesus about himself is not valid because no other witness speaks in his favour (8:13). It is noteworthy that in the story of the man born blind, although the Pharisees agree that by healing him on a Sabbath, Jesus has violated the Torah, some of them admit that it is impossible for a sinner to perform such a miracle (9:16). However, in the end, all of them consider Jesus to be a sinner (9:24). Moreover, they unanimously cast the healed man out of the synagogue because of his faith in Jesus (9:34). Subsequently, the Pharisees are insulted by Jesus' reference to their spiritual blindness (9:40). In their opinion, those who do not know the law are blind, and are therefore sinners (cf. 7:49; 9:34). Along with the chief priests, the Pharisees decide to have Jesus killed (11:47, 53, 57), and

⁶⁸ In John, Joseph of Arimathea is not mentioned as being a member of the Sanhedrin. This could be presupposed in case John has knowledge of the relevant Markan and/or Lukan tradition (Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50), but it cannot be proven. See the relevant discussion in C. Bennema, *Encountering Jesus: Character Studies in the Gospel of John* (2nd ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 357–66; W. J. Lyons, "Joseph of Arimathea: One of 'the Jews', But with a Fearful Secret!" in Hunt et al. (eds.), *Character Studies*, 646–57 (n. 28).

⁶⁹ See C. Karakolis, "'Across the Kidron Brook, Where There Was a Garden' (John 18,1): Two Old Testament Allusions and the Theme of the Heavenly King in the Johannine Passion Narrative," in *The Death of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (ed. G. Van Belle; BETL 200; Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 757–58.

⁷⁰ Cf. R. Bauckham, "Nicodemus and the Gurion Family," *JTS* 47 (1996): 29–32.

⁷¹ Cf. U. Poplutz, "The Pharisees: A House Divided," in Hunt et al. (eds.), *Character Studies*, 120–26 (n. 28).

are disappointed when they realise that all Jewish people seem to be following him (12:19). Finally, they are prepared to cast out of the synagogues even those Jewish leaders who would recognise and confess Jesus as the Messiah (12:42).

On the other hand, it is noteworthy that the Gospel's last reference to an actual presence of the Pharisees is in 12:42. In 18:3, the servants of the Pharisees are mentioned, but the Pharisees are not said to be present.⁷² Due to their absence in the Passion narrative, their responsibility for Jesus' final conviction and execution is reduced when compared to the leading role the chief priests play in these events.⁷³

Summing up the above, although the Pharisees constantly oppose Jesus, they also acknowledge that he cannot be a sinner and perform miracles at the same time. Nicodemus, being one of them, has a very respectful attitude towards Jesus, which finally develops into faith.⁷⁴ In the end, the Pharisees abstain from Jesus' conviction and execution. Hence, there is no reference whatsoever to the final outcome of their narrative development. On this basis, their conversion to faith in Jesus remains an open possibility outside of the narrative universe, namely in the real, historical world of the evangelist, in which Pharisaic Judaism still exists.⁷⁵

4.2 "The Jews" Meaning the Jewish People

Provided that the expression "Jews of Jerusalem" implies the chief priests and/or the Pharisees, in 1:19–2:11, the group-character of the "Jews," meaning the Jewish people, only appears indirectly in 2:6.⁷⁶ There, the evangelist refers to the stone jars that contain water for the purification rituals of the "Jews."

As a group-character, the Jews could theoretically include all Jewish subgroups and individual characters of the Johannine narrative in their entirety. Particularly in 1:19–2:11, the priests and Levites (as well as implicitly the chief priests and/or the Pharisees who send them), John the Baptist, Jesus' disciples, Jesus' Mother, the bridegroom, the steward and the servants of Cana, and of course Jesus himself (cf. 4:21–22), are all Jews.

⁷² This could be a reference to 11:57 and probably not to an active involvement of the Pharisees in the night of Jesus' arrest. On the remarkable absence of the Pharisees from the Johannine Passion narrative see Bennema, "Identity," 248–49 (n. 32); Poplutz, "Pharisees," 122 (n. 71); Marshall, *Portrayal*, 199–202 (n. 35).

⁷³ Contra R. Hakola and A. Reinhartz, "John's Pharisees," in *In Quest of the Historical Pharisees* (ed. J. Neusner and B. D. Chilton; Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), 137–38.

⁷⁴ On such small positive nuances in the Pharisees' portrayal in John see Marshall, *Portrayals*, 191–93 (n. 35).

⁷⁵ Cf. Poplutz, "Pharisees," 125 (n. 71).

⁷⁶ Cf. Tolmie, "Ιουδαῖοι," 379–80 (n. 36).

Nonetheless, it is clear that the Johannine “Jews” as a group-character can only refer either to the Jewish leaders or to the Jewish people, in part or in total, depending on the context.⁷⁷

In particular, the “Jews” meaning all or parts of the “Jewish people” can be opponents of Jesus, skeptics or admirers of him. Thus, they appear to fluctuate in their attitude and beliefs towards Jesus from trying to seize and stone him for blasphemy (10:31–33; 11:8) to believing in his name (2:29) and recognizing him as “the prophet” (6:14), their king (6:15) or the Messiah (12:13; cf. 12:9).⁷⁸

Even when the Jews are presented as believing in Jesus after witnessing his signs, it is only a superficial *Wunderglaube*.⁷⁹ Therefore, Jesus never actually trusts them (2:28–29; 4:44; 6:15). However, this is the first step towards true faith. Nicodemus serves as an example of this positive attitude toward Jesus not only as a Pharisee, but also as one of the “Jews” (3:1).⁸⁰ Some Jews even conclude that the Messiah will not perform any more signs than Jesus, thus accepting the possibility that Jesus may well be the awaited Messiah (7:31). Others conclude that a demoniac cannot open the eyes of a blind man, thus rejecting the relevant accusation against Jesus (10:21). Many of the Jews (12:9, 12; cf. 12:19) receive Jesus as their messianic “king of Israel” (12:13) in Jerusalem a few days before the final Passover. Finally, there are even some individual Jews, apart from the disciples, who reach true faith in Jesus like the royal official (4:50, 53), the lame man (5:15), the man born blind (9:38), and the two sisters Martha (11:27) and Mary (12:3).

As already mentioned, depending on the context, references to the “Jews” can also mean the Jewish leaders, be it the Pharisees, the chief priests, or both of them. Characteristically, according to 7:11 the Jewish people as the “Jews” seek Jesus and ask about his whereabouts. However according to 7:13, nobody speaks publicly about him for fear of the “Jews.” Obviously here, the Jews of 7:13 are the Jewish authorities. This also applies to the reference of 18:14, in which the readers are reminded of Caiaphas’s counsel to the Jews, clearly meaning the Sanhedrin members, and not the Jewish people.

Particularly in the Passion narrative, the “Jews” who are directly involved in Jesus’ conviction and execution are exclusively the “chief priests and their

⁷⁷ Cf. R. Zimmermann, “‘The Jews’: Unreliable Figures or Unreliable Narration?” in Hunt et al. (eds.), *Character Studies*, 97–99 (n. 28).

⁷⁸ On the complexity of the Jews as a character see *ibid.*, 106–7; U. Schnelle, “Die Juden im Johannesevangelium,” in *Gedenkt an das Wort: Festschrift für Werner Vogler zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. C. Käher, M. Böhm, and C. Böttich; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1999), 218–21.

⁷⁹ Cf. R. Bultmann, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (8th ed.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1980), 425.

⁸⁰ Cf. Tolmie, “Ἰουδαῖοι,” 380–81 (n. 36).

servants" (cf. 18:36, 38; 19:7, 12, 14).⁸¹ This is evident for instance in 19:6–7, in which the same group of people are called both "chief priests and servants" and "Jews" (cf. also 19:14–15).⁸² Furthermore, the information that many (πολλοί) of the Jews read the inscription of the cross because of Golgotha's proximity to Jerusalem (19:20), proves that actually only a small number of "Jews" are previously present at the praetorium. Otherwise, the πολλοί would be expected to follow the procession from the praetorium to Golgotha, and not just come by at a later time.⁸³ Finally, the Jews who ask of Pilate the breaking of the legs of the crucified (19:31) can only be the chief priests, who due to their status are able to directly submit to him their demands (cf. 19:21).⁸⁴

As a whole, the "Jews" in the sense of the Jewish people display a fluctuating attitude toward Jesus.⁸⁵ While they tend to oppose him, on the other hand, they sometimes believe in him, even if superficially. Just like the Pharisees, the Jewish people disappear during the Passion narrative only to appear after Jesus is already on the cross. Jesus is arrested late at night, when the Jewish people rest in their dwelling places. His interrogation takes place right after his arrest and in private. When he is brought to Pilate very early in the morning of the next day, the Jewish people are not yet informed about what is happening and therefore cannot be present.

Thus, the final outcome of the faith of the "the Jews" meaning the Jewish people remains open to be answered outside of the narrative world.⁸⁶ In the Gospel's historical context, they are not the only ones to receive Jesus' and the evangelist's call to faith. However, they are definitely included in the κόσμος (cf. 19:19–20) that is invited to believe through the activity of Jesus' disciples (14:12) after his own death and resurrection, and especially through reading or hearing about Jesus' signs as described in the Fourth Gospel (20:30–31).

⁸¹ Cf. U. Schnelle, "Juden," 225–26 (n. 78); Tolmie, "Ιουδαῖοι," 392 (n. 36); contra Bennema, *Encountering Jesus*, 91–92 (n. 68).

⁸² Cf. Thyen, *Johannesevangelium*, 725 (n. 48); contra von Wahlde, "Narrative Criticism," 241 (n. 38).

⁸³ Cf. the Lukan Passion narrative (23:27), where this is exactly what happens.

⁸⁴ Contra von Wahlde, "Narrative Criticism" (n. 38), who understands the reference to the Jews of 19:31 in geographical terms.

⁸⁵ Cf. among others L. Kierspel, *The Jews and the World in the Fourth Gospel: Parallelism, Function, and Context* (WUNT 2/200; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), esp. 74–75; contra von Wahlde, "Narrative Criticism," 236 (n. 38).

⁸⁶ Cf. Zimmermann, "Jews," 106–7 (n. 77).

5. Conclusions

According to the above analysis, Jesus' Mother and John the Baptist possess supreme knowledge of Jesus from the very beginning of the narrative. This knowledge does not change or fluctuate in the course of events. Their function is not to be models of faith for the readers because both of them possess a unique position with regard to Jesus. While "Jesus' Mother" has a unique position as his mother, John the Baptist is the only character to have received a direct and unique revelation from God about him.⁸⁷ Thus, their function as to the Gospel's readers would be to show what the ideal relationship with Jesus could look like. On this basis, the Gospel's readers are indirectly urged to strive towards this level of knowledge, trust, devotion, and submission, even if realistically, this is a level they will never be able to fully reach. The closest to such relationships the believers can eventually come is to become Jesus' spiritual relatives, namely children of God and Jesus' brothers and sisters.

The chief priests are the only narrative character to have a clearly negative stance toward Jesus as their basic trait. They always stick to their own truth, which unavoidably leads them very early to their decision to have Jesus killed, a decision that they actively pursue to the very end. As a continually non-believing group-character,⁸⁸ the chief priests are a model to avoid for the readership of the Fourth Gospel, especially for those who do not yet belong to the community of believers.⁸⁹

Individual disciples differ from each other in the way their faith and relationship with Jesus develops. On the one hand, the faith of the unnamed Beloved Disciple develops rather smoothly and culminates in the resurrection narrative. This could implicitly apply to Nathanael as well. On the other hand, the faith of Peter, and less so the faith of Andrew and Philip, seems to have ups and downs until it reaches the final stage of its potential. This could well be a reflection of the real-life situation of many (if not most) of the Gospel's believing readers and/or listeners, whose faith in Jesus is present without, however, having yet fully developed.

⁸⁷ Probably, according to the above analysis, this applies to Jesus' Mother as well. However, in her case the evangelist does not offer any explanation as to the origin of her knowledge about Jesus.

⁸⁸ It could be that John considers the chief priests as static non-believers because they no longer exist during the time of the writing of the Fourth Gospel, namely after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. There is indeed no hope for them to convert or to believe, not because they are excluded from having eternal life, but simply because they are not there anymore.

⁸⁹ On the matter of the implied non-Christian readers of the Fourth Gospel, cf. C. Karakolis, "The Logos-Concept and Dramatic Irony in the Johannine Prologue and Narrative," in J. G. van der Watt et al. (eds.), *Prologue*, 150–51 (n. 31).

Nevertheless, the most intriguing characters are the ones who have an unstable faith and a fluctuating attitude toward Jesus. In 1:19–2:11 two such major categories group-characters are introduced, namely the Pharisees and the “Jews.”

The evangelist views neither of these two group-characters as being in a state of constant unbelief or even enmity towards Jesus, but rather as having a fluctuating attitude. Quite differently from the disciples, their attitude moves between the two extremes of denial and faith, active enmity and messianic confession. As a matter of fact, there are individual Jews, such as the royal official, the lame man,⁹⁰ or the man born blind, whose faith in Jesus reaches its full potential in the narrative. Nicodemus is a similar example of an individual Jewish leader. Moreover, while both the Jewish people and the Pharisees attempt at times to capture or even kill Jesus during his public activity, they are mentioned only in passing in the Passion narrative. There, only the chief priests continue pursuing this goal, at least in an active manner. Therefore, in John, there is no final outcome of the narrative development of the Jewish people and the Pharisees. It would seem that at the time of the Gospel’s composition, the call of Jesus and his Christian followers continues to be addressed to the Jews and their (Pharisaic) leaders as well. This would mean that the Jewish people and the Pharisees are still able and expected to put aside their opposition to Jesus and his followers, and believe in him, of course not in the narrative itself but in the historical setting of the fourth evangelist and his community.

During the course of the narrative, characters of developing or fluctuating faith have the potential of functioning as models, which the various categories of the Gospel’s readers should be able to identify themselves with. This applies to Jesus’ disciples,⁹¹ as well as to the Pharisees and the “Jews.” Especially hypothetical Jewish readers of the Gospel, who are considering conversion or are being skeptical toward Christian faith, can definitely find their Jewish or Pharisaic counterparts in the narrative. According to the first epilogue of the Gospel (20:30–31), the way of such readers towards true faith in Jesus remains wide open.

⁹⁰ On the positive development of the lame man’s faith, see C. Karakolis, “Εὐρίσκει αὐτὸν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ (Ἰω. 5,14α): Συνάντηση καὶ ἀποκάλυψη,” in idem, *Θέματα ἐρμηνείας καὶ θεολογίας τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης* (Thessaloniki: Pournaras, 2003), 161–68, 191–92; idem, “Logos-Concept,” 147–49 (n. 89).

⁹¹ Cf. Farely, *Disciples*, 190–95 (n. 44).