

THREE SYMPOSIA: Plato, Philo and John—An Exercise in Triangulation¹
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Dear colleagues and students, ladies and gentlemen,

I am very grateful for the warm welcome that I have received. This started already in May, after my election, with a symbolic visit to the University Library on the initiative of the chair of the faculty board, Prof Ian McPharland, to see, together with my predecessor, Prof Judith Lieu, the Codex Bezae. This was by kind permission of the University Librarian, Dr Jessica Gardner, and the codex was shown to us by its curator, Dr James Freeman. The Codex Bezae is one of the great extant early codices of the New Testament, a 5th-cent. manuscript, kindly given to Cambridge University by Beza, Calvin’s successor at Geneva, in 1582, in the reign of the last Tudor, Elisabeth I, when (the consequences of) the first Brexit were still taking shape. I mean of course the Brexit of the Anglican Church from Continental Europe, although the imagery might be poor because—as one very senior professor of ecclesiastical history assured me—if they would have put up a referendum on that Brexit, they would have lost. The manuscript was probably given by Beza because it was such an important manuscript of the New Testament, which had only recently been used as a reference text at the Council of Trent (1545-63) but had fallen into Protestant hands, and was now sent by Beza to England to propel and support the protestantization of England. Whether there will be similar benevolent gifts from the European continent in our time, in the days of the second Brexit, still remains to be seen. Whatever may be the case, our visit to the Codex Bezae was a rather symbolic moment in my succession to Judith Lieu, and it is a great honour to be teaching “her” B5 paper in Johannine literature right now. To put it in Johannine phraseology, she didn’t leave me orphaned, as she has just published her *Oxford Handbook of Johannine Studies*, that she left as a kind of consolation for her absence, and now serves as the course’s main literature. The topic of today’s lecture will also be on the Johannine literature of the New Testament.

As an inaugural lecture, as a genre, is perhaps the event to present some proof of, and give some sample of one’s literacy in a particular subject in order to see whether one could communicate with interested interlocutors in one’s own and cognate fields, I will present my lecture in the form of an ABC and will now start by explaining the meaning of these acrostic letters. “A” is for the “Approach” that I want to set out, exemplified in my contextualization of John’s Gospel in the Graeco-Roman world, part of a monograph that I started five years ago during my sabbatical here in Cambridge and have just finished in draft. As I believe I have some new things to say here, one of my colleagues from a different subject area, suggested that I should reflect on the reasons why what I say hasn’t been said before, and so I will do under the “B” of “Belated development”. How to account for the “Belatedness” of my approach? Finally, the “C”, the “Consequences” will follow from here by way of conclusion.

The first A-section, about my approach forms the major half of my lecture, and the B- and C-sections will make up the final minor half. So, first, what is my approach?

SECTION A: APPROACH

My prime interest and expertise are in the Graeco-Roman context of the New Testament, and this Graeco-Roman context for me both consists in Graeco-Roman Judaism and, so to speak, in Graeco-Roman “paganism”. My favourite method to explore their mutual relations is what I, following Philip Alexander, call triangulation, and which I apply through a discourse analysis of all available Greek texts that have now been collected in the TLG, the digital database of all extant Greek literature. Triangulation is a term that is derived from cartographical surveying and denotes a survey method that calculates the unknown position of a third object on the basis of its connection with the known position of two other objects.² This method is very useful I think, and deserves a greater popularity and application in New Testament studies, precisely because there are so many “unknowns” in its position with regard to the Jewish and larger Graeco-Roman world. For that reason, I’m conducting, however briefly, a triangulation of three symposia: Plato’s *Symposium*, a dialogue that I will introduce shortly, and two other Symposia, a Jewish one, provided in a treatise of the 1st cent. Hellenistic-Jewish author Philo of Alexandria, and the Gospel of John, a contemporary Christian writing that, as I will argue, strongly resonates with the issues of Plato’s *Symposium*.

Such a direct comparison of John’s Gospel with Plato’s *Symposium* has only been rendered possible since the last quarter of the 20th century, because the establishment of three important preconditions for such an approach.

First, up till then the New Testament Gospels, from a predominantly German perspective, were seen as *Kleinliteratur*, as literature with a small l, a form of folk literature that is rather “unliterary” as opposed to the *Hochliteratur* of the surrounding pagan Graeco-Roman world. As the great American New Testament scholar David Aune indicated, in his criticism of this view, “During the last quarter of the twentieth century, it became clear to many scholars that the ... assumption of a dichotomy between *Kleinliteratur* and *Hochliteratur* was an artificial distinction that owed more to romantic notions of primitivity than to insights into comparative literature.”³ The effect of this can now be seen in books such as that by Tomas Hägg who in his *The Art of Biography in Antiquity* (CUP 2012) includes a chapter on the gospels as part of the genre of ancient biography. This reconnection of the gospels with the larger Graeco-Roman world now allows us to study the gospels more directly in this context. Following a suggestion by C.H. Talbert, John’s Gospel may best be seen as a generic mixture of ancient biography and dialogue, and I would specify the latter term as “Symptotic” dialogue. Differently from Simon Goldhill’s *The End of Dialogue in Antiquity* (CUP 2008), Jason König in his splendid book on *Saints and Symposiasts* (CUP 2012) very much recognizes the continued relevance of dialogue in Early Christianity, but whereas he thinks that the evidence for Symptotic dialogue is meagre, I would like to add John’s Gospel as an example; it is Symptotic in a very specific sense, that the author models his Gospel on Plato’s *Symposium*, both in its self-authentication, by identifying its author with Jesus’ “beloved pupil” and locating him as an eyewitness at the last symposium, but also in its subject matter and many characteristic features.

Secondly, another precondition for an appreciation of the importance of the Graeco-Roman context was the literary turn in Johannine studies that was effected by the remarkable book that Alan Culpepper published on John’s Gospel, his *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study*

in Literary Design (1983), published as the result of his sabbatical period here in Cambridge in 1980-81, where he drew his inspiration from his close collaboration with the then King Edward VII Professor of English Literature, Frank Kermode. Culpepper's literary turn enabled us to see the gospel again as a literary unity, ending the supremacy of source-critical and redaction-critical approaches that had fragmented the Gospel into endless sources and redactions and isolated it into a very specific corner of the early Christian world.

Thirdly, also the precondition outside New Testament studies has developed favourably for our understanding of the New Testament, including the Gospel of John, as since the last quarter of the 20th century ancient philosophers themselves have now more deeply studied the period contemporary to the New Testament, from John Dillon to George Boys-Stones, and also recognized the importance of religious ideas in Plato's philosophy, such as his understanding of the assimilation to God as the final goal of his ethics. It is particularly David Sedley who has done ground-breaking work on this, and the importance of the religious side of ancient philosophy has also been emphasized by his successor Gábor Betegh. At the same time close readings of Plato's *Symposium* have been recently performed by such Classicists as Frisbee Sheffield, from an ancient philosophical perspective, and Richard Hunter, from a literary perspective. I would suggest that everything has now been set for a proper contextualization of (the Greek side of) the Gospel of John.

To suggest that the Gospel of John could have something to do with Plato's *Symposium* is nothing strange. They inhabit the same world, as is nicely symbolized in their material culture: the oldest surviving manuscripts of both writings are papyri from the second century that have been found among the Oxyrhynchus Papyri in Egypt.⁴ They attest to the simultaneous interest of its inhabitants in Plato's *Symposium* and John's *Gospel*. Furthermore, we know that first-century Jews were reading Plato and interested in Socrates. Not only Philo of Alexandria, but also Justus of Tiberias in first-century Galilee, as he is the source of an apocryphal story related in Diogenes Laertius that Plato had intervened during Socrates' trial.⁵ Hence the only thing required for the Gospel of John is a Hellenistic-Jewish author such as Justus of Tiberias being interested in writing Jesus' biography.

That early Christians were interested in Plato's dialogues for their depiction of Jesus has of course long been recognized, and the late Michael Frede wrote a splendid piece arguing that they were especially interested in Plato's *Apology* and *Phaedo*, the dialogues that deal with Socrates' trial and death, because of their interest in the case of Jesus and his subsequent death.⁶ Restricting myself to the reception of Plato's *Phaedo*, I would say that this early Christian interest is already visible in John's Gospel and well extends beyond the scenes of Jesus' trial and death here.

To give a very brief sketch of the similarities between John's Gospel and Plato's *Phaedo* I just point at John's use of the distinctively Platonic phrase "the true light". It is the detection of this occurrence, presented at a conference here in Cambridge in 2002, that triggered my Johannine research, as a search for the origins of this peculiar phrase in the TLG database showed me that this phrase only occurs in Plato's *Phaedo* and in all pagan literature that is dependent upon it, but also in John's Gospel and in all Christian literature in Greek dependent upon it (*Phaedo* 109e-110a; John 1:9). I've been trying to unravel the fabric of John's Gospel ever since, not in order to destruct the Johannine tunic, but in order to understand how, so to speak, the author of John's Gospel uses the Jewish warp and the Greek weft in the weaving of his Christian Gospel, turning the threads of Jesus' biography into this particular fabric. And of course with the intention to "Let John be John".⁷ Further common features of John's Gospel and Plato's *Phaedo*, and that are equally without parallel in the other gospels, include John's talk of true bread, food and drink (6:32, 55) in contrast to

physical nurture (4:8), mirroring Plato's criticism of the so-called pleasures of eating and drinking and his endorsement of a love for "what is most true" (65d-e) and for true nurture, "beholding that which is true and divine . . . , making that its only food" (84a-b).

In passing, I may take the opportunity to suggest that our university's motto, although its origins seem unknown, is thus deeply Platonic and Johannine; it reads "Hinc lucem et pocula sacra", "From here [we receive] light and sacred draughts". The motto encircles an emblem that shows a figure, representing the University as an Alma Mater, who derives her enlightenment from the sun and her spiritual nourishment from the drops that descend from the clouds of heaven. As this emblem was first used by the University Press in 1600, it seems indeed to date back to the atmosphere in the Renaissance in which biblical and Platonic notions were mixed, combining the Jewish view of the divine "sun of righteousness" (Malachi 4:2) with the true light and true nurture from Plato's *Phaedo* and John's Gospel.⁸

To continue my argument about the correspondence between John and Plato's *Phaedo*, there is also a similarity on the narrative level as, in response to the fear of the members of Socrates' circle that they will live the rest of their lives as orphans, Jesus, at his departure says, that he will not leave his pupils orphaned (116a; 14:18). And whereas Socrates turns his wife and children away at the moment of his death, Jesus commends his mother to his beloved pupil (19:25-27; 116a-b, 117b; John 19:25-27). Moreover, as Glenn Most already suggested in a splendid book (HUP 2007), the figure of the doubting Thomas from John's Gospel is reminiscent of the doubtful figures of Simmias and Cebes in Plato's *Phaedo* (HUP 2007). And finally, in both Plato's *Phaedo* and John's Gospel death is seen a transmigration to another, heavenly *oikos*, a heavenly home (117c; 14:1-3). All these distinctive parallels give me the confidence to assert that, like his fellow-Jews Philo of Alexandria and Justus of Tiberias, John, too, was acquainted with Plato's dialogues.

I will now claim that this familiarity with Plato's dialogues also included his *Symposium*, and I will do so against the background of the picture of this marvellous object that is in the collection of our Fitzwilliam Museum, the drinking cup that was painted by the so-called "Nikosthenes Painter" in Athens around 500 BCE (Object Number GR.1.1927) and depicts a symposiast, holding a drinking horn in one hand and gesturing with his other hand.⁹

To pave the way for a subsequent comparison with John's Gospel, I will now offer a brief preview of the main features of Plato's *Symposium* that are relevant for my lecture today. In this dialogue Socrates visits a particular symposium, the Greek precursor of the social after-dinner drink in a Cambridge Senior Common Room after formal, depending the mood of those present spent as drinking bout or for learned, civilized conversation. Socrates' fellow-symposiasts decide on the latter, and they all agree to eulogize the god of Love, Eros, delivering their speeches in turn. One of them, Pausanias, introduces a distinction between two different gods of Eros, with two different types of Aphrodite for a mother: heavenly, abiding love versus transient, bodily love (180d-e). As Richard Hunter has suggested, it is Pausanias's speech "to where we may perhaps also trace the very notion of a duality of love in pagan and Christian traditions."¹⁰

In his speech, Socrates refers back to a speech on the issue of Love that was once delivered to him by the prophetess Diotima, and elaborates on the distinction between two types of love by differentiating between two types of generation, "generation according to the body" and "generation according to the soul"—physical and spiritual generation (206b-e; 209a-d). And it is this differentiation that also occurs in John's Gospel, both in its Prologue and in the episode of Nicodemus' nightly visit to Jesus. In Diotima's speech the difference between physical and spiritual generation is illustrated through the imagery of a ladder that leads from physical love to spiritual love, or as the illustrated BBC history of ideas has it,

from “lust” to “virtue”. The ascent on this ladder takes place through increasing abstractions from physical forms of love to the source of love itself. This ascent is described as an initiation into the mysteries, and at the end of the ladder those who have been able to scale its full height attain to i) full purification; ii) contemplation of the divine unity; iii) truth; and iv) immortality.

To sketch the comparative perspective that I have in mind, I already relate here, that exactly these four aims of purity, unity, truth, and immortality are also realized in the Gospel of John, in Jesus’ speech during his last symposium, without any parallel in the other gospels. And in John’s Gospel there is also the imagery of a ladder, drawn from the episode of the ladder of Jacob in the book of Genesis but now identified, in a complex reconfiguration, with the Christ-Logos (1:51; cf. 1:14, 3:13, 6:62). Diotima’s ladder is now a person,¹¹ rather than an abstract method, and I will come back to this in due course.

Three final relevant issues in Socrates’ re-narration of the speech of Diotima for our present purposes are, first, that Diotima doubts whether Socrates himself is able to scale this ladder of love, and secondly, that according to Diotima the divine figure of Love is not a full god, but only an intermediary demi-god, because, as she emphatically says, “God with man does not mingle (θεὸς δὲ ἀνθρώπῳ οὐ μίγνυται)” (203a). Thirdly, after Socrates’ re-narration of Diotima’s speech, the symposium is abruptly disturbed by the entrance of a drunken Alcibiades,¹² one of Socrates’ pupils, who learning of the symposium’s topic decides to continue the eulogy of the god of Love, but now—as Alcibiades sees this god—as embodied in the figure of Socrates.

I will shortly further comment on Alcibiades, but before that, as part of my triangulation of John in relation to pagan and Jewish authors, I will first briefly comment on Philo of Alexandria who, too, is well acquainted with Plato’s *Symposium*, and responds to it both critically and affirmatively. This mixed reception of Plato’s *Symposium* also reflects the multiple responses that Plato’s writing elicited in pagan Graeco-Roman authors, who took it either as a model of literary emulation, the object of parody, or even the object of criticism. Philo’s response reflects a combination of these attitudes. In his *On the Contemplative Life*, Philo favourably contrasts the banquet customs of the Jewish movement of the so-called Therapeutae, who have fully embraced “the theoretical, contemplative life”, with the banquets described in Xenophon’s and Plato’s *Symposia*. Philo derides Plato’s *Symposium*, and expresses his amazement that Xenophon and Plato thought that the symposia that they depicted were worthy of mention, “surmising that they would serve to posterity as models of the happily conducted symposium (... παραδείγματα ... τῆς ἐν συμποσίοις ἐμμελοῦς διαγωγῆς)” (Philo, *On the Contemplative Life* 57-58).

In an excellent article on Philo’s critique of Plato’s *Symposium*, Maren Niehoff argues that Philo wrote it at the later stages of his career when he was much more oriented towards Rome than before, contrasting the non-alcoholic, philosophical symposia of the Jewish Therapeutae with the decadent, drunken practices of the Greek symposia.¹³ His criticism here, Niehoff notes, is rather similar to that of Seneca who is equally critical of Greek symposia. According to Niehoff, in this way “A clear dichotomy is ... constructed between Us Romans and the Greek Other, who is characterized by drunkenness at excessive banquets ... By implication, the Roman character emerges—parallel to Philo’s Therapeutae—as sober, self-restrained, healthy, and benign. The symposium,” Niehoff concludes, “clearly has become an arena where national identities are constructed and displayed.” (101-104).

Yet this is not the full story of Philo’s reception of Plato’s *Symposium*. Despite his polemics Philo adopts the differentiation between two kinds of love from Plato’s *Symposium*, physical and spiritual love, throughout his oeuvre.¹⁴ And in his exegesis of the ladder of Jacob, Philo reveals a positive appropriation of the imagery of the ladder of Diotima, as his

ladder leads from sense-perception to a mind that is drawn up and purified by the ascending divine *logoi* that disconnect the soul from what is mortal (Philo, *On Dreams* 1.146-147). Both Philo and John, thus, seem to associate the imagery of Diotima's Ladder of Love with that of Jacob's Ladder. Both reflect a similar, intensive Jewish engagement in a Platonic discourse.

We see the same ambivalence between positive and negative receptions of Plato's *Symposium* in John's Gospel, and it is exactly this ambivalence, I would say, that is the hallmark of real dialogue. I will first mention a similarity between John's Gospel and Plato's *Symposium*, to be followed by an important difference. The similarity that I wish to highlight concerns the similarity of the Alcibiades scene with what John narrates about Jesus' encounters with Nicodemus and John, the beloved pupil. As I have already briefly indicated, the speech of Alcibiades seems to supplement, and converge with the speech of Diotima, and I'm in agreement with those Classicists who emphasize their convergence.¹⁵ Whereas Diotima's speech about the ladder of Love is rather abstract, Alcibiades' frank eulogy on Socrates shows how this kind of Love is also personal, as this Love is embodied in the figure of Socrates. For that reason, the critique that the 20th century poet W.H. Auden expressed against Diotima's ladder seems unjustified or perhaps, I should say, answered by Plato in his addition of the speech of Alcibiades. Responding to Diotima's abstract, impersonal depiction of Love through an ascent through all "fair forms" and "principles", Auden addresses her in the following way: "it is quite true, as you say, that a fair principle does not get bald and fat or run away with somebody else. On the other hand, a fair principle cannot give me a smile of welcome when I come into the room. Love of a human being may be, as you say, a lower form of love than love for a principle, but you must admit it is a damn sight more interesting."¹⁶ This critique is however fully answered, I would say, by Plato's inclusion of Alcibiades' subsequent speech in which, despite its characteristics, the divine Love is embodied in a rather unique person, in the figure of Socrates. Alcibiades operates at the same narrative level at which the Gospel operates, when it sees the divine Love embodied in Christ. Whereas the Prologue of the narrative is the more abstract, theoretical background to the entire Gospel, the rest of the Gospel contains episodic narratives that illustrate this theory on the level of the Christ-Logos that is the incarnation of divine Love.¹⁷

Similarly, Alcibiades, in his narrative, reveals that Socrates has superhuman, divine qualities and shows himself disinterested in physical love, prompting his lovers to embrace him in a different manner. Alcibiades's speech is actually testimony to the fact that Socrates proved himself capable of scaling the ladder of Love from the physical to the spiritual. Socrates, according to Alcibiades, in defiance of his unattractive outward appearance, shows his inner being to be full of soundness of mind and moderation in sensual desires (*σωφροσύνη*; 216d-e), with due neglect of the superficial attraction of beauty and wealth, counting all possessions as nothing worth (216e), which reminds him of the ugly images of Sileni, the Satyrs that accompany Dionysus, and which—as Alcibiades' comparison suggests—were also used as the forerunner for a kind of IKEA storage furniture that could be opened to serve as a storage place of portable chests for divine images: "It is an outward casing [Socrates] wears—Alcibiades says—, similarly to the sculptured Silenus. But if you opened his inside, you cannot imagine how full he is ... of sound moderation" (216d). His own inner wealth is that of divine images hidden in an outer casing: "I saw them one day, and thought them so divine and golden, so perfectly fair and wondrous, that I simply had to do as Socrates bade me" (217a). In a similar way, the author of John's Gospel deems Jesus to be "full of kindness and truth" (1:14).

Furthermore, just in the same way that Socrates warns Alcibiades against the deception of outward appearances and says: "Remember, the intellectual sight begins to be keen when the visual is entering on its wane; but you are a long way yet from that time" (219a), in the

same way Jesus criticizes Nicodemus, the teacher that comes to him at night for instruction about the difference between physical and spiritual generation, telling him: “If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?” (3:11-13).

Moreover, the figure of Alcibiades, who enjoys the intimacy of sitting directly to Socrates (213a-b), and refers to Socrates as the one who loves him (218c), whilst Socrates indeed refers to Alcibiades as the object of his love (213c-d), resonates, not only with the figure of Nicodemus, but also with the figure of the beloved pupil, who is reclining next to Jesus (13:23; 21:20) in the same way that Alcibiades is seated next to Socrates, and who identifies himself as the pupil whom Jesus loved (13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20). Hence, whilst Johannine scholarship has been wondering about the background of this notion of the beloved pupil, I suggest we find it here in Plato’s dialogue. And for both John and Alcibiades, their teachers have truly super-human, divinely empowered characteristics and are the embodiment of a different, divine, non-physical kind of Love.

Yet, despite all commonalities there is also an important difference. I’m not arguing that John is a Platonist, but rather that—both in his agreements and disagreements with Plato—he is engaged in a *discourse* with Plato. One such important disagreement concerns the status of the divine Love that is finally seen embodied in Socrates. Differently from the preceding speakers, who all treat Love as a god, Diotima, as I have already briefly indicated before, in her speech that is rehearsed by Socrates, denies that Love is a god, asserting that it is only an intermediary demi-god because—as Diotima emphatically says—“God with man does not mingle (θεὸς δὲ ἀνθρώπῳ οὐ μίγνυται)” (203a). It seems that in response to this, John equally insistently, and provocatively states that the Logos, which in the beginning was not only *with* God, but which *was* God”, that this “Logos became *flesh* (ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο), became *incarnate*, and lived among us” (1:14), and that “*the god is love*” (1 John 4:8). And, in full contradiction of the ascent that is envisioned on the ladder of Diotima, John asserts that “no one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man (οὐδεὶς ἀναβέβηκεν εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν εἰ μὴ ὁ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καταβάς, ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου)” (3:13), who is not only the one descending, but also the very ladder itself (1:51). Yet these differences, that expresses John’s “incarnationalism”, emerge from the shared discourse and continue the same dialogue, although now expressing disagreement.

To some extent, John’s “incarnationalism” is no problem for the Greeks. Also according to Alcibiades the demi-god of Love is embodied in Socrates, but then indeed, as stated by Diotima, Love is no god, but precisely a demi-god that functions as the intermediary between gods and human beings, but itself indeed no god. Interestingly, however, Platonists, as the case of the pagan philosopher Amelius—a pupil of Plotinus in Rome in the mid-3rd century (246-269 CE)—shows, were prepared to accept the incarnation of the Logos, if this incarnation is understood, in a less extreme way, as an epiphany. This is how Amelius interpreted the descent of the Logos, which he identifies with the Logos of Heraclitus of Ephesus:¹⁸

“And this then was the Logos (ὁ λόγος), on whom as being eternal depended the existence of the things that were made, as Heraclitus also would maintain (ὡς ἂν καὶ Ὁρᾶκλειτος ἀξιῶσειε), and the same indeed of whom, as set in the rank and dignity of the beginning (John 1:1-2), the Barbarian [i.e., the non-Greek, Jewish, hence Barbarian author of the Gospel of John] maintains that He was with God and was God (1:1-2): through whom absolutely all things were made (1:3); in whom the living creature, and life, and being had their birth (1:3-4): and that He fell down into [the realm of] the bodies and, having clothed himself in flesh (1:14), was presented to the eye as human being (καὶ εἰς τὰ σώματα πίπτειν καὶ σάρκα ἐνδυσάμενον φαντάζεσθαι

ἄνθρωπον), yet showing even under these circumstances the majesty of his nature (1:14); and indeed, even after dissolution He was again deified, and is a god (1:18), such as He was before He was led down to the body, and the flesh, and Man (πρὸ τοῦ εἰς τὸ σῶμα καὶ τὴν σάρκα καὶ τὸν ἄνθρωπον καταχθῆναι).” (Amelius, preserved in Eusebius of Caesarea, *Preparation for the Gospel* 11.19.1-3)

In this very early pagan commentary on John’s Prologue (of about the same age as the Christian commentary on John by Origen [184/185–254/255] CE), the Logos’s “incarnation” is perceived as a φάντασμα, a φάσμα, an apparition, an (at least partially) deceptive appearance that is so characteristic of the anthropomorphic epiphanies of the Greek gods, such as that of Zeus’ daughter Helen, whose abduction from Sparta to Troy caused the Trojan war. According to Greek poets and playwrights such as Stesichorus and Euripides “the real Helen” never went to Troy as a fake Helen was put in place, as a phantom (φάσμα; Euripides, *Helen* 569) of the real Helen.¹⁹ If so understood, it could be argued that Amelius has a positive, although reductionistic-epiphanic understanding of Johannine incarnation. Yet, this reductionist understanding of the incarnation seems to be exactly what is being criticized elsewhere in the Johannine corpus, in the Letters of John, which criticize those who do *not* confess that “Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα)” (1 John 4:2-3; cf. 2 John 7). So Johannine incarnationalism takes the incarnation indeed in a maximalist way and does not simply take issue, in an inner-Christian mode, with Christian-Gnostic Docetism, but is best understood as disagreeing with the general Greek understanding of incarnation in the weaker sense of a divine epiphany. And it is in this maximalist sense that the Platonists to whom Augustine refers later, take offence at Johannine incarnationalism, despite their general appreciation for the beginning of John’s Gospel (*The City of God* 10.29). So indeed, in the end, despite all extensive agreements with Plato’s *Symposium*, John differs from Plato in his radical understanding of divine incarnation, although Amelius confirms that even here he remained within a discourse with Plato.

This discourse between John and Plato is not only evidenced by the great level of intertextuality between their writings, but from a narratological perspective “the Greeks”, as John calls them, also feature in the Gospel’s plot. At the final Passover festival that Jesus celebrates in Jerusalem, while John’s plot is moving to a climax, according to John, “among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks” who subsequently express their wish to “see Jesus” to two of Jesus’ pupils, Philip and Andrew (12:20-21). I think here John portrays these Greeks as Greek “theōroi (θεωροί)”, “spectators”, literally, that is envoys who were sent to be present at festivals—a phenomenon that has been well studied in Ian Rutherford’s *State Pilgrims and Sacred Observers in Ancient Greece: A Study of Theōriā and Theōroi* (OUP, 2013), in which he indicates how these *theōroi* fit in the context of religious pilgrimage tourism, in which individuals and (official diplomatic) delegations travel to a foreign cult place in the Graeco-Roman world with the intention of “seeing the gods”.

Close to Cambridge, in the Church of St. Andrew in Grantchester, these Greeks make a unique appearance in the stained glass of the chancel, a gift from Annesley William Streane DD, vicar in Grantchester from 1898 to 1904, fellow of Corpus Christi, and a scholar of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures.²⁰ One wonders whether the (empty) scrolls in the lower window are an allusion to the Septuagint which, in Streane’s imagination, the Greeks may have read on their way to Jerusalem.

Their appearance in the text of John’s Gospel at such a crucial stage in the development of its plot, seems to confirm Culpepper’s argument that John’s Gospel is not addressed to Jews, and in my view the most likely audience then is an audience of pagan, or ex-pagan Greeks. It seemed that its author, John, the beloved pupil, is someone whose mind had already been saturated with Plato’s dialogues, rather similar to Justus of Tiberias, and that

meeting Jesus he recognized in him the Socrates-figure of Plato’s writings. Interestingly, it is Plato’s dialogues themselves which are open for such an understanding, as, for instance, in Plato’s *Symposium*, Socrates himself refer to others, “whether among the Greeks or among Barbarians” who master spiritual generation and have shown forth “good deeds (καλὰ ἔργα)” (209d-e), a phrase that John uses to qualify the deeds of Jesus (10:32-33). And in the *Phaedo*, during his farewell speech to the members of his circle, in his response to the plea of Cebes to reassure them, Socrates draws their attention to the possibility that “Socratic” figures exist among the barbarians, who could offer them guidance when he himself is no longer there:

“Then where, Socrates,” [Cebes] said, “are we going to get a good enchanter to charm away these sorts of fears, since you,” he said, “are abandoning us?” “Greece is a large country, Cebes,” [Socrates] said, “where I imagine there are some good men (Πολλὴ μὲν ἡ Ἑλλάς, ἔφη, ὃ Κέβης, ἐν ἧ ἔννεϊσι πού ἀγαθοὶ ἄνδρες), and *there are many barbarian people too all of whom you must track down in your search for such an enchanter (πολλὰ δὲ καὶ τὰ τῶν βαρβάρων γένη, οὓς πάντα χρὴ διερευνᾶσθαι ζητοῦντας τοιοῦτον ἐπωδόν).*” (*Phaedo* 78a).

It seems as if the author of John’s Gospel makes the best use of the openings offered in Plato’s *Symposium* and *Phaedo*, and presents Jesus indeed as such a “Socratic” figure among the “barbarian” Judaeans, who is recognized and found by the Greek visitors, and who—differently from Socrates—does not leave his pupils orphaned.

SECTION B: BELATED DEVELOPMENT

So why has this close relation between John’s Gospel with Plato’s *Symposium* not been noticed before, we might indeed ask—and here starts section B on the belatedness of this insight. Well, of course, there was no knowledge of Plato’s *Symposium*, which was written in Greek, in the medieval Latin West. Only a very few dialogues of Plato had been translated into Latin during the Middle Ages, and the *Symposium* was not among them.²¹ This all changes in the fifteenth century during the run-up to and aftermath of the Fall of Constantinople in 1453 which brought the Greek manuscripts of Plato to the Latin West, to Italy, where they were translated into Latin by Marsilio Ficino.²² When these Latin translations were printed and disseminated in the West, Erasmus was among the first to note the similarities between the New Testament and Plato. He first read Plato’s dialogues in their Latin translation, and only later also in Greek after the first printed edition of the Greek text of Plato, including the *Symposium*, had become available. It is perhaps fair to say that Erasmus learned his Plato especially at the other place, from John Colet, the great humanist, Christian and reformer whom Erasmus visited in 1499. As is well known, Erasmus said of Colet, “When I listen to Colet it seems to me that I am listening to Plato himself.”²³

It’s very appropriate to start my explanation with Erasmus, not because he was the 4th incumbent of this chair during his years here in Cambridge—as *The Historical Register* of this university has it. Richard Rex has convincingly shown that, although it cannot be categorically ruled out, there is no positive evidence for it.²⁴ Of course, Erasmus knew Lady Margaret in as much as he was befriended with John Fischer, the first holder of the Lady Margaret’s chair and her chaplain and confessor, and it was Erasmus who wrote her epitaph in Westminster Abbey, commemorating that she “gave a salary ... to two interpreters of Scripture, one at Oxford, the other at Cambridge, where she likewise founded two colleges, one to Christ, and the other to St John, his disciple.”²⁵ So in that sense he was acquainted with this remarkable Lady who, as the translator of a part of the *Imitation of Christ* by the Dutch Thomas à Kempis, has been dubbed “Renaissance England’s first female translator” and “the only female translator of [à Kempis] in Europe throughout the whole medieval and

early modern period, commanding a place among monks, priests and university-trained men”²⁶.

So here I am, in these Dutch-drained lands of the Fens without the protection of Erasmus as a patron saint on this chair. It is appropriate, however, to start with Erasmus because, within two decades after the appearance of Ficino’s Latin translation (1484), Erasmus was the first to note the similarities between Plato’s *Symposium* and John’s Gospel.²⁷ In his *Enchiridion militis christiani* (*The Handbook of the Christian Soldier*, 1503),²⁸ Erasmus says that, of the Greek philosophers, the Platonists, “in much of their thinking as well as in their mode of expression, . . . are the closest to the spirit of the prophets and of the gospel” (p. 33). In this writing, Erasmus also shows one of the first signs of his acquaintance with Plato’s *Symposium* and puts its differentiation between two sorts of love in relation to Christ when he refers to “the two Venuses and the two Cupids of Plato, that is, honourable love and base love, godly pleasure and base pleasure”, stating that Christ exhorts people to follow “the honourable love” and “godly pleasure”, by turning their mind “to the love of the sovereign good and the most perfect beauty” (p. 116).²⁹

It is then in his *Adages* (first edn 1508, greatly extended in 1515)³⁰—a collection of, and commentary on well-known proverbs—that he also picks up the metaphor of the images of the Sileni that Alcibiades in his speech in Plato’s *Symposium* uses to describe Socrates. After having introduced the proverb of “The Sileni of Alcibiades”, Erasmus clarifies that “Alcibiades in Plato’s *Symposium*, who is preparing to deliver a panegyric of Socrates, draws a parallel between him and Sileni of this kind, because like them he was very different on close inspection from what he seemed in his outward bearing and appearance. . . . Yet, had you opened this absurd Silenus, you would have found, you may be sure, a divine being rather than a man, a great and lofty spirit worthy of a true philosopher” (pp. 262-63). Erasmus then lists the names of such exemplary philosophers, including Antisthenes, Diogenes, and Epictetus, and emphasizes their “Silenic” nature as “Their excellence they bury in their inmost parts, and hide; they wear what is most contemptible at first glance on the surface, concealing their treasure with a kind of worthless outward shell and not showing it to uninitiated eyes” (p. 264). Erasmus then makes an abrupt transition from these philosophers to Christ, raising the following questions:

“And what of Christ? Was not He too a marvellous Silenus, if one may be allowed to use such language of Him?” (p. 264).

Clearly, Erasmus was not allowed to draw this comparison according to some Christians, as in this copy of his *Adages* the entire comparison of Christ with Plato’s Silenus is blocked out.³¹ Erasmus, however, thinks that this comparison is in order:

“Observe the outside surface of this Silenus (i.e., of Christ): to judge by ordinary standards, what could be humbler or more worthy of disdain? . . . And now, if one has the good fortune to have a nearer view of this Silenus, open—if, in other words, He shows Himself in His mercy to anyone, the eyes of whose soul have been washed clean—in heaven’s name what a treasure you will find . . .” (p. 264)

I believe that already here we have an application of this image to the specifically Johannine Christ, as Erasmus’ phrasing that “this Silenus”, once opened, “shows himself in his *mercy*” reads like an allusion to John’s assertion in the Prologue of his Gospel that the incarnate Logos “is full of *mercy* and truth” (πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας, 1:14).

Then indeed, in Erasmus’ *Paraphrase on John* (1523; 4th edn 1535),³² Plato’s *Symposium* is fully brought to bear on John’s Gospel, as Erasmus applies the figure of Alcibiades, as the beloved pupil of Socrates in Plato’s *Symposium*, to the figure of John, who is the beloved pupil of Christ in John’s Gospel. According to Erasmus, Jesus

“inspired his favourite, if I may use the term, with a fuller knowledge of certain mysteries. Let us all therefore drink deep of this man whom Christ loved, that we in our turn may deserve to become lovers of Christ” (p. 12).

This passage is replete with reference to Plato’s *Symposium*, alluding to Alcibiades’ status as beloved pupil, to Diotima’s induction of Socrates to the mysteries, and also the inversion of the love relationship, as those who are the favourites of Socrates are made to love him in a reciprocal, but different sense, just as the readers that Erasmus addresses are to become “lovers of Christ”. Furthermore, the imagery of the Sileni who cover their divine identity under their unassuming outward appearance, is now applied to the two natures of Christ: his incarnate, human appearance and his inner divinity, and—as on Diotima’s ladder of Love—it is the human appearance of Christ that leads those who love him on to a love for his divinity. As Erasmus phrases it, “It was however of the first importance that the world should know and believe that Christ was at once true God and true man. Of which the latter first makes a contribution towards arousing men’s love towards him (for we are more ready to love things which we know) and then provides a keener incentive to imitate him” (p. 11).³³

So what happened to these very promising beginnings at the dawn of the Renaissance? In the Netherlands this Erasmian spirit was very much alive, and Hendrik Laurenszoon Spiegel (1549-1612)—together with Vondel (1587-1679) the Dutch counterparts of Shakespeare (1564-1616)—designed the scheme of a painting that is now lost but survives as an engraving by Jan Saenredam, the father of the Dutch painter Pieter Saenredam.³⁴ This engraving, from 1604, depicts Plato’s Allegory of the Cave from his *Republic*, interpreted in the light of a quotation from John’s Gospel in the upper frame of the picture, which reads “the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light” (John 3:19).³⁵ The picture itself shows Plato’s cave allegory, according to which people in a dark cave work their way upwards into the day-light by closely attending to the interplay between the light, the figures of a procession, and the shadows of these figures that the light casts upon the wall of the cave. This will enable them to work their way upwards—as on Diotima’s ladder³⁶—from the shadows to the figures themselves, and ultimately from the light of the fire to the light outside the cave, which can be glimpsed through the narrow corridor that is leading to the brilliance of the true reality. Hence, the quotation from John’s Gospel that talks about light and darkness, about knowledge and ignorance is well chosen.

But not only the quotation from John’s Gospel shows the Christianization of this image. If we have a closer look at the figures whose shadows are cast upon the wall, we see that this procession, in this picture, is headed by the three Christian virtues of Love, Hope and Faith (cf. Paul, 1 Cor 13:13)—Love being symbolized by Eros-Cupido, the winged figure of Love; Hope by the Anchor; and Faith by the Cross. It is highly remarkable that the Christian Johannine Love is symbolized by the Platonic Eros. Further down in the procession we also find the figure of Dionysus-Bacchus, who is alluded to in John’s narration of the Wedding of Cana. So not only the explicit quotation from John in the frame of the picture, but also the picture itself reflects the same understanding as exhibited by Erasmus, of the closeness of John’s Gospel and Plato’s dialogues, including his *Symposium*.

In England, meanwhile, here in Cambridge, after Erasmus, two professors who were Lady Margaret’s Professors, and still survive on Richard Rex’s amended list, did indeed lecture on Plato: John Redman (1538) and John Cheke (1549), the latter already having served as the first Regius Professor of Greek (1540) before he was appointed on the Lady Margaret’s chair,³⁷ and starting to read the New Testament in the context of Plato, Plutarch and Josephus—so a good relationship between Divinity and Classics seems innate in the history of their chairs.

It was the Cambridge Platonists of the 17th century, who are studied so well in Douglas Hedley's Centre for the Study of Platonism here, who expanded and consolidated their knowledge of Plato and combined this with a great appreciation for the Gospel of John.

Yet the radical, iconoclastic nature that seems ingrained in Protestantism soon cast doubt on the relevance of Plato for Christianity in the 17th and 18th century. In 1700, a London pastor, the Huguenot refugee Jacques Souverain published a book, *Platonism Unveil'd*, in which he attacked both Plato and John's Gospel, arguing that John, under the spell of Plato, had started to corrupt the original, primitive form of Christianity and had rendered Christ into a pagan god. Following Souverain, the Gospel of John now became the battle-ground for anti-Trinitarian attacks and Trinitarian responses, dominating the agenda of the 17th and 18th century. This battle is now well studied in Paul Lim's, *Mystery Unveiled: The Crisis of the Trinity in Early Modern England* (OUP 2012), which shows how much Souverain and others, in their search for primitive Christianity, loathed what they saw as the "unfortunate Platonic captivity of the pure church".³⁸ This could either lead to a distinction between John and Platonism, by which John was saved from Platonism, or the most radical theologians, such as Souverain himself but also a graduate from Emmanuel College here, Edward Evanson, argued that John himself was Platonic too and therefore needed to be condemned together with Plato. As Evanson writes in his *The Dissonance of the Four generally received Evangelists and the Evidence of their Authenticity examined* (Ipswich, 1792), "whoever the writer of this Gospel really was, it must be evident to every competent, unprejudiced judge, who reads it in the original, particularly the exordium, that he was well acquainted with the writings of Plato" (p. 220); he was "a convert of the second century from the Platonic school ... who was one of the earliest fathers of that apostate, antichristian church, whose doctrines are a heterogenous compound of paganism, Judaism and Christianity" (p. 235). There is a direct link between this call back to the supposed primitivism of the earliest Church, as first voiced by Souverain, and Adolf von Harnack's historiography with its negative appreciation of Hellenism.³⁹ Consequently, in his *History of Dogma* (1885-1898; ET 1894-1899) Harnack struggles to separate John, and Paul, from what he regards as the impending threat of the Hellenization of the early Church.

Interestingly, despite all this, in 19th century Victorian Cambridge there is still a resonance of the Platonic interpretation of John's Gospel in the work of Westcott and Lightfoot, as I will now briefly point out. Whilst the world seemed entirely occupied by the anti-Hellenists, that was not entirely the case. One small village of indomitable Cantabrigians still held out against the anti-Hellenistic invaders.⁴⁰ Their embracement of Plato, however, is ambiguous. It is presupposed in their work and expressed in a general way, but never quite followed through in their New Testament commentaries. On the one hand, Westcott wrote essays about major Classical Greek authors, and at the end of an essay on Plato refers indeed to the doubting figure in Plato's *Phaedo*, Simmias, and connects him directly to the Gospel of John in the conclusion of his essay, although only by way of suggestion and without further substantiation: "The Word for which the wavering faith of Simmias thus longed, has, we believe, been given to us; and once again Plato points us to St John" ("The Myth of Plato", 1866). And in the introduction to his collection of these essays under the title "Essays in the History of Religion in the West" (1891), about twenty-five years later, when he is Bishop of Durham, he comes back to this essay and writes:

"Certainly in the days which have passed since no call to effort has grown fainter and no prospect less bright. If it was possible then to make our own the memorable phrase with which Socrates closed his summons to a life of faith $\kappa\alpha\lambda\acute{o}\nu\ \tau\acute{o}\ \acute{\alpha}\theta\lambda\omicron\nu\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \eta\ \acute{\epsilon}\lambda\pi\iota\varsigma\ \mu\epsilon\gamma\acute{\alpha}\lambda\eta$

("[for] it is a noble prize and the hope is great"), it has been brought home to us in the interval once and again by those who have proved to the last struggle of life that "the Word for which Plato longed, as a sure support, has been given to us in Him Whom St John has made known."

Yet, on the other hand, despite this explicit connection of John's Gospel with Plato's writings, in his big commentary that he had published in between (1881) there is hardly any reference to Plato.⁴¹ And this despite his life-long conviction, that he reveals in the introduction to his essays, of believing that "a careful examination of the religious teaching of representative prophetic masters of the West, if I may use the phrase, would help towards a better understanding of the power of the Christian Creed. Their hopes and their desires, their errors and their silences, were likely, I thought, to shew how far the Gospel satisfies our natural aspirations and illuminates dark places in our experience."⁴²

The same holds true for Lightfoot, who was Lady Margaret's Professor here, and whose commentary notes on the Gospel of John from his time in Cambridge were only recently found in the Library of Durham Cathedral, where Lightfoot had been appointed bishop before Westcott took over from him.⁴³ Similar to Westcott, Lightfoot, commenting on the Johannine Logos, says that it is his "purpose in this initial examination ... to show how the religious phraseology, and to some extent, the religious thought, of the time had prepared the way for the promulgation of the Gospel" (p. 81), taking the "Christian doctrine of the Logos" as "the synthesis of the two influences", namely of the Jewish Scriptures and Platonic philosophy. His enquiry, however, is entirely limited to the Gospel's Prologue and differently from Westcott he does not highlight the figure of Socrates. This despite his conviction, borrowing a phrase from Paul, that the time of the New Testament is "the fulness of time" (Gal 4:4), the "seething of all the diverse elements, the fusion of opposites in the order of thoughts" (p. 85).⁴⁴

One can only wonder why despite their confident assertions about the relation between John's Gospel and Plato, neither Westcott nor Lightfoot felt the need to demonstrate this. Perhaps their confidence was part of a general, renewed cultural appreciation of Plato in the Victorian age, as studied in the works of Frank Turner on the Greek heritage in Victorian Britain and of Michael Wheeler on the Victorians' response to the Gospel of John in the arts.⁴⁵ In some sense, this might also be the atmosphere that is reflected in Streane's window of the Greeks wishing to see Jesus in the Church of St. Andrew in Grantchester (1904).

Someone who was clearly disappointed, however, about Westcott's failure to implement his Platonic agenda, is one of Lightfoot's successors, William Ralph Inge, here shown on a portrait in my room. Having been Lady Margaret's Professor already well before the First World War, he was subsequently appointed Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London and it was in that capacity that he returned to Cambridge in 1925-26 to deliver the Hulsean Lectures in our faculty on "The Platonic Tradition in English Religious Thought",⁴⁶ a plea to recognize the strength, and importance of the Platonic-Johannine tradition in Christianity, alongside the Roman-Catholic and Protestant traditions. Although recognizing Westcott's sympathies for a spiritual, Platonic form of Christianity, he, perhaps from the critical distance of London, voiced his disappointment about Westcott's commentary on John, especially because none other than Westcott himself would have been better placed to argue for John's engagement with Plato.⁴⁷

It does not seem that the First World War was necessarily the watershed moment after which such a Platonic interpretation became impossible. It has been suggested that the horror of the trenches rendered Platonism with its divine immanence (besides its transcendence) unfashionable after the experience of God's absence in the trenches. Yet the sacramental

poetry of such soldier poets as David Jones suggests that this is not necessarily the case. Moreover, Inge delivered his plea for a Platonic-spiritual form of Christianity here in Cambridge after the Great War, and—as we all know—that most famous professor of all, C.S. Lewis’s alter-ego in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Professor Digory Kirke, is still able to exclaim in the 1950s: “It’s all in Plato, all in Plato: bless me, what do they teach them at these schools!”

And then indeed, this possibility of a Platonic reading of John’s Gospel is what actually materialized in the 1950s, as C.H. Dodd, by then the Norris-Hulse Professor Emeritus (1935-49) of this university, published his *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (CUP 1953). In a sense, Dodd was the first scholar, after Erasmus, to make a Platonic reading of John’s Gospel work. Yet he did not entirely succeed in this as he took as his reference literature the Corpus Hermeticum that is the final product of Hermetic philosophical texts that started to emerge in the 1st to 3rd centuries CE and reflects a “popular Platonism”. Dodd’s choice for this corpus of literature was quite understandable since an important edition and commentaries of the Corpus Hermeticum had just been appearing whilst he was preparing his book and had thus attracted his attention.⁴⁸ It’s a shortcoming, however, that he did not work with more contemporary and existing Platonic texts, including Plato’s dialogues themselves. Dodd’s programme, however, remains still on the table. It fell flat because scholarly attention was by then entirely turned to the spectacular discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls which seemed to give sense to John’s purported Light-Darkness dualism (and its alleged sectarianism). Then, in a second wave, the English translation of Bultmann’s commentary on John in the 1970s diverted attention even further.⁴⁹

After Dodd’s book New Testament scholarship on the relation between John and Plato remained silent, and it seems that an awareness of their similarity remained preserved only in artistic intuition. In various poems and essays, right from the 1940s to the 1960s, the poet W.H. Auden circled around themes from John and Plato, even if he agreed with the former and disagreed with the latter. But there is a continuous pondering in his work about the issues of Platonic love, the different sorts of love, and the Johannine theme of incarnation, most notably in his poem “Kairos and Logos” (early 1941). In the first part of this superb poem he investigates, in Platonic fashion, reminiscent of the various types of loves that are explored in Plato’s *Symposium*, how these types of love relate to Kairos and Logos in their different manifestations in 1) time, death and life (“Kairos”), and in 2) world and order (“Logos”), each with its own form of condemnation, and seen from the different perspectives of the Roman emperor, the Roman armies, the Greeks, the Barbarians, and the Christians;⁵⁰ the intertextuality with Plato’s *Symposium* seems also visible in the implicit critique of Diotima’s ladder later on in the final part of the poem when the poet speaks of the failure to “climb the broken ladders of our lives”. His “Kairos and Logos” is written at the same time as his *New Year Letter* (published May 1941), which ends in the final two stanzas with references to John’s Prologue. And in the same year, Auden writes a book review of Denis de Rougemont’s “Love in the Western World” in which he contrasts Eros with Christian Agapē, to be supplemented later, in the 1960s, with the explicit critique of Diotima’s impersonal, abstract notion of Love in her speech in Plato’s *Symposium* that I mentioned earlier. Auden’s mind was thus fully saturated with reflections on John’s Gospel and Plato’s *Symposium*, and although he was very critical of Plato, as clearly visible in his poem with the programmatic title “No, Plato, No” (1973), he was ambiguous in his criticism, and remained throughout in a discourse with Plato.

Another example of such an awareness of the closeness of John’s Gospel with Plato’s *Symposium* is the brilliant, moving comparison between John’s Gospel and Plato’s

Symposium under the title “The Two Suppers” (1995) by the Jewish literary critic George Steiner, who still lives here in Cambridge. In “The Two Suppers”, Steiner compares the last supper of Jesus in John’s Gospel with the supper of Socrates in Plato’s *Symposium*, but I haven’t seen any resonance of this piece in New Testament scholarship. Of course, sometimes a critical attitude in scholarship is demanded for things that prove to be counter-intuitive, yet sometimes it is intuition that offers a way through the complexity of things.

Over the last 15 years, this intuition has now again become matched with exegetical scholarship. This recent period has seen a resurgence of a reading of John’s Gospel in its Graeco-Roman context, a movement of which I am proud to be part, and is located in the USA, Denmark, Switzerland, and now also in the UK, and is still gaining momentum. It includes work on the literary aspects of John, focussing on elements of Greek tragedy in his Gospel and on such literary themes as farewell and recognition.⁵¹ And it includes work on the philosophical aspects of John’s Gospel, either on the Stoic side, in the Copenhagen school, or on the Platonic side, on which work is being done in Yale, Bern and Cambridge.⁵² Whereas my Platonizing colleagues, Harold Attridge and Rainer Hirsch-Luipold, mainly work on the Platonic symbolism of John’s Gospel and on generic issues, I propose to read John’s Gospel (both narratologically and thematically) in its intertextual, “discursive” relation with Plato’s *Symposium*, the *Republic*, and the dialogues about the last days of Socrates, which were all so very well known in the 1st century when John wrote.

This is the answer, I believe, to my colleague’s question why such a Platonic approach to John’s Gospel is rather belated. It could only emerge after Plato’s *Symposium* became known in Ficino’s Latin translation at the end of the 15th century, and then, within two decades, was applied by Erasmus to his reading of the New Testament, including his interpretation of John’s Gospel. But this promising start at the beginning of the Renaissance was then prevented from flourishing by time-specific circumstances surrounding the interpretation of John’s Gospel. And a Platonic interpretation of this Gospel fell increasingly victim to a primitivist historiography that either overlooked John’s Greek discourse, or recognised but excluded it from the primitivist canon. I now come to the C, the Consequences, and the Conclusion.

SECTION C: CONSEQUENCES AND CONCLUSIONS

It is this primitivism, that can now be questioned. Living after the linguistic turn in Johannine studies, which shows the unity and sophistication of its literature; living after the generic turn from the gospels as *Kleinliteratur* to the gospels as ancient biographies; and now so much work has been done by the Classicists themselves on the development of ancient philosophy; and a searchable digital database of all extant Greek literature has become available for a sustained discourse analysis of all relevant Greek authors, it has now become possible to locate New Testament authors such as John far more precisely alongside their Jewish-Hellenistic and pagan-Hellenistic contemporaries through the triangulation of their works, determining their relative location from the comparative perspective of the others. One of the results of the triangulation of John between Philo and Plato, is that John and Philo show themselves rather similar in their acquaintance with, and reworking of Plato’s *Symposium*. They are engaged in a discourse with Plato. When they read about the Ladder of Jacob in the Jewish Scriptures, both Philo and John ask themselves how its meaning can be translated in their Hellenistic world, and—so to speak—merge the ladders of Jacob and Diotima into one telescopic ladder. They agree with Plato that there is a hierarchy of a multi-layered structure of reality and love. And John agrees with Plato’s Alcibiades that divine love is also embodied

in a particular figure, in Socrates, in Christ, as an exemplification how divine love works. John even challenges Plato's Diotima by stating that Love is not only a demi-god, but that "the god is love (ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν)" (1 John 4:8). Both Philo and John agree and disagree with aspects of Plato's *Symposium*, showing that the primitivism of Souverain and von Harnack is unjustified. In their search for the origins of Christian primitivism Souverain and von Harnack both loathed what they saw as "the Platonic captivity" of the early Church, but a triangulation of John, Philo and Plato now shows that such Platonic reflections of John could well have been part of the earliest phase of Christianity, as John is already preceded by Philo, who shows the same interaction with Plato as John does. So the advantage of such a sustained discourse analysis is that it criticizes simplistic historiographies. This kind of comparative triangulation is perhaps best seen as part of drawing a minute Venn-diagram of the discourses between Greek-writing Jews, Christians and pagans, expressing all the different "discursive" relations between the authors that are being compared, indicating both differences and commonalities.⁵³ This imagery of a Venn-diagram, which I derive from George Brooke's comparative studies on the Dead Sea Scrolls, is perhaps rather fitting here, as Venn-diagrams were invented in Cambridge, by John Venn in the late 19th century.

I very much look forward to exploring the discourses of early Christians, Jews and pagans in a close cooperation with all my colleagues here in Cambridge, in the relevant subject fields, biblical and non-biblical. I very much value what seems to be the profile of the Cambridge faculty: the constructive relation between Theology & Religious Studies, and I believe comparative religion, and comparative literature, could be really an approach that would bring us further. Whereas C.S. Lewis once thought, after his reading of the foundational charter of British anthropology, Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, that parallels between the New Testament and Classical literature relativized its significance, he later understood that parallels tell nothing either for or against Christianity, but that if we assume with John's Prologue that "the true light ... enlightens everyone" (1:9) we ought not to be surprised about the existence of such parallels; they rather ought to be there.⁵⁴ I think this is a marvellous, open attitude and expresses for me the usefulness of the method of comparison, including comparative religion. I think that Sandmel's famous discrediting of this approach as "parallelomania" is undue,⁵⁵ and that this critique is rather an expression of parallelophobia. If parallels are understood as possible expressions of a common human discourse, that is a good thing, I would say. I therefore very much look forward to cooperation with all my truly excellent colleagues here in Cambridge, inside the faculty, across all the disciplines; but also outside the faculty, with the Classicists, and also with colleagues from the other faculties of the School, in our common plight for the Arts & the Humanities; and of course beyond this place with all my colleagues in the UK in the field of the New Testament and all other relevant fields. I look forward to much discourse, but now it's time for sympotic drinks.—I thank you for your attention.

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¹ This inaugural lecture is dedicated to the memory of Dr W. Aalders, the author of *Plato en het Christendom* (The Hague: Voorhoeve, 1984).

² Talking about the "triangulation" of Rabbinic texts with Christian and pagan literature in his "Using Rabbinic Literature as a Source for the History of Late-Roman Palestine: Problems and Issues" in Martin Goodman & Philip Alexander (eds), *Rabbinic Texts and the History of Late-Roman Palestine* (OUP 2010).

³ D.E. Aune, *Jesus, Gospel Tradition and Paul in the Context of Jewish and Greco-Roman Antiquity* (Collected Essays II; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), chap. 1: “The Meaning of Eúaggélion in the Inscriptioes of the Canonical Gospels”, 30.

⁴ Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 843 contains large portions of the second half of the *Symposium*, whereas P90 (Pap. Oxy. 3523) contains John 18:36-19:1 and 19:2-7.

⁵ See Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 2.5 Socrates 41; Tiberias is named in John 6:1, 23 and 21:1, the sole references in the entire New Testament.

⁶ Michael Frede, “The Early Christian Reception of Socrates”, in: Lindsay Judson & Vassilis Karasmanis (eds), *Remembering Socrates: Philosophical Essays* (OUP 2006), chap. 12, 188-202.

⁷ James D.G. Dunn, “Let John Be John: A Gospel for Its Time”, in: idem, *The Christ and the Spirit: Collected Essays* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), vol. 1, chap. 20, 345-75 (originally 1982).

⁸ Cf. Frank Stubbings, *Bedders, Bulldogs and Bedells: A Cambridge Glossary* (CUP 1991, Revised and enlarged edition, 1995).

⁹ See <https://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/collections/greeceandrome/68955>, accessed on February 6th, 2019. Cf. the description on the museum’s website: “Propped against a striped cushion, the man holds up a large drinking horn in one hand. The long fingers of his other hand are outstretched, perhaps applauding or marking time to a song. Above his legs hangs an animal-skin case for a musical instrument.”

¹⁰ Richard Hunter, *Plato’s “Symposium”* (OUP 2004), 129.

¹¹ Cf. the similar, but independent move of Paul in Romans 10:4, where Christ is the personified natural law, the *nomos empsychos* of Stoic philosophy.

¹² See the depiction of the scene by Pietro Testa (Italy, 1648), a.o., in the collection of the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, see <http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.185146>, accessed on February 14th, 2019.

¹³ M.R. Niehoff, “The *Symposium* of Philo’s Therapeutae: Displaying Jewish Identity in an Increasingly Roman World”, *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 50 (2010): 95-117. For Philo’s Therapeutae, see further Joan E. Taylor, *Jewish Women Philosophers of First-Century Alexandria: Philo’s ‘Therapeutae’ Reconsidered* (OUP 2006).

¹⁴ Including in the *On the Contemplative Life* itself, which contains both a critique of “the common vulgar love” of Plato’s *Symposium* (59-60), and the different love by which the Therapeutae are possessed, as they are “carried away by a heaven-sent passion of love (ὄψ’ ἔρωτος ἀρπασθέντες οὐρανόυ)” (10-13), “having drunk as in the Bacchic rites of the strong wine of God’s love (καθάπερ ἐν ταῖς βακχεῖαις ἀκράτου σπᾶσαντες τοῦ θεοφιλοῦς)” (85).

¹⁵ See C.J. Rowe, *Plato: Symposium—Edited with an Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Aris & Phillips Classical Texts; Oxford: Oxbow, 1998), 205-206; Dominic Scott, “Socrates and Alcibiades in the *Symposium*”, *Hermathena* 168 (2000): 25-37; Frisbee C Sheffield, “Alcibiades’ Speech: A Satyrical Drama”, *Greece & Rome* 48 (2001): 193-209; M.C. Howatson & Frisbee C.C. Sheffield, *Plato: The Symposium* (Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy; Cambridge: CUP, 2008), xxvi-xxviii; and Yancy Dominick, “Images for the Sake of the Truth in Plato’s *Symposium*”, *Classical Quarterly* 63 (2013): 558-66; pace Martha Nussbaum, “The Speech of Alcibiades: A Reading of Plato’s *Symposium*”, *Philosophy and Literature* 3 (1979): 131-72. See also Harold W. Attridge, “Plato, Plutarch, and John: Three Symposia about Love”, in: Eduard Iricinschi, Lance Jenott, Nicola Denzey Lewis & Philippa Townsend (eds), *Beyond the Gnostic Gospels: Studies Building on the Work of Elaine Pagels* (Studies and Texts in Antiquity and Christianity 82; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 367-78 at 374 on Socrates “illustrating in action the principle articulated in Diotima’s discourse.”

¹⁶ See Auden’s introduction to *The Protestant Mystics* (Selected and edited by Anne Fremantle, with an Introduction by W.H. Auden; London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964); cf. Arthur Kirsch, *Auden and Christianity* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2005), 84-85.

¹⁷ Cf. R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), esp. chap. 4, pp. 87-89, 97-98; cf. also 151 and 234.

¹⁸ Cf. Luc Brisson, “Amelius Gentilianus”, *Brill’s New Pauly* (consulted online on January 22nd, 2019). See further his “Amélius: Sa vie, son oeuvre, sa doctrine, son style”, in: *ANRW* 2.36.2, 793-860.

¹⁹ Cf. Verity Platt, *Facing the Gods: Epiphany and Representation in Graeco-Roman Art, Literature and Religion* (Cambridge: CUP 2011); and the excellent study of my former student, Stefan Mulder, *Early Christian Christology Contextualised: The Graeco-Roman Context of “Christian” Docetism* (Research Master thesis, University of Groningen, 2016, unpublished).

²⁰ For Streane’s scholarship, see, among others, his *The Double Text of Jeremiah (Massoretic and Alexandrian) Compared: Together with an Appendix on the Old Latin Evidence* (Cambridge: Deighton Bell, 1896) and *The*

Age of the Maccabees: With Special Reference to the Religious Literature of the Period (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1898).

²¹ On the availability of Plato's dialogues in the Latin West prior to the second half of the 15th century, see John Marenbon, *Medieval Philosophy: An Historical and Philosophical Introduction* (London/New York: Routledge, 2007), 13 (available but largely ignored: the *Meno* and *Phaedo*; wide-spread: the *Timaeus*, together with a summary of the *Republic*).

²² Cf. Frantisek Novotny, *The Posthumous Life of Plato* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977), chaps 16-21.

²³ Erasmus, *The Correspondence: Letters 1-141 (1484-1500)*, translated by R.A.B. Mynors, D.F.S. Thomson & Wallace K. Ferguson Estate (Collected Works of Erasmus 1; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 235-36: "118 / To Robert Fisher (London, 5 December [1499])".

²⁴ See Richard Rex, "Lady Margaret Beaufort and her Professorship, 1502-1559", in: Patrick Collinson, Richard Rex & Graham Stanton (eds), *Lady Margaret Beaufort and her Professors of Divinity at Cambridge: 1502 to 1649* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), chap. 2, 19-56, esp. 29-31, with Appendices I and II containing, resp. the succession list from *The Historical Register at the University of Cambridge* (1910) and the revised list by Richard Rex.

²⁵ See <https://www.westminster-abbey.org/abbey-commemorations/commemorations/margaret-beaufort-countess-of-richmond>, consulted on 12th February, 2019.

²⁶ See Patricia Demers, "God may open more than man maye vnderstande": Lady Margaret Beaufort's Translation of the *De Imitatione Christi*", *Renaissance and Reformation* 35 (2012): 45-61 at 47, with reference to Brenda M. Hosington, "Lady Margaret Beaufort's Translations as Mirrors of Practical Piety", in: Micheline White (ed.), *English Women, Religion, and Textual Production, 1500-1625* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate), 188 and 203.

²⁷ It does not seem that Ficino himself already drew a specific parallel between John's Gospel and Plato's *Symposium*; his *Commentarium in convivium Platonis de amore* is an explanatory re-narration of Plato's *Symposium*. To date, the edition and translation of Ficino's commentary on the *Symposium* has not yet appeared in the "Marsilio Ficino - Commentaries on Plato" series of The I Tatti Renaissance Library published by Harvard University Press. For translations, see Marsilio Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love: An English translation by Sears Jayne* (Woodstock, CT: Spring Publications, 1985, 2nd rev. ed.); Arthur Farnell, *On the Nature of Love: Ficino on Plato's "Symposium"* (London: Shephard-Walwyn, 2016). For an edition and French translation, see Pierre Laurens, *Marsile Ficin: Commentaire sur le Banquet de Platon, de l'Amour / Commentarium in convivium Platonis* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2002). Ficino, however, is very well aware of the closeness of John and Plato, and shows himself familiar with Amelius' interpretation of John's Prologue, see Denis J.-J. Robichaud, *Plato's Persona: Marsilio Ficino, Renaissance Humanism, and Platonic Traditions* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 187 and 200-203 (with 282 note 54); cf. also 187-88. See also Michael J. B. Allen, "Marsilio Ficino on Plato, the Neoplatonists and the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity", *Renaissance Quarterly* 37 (1984): 555-84, esp. 556, 557, 565, 581-583, showing that Ficino assumed that "the post-Christian Platonists", including Amelius, had access, and were dependent upon John's Gospel.

²⁸ Erasmus, *Spiritualia: Enchiridion / De contemptu mundi / De vidua christiana / Desiderius Erasmus*, edited by John W. O'Malley (Collected Works of Erasmus 66; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988); *The Handbook of the Christian Soldier* is translated and annotated by Charles Fantazzi.

²⁹ Erasmus probably first worked with Ficino's Latin translation of Plato's *Symposium*. He owned the following Latin copies of 1) Plato, *Opera latine, interprete Marsilio Ficino*, Venice: Asulanus, 1491; and 2) *Platonis Opera translatione Marsilii Ficini*, Basel: Froben, 1532. And then acquired, around 1525, a copy of 3) the edition princeps of the Greek text: *Platonis Opera graece*, Venice: Aldus, 1513 (now in the Royal Library, The Hague). See Egbertus van Gulik, *Erasmus and his Books*, edited by James K. McConica and Johannes Trapman (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2018), 343-45, nos. 216-218. With kind acknowledgment of the help that I received from Prof Henk Jan de Jonge (Leiden).

³⁰ Erasmus, *Adages* (1536, final edn; developing from 1508-36; mainly 1515); *Adages: II.7.1 to III.iii.100*, translated and annotated by R.A.B. Mynors (Collected Works of Erasmus 34; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992); *Adage III.iii.1*, "Sileni Alcibiadis: The Sileni of Alcibiades", pp. 262-82; for introduction and notes, see pp. 405-408. On the growth of the various editions, see p. 405: "In 1508 this was a short piece of two or three sentences, naming as its source the passage in Plato's *Symposium* where Alcibiades in his eulogy of Socrates compares him to the popular figurines of the demi-god Silenus, which open to reveal an inside much richer than the outside would lead one to expect. Despite Erasmus' explicit statement later, the words are not known to appear in any extant ancient collection of Greek proverbs; but they had already been used as a symbol by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola in a letter of 1485 to Ermolao Barbara, printed in Pico's *Opera omnia* (Basel 1557) 1354. ... In 1515, we find the existing text largely rewritten and expanded to over a hundred times its

original length, after which a few additions in 1517/8 and 1528, and a few modifications, brought it to its final form.”

³¹ See the copy of Erasmus’s *Adages* in The Newberry Digital Collections for the Classroom (The Newberry, Chicago), at <https://dcc.newberry.org/items/sileni-alcibaides>, accessed on February 14th, 2019.

³² Erasmus, *Paraphrase on John*, translated and annotated by Jane E. Phillips (Collected Works of Erasmus 46; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

³³ For both quotations, see the “Dedicatory Letter” at the beginning of his paraphrase. Cf. also his further reflections on John’s status as the one “especially loved by the one who is eternal love” and on the nature of divine love in his epilogue “To the Pious Reader”: “Certainly the whole gospel teaching, the whole life of Christ, breathes a new and marvellous love, but no one expresses this more than John the Evangelist, who, just as he was especially loved by the one who is eternal love, likewise speaks nothing else, breathes nothing else, than pure love, whether one reads his Gospel or his Epistles. This is of course the Christian love which teaches in brief whatever is taught in all the volumes of the Old Testament, all the books of the philosophers, all human laws; this is the love that of its own accord brings with it every virtue there is” (p. 226); cf. the link between divine heavenly Eros and virtue in Plato, *Symposium* 180b, “So there is my description of Love—that he is the most venerable and valuable of the gods, and that he has sovereign power to provide all virtue and happiness for men whether living or departed” (and see also 185b-c). For the interpretation of Christ’s dual nature in the light of Alcibiades’ imagery of the Sileni and Diotima’s ladder of Love, see also Erasmus’s *Paraphrase on Luke* (1523; 4th edn 1535) published later in the same year, see *Paraphrase on Luke 1 to 10*, translated and annotated by Jane E. Phillips (Collected Works of Erasmus 47; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), see p. 98; for the dating of the *Paraphrase on Luke*, see pp. x, xiii-xiv.

³⁴ Cf. the English-written article by P.J. Vinken, “H. L. Spiegel’s *Antrum Platonicum*”, *Oud Holland – Journal for Art of the Low Countries* 75 (1960): 125–142. For the object, in the collection of the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, see <http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.169279>, accessed on February 14th, 2019.

³⁵ Note the misprint in the Latin: “Lux venit in mundun ...”, instead of “... mundum ...”

³⁶ Note the common ascent language in John’s Gospel (see ἀναβαίνω in John 1:51; 3:13; 6:62; 20:17), Diotima’s speech in Plato’s *Symposium* (see ἐπαναβασιμός in 211c) and in Plato’s Allegory of the Cave in his *Republic* (see ἀναβαίνω in Book 7, 517a; 519d; and ἀνάβασις in 515e; 517b; 519d).

³⁷ Cf. Rex, “Lady Margaret Beaufort and her Professorship”, 46-47.

³⁸ See esp. chap. 6: “Platonic Captivity or Sublime Mystery? The Trinity and the Gospel of John in Early Modern England”; quotation from p. 60. For Souverain’s view on the Gospel of John, see 309-18. And for his influence on von Harnack, see 308-9 and 309.

³⁹ Cf. E.P. Meijering, *Die Hellenisierung des Christentums im Urteil Adolf Von Harnacks* (Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkunde 128; Amsterdam/New York: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1985); for his comments on Souverain, see p. 14.

⁴⁰ Some readers will recognize a reference here to the fixed introductions to Asterix: “The year is 50 BC. Gaul is entirely occupied by the Romans. Well not entirely! One small village of indomitable Gauls still holds out against the invaders. And life is not easy for the Roman legionaries who garrison the fortified camps of Totorum, Aquarium, Laudanum and Compendium ...”

⁴¹ See Westcott, *The Gospel According to St John* (London 1881), only referring to Plato on p. xvii in a discussion of Philo, so indirectly; and once to Socrates, on p. 133, while commenting on Jesus’ statement in John 8:32, “the truth shall make you free”: “This principle is that which Socrates (for example) felt after when he spoke of vice as ignorance”).

⁴² For Westcott’s programme, cf. also David Newsome, *Bishop Westcott and the Platonic Tradition* (CUP 1969); and Henry Chadwick, “The Vindication of Christianity in Westcott’s Thought”; now subsumed in Chadwick’s *Tradition and Exploration* (1994).

⁴³ J.B. Lightfoot, *The Gospel of St. John: A Newly Discovered Commentary*, edited by Ben Witherington III and Todd D. Still, assisted by Jeanette M. Hagen (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015).

⁴⁴ See also the fuller passage on pp. 85-86: “The seething of all the diverse elements, the fusion of opposites in the order of thoughts, it was when the ‘fullness of time’ (τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου —Gal 4:9) had come, that ‘God sent into the world his Son, born of woman.’ The more one studies history, the more one feels the force and significance of St. Paul’s expression. Whether considered morally, or socially, or politically, or philosophically, or religiously, it was essentially the fullness of time. Even an unbeliever must allow, the Christian Era has been the turning point of world history. This is not a matter of theory, but of fact. Whether we consider the actions of Rome, or the intellect of Greece, or the religious aspirations of Judaea, the expression ‘fullness of time’ is apt.” The reference to Plato on p. 157 is wrong and should be to Plutarch (*Quaestiones convivales / Table-Talk*); cf. the correct ascription on p. 299.

⁴⁵ For the Victorians' response to the Gospel of John in the arts, see Michael Wheeler, *St John and the Victorians* (CUP 2014); and for the Victorians' appreciation of Plato, see Frank M. Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981). For the following interesting motivation for Benjamin Jowett, at the other place, to turn to Plato, see Turner, *Contesting Cultural Authority: Essays in Victorian Intellectual Life* (CUP 1993), 351-352: "... Jowett came to recognise during the early 1860s that neither the high church party nor the evangelicals in the Church of England would permit an interpretation of scripture that took into account the critical difficulties posed by modern scholarship. Without such a new reading of scripture, he believed that traditional Christian moral values ... might not survive the mid-century intellect assault arising from utilitarianism, historical criticism, and scientific naturalism. Foiled in his effort to sustain Christian morality on the basis of liberal theology, Jowett turned to the philosophy of Plato to provide a surrogate"; cf. Peter Hinchliff, *Benjamin Jowett and the Christian Religion* (OUP 1987).

⁴⁶ See W.R. Inge, *The Platonic Tradition in English Religious Thought: The Hulsean Lectures at Cambridge, 1925-1926* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1926).

⁴⁷ In Inge's view this failure had to do with Westcott's conservative stance on the gospel's authorship: "Many who have read that commentary with gratitude and admiration cannot help feeling a deep regret that Westcott never really regarded the traditional authorship of the Gospel as an open question. His arguments for the Johannine authorship are now seen to be quite unconvincing, and his rooted conservatism in matters of higher criticism—an attitude which belongs to all the great new Testament scholars of his time at Cambridge, though less to Hort than to Westcott and Lightfoot, prevented him from treating the 'spiritual gospel' as what it is—an inspired interpretation of the Person and work of Christ, address to the third generation of Christians. In this way the one man who among all his contemporaries was best fitted by natural sympathy and understanding to expound the deepest teaching of the Gospel, was condemned to see his work superseded by commentators who, though they have read the open secret of the class of literature to which the Gospel belongs—it was no secret to Origen, who knew what he meant by a 'spiritual Gospel'—have not the insight of Westcott into the sublime teaching which is enshrined in its very simple language" (pp. 97-98). In Inge's view John's Gospel is "a further development and explication of Paulinism, with the help of Philo's Platonised Judaism" (p. 13), "an inspired interpretation of the Person and work of Christ, addressed to the third generation of Christians" (p. 97), its "Logos doctrine" written after the "fading of the Messianic hope" (p. 106). As the triangulation of John with Philo and Plato shows, there is no reason to necessarily adopt such a late date. With Westcott, however, Inge shared the view that "A Christian will be disposed to find, in this independent growth of spiritual religion ... a divinely ordered preparation for the supreme revelation in the Gospel" (p. 10), of course alluding to Eusebius' *Preparation for the Gospel*.

⁴⁸ See A.D. Nock & A.J. Festugière, *Corpus hermeticum: Texte établi par A.D. Nock et traduit par A.-J. Festugière*, Paris: Les belles lettres, 1945-54, 4 vols; vol. 1: *Traité I-XII*; vol. 2: *Traité XIII-XVIII; Asclepius*; vol. 3: *Fragments extraits de Stobée (I-XXII)*; vol. 4: *Fragments extraits de Stobée (XXIII-XXIX), Fragments divers*.

⁴⁹ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A commentary*, translated [from the German] by G.R. Beasley-Murray, R.W.N. Hoare and J.K. Riches (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971).

⁵⁰ Note also Auden's profound engagement with the Greek world by the implicit contrast that he builds up between Helen of Sparta, "Destroyer of cities", and the Christ-Logos, and, in the second part, with his Mother Mary.

⁵¹ See Jo-Ann A. Brant, *Dialogue and Drama: Elements of Greek Tragedy in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004); George L. Parsenios, *Departure and Consolation: The Johannine Farewell Discourses in Light of Greco-Roman Literature* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2005); and Kasper Bro Larsen, *Recognizing the Stranger: Recognition Scenes in the Gospel of John* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2012). For a more religio-historical approach, see Dennis R. MacDonald, *The Dionysian Gospel: The Fourth Gospel and Euripides* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), to be read in conjunction with Courtney J.P. Friesen, *Reading Dionysus: Euripides' Bacchae and the Cultural Contestations of Greeks, Jews, Romans, and Christians* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015).

⁵² For the Stoic contextualization of John's Gospel, see now Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *John and Philosophy: A New Reading of the Fourth Gospel* (OUP 2017) and Gitte Buch-Hansen, "It Is the Spirit That Gives Life" (*John 6:63*): *A Stoic Understanding of Pneuma in John's Gospel* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010).

For a Platonic reading, see George van Kooten, "The 'True Light which Enlightens Everyone' (John 1:9): John, Genesis, the Platonic Notion of the 'True, Noetic Light', and the Allegory of the Cave in Plato's *Republic*", in: idem (ed.), *The Creation of Heaven and Earth: Re-interpretations of Genesis I in the Context of Judaism, Ancient Philosophy, Christianity, and Modern Physics* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2005), 149-94; Harold W. Attridge, "The Cubist Principle in Johannine Imagery: John and the Reading of Images in Contemporary Platonism" (originally published in 2006), in: idem, *Essays on John and Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker

Academic, 2010), chap. 6, 79-91; and Rainer Hirsch-Luipold, *Gott wahrnehmen: Die Sinne im Johannes-evangelium* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017).

Attention to the (generic and thematic) similarity between John's Gospel and Plato's *Symposium* was first drawn by Attridge, "Plato, Plutarch, and John: Three Symposia about Love", in: Eduard Iricinschi, Lance Jenott, Nicola Denzey Lewis & Philippa Townsend (eds), *Beyond the Gnostic Gospels* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 367-78.

For a Platonic reading, see further van Kooten, "Bildung, Religion, and Politics in the Gospel of John: The Erastic, Philhellenic, Anti-Maccabean, and Anti-Roman Tendencies of the Gospel of 'the Beloved Pupil'", in: Florian Wilk (ed.), *Scriptural Interpretation at the Interface between Education and Religion* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2019), 123-177; "The Sign of Socrates, the Sign of Apollo, and the Signs of Christ: Hiding and Sharing Religious Knowledge in the Gospel of John—A Contrapuntal Reading of John's Gospel and Plato's Dialogues", in: Mladen Popovic, Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta & Clare Wilde (eds), *Sharing and Hiding Religious Knowledge in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2018), 145-170; and "The Last Days of Socrates and Christ: *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo* Read in Counterpoint with John's Gospel," in: Anders Kloostergaard Petersen & van Kooten (eds), *Religio-Philosophical Discourses in the Mediterranean World: From Plato, through Jesus, to Late Antiquity* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2017), 219-43.

For an overview of the new Graeco-Roman approaches, see Buch-Hansen, "The Johannine Literature in a Greek Context", in: Judith M. Lieu & Martinus C. de Boer (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Johannine Studies* (OUP 2018), chap. 9, 138-154.

⁵³ This application of the image of a Venn-diagram is borrowed from George Brooke's forthcoming comparative work on the Dead Sea Scrolls.

⁵⁴ See C.S. Lewis, "Is Theology Poetry?" (1945), "The truth is that the resemblances tell nothing either for or against the truth of Christian Theology. ... Theology, while saying that a special illumination has been vouchsafed to Christians and (earlier) to Jews, also says that there is some divine illumination vouchsafed to all men. The Divine light, we are told, 'lighteneth every man'. We should, therefore, expect to find in the imagination of great Pagan teachers and myth-makers some glimpse of that theme which we believe to be the very plot of the whole cosmic story—the theme of incarnation, death and rebirth" (Lewis, *Essay Collection: Faith, Christianity and the Church* [edited by Lesley Walmsley], London: HarperCollins, 2000, chap. 2, 15-16). Cf. also his "Myth Became Fact" (1944): "We must not be nervous about 'parallels' and 'Pagan Christs': they ought to be there – it would be a stumbling block if they weren't" (Lewis, *Essay Collection*, chap. 17, 142).

⁵⁵ Samuel Sandmel, "Parallelomania", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962): 1-13.