

The Two Magdalene Reports on the Risen Jesus in John 20

Robert Crotty

Abstract: This article offers a review of previously suggested structures of John 20 and proposes an alternative structure based on both linguistic and thematic grounds. The theological message of the text delineated by this structure indicates the resurrection event as narrated in John 20 depicts the completion of Jesus' ministry and concludes the gospel message. Henceforward, the interpretation of Scripture, *hê graphê*, and the preaching of the word, *legein*, would replace the original event for subsequent potential and actual Christians. Mary Magdalene, as she exists in the Johannine narrative, provided the living link between original events and the subsequent interpretation and preaching of the Christian community.

MARYMAGDALENE HAS ALWAYS HAD A STALWART following among Christians. Some of the early Gnostics elevated her to a pre-eminent status above the other disciples of Jesus, while some modern feminists have initiated their own search for an historical Mary Magdalene. But the literary role that the author of the fourth gospel assigns to her in John 20 should ensure her importance.

There have been various attempts to provide John 20 with the structure intended by its author (who can for convenience be called "John"). Since John 21 is commonly regarded as an appendix, or at least an epilogue,¹ the previous chapter should be seen as a conclusion to the entire gospel, drawing its theological threads together. Its structure would therefore be of prime importance, and should have the character of a conclusion.

My intention is, in the first place, to review some previously suggested structures; secondly, to propose an alternative structure based on both linguistic and thematic grounds, taking into account what John has added to what can be identified as the pre-Johannine narrative and, thirdly, to spell out the theological message of the text delineated by this structure.

1. See P. S. Minear, "The Original Functions of John 21", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102 (1983) 85-98.

Most scholars make the human characters within the text the determining factor in their structure. Thus, Moloney writes of "a unified literary unit, a story plotted by the passing of time and the changes of characters and places".² Within this structure he identifies people completing a journey from unbelief to full faith: Mary Magdalene, the Beloved Disciple and Thomas. He traces three steps for Mary Magdalene from unfaith to a conditioned faith to perfect belief. Likewise the Beloved Disciple goes from no faith to partial faith to the fullness of resurrection faith and Thomas journeys from complete disbelief to an intermediate stage where he will believe on his own criteria to full faith. The problem with this structure is that the faith journeys awkwardly overlap the structural features of time and place and there is no place for Peter who does not come to faith.

Byrne agrees with Moloney in making the faith-process the basis of a structure but he has preferred two frames which hold the narrative together: the faith of the Beloved Disciple and the faith of the community, in both of which faith follows the perception of a sign, *semeion* in the Johannine sense, without seeing the risen Jesus.³ Mary, the disciples and Thomas see Jesus and believe according to the sequence of the three steps as Moloney has outlined. Byrne's structure is:

Faith of Beloved Disciple: sign faith

Coming to faith of those who have visions: three stage faith

Faith of Community: sign faith

Byrne admits that Peter does not fit into this structure and he offers reasons for the evangelist treating Peter differently. This is a weakness in what is undoubtedly an attractive theory.

Lee had divided the material into three scenes plus a conclusion:⁴

a At the empty tomb on Easter morning 1-18

b In a room in Jerusalem on Easter night 19-23

a1 In a room in Jerusalem one week later 24-29

c Summation of the Gospel 30-31

While this is an efficient way of analysing the text, there does not seem to be a stress on place such as to justify a division on the basis of place. Lee then contrasts the parallel roles of Mary Magdalene and Thomas as against Peter and the Beloved Disciple. I would not see that this is justified from a consideration of the entire text. Mary Magdalene has a much more key role.

2. F. J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John* (Sacra Pagina, vol. 4; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998) 516.

3. B. J. Byrne, "The Faith of the Beloved Disciple and the Community in John 20", *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 23 (1985) 83-97.

4. D. A. Lee, "Partnership in Easter Faith: The Role of Mary Magdalene and Thomas in John 20", *Journal of Studies in the New Testament* 58 (1995) 37-49.

A much earlier analysis of John 20 provided a chiasm. Dupont, Lash and Levesque had based their structure on the factual content of the chapter, which they claimed dealt with the parallelism of ways of seeing: physical vision without faith, the vision of faith without visual perception, physical vision with and without the vision of faith.⁵ They do not, however, cite any literary criteria to substantiate the chiasm:

- A 20:1-10 Disciples at tomb: no physical vision but a vision of faith
- B 11-18 Magdalene: a physical vision of Christ prior to his glory
- C 19-23: Disciples: a physical vision
- B1 24-29 Thomas: a physical vision of glorious Christ
- A1 30-31 Faithful: no physical vision, only vision of faith

While the chiasm is cleverly contrived, its problem is, first of all, lack of literary criteria and secondly, the fact that Mary Magdalene is much more prominent in the text than this structure gives credit. In addition, its deployment of vv 30-31 in the structure is problematic since the verses clearly conclude the entire gospel and not just chapter 20.

Mollat, who has subsequently been followed by de la Potterie, breaks the material down into four concentric scenes:⁶

- Part 1:** The search for Jesus
 - A 20:1-10: "He saw and he believed"
 - B 11-18: "I have seen the Lord"
- Part 2:** Revelation of the glorious Christ
 - B1 19-25: "We have seen the Lord"
 - A1 26-29: "Because you have seen and believed"

While giving every appearance of a logical sequencing, this structure does not seem to corroborate the Johannine message which the authors propose, nor does it highlight the prime role of Magdalene, a fact which many structural attempts fail to include.

R. E. Brown has identified two time notations in vv 1 and 19 as delineating the structure.⁷ Brown used these notations to divide the chapter into two parallel scenes, each with two episodes, the first dealing with disciples coming to faith and the second dealing with an appearance of Jesus to an individual.

- Scene One:** At the Tomb
 - Episode 1:** Visits to the Empty Tomb 1-10
 - Episode 2:** Jesus appears to Magdalene 11-18

5. I. Dupont, C. Lash and G. Levesque, "Recherche sur la structure de Jean 20", *Biblica* 54 (1973) 482-98.

6. D. Mollat, "La foi pascale selon le chapitre 20 de l'évangile de saint Jean", in E. Dhanis (ed), *Resurrexit: Actes du Symposium internationale sur la resurrection de Jésus* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1974); I. de la Potterie, "Genese de la foi pascale d'après Jn 20", *New Testament Studies* 30 (1984) 26-49.

7. R. E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII-XXI* (New York: Doubleday, 1970) 965.

Scene Two: Where the Disciples are Gathered**Episode 1:** Jesus appears to the disciples 19-23**Episode 2:** Jesus appears to Thomas 24-29

In reality this is similar to the concentric structure of Mollat and de la Potterie but, as will be demonstrated, it does not cover all the literary cues.

While each of these structures has its own positive qualities, none of them fully takes into account the creative prowess of John together with an acknowledgment of the limitations placed on his creativity. John's complete gospel text creates a story world, a particular cultural world which is distinctively and recognisably Johannine. The words and rhetorical devices within the text powerfully evoke a cultural reality and invite a comprehending reader to share that reality. But it must be recognised that the Johannine text was not created *ab initio*. It was formed within a specific community surrounding John and was significantly affected by that community. John was not a free spirit. He wrote within community restraints.

In order, therefore, to discern the original Johannine structure, it is necessary to be aware of two factors: the dependence of John on pre-existing traditions which he has taken over and to which he is beholden, together with the deliberate construction of specifically Johannine material to complete his theological statement. In order to discriminate between the pre-Johannine material and the Johannine construction it will be necessary to look at *aporiae* or inconsistencies and the ideological novelties that erupt within the narrative, both of which indicate the interface of pre-Johannine and Johannine materials. The reconstruction of a pre-Johannine text has been attempted by Bultmann, Haenchen, Ghiberti, Hartmann, Brown, and Moloney.⁸

Taking first the *aporiae*, in v 2 there is the unexpected use of "we", *ouk oidamen*, although Mary Magdalene was presumably the only witness to the empty tomb. Secondly, there is her immediate conclusion that the body has been removed, despite the fact that Mary does not examine the tomb until v 11. Verse 2 also includes an awkward extra *kai pros* referring to the *allos mathêtês*. Verse 3 reads in an uneven fashion:

Peter and the *allos mathêtês* left (singular, *exêlthen*) and they were coming (plural, *êrchonto*) to the tomb.

There is also an awkward double reference to both Peter and the *allos mathêtês* seeing the grave clothes. In v 11 Magdalene is back at the tomb,

8. R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971); E. Haenchen, *Das Johannesevangelium. Ein Kommentar* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1980); G. Ghiberti, "I racconti pasquali del capitolo 20 di Giovanni", *Studi Biblici* 19 (1972) 21-50; G. Hartmann, "Die Vorlage der Osterbericht in John 20", *Zeitschrift für Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 55 (1974) 197-220; Brown, *The Gospel according to John*; and F. J. Moloney, "John 20: A Journey Completed", *Australasian Catholic Record* 54 (1982) 417-32; *The Gospel of John*.

although there is no mention of her accompanying the two disciples. In v 12 she sees angels but not the burial clothes, whereas the disciples had seen the reverse.

Besides the *aporiae* there are specifically Johannine novelties in the text. These are, first, the distinctive roles played by Mary Magdalene and Thomas. No other canonical gospel gives prominence to either. We know that in other early Christian circles, specifically Gnostic, they played major roles. Then there is the *allos mathêtês hon ephilei ho Iêsous*, a figure peculiar to John. It is John who recognises *alloi mathêtai* who presumably are not counted among the traditional list of disciples. One of these is beloved by Jesus and is mentioned in the account of the last supper, at the cross of Jesus, here in the empty tomb story, in an appearance story in chapter 21 and in the finale to that chapter. In the appearance story, he is one of two anonymous disciples and it could well be that the *allos mathêtês* who plays a role in high priest's courtyard is not *hon ephilei ho Iêsous*. The finale to the epilogue may indicate that this *allos mathêtês hon ephilei ho Iêsous*, was the author of the gospel and possibly John the Elder.⁹ The tradition of the fourth gospel enhanced Mary Magdalene, Thomas and the Beloved Disciple and they come into prominence in this finale.

Another specifically Johannine item in the narrative is the *soudarion* which covers the face of Jesus in the tomb. The Johannine theme of an ascension (*anabainein*), concomitant with the resurrection from the tomb and associated with exaltation, and the theme of the spirit (*pneuma hagion*) are also prominent.

The *aporiae* can be satisfactorily explained by the fact that John attempted to stitch together narratives that he received from the early tradition and, at the same time, to mould the total block of material into a single structure that communicated his distinctive theological message as revealed in the peculiar ideological additions. Thus, the "*ouk oidamen...*" statement would have come down as a communal pronouncement. It was inserted as such on to the lips of Magdalene despite the fact that a singular would have been more in place. Likewise, the *allos mathêtês* was intentionally inserted into the text and his presence is made obvious by the grammar.

THREE UNDERLYING NARRATIVES

I would propose that underlying the present material are three narratives received from pre-Johannine tradition that become more recognisable when the *aporiae* and the ideological concerns are taken into account. The synoptic gospels include two types of discourse

9. M. Hengel, *The Johannine Question* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989); R. Bauckham, "The Beloved Disciple as ideal author", *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 49 (1993) 21-44.

concerning the resurrection of Jesus: empty tomb stories and appearance stories. John's narrative contains an exemplary narrative of each type which he has derived from the early tradition. Into each narrative, however, John has interwoven his own particular theological material and so significantly modified the original versions of the tradition. He has thereby structured the material in a peculiarly Johannine manner so that a very dense theological treatise emerges.

The first of these narratives in vv 1, 11-13 is an appearance story of several women going to the tomb on the Sunday morning, finding it open and then returning to the disciples with the news. The empty tomb is interpreted for them by an angel-interpreter. John has removed the other women for the specific purpose of highlighting the role of Magdalene. He intended that she should be the spokesperson of the entire piece and he has inserted v 2 because this is the role of Mary, to speak twice at the key points in the narrative. The statement has been lifted from the main narrative in v 13. The fact that the statement has been duplicated and placed at the beginning of the account, where it is illogical (since the tomb at that point had not been examined), points to the fact that the Magdalene statement is integral to the Johannine structure and was never intended to be taken in chronological sequence.

This explains the original "we" in 20:2, which presumably John retained since Mary was making a group response.¹⁰ It was not an oversight on the part of John; it was respect for a tradition which the readers knew only too well. It also explains why Magdalene is back at the tomb in v 11 – she had never left it in the earlier tradition. It further explains why her experience of the tomb in v 12 was different from that of the disciples and why she drew the conclusion that the body had been removed even though she did not examine the tomb until v 11. The closest Synoptic account to John is Matt 28:1-10 but the parallels are far from exact. It would seem more likely that the Synoptic narratives and John are both dependent on the same original which is no longer extant.

In his narrative, John has then used an empty tomb story in vv 3-10 with an account of several disciples, headed by Peter, who go to the tomb after hearing the women's report and are equally amazed to find it empty. John would have inherited a tradition similar to Luke 24:12 and 24 which made mention only of Peter.¹¹

John then introduced the *allos mathêtês*, identified specifically as *hon ephilei ho Iêsous*, into this traditional narrative. It was this insertion that caused the *aporiae* such as the awkwardness of *kai pros* and v 3 with its singular and plural verbs and the twofold description of each seeing the

10. Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, 996-1004; R. Schnackenburg, *Das Johannes-evangelium. 3 Teil: Kommentar zu Kap. 13-21* (Vienna: Herder, 1976) 35-61.

11. P. Benoit, "Marie-Madeleine et les disciples au tombeau selon Jean 20:1-18", in *Judentum, Urchristentum, Kirche* (Berlin: Topelmann, 1960) 143.

grave clothes, which was presumably meant to prove that it was actually Jesus' tomb and not someone else's.

The third narrative used in John 20 was a traditional appearance story of Jesus to women including Mary Magdalene prior to other disciples, something similar to Matt 28:9-10 and the Markan appendix in 16:9-11. It would seem likely once again that John's account depends on a tradition that is not preserved in the canonical gospels,¹² although Neiryneck proposed that John borrowed his narrative from Matthew who had constructed the material in order to account for the appearance to the disciples in Galilee.¹³ Much closer is Luke 24:36-53, which relates a physical demonstration of the crucifixion, an apostolic commission and the gift of the *pneuma*. There is not sufficient literary evidence to suggest any more than that John and Luke are dependent on some pre-existing source.

The fact that Jesus is changed, so that he is not readily recognisable, is common to these appearance stories. The simultaneous occurrence of an angelophany and a Christophany in vv 12-17, however, would seem to indicate that the traditional narrative used by John is later than the Synoptics, but not as late as the second century *Epistula Apostolorum*, sections 10-11, which relates only a Christophany, which has displaced an original angelophany.¹⁴

John has reworked this appearance material to a considerable extent. In the first instance he has replaced the plural "women" with Mary Magdalene alone, for his own structural purposes. He also expanded the *pneuma* theme in vv 19-23, a typically Johannine interest.

It is clear that John intended Mary Magdalene to be central to the whole narrative and he has gone to considerable trouble to highlight her major thematic statements. Besides her report in v 2 there is a second in v 18. An examination of these two reports shows that each statement by Magdalene is followed by its elaboration. The first report regards the location of Jesus' body; it is followed by an elaboration regarding a search for the body. The report subsequently introduces a "misunderstanding", introduced by *de*. It seems clear that a first sub-section can be identified:

First Magdalene Report v 2

Elaboration: search for the empty tomb vv 3-10

Misunderstanding of *airein* by Magdalene: *mê mou haptou* vv 11-17
(note *arô* in v 15)

12. C. H. Dodd, "The Appearances of the Risen Christ: An Essay in Form Criticism of the Gospels", in *Studies in the Gospels*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1957) 9-35.

13. F. Neiryneck, "Les femmes au tombeau; Étude de la rédaction mattheenne", *New Testament Studies* 15 (1968-69) 168-90.

14. E. Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha* (London: SCM, 1963-1966) vol. 1, 195-7.

The section is held together literarily by the stress on *airein*. Magdalene's report is that *êran ton kurion ek tou mnêmeiou*. Mary repeats this statement to the angels in the misunderstanding section and then, speaking to Jesus, she states that *kagô auton arô* (v 15).

Beginning with the Second Magdalene Report in v 18, in which Mary tells of the appearance of Jesus, the literary sequence is repeated. Again there is an elaboration on her statement which describes an appearance to the assembled disciples in detail. This gives rise to a second misunderstanding, this time by Thomas, also introduced by *de*. Hence we have a complementary structure:

Second Magdalene Report v 18

Elaboration: The disciples see the Lord vv 19-23

Misunderstanding of *idein* by Thomas: *mê ginou apistos alla pistos*
vv 24-28 (note *idô* in v 25)

Once again literary features and content suggest that this is an intentional sub-sectional division. The first section stresses *airein* but also introduces the theme of *idein* (which is the cumulative term after *blepein* and *theorein*). The two sections, vv 3-10 and vv 19-23, are linked by the notion of *idein* in v 8 and v 20. This verbal link of *idein* then connects the sections of the second report. It is the substance of the Magdalene's second report and then, as in the first section, it is repeated by the disciples in the misunderstanding section (v 25) and Thomas' misunderstanding centres on *idein* as Magdalene's did on *airein*.

There are other significant parallels between the two misunderstanding scenes. Both have concluding admonitions of Jesus, to Magdalene in v 17 and to Thomas in v 27, with the unusual present imperatives *mê haptou* and *mê ginou apistos*. Both Mary and Thomas bestow a title on Jesus: Mary's title is *rabbouni* while Thomas' title is *ho kurios mou kai ho theos mou*.

In summary, the literary structure of John 20, based on literary cues and parallels in thought is as follows:

Introduction 20:1

First Magdalene Report 20:2

Elaboration: Search for the empty tomb 3-10

Misunderstanding by Magdalene 11-17

Second Magdalene Report 18

Elaboration: The disciples see the Lord 19-23

Misunderstanding by Thomas 24-28

Conclusion 29

THE FIRST MAGDALENE REPORT

I will now follow this literary structure through in order to analyse its Johannine message. We begin with the First Magdalene Report and recognise the importance of the central statement: *êran ton kurion ek tou mnêmeiou, kai ouk oidamen pou ethêkan auton*. Mary has been made the spokesperson for the group. Her statement on the empty tomb is the statement of the Christian group; it contrasts the "they" and the "we". In vv 3-10 John has taken a traditional narrative and inserted the *allos mathêtês hon ephilei ho Iêsous*, to form his own elaboration on this statement. It is obvious that John intended to contrast this disciple to Peter, although the disciple does not displace Peter.¹⁵

The *allos mathêtês* believes because of the empty tomb, the grave clothes and the *soudarion*, whereas Peter does not believe. While the grave clothes are part of an original tradition, which had the apologetic intention of showing that such orderliness indicated resurrection and not body theft, there is something undoubtedly important about the *soudarion*, which is a Johannine term used only here and in 11:44, where Lazarus comes out of the tomb still wearing a *soudarion*. I think that Schneiders' theory¹⁶ is the most plausible of the many put forward. Schneiders points out that the word is used to translate Moses' face veil in Exodus 34 in the Targums of Pseudo-Jonathan and Neofiti. She surmises that John's readership may have been expected to pick up the reference, and so the meaning of the *soudarion* would be that Jesus, as the New Moses, had left aside his veil so as to see God, just as Moses had done on Sinai, whereas Lazarus, who had not seen God, came out of the tomb with his *soudarion* still in place (see 11:44).

By means of the juxtaposition of Peter and the *allos mathêtês*, John shows that the empty tomb did not, of itself, necessarily generate faith. This was not intended to be a denigration of Peter. John has made Peter the model disciple in the life-situation of Jesus while the *allos mathêtês* is the model for the subsequent, Christian era. Only the *allos mathêtês* came to faith from the evidence: *kai eiden kai episteusen*. It is precisely the process of faith which v 29 will attribute to Thomas. An explanation regarding "the scripture (*hê graphê*)" is added to show that scriptural evidence was at that time available but not utilised.

The *allos mathêtês* has a vital functional importance in this pericope as the interpreter of the tomb, the grave clothes and the *soudarion*. He alone is able to grasp their true significance without the aid of Scripture. *Hê graphê* at a later period would supply, with its sequence of fulfilments, the evidence once proffered by the empty tomb, the grave clothes and the *soudarion* to Peter and John.

15. See 13:23f; 18:15f; 21:7; 21:20-22..

16. S. M. Schneiders, "The Face Veil: A Johannine Sign (John 20:1-10)", *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 13 (1983) 94-7.

With the first episode completed, John makes use of a part of the traditional narrative together with a tradition of an appearance to Mary Magdalene (held together rather unsteadily) in order to form a subsidiary scene. This newly constructed scene is given unity by the typical Johannine theme of misunderstanding. Magdalene misinterprets the empty tomb, a theme that is here connected with the previous Mosaic reference. Moses was buried according to the text of Deuteronomy 34, but no-one knew the site of his grave. This allowed for later Jewish accounts of his ascension. Likewise, the new Moses has been buried and then translated, but no-one is able to identify where he has been placed. The episode concludes with Magdalene's bestowal of a title on Jesus – *rabbuni* (or *rabbouni* in its Greek form).

Whatever might have been the original meaning of the title, the interpretation given by John is "Teacher".¹⁷ *Rabbouni* is a caritative, a diminutive form of endearment. For John, *rabbouni* is a title used by disciples during Jesus' lifetime with overtones of familiarity and closeness. Mary perceives him to be the same Jesus who led the group during his earthly ministry. She wants to recapture the experience of the days when Jesus walked the earth, when he was specifically The Teacher.¹⁸ Jesus rejects this attempt with the curt: "Do not keep on clinging to me (*mê mou haptou*)".¹⁹ The *gar* which then follows is an anticipatory conjunction linked to the next sentence. The reason is the fact that Jesus has not yet ascended, although the connection is not immediately obvious.

Jesus indicates that he is actually in the process of ascending, of being exalted. The basic point of the narrative is that Mary must give up any notion of a resuscitation of an earthly Jesus, of a return to the conditions of the temporal ministry. The only proper relationship is with the ascended and exalted Jesus.

The associated use of "brothers" (*adelphoi*) in relationship with my/your Father and God clearly delineates the purpose of the ascension. Jesus is to return to the Father and to cement a relationship that can be shared by others who are believers. Mary, in short, had misunderstood the appearance. She thought it meant that Jesus would continue the ministry, his active "teaching" implied in the title of *rabbouni*. But his "teaching" as *rabbouni* had been a once and for all event. He was about to establish a new relationship with the Father, through his ascension,

17. John uses *rabbi* eight times with the meaning of "teacher".

18. See Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1010.

19. *Mê mou haptou* and *mê ginou apistos* (v 27) are both present imperatives which indicate that something existing has to stop, that a present attitude has to change. The tense is quite significant. See F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961) sections 335-6.

and that relationship would be shared by believers. He would become a "son" and they would become *adelphoi*.

THE SECOND PHASE OF THE NARRATIVE

The second phase of the narrative opens with a Second Magdalene Report in v 18: *Heôraka ton kurion*. This second report is then elaborated in a narrative concerning seeing the Lord, in the same way as v 2 was elaborated in a narrative on the disciples' finding the empty tomb. This elaboration in vv 19-23 is based on a pre-existing tradition which described the first appearance of the glorified Jesus to the Eleven. John expands the account to include the reception of the *pneuma hagion*. There is unanimity that this expansion is a Johannine construct.²⁰

In John's narrative, Jesus first commissions his disciples. They are to replace him and to continue his ministry. Then he breathes (*emphysan*, hapax in the Christian Scriptures) over them. The implication is only too clear. The only usages of *emphysan* in the Septuagint are the creation account in Genesis 2:7, its restatement in Wisdom 15:11 and the account of the revivification of the dry bones in Ezekiel 37:9. In short, just as the breathing of God created humans and reconstituted the people of Israel, the ritual action described by Jesus' breathing effects a newly created community, a group that is vivified by the presence of the Spirit. The ascended Jesus, in John's gospel, has become a Spirit-giver (as foretold in 7:39). This Spirit, the narrative continues, will bring about a *krisis*, the final stage of the salvific process. John 20 thus sums up the entire momentum of the gospel: Jesus died, was raised/ascended, became a Spirit-giver and then created a new community to judge the world.

The community's newly acquired role is described in the rather awkward, traditional logion that follows in v 23.²¹ The meaning in John is that the disciples must continue the discriminatory work of *krisis* that Jesus initiated, separating the evil from the good, bringing about a judgement in the present.²²

Once again there is a misunderstanding. Implicit in all the appearance stories of the canonical gospels is the theme of doubt. In Luke 24:36-40, for example, the assembled disciples think that Jesus is a ghost. He reassures them by indicating his hands and feet and offering to allow them to touch him. John has extended this traditional theme of doubt

20. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1031; B. Lindars, "The Composition of John XX", *New Testament Studies* 7 (1960-1961) 142-147, 997.

21. Emerton's suggestion would still seem to hold good, namely that an original saying based on Isaiah 22:22, in which the opposition pair was, in Aramaic, close/open was differentially interpreted by Matthew as bind/loose and by John as retain/forgive. See J. A. Emerton, "Binding and Loosing – Forgiving and Retaining", *Journal of Theological Studies* 13 (1962) 325-31.

22. See John 5:22 for Jesus as the source of *krisis*. There are distinct parallels at Qumran to this link between Spirit and forgiveness. IQS 3:7-8; CD 13:9-10.

and introduced the figure of Thomas who had already featured as an identifiable character in his gospel in 11:16 and 14:5. In these two instances he appears dour, even obtuse; he continues to be so. Thomas' words in v 25 appear to be a Johannine reworking of, or at least reminiscent of, John 4:48, which concerns lack of appropriate faith response generally.

The vital point behind this second misunderstanding is that Thomas refuses to accept the word of the other disciples, despite their insistence. John uses the imperfect (*elegon*) to press home the point that the disciples' statement, repeating the Second Magdalene Report, was a protracted one. They preached at Thomas. This is the core of the pericope, one often overlooked: Thomas refuses to accept on the word of the other disciples that Jesus had appeared. He wants gross evidence that Jesus, identical to the Jesus of the ministry, had been present. He wants his own vision. Subsequently, Jesus offers him physical proof in a distinctly sardonic way, but Thomas does not take up the offer to insert his hands into the physical wounds. Instead, Thomas' response is to bestow the title, *ho kurios mou kai ho theos mou*.

Often this title is lauded as simply the final and greatest of all the faith expressions in the gospel. This is to gloss over its true significance. The title combines *kurios/YHWH* and *theos/’elohim*. Significantly, these had been combined in the Hebrew text of Genesis 2:7 (*YHWH ’elohim*) and Ezekiel 37:9 (*’elohim YHWH*), which we saw were both connected with the notion of “breathing” and *pneuma*. John intends *ho kurios mou kai ho theos mou* to be the spontaneous response of anyone with faith who receives an appearance of the risen Jesus. Taking the two misunderstanding passages together we have the Johannine message that Jesus is no longer *rabbouni*, but he is *ho kurios mou kai ho theos mou*.

The chapter closes with a macarism that contrasts the two situations of seeing and not-seeing. It does not set out to belittle the experiences of Mary Magdalene and the two disciples who “saw” the evidence of the empty tomb or Mary Magdalene and the Eleven who “saw” a vision of the risen Jesus. These visual experiences were unique but transient events. They were necessary because the process had to start somewhere. Those founding experiences initiated faith and community. But they were once and for all events, unrepeatable. They are never to be expected again.

Henceforward the typical Christian experience would be a faith response to the interpreted scriptures (the *hê graphê*) of the first sub-section) and to the preached word regarding the resurrection (the *elegon* of the second sub-section). The task of the Christian community, activated by the presence of the Spirit, would be one of interpreting the Scripture and preaching the message, thereby bringing about a *krisis*. Potential converts would no longer inspect an empty tomb but interpret

Scripture, no longer experience an appearance of the risen Jesus but hear the preached word of believers. For John the *hê graphê* from the past and the *legein* of the present are the bases of faith in a post-resurrection era.

This vital distinction between a founding event that is unique, once and for all, and its subsequent transmission is also found in the Jewish text of *Tanhuma* 6:32a, recorded by Rabbi Simeon ben Lakish in the third century CE:

The proselyte is dearer to God than all the Israelites who were at Sinai. For if those people had not witnessed thunder, flames, lightning, the quaking mountain and the trumpet blasts, they would not have accepted the rule of God. Yet the proselyte who has seen none of these things comes and gives himself to God and accepts the rule of God. Is there anyone who is dearer than this man?²³

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, John 20 must be read as a literary whole, its individual parts seen as composing a redactional entity. It cannot be adequately interpreted by comparing it to the synoptic gospel accounts of the empty tomb and appearances which have their own structures. It is self-contained and has its peculiar Johannine message.

I would contend that the structure I have outlined takes into account all the literary and narrative cues inherent in the text. Following this structure, the resurrection event as narrated in John 20 depicts the completion of Jesus' ministry and concludes the gospel message. That event produced faith and community in the founding group. The experiences of the empty tomb and the Jesus appearances would never be repeated and should not be expected by any future generation. Henceforward, the interpretation of Scripture, *hê graphê* and the preaching of the word, *legein*, would replace the original event for subsequent potential and actual Christians.

Mary Magdalene, as she exists in the Johannine narrative, provided the living link between original events and the subsequent interpretation and preaching of the Christian community. That was the powerfully stated Johannine message with which his gospel originally concluded.

23. Taken from H. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum NT aus Talmud und Midrash* (Munich: Beck, 1922-1961).