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To Touch or Not to Touch?

Doubting and Touching in John 20:24–29[1]

Jörg Frey zum 23. Februar 2017

Der Johannesevangelist platziert die Begegnung zwischen dem „Zweifler" Thomas und dem Auferstandenen (Joh 20,24–29) unmittelbar vor die metatextuelle Schlusssequenz seines Buches (Joh 20,30–31) und weist so dem Zweifel und seiner Überwindung beträchtliche Aufmerksamkeit zu. Vor dem Hintergrund der verzweigten Auslegungsgeschichte der Thomasepisode geht der Aufsatz der Frage nach, ob Thomas gemäß der Erzähllogik des impliziten Autors tatsächlich „seinen Finger in die Wunde tat". Er kommt gegen die überwältigende Mehrheit der gegenwärtigen Johannesexegese, aber im Einklang mit der spätantiken und mittelalterlichen Auslegung zu einer positiven Antwort. Davon ausgehend werden grundlegende Einsichten zur johanneischen Theologie formuliert.

Keywords: Gospel of John, Thomas, resurrection, faith, doubt, history of reception

The Fourth Gospel is a text dotted with narrative gaps. It pushes the minds of its readers to ponder the things that are *not* said and thus to cooperate in producing meaning.[2] Omissions and lacunae in the story have generated its dynamic and preserved its fascination for generations of readers. Empirical verification for the productivity of Johannine openness can be found in the plethora of "apocryphal" narratives and other literary developments, and also in the growing exegetical and homiletical literature of early Christianity. In the critical era of biblical scholarship, the numerous commentaries of the nineteenth century prove particularly instructive, as they exploit the narrative potential of John's Gospel with acumen and erudition, even if they oftentimes reveal historicizing and psychologizing

1 I wish to thank Jörg Frey (Zurich) for his valuable comments and to Andrew Bowden (Munich) for improving the English style of this article.

2 Among New Testament texts, the Gospel of John appears most open to the theory of literary gaps as proposed by W. Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore, Md., 1978).

Early Christianity 8 (2017), 69–93
ISSN 1868-7032
DOI 10.1628/186870317X14876711440123

tendencies. In an analogous manner, current narratological approaches endeavor to unveil the narrative possibilities of the text by means of a more nuanced methodological repertoire.

In a recent essay on John 20, Christopher Tuckett has pointed out that the chapter is "one of the most enigmatic chapters of the whole gospel […]. It has a number of 'open spaces' […] where one can fill the 'gaps' in the individual stories in different ways with resulting different interpretations of the pericopes where they occur, as well as of the overall story of the gospel as a whole."[3] The present essay addresses one of the most striking lacunae of John 20 and of the Gospel as a whole, which has stirred the minds and moods of many readers of John's Gospel throughout the centuries: Before Thomas uttered his confession, did he touch the wounds of Jesus? The essay is structured in five parts. I first offer a few observations on John's narrative technique in John 20:24–29, particularly focusing on the feature of "open spaces" (1). After presenting selected aspects of the rich and intriguing history of scholarship regarding "Touching Thomas" (2), I briefly review exegetical arguments in support of the (nowadays mainstream) view that Thomas did *not* perform a touching gesture (3). In my opinion, however, there are a number of clues in John's account that actually suggest the opposite: Thomas *did* in fact touch Jesus according to the narrative logic of the evangelist, even if this is not stated explicitly (4). The conclusion sketches the role of Thomas within the plot and theology of the Fourth Gospel (5).

1 How Does the Story Develop? Observations on John's Narrative Technique

It is Easter and two disciples are missing. Not only the betrayer Judas but also Thomas, famed as "the dour, dogged disciple,"[4] is absent when Jesus appears through locked doors to the rest of the disciples on Easter Sunday. John's note is quite short: "But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came" (John 20:24).[5] There is nothing in the previous pericope (20:19–23) that would have prepared the readers for this remark, since John had portrayed the gathered disci-

3 C.M. Tuckett, "Seeing and Believing in John 20," in *Paul, John, and Apocalyptic Eschatology: Studies in Honour of Martinus C. de Boer* (ed. J. Krans et al.; NovTSup 149; Leiden, 2013), 169–185, here 169.

4 N.T. Wright, *John for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 11–21* (London, 2004), 153.

5 Biblical citations are generally taken from the NRSV.

ples as a cohesive group. This textual "gap" invites the readers' imaginations: Why was Thomas missing? Why did he withdraw from the group?

Commentators have given many answers to these questions; their various suggestions not only prove their creativity, but also the openness of the Johannine text. Was it divine providence and philanthropy that necessitated a second appearance of Jesus?[6] Did Thomas not return after he had fled together with the other disciples?[7] Was he tied only loosely to the Twelve, playing the role of an outsider?[8] Did he reside further away so that he learned about the resurrection too late?[9] Did his depressed and doubting thoughts make him walk alone on solitary paths?[10] Did he perhaps leave the room prior to the miraculous appearance of Jesus?[11] Although these conjectures are interesting, they remain far too speculative to allow a deeper insight into the narrative dynamics of the story and the portrayal of the character of Thomas.[12]

More illuminating is the observation that the motif of absence serves a pragmatic interest: "The mention of Thomas' absence […] alerts implied readers that an important element of the story is at hand."[13] Thomas's temporary absence increases the significance of his appearance and of his role in the narrative. However, even more telling is the ingeniousness by which

6 According to Chrysostom (*Hom. Jo.* 87.1 [PG 59.473]), it is the Lord's philanthropy (φιλανθρωπία) that shines forth towards the unbelieving disciple: Jesus appears to save him, even though he was more obstinate than the other disciples (καίτοι τῶν ἄλλων παχύτερον ὄντα). In a similar vein, Gregory the Great (*Homiliarum in evangelia libri II* 26.7 [PL 76.1197]) says with great homiletic pathos: "Do you really believe that it happened by chance that this chosen disciple was absent at first, then however, came and heard, heard and doubted, doubted and touched, touched and believed (*veniens audiret, audiens dubitaret, dubitans palparet, palpans crederet*)? No, it did not happen by chance, but through divine providence (*divina dispensatione*). For in a miraculous way, celestial mercy arranged it that this doubting disciple, while touching the wounds of the flesh of his master, should heal our wounds of disbelief (*dum in magistro suo vulnera palparet carnis, in nobis vulnera sanaret infidelitatis*)." If not otherwise indicated, all translations in this essay are mine.

7 Cf. Euthymius Zigabenus, *Expositio in Joannem* (PG 129.1488).

8 Cf. P. Dschulnigg, *Jesus begegnen: Personen und ihre Bedeutung im Johannesevangelium* (2nd ed.; Münster, 2002), 231.

9 Cf. J.A. Bengel, *Gnomon Novi Testamenti* (ed. J. Steudel; 3rd ed.; Tübingen, 1855), 408.

10 Cf. T. Zahn, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (5th/6th ed.; Leipzig, 1921), 680.

11 Considered in N. Farelly, *The Disciples in the Fourth Gospel: A Narrative Analysis of Their Faith and Understanding* (WUNT 2/290; Tübingen, 2010), 122.

12 G. Most, *Doubting Thomas* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005), 44, mentions additional inferences, which culminate in his question: "[O]n the evening of the first day of the week after Jesus' crucifixion, what could he possibly have had to do more urgent than commemorating Jesus together with his fellows?"

13 Farelly, *Disciples* (see n. 11), 122; cf. R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York, 1981), 66.

John interweaves the perspective of his readers into his story: In a sense, they are all "absent," because they *cannot* have been present when Jesus enters into the midst of the disciples. They are all dependent on the testimony of those who already believe.

The disciples' announcement that they have seen the risen Lord – and, by implication, his hands and his side[14] – provokes a response from the tardy late-comer. Thomas makes it more than clear that he cannot base his faith on hearsay evidence, but only on his own seeing and touching. He requests an "autopsy" with his own hand. His words are remarkably harsh and sharp: "*Unless* I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I *will not* believe" (John 20:25, emphasis added). The impression of a "sudden, drastic violence of his reply"[15] is caused by the double, categorical negative: οὐ μὴ πιστεύσω is the strongest possible negation (cf. 4:48).[16] Thomas's words neither convey his "solid certainty" that resurrection could never take place,[17] nor are they intended "to expose the absurdity" of what the disciples have told him,[18] nor should they be labelled as "a sarcastic expression of unbelief."[19] Rather, according to his critical mind-set, Thomas requests a valid foundation for his faith based on personal experience rather than the experience of others. His doubt in the resurrection, which confirms for the readers his lack of understanding of Jesus's way (cf. 14:5–6), can only be removed if his palpable encounter with the Risen One will prove the incredible to be credible. In a sense, "Thomas simply demands what the others got – a first-hand experience of the risen Jesus,"[20] but he does so with striking bluntness and drastic clarity. Therefore, his doubt is not the doubt of every disciple, but the doubt of a critically probing character who requires compelling – i. e., tangible –

14 Cf. already Bengel, *Gnomon* (see n. 9), 408: *Sine dubio locuti sunt etiam de manibus et latere.*

15 Most, *Doubting Thomas* (see n. 12), 45.

16 Cf., e. g., H. Thyen, *Das Johannesevangelium* (HNT 6; Tübingen, 2005), 768; also D.B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament with Scripture, Subject, and Greek Word Indexes* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1996), 468 ("the strongest way to negate something in Greek").

17 Against C.E. Luthardt, *Das johanneische Evangelium nach seiner Eigenthümlichkeit* (2 vols.; 2nd ed.; Nuremberg, 1876), 2.516.

18 Against H. Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (trans. J. Vriend; Grand Rapids, Mich., 1997), 646–647.

19 W. Bonney, *Caused to Believe: The Doubting Thomas Story as the Climax of John's Christological Narrative* (BibInt 62; Leiden, 2002), 159–160.

20 C. Bennema, *Encountering Jesus: Character Studies in the Gospel of John* (2nd ed.; Minneapolis, 2014), 292.

evidence. Certainly, he is confronted with the problem of all later generations (i.e., Jesus's absence), but he faces the problem in his own manner, with thorough scepticism. More importantly, the manner in which Jesus responds to Thomas's request is paradigmatic (in this Gospel) for an empathetic and effective reaction to doubt and scepticism.

According to John's account, eight days pass and nothing notable happens. This is remarkable, considering that it is the first week after Easter. Once again, the imagination of John's readers and interpreters and their knowledge of the Synoptic Easter narratives instinctively tries to fill in the gaps. Did the Risen One appear to other followers in different places? Did the disciples make another attempt to convince Thomas? Did they actually leave Jerusalem and return to Galilee (cf. Matt 28:16–20)?[21] For John, the only noteworthy event is Jesus's appearance in the following week – again on "Sunday" and again through locked doors – and he greets all the disciples with the same words ("Peace be with you!"). Then Jesus turns to Thomas, the disciple whose "hyperbolic doubt"[22] prompted Jesus to return. Remarkably, Jesus's invitation to Thomas corresponds (with slight variations) to the very obstacles of Thomas's faith. Having insight into the thoughts of Thomas, Jesus offers him the same visual (ἰδεῖν) and tangible (βάλλειν) demonstration that Thomas said would be necessary to dispel his doubt: "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not be faithless, but believe!" (John 20:27).[23]

John has chosen not to specify the tonality of Jesus's words and their desired effect on Doubting Thomas. Again, the evangelist's mode of expression is open to quite diverging interpretations. Does Jesus address Thomas in a condescending attitude by repeating his three-part request in order to rebuke his sinful and punishable doubts and even to humiliate him?[24] Or does Jesus exhibit empathetic affection by being aware of and

21 On this most unlikely hypothesis, see Zahn, *Johannes* (see n. 10), 681, with reference to Gos. Pet. 14:58–59: "Now it was the final day of the Unleavened Bread; and many went out returning to their home since the feast was over. But we twelve disciples of the Lord were weeping and sorrowful; and each one, sorrowful because of what had come to pass, departed to his home (καὶ ἕκαστος λυπούμενος διὰ τὸ συμβὰν ἀπηλλάγη εἰς τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ)" (trans. R.E. Brown).

22 Most, *Doubting Thomas* (see n. 12), 46.

23 Notably, Jesus's assenting reaction to Thomas's challenge does *not* follow the pattern of suggestion, negative response, and positive action, which can be observed elsewhere (cf. C.H. Giblin, "Suggestion, Negative Response, and Positive Action in St. John's Portrayal of Jesus [John 2.1–11; 4.46–54; 7.22–14; 11.1–44]," *NTS* 26 [1979/80], 197–211).

24 Nineteenth-century commentators tend to opt for a rather confrontational interpretation. Cf., e.g., A. Tholuck, *Commentar zum Evangelium Johannis* (7th ed.; Gotha,

responding to the hidden doubts and needs of his disciple?[25] Since Jesus does not utter a word of rebuke, unlike other occasions (cf. John 13:38 to Peter; 14:9–19 to Philip), the confrontational interpretation is less likely. Jesus's benevolent reaction to the doubter provides the key to conquering doubt. The implied reader has previously been alerted to the idea that Jesus's omniscience and insight into a person's heart reveals a deeper knowledge of Jesus's identity (cf. 1:47–51 to Nathanael; 4:19, 39 to the Samaritan woman).[26] The same pattern is at work here.

The ensuing invitation of Jesus (i.e., "Be not faithless, but believing," John 20:27) links the attribute ἄπιστος to Thomas's attitude. In the context of the narrative, Jesus's words to Thomas immediately precede the disciple's radical shift from unbelief to faith. In the climax of the story – indeed, the climax of the Gospel – which alludes to its beginning (1:1, 14), Thomas "articulates the Gospel's christology as personal confession."[27] He responds and says: "My Lord and my God!"

2 What Do They Say about "Touching Thomas"? Glances at the History of Interpretation

The apparently seamless transition from Jesus's invitation to Thomas's confession actually entails the most striking and productive textual lacuna within the Thomas episode: The Gospel-writer remains completely silent about whether or not Thomas actually touched Jesus's wounds. This has both sparked the imagination and called for the collaboration of the readers of the Gospel. Did Thomas carry out Jesus's command? In other words, was his doubt overcome by tactile evidence or (just) by the overwhelming presence and/or the powerful words of the Risen One?

The history of interpretation from the church fathers to the Counter-Reformation has been amply documented and analysed in the studies of Ulrich Pflugk and Glenn Most.[28] Their analyses have revealed a remark-

1857), 442; Luthardt, *Das johanneische Evangelium* (see n. 17), 2.517; B. Weiss, *Das Johannesevangelium als einheitliches Werk* (Berlin, 1912), 353.

25 Cf., e.g., J. Frey, "Der 'zweifelnde' Thomas (Joh 20,24–29) im Spiegel seiner Rezeptionsgeschichte," *HBl* 1 (2011), 5–21, here 13; see also the commentary by F.A. Lampe, *Commentarius analytico-exegeticus in Evangelium secundum Joannem* (3 vols.; Amsterdam, 1724–1726), 3.705: *Ingens ex hoc alloquio Christi patescit* φιλανθρωπία.

26 Cf. Bonney, *Caused to Believe* (see n. 19), 165–166.

27 M.M. Thompson, *John: A Commentary* (NTL; Louisville, Ky., 2015), 426.

28 In his acclaimed study *Doubting Thomas* (see n. 12), Glenn Most draws heavily on the dissertation of U. Pflugk, "Die Geschichte vom ungläubigen Thomas (Johannes 20,24–

able detail: "In the whole of late ancient and medieval Christian exegesis, there seem to be only four moments when the possibility that Thomas might not have touched Jesus after all emerges briefly, only to be suppressed at once."[29] Before disclosing the names and thoughts of these interpreters, I briefly summarize mainstream exegesis, which presumes that Thomas touched Jesus, though for different reasons and with different intentions. Three major figures of the early church serve as an illustration, namely Tertullian, Origen, and Augustine.[30]

(1) Tertullian argues in *De anima* – against Marcion – for the materiality of the resurrected body. His writing contains a paragraph on the five senses (sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch) (17.1), in which he criticizes the platonic scepticism regarding sensory perception. Contrary to Marcion's heretical insinuation, Christ's body was no "phantasm" (*phantasma*) (17.14). Christ was not "deceived in touching Peter's wife's mother" (17.13), and "it was trustworthy when he was seen and heard on the mountain, and trustworthy when he tasted the wine […] and then it was trustworthy when he was touched by believing Thomas" (17.14).[31] Like many later interpreters, Tertullian appeals to 1 John 1:1: "We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life."[32] Still, what is surprising is not Tertullian's actual appeal to the Thomas episode for his argumentative goals, but that the number of references is quite sparse. One might think that the story would have offered him a powerful knockout argument against the docetic-gnostic heresy he was fighting. Probably, however, Thomas was "too

29) in der Auslegung der Kirche von den Anfängen bis zur Mitte des sechzehnten Jahrhunderts" (PhD diss., Universität Hamburg, 1965). Both works are limited in that they disregard later milestones of interpretations. As will be seen, not all of Most's results are equally convincing.

29 Most, *Doubting Thomas* (see n. 12), 139.

30 The earliest second-century receptions and reflections on the Thomas episode, which present themselves in narrative developments of the scene or in isolated motifs, cannot be discussed here. I presume that the following texts display influences of John 20:24–29, namely 1 John 1:1, Ign. *Smyrn.* 3:2; Ep. Apos. 12(23); Prot. Jas. 19. All texts imply in some sense – for different reasons, explicitly or implicitly – that the Risen One has been touched.

31 CCSL 2.806 (trans. Most, *Doubting Thomas* [see n. 12], 131).

32 In the history of interpretation of the Thomas scene, 1 John 1:1 has often been referred to as a proof text for the view that Thomas in fact touched Jesus. See already Ep. Apos. 12(23).

compromised by his status as a Gnostic saint to be readily used as a weapon against the Gnostics."[33]

(2) One generation later, Origen fought an intellectual battle against an opponent who denied bodily resurrection. According to Origen, the Middle Platonist philosopher Celsus thought that after his death Jesus "used to produce only a mental impression (φαντασία) of the wounds he received on the cross, and did not really appear wounded in this way" (*Cels.* 2.61).[34] This is why Jesus called upon one of his disciples to prove the materiality of his risen body. It is worth noting that Origen developed an intricate doctrinal model to define the constitution of Jesus's post-resurrection body (which would become a point of contention for later anti-Origenists): He believed "that the continuity of Jesus' body […] was guaranteed not by its materiality but by a kind of somatic form (εἶδος σωματικόν) sufficient to resist Thomas's touch but still capable of passing through locked doors."[35] Jesus was, "as it were, in a sort of intermediate state (ὡσπερεὶ ἐν μεθορίῳ τινί) between the solidity (παχύτης) of the body as it was before his passion and the condition of a soul uncovered by any body" (*Cels.* 2.62). It is not unlikely that Origen's subsequent condemnation helped ensure that orthodox theology insisted on Thomas's touching of Jesus.[36]

(3) Augustine discusses the Thomas episode in many places of his vast corpus.[37] Most elaborate and significant are his 124 *Tractates on the Gospel of John.* On John 20:27 Augustine comments, "He saw and touched the man, and acknowledged the God whom he neither saw nor touched; but by the means of what he saw and touched, he now put far away from him every doubt, and believed […]" (121.5). It is part of divine providence that doubt is removed by touching. As Augustine says, "the marks

33 Most, *Doubting Thomas* (see n. 12), 133. The remarkable fact that Irenaeus nowhere refers to John 20:28 and the confession of Thomas in his principal work *Adversus haereses*, even if it might have served his argument, can possibly be explained in the same way: Thomas's usurpation by the opponents rendered him unusable for Irenaeus's concerns (cf. B. Mutschler, *Das Corpus Johanneum bei Irenäus von Lyon: Studien und Kommentar zum dritten Buch von Adversus Haereses* [WUNT 189; Tübingen, 2006], 31). All of Irenaeus's few references to the Thomas story are noted in Pflugk, "Die Geschichte vom ungläubigen Thomas" (see n. 28), 11–12.

34 M. Marcovich (ed.), *Origenes: Contra Celsum libri VIII* (VCSup 54; Leiden, 2001), 132 (trans. H. Chadwick, *Contra Celsum* [Cambridge, 1980], 113). See further Pflugk, "Die Geschichte vom ungläubigen Thomas" (see n. 28), 13–20.

35 Most, *Doubting Thomas* (see n. 12), 137.

36 Cf. Most, *Doubting Thomas* (see n. 12), 139.

37 See the ample documentation and interpretation in Pflugk, "Die Geschichte vom ungläubigen Thomas" (see n. 28), 107–122, 126–136.

of the wounds are preserved for healing the hearts of the doubting" (*ad dubitantium corda sananda, vulnerum sunt servata vestigia*, 121.4). For "therapeutic" purposes, a physical contact has occurred. Augustine provides a perceptive philological explanation: When Jesus says, "Put your finger here and see my hands" (John 20:27), this must imply that Thomas did in fact touch Jesus, for "he had no eyes in his finger" (*Nec tamen oculos ille habebat in digito*, 121.5). "[S]ight is a kind of general sense," Augustine reasons, "For sight is also habitually named in connection with the other four senses: as when we say, Listen, and see how well it sounds; smell it, and see how well it smells; taste it, and see how well it savors; touch it, and see how hot it is. Everywhere has the word, See, made itself heard, although sight, properly speaking, is allowed to belong only to the eyes" (121.5).[38]

Tertullian, Origen, and Augustine all agree that Thomas touched Jesus at the Easter scene in Jerusalem. They represent the vast majority of late ancient interpreters of John 20:24–29.

In the rich history of late ancient and medieval Christian exegesis only *four* commentators briefly entertained an alternative option, though without regarding it as valid. Considering literary dependence of three of them, the number is actually reduced to two interpreters who deliberate briefly on the idea that Thomas might not have actually touched Jesus, one Latin theologian, one Greek theologian: Augustine and Euthymius Zigabenus, an early twelfth-century Byzantine theologian.[39]

(1) Augustine is to be mentioned again, as in in his *Tractates on the Gospel of John* he recognizes that Jesus did not say "You have touched me," but "You have seen me" (John 20:29). Augustine then follows the claim that sight is to be regarded as a "kind of general sense." Only in a fleeting comment does he affirm "that the disciple did not dare to touch" (121.5), despite Jesus's offer. The idea seems too unimportant to be dealt with in greater detail. Augustine's main point is that Thomas believed. In the following centuries, Albertus Magnus (ca. 1200–1280) and Thomas Aquinas

38 CCSL 36.667–68 (trans. *NPNF*[1] 7.438–439).

39 There is an enigmatic comment by J. Maldonado, *Commentarii in quatuor evangelistas* […] (Lyon, 1682), 1862, concerning Eusebius of Emesa (ca. 300–360), an early representative of the view that Thomas did not touch Jesus. Eusebius is said to base his argument on three pieces of evidence: (1) The evangelist has connected Jesus's words and Thomas's exclamation very closely (*maxime conjunxerit*); (2) Thomas recognized Jesus by his appearance and voice (*ex aspectu & voce*); (3) Jesus merely said "because you have seen me," not mentioning touch. I was unable to unearth the source of Maldonatus's citation, since his clues are quite opaque. Maldonado states that Eusebius merely alluded to this view, rather than expressing it openly (*Tribuitur haec sententia Eusebio Emeseno, quam ille, etsi aperte non dicit, indicat tamen*).

(ca. 1225–1274) make recourse to Augustine's discussion, aligning themselves with his judgement.[40]

(2) Euthymius, who is heavily indebted to the patristic tradition, comments: "When [Thomas] saw the signs of the nails in his [Jesus's] hands, and his pierced side, he believed immediately and did not wait to touch him (αὐτίκα ἐπίστευσε, μὴ ἀναμείνας ψηλαγῆσαι)." He immediately adds, "But others say that after he had touched him he cried out, 'My Lord and my God!'"[41] Euthymius then notes that interpreters are divided, but he omits the names of those who thought Thomas did not touch Jesus. His final remark that Thomas deemed touching more reliable than seeing, appears to be his own thought, as it is not found in any of the patristic authors.[42]

The evidence is remarkable. Two solitary, scarcely audible voices in a colossal choir briefly suggest an alternative melody, but eventually follow the main song. The unanimity can be explained by the concern of the great church fathers to ward off gnostic and docetic ideas and, secondly, by the fathers' ensuing authority in exegetical matters. Starting with the Reformation, however, dissenting voices would increase in number and slowly gain the upper hand.

One should assume that the three *particulae exclusivae* of the Reformation affect the exegetical question about whether Thomas did in fact touch Jesus. From the principle *sola fide* it could follow that Thomas's believing response, rather than his action or "work," is relevant. *Sola gratia* could imply that solely Jesus's gracious turning to Thomas overcame his doubt and evoked faith. And the third exclusive particle *sola scriptura* could point to the fact that Jesus simply says "You have seen me" (John 20:29), not mentioning the act of touching. In fact, the impact of the Reformation's theological programme did not leave the question of Thomas's doubt and faith untouched. Surprisingly, however, most Reformers actually align themselves with tradition when it comes to the question of Thomas's physical contact with Jesus. Therefore, it seems more accurate to speak of a gradual shift of emphasis rather than "a new and quite different interpretation," which could be traced to "a new willingness, indeed an

40 Beda Venerabilis (*In S. Joannis evangelium expositio* [PL 92.921]) (672–735) – not cited in Most – merely quotes Augustine.

41 Euthymius Zigabenus, *Expositio in Joannem* (PG 129.1489) (trans. Most, *Doubting Thomas* [see n. 12], 140–141).

42 Cf. Pflugk, "Die Geschichte vom ungläubigen Thomas" (see n. 28), 83.

eagerness, to break with the Catholic interpretative tradition and the hermeneutic monopoly of the church."[43]

In a sermon from 1523, Martin Luther highlighted Thomas as a representative of the disciples who all lacked faith – for they had locked the doors of the house out of fear. Luther explicitly says that Thomas remained unbelieving "until he sees and touches."[44] In another sermon Luther clarified when Jesus showed his hands and feet to the disciples, and particularly to Thomas, he revealed to them "that it is these hands and feet that will do and nothing else, i. e., it is his works that attain salvation and no other."[45] John Calvin also takes for granted that Thomas actually touched Jesus when he charges the doubter with defiance, stubbornness, and insolence: "[W]hen he saw Christ, he should have been confounded and terrified with shame (*pudore confundi et expavescere*). Yet he boldly and fearlessly (*audacter et intrepide*) stretches out his hand as if unconscious of any wrongdoing. For it may be readily inferred from the Evangelist's words that he did not come to his senses before he was convinced by touching (*tactu*)." Calvin diagnoses a severe lack of faith in Thomas: The one who does not appropriately honor the word will be taken by surprise by "a growing obstinacy which bears with it a contempt of the Word and shakes off all reverence for it."[46]

It can be observed that the Reformation commentators are less concerned with christological controversies, such as the materiality of the body of Jesus, but rather with the impact of the appearance and words of Jesus. Thomas is the paradigmatic beneficiary of Jesus's gracious activity; Jesus turns to the individual in word and deed, no matter how obstinate he or she might be. Nevertheless, time and again, post-Reformation writers will continue questioning whether or not Thomas did in fact touch Jesus. They do so in a rather non-polemical way, mostly in passing, and

43 Most, *Doubting Thomas* (see n. 12), 145, 148. See, however, the correct statement ibid., 149: "We must of course not exaggerate the caesura produced by the Reformation within the history of the Christian interpretation of the story of Doubting Thomas." It should be noted that, compared to patristic literature, medieval exegesis placed little emphasis on the idea that Thomas really did touch Jesus, though it is uniformly presupposed (cf. the summaries in Pflugk, "Die Geschichte vom ungläubigen Thomas" [see n. 28], 180, 223).

44 M. Luther, "Am ersten Sontag nach Ostern, Euangelion Johannis. XX," WA 10/1.2, 228–230, here 229.

45 M. Luther, "Am tage Thoma des hayligen Apostels. Euangelion Johannis. XX," WA 17/2, 289–297, here 294.

46 The translation follows T.H.L Parker in D.W. Torrance and T.F. Torrance (eds.), *Calvin's Commentaries: The Gospel according to St John 11–21 and The First Epistle of John* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1959), 209 (on John 20:27).

even the Counter-Reformation can hardly be said to display aggressiveness. Most's contention that "the Catholic Counter-Reformation responded vigorously and polemically to the Protestant challenge within the tiny field of the exegesis of John 20,"[47] seems like a crude overstatement, as the following representative selection of comments shall demonstrate.

Opposite to Counter-Reformation exegetes, such as the great Spanish Jesuits Alfonso Salmerón (1515–1585)[48] and Juan Maldonado (1533–1583),[49] who list an impressive number of arguments and witnesses to demonstrate a physical contact between Thomas and Jesus, stands their contemporary Theodore Beza (1519–1605), Calvin's French companion and successor in Geneva. He follows Calvin in condemning the request of Thomas as an "inexcusable sin," but argues that upon seeing the Lord he was so flustered (*confusus*) that he exclaimed the confession without touching the wounds.[50] On the other hand, Johann Gerhard (1582–1637), an eminent figure in Lutheran Orthodoxy, does also highlight the graveness of Thomas's sin (*gravissium peccatum*),[51] but then goes on

47 Most, *Doubting Thomas* (see n. 12), 149.

48 A. Salmerón, *Commentarii in Evangelicam historicam, et in Acta Apostolorum*, vol. 11: *Tractatus XXVII* (Cologne, 1614), 216 (trans. Most, *Doubting Thomas* [see n. 12], 150–151): (1) "sight" represents all senses (cf. Augustine); (2) 1 John 1:1 refers to Thomas's touching (cf. Tertullian); (3) the relic of Thomas's finger in the church of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem; (4) the testimony of the Fathers; (5) "reason itself proves this: first because Thomas would have obeyed the Lord […] [on this see section 4 below]; then because Christ showed himself to all the senses to be recognized; then again, lest Thomas might perhaps have regretted that he did not touch […]; and then finally for our sake […]." With the possible exception of the latter, the arguments are hardly original, so that Most's assessment (*Doubting Thomas*, 151) seems inadequate: He wants to read "[t]he very accumulation of arguments, which are heaped up in an order that seems quite random despite their numeration […] as a symptom of an anxiety that no single truly decisive argument is available to prove the case once and for all: better, then, perhaps, to offer twenty bad arguments than to have to admit that there is not one good one."

49 Maldonado, *Commentarii* (see n. 39), 1862, refers to Augustine and a host of other church fathers, concluding from the words of Jesus (John 20:27) that it is "hardly obscure" that Thomas must have touched the wounds.

50 T. Beza, *Homiliae in Historiam Domini Resurrectionis* (Geneva, 1593), 426–427. Without any polemics, Beza argues from the fact that the text does not mention an actual touching. He obviously makes use of an allusion from Thomas Aquinas, which Aquinas did not adopt himself: "One could say that Thomas became flustered (*confusus*) when he saw Christ's wounds and scars, and before he touched Christ with his finger he believed and said, 'My Lord and my God'" (Thomas Aquinas, *Super evangelium S. Joannis lectura* 2565; trans. F. Larcher and J.A. Weisheipl, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* [Washington, D.C., 2010], 280).

51 J. Gerhard, *In Harmoniam Historiae Evangelicae de Resurrectione et Ascensione Christi Salvatoris Nostri ex Quatuor Evangelistis Contextam, Commentarius Conscriptus* (Jena, 1617), 321.

to paraphrase Gregory the Great explaining that Thomas was strengthened by his touching so that we in turn might be strengthened by him.[52] In the end, we learn "that the apostles […] did not believe hastily and blindly, but only after properly exploring the matter (*sed re probe prius explorata*)." Gerhard underlines his point with a reference to 1 John 1:1 and then follows in the interpretative footsteps of Calvin (without calling him by name): "From the words of the Evangelist we can follow with confidence that Thomas has not been led to faith prior to being convicted by touching. Gazing at Christ, he had to be dashed with embarrassment and humiliation; but he boldly and fearlessly (*audacter et intrepide*) stretches forth his finger into the wounds of the hands and into the side of Christ. An inner illumination of his mind joined, and he came to his senses, exclaiming: 'My Lord and my God.'"[53]

In line with the Lutheran Johann Gerhard we find quite dissimilar figures of quite different movements within Protestant theology. To name just a few in chronological order, there are the Reformed theologian Hugo Grotius (1583–1645),[54] his Lutheran antipode Abraham Calov (1612–1686),[55] the Remonstrant Arnold P. Poelenburg (1628–1666),[56] as well as the Pietist Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687–1752).[57] In Moravian piety, fostered in particular by Nicolaus Zinzendorf (1700–1760), the contemplation of Jesus's side wound would take on quite bizarre features, establishing itself as the centerpiece of their mystical theology.[58] However, since the eighteenth century, we can observe a trend in the historical-crit-

52 Most likely, Gerhard has the following statements from Gregory's homily in mind: *Plus enim nobis Thomae infidelitas ad fidem quam fides credentium discipulorum profuit, quia dum ille ad fidem palpando reducitur, nostra mens, omni dubitatione postposita, in fide solidatur* (*Homiliarum in evangelia libri II* 26.7 [PL 76.1201]). Gerhard's free paraphrase indicates that Gregory's comments had actually become exegetical commonplace in the interpretation of the Thomas episode. Thomas Aquinas and many other interpreters refer to Gregory's spiritually appealing insights.

53 Gerhard, *Commentarius* (see n. 51), 321.

54 H. Grotius, *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum*, vol. 4: *Annotationes ad Iohannem* (Groningen, 1828), 278: *Verbo* videndi *hic etiam Tactus comprehenditur.*

55 A. Calov, *Biblia Novi Testamenti Illustrata* […], vol. 1: *Harmonia Evangelistarum* […] (Dresden, 1719), 823: *Omnino quod iubet Christus fecisse Thomam puto, & tum exclamasse.* A reference to 1 John 1:1 and to Tertullian follows.

56 Quoted in Lampe, *Commentarius* (see n. 25), 3.707.

57 Bengel, *Gnomon* (see n. 9), 409.

58 Cf. P. Vogt, "'Gloria Pleurae!' Die Seitenwunde Jesu in der Theologie des Grafen von Zinzendorf," *PuN* 32 (2006), 175–212; also C.D. Atwood, *Community of the Cross: Moravian Piety in Colonial Bethlehem* (University Park, Pa., 2004), 203–221 ("Living in the Side Wound of Christ"). Incidentally, one of the most popular hymns in Moravian piety was called "Little side hole, little side hole, you are mine."

ical exegesis of John, which deems Thomas's physical verification of Jesus's wounds as improbable or inappropriate. The trend continues until today.

3 Thomas Did Not Touch Jesus: Textual and Theological Arguments

3.1 The Text of John 20:28–29

The main arguments brought forth in opposition to the view that Thomas in fact touched Jesus can be grouped under the two categories of "text" and "theology." Proponents regularly point to two features of the text in John 20:28–29: the narrator's phrase ἀπεκρίθη Θωμᾶς (20:28) and Jesus's words to Thomas ὅτι ἑώρακάς με (20:29).

(1) Rather apodictically, Glenn Most argues that the meaning and function of the verb ἀποκρίνεσθαι is unambiguous. The verb "occurs more than two hundred times in the New Testament, and whenever it introduces a quoted speech B spoken by one person that follows a quoted speech A spoken by someone else, then speech B is a direct and immediate response to speech A; speech B is caused directly by speech A, not by any other event intervening between the two speeches." Consequently, "there is no room between Jesus' speech and Thomas' speech in which something else could happen that might motivate Thomas's words."[59] One should note, however, that John's narrative style does not preclude a non-verbal action from taking place prior to the response of a person. In John 2:18, the "Jews" react to Jesus's temple-action and temple-word (ἀπεκρίθησαν οὖν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι καὶ εἶπαν αὐτῷ), and in between John expresses the disciples' thoughts concerning the scriptural background (2:17). Even more striking is Jesus's response to the "Jews" in John 5: After noting that they were seeking to kill Jesus because he made himself equal to God (5:18), John states that Jesus "responded" to them (ἀπεκρίνατο οὖν ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς, 5:19). Hence, events other than the utterance of words are able to motivate a response (expressed by ἀποκρίνεσθαι), so it is surely possible that tangible experience can lead to a verbal response.

(2) The wording of John 20:29 constitutes another major argument. Jesus says to Thomas: "You have believed because *you have seen me* (ὅτι ἑώρακάς με)."[60] John does not say that Thomas "touched" Jesus

59 Most, *Doubting Thomas* (see n. 12), 57–58.

60 Contrary to NA[28] and many interpretations (recently, e. g., D. Estes, *The Questions of Jesus in John: Logic, Rhetoric and Persuasive Discourse* [BibInt 115; Leiden, 2013],

(nor does he say that Thomas did not touch Jesus!). Augustine's above-mentioned intuition should not be dismissed as uncritical and unwarranted speculation: Sight is in fact "a kind of general sense" and might have also included the sense of touch for John. Furthermore, the "sensuous" character of the Gospel as a whole (see below) suggests that the words put into the mouth of Jesus not only pertain to the visual, but also to the other senses.

3.2 Theological Concerns

While grammar and semantics are merely the Propylaea of the argument against a physical contact, theology is the true Palladium. Thomas was convicted neither by his seeing nor by his touching, but by *Jesus*'s overwhelming presence and efficacious word. Christ's appearance and utterance overrode Thomas's original intention and turned him into a confessor at once. We can observe this theological rationale in the leading commentary of the eighteenth century, the massive three-volume *Commentarius analytico-exegeticus in Evangelium secundum Joannem* by the Reformed theologian Friedrich Adolph Lampe (1683–1729). Lampe states that Jesus's presence evoked the deepest emotions in Thomas, which John illustrates by his eruptive narrative style: *Verba* […] *brevia sunt & abrupta.* Glowing grace dissolved the gloom of Thomas instantly and completely, and he was overwhelmed with admiration, shame, love, joy – all at once. No touching is necessary.[61] Numerous later commentators share the view that Thomas and his doubt were conquered by "Jesus' extraordinary appearance as well as his extraordinary word," so that he eventually abandoned his former intention so vigorously brought forth at the outset of the scene.[62] It is hardly surprising that the preeminent "Word of God"-theologian Karl Barth highlights particularly Jesus's word: "Be not faithless, but believing" (John 20:27). Barth holds: "This

113, 165; R. Hirsch-Luipold, *Gott wahrnehmen: Die Sinne im Johannesevangelium* [Ratio Religionis Studien; Tübingen, forthcoming]) and translations (e.g., NRSV), I take the sentence as a declarative sentence rather than a question. Taken as a question it would carry a chiding tone, which cannot be discerned here or in John 20:27 (cf. P.J. Judge, "John 20:24–29: More than Doubt, Beyond Rebuke," in *The Death of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* [ed. G. Van Belle; BETL 200; Leuven, 2007], 913–930, here 919–920).

61 Lampe, *Commentarius* (see n. 25), 3.707.

62 Luthardt, *Das johanneische Evangelium* (see n. 17), 2.518. Similar arguments are found, e.g., in Tholuck, *Commentar* (see n. 24), 443; H.A.W. Meyer, *Kritisch exegetisches Handbuch über das Evangelium des Johannes* (4th ed.; Göttingen, 1862), 566; Zahn, *Johannes* (see n. 10), 685.

is not just pious exhortation, but a word of power (Machtwort). And to this Thomas gives the appropriate answer: 'My Lord and my God.'"[63]

Other leading twentieth-century commentators of John concur with Barth's position, including Rudolf Bultmann, Charles H. Dodd, Rudolf Schnackenburg, and Raymond Brown.[64] With only a few exceptions,[65] this view also prevails in present-day Johannine exegesis with the same rationale.[66] Glenn Most, never shying away from a clear decision, concludes: "[T]o suppose that Thomas might actually have touched Jesus, and thereby have been brought to belief in his divinity, is to misunderstand not just some detail of John's account, but its deepest and most fundamental message."[67] Thus, the monotony regarding the question about how to fill this most striking lacuna in John's text is currently as massive as it was in late ancient and medieval Christian exegesis. However – to use the same mu-

63 K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3.2: *The Doctrine of Creation* (ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance; Edinburgh, 1960), 449.

64 R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (trans. G.R. Beasley-Murray; Philadelphia, 1971), 694; C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge, 1953), 443 n. 1; R. Schnackenburg, *Das Johannesevangelium: Einleitung und Kommentar zu Kapitel 13–21* (6th ed.; HThKNT 4/3; Freiburg im Breisgau, 1992), 396; R.E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII–XXI* (AncB 29A; New York, 1970), 1046; cf. id., *An Introduction to the Gospel of John* (ed. F.J. Moloney; New York, 2003), 314.

65 U. Schnelle, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (THKNT 4; Leipzig, 1998), 306–307; Thyen, *Johannesevangelium* (see n. 16), 770; G.L. Borchert, *John 12–21* (NAC 25B; Nashville, 2002), 314; possibly C.S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (2 vols.; Peabody, Mass., 2003), 2.1193. None of them offers a discussion of the question.

66 Rather than taking into account the numerous monographs and studies on John 20 and Thomas (see below n. 82), and without attempting to be exhaustive, I simply refer to the following commentaries on John: C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (2nd ed.; Philadelphia, 1978), 572; J. Becker, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (2 vols.; ÖTK 4/1–2; Gütersloh, 1991), 2.630; H.N. Ridderbos, *The Gospel according to John: A Theological Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1997), 648; G.R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (WBC 36; Waco, Tex., 1987), 384; D.A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (PNTC 4; Grand Rapids, Mich., 1991), 657; X. Léon-Dufour, *Lecture de l'Évangile selon Jean*, vol. 4: *L'heure de la glorification (chapitres 18–21)* (Paris, 1996), 248–249; F.J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John* (SP 4; Collegeville, Minn., 1998), 537; L. Schenke, *Johannes: Kommentar* (Düsseldorf, 1998), 380; U. Wilckens, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (NTD 4; Göttingen, 1998), 315; C. Dietzfelbinger, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (2 vols.; ZBK 4/1–2; Zurich, 2001), 2.343; A.J. Koestenberger, *John* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, Mich., 2004), 579; A.T. Lincoln, *The Gospel according to St John* (London, 2005), 503; K. Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium* (2 vols.; Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 4/1–2; 2nd ed.; Stuttgart, 2007), 2.318; J. Zumstein, *L'évangile selon saint Jean (13–21)* (CNT 4b; Geneva, 2007), 291; J.R. Michaels, *The Gospel of John* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, Mich., 2010), 1018; J. Beutler, *Das Johannesevangelium: Kommentar* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 2013), 530; Thompson, *John* (see n. 27), 425 (by implication).

67 Most, *Doubting Thomas* (see n. 12), 58.

sical metaphor – the key modulated from a unanimous affirmation that Thomas touched Jesus to the opposite affirmation that he did have the opportunity to touch, but refrained from putting it into action.

4 Thomas Did Touch Jesus! Clues for a Fresh Reading

In the following section I intend to challenge the *communis opinio* by having a second look at the narrative style and theology of John's Gospel as a whole and at the place of Doubting Thomas in its overall arrangement. It goes without saying that the following considerations are intended to weigh narrative possibilities rather than to contribute to the quest for historical events. Five clues in John's text make a physical contact between Thomas and Jesus probable.

(1) *The imperatives of Jesus in John.* Although the questions of Jesus in John have been studied in a recent monograph,[68] the rhetoric of the imperatives awaits closer analysis. An examination of Jesus's distinct commands to both his intimate and more distant followers reveals that, without exception, they follow the command immediately.[69] This is clarified at times by the further course of the narrative and other times is stated explicitly. In my opinion, there is no need to assume that Jesus's invitation to Thomas constitutes the one exception to this pattern in the Gospel. Tuckett suggests in a footnote: "Given the very high status that Jesus has in John, an 'invitation' by Jesus to do something may almost have the force of a command."[70] Certainly, the rule that Jesus's commands are carried out instantly not only describes an aspect of John's narrative technique, but is rather exemplary for a theological concept: When the characters of the Gospel comply with the will of Jesus, they understand

68 Estes, *Questions of Jesus* (see n. 60).

69 All commands of Jesus addressed to his disciples (and expressed in the imperative) are followed by them. This is stated explicitly in John 1:39 (ἔρχεσθε καὶ ὄψεσθε – ἦλθαν […] καὶ εἶδαν); 6:10 (ποιήσατε […] ἀναπεσεῖν – ἀνέπεσαν); 7:8, 10 (ἀνάβητε – ἀνέβησαν); 11:39, 41 (ἄρατε – ἦραν, cf. 21:6), and presupposed by the context in all other instances (John 1:43; 11:44; 14:31; 18:11; cf. 13:37). Other addressees of Jesus's imperatives also follow suit: the servants at the Wedding at Cana (John 2:7–8: γεμίσατε – ἐγέμισαν; φέρετε – ἤνεγκαν); the royal official (4:50: πορεύου – ἐπορεύετο); the sick man at the pool of Bethesda (5:8–9: ἔγειρε […] καὶ περιπάτει – ἦρεν […] καὶ περιεπάτει); the man born blind (9:7: ὕπαγε νίψαι – ἀπῆλθεν […] καὶ ἐνίψατο). Also the Samaritan woman is assumed to have followed Jesus's command δός μοι πεῖν (4:7), because the course of the story implies that Jesus received water from her (cf. 4:13: ὁ πίνων ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος τούτου). On Mary Magdalene, see the following paragraph.

70 Tuckett, "Seeing and Believing" (see n. 3), 172 n. 9.

a new facet of Jesus's identity and mission. They (and, together with them, the readers of the Gospel) see another glimmer of his glory (cf. John 1:14).

(2) *Mary and Thomas.* The motif of physical closeness structures the parallelism between the "gender pair"[71] Mary and Thomas, which has regularly caught the attention of John's interpreters. The links between the two encounter stories with Jesus are evident – despite the fact that the meaning of Jesus's enigmatic response to Mary μή μου ἅπτου (20:17) is highly contested:[72] Here *ex dilectione* Mary desires to hold onto Jesus, there *ex incredulitate* Thomas insists on touching Jesus.[73] The one exemplifies those who grieve about Jesus's death – grief, which will turn into joy – the other represents the paradigmatic doubter whose incredulity transforms into the confession of Christ. The unsettling disappearance of Jesus's body from the sealed grave contrasts the miraculous appearance of Jesus through locked doors. Jesus prohibits Mary in her joy from holding on to him, but responds to Thomas's scepticism by commanding him to touch him. Both Mary and Thomas follow the directive of Jesus with the consequence that Mary's grief and Thomas's doubt are overcome, and both come to "see" the Lord (20:18, 29). In a sense, "Mary is the first witness of the resurrection, Thomas the first interpreter of the resurrection's meaning."[74] As Alan Culpepper insightfully comments, "[t]here is no inconsist-

71 Cf. M.M. Beirne, *Women and Men in the Fourth Gospel: A Genuine Discipleship of Equals* (JSNTSup 242; Sheffield, 2003), 195–218.

72 See the judicious survey of interpretative options in H.W. Attridge, "'Don't Be Touching Me': Recent Feminist Scholarship on Mary Magdalene," in *Essays on John and Hebrews* (WUNT 264; Tübingen, 2010), 137–159. With many other recent commentators, Attridge suggests that John considers Jesus to continue journeying to his father and therefore only at a liminal stage. In my view, the physical component of the verb ἅπτεσθαι, which is present in all other occurrences of ἅπτεσθαι in the New Testament, should not be too quickly replaced with a metaphorical sense (cf. also Matt 28:1, 9). It is not unlikely that John wants his readers to imagine that "Mary Magdalene apparently embraces Jesus" and that he refuses to reciprocate the embrace (A. Fehribach, *The Women in the Life of the Bridegroom: A Feminist Historical-Literary Analysis of the Female Characters in the Fourth Gospel* [Collegeville, Minn., 1998], 160); cf. Keener, *John* (see n. 65), 1193: "In the context, 'touch' probably refers to 'embrace'; it is difficult to envision Mary, under such circumstances, merely poking a suspicious finger at Jesus' arm [cf. John 20:25] or grabbing his right hand for an ancient promise of fidelity." R. Bieringer, "Touching Jesus? The Meaning of μή μου ἅπτου in Its Johannine Context," in *To Touch or Not to Touch? Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Noli Me Tangere* (ANL 67; Leuven, 2013), 61–81, here 80, argues "that the focus is not on touching as such, but on approaching someone to be close to that person."

73 Tertullian, *Prax.* 25.2 (CCSL 2.1195–1196).

74 J.S. Sturdevant, *The Adaptable Jesus of the Fourth Gospel: The Pedagogy of the Logos* (NovTSup 162; Leiden, 2015), 171; cf. D.A. Lee, "Partnership in Easter Faith: The Role of Mary Magdalene and Thomas in John 20," *JSNT* 58 (1995), 37–49, here 46–48.

ency between Jesus' admonition to Mary, 'Do not hold on to me' (20:17) and his invitation for Thomas to touch him. In both cases he was inviting each one to do what he or she needed to do to take the next step in faith and understanding."[75]

(3) *Thomas and the soldiers at the cross.* We encounter the Johannine strategy of comparison and contrast in another place in the Passion and Easter narrative.[76] Hitherto, Johannine exegesis has not considered this aspect with respect to our question about Thomas. It is not only Thomas and Mary who are linked by the motif of physical contact with Jesus, but also the soldiers at the cross (John 19:33–34). In a way, the soldiers symbolize the counter-image to Doubting Thomas. After realizing that Jesus was already dead, one of the soldiers pierces Jesus's side with a spear in order to verify his death. By contrast, Thomas reaches with his hand into Jesus's side in order to verify his resurrection and life. The soldiers see Jesus (cf. 19:33: εἶδον) without recognizing who he is, and they spear his dead body from the furthest possible distance with a sterile instrument of death. Thomas, however, sees and touches his friend and acknowledges his true identity: Lord and God. Ironically, the soldiers open the side of Jesus, from which blood and water – symbols of the spirit – flow out.[77] Thomas reaches into the wounded side of Jesus as the place of pneumatic presence and receives the spirit, which bestows faith.[78]

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75 R.A. Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John* (Interpreting Biblical Texts; Nashville, 1998), 243; similarly C.F.D. Moule, "The Individualism of the Fourth Gospel," *NovT* 5 (1962), 171–190, here 175. Incidentally, commentaries unanimously recognize Mary's compliance to Jesus's will, but not Thomas's.

76 On this pattern, see R.F. Collins, "'Who Are You?' Comparison/Contrast and Fourth Gospel Characterization," in *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John* (ed. C.W. Skinner; LNTS; London, 2013), 79–95.

77 On the pneumatological symbolism of Jesus's side and hands, see T. Popp, "Thomas: Question Marks and Exclamation Marks," in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Literary Approaches to Sixty-Seven Figures in John* (ed. S.A. Hunt, D.F. Tolmie, and R. Zimmermann; WUNT 314; Tübingen, 2013), 504–529, here 517 (cf. John 3:34–35; 19:34; 20:20).

78 The question concerning when Thomas received the Spirit – a question that particularly troubled readers in the early church – receives a subtle explanation. Indeed, "strangely, when Thomas does come to faith, there is no mention of the Spirit" (Carson, *John* [see n. 66], 654), but there is mention of the symbolic abode of the Spirit and the invitation to Thomas to grasp it. Based on the alleged "aporia" that "it is inconceivable that the Holy Spirit would have been conferred on all the disciples except Thomas," literary critics find confirmation for their respective compositional theories (thus recently U.C. von Wahlde, *The Gospel and Letters of John* [3 vols.; ECC; Grand Rapids, Mich., 2010], 3.868).

(4) *A sequential intensification of bodily closeness in the Johannine Easter narratives.*[79] John 20 is composed of four distinct Easter scenes that epitomize a development concerning the manifestation of Jesus's corporeality: Peter and the Beloved Disciple only see the linen wrappings in the empty tomb (20:3–10); Mary encounters Jesus in a peculiar liminal stage, does not recognize him by sight, and is prohibited from touching him (20:11–18); the ten disciples are privileged to see the *signa crucis* and receive the Spirit through the breath of Jesus's mouth (20:19–23); Thomas, finally, not only sees the wounds, but is invited to touch them in order to experience the identity of the Crucified and Risen One by means of physical verification (20:24–29).[80] There is no need to construct a second, reverse interpretation in terms of a degradation of the certainty of faith: the Beloved Disciple believes without seeing; Mary Magdalene grieves and only recognizes Jesus when personally addressed by him; the fearful disciples rejoice when they see Jesus; Thomas doubts and vehemently requests tangible proof.[81] After all, even the Beloved Disciple "saw" (βλέπει, 20:5) the cloths, indeed "saw and believed" (εἶδεν καὶ ἐπίστευσεν, 20:8), and, conversely, it is Thomas who pronounces the Gospel's highest confession.

(5) *Corporeality and the senses in the Fourth Gospel.* Finally, for the composition of the Gospel as a whole, the corporeal and sense-dimensions are of pivotal narrative and theological significance.[82] Based on this alone, one should be reluctant to assume that Thomas's doubt has been overcome merely through the powerful word of Jesus or through his overpowering presence. To put it bluntly: John is not a "Word of God"-theologian in the

79 Cf. especially the section "Von Magdalena zu Thomas: Steigernde Intensität der Berührung in Joh 20" in M. Gruber, "Berührendes Sehen: Zur Legitimation der Zeichenforderung des Thomas (Joh 20,24–31)," *BZ* 51 (2007), 61–83, here 74–76.

80 Cf. Schnelle, *Johannes* (see n. 65), 322. See also the modification and clarification of Schnelle's thesis in J. Frey, "'Ich habe den Herrn gesehen' (Joh 20,28): Entstehung, Inhalt und Vermittlung des Osterglaubens nach Johannes 20," in *Studien zu Matthäus und Johannes: Festschrift für Jean Zumstein zu seinem 65. Geburtstag* (ed. A. Dettwiler and U. Poplutz; ATANT 97; Zurich, 2009), 267–284.

81 Against Schnelle, *Johannes* (see n. 65), 322.

82 Cf. D.A. Lee, "The Gospel of John and the Five Senses," *JBL* 129 (2010), 115–127; J. Frey, "Leiblichkeit und Auferstehung im Johannesevangelium," in *Studien zu den Johanneischen Schriften*, vol. 1: *Die Herrlichkeit des Gekreuzigten:* (ed. J. Schlegel; WUNT 307; Tübingen, 2013), 699–738; K.H. Wang, "Sense Perception and Testimony in the Gospel According to John" (PhD diss., Durham University, 2014); Hirsch-Luipold, *Gott wahrnehmen* (see n. 60). Notably, all these studies on the senses in John either consider the question of a physical verification irrelevant from a literary or theological perspective, or assert – for different reasons – that upon seeing the risen Jesus, the Johannine Thomas no longer needed to touch him.

manner of Karl Barth, for whom Jesus's address to Thomas "Believe!" encloses in itself the faith of the addressee. Rather, John is a "Word-theologian" in the sense that the *Logos* became visible, tangible "flesh." In his markedly corporeal and sense-oriented text, words are but *one* medium of the communication of faith, but not the exclusive medium. Additionally, John is not a philosopher of language in the manner of Wilhelm Humboldt, who assumes the principal linguisticality ("Sprachlichkeit") of all human senses, being convinced "that all a human being sees, tastes, does, says and eventually thinks, is verbal (sprachlich)."[83] In the symbolic world of the evangelist, seeing – as both a sensual and spiritual perception! – is rather more significant in the process of coming to faith than mere words,[84] and undoubtedly the other senses of human nature play an essential role as well: taste (2:9), smell (12:3; cf. 11:39), and touch (20:27).[85]

5 The Role of Doubting and Touching Thomas in John's Gospel

If it is correct that in the narrative logic of the implicit author of the Gospel, Thomas not only saw but also touched Jesus, then commonly held views on his function at the climax of the story should be reconsidered.

(1) The resurrection narratives, including the Thomas episode, are *not* superfluous and anomalous within the structure and theology of the Gospel.[86] John's drama of the cross and his *theologia crucifixi* are not wrapped

83 Thus Bruno Liebrucks on Humboldt's understanding of the "Sprachlichkeit" of the human being, as quoted and adopted in J. Ringleben, *Das philosophische Evangelium: Theologische Auslegung des Johannesevangeliums im Horizont des Sprachdenkens* (HUT 64; Tübingen, 2014), 261 n. 68: "dass alles, was der Mensch sieht, hört, schmeckt, tut, spricht und schließlich denkt, *sprachlich* ist."

84 On the complex interrelation between seeing and believing, see, e.g., C.R. Koester, "Jesus' Resurrection, the Signs, and the Dynamics of Faith in the Gospel of John," in *The Resurrection of Jesus in the Gospel of John* (ed. C.R. Koester and R. Bieringer; WUNT 222; Tübingen, 2008), 47–74; Tuckett, "Seeing and Believing" (see n. 3). F. Hahn, "Sehen und Glauben im Johannesevangelium," in *Neues Testament und Geschichte: Oscar Cullmann zum 70. Geburtstag* (ed. H. Baltensweiler and B. Reicke; Zurich, 1972), 125–141, here 136, has emphasized that, according to John, Christian faith is concerned with the concrete act of seeing, since it has to do with God's salvation, which has become manifest in the concrete, earthly realm and is, therefore, also visible.

85 Cf. Frey, "Leiblichkeit" (see n. 82), 715, 717, though he holds that in John 20:27 touching Jesus is only a possibility.

86 Against, e.g., J.A. Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford, 1991), 485 ("superfluousness of the resurrection stories"); H.W. Attridge, "From Discord Rises Mean-

up in the τετέλεσται (John 19:30), but are always perceived in light of the Easter events and the post-Easter knowledge of the meaning of Jesus's death.[87] Thomas speaks and acts in place of those (implied readers) who have not been able yet to situate themselves in the Easter light and therefore still struggle with understanding existentially the meaning of the cross. Therefore, John gives room to Thomas's doubt, allows for his "impious" request (without criticizing it), illustrates the empathy of Jesus, has Thomas grasp the meaning of Jesus's death – both literally and metaphorically – and puts into his mouth the confession that Jesus is "Lord and God." In the dynamics of John's narrative, the τετέλεσται of the Son of God requires the ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου of those who encounter him. If it is the goal of John's "strategy of faith" to call to believe,[88] Thomas's individual journey and expression of faith is neither superfluous nor anomalous, but rather climactic – even if his faith is based on the miraculous.

(2) Thomas does *not* represent, as Bultmann has famously claimed, "the common attitude of men, who cannot believe without seeing miracles (4.48)."[89] At the root of this assessment is not so much John's theology of faith, but rather Bultmann's presupposed clear-cut antagonism of seeing and believing: "ὁρᾶν […] and πιστεύειν are radical opposites."[90] Clearly, the textual evidence in John regarding the correlation of seeing and believing is complex. There are passages that suggest an identification of seeing and believing (6:40; 12:44–45) and others that seem to separate both events (4:48). As the example of the soldiers demonstrates, there is certainly no automatic linkage between seeing and believing, since seeing as a sense-perception of Jesus can be limited and superficial, not leading to a spiritual perception of his identity (19:33; cf. 19:5: ἰδοὺ ὁ ἄνθρωπος; 6:36; 14:8). However, seeing is neither linked by John to a deficient faith nor to the "weakness of man."[91] The meta-textual conclusion about the Thomas-episode and the book as a whole (20:30–31) does

ing: Resurrection Motifs in the Fourth Gospel," in *Resurrection of Jesus* (see n. 84), 2–19, here 15: "The very existence of the chapters [20 and 21] is something of an anomaly."

87 Cf. J. Frey, "Die 'theologia crucifixi' des Johannesevangeliums," in *Herrlichkeit des Gekreuzigten* (see n. 82), 485–554, here 552.

88 Cf. J. Zumstein, "L'évangile johannique: Une stratégie du croire," in *Miettes exégétiques* (MdB 25; Geneva, 1991), 237–252.

89 Bultmann, *John* (see n. 64), 696.

90 Bultmann, *John* (see n. 64), 695 n. 5.

91 Against Bultmann, *John* (see n. 64), 696: "As the miracle is a concession to the weakness of man, so is the appearance of the Risen Jesus a concession to the weakness of the disciples. Fundamentally they ought not to need it!"

not devaluate the faith of those who have seen signs with their physical eyes; rather, the signs are written precisely for the purpose of evoking faith.[92] Those who critique Thomas for requesting signs so that he can believe must wrestle with the concluding word of the Evangelist, who wrote down many signs "so that you may come to believe" (ἵνα πιστεύ[σ]ητε, 20:31). On the narrative level, Thomas's encounter with Jesus, seeing *and* touching him, evoked genuine faith.[93] In the world of the readers, it is the signs set out in writing that call for and manifest faith. As Hans Urs von Balthasar explained, in contrast to Bultmann's interpretation of the Thomas story, "[w]hat is […] real is sensory, whether it is perceived directly through the human senses or whether it is witnessed to as having been perceived. The *proton pseudos*, the 'primal lie', of theology and spirituality is the naïve or reflected equation (or confusion) of the human 'spirit' with the Holy Spirit, of 'abstraction' with the resurrection of the flesh."[94]

(3) Thomas is *no* "borderline case," as Marinus de Jonge proposed,[95] insofar as he would be the last to see signs and the first whose faith is evoked by the word of the witnesses. Rather, he represents the supreme culmination of the time of signs. The tension between the era of Jesus's presence and the era of all later believers is carried to extremes: Thomas sees *and* touches. To him – the inquisitive doubter – more is granted than to the other disciples and to the implied readers. They, by contrast, are dependent on the testimony of the Easter witnesses (17:20), the testimony of the written book (20:30), and the testimony of the Holy Spirit (14:17, 25–26). Thomas complied to Jesus's invitation in the literal sense, not merely

92 Cf. K.S. O'Brien, "Written That You May Believe: John 20 and Narrative Rhetoric," *CBQ* 67 (2005), 284–302.

93 The close relationship between John 4:48 and 20:25 in both form and content is regularly noted in Johannine exegesis. Oftentimes, John 4:48 is said to point to a critique of miracle-belief, taken up in the encounter with Thomas and the concluding macarism of John 20:29. However, Jesus's word to the royal official does not imply a general rejection of miracles (and "a scornful rebuke of Jesus"; against Tuckett, "Seeing and Believing" [see n. 3], 174 n. 16), nor does Jesus reprimand Thomas. Rather, Jesus grants the official's request, so that "he himself believed, along with his whole household" (4:53), and he takes up Thomas's challenge, which led him to the highest confession. Neither way of (coming to) faith is criticized as inferior or deficient (cf. correctly U. Schnelle, *Antidoketische Christologie im Johannesevangelium: Eine Untersuchung zur Stellung des vierten Evangeliums in der Johanneischen Schule* [FRLANT 144; Göttingen, 1987], 157).

94 H.U. von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, vol. 1: *Seeing the Form* (Edinburgh, 1982), 316.

95 So M. de Jonge, "Signs and Works in the Fourth Gospel," in *Miscellanea Neotestamentica*, vol. 2 (NovTSup 48; Leiden, 1978), 107–125, here 119. Cf., e.g., Beutler, *Johannesevangelium* (see n. 66), 530.

in the spiritual, metaphorical sense.[96] A spiritual reality has been disclosed to him in his seeing with his bodily eyes and touching with his finger. His coming to faith via doubting, seeing, and touching separates him most starkly from those who will later believe; his confession of faith, however, is intended as a model for all Christians, particularly those who doubt and wish to see and touch.

(4) Thomas is *not* the "mouthpiece" of *all* later generations (contra, e.g., Michael Theobald[97]), but is a witness to the doubters and the paradigm for Jesus's turning to them. The Easter scene does not present his path to faith as exemplary for all readers. Thomas stands out due to his direct, exclusive contact with Jesus, which is not mediated by the testimony of the eyewitnesses. His special role is also evidenced by several extremes in the portrayal of his character:[98] Both his unbelief and his confession correspond in terms of their unparalleled intensity, and his encounter with Jesus is indeed extraordinary, as it includes a tangible dimension, which is requested by Thomas and granted by Jesus. The intensity of Thomas's encounter with Christ benefits all those whose time is characterized by Jesus's absence (cf. 14:18), who arrived "too late" (cf. 20:24), but who want to see and feel more. Attending to the testimony of the physical hearing, seeing, and touching of Jesus's followers, particularly of Doubting Thomas, establishes κοινωνία between the first and later generations of faith (cf. 1 John 1:1–3), who will hear, see, and touch with the help of the Spirit. In the Paraclete, Jesus turns to those who, like Thomas, doubt; and the manner in which Jesus meets this challenge is both model and promise for those who can no longer see, but still desire to believe.[99] To such people John addresses his concluding macarism.[100] If we

96 A distinctly metaphorical interpretation of Thomas's seeing and touching is prominent already in early church interpretation, and also in more recent studies. Cf., e.g., S.M. Schneiders, "Touching the Risen Jesus: Mary Magdalene and Thomas the Twin in John 20," in *Jesus Risen in Our Midst: Essays on the Resurrection of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville, Minn., 2013), 34–60, here 52: "The invitation is not to see physically but to grasp what cannot be seen with the eyes of flesh."

97 M. Theobald, "Der johanneische Osterglaube und die Grenzen seiner narrativen Vermittlung (Joh 20)," in *Studien zum Corpus Iohanneum* (WUNT 267; Tübingen, 2010), 443–471, here 468.

98 Cf. J. Hartenstein, *Charakterisierung im Dialog: Maria Magdalena, Petrus, Thomas und die Mutter Jesu im Johannesevangelium im Kontext anderer frühchristlicher Darstellungen* (NTOA 64; Göttingen, 2007), 221.

99 Cf. Frey, "Der 'zweifelnde' Thomas" (see n. 25), 32.

100 Thus, the macarism is not a (backward-looking) critique of Thomas (against, e.g., Tuckett, "Seeing and Believing" [see n. 3], 174–175, 185), but a (forward-looking) promise to the (skeptical) addressees of the Gospel.

fill the narrative gap in the proposed way and take into account Augustine's sentiment, we can see and grasp that the visual sense stands *pars pro toto* for all other senses: "Blessed are those who have not seen – nor heard, smelled, tasted, and touched – and yet have come to believe!"

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