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The Origin and Development of the Johannine *Egō Eimi* Sayings in Cognitive-Critical Perspective

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Abstract

The long-held critical judgment that the I-am sayings of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel have no connection at all with the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth is based primarily on the inference that they are entirely missing from the Synoptics. As a result, John has been expunged from Jesus research, assuming its patent ahistoricity; yet critical analyses have largely overlooked Johannine-Synoptic similarities. While the Johannine presentation of Jesus' I-am sayings is indeed distinctive and highly theological, it cannot be claimed that either the I-am convention of speech or its predicate metaphors and themes are absent from the Synoptics. Indeed, some absolute I-am sayings are present in Mark, and each of the nine terms used with the predicate nominative in John are also present in the Synoptics. Therefore, it cannot be claimed that such terms, on the basis of the Synoptics alone, were never used by the historical Jesus or present within early traditional material. As a means of discerning a plausible understanding of how the Johannine presentation of the I-am sayings of Jesus may have emerged, cognitive-critical analysis poses a way forward. Within the developing memory of the Johannine tradition, earlier words of Jesus likely became crafted into the evangelist's apologetic presentation of Jesus' ministry as a means of convincing later audiences that he was indeed the Messiah/Christ.

Keywords

absolute use; cognitive-critical analysis; ἐγώ εἰμι (*egō eimi*); Fourth Gospel; gnoseological; Gospel traditions; historical Jesus; John, Jesus, and History Project; memory; predicate nominative use; Synoptic

One of the great puzzles of biblical studies is the fact that the Johannine Jesus is presented as speaking constantly about himself in I-am sayings and long, drawn-out discourses, whereas the Synoptic Jesus speaks primarily about the kingdom of God in short, pithy aphorisms, also using parabolic speech. Further, the Synoptic Jesus emphasizes messianic modesty; in John, Jesus exhibits messianic disclosure. If Jesus sought to minimize the disclosure of his identity, how could the extroverted claims of the Johannine Jesus be anything close to the Jesus of history? Conversely, if the real Jesus spoke of himself in such I-am terms as ‘the light of the world’, ‘the bread of life’, ‘the gate to the sheepfold and the good shepherd’, ‘the true vine’, ‘the resurrection and the life’, and ‘the way, the truth, and the life’, how could these sayings *not* have been preserved in the other Gospel traditions?¹ And certainly, if the Jesus of history made references to the ‘I-am’ statements of Yahweh associated with the theophany of Exod. 3 or Yahweh’s provision in Isaiah 43, why are these statements preserved *solely* in John?²

¹ Extended analyses of the strengths and weaknesses of bases for questioning the historicity of the Fourth Gospel, including a half-dozen major literature reviews, may be found in P.N. Anderson, *The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus: Modern Foundations Reconsidered* (LNTS, 321; London/New York: T&T Clark, 2006); *John, Jesus, and History, Volume 1: Critical Appraisals of Critical Views* (Symposium Series, 44; Early Christianity and its Literature, 1; ed. P.N. Anderson, F. Just, S.J., and T. Thatcher; Atlanta: SBL/Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2007); *John, Jesus, and History, Volume 2: Aspects of Historicity in the Fourth Gospel* (Early Christianity and its Literature, 2; ed. P.N. Anderson, F. Just, S.J., and T. Thatcher; Atlanta: SBL/Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2009).

In addition, see J.H. Charlesworth, ‘The Historical Jesus in the Fourth Gospel: A Paradigm Shift?’ *JSHJ* 8 (2010), pp. 3-46; P.N. Anderson, ‘Aspects of Historicity in John: Implications for Archaeological and Jesus Studies’, in *Jesus and Archaeology* (ed. J. Charlesworth; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), pp. 587-618. The present essay, presented first at the Psychology and Biblical Studies Section of the SBL in 2005, seeks to further the paradigm shift mentioned by Charlesworth in his *JSHJ* essay.

² For some of the best treatments of the Johannine I-am sayings see D.M. Ball, ‘I Am’ in *John’s Gospel: Literary Function, Background, and Theological Implications* (JSNTSup, 124; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); R.E. Brown, ‘Appendix IV: *EGO EIMI*—I AM’, in *The Gospel According to John (i-xii)* (Anchor Bible Commentary, 29; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), pp. 533-38; R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John* (trans. G.R. Beasley-Murray, R.N.W. Hoare, J.K. Riches; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), pp. 225-26 n. 3; J.C. Coetzee, ‘Jesus’ Revelation in the *Ego Eimi* Sayings in

For these and other good reasons, Jesus and Johannine scholars alike have accorded greater historical weight to the Synoptic presentations of Jesus' teachings over and against the Johannine, functioning to expunge the sayings of the Johannine Jesus from modern historical-Jesus studies. As Rudolf Bultmann put the issue tersely, 'The Gospel of John cannot be taken into account at all as a source for the teaching of Jesus, and it is not referred to in this book'.³ Within that judgment, because

Jn 8 and 9', *A South African Perspective on the New Testament* (ed. J.H. Petzer and P.J. Hartin; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986), pp. 170-77; P.W. Comfort, *I Am the Way: A Spiritual Journey Through the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994); E.D. Freed, 'Egō Eimi in John 1.20 and 4.25', *CBQ* 41 (1979), pp. 288-91; E.D. Freed, 'Who or What Was before Abraham in John 8.58?', *JSNT* 17 (1983), pp. 52-59; A. Hajduk, "'Ego Eimi" bei Jesus und seine Messianität', *Communio Viatorum* 6 (1983), pp. 55-60; P.B. Harner, *The 'I Am' of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Johannine Usage and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970); G.L. Gramling, *The Metaphorical Ego Eimi Sayings in the Fourth Gospel: Their Origin and Significance* (PhD thesis, Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, 1993); E. Miller, 'The Christology of John 8.25', *TZ* 36 (1980), pp. 257-65; J. Neyrey, S.J., "'I Am the Door" (John 10.7, 9): Jesus the Broker in the Fourth Gospel', *CBQ* 69 (2007), pp. 271-91; M.C. Parsons, 'A Neglected EGO EIMI Saying in the Fourth Gospel? Another Look at John 9.9', in *Perspectives on John: Methods and Interpretation in the Fourth Gospel* (NABPR Special Studies, 11; ed. R.B. Sloan and M.C. Parsons; Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1993), pp. 145-80; R. Schnackenburg, 'Excursus 8, the Origin and Meaning of the ἐγώ εἰμι Formula', in *The Gospel According to St. John, Vol. 1* (trans. K. Smyth; New York: Seabury Press, 1980), pp. 79-89; E. Schweizer, *Ego Eimi* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1939); E. Stauffer, *Jesus and his Story* (1957; trans. R. and C. Winston, New York: Knopf, 1960), pp. 174-95; C.H. Williams, *'I am He': The Meaning and Interpretation of 'ANI HU' in Jewish and Early Christian Literature* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr/Siebeck, 1999); C.H. Williams, "'I Am" or "I Am He"?: Self-Declaratory Pronouncements in the Fourth Gospel and in the Rabbinic Tradition', *Jesus in Johannine Tradition* (ed. R.T. Fortna and T. Thatcher; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), pp. 343-52; H. Zimmermann, 'Das absolute "Egō eimi" als die neutestamentliche Offenbarungsformel', *BZ* 4 (1960), pp. 54-69, 266-76.

³) R. Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word* (trans. L.P. Smith and E.H. Lantero; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 12. Put bluntly by Robert Funk, founder of the Jesus Seminar, in *The Five Gospels: What Did Jesus Really Say?* (ed. R.W. Funk, R.W. Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar; San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), p. 10 (emphases mine):

In the synoptic gospels, Jesus speaks in brief, pithy one-liners and couplets, and in parables... Such speeches as Jesus makes in Matthew, Mark, and Luke are

they are so different from the Synoptics, the Jesus sayings in John are considered the weakest element in the Fourth Gospel's historicity.⁴ The Johannine I-am sayings are thus relegated to categories of theology or myth, rather than history, requiring alternative explanations of their

composed of aphorisms and parables strung together like beads on a string. In John, these speeches form coherent lectures on a specific theme, such as 'light', Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life, and the vine and the canes. The parables, which are so characteristic of Jesus in the synoptic tradition, *do not appear in John at all*.

The ethical teaching of Jesus in the first three gospels is *replaced in John by lengthy reflections on Jesus' self-affirmations in the form of 'I AM' sayings*.

In sum, there is *virtually nothing of the synoptic sage in the Fourth Gospel*. That sage has been displaced by Jesus the revealer who has been sent from God to reveal who the Father is.

In their cameo essay on 'The I AM Sayings in the Gospel of John', Funk *et al.* conclude by claiming, 'In virtually every case, the reader is being confronted with the language of the evangelist and not the language of Jesus' (p. 419). Therefore, the words of Jesus of Nazareth and the Johannine Jesus bear no overlap whatsoever, and the lynchpin is the problematic 'I AM' sayings of Jesus in John.

⁴ Note, for instance, that C.H. Dodd, in his *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), constructs his case for the historicity of the Johannine tradition proceeding from the most certain elements to the least certain: Part I, 'The Narrative' (A. 'The Passion Narrative', B. 'The Ministry', C. 'John the Baptist and the First Disciples', pp. 21-312) is followed by Part II, 'The Sayings' (pp. 315-420). Further, in Dodd's analysis, he only considers the sayings of Jesus in John that have some contact with the Synoptics. Independently, the John, Jesus, and History Group structured their analysis of 'glimpses of Jesus through the Johannine lens' in their SBL third triennium by focusing on the Passion narrative (2008), the works of Jesus (2009), and the words of Jesus (2010) at the national SBL meetings (these essays will appear in *John, Jesus, and History, Vol. 3* within the next year or two). Apparent within those two dozen papers is the linking of Johannine historicity inferences to Synoptic attestation, although such a methodology is centrally vulnerable to error. If the Johannine witness sought at all to include distinctive material not included in Mark (suggested by the earlier and final concluding professions of selectivity in Jn 20.30; 21.25), the bulk of John's individuated traditional material will have been overlooked categorically—and wrongly so. In addition to the paradigm shift elucidated by Charlesworth (*JSHJ* 8, 2010), see a new paradigm of Johannine composition and distinctive relations to the different Synoptic traditions in P.N. Anderson, *The Riddles of the Fourth Gospel: An Introduction to John* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), pp. 125-55, 195-219.

origins.⁵ Indeed, the Johannine Jesus *does* speak with the language of the Fourth Evangelist, and theologically so, but an adequate investigation as to how such a phenomenon might have evolved would yet make a welcome contribution to more than one set of studies.⁶ If, however, the primary basis for excluding the Johannine I-am sayings from canons of historicity is their inferred differences from the Synoptics, such approaches overlook three telling phenomena: (a) Synoptic traditions (and their forms) were also factors of theological and rhetorical interests, (b) the Johannine tradition has a great deal of independent historical-type data, and (c) key elements of Johannine I-am sayings are also found in the Synoptics, albeit in different formal presentations. Given that this third element has largely been overlooked in terms of historical-critical analysis, the present essay will focus on the plausible historical origin, development, and presentation of the Johannine I-am sayings as informed by the Synoptic traditions. In doing so, the character and function of memory will be considered in the perspective of cognitive-critical analysis, suggesting a critical alternative to the flat denigration of Johannine historicity.⁷ As a result, more adequate

⁵ Most notably, see the treatment of R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John* (1971), which infers that the distinctive Johannine I-am sayings must have come from a Revelation-Sayings source, supposedly originating in the Gnostic community of John the Baptist. According to A. Feuillet, *Johannine Studies* (trans. T.E. Crane; Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1964), 'Since this type of phraseology has no parallels in the Synoptic gospels, some have considered it as borrowed from the oriental religions, in which gods, kings and prophets emphasize their dignity by "*ego eimi*" followed by an attribute' (p. 84).

⁶ See, for instance, F. Mussner, *The Historical Jesus in the Gospel of John* (trans. W.J. O'Hare; New York: Herder & Herder, 1966), where the 'gnoseological' features of Johannine memory are helpfully analyzed. Noting the fact that the evangelist declares the development of memory and meaning within his tradition, it will not be surprising that earlier historical tradition developed into what is now the Johannine witness, comprising interpreted history rather than ahistorical theology alone. This work has gone largely unengaged within historical Jesus and Johannine studies alike.

⁷ Following the lead of C.K. Barrett, 'The Dialectical Theology of St. John', in his *New Testament Essays* (London: SCM Press, 1972), pp. 49-69, the character of John's dialectical mode of thinking has deserved critical attention. First developed in chapter 7 of Anderson, *Christology*, pp. 137-65, other cognitive-critical analyses of the Johannine and Markan traditions' development may be found in P.N. Anderson, 'Cognitive

understandings of historicity itself, in the light of critical theory, shed new light on the origin and development of these sayings in ways that have not yet been adequately explored—informing also our quests for the Jesus of history, not despite the Johannine Gospel, but precisely because of it. The goal of the present essay is to suggest how this might be so.

The I-Am Sayings in John—their Presentation

The Johannine I-am sayings can be divided into several grammatical categories.⁸ The first simply involves what has been called the ‘absolute’ use of the term, having several subcategories within it. Discussions here revolve around questions of christological altitude and explicitness of messianic reference. While some references (such as John 8.58) seem to bear associations with Yahweh in Exod. 3 and Isa. 43, others simply assert the personal identity of the subject; while some references bear

Origins of John’s Christological Unity and Disunity’, *Horizons in Biblical Theology: An International Dialogue* 17 (1995), pp. 1-24; also in *Psychology and the Bible: A New Way to Read the Scriptures*, Vol. 3 (ed. J.H. Ellens and W. Rollins; Westport, CT: Praeger/Greenwood, 2004), pp. 127-48; and P.N. Anderson, J.H. Ellens and J.W. Fowler, ‘Cognitive-Critical Analysis—A Way Forward in the Scientific Investigation of Gospel Traditions’, in *Psychology and the Bible: A New Way to Read the Scriptures*, Vol. 4 (ed. J.H. Ellens and W. Rollins; Westport, CT: Praeger/Greenwood, 2004), pp. 247-76.

⁸⁾ The word εἰμι (I am) occurs 54 times in the Gospel of John—24 times with ἐγώ (I) following it directly. Sometimes the ‘I’ is understood; at other times it follows the verb or is separated from it by other words. When used by itself, its use is called ‘absolute’; otherwise it refers to a predicate nominative. R.E. Brown (*The Gospel of John*) describes the uses as: ‘the absolute use with no predicate’ (Jn 8.24, 28, 58; 13.19), ‘the use where a predicate may be understood even though it is not expressed’ (Jn 6.20; 18.5); R. Schnackenburg (‘Excursus 8’) describes the non metaphorical uses as: ‘the absolute use, without any addition’ (Jn 6.20; 8.24, 28, 58; 13.19; 18.5, 6, 8), and passages where the formula is ‘combined with a nominalized participle (4.26; 8.18) or with a defining preposition (8.23)’; C.H. Williams (“I Am” or “I Am He”?) rightly questions whether there is much difference among the Johannine absolute I-am sayings between those in which a predicate is absent (‘I am’—Jn 8.24, 28, 58; 13.19) and those in which a predicate is implied by the immediate context (‘I am he’—Jn 4.26; 6.20; 9.9; 18.5, 6, 8).

messianic associations, among others such is questionable, although double meanings may also abound.⁹ The second category involves the use of the predicate nominative—especially with reference to a christological metaphor or image. These are the most distinctive of the Johannine I-am sayings, as their form is not replicated in the Synoptics. A third category involves instances where ἐγώ is understood, as εἰμι occurs either by itself or separated from the subject, ἐγώ. These references most often relate to space and time, although they also assert such claims as the relation of Jesus to the Father and his messianic identity. The fourth category involves the I-am speech of other actants in the narrative, including John the Baptist, the formerly blind man, disciples, and Pilate. John makes negative I-am claims ('I am *not* the Messiah!'), whereas the seeing blind man appears to align himself with Jesus in declaring repeatedly, 'I am'. Therefore, ranging from the highest christological associations to the more mundane, the I-am sayings of the Johannine Jesus include the following instances.

1. The Absolute I-Am Sayings of Jesus in John

Among the absolute uses of ἐγώ εἰμι, some appear to be simple statements of identification, while others bear overtones of Yahweh's self-references in Hebrew scripture. Interestingly, the New Testament presentations of Jesus' using this convention are not unique to John; this convention, employed by Jesus, also occurs several times in the Synoptics, Acts, and Revelation.

Absolute I-Am Sayings in John

- 'I am *he*!' (the Messiah—Jesus to the Samaritan woman, 4.26)
- 'I am—fear not!' (during the sea crossing, 6.20)

⁹) On double meanings in John see D.W. Wead, *The Literary Devices in John's Gospel* (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt Kommissionsverlag, 1970), pp. 30-46; R.A. Culpepper, *The Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), p. 159; E. Richard, 'Expressions of Double Meaning and their Function in the Gospel of John', *NTS* 31.1 (1985), pp. 96-112.

- ‘*I am the one* who bears witness to myself’ (8.18)
- ‘You will die in your sins unless you believe that *I am he* [that is, he that is from above—8.23]’ (8.24)
- ‘When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that *I am he* [that is, the one declaring to the world what I have seen and heard from the Father who sent me]’ (8.28)
- ‘Indeed, I tell you: before Abraham was, *I am!*’ (and they picked up stones to kill him—the penalty for blasphemy, 8.58)
- ‘I tell you this now, before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe that *I am he* [that is, your teacher and lord]’ (13.19)
- ‘*I am he!*’ (in response to the guards’ statement that they are seeking Jesus of Nazareth, 18.5, 6, 8)

As the absolute I-am sayings of Jesus in John bear a great deal of interpretive weight, a common flaw among traditional interpreters is to fill in the gaps—elevating an otherwise mundane claim on account of other more explicitly theological claims. This practice, of course, invokes critical objections, as most I-am statements can be taken in more ways than one. An obverse tendency, however, is to discount a theophanic or messianic association because it is not explicitly made. ‘Not necessarily’ is taken fallaciously to imply ‘necessarily not’. Among the explicitly messianic claims, Jesus appears to affirm such to the Samaritan woman (4.26), claims to bear witness to himself—asserting the importance of believing he is sent from the Father (8.18, 24, 28), and declares things ahead of time so that when they come to pass he will be recognized as the one of whom Moses wrote in Deut. 18.15-22 (the authentic prophet’s word always comes true, Jn 13.19). A theophanic association appears most clearly in Jn 8.58—confirmed by the reaction of the religious leaders, who picked up stones to kill Jesus (the penalty for blasphemy, Lev. 24.16), although charges of blasphemy need not be tied to Yahweh’s words in Exod. 3 in particular.¹⁰ More subtly theophanic, and

¹⁰ As E. Stauffer (‘Appendix II: Provisions against Heretics’, in *Jesus and his Story*, pp. 205-210) points out, Jewish writings of the Great Sanhedrin name dozens of reasons one might be accused of blasphemy or apostasy (including breaking the Sabbath or being a pseudo-prophet, as well as claiming divine associations), so the blasphemy charges in Mark and John do not imply a direct reference to Exod. 3.14.

yet functioning as double entendres—otherwise innocent statements of identification ('It is I') bearing also theological associations ('I am' or 'I am he')—are the appearance of Jesus on the water (6.20) and his self-identification in the garden (18.5, 6, 8). In the former, the disciples receive the Lord into the boat, and their rescue follows directly; in the latter, the soldiers fall to the ground as before the burning bush, followed ironically by their arresting Jesus.

Scholars debate the christological elevation of some of these passages, as well as particular associations, citing either connections with Hebrew scripture or contemporary religious literature. Parallels with the Synoptics are notable, though, as especially the Markan Jesus makes several absolute I-am statements bearing either direct or indirect messianic associations.¹¹ A predicate nominative is used in Jn 8.18, where Jesus claims to be the one who witnesses to himself, but this is a claim to identity rather than a metaphorical reference, as are the following.

2. I-Am Sayings with the Predicate Nominative in John

When I-am sayings use a predicate, they normally identify the referent (Jesus) with a particular theme or metaphor. This is the form of use most distinctive to John, as this metaphorical use of the predicate nominative is not found in the Synoptics.

John's I-Am Sayings with the Predicate Nominative

- 'I am *the bread of life*/*living bread*' (6.35, 41, 48, 51)
- 'I am *the light of the world*' (8.12; see also 9.5)
- 'I am *the gate of the sheepfold*' (10.7, 9)
- 'I am *the good shepherd*' (10.11, 14)
- 'I am *the resurrection and the life*' (11.25)

¹¹⁾ Upon comparing the I-am language of Jesus in John and the Synoptics, R.E. Brown concludes that 'John's absolute use of "I am" ... may be an elaboration of a use of "I am" attributed to Jesus in the Synoptic tradition as well. Once again, rather than creating from nothing, Johannine theology may have capitalized on a valid theme of the early tradition.' Brown, 'Appendix IV', p. 538.

- ‘I am *the way, the truth, and the life*’ (14.6)
- ‘I am *the vine/true vine*’ (15.1, 5)

Among the metaphorical I-am sayings of Jesus in John, sometimes these images and themes follow on (or anticipate) signs performed by Jesus (the water-into-wine miracle→Jesus is the true vine; the feeding of the multitude→Jesus is the bread of life; Jesus is the light of the world→the healing of the blind man; Jesus is the resurrection and the life→the raising of Lazarus, etc.),¹² while others simply further the teachings of Jesus within that context. Just as the absolute I-am sayings have echoes in Hebrew scripture, each of these nine metaphors and themes is also found in Hebrew scripture—often a typological representation of Israel. Such features suggest the homiletical employment of these themes within the Johannine tradition, reflecting also their development and rhetorical crafting by the evangelist.

3. *I-Understood Uses of Ἐγώ in John*

A third type of I-am saying in John actually involves the uses of εἰμι where ἐγώ is understood. As the word εἰμι does not require a subject for it to mean ‘I am’ in Greek, the occurrences of εἰμι by itself, or with ἐγώ separated by one or more other words, still deserve consideration as I-am sayings. Interestingly, most of these uses of ‘am’ with the ‘I’-understood relate to the origin, destiny, space, time, or identity of Jesus as the Messiah.¹³ The origin and destiny of Jesus are declared as being sent from and returning to the Father (7.28, 29, 33, 34, 36; 8.23); the identity of Jesus is declared as one who judges (8.16), God’s Son (10.36), the disciples’ teacher and Lord (13.13), and the king of the Jews (19.21); and Jesus thereby declares himself to be with his disciples

¹² Note that most often the I-am saying expands upon a sign or work of Jesus; twice, however, it introduces a sign (‘light of the world’ and ‘resurrection and the life’). The vine/true vine reference (ch. 15) is separated from the water-into-wine miracle (ch. 2), so at times the echo is distant.

¹³ As a Synoptic reference to the enduring presence of Christ with the I-separated use of εἰμι, the Matthean Jesus likewise declares, ‘I am with you always, to the end of the age’ (Mt. 28.20).

and they with him (7.33; 12.26; 13.33; 14.3, 9; 17.24), and with the Father and the Father with him (16.32; 17.11, 14, 16).

References to Origin, Destiny, Identity, Space, and Time (I-Understood)

- ‘You know me, and you know *where I am from*’ (Jesus to Jerusalem leaders, 7.28)
- ‘I know him, because *I am from him*, and he sent me’ (Jesus to Jerusalem leaders, 7.29)
- ‘*I am with you* a little while longer, and then I go to him who sent me’ (Jesus to Jerusalem leaders, 7.33)
- ‘*Where I am* you cannot come’ (Jesus to Jerusalem leaders, 7.34, 36)
- ‘*I am not alone the one who judges*, but also my having-sent-me Father’ (Jesus to Jerusalem leaders, 8.16)
- ‘You are from below, *I am* from above; you are of this world, *I am not of this world*’ (Jesus to Jerusalem leaders, 8.23)
- ‘Can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, “*I am God’s Son*”?’ (Jesus to Jerusalem leaders, 10.36)
- ‘Whoever serves me must follow me, and *where I am*, there will my servant be also’ (Jesus to his followers in Jerusalem, 12.26)
- ‘You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for *that is what I am*’ (Jesus to his followers at the Last Supper, 13.13)
- ‘Little children, *I am with you* only a little longer’ (Jesus to his followers at the Last Supper, 13.33)
- ‘And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that *where I am*, there you may be also’ (Jesus to his followers in Jerusalem, 14.3)
- ‘*I am with you* all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me?’ (Jesus to Philip, 14.9)
- ‘Yet *I am not alone* because the Father is with me’ (Jesus to his disciples, 16.32)
- ‘*I am no longer in the world/not of the world*’ (Jesus praying for his disciples, 17.11, 14, 16)
- ‘Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me *where I am*, to see my glory, which you have given me

because you loved me before the foundation of the world' (Jesus praying for his disciples, 17.24)

- 'Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews', but, 'This man said, "*I am King of the Jews*"'" (19.21)

Nearly 40 percent of the I-am sayings of Jesus in John fall into this category, and this feature suggests the prolific conventional use of I-am references within the Johannine tradition. As a convention, it is also used extensively in the Synoptics and in other writings of the New Testament, so the use of εἰμι is not distinctively Johannine. Further, many of the I-understood uses of εἰμι in the Synoptics are also similar to those in John.

4. I-Am Sayings of Characters Other than Jesus in John

A fourth type of I-am saying in the Fourth Gospel involves its use by other characters in the story besides Jesus. Many of these are negative statements ('*I am not* the Christ'—John the Baptist, '*I am not* one of his disciples'—Peter; '*I am not* a Jew'—Pilate), but one of them is used with reference to the formerly blind man. With some consternation, witnesses in Jerusalem declare, 'He keeps saying, "I am"' (9.9). Even the negative use of the term by the Baptist highlights the messianic association of the term when used by Jesus, and the seeing blind man ironically is presented as a witness to the light over and against those who claim to see.

I-Am Sayings of Characters in the Johannine Narrative

- '*I am not* the Christ' (3.28, uttered by John the Baptist, clarifying that he had earlier denied being such in 1.20-21—ἐγὼ οὐκ εἰμι ὁ χριστός)
- The formerly blind man kept saying '*I am*' (9.9—ἐκεῖνος ἔλεγεν ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι)
- '*I am not*!' (one of his disciples—Peter, denying his Lord, 18.17, 25—οὐκ εἰμι)
- '*I am not* a Jew, am I?' (Pilate responding to Jesus, 18.35—μήτι ἐγὼ Ἰουδαῖός εἰμι)

- Jesus is declared by the Jewish leaders to have said, '*I am God's Son*' (in Jerusalem, 10.36) and '*I am the King of the Jews*' (before Pilate, 19.21)

In sum, several types of I-am sayings are presented in John, raising any number of critical questions. First, what are the similarities and differences between Johannine and Synoptic presentations of Jesus' I-am sayings, and why are they so? Second, what might have been the background of these sayings within contemporary religions or Jewish scripture? Third, what might be the relations between the I-am sayings in John, the Jesus of history, and the Christ of faith? Fourth, how are history and memory understood critically, and how might these themes have developed in terms of form and function within the Johannine tradition? Fifth, what is the relation between the rhetorical crafting of the Johannine I-am sayings and their epistemological origins? The exploration of these issues is readily observable among critical approaches to the Johannine I-am sayings.

Critical Approaches to the Johannine I-Am Sayings

The state of the issue within critical scholarship shows several movements.

1. John, the Synoptics, and Jesus Research

In an attempt to make sense of the differences between the Johannine and Synoptic presentations of Jesus' teachings, the primary approach among critical scholars has been to infer Synoptic historicity and Johannine theologization. Put otherwise, the Synoptics show a characteristic portrayal of the teachings of the Jesus of history, who taught in parables about the kingdom, uttered short and pithy aphorisms, and was self-effacing about his identity. The Johannine Jesus, consequently, is held to be a construct of the Johannine evangelist, who crafted his presentation according to his central rhetorical interest: seeking to lead audiences to believe that Jesus is the Messiah/Christ and Son of God (Jn 20.31). Thus, the presentation of Jesus' ministry

in John is rhetorical from start to finish, created out of ‘whole cloth’, asserting high christological claims regarding Jesus’ divinity and forging existential connections with later audiences. That being the case, there is nothing conceivably historical in the Johannine I-am sayings, and they even come to serve as examples of the sort of thing Jesus would *not* have said, within some paradigms becoming markers of ahistoricity in other traditions, as well. Therefore, historical-Jesus research can (and must) proceed on the basis of Synoptic (and almost any sources *except* John) presentations, devoid of Johannine theologizing contamination.¹⁴

Problems with such an approach, however, are several. First, just because a type of speech is arguably characteristic of Jesus, this does not establish a singular mode of expression. If Jesus indeed held crowds for more than a few minutes, it is unlikely that one-liner quips were all he had in his didactic quiver. He probably did a good deal of teaching

¹⁴) What J.D.G. Dunn refers to as ‘the Baur consensus on the historical value of John’s Gospel’ (i.e. its negative value) indeed is based upon the problematic differences between John and the Synoptics, of which the pinnacle involves the sayings of Jesus. Says Dunn, ‘Probably most important of all, in the Synoptics Jesus’ principal theme is the kingdom of God and he rarely speaks of himself, whereas in John the kingdom hardly features and the discourses are largely vehicles for expressing Jesus’ self-consciousness and self-proclamation. Had the striking “I am” self-assertions of John been remembered as spoken by Jesus, how could any Evangelist have ignored them so completely as the Synoptics do?’ *Christianity in the Making; Vol. 1, Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 164.

Allow me to correct, however, the impression I gave in *The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus*, p. 2, affirming again Dunn’s good judgment. While Professor Dunn correctly cites Baur and Strauss for the pervasive critical stance against John’s historicity for over a century, I neglected to say that he actually *departs* from that view and sides with C.H. Dodd, whose second monograph on John (*Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel*) outlines many ways that John’s Gospel is actually rooted in an independent historical tradition. While Dunn promises to address the Johannine tradition in his third volume (forthcoming), even in vol. 1 he shows how the Fourth Gospel serves as an important-though-secondary source for historical-Jesus research. Most significant in Dunn’s larger project is his critical contention that the primary source for the memory of Jesus within Gospel traditions was the pre-resurrection Jesus, not simply the post-resurrection Christ. Such an approach also has extensive implications for the present study.

in more in-depth ways, and more extended developments of subjects are likely to have also been a part of his pedagogy. Second, argument from silence is categorically weak. Just because the Synoptic Jesus is not presented as making some utterances that the Johannine Jesus does, this does not prove that he did not make such statements.¹⁵ Certainly, none of the Gospel traditions include all the sorts of things Jesus said, so too much should not be claimed on the basis of Synoptic silence. Third, it cannot be said that the Johannine Jesus avoided parabolic speech altogether and did not develop basileic themes.¹⁶ The word παραβολή (parable) does not occur in John, but the word παροιμία (riddle) does (Jn 10.6; 16.29); and, while the figurative speech is different in John, Johannine symbolism and semeiology are certainly

¹⁵ No fewer than 44 similar Jesus sayings can be found within the Johannine and Markan traditions alone, and yet none of them is identical. See also a dozen or so similar sayings of Jesus in John and Q: Anderson, *Quest*, pp. 131-32, 134-35. The implications for historicity are extensive. It is precisely the non-identical similarities between the Johannine and Markan traditions that pose independent corroborations between these two self-standing traditions. Because of differences at every turn, traditional dependence in one direction or another is disconfirmed; it is precisely their distinctive ways of putting something similar—even in ways paraphrastic—that point to a pre-traditional origin, plausibly the impact of their common subject: Jesus. On historiography and the effective assessment of sources, see M. Howell and W. Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001); J.L. Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); and E. Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern* (3rd edn; Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

¹⁶ Note, for instance, the insistence of C.H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), pp. 366-87; A.M. Hunter, *According to John: The New Look at the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), pp. 78-89; and E. Schweizer, 'What about the Johannine "Parables"?', in *Exploring the Gospel of John* (ed. R.A. Culpepper and C.C. Black; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), pp. 208-219, that the Johannine Jesus did indeed speak in parabolic forms. They are simply different in John. Note also the analyses of which show that short, pithy aphorisms are abundant in John: W.F. Howard, *The Fourth Gospel in Recent Criticism and Interpretation* (London: Epworth Press, 1931), pp. 253-70; A.J.B. Higgins, *The Historicity of the Fourth Gospel* (London: Lutterworth, 1960), pp. 67-82; and Anderson, *Quest*, pp. 52-53.

pervasive.¹⁷ While kingdom sayings are minimal in John, the Johannine presentation of Jesus focuses more on ‘the king’ than do the Synoptics, and most of the Synoptic kingdom motifs are also developed independently in John without overt basileic packaging.¹⁸ Further, two pivotal kingdom (βασιλεία) sayings *are* featured in John, and it might be said that they encompass issues central to both vertical and horizontal aspects of life.¹⁹ Fourth, the Synoptics are also highly theological, and John has a great deal of non-symbolic, mundane material, so the

¹⁷ Consider, for instance, the vast panoply of ways Johannine symbolism is developed in C.R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (2nd edn; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003). See also the vast number of ways Jesus is presented as using riddles, parables, similes, allegories, parallelisms, and puzzles in T. Thatcher, *Jesus the Riddler: The Power of Ambiguity in the Gospels* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006).

¹⁸ While the references to Jesus as βασιλεύς in John appear in four different scenes (Jn 1.49; 6.15; 12.13, 15; 18.33, 37; 19.3, 12, 14, 15, 19, 21), they only occur in the Markan rendering during Jesus’ trial before Pilate in Mark 15. Further, leading Synoptic kingdom themes are certainly present in John—albeit in different form and language—including: (a) the present activity of God’s reign; (b) the invitation to follow Jesus; (c) the inversion of the world’s values; (d) the necessity of coming to God in authentic (childlike) faith; (e) meeting the needs of others with divine love; (f) challenging oppression with liberating truth; (g) refusing violence and putting away the sword; (h) elevating the way of the cross as the paradoxical way of life; (i) inviting an immersion in the Holy Spirit as the source of divine guidance and empowerment. Historical memory transcends verbatim citations despite modern cults of objectivism, empiricism, and positivism; cf. M. Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962); P. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2nd rev. edn.; trans. J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall; London/New York: Continuum, 2004).

¹⁹ In that sense, both vertical and horizontal aspects of the kingdom are explicated in John. First, *entry into the kingdom of God* is a direct contrast to human-originated approaches to God, as one must be born from above (Jn 3.3-8; therefore, humanity must respond to the divine initiative by faith—kingdom entry is addressed centrally in Mt. 5.20; 7.21; 18.3; 19.23-24; Mk 9.47; 10.15, 23-25; Lk. 16.16; 18.17-25). Second, *the way of Jesus’ kingdom* is a direct contrast to worldly power and authority, as Jesus’ reign is one of truth (Jn 18.26-27; therefore his disciples do not resort to worldly force—Mt. 5.3, 10; 11.11-12; 12.28; 18.1-4; Mk 9.1; Lk. 6.20; 7.28; 11.20; 13.18-21; 16.16; 17.20-21). Note also the contrastive function of the two Johannine kingdom passages: entry into the kingdom is *not* x but y, and the way of the kingdom

flat theological-versus-historical assessment of John and the Synoptics itself does not hold.²⁰ Fifth, the Synoptics also present Jesus as speaking in I-am ways about his messiahship; Moses and the burning bush are mentioned by the Markan Jesus; and all nine of the Johannine I-am metaphors and themes are also found in the Synoptics, albeit in different forms. Therefore, these issues cannot be solved on the basis of a simplistic ‘theology-versus-history’ inference.

2. *Attempted Harmonizations*

A second approach to the Johannine-Synoptic differences is an attempted harmonization, sometimes posed by more conservative scholars. As the Synoptics feature the public ministry of Jesus, John is thought to have included the private teachings of Jesus, as would have been remembered by an ‘inner ring’ of disciples—including the Beloved Disciple, if he were one of those closest to Jesus.²¹ Presumably, the Synoptics preserved the public ministry of Jesus, including parables and kingdom sayings, while the private teachings of Jesus, preserved in John, featured his I-am sayings and relation to the Father. While the Johannine and Synoptic traditions may indeed be regarded as ‘bi-optic’ perspectives,²² reflecting individuated perspectives of the pre-Markan

is *not* x but y. Might John’s contrastive approach to basileic themes of Jesus’ teachings be intentional?

²⁰ See, for instance, the multiple categories of mundane material in John, ranging from topographical, archaeological, spatial, sensory, chronological, temperature, seasonal, and political references: Anderson, ‘Aspects of Historicity in the Gospel of John’.

²¹ According to W. Temple, *Readings in St. John’s Gospel* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1947), p. xiv, ‘The discourses recorded in the Synoptic Gospels are mostly such as were delivered to “the multitudes” or to the local religious leaders in Galilee. Those recorded in the Fourth Gospel are mostly such as were delivered in controversy with religious leaders in Jerusalem, or in intimate converse with the inner group of the disciples. It is natural that there should be a broad difference alike of subject-matter and of manner.’ This approach is not without its basis, as Jesus is said to have instructed his disciples privately in Mt. 17.8; Mk 4.10; Lk. 9.18, and in many other instances publicly.

²² Indeed, Temple (*Readings*) is correct: ‘Moreover it is well to remember that where there is a divergence between the Synoptists and St. John, it is not a case of three witnesses against one... The divergence then is between the Second Gospel and the Fourth’ (p. xii). For extended literary analyses of Mark and John as ‘the Bi-Optic Gospels’,

and early Johannine traditions, going back to the earliest stages of their developments, the public/private inference breaks down on several levels.

First, not all the Synoptic parables of Jesus are delivered in public settings, and many are spoken to the disciples on the way to Jerusalem.²³ And, once in Jerusalem, the Synoptic Jesus engages Jewish leaders as does the Johannine Jesus during his multiple visits. Second, and more importantly, the Johannine I-am sayings are mostly delivered in public settings, not private ones. Of the metaphorical I-am sayings in John, only those of John 14 and 15 (the way, the truth, and the life; the true vine) are presented as private teachings to the disciples; the others are all presented as delivered within public contexts (the Galilean crowd in John 6, the Jerusalem public debates in John 8 and 10, the family and friends of Lazarus in John 11, etc.). Further, if Mark's or the other Synoptic traditions had at least some access to apostolic memory and

see Anderson, *Christology* (pp. 153-60, 170-93) and *Quest*, pp. 104-12; see also P.N. Anderson, 'John and Mark—the Bi-Optic Gospels', in *Jesus in Johannine Tradition* (ed. R.T. Fortna and T. Thatcher; Philadelphia: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001), pp. 175-88.

On this matter, however, it is sometimes a factor of four-to-one against the Johannine record, as the characteristic Synoptic-like sayings of Jesus are found in the M and L traditions, in addition to Mark, as well as in Q (I am grateful to Stephen Harris for pointing this out to me).

²³⁾ Jesus also is presented as speaking parabolically not to the crowds but to his disciples in Mark: the meaning of the parable of the sower and the soils, followed by the parables of the lamp and its radiance, the seed growing secretly, and the mustard seed (Mk 4.10-32); parabolic references to millstones around children-corruptors' necks, amputating body parts, and savory/unsavory salt (Mk 9.42-50), the camel and the eye of the needle (Mk 10.23-25), and the parable of the returning master (Mk 13.32-37); in the Q tradition: the parables of the leaven (Mt. 13.33; Lk. 13.20-21) and the lost sheep (Mt. 18.10-14; Lk. 15.3-7); in the Matthean tradition: the interpretation of the parable of the tares and the parables of the tares, the hidden treasure and the pearl, the net, and treasures new and old (Mt. 13.36-53); the parable of the mustard seed (Mt. 17.19-21); the parable of the unforgiving servant (Mt. 18.23-35) and the wages paid to the laborers (Mt. 20.1-16); and in the Lukan tradition: the imagery of the ravens and the lilies and the returning master of the feast (Lk. 12.22-40) and the parable of the unjust steward (Lk. 16.1-9). It thus cannot be said that Synoptic parables were delivered in public settings alone.

preaching, accounting for Johannine-Synoptic differences as a reflection of insider-outsider perspectives falls rather short critically. Then again, it is wrong to assume that all historical memories of even a similar set of events would have remained the same over decades of recollections, selections, oral deliveries, recordings in written forms, editings, and finalizations as complete narratives. So, differing impressions, traditional developments, and rhetorical designs must have played roles in the Johannine-Synoptic distinctives as well.

3. *History-of-Religions Approaches*

A leading historical-critical approach has been to infer a borrowing of themes from contemporary religions, such as proto-Mandean Gnosticism or other history-of-religions sources. Most notable in advancing such a view is Rudolf Bultmann's inference of a Revelation-Sayings Source (an *Offenbarungsreden* collection) having underlain the distinctively Johannine presentation of Jesus' teachings. In Bultmann's view, John the Baptist's gnosticizing movement, from which the followers of Jesus came (according to Jn 1.35-51), must have employed revelation sayings characterized by the poetic form of the Prologue. By means of performing a form-critical reconstruction of Jn 1.1-18, applying similar characteristics to the rest of the Johannine discourse material, and inferring a disordering and (wrong) reordering of the Johannine material, Bultmann is able to reconstruct an imagined 'source' from which the Johannine I-am sayings are said to have emerged. His argument is that the Johannine I-am sayings are similar to the language and thought forms of the *Odes of Solomon* and other Gnostic-Christian literature, enough to have inferred a common religious history origin. This theory also functioned to explain the epistemological origin of John's high and low Christology—the former attributable to an alien source, and the latter attributable to the incarnational Christology of the evangelist.²⁴

²⁴) R. Bultmann, 'The History of Religions Background of the Prologue of the Gospel of John', in *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (1923, ed. and trans. J. Ashton, 2nd edn; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), pp. 26-27. Bultmann's student, H. Becker, developed a book-length explication of what such a source might have

Weaknesses of such a view, however, are several. First, the disordering-reordering scheme Bultmann argues requires more faith than critical sensibilities will allow. Even if some rearrangement may have happened, the extensive scheme argued by Bultmann forfeits credibility in direct proportion to the extendedness of the argument.²⁵ Second, since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, John the Baptist is more closely linked with sectarian Judaism (especially the Qumran community and/or the Essene movement) than with Gnosticism proper.²⁶ Third, the origins of John's agency and revelation schemas are more plausibly Jewish (rooting in the agency motif of Deut. 18.15-22) than in Hellenism or Gnosticism, although John was certainly finalized and delivered within the later Gentile settings.²⁷ Fourth, the contacts between the Odes of Solomon and John simply are not close enough

looked like as his doctoral thesis, published after his death in World War II: *Die Reden des Johannesevangeliums und der Stil der gnostischen Offenbarungsreden* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956). For Bultmann's treatment of the Revelation-Sayings source, see D.M. Smith, *The Composition and Order of the Fourth Gospel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), pp. 15-34.

²⁵ Evaluations of all of Bultmann's evidence for disparate sources underlying John, John's disordering/reordering, and a redactor's overlaying the evangelist's works with his own material are performed in Anderson, *Christology* (pp. 70-169). Using John 6 as a case study, when stylistic, contextual, and theological evidence for disparate sources are plied out within the text—even using Bultmann's own marshalling of evidence on its own terms—the evidence is completely underwhelming. Therefore, the inference of an alien source to account for John's distinctive I-am sayings is critically insufficient.

²⁶ The history of the secondary literature on the subject will bear this out: P.N. Anderson, 'Beyond the Shade of the Oak Tree: Recent Growth in Johannine Studies', *Expository Times* 119.8 (2008), pp. 365-73; and P.N. Anderson, 'John and Qumran: Discovery and Interpretation over 60 Years', in *The Fourth Gospel and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. M. Coloe and T. Thatcher; Atlanta: SBL, 2011), pp. 15-50.

²⁷ Conversely, at least two dozen parallels are evident between the septuagintal rendering of Deut. 18.15-22 and the agency of the Son in the Gospel of John. Cf. P.N. Anderson, 'The Having-Sent-Me Father—Aspects of Agency, Encounter, and Irony in the Johannine Father-Son Relationship', *Semeia* 85 (ed. Adele Reinhartz, 1999), pp. 33-57. Therefore, contra Bultmann, the History-of-Religions origin of the Johannine agency motif is more likely the Jewish agency schema than the Gnostic Redeemer-Myth. Incidentally, the former is also a feature unlikely to have been foreign to the Jesus of history, arguably reflecting his self-understanding of his mission in prophetic, Jewish terms.

to infer any sort of direct derivation either way, and given their relative lateness, John probably influenced them rather than the other way around.²⁸ The point of this analysis is that critical approaches to the epistemological origins of the distinctive Johannine I-am sayings on the basis of Hellenistic religions fall flat in the light of factual stylistic evidence. John's I-am sayings have closer parallels in the Synoptic Gospels and Hebrew scripture than among Hellenistic religions.

More promising, however, is an inference of the Jewish cultic background of the I-am sayings in the Gospels, associated with temple festivals and Jewish feasts. While not a direct response to Bultmann's work, E. Stauffer argues that because the temple in Jerusalem was 'the site of the presence of God', the 'great temple festivals were in essence theophanic celebrations in which the assembled hordes of pilgrims from all over the world experienced that presence'.²⁹ Given that the Feast of Tabernacles (autumn) was a thanksgiving festival commemorating Yahweh's presence and provision in the wilderness, and that Passover (springtime) celebrated Yahweh's deliverance from Egypt, various 'Hallel Psalms' (113–118) were read and sung (note especially Ps. 115.9-11), as were Psalms 46, 50, and 81. In addition, the

²⁸) When comparing the connections between the Fourth Gospel and the Odes of Solomon, the following judgments follow. (a) The parallels with the Odes of Solomon are interesting but not that direct, as most of the Johannine I-am metaphors are missing (bread, shepherd, vine, resurrection, gate), and among those that are present none of them are rendered as an I-am (or even a he-is) saying (although see 'the truth'—*Od. Sol.* 18.15; 24.10, 12; 31.2; 38.1, 4, 10, 16; 41.1, 15; 'the life'—3.9; 'the light'—12.7; 21.6; 36.3; 'the way'—11.3; 22.7; 39.7, 13). (b) It is clear that the Odes are later than the Fourth Gospel, as they appear to have synthesized Johannine material in their references to the Lord's Word (9.3; 10.1; 12.3, 5, 10, 12; 16.7-8, 14, 19; 18.4; 29.9-10; 37.3; 39.9; 41.11, 14) and their amalgamation of such Johannine themes as living water (6.18; 11.7), the light of truth (38.1), and the way/s of truth (11.3; 33.8). (c) The composition seems to reflect a later set of developments, as it reflects speculation upon the 'perfect virgin' and a wondrous conception and birth (19.6-7; 33.5) and even reflects trinitarian developments, referring to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (19.2; 23.22); cf. J.H. Charlesworth, *The Odes of Solomon* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977). Therefore, the Odes of Solomon reflect an expansion upon the Gospel of John and other Gospel narratives rather than a likely source.

²⁹) Stauffer, *Jesus and his Story*, p. 174.

recitation of God's delivering power in Isaiah 43 (featured in the Qumran Isaiah Scroll) as well as in Deut. 32 identifies the *leitmotif* as the I-emphasis of Yahweh in his provision for Israel, couched in theophanic terms.³⁰ According to Stauffer, this emphasis would have been rife within Jewish liturgies before and during the ministry of Jesus, and he argues that Jesus chose the theophanic presence of Yahweh in the wilderness as 'the purest, the boldest, and the profoundest declaration by Jesus of who and what he was'. In appropriating the *ání hú* ('I am') language of Yahweh rooting in Exodus 3 and its expansions, Jesus was declaring, 'where I am, there God is, there God lives and speaks, calls, asks, acts, decides, loves, chooses, forgives, rejects, suffers, and dies... fulfilled in the form of a man'.³¹ On this basis, Stauffer argues that the wilderness theophany motif would have been perfectly at home during the Feast of Tabernacles celebrated in John 7 and 8 and also at the Passover (springtime) sea crossing, presented in both Mark and John (Mk 6.50; Jn 6.20), and likewise at the trials in Jerusalem (Mk 14.62).

Stauffer goes on to argue that later Jewish polemics against the Jesus movement, accusing Jesus of claiming to be God, likely had their origin in traditional memory, confirming Jesus' theophanic self-references. However, such could also have come from knowledge of the Gospels themselves, and even the theophanic connections with the festivals of Tabernacles and Passover could have come from the evangelists or their traditions rather than the Jesus of history. Therefore, while Stauffer and others³² make significant advances on the Jewish history-of-religions background of the Johannine I-am sayings, it is impossible to know whether the theophanic associations with Jesus originated with himself or within Gospel traditions and their rhetorical designs.

³⁰ Stauffer, *Jesus and his Story*, pp. 175-78.

³¹ Stauffer, *Jesus and his Story*, p. 194. While Hajduk, "'Ego Eimi" bei Jesus und seine Messianität', finds Stauffer's argument compelling, Schnackenburg finds it 'extremely dubious' ('Excursus 8', p. 459, n. 26).

³² Under the supervision of Stauffer, J. Richter produced his doctoral dissertation on the topic, '*Ani hu* und *Ego eimi*' (Erlangen, 1956), expanding the associations of the I-am language beyond theophanic meanings in the Old Testament and in the Gospel of John. H. Zimmermann showed how the revelational I-am formula, especially as developed in the Septuagint, found its way into John's presentation of Jesus as the Revealer in his 'Das absolute "Ego Eimi" als die neutestamentliche Offenbarungsformel'.

4. *Origins of the I-am Convention in Hebrew Scripture*

Building on the works of Stauffer, Zimmermann, and Richter (and somewhat reacting against them), several English-speaking scholars have explored further the Jewish origins of the Johannine I-am sayings, distancing them from direct theophanic associations. P.B. Harner, for instance, argues the many appearances of *ánî hú* in Second Isaiah are quite different from the Tetragrammaton of Exod. 3.14-15. As a result, Harner cautions against connecting I-am sayings with theophanic associations in Jewish scripture, in the Synoptics or in John—and *certainly* not with Jesus.³³ D.M. Ball conducts a more extensive analysis of the subject and contributes a valuable 'literary analysis of the function of ἐγώ εἰμι in John's Gospel'.³⁴ By analyzing the relatedness between the 'predicated and unpredicted' I-am sayings in John, he shows the interactivity of the forms over and against their differences, confirming (with E. Schweizer, *Ego Eimi*) the unity of the text. He also notes the ironic function of the interplay between the various meanings of I-am conventions, and he points to the Hebrew scripture background of the Johannine I-am metaphors and themes, which strengthens the links between John and the I-am language of Yahweh in Isa. 42–43.³⁵

The most extensive analysis of the Jewish background of the I-am sayings in John, however, has been performed by C.H. Williams. Noting

³³) Harner, *The 'I Am' of the Fourth Gospel*. Interestingly, one of Harner's presuppositions in his analysis is betrayed in his penultimate paragraph: 'If Jesus had spoken explicitly about his own nature, his own understanding of his role, and his relationship to God, his followers would most likely have preserved such sayings *in all their traditions and accounts of his ministry*. They would have regarded these sayings as *too important to omit from any account of Jesus' ministry*, since they would represent Jesus' own explanation of the significance of his life and work', pp. 64-65 (emphases mine). Is presuppositionless historiography (in addition to presuppositionless exegesis) possible? For instance, Harner points out suitably that double entendre abounds with the I-am conventions in scripture and otherwise, so it cannot be assumed that a particular meaning (a theophanic one) is implied *or* ruled out within a text. Might such be true of the earlier stages of traditions as well as their later ones?

³⁴) Ball, *'I Am' in John's Gospel*, pp. 48-160.

³⁵) Ball, *'I Am' in John's Gospel*, pp. 204-83.

the rich backgrounds of Hebrew scripture (especially in Deuteronomy, Second Isaiah, and Psalms), Williams goes far beyond the treatments of Jewish texts in previous studies, analyzing also their developed interpretations within Judaism. As a result, the predominant Hebrew scripture rendering of Yahweh's *ánî hú* pronouncements should be 'I am he' rather than 'I am'.³⁶ In showing the extensive ways in which Yahweh's assurances of provision for Israel are associated with his self-declarations, Williams argues that the I-am sayings in Mark and in John are connected not to the theophany of Yahweh before Moses and the burning bush (Exod. 3.14), but with Yahweh's assurances of guidance and provision for Israel elsewhere.³⁷ The significance of Williams' contribution is that it clarifies the prevalent I-am claims of Yahweh in scripture, connecting the saving action of Yahweh—rather than his divine being—with Jesus' I-am sayings in John.

This being said, it cannot be claimed that theophanic emphases are entirely missing from John and the Synoptics, even if Gospel I-am

³⁶ See her analyses of Isa. 41.4; 43.10, 13, 25; 44.6; 46.4; 48.12; 51.12; 52.6; Deut. 32.39; and Ps. 102.28 in addition to Exod. 3.14: Williams, '*I am He*', pp. 16-54. Williams also shows how 'I am he' proves the best reading of Yahweh's self-declarations in these and other texts as found in the Peshitta, the Qumran writings, the Vulgate, Samaritan texts, the Targumim and numerous Rabbinic interpretations, pp. 55-213.

³⁷ What the impressive work of Williams accomplishes is to show amply that if Exodus 3 were missing from the biblical witness entirely, there would still be ample foundational texts within Hebrew scripture to account for associations with all of the Johannine absolute I-am sayings, and in many cases more suitably so. Nonetheless, questions still remain regarding: (a) the impact of Exod. 3.6-17 upon the development of I-am motifs in Deuteronomic and Isaianic traditions (i.e. could these traditions have *not* been aware of building on Exodus 3 in their developments of the theme, even if distinctive?); (b) the presence of the burning bush motif explicitly in the Synoptics and implicitly in John; and (c) the possibility of double-meanings, so that some of the Johannine (and Markan) references may refer to more than one biblical text (instead of a singular one), including Exod. 3 as an associated meaning. On the latter point, R. Bauckham notes that while Mk 14.62 does indeed present an affirmative response by Jesus to the high priest's question regarding Jesus' being the Messiah, 'Mark, as well as John, is capable of christological *double entendre*', review of Williams, '*I am He*'; *BibInt* 12.2 (2004), p. 221. So, Exod. 3 still remains in the picture as a plausible association in the teachings of Jesus even if none of the Johannine I-am sayings make direct reference to it.

sayings are accounted for otherwise. Between these traditions, several features are common. First, associations with Moses and the burning bush are declared by Jesus in Mark, so such associations in John are not unique.³⁸ Second, in Mk 14.64 and Jn 10.33 (implicitly in 8.59) Jesus is accused of blasphemy, so bolstering associations with Yahweh and his care for Israel in Deuteronomy, Isaiah, and the Psalms does not offer much of an advance over the theological and historical problems of Jesus' associating himself with the theophanic words of Yahweh in Exod. 3.6-17. Third, epiphanic or theophanic associations with the I-am sayings are presented as anagnorisis (dramatic recognition) scenes in both traditions, so the question is whether the origin of such features was earlier than their final presentations.³⁹ Fourth, agency associations accompany the I-am motif in the Johannine and Synoptic traditions, suggesting additional meanings of the phrase. Fifth, in addition to the I-am texts in John and Mark that do appear to be at least possessive of theophanic overtones (Jn 6.20; 8.58; 18.5-8; Mk 6.50), the

³⁸) Mark 12.26 cites Exod. 3.6-17 directly: 'And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the story about the bush, how God said to him, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"?' This reference to the burning-bush scenario is repeated by Lk. 20.37, and Luke presents Stephen as citing Exod. 3.6-17 with two references to the burning bush and a direct citation of Yahweh's 'I-am' declaration to Moses (Acts 7.30-35). Exod. 3.6-17 is also echoed (though less clearly) in Mt. 22.32. Given that Stephen's witness refers to several primitive themes, such as Jesus as the Son of Man and the Prophet like Moses, might Luke's references to Exod. 3.6-17 reflect an early tradition with some proximity to Jesus? The point here is that theophanic references in the Gospels and Acts are by no means unique to John.

³⁹) Here the work of F. Mussner, *The Historical Jesus in the Gospel of John*, is significant, as the development of memory within the Johannine tradition can be traced. Such is also notable, though, within the Synoptic traditions. Therefore, three levels of recognition-reflection are at work in the Synoptic and Johannine traditions alike—from later to earlier stages in the traditions: (1) rhetorically, the narratives function so as to lead the reader into an encounter with their subject, Jesus; (2) spiritual recognition is referenced in post-resurrection perspective, as the Spirit gives words and insights as needed in the life of the emerging Jesus movement (Mt. 10.19-20; Mk 13.11; Lk. 12.11-12; Jn 14.26; 15.26; 16.13); (3) epiphanic associations with the historic ministry of Jesus are referenced in all four Gospel traditions (Mt. 14.27; Mk 6.50; Lk. 1.19; Jn 6.20; 20.16, 28). Again, these features are *not* unique to John.

epiphanic use of the I-am convention is also rife elsewhere within the New Testament. Therefore, its presence in John may be distinctive, but it is not unique.

5. *Conventional Uses of the Term*

It has also been noticed that the I-am sayings in the Gospel traditions are by no means confined to Jesus and his teachings; rather, they are also purportedly made by false messiahs (Mk 13.6; Mt. 24.5—see the allegation made about Jesus by the Jewish leaders in Jn 19.21) and interestingly by the blind man in John (Jn 9.9).⁴⁰ The negative I-am is presented in the Gospels as uttered by John the Baptist (Mk 1.7; Lk. 3.13; Jn 1.20, 21, 27; 3.28), Jesus (Jn 8.23; 16.32; 17.11, 14, 15), Peter (Mt. 26.22; Jn 18.17, 25), Judas (Mt. 26.25), and Pilate (Jn 18.35)—the latter three as a question. Therefore, it must be noted that the Gospel uses of I-am language reflect conventional forms of self-identification. These conventional associations (both positive and negative) with identity claims suggest why the term could be used as a reference to messianic claims in double-meaning sorts of ways. This feature lends itself to narrative irony, as one might be presented as saying simply ‘It is I’ (as in—not another), when the meaning could also imply ‘I am he’ (as in—the Messiah or some other noted figure).⁴¹

⁴⁰ Cf. Parsons, ‘A Neglected EGO EIMI Saying in the Fourth Gospel?’

⁴¹ The ‘excursus footnote’ of Bultmann (*The Gospel of John*, pp. 225-26, n. 3) cites various forms of the ἐγώ εἰμι convention. (1) The presentation formula answers the question ‘Who are you?’—to which Yahweh replies ‘I am El-Shaddai’ (Gen. 17.1)—found also in Hermetic and Egyptian literature. (2) The *qualificatory formula* answers the question, ‘What are you?’—to which Yahweh replies, ‘I am the first and the last, and apart from me there is no God’ (Isa. 44.6)—found also in Hellenistic and Mandaean literature. (3) The *identification formula* connects the speaker with another person or object—see parallels in Egyptian and Syrian religious literature. (4) The *recognition formula* involves ἐγώ being the predicate; in answer to the question, ‘Who is the one expected, asked for, spoken to?’ the answer comes: ‘I am he’—see Yahweh’s response to the question, ‘Who has done this?’ (Isa. 41.4)—see also Deut. 32.39 and parallels in Hermetic literature.

In Bultmann’s analysis, the I-am sayings in Jn 6.35, 41, 48, 51; 8.12; 10.7, 9, 11, 14; 15.1, 5 are recognition formulae, as here ‘the ἐγώ is strongly stressed and always contrasted with false or pretended revelation’; the I-am sayings in Jn 11.25 and 14.6,

The fact that such variations of meaning in both ἐγώ εἰμι sayings and εἰμι references would have played dialogically on several levels within Palestine and Hellenistic settings makes it clear that limiting an I-am saying to a singular meaning often goes against the double-entendre function of its uses in John. These especially include Jn 6.20 and 18.5-8. Of course, I-am associations with Jesus' being the Messiah, or one who was sent from the Father, also abound (4.26; 8.18, 24, 28; 13.19), although these are not connected directly to Exod. 3.6-17. Rather, they bear a closer connection to the agency and sending motifs, rooted in Deut. 18.15-22.⁴² Given that elevated associations with at least some I-am sayings are evident, an epistemological analysis of their implications may also provide a key to understanding how the rest of the Johannine I-am sayings developed.

6. *Rhetorical Functions of the Johannine I-am Sayings and their Crafting*

With a strong degree of certainty, the Johannine I-am sayings appear to have been crafted rhetorically in order to convince audiences to believe in Jesus as the Messiah/Christ, targeted at both Jewish and Gentile

however, are 'probably identification formulae'; the I-am sayings in Jn 4.26; 8.18, 25; 18.5, 6, 8 are not used as a sacred formula. Elsewhere in his commentary, Bultmann connects the I-am sayings in Jn 6.20 with 'the traditional formula of greeting used by the deity in his epiphany' (p. 216); in 8.24, 28; 13.19 as a reference to 'the Revealer' as an implied predicate (pp. 348-49, 478 n. 3); and in 8.58 as the Revealer being 'the "I" of the eternal Logos, which was in the beginning, the "I" of the eternal God himself' (p. 327).

⁴² An error of form-analyses of the I-am sayings of Jesus in John 8, for instance, is to fail to see the main thrust (the *Leitmotif*) of Jesus' agency claims as the revelatory prophet-like Moses of Deut. 18.15-22: (1) as the 'light of the world' Jesus reveals the life-producing truth of God to humanity (8.12); (2) upon the Pharisees' objection that Jesus is acting as the presumptuous prophet (Deut. 18.20), he affirms that he testifies only to being one of two witnesses, the other of which includes the Father (Jn 8.17-18; Deut. 17.6; 19.15) precisely because he represents the word of the Father authentically (Jn 8.14-16; Deut. 18.15-18); (3) at the Pharisees' failure to understand Jesus' words, he asserts that they will be held accountable for their response to the one sent from the Father (Jn 8.19-25; Deut. 18.19); (4) referencing a confirming sign that the prophet's words had come true, Jesus refers to his being lifted up on the cross as a testimony to his authentic representation of the Father, whose message he conveys authentically (Jn 8.28-29; Deut. 18.20-22).

members of the audience. As a means of connecting the redemptive work and identity of Jesus with that of God, the *absolute* use of the phrase ties the mission of Jesus to the steadfast provision of Yahweh for Israel, associated also with the burning-bush theophany of Exod. 3.14. The agency motif of Deut. 18.22 is also asserted in Jesus' claiming that he is sent from the Father, which may have involved primitive-and-later rhetorical claims within the Johannine tradition.

The *metaphorical and thematic* (or predicate nominative) I-am sayings function rhetorically in at least two ways. First, they either expand upon or introduce several of the signs of Jesus. In that sense, they clearly connect the 'significance' of the signs with christological meanings serving the purposes of the evangelist. Second, the images connect with audiences, both Jewish and Gentile. For Jewish audiences, each of the I-am metaphors echoes a typology of Israel in Hebrew scripture. As Israel is a light to the nations (Isa. 42.6; 49.6), Israel's leaders are described as shepherds (2 Sam. 5.2; Ps. 78.70-72), Israel is a luxuriant vine (Hos. 10.1), the Torah is associated with bread (Deut. 8.3), etc. Further, each of the nine I-am metaphors and themes in John possesses cross-cultural qualities that address existential needs of humanity, so they would communicate well to Gentile audiences as well. Therefore, the absolute and metaphorical/thematic I-am sayings of Jesus in John further directly the purpose of the narrative, which is to lead audiences—Jewish and Gentile alike—to believe in Jesus as the Messiah/Christ (Jn 20.31).

In sum, recent scholarship on the I-am sayings of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel clarifies the following. First, while significant differences in form abound between John and the Synoptics, there is still a good deal of similarity between the absolute I-am sayings in John and the Synoptics and between the Johannine I-am metaphors and imagery used by the Synoptic Jesus. In fact, the Johannine-Synoptic I-am similarities are more pronounced than those that may exist between the Johannine narrative and Hellenistic religions, including later developments in Christian Gnosticism, suggesting earlier traditional origins. Second, as the most compelling origin of the I-am sayings is Hebrew scripture, a good number of texts and typologies (not just one) are likely to have underlain the Johannine and Synoptic origins of these sayings. Overall, the absolute uses of the term bear associations with the sustaining and

empowering work of Yahweh in Isaiah and Deuteronomy, although the self-identification of Yahweh in Exodus 3–4 cannot be ruled out altogether. Likewise, the Johannine I-am metaphors bear close similarities to associations with Israel in Hebrew scripture, connecting the ministry of Jesus with the embodying of leading typologies of Israel. Third, earlier traditional I-am material is developed within the Johannine narrative, serving theological and rhetorical purposes effectively. This does not mean, however, that its origin was solely late and apologetic; connections with Jesus have yet to be ascertained.

The I-Am Sayings in Bi-Optic Perspective

As the Markan and Johannine traditions reflect two individuated traditions, their similarities and differences have considerable implications for Jesus research. Given that among the numerous similarities between John and the Synoptics, *none* of them is identical, it is unlikely that either is dependent on the other. Then again, it is also unlikely that John's independence from the Synoptics implies total isolation, as some Johannine familiarity with at least Mark is a plausible inference.⁴³ Whatever one's approach to the relations between John and the Synoptics, the similarities and differences will be suggestive, and this is especially the case regarding the I-am sayings and their features.

Given that a primary basis for the judgment that Jesus never made I-am statements as represented in John is 'their conspicuous absence in the Synoptics', a closer analysis is required. Occurrences of εἰμι in John number 54 and 34 in the Synoptics; occurrences of ἐγώ number

⁴³) While the works of P. Gardner-Smith, *Saint John and the Synoptic Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938) and D.M. Smith, *John Among the Gospels* (2nd edn; Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2001) are overall compelling, as none of the similarities between John and the Synoptics are identical, the Johannine evangelist may indeed have heard the Gospel of Mark delivered in a meeting for worship, as argued by I.D. MacKay, *John's Relationship with Mark* (WUNT II, 182; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2004). R. Bauckham plausibly argues that the Johannine Gospel was crafted for readers of Mark in 'John for Readers of Mark', in *The Gospels for all Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (ed. R. Bauckham; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 147-71.

131 in John and 65 in the Synoptics. And, both words occur together as ἐγώ εἰμι 5 times in Matthew, 3 times in Mark, 4 times in Luke, and 24 times in John. Therefore, while I-am words are far more pronounced in John than in the Synoptics, they are still present in significant ways, also showing a good number of general similarities with their uses in John.

1. Absolute I-am Sayings of Jesus in John and the Synoptics

As R.E. Brown and others acknowledge, similarities between the absolute I-am sayings in John and the Synoptics are evident, although few scholars connect these sayings with the language of the historical Jesus.⁴⁴ While only one of these (Jesus’ declaring ‘It is I; fear not!’ at the sea crossing) is arguably reminiscent of the same words of Jesus at the same event, interesting similarities still abound with the other sayings despite their considerable differences.

Table 1: Similar *ego eimi* (ἐγώ εἰμι) sayings of Jesus in the Synoptics and John

The Synoptics	John
On the sea, Jesus declares—θαρσεῖτε, ἐγώ εἰμι· μὴ φοβεῖσθε (‘Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid!’ Mk 6.50; Mt. 14.27)	On the sea, Jesus declares—ἐγώ εἰμι· μὴ φοβεῖσθε (‘It is I; do not be afraid!’ Jn 6.20)
On Jesus and Abraham—A daughter and a son of Abraham are mentioned (Lk. 13.16; 19.9); περὶ δὲ τῶν νεκρῶν ὅτι ἐγείρονται οὐκ ἀνέγνωτε ἐν τῇ βίβλῳ Μωϋσέως ἐπὶ τοῦ βάτου πῶς εἶπεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεὸς λέγων· ἐγὼ ὁ θεὸς Ἀβραάμ καὶ [ὁ] θεὸς Ἰσαάκ καὶ [ὁ] θεὸς Ἰακώβ; οὐκ ἔστιν θεὸς νεκρῶν ἀλλὰ ζώντων·(And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the story about the	On Jesus and Abraham—Οἶδα ὅτι σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ ἐστε· ἀλλὰ ζητεῖτέ με ἀποκτείνειν, ὅτι ὁ λόγος ὁ ἐμὸς οὐ χωρεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν.... Ἀβραάμ ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ἠγαλλιάσατο ἵνα ἴδῃ τὴν ἡμέραν τὴν ἐμήν, καὶ εἶδεν καὶ ἐχάρη.... ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, πρὶν Ἀβραάμ γενέσθαι ἐγώ εἰμι (‘I know that you are descendants of Abraham; yet you look for an opportunity to kill me, because there

⁴⁴) Brown, ‘Appendix IV’, p. 538.

Table 1: (*Cont.*)

The Synoptics	John
bush, how God said to him, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”? He is God not of the dead, but of the living’, Mk 12.26-27; cf. Mt. 22.31-32; Lk. 20.37-38).	is no place in you for my word... Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad... Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am’, Jn 8.37, 56, 58).
I-am claims to being the Messiah—πολλοὶ ἐλεύσονται ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί μου λέγοντες ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι, καὶ πολλοὺς πλανήσουσιν (‘Many will come in my name and say, “I am!” and they will lead many astray’, Mk 13.6; Lk. 21.8; Mt. 24.5 adds χριστός—‘I am the Christ’)	I-am claims to being the Messiah—ἐγὼ εἰμι, ὁ λαλῶν σοι (in response to the Samaritan woman declaring her belief that the coming of Messiah/Christ will disclose all things, Jesus declares to her: ‘I who speak to you am he’, Jn 4.25-26)
At a trial of Jesus (when asked by the high priest if he were the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One) he declares—ἐγὼ εἰμι, καὶ ὅψεσθε τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐκ δεξιῶν καθημένον τῆς δυνάμεως καὶ ἐρχόμενον μετὰ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ (‘I am; and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven’, Mk 14.61-62; cf. Lk. 22.70; Mt. 26.63-64)	At a trial of Jesus (when asked by Pilate if Jesus were a king) he declares—σὺ λέγεις ὅτι βασιλεὺς εἰμι. ἐγὼ εἰς τοῦτο γεγέννημαι καὶ εἰς τοῦτο ἐλήλυθα εἰς τὸν κόσμον, ἵνα μαρτυρήσω τῇ ἀληθείᾳ· πᾶς ὁ ὢν ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας ἀκούει μου τῆς φωνῆς (‘You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice’, Jn 18.37)

The first I-am statement of Jesus in the Synoptics and John occurs as a declaration by Jesus at a sea-crossing event. As in the case of Jn 6.16-21, Jesus is presented in Mk 6.45-52 (followed by Matthew) as also appearing to the disciples during a sea crisis, and just before the storm subsided, declaring the same words: ἐγὼ εἰμι· μὴ φοβεῖσθε (‘It is I; do not be afraid!’—or, should that be ‘I am; fear not!’?).

Whether some event such as this happened in history is impossible to ascertain beyond its attestation in the Gospel traditions, although the Johannine and Markan similarities are not close enough to suggest John's dependence on Mark.⁴⁵ As a result, differences of interpretation appear to be rooted in originative factors rather than developing ones—(a) differing perceptual impressions of the ambiguous appearance of Jesus (going past the boat versus coming to the boat), (b) differing reactions by the disciples (the disciples in Mark perceive Jesus to be a ghost; no such perception is recorded in John), (c) differences in Jesus' words (Mark anticipates the I-am saying with *θαρσείτε*, 'Cheer up!' or 'Take heart!'), (d) leading to differing presentations of the outcomes ('It is I—not a Ghost' in Mark; 'I am' in John), (e) leading to entirely different theological interpretations of the scenario (Mark's perceptual set features the calming of the waves; John's theophanic association leads to the calming of the disciples and their deliverance).⁴⁶

The point here is *not* to argue that I-am words of Jesus were delivered in conjunction with an appearance to the disciples on the sea (such is impossible to prove *and* to disprove); it *is* to say that if the ambiguous *ἐγώ εἰμι* words (or their Aramaic equivalents)—in *any* setting—were experienced in radically different ways between the formative origins of the Markan and the Johannine renderings, this could account for their distinctive trajectories.⁴⁷ It may even be that such words were never

⁴⁵ J.P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Vol. 2, Mentor, Message, and Miracles* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1994), pp. 919-24, infers that while a fellowship meal in the wilderness is plausible, a sea rescue is not. However, if Fortna and Lindars are correct (R.T. Fortna, *The Gospel of Signs: A Reconstruction of the Narrative Source Underlying the Fourth Gospel* [SNTSMS, 11; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970], p. 63; B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972], p. 236-37) that the three accounts of a feeding, a sea crossing, and discussions of the feeding in Mark 6 and 8 and John 6 represent individuated traditions, it is plausible that these independent accounts may have rooted in a similar set of events. Like the passion narrative, corroborative attestation between the Bi-Optic Gospels outweighs theological disqualification from historicity proper.

⁴⁶ For a fuller analysis of the Johannine and Markan renderings of the event see Anderson, *Christology*, pp. 170-93.

⁴⁷ Most telling here are the perceptual differences between presentations of Jesus' I-am statement in Mark 6 and John 6. If the first impressions of some disciples was

uttered with intended theological meanings, and that a statement of identification by Jesus, seeking to console his distraught disciples, might have been interpreted variously. Thus, the very ambiguity of I-am language in its rhetorical delivery would also have applied to its originative perceptions and memories, including different eikonic impressions within the earliest stages of the pre-Markan and Johannine traditions. Indeed, an epiphanic association would have been enough to create a meaningful category of interpretation in the cognitive framework of the Johannine originative tradition, not simply its later developments. On the basis of Mark alone, it cannot be said that Jesus never said 'I am' or 'It is I' with reference to himself.

The second I-am saying of Jesus in Mark is presented as Jesus' quoting God's words to Moses in Exod. 3.6: 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'. Like the debates with Jewish leaders in John 8, this dialogue is presented as taking place in Jerusalem, although the dispute in Mark is over the resurrection. Still, associations with the theophanic appearance of Yahweh in the wilderness are by no means unique to John; they are even more pronounced in Mark and the Synoptics. Further, when compared with John 7–8, several other features in Mark 11–12 are also apparent: challenges to Jesus' authority are issued (Mk 11.28; Jn 8.13), the agency of the Son is asserted with prominence (Mk 12.1–11; Jn 8.12–29), religious leaders try to arrest Jesus for the first time (Mk 12.12; Jn 7.30), Abraham is drawn into the discussion (Mk 12.26; Jn 8.33–58), and the burning-bush motif is referenced directly or indirectly (Mk 12.26; Jn 8.58). While scholars have sought to distance the I-am saying of

that of seeing Jesus going past the boat and thinking it was a ghost, his words $\theta\alpha\rho\sigma\epsilon\acute{\iota}\tau\epsilon$, $\epsilon\gamma\acute{\omega}\ \epsilon\iota\mu\iota\cdot\ \mu\eta\ \phi\omicron\beta\epsilon\iota\sigma\theta\epsilon$ ('Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid!') may well have been experienced as a statement of identification ('Don't worry; it is I, not a ghost'). In John, however, there is no mention of a ghost perception, and Jesus is coming towards the boat, not past it. Within that perceptual set, it could be that the Johannine association was more theophanic from day one, perhaps reminiscent of the Septuagintal rendering of the words of Yahweh before Moses at the burning bush in Exod. 3.14, $\epsilon\gamma\acute{\omega}\ \epsilon\iota\mu\iota\ \acute{\omicron}\ \acute{\omega}\nu$, 'I am that I am', as well as other I-am declarations of Yahweh in Hebrew scripture. In cognitive-critical perspective, this would also explain why the I-am language of Jesus may have assumed meaningful significance for the evangelist and his rendering of Jesus' ministry.

Jn 8.58 from Exodus 3 and its associated meanings, on the basis of Mark the divorcing of Jesus from Abraham and the I-am sayings of Yahweh in Exodus 3 cannot be done.

The third I-am saying in Mark shows Jesus as warning his followers of false Messiahs claiming 'I am'. Interestingly, it is not only Jesus in the Fourth Gospel who claims messianic associations in I-am ways (Jn 4.26; 8.18, 24, 28; 13.19), but the Synoptic Jesus also warns that false pretenders will claim ἐγώ εἰμι (Mk 13.6; Lk. 21.8; the implicit is made explicit in Mt. 24.5, as ὁ χριστός is added) and warns his disciples to not be fooled by those claiming such. Note also that the crowd at the crucifixion in Mt. 27.43 accuses Jesus of claiming '*I am* God's Son', a feature presented less directly by Jesus in Jn 3.18; 5.25; 11.4, and allegedly in Jn 10.36. Therefore, while some scholars will question messianic associations with the Johannine I-am sayings, on the basis of the Synoptics alone this cannot be done.

The fourth passage in Mark where Jesus uses ἐγώ εἰμι language occurs climactically at the tribunal before Pilate. Again, the reference is not developed theologically in Mark, although it *does* draw a demand from the high priest to have Jesus put to death due to blasphemy (Mk 14.63-64). In Mark as well as John, Jesus is accused of blasphemy and threatened with death directly after declaring in the absolute sense: ἐγώ εἰμι. The plot then thickens, laced with subtle irony. When Jesus is asked during his trial before the Jewish leaders if he were indeed 'the Christ, the Son of the Blessed', Jesus declares, ἐγώ εἰμι (Mk 14.62; see also Mt. 26.63-64 and Lk. 22.67-70). A bit later Pilate asks Jesus if he were the King of the Jews, and he simply declares, 'You have said so' (Mk 15.2; Mt. 27.11; Lk. 23.3). John corroborates this pattern, and following Pilate's question as to whether Jesus was a king, Jesus replies: 'I am (ἐγώ εἰμι); and my kingdom is one of truth' (Jn 18.37). Again, the point is *not* to argue that Jesus actually used 'I am' language before the Jewish leaders and/or before Pilate in his historical trials, although this could have been the case. It *is* to point out that Mark's tradition also includes a climactic and theological I-am saying, challenging the assumption that John's distinctive presentation of such language as a self-reference of Jesus was unique. On the basis of the Synoptics alone it cannot be claimed that Jesus never used I-am language at his trials.

As a result of comparing the four absolute I-am sayings of Jesus in Mark with those of John, only one of them plausibly represents

individuated representations of a common event—the sea-crossing appearance. Nonetheless, impressive parallels abound with all three of the other cases as well, so that it cannot be claimed on the basis of Mark and the Synoptics that the Jesus of history never made I-am statements as a means of self-identification, as a messianic reference, as an association with the theophanic events of Exodus 3, or as a claim resulting in charges of blasphemy by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. Of course, this does not prove that Jesus indeed used such language, and ambiguous statements may have been interpreted diversely in the earliest stages of traditional developments as well as being used differently within later rhetorical craftings. Corroborated by distinctive-yet-similar presentations of Jesus making absolute I-am statements, the claim that such language was never uttered by Jesus on the basis of the Synoptics alone is highly problematic.

2. Predicate Nominative I-am Sayings of Jesus in John and the Synoptics

Because the contrasts between the Johannine I-am sayings and the Synoptics are most pronounced in terms of their form-critical differences, the question is how significant the real differences in form might be. Again, nothing like the dozen or more times the Johannine Jesus claims ‘I am’ with reference to a predicate nominative is present in any of the Synoptics. Therefore, scholars infer that if the Jesus of history had actually made such claims, they would be replicated in more traditions than the Johannine. Further, as many of the I-am predicate nominative terms in John expand upon or introduce a ‘sign’ performed by Jesus, the rhetorical function of the Johannine I-am metaphors is understandably assumed to comprise their origin rather than historical memory. That being the case, however, a looming issue involves the question of how significant literary forms, or the absence thereof, might be in determining historicity, and likewise, ahistoricity.

In his analysis of Mark, Samuel Sandmel launches three critiques of form criticism as a historiographic methodology.⁴⁸ ‘First, the method is unreliable, for it builds upon a suppositious case about the universals in the growth of folk literature (and hence the classification into

⁴⁸) S. Sandmel, ‘Prolegomena to a Commentary on Mark’, in *New Testament Issues* (ed. R. Batey; New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1970), pp. 45-56.

types) and then proceeds to try to make Gospel material fit the pre-conceived patterns—and subjectivity has nowhere been more rampant in scholarship than in New Testament form criticism.⁴⁹ A second criticism involves the ironic fact that while form criticism was intended to identify historical units of tradition underlying the Gospels, it fails to allow an evangelist any historical knowledge—assuming Gospel writers would not have altered pristine forms or even have contributed to their development. Therefore, the assumption that ‘an evangelist never created material, he only copied it’ functions to distance the Jesus of history (wrongly) from the theological interests of the evangelists.⁵⁰ Third, the atomization of Gospel narratives into form-critical pericopes has functioned to distort the overall harmonies between the Gospels so that Mark is too often not treated on its own terms.⁵¹ As a result, Sandmel also wonders if redaction-critical analysis of the Synoptics is too harmonizing, seeing Matthew and Luke as benign supplementers of Mark. Perhaps ‘Matthew wrote because he disapproved of Mark, and Luke wrote because he disapproved of Matthew and Mark’.⁵²

The point of noting Sandmel’s critique of form-critical approaches to Mark for determining historicity as an unreliable methodology for producing positive results is that such is even more unreliable for producing negative certainties. If it cannot be known that the conventions of parables and kingdom sayings went back to Jesus alone (instead

⁴⁹ Sandmel, ‘Prolegomena to a Commentary on Mark’, p. 49. And, the most extended case of form-critical speculation in New Testament scholarship is the highly imaginative diachronic attempts to explain the presence of John’s apparently historical tradition given the assumption that its author cannot have been imparting historical memory—based upon scholars’ prior claims to know whom the Fourth Evangelist cannot have been. Cf. Anderson, *Riddles*, pp. 104-14.

⁵⁰ Sandmel, ‘Prolegomena’, pp. 49-50.

⁵¹ Sandmel, ‘Prolegomena’, p. 50. Indeed, John’s alternative presentation of Jesus is arguably historical in its interest as well as theological, precisely because of its differences. Cf. Anderson, *Riddles*, pp. 195-219.

⁵² Sandmel, ‘Prolegomena’, p. 51. Sandmel also here references E.C. Colwell, *John Defends the Gospel* (Chicago: Willet, Clark & Co., 1936), who argues that John was written to supplant the Synoptics—claiming to go beyond his work. I would take it down a notch, though; the first edition of John seems to augment (and to some degree correct) Mark, while the later material in John (Jn 1.1-18 and chs. 6, 15-17, and 21) seems to complement the Synoptics. Cf. Anderson, *Riddles*, pp. 125-55.

of pre-Markan deliveries of material or Synoptic traditions), how can the relative lack of, or the distinctive presentations of, such forms in John reliably negate Johannine historicity? And, given the lack of I-am sayings using the predicate nominative in the Synoptics, how can arguments from Synoptic silence regarding the form alone determine conclusively that John’s presentation of Jesus’ ministry is constructed of ‘whole cloth’—cut by the evangelist to fit solely his rhetorical interests—with no rooting in the historic ministry of Jesus? Therefore, Gospel historians deserve to do more critical thinking about critical theory when it comes to historiography, especially regarding what is held to determine conclusively the canons of historicity or ahistoricity, proper. If Sandmel is anywhere close to correct, features of form alone cannot historicity determine or undermine.

This is especially interesting when the nine metaphors and terms used in the Johannine predicate nominative I-am sayings are readily identified within the teachings of Jesus *in* the Synoptics. Put pointedly, if the lack of predicate nominative I-am sayings in the Synoptics is the most robust basis for judging John’s presentation of Jesus’ teaching ministry to be ahistorical, why are *all nine of these metaphors and terms* found so prolifically in the Synoptics—with some of them used even more often and in more contexts than in John? While differences in each case abound, the similarities on this matter have largely been overlooked by Gospel and Jesus scholars alike. Note, for instance, the following particular parallels.

Table 2: Johannine I-am metaphors and terms in the Synoptic Jesus’ teachings

The Synoptics	John
ἄρτος—Jesus is tempted to turn stones into <i>bread</i> (Mt. 4.1-4; Lk. 4.1-4), feeds the multitudes with <i>bread</i> (Mt. 14.13-21; 15.32-39; Mk 6.32-44; 8.1-10; Lk. 9.10-17), and instructs his disciples to ask God for <i>daily bread</i> (Mt. 6.11; Lk. 11.3)	ἄρτος—Jesus feeds the multitude with <i>bread</i> , the crowd ‘tempts’ Jesus with Moses’ giving ‘ <i>bread from heaven</i> ’ to eat, but in contrast to <i>death-producing bread</i> in the wilderness, Jesus is the <i>bread of life</i> (Jn 6.1-13, 31-35, 41, 48-58)
φῶς—Jesus’ disciples are the <i>light of the world</i> (Mt. 5.14-16)	φῶς—Jesus is the <i>light of the world</i> (Jn 8.12; 9.5)

(Continued)

Table 2: (Cont.)

The Synoptics	John
θύρα—Authentic prayer is behind closed <i>doors</i> (Mt. 6.6); negotiating the locked or narrow <i>gate/door</i> is key (Lk. 11.7; 13.25)	θύρα—The gate is the only authentic way into the sheepfold; Jesus is the <i>gate for the sheep</i> (Jn 10.1, 2, 7, 9)
ποιμὴν—The parable of the <i>shepherd</i> (Mt. 18.10-14; Lk. 15.3-7) emphasizes the care of Jesus for his fold; the <i>shepherd</i> divides sheep from goats (Mt. 25.32)	ποιμὴν—The <i>shepherd</i> enters through the gate; Jesus is the <i>good shepherd</i> , and he seeks to gather his sheep into one flock under one <i>shepherd</i> (Jn 10.2, 11, 14, 16)
ἀνάστασις—Debates over the <i>resurrection</i> arise between Jesus and Jewish leaders (Mt. 22.23-33; Mk 12.18-27; Lk. 20.27-40), and the raising of Jarius's daughter (Mt. 9.18-26; Mk 5.21-43; Lk. 8.40-56) brings life out of death	ἀνάστασις—Jesus declares that the <i>resurrection</i> will lead to just consequences for the good and the wicked; Martha believes Lazarus will rise again on the last day; Jesus is the <i>resurrection</i> and the life (Jn 5.29; 11.24, 25)
ὁδὸς—The <i>difficult way</i> and the 'way of <i>righteousness</i> ' (Mt. 7.14; 21.28-32) lead to life	ὁδὸς—Jesus is the <i>way</i> , through whom believers have access to the Father and to life (Jn 14.6)
ἀλήθεια—The way of God in <i>truth</i> is what Jesus teaches (Mt. 22.16; Mk 12.14, 32; Lk. 20.21)	ἀλήθεια—The <i>truth</i> is liberating, Jesus speaks the <i>truth</i> , and Jesus is the <i>truth</i> (Jn 8.32; 10.45-46; 14.6)
ζωή—The narrow way leads to <i>life</i> (Mt. 7.14), and Jesus discusses what it means to inherit <i>eternal life</i> (Mt. 19.16, 23-30; 10.17; Mk 10.23-31; Lk. 18.18, 24-30)	ζωή—Jesus came that believers might have <i>life</i> (Jn 3.15-16, 36; 10.10), Jesus is the <i>life</i> (Jn 11.25; 14.6), knowing the Father and the Son is <i>eternal life</i> (Jn 17.2-3)
ἄμπελος—The owner of the <i>vineyard</i> sends his son to the tenants (Mt. 21.33-41; Lk. 20.9-16), and Jesus drinks of the fruit of the <i>vine</i> one last time (Mt. 26.29; Mk 14.25; Lk. 22.18)	ἄμπελος—Jesus is the <i>vine</i> , and the Father is the <i>vinedresser</i> ; Jesus is the <i>true vine</i> , and his followers are the branches; unless they abide in him they can bear no fruit (Jn 15.1-5)

Just as it cannot be said that the Synoptic Jesus never employs absolute I-am language, so it cannot be said that the Synoptic Jesus never employs the metaphors and themes used within the Johannine predicate nominative I-am sayings. While the form of the presentations may be Johannine, the sayings cannot be claimed to have originated in-and-only-in John's later traditional developments, as such imagery is clearly employed by the Jesus of the Synoptic and Johannine traditions alike. Therefore, in bi-optic perspective, these theologically rich metaphors can be clearly identified as central components of Jesus' teaching about his mission and the character of God's workings in the world.

First, 'bread' as a subject and metaphor occurs in John (ἄρτος, Jn 6.1-15, 26-58) and the Synoptics in a variety of ways. First, it is the subject of the only miracle in all four Gospels. Second, after crossing the sea, the disciples discuss the fact that they had forgotten to bring bread, whereupon bread and leaven are developed as references to the teachings of Jesus (versus those of the Sadducees and the Pharisees) and what Jesus can provide (Mk 8.14-21; Mt. 16.5-12; Lk. 12.1). Third, Jesus as a producer of bread is presented in both Q and John as a basis for temptation—argued by Satan (Mt. 4.1-4; Lk. 4.1-4) or by the crowd (Jn 6.26-58). The Jesus of Q brings Deut. 8.3 into the picture, connecting bread with the word that proceeds from the mouth of God; in John Jesus is the Word, and he not only gives bread, but he is that which he gives.

The second I-am metaphor, 'the light of the world' (τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου, Jn 8.12; 9.5), is found also in the Synoptics, but in Matthew it is Jesus' disciples who are 'the light of the world' (Mt. 5.14), while in John the focus is Jesus. Two implications arise: first, the similarity of this imagery is impressive, suggesting a traditional origin or connection likely appropriating Zion's being a source of blessing as a light to the nations (Isa. 9.2; 42.6; 49.6; 60.1, 19). Second, the contrast between John and the Synoptics is also significant, as the Matthean Jesus invites his followers to take up the mantle entrusted to the children of Abraham to be a blessing to the nations (Gen. 12.1-3) by means of their faithful witness; the Johannine rendering focuses on Jesus, to which his followers are invited to witness (as did John the Baptist, Jn 1.6-8), which, coming into the world enlightens all (Jn 1.9). This might even reflect a dialectical engagement between the Johannine and Matthean traditions,

although it is impossible to know whether the enlightenment motif is first slanted towards the mission of the disciples or towards Christology. Then again, Jesus' having used the same image in more than one direction is also not impossible to imagine; whatever the case, the 'light of the world' motif is not unique to the Johannine tradition.

The third I-am metaphor, 'the gate to the sheepfold' (θύρα, Jn 10.7, 9), has parallels in Mt. 7.13-14 and Lk. 13.23-24, where the narrow gate that leads to salvation is contrasted to the broad gate that leads to destruction. These passages, likely derived from the Q tradition, are also connected with the Matthean warning against false prophets who deceive the flock as false prophets who come in sheep's clothing but are inwardly ravenous wolves (Mt. 7.15).⁵³ The primary similarity between Synoptic and Johannine presentations of 'the gate' is the narrowing of valid options for those who would authentically respond to God. In contrast to competing leaders and figures, the way of Jesus is credited with being the narrower-yet-better way.

As in John 10, the connection in Matthew and Luke is also very close to the fourth I-am metaphor, 'the good shepherd' (ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλός, Jn 10.11, 14), which likewise has clear parallels to Synoptic parables on the shepherd and the sheep (Mt. 18.10-14; Lk. 15.3-7). Even in considering the differences between the ways Matthew and Luke employ the Q parable about the shepherd (note Matthew's focus upon the Father's seeking the lost versus the Lukan emphasis upon greater rejoicing in heaven over one repentant sinner than 99 self-righteous ones), the Johannine parallels are impressive. The Johannine Jesus emphasizes (a) the nurturing character of the Good Shepherd's work, (b) the contrast between the authentic shepherds and those who care only for themselves (and not the flock), and (c) the authentic shepherd's willingness to sacrifice or to lay down his life for the sheep. The christological thrust of the Johannine emphasis is thus dual: an emphasis on responding in faith to Jesus as the authentic Shepherd of Israel, and the

⁵³) Note the 13 connections between the Johannine and Q traditions, implying some sort of contact between them (Anderson, *Quest*, pp. 134-35). While some interfluentiality may have existed between them, the 'bolt out of the Johannine blue' in Q suggests the early Johannine tradition may have been a source for Q, unless they both went back to Jesus or some other unknown source (ibid., pp. 117-19).

presentation of Jesus as the model shepherd—an example to Christian leaders in later times, calling them to be willing to suffer for the flock if required. Again, while the Johannine tradition crafts the shepherd motif in ways suitable to its developing situation and needs, the shepherd motif is unlikely to have been a Johannine invention.

The fifth I-am theme, ‘the resurrection’ (ἡ ἀνάστασις, Jn 11.25), is also not unique to John as a prevalent Gospel motif. Indeed, the Synoptic Jesus also emphasizes the resurrection in his teachings, and the Sadducees come challenging Jesus in all three Synoptic accounts (Mt. 22.23-33; Mk 12.18-27; Lk. 20.27-40) regarding whether or not there was indeed life after death. In Jesus’ response, God is not the God of the dead, but of the living (Mk 12.27), emphasizing the resurrection and the life. The Synoptic account of the raising of Jarius’ daughter also features the resurrection motif (Mt. 9.18-26; Mk 5.21-43; Lk. 8.40-56), although in John the emphasis is placed upon Lazarus’ having been dead for four days—a bolstering of the wonder-appeal when compared to Jesus’ command to secrecy in Mark (Mk 5.43). Again, John’s development of the resurrection motif is autonomous and distinctive, but it is not unique; the Synoptic Jesus also emphasizes this theme and reality.

The sixth, seventh, and eighth I-am references, ‘the way’, ‘the truth’, and ‘the life’ (ἡ ὁδὸς καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια καὶ ἡ ζωή, Jn 11.25; 14.6), are also found in the Synoptics as well as in John. In Mt. 21.28-32 Jesus mentions ‘the way of righteousness’ as that which his audience rejected, and ‘the way that leads to destruction’ is added in Mt. 7.13-14 to the Q saying on the narrow gate and the easy path. John the Baptist comes echoing Isa. 40.3, preparing ‘the way’ for the Messiah in all four Gospels (Mt. 3.3; Mk 1.3; Lk. 3.3-4; Jn 1.23), and in all three Synoptic accounts Jewish leaders seek to trap Jesus on paying tribute to Caesar with false flattery, declaring disingenuously that Jesus indeed teaches ‘the way of God in truth’ (Mt. 22.16; Mk 12.14; Lk. 21). Likewise, the scribe affirms Jesus’ speaking ‘a truth’ (Mk 12.32) in his describing of the greatest commandment as consisting of the love of God and neighbor. On the life motif, the narrow gate is what leads to life in Mt. 7.14, and Jesus is asked what one must do to inherit ‘eternal life’ (Mt. 19.16; Mk 10.17; Lk. 18.18). In the discourse that follows, Jesus describes how those who have left family, home, and security for the sake of the kingdom will inherit *eternal life* (Mt. 19.23-30; Mk 10.23-31; Lk. 18.24-30). Impressively, the way, the truth, and the life cohere even

within the Synoptic associations of Jesus and the way of the kingdom, especially contrasted to inauthentic alternatives typified by the rich, the scribes, and the Pharisees.

The ninth Johannine I-am metaphor, ‘the vine’ and ‘the true vine’ (ἡ ἄμπελος ἡ ἀληθινή, Jn 15.1, 4, 5) occurs in the Synoptics on the lips of Jesus at the Last Supper, where he declares that he shall not drink again of the ‘fruit of the vine’ until the day when he drinks it anew in the kingdom of God (Mt. 26.29; Mk 14.25; Lk. 22.18). Here the associations with the Johannine setting—also at the Last Supper and emphasizing abiding communality with the Lord—are impressive. Matthew also contains two distinctive vineyard parables (the late-coming laborers, Mt. 20.1-8; the two sons in the vineyard, Mt. 21.28-32), both emphasizing grace and faithfulness, with implications for community and discipleship. In all three Synoptic Gospels, the parable of the vineyard and the killing of the owner’s son is used to prefigure the rejection and death of Jesus at the hands of the Jewish leaders (Mt. 21.33-46; Mk 12.1-12; Lk. 20.9-19).

As is the case with the absolute uses of the phrase ἐγώ εἰμι in the teachings of the Synoptic Jesus, the predicate nominative uses of the phrase are equally present. Indeed, every single one of the nine I-am metaphors and themes in John is found in close association with the teachings of Jesus in the Synoptics, despite being presented in significantly distinctive ways. It is also the fact that several of these Synoptic sayings are grouped together in ways similar to those in John (shepherd and gate; the way, the truth, and the life, etc.), and in John and the Synoptics alike, the mission of Jesus is connected with scriptural typologies of Israel. Despite formal differences in John, it cannot be said on the basis of the Synoptics alone that Jesus never made reference to any of the nine Johannine I-am metaphors and themes. Rather, the opposite judgment is corroborated independently between the bi-optic traditions.

3. I-am Language in the Teachings of the Synoptic Jesus about Himself

Not only does the Johannine Jesus teach with I-am conventions, but these are also found centrally in the teachings of the Synoptic Jesus about himself—albeit in different ways. First, like its use in John,

the I-understood use of εἰμι in Matthew and Luke communicates the character of Jesus as well as his abiding example for his followers. In Mt. 11.29 Jesus declares ἄρατε τὸν ζυγόν μου ἐφ' ὑμᾶς καὶ μάθετε ἀπ' ἐμοῦ, ὅτι πραῦς εἰμι καὶ ταπεινὸς τῇ καρδίᾳ, καὶ εὐρήσετε ἀνάπαυσιν ταῖς ψυχαῖς ὑμῶν ('Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for *I am gentle and humble in heart*, and you will find rest for your souls'). While the use of a predicate here does not involve a metaphor, it certainly is used of Jesus to describe his character and way of being—inviting his followers to learn of him and to follow in his way—bolstered by an I-am claim about himself. Therefore, similar to the Johannine presentation of Jesus' claiming to be the teacher and master of his followers in Jn 13.13-14, 19—calling them to serve one another, the Matthean Jesus also describes his character to his followers—inviting them to embrace his yoke and to follow his example.

Second, Jesus promises in Mt. 18.20 his abiding presence with his followers within their meetings for worship: οὐ γὰρ εἰσιν δύο ἢ τρεῖς συνηγμένοι εἰς τὸ ἐμὸν ὄνομα, ἐκεῖ εἰμι ἐν μέσφ' αὐτῶν ('For where two or three are gathered in my name, *I am there among them*'). This use of εἰμι to denote Jesus' presence with his disciples is entirely parallel with his doing the same in John (Jn 7.33; 12.26; 13.33; 14.9; 17.24). Like the I-understood uses of εἰμι in John, its use in Matthew alludes to place and time, emphasizing the duration and reality of his spiritual presence among them.

Third, the I-understood reference to presence continues as Jesus in Mt. 28.20 promises to be with his followers in their mission of outreach to the world: καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος ('And remember, *I am with you always*, to the end of the age). Note the impressive parallels to Jesus' affirming his own mission as being sent from and returning to the Father by use of the I-understood language (Jn 7.28-29, 34, 36; 8.16, 23; 14.3; 16.32) as well as affirming his support for the mission of his followers in the world (Jn 17.11, 14, 16). Therefore, in both Matthew and John, Jesus' declaring εἰμι promises empowerment in the mission of his followers, rooted in his own agency from the Father.

Fourth, Jesus defines his servant leadership in Lk. 22.27 as ἐγὼ δὲ ἐν μέσφ' ὑμῶν εἰμι ὡς ὁ διακονῶν ('But I am among you as one who

serves'). Note that here the closest parallels with Luke are found in the Gospel of John, as Jesus in Jn 13.13-19 declares that he as their teacher and lord is given to serving others—inviting them to follow his example and do the same. Interestingly, Luke follows John in departing from Mark's order, moving the servant motif to the Last Supper setting—where it is in John.⁵⁴ Therefore, entirely parallel to the I-understood uses of εἰμι language in the Fourth Gospel, the Lukan Jesus, like the Matthean Jesus, makes εἰμι claims with reference to his character, time, and place. While the particulars differ, the parallels between John and the Synoptics are impressive.

4. *I-am Language in the Parables of the Synoptic Jesus*

Given the conviction of historical-Jesus scholars that Jesus never uttered I-am statements, it is odd that not only does the Synoptic Jesus make I-am claims about himself, but likewise conspicuous is the fact that I-am language is employed in the Synoptic parables of Jesus—largely in the I-understood mode of presentation. In Mt. 20.15, in the parable of the land owner, Jesus highlights the man's gracious character as a representation of God's grace: ἐγὼ ἀγαθός εἰμι (*I am benevolent*). In Lk. 15.19-21 the prodigal son declares twice οὐκέτι εἰμι ἄξιος κληθῆναι υἱός σου (*I am no longer worthy to be called your son*), acknowledging his need for grace. In Lk. 18.11 the boastful Pharisee declares ὁ θεός, εὐχαριστῶ σοι ὅτι οὐκ εἰμι ὥσπερ οἱ λοιποὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἄρπαγες, ἄδικοι, μοιχοί, ἢ καὶ ὡς οὗτος ὁ τελώνης ('God, I thank you that *I am not like other people*: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector). Conversely, the denial of the need for grace is here represented in the ironic contrast between the self-righteous Pharisee and the repentant tax collector. In Lk. 19.22 the harsh master declares to the steward, ἤδεις ὅτι ἐγὼ ἄνθρωπος ἀυστηρός εἰμι αἴρων ὃ οὐκ ἔθηκα καὶ θερίζων ὃ οὐκ ἔσπειρα ('You knew, did you, that *I am a harsh man*, taking what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow'), featuring his unmerciful character.

⁵⁴) See the larger set of arguments regarding the likelihood that Luke's many departures from Mark in Johannine directions suggest his dependence on the Johannine tradition, probably in its oral stages of development: Anderson, *Quest*, pp. 112-17.

In all these uses of εἰμι in the Synoptic parables of Jesus the first-person pronoun is understood or used elsewhere in the same sentence, and they describe the character of a figure in the story by means of making an I-am reference. What is interesting about their use is that εἰμι is used by characters in the parables to make emphases in opposite directions. Whether featuring mercy or mercilessness, or the acknowledgment of the need for grace or the denial of such, the Synoptic Jesus describes these characteristics in his parables by means of I-am language. Therefore, parallel to the speech of the Johannine Jesus, εἰμι conventions are used by the Synoptic Jesus—at times referring to himself and sometimes featuring attributes of figures in the parables.

5. *I-am Sayings Attributed to Others in John and the Synoptics*

In addition to Jesus' using I-am language in the Synoptics, such language is also attributed to others in the narrative—most often with the I-understood use. Among the uses of εἰμι in the Synoptics, *the negative use by John the Baptist* is clear. In Mk 1.7; Mt. 3.11; and Lk. 3.16 John the Baptist declares οὐ οὐκ εἰμι ἱκανός (I am not worthy) with relation to Jesus—parallel to Jn 1.27, where John also declares οὐ οὐκ εἰμι [ἐγὼ] ἄξιός (I am not worthy), emphasizing the Baptist's sense of unworthiness to untie/carry the sandals of Jesus. Further, the negative I-am claims of John the Baptist in Jn 1.20-21 and 3.28 are replicated in Acts 13.25, where John claims *not* to be the Messiah, and also echoes the Johannine rendering of unworthiness rather than the Markan (οὐ οὐκ εἰμι ἄξιός). Therefore, in the Synoptics and Acts, as well as in John, the Baptist's negative I-am sayings are replicated in similar-though-distinctive ways.

Like John the Baptist, *the centurion of the Capernaum healing from afar* within the Q tradition also declares 'I am not worthy' to have Jesus under his roof (οὐκ εἰμι ἱκανός—Mt. 8.8; οὐ γὰρ ἱκανός εἰμι—Lk. 7.6), demonstrating the use of the negative I-am convention. Like the seeing blind man in Jn 9.9, however, the Centurion in both Matthew and Luke plays the role of a positive example, declaring 'I am a man under authority' (ἐγὼ ἄνθρωπός εἰμι ὑπὸ ἐξουσίαν) in the next verses, showing the identificational use of the I-am convention.

In both John and the Synoptics, I-am statements are made by *Jesus' disciples*. Similar to the Johannine presentation of Peter's negative use

of the I-am convention in Jn 18.17 and 25, Peter declares οὐκ εἰμι ('I am not!') in Lk. 22.58, as he denies being a follower of Jesus. Peter also declares ἀνὴρ ἁμαρτωλὸς εἰμι ('I *am* a sinful man') in Lk. 5.8, and κύριε, μετὰ σοῦ ἔτοιμός εἰμι καὶ εἰς φυλακὴν καὶ εἰς θάνατον πορεύεσθαι ('Lord, *I am willing* to go with you to prison and unto death!') in Lk. 22.33. Both the disciples and Judas exclaim μήτι ἐγὼ εἰμι ('Surely not I!') in Mt. 26.22 and 25 after Jesus speaks of his betrayal, so the I-am convention is clearly used by Jesus' disciples in the Synoptics.

Finally, it is claimed by others in the Synoptics and John that Jesus made I-am claims related to his missional identity. In Matthew, Jewish leaders accuse Jesus before Pilate of having uttered an I-am statement, εἶπεν γὰρ ὅτι θεοῦ εἰμι υἱός ('he said, "*I am* the Son of God"', Mt. 27.43); in John, Jewish leaders in Jerusalem accuse Jesus of having said υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ εἰμι ('*I am God's Son*', Jn 10.36), and Jewish leaders before Pilate accuse Jesus of having said βασιλεὺς εἰμι τῶν Ἰουδαίων ('*I am King of the Jews*', Jn 19.21). If the Jesus of history never made I-am claims, it seems odd that his accusers, in both the Synoptics and John, would accuse him of having done so. While there are few exact parallels, secondary characters do make I-am statements in the Synoptics as well as in John—both positively and negatively—so the convention cannot be said to be uniquely Johannine.

6. The Burning Bush and Theophanic Associations in John, the Synoptics, and Acts

Despite the fact that the biblical background of nearly all of the I-am sayings of Jesus in John can be identified without direct connections to the theophany in the wilderness in Exodus 3, as Williams and others have shown, this does not prove that Jesus made no such references in his teaching. Not only in Jn 8.58 is there a palpable allusion to Yahweh's appearance to Moses in the burning bush of Exodus 3, but this motif is also present in various places in the Synoptics and Acts—even more clearly than in John. In response to the attempts by the Sadducees to trap Jesus on questions of the afterlife, Jesus defends his teachings in all three Synoptic traditions by appealing to Exodus 3.6—the appearance and words of Yahweh from the burning bush (Mt. 22.32; Mk 12.26;

Lk. 20.37). The burning-bush motif is mentioned explicitly in Mark and Luke, and the I-am words of Yahweh are cited in Matthew: ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ θεὸς Ἀβραάμ καὶ ὁ θεὸς Ἰσαὰκ καὶ ὁ θεὸς Ἰακώβ ('I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob').

The emphasis is that he is the God of the living, not the dead—an allusion to the gift of eternal life, developed in several of the Johannine I-am associations (bread—Jn 6.33, 35, 48, 51, 57-58; light—Jn 8.12; shepherd—Jn 10.10-11; resurrection—Jn 11.25; the way and the truth—Jn 14.6).⁵⁵ Luke then repeats both the I-am motif of Exod. 3.6 and the burning-bush motif (twice) in the witness of Stephen before his martyrdom in Acts 7.30-35.⁵⁶ As Stephen makes several references that seem closer to the Jesus of history than the Christ of faith,⁵⁷ inferences that the Jesus of history may indeed have made reference to the burning bush and the theophany in the wilderness—even if the Gospel of John did not exist—are plausible.

⁵⁵ Put obversely, not only is the 'life' motif associated with I-am sayings in John, but several I-am sayings in John—both absolute and with a nominative—have the impact of delivering believers from death. Jesus' life-producing mission poses a contrast to death-producing manna in the wilderness—Jn 6.49-50, 58; provides an alternative to the death-producing failure to believe Jesus' emissary mission—Jn 8.24; brings an alternative to the heredity of Abraham and the prophets who died—Jn 8.51-53; brings the hope of life over and against the death of Lazarus—Jn 11.26.

⁵⁶ Interestingly, 4 Esdras 14.1-9 presents God speaking out of a bush to Ezra, reminding him that he had revealed himself in a bush to Moses—presenting both Moses and Ezra in the image of a Christ figure echoing the apocalyptic themes also presented in Mark 12-13 and related passages. Just as Moses was shown the secrets of the end times, Ezra is promised their interpretation and hope of an ascension and the honor of living eternally with God's Son and those who are like Moses. If 4 Esdras may be considered a late first-century or second-century CE text, it seems that emerging Jewish-Christian apocalyptic themes are associated with the burning-bush theophany of Exodus 3 as a means of bolstering the prophet's authority. In that sense the burning-bush motif within the nascent Christian movement cannot be attributed to the Johannine tradition alone; it is clearer in the Synoptics and other texts, even if it is drawn into rhetorical service in Jn 8.58.

⁵⁷ For instance, Stephen is the only person referring to Jesus as the Son of Man other than himself (Acts 7.56), and he refers to Jesus as the prophet like Moses of Deut. 18.15-22 (Acts 7.37); his references to the burning bush arguably could also have an early traditional connection (Acts 7.30, 35), perhaps with the teachings of Jesus.

Interestingly, not only do the I-am words of Jesus in his sea-crossing appearance to his disciples in John and the Synoptics function as an epiphany, but epiphanic associations with I-am statements also abound elsewhere in the New Testament. In Lk. 1.18-19 Zacharias describes his condition declaring 'I am (εἰμι) an old man', but in his divinely appointed appearance, Gabriel declares 'I am (ἐγώ εἰμι) Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you good news.' When the risen Lord appears to his disciples in Lk. 24.39, he declares ἐγώ εἰμι αὐτός ('It is I, myself!'). In addition, epiphanic associations with the I-am sayings of the risen Christ can also be found in Acts and Revelation, so the epiphanic association with Jesus' I-am sayings is clear, even beyond the Gospel traditions.⁵⁸

Even if the Gospel of John had not been written, theophanic and epiphanic associations with the I-am sayings of Jesus (and other divine agents) are clearly evident in the Synoptics and elsewhere in the New Testament. Therefore, even if other biblical texts might be said to be a more likely consideration as a background for many or most of the Johannine I-am sayings, the events of Exodus 3 and their theophanic associations cannot be ruled out as potentially having been cited by the historical Jesus on the basis of the Synoptics alone. Rather, they appear to be confirmed by the Synoptics, as do nearly all of the other Johannine I-am sayings, in general and in particular.

In sum, while it may be impossible to prove that the Jesus of history uttered I-am sayings as rendered in the Johannine narrative, it also is impossible to demonstrate that Jesus never made such statements on the basis of the Synoptic Gospels themselves. More pointedly, a bi-optic analysis evidences the following facts: (a) the Markan Jesus indeed is clearly presented as making absolute I-am claims as to his messianic identity; (b) while the predicate-nominative I-am sayings characteristic

⁵⁸) In all three of the risen Christ's appearances to Paul in Acts 9.5; 22.8; 26.15 Jesus declares ἐγώ εἰμι Ἰησοῦς ('It is I, Jesus'). And, in Revelation, Christ makes several declarations as to his being and character in his appearances to John using the ἐγώ εἰμι formula, saying: 'I am the Alpha and the Omega' (Rev. 1.8); 'I am the first and the last' (Rev. 1.17); 'I am the one who searches minds and hearts' (Rev. 2.23); 'I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end' (Rev. 21.6); and 'I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star' (Rev. 22.16).

of the Johannine Jesus do not appear in the same literary form in the Synoptics, all nine metaphors and themes indeed are present, and some of them are developed in greater detail than they are in John; (c) the Synoptic Jesus clearly uses εἰμι references in his teaching about himself and in his parables; (d) other characters in the Synoptics make I-am statements, and they also accuse Jesus of having made I-am claims; (e) the burning-bush motif and theophanic/epiphanic associations with Yahweh's appearance in the wilderness (Exod. 3) are even more pronounced in the Synoptics than in John. Therefore, on the basis of the Synoptics alone, none of these elements can be excluded from features of the teachings of the Jesus of history despite their possessing Johannine prominence. Thus, in bi-optic perspective, the patent ahistoricity of the I-am sayings of Jesus in John—rather than affirmed—is degraded.

The Origin of the I-Am Sayings of Jesus in Cognitive-Critical Perspective

Unless one is prepared to claim one *knows* that neither the disciples, nor the Baptist, nor the Jewish leaders, nor the formerly blind man ever made 'I am' statements, one cannot claim to know that Jesus never uttered such either—even if such statements were perceived and regarded variously. Nonetheless, while many similarities abound between Johannine and Synoptic I-am sayings of Jesus, the differences are also considerable and deserve to be addressed. First, the I-am language is far more pronounced in John than it is in all the Synoptics combined. Second, the I-am sayings of Jesus in John (both absolute and with the predicate nominative) are far more momentous in the narrative than they are in the Synoptics, showing a Johannine favoring of this convention. Third, the christological elevation of some of the I-am sayings in John seems higher than in the Synoptics overall, although Mk 14.62 certainly issues a high christological claim. Fourth, the distinctive form of the nominative I-am sayings in John, in combination with the signs they expand upon or introduce, shows their rhetorical crafting within the Johannine tradition and narrative construction. Fifth, because I-am sayings, in Aramaic or Greek or both, would have had multiple levels

of meaning, questions remain as to whether the double entendre of an I-am saying resided in its origin, its later crafting, or some combination of the two. Therefore, plausible epistemological origins deserve consideration in seeking to understand the similarities and differences between the I-am sayings of Jesus in the Synoptics and John.

Because it cannot be claimed on the basis of Synoptic differences from John that Jesus never employed I-am language, a further historiographic assumption deserves rethinking.⁵⁹ If Jesus of Nazareth may have employed I-am language, to at least some degree, was it necessarily understood identically by all members of his audience, or might there have been differences of perception and understanding—even among his followers—from day one? If so, might such originaive differences of impression have had some bearing on the divergent trajectories in the pre-Markan and the early Johannine traditions as well as during later phases of their developments? Gospel ‘traditions’ were not disembodied sets of ideas and forms, floating throughout the early Christian movement docetically—no. They were *persons*—living, thinking, sensing, perceiving, reflecting persons, seeking to make sense of the dialogue between earlier and later experiences and perceptions—cognitive agents at the beginnings, developments, and finalizations of Gospel traditions.

Therefore, the *human* sources of Gospel traditions deserve consideration as a plausible means of accounting for the origin and development of the similarities and differences between the Synoptic and Johannine presentations of the I-am sayings of Jesus. This being the case, cognitive-critical analysis offers a way forward in inferring the epistemological origin and development of these sayings within the Johannine

⁵⁹ History itself requires rethinking because of its epistemological fragility. And yet, it is precisely the historical claims—on the basis of epistemological inferences about what Jesus can and cannot have said, based on the similar-yet-different presentations of John and the Synoptics—that critical theory must be brought to bear on the whole enterprise of historical-Jesus studies. According to K. Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History* (London/New York: Routledge, 2003), the epistemological frailty of history itself is fourfold: (1) no historian can cover entirely the limitless past; (2) no account can recover the past because it is irretrievable and cannot be repeated; (3) history is produced by and seen through the lens of an interpreter with vested interests and perspectives; (4) producing history is itself a constructive act and rhetorically so (pp. 13-16).

and Markan traditions.⁶⁰ Considering the possibility that either the Johannine evangelist or the human source(s) of his tradition heard Jesus make something like a Greek ἐγώ εἰμι or an Aramaic *āna hū* reference, this likely framed a perceptual rubric for remembering, organizing, and interpreting related aspects of Jesus' ministry.⁶¹ Whether or not Jesus intended to make such theological claims about himself, this distinctively theophanic association by at least some audience members is a plausible inference within the originative phases of the Johannine tradition. Thus, the possibility of a set of first impressions and an associative rubric built upon those eikonic perceptions deserves consideration as a cognitive-critical source of the Johannine individuated and autonomous tradition.⁶² The same may be true, in a different way, for the Markan tradition as well.

⁶⁰ Four epistemological origins of John's tensions and riddles include: the dialectical reflection of the evangelist; an agency schema rooted in Deut. 18.15-22; the evolving dialectical Johannine situation; and the rhetorical devices of the narrator. Cf. Anderson, *Christology*, pp. 252-65; also P.N. Anderson, 'On Guessing Points and Naming Stars: The Epistemological Origins of John's Christological Tensions', in *The Gospel of St. John and Christian Theology* (ed. R. Bauckham and C. Mosser; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), pp. 311-45; *Riddles*, pp. 157-70.

⁶¹ M. Polanyi notes that all real knowledge is personal, and that personal participation is always involved in both tacit and explicit types of knowledge. Further, if the human dimension is ignored by historians, three types of errors are likely: (1) the rationalist fallacy (right thinking based upon wrong experiential inferences—the trout mistakes the angler's fly for an insect); (2) the relativist fallacy (adequate inference of experience based upon an 'erroneous interpretive framework'—young geese imprint on a human as their mother); (3) the determinist fallacy (the product of materialistic or empiricist givens—the rat's judgments determined by missing parts of its brain). By contrast, correct judgment involves a 'balanced respect' for humanity, avoiding such fallacies. M. Polanyi, *The Study of Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 29, 76-89.

⁶² This case was first argued in Anderson, 'Cognitive Origins of John's Christological Unity and Disunity'; and in Anderson, *Christology*, pp. 137-65. See the responses by J.H. Ellens and J.W. Fowler in Anderson, Ellens and Fowler, 'Cognitive-Critical Analysis—A Way Forward in the Scientific Investigation of Gospel Traditions'. See also P.N. Anderson, 'Jesus and Transformation', in *Psychology and the Bible: A New Way to Read the Scriptures*, Vol. 4 (ed. J.H. Ellens and W.G. Rollins; Westport/London: Praeger/Greenwood, 2004), pp. 305-328.

The first question in such an investigation relates to how memory is formed and associations emerge. Well established is the fact that any given event will be experienced and perceived differently by varying witnesses,⁶³ and it is a fact that in all four canonical Gospels declarations are made that the disciples (let alone other actants in the narrative) perceived and understood aspects of Jesus *differently*.⁶⁴ Many a reference

Note the agreement and further contributions by W.G. Rollins, 'John the Evangelist', in *The Blackwell Companion to the Theologians* (ed. I.S. Markham; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 129-46. According to Rollins, main-line scholars formally took the Johannine I-am sayings to be ahistorical because of their problematic dissonance, but what if such were a feature of Jesus' transformative action—creating cognitive dissonance in order to introduce new levels of comprehension? Says Rollins (p. 139),

But in the twenty-first century scholars are beginning to ask whether we might do well to rethink the I AM sayings, not as the creation of the early church, nor as the pronouncements of an ego-inflated cult leader, especially in light of statements of Jesus, such as, 'If I bear witness to myself my testimony is not true' (5:31). Instead they are beginning to consider the I AM sayings as a consciously adopted code word that Jesus employed to raise consciousness of his identity and their identity as God's offspring, initiating hearers into the mystery of the presence of God in their midst. In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus does this with parables. In John, Jesus achieves this with the symbol, image, conundrum, and metaphor of I AM sayings, designed to fracture consciousness and give birth to a new angle of vision.

⁶³ Such is uncontroversial among modern historians, although their works remain largely unconsulted by Jesus scholars. As E.H. Carr says, history 'is a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past'. *What is History?* (New York: Vintage, 1961), p. 35. Historians ask the questions 'Why?' and 'Whither?' in service to societal interests, so the meaning of the past for the future is always a constructed reality. According to M. Bloch, *The Historian's Craft* (trans. P. Putnam; New York: Vintage, 1953), p. 194, 'Historical facts are, in essence, psychological facts'. Asking whose history and memory are being preserved and propounded, postmodern historians have taken perspectivalism further; note, for instance, the works of H. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973); *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

⁶⁴ Note that the miscomprehension of Jesus' disciples is declared explicitly in John (Jn 12.16); the result of Jesus' speaking in parables is the miscomprehension of his audiences (Mk 4.10-13; Mt. 13.10-19; Lk. 8.10); the disciples did not understand about the loaves (Mk 6.51-52; 8.14-21), about washing (Mk 7.18), about the suffering of the Son of Man (Mk 9.30-32; Lk. 9.45—rectified in Lk. 24.44-48);

is also made to earlier misunderstandings regarding Jesus' words and works, followed by later, fuller understandings. These facts suggest that in the light of varying memory and divergent developments, differences in interpretation existed between different witnesses of Jesus' ministry, between different purveyors of tradition, and also between earlier and later reflections within traditions. Indeed, interfluent dialogical exchanges between emerging traditions can also be inferred when considering similarities and differences between Johannine and particular Synoptic traditions. The point here is that all four Gospels record differences of originative perceptions and experiences, even stated explicitly as differences among the closest followers of Jesus—a claim at least somewhat substantiated by the empirical fact of Gospel similarities and differences. How these facts account for at least some of the Johannine-Synoptic differences is an important critical consideration.

From a cognitive-critical standpoint, building on the work of James Loder,⁶⁵ five common elements comprise every knowing event: (1) a sense of *conflict*; (2) an *interlude* for scanning; (3) the posing of a working 'hypothesis' as a *constructive act of the imagination*; (4) the testing of the hypothesis leading to a sense of *release and opening*; and finally (5) an *interpretation*, which interprets future experiences in the light of the construction of a perceptual set and eikonic impression of the memory, as reflected upon over time. According to Loder and the theorists upon which he founds his paradigm, all knowing events

and, even some of his words and deeds are not understood by his disciples until later, including his demonstration in the temple (Jn 2.22), his entry into Jerusalem (Jn 12.12-16), his washing of his disciples' feet (Jn 13.6-7), and his statements about his death and glorification (Jn 13.7; 14.5; 20.9-10). Explicitly, the narrator or Jesus declares the miscomprehension of Nicodemus (Jn 3.10) and the Judean leaders (Jn 8.27, 43; 10.6, 38).

And, Isa. 6.9-10 is referenced within all four Gospels to account for the ironic reality that despite hearing and seeing, people would neither hear nor understand (Mk 4.11-12; Mt. 13.13-14; Lk. 8.10; Jn 12.40-41). Therefore, because a good deal of misunderstanding among Jesus' first audiences is preserved within all four canonical traditions, what is impressive is the similarities between traditions—not the differences.

⁶⁵ J.E. Loder, *The Transforming Moment* (2nd edn; Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1989), pp. 35-65.

follow something like this sort of sequence, and presumably this must have been true also with early Christian perceptions and memories of Jesus and his ministry. Many factors may have contributed to distinctive perceptions and interpretations, including predisposing and experiential ones, but particular developmental histories must also have played roles in the formation of memory and reflection. A distinctive feature of the Johannine tradition, however, is the fact of transformative encounter as a central feature in the narrative. Note the following reports of such encounters in John.

Johannine Encounter Scenes and their Reports

- People are presented as *encountering something of the numinous in the presence of Jesus*: Nathanael is known from afar as a 'true Israelite in whom there is nothing false' (Jn 1.47-50), the Samaritan woman experiences her marital situation as known by Jesus (Jn 4.17-18, 39), Mary Magdalene encounters the risen Lord in the garden (Jn 20.10-18).
- Various *recognition scenes* are presented, suggesting something of a transformative knowing event in the experiences of: the blind man (who came back seeing after washing his eyes as instructed by Jesus, Jn 9.1-25), Thomas (who confessed 'My Lord and my God!' after touching the flesh wounds of Jesus, Jn 20.24-28), the Beloved Disciple (who recognizes Jesus on the shore and makes him known to Peter, Jn 21.7).
- The Johannine Jesus is presented by the narrator as *knowing what is in the hearts and minds of persons*, and he reportedly knows what will happen to him next (Jn 1.48; 2.24-25; 4.1-3, 16-19; 5.6, 42; 6.6, 15, 64; 13.1; 16.19; 19.28).
- Fulfilled understandings are also mentioned, as *later fuller understandings* expose earlier miscomprehensions: the prophecy about rebuilding 'this temple' in three days (among Jesus' disciples, Jn 2.22), the one Jesus claimed had sent him was the Father (among Jewish leaders, Jn 8.27), his entering Jerusalem on a donkey fulfilled the Zechariah prophecy (among his disciples, Jn 12.16), Jesus was saying to Judas at the Last Supper (among his disciples, Jn 13.28), Jesus on the shore (by Peter and other disciples, Jn 21.4).

- Several epiphanic associations link the theophanic words of Yahweh to Moses before the burning bush (Exod. 3.14) with some of the absolute I-am sayings of Jesus in John: the striking appearance of Jesus on the sea (the words ἐγώ εἰμι are identical in the Septuagintal reading of Exod. 3.14 and Jn 6.20), the bold declaration of Jesus before the Jewish leaders ('Before Abraham was, I am'—leading to an inference of blasphemy, Jn 8.58-59), the soldiers in the garden (at Jesus' declaring ἐγώ εἰμι, the soldiers fall to the ground, in the manner of Isaiah's theophanic encounter in the Temple, Isa. 6.1-8—clearly an ironic double entendre, Jn 18.5-8).
- Proleptically, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, the second παράκλητος will disclose further understandings to Jesus' disciples about his teachings and their meanings at later times (Jn 14.26; 15.26; 16.8-15).

While some of these features may be factors of an artistic construct, or a mimetic imitation of reality, arguing that *all* of them were such is critically questionable. Whether transformative encounter was a part of the originaive Johannine memory, it was at least a feature of emerging spiritual encounter and remembrance within the developing tradition—what Franz Mussner calls the 'gnoseological terminology' of the Fourth Evangelist's historical reflection. Given that such words as 'seeing', 'hearing', 'coming to know', 'knowing', 'testifying', and 'remembering' are words used for describing the 'historical reason' of the Fourth Evangelist, his gospel deserves to be interpreted as a work of *anamnesis* moving from individual to corporate reflection and experience.⁶⁶

⁶⁶) J. Painter's 'Memory Holds the Key: The Transformation of Memory in the Interface of History and Theology in John', in Anderson *et al.* (eds.), *John, Jesus, and History; Vol. 1*, pp. 229-48, follows Dunn's lead in *Jesus Remembered*, noting that new perspectives on the historical past are referenced in Jn 14.26 as a factor of the Holy Spirit's transformation of memory. Mussner and Rollins would concur. As P. Ricoeur says, 'The three dialectical moments of testimony—event and meaning, the trial of false testimony, and testimony about what is seen and of a life—find their echo, their reverberation, in the movement of consciousness that renounces its sovereignty.' *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), pp. 113-14. It is precisely the knowledge of the past that can find itself yielding to new meanings of history in the future.

Put otherwise, while the Johannine Jesus speaks in the evangelist's language and thought forms, later developments imply reflections upon earlier impressions and experiences instead of mere innovations. Therefore, the ongoing work of reflection, either as a cognitive process or even as a factor of the memory-enhancing work of the *παράκλητος*, functions to bring new meanings and understandings to earlier perceptions and experiences.

This being the case, the evangelist (or whoever was responsible for the developing of the Johannine tradition) recrafted the Johannine material to be relevant in later situations as befitting the needs of the evolving context. Indeed, references to the recovery of earlier meanings and the discovery of newer meanings can be inferred throughout the Johannine narrative, and the surplus of meaning⁶⁷ continues to be extended to each of at least seven crises within the seven decades of the Johannine tradition's development. In particular, crafting a presentation of Jesus who (1) is remembered as the authentic northern prophet testifying to God's grace and truth—among the religious authorities of Jerusalem, (2) indeed supersedes the ministry of John the Baptist—for the sake of his followers in later generations, (3) is then advocated apologetically as the Messiah fulfilling the typology of the Mosaic Prophet—among Jewish family and friends in a setting among the mission churches, (4) advances God's kingdom as one of truth rather than force—in contrast to Roman emperor worship under Domitian, (5) actually suffered and died—as a challenge to docetizing tendencies among Gentile Christian preachers, (6) leads the church by means of his accessible Spirit—as a corrective to rising institutionalism in the name of Peter, and (7) is written about in ways that augment and set the record straight—in dialogue with parallel Gospel traditions on such matters as the significance of miracles and the delay of the *Parousia*.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ P. Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976) describes several levels of dialogue within historical memory and its interpretation. Dialectics between event and meaning, speaking and writing, explanation and understanding, and distanciation and appropriation all play a role in memory and the making of meaning.

⁶⁸ These seven dialogical crises developing over seven decades within the evolving Johannine situation build on the works of Brown, Borgen, Cassidy, Käsemann, and

Indeed, it is nearly impossible to distinguish the words of Jesus from those of the Johannine evangelist (and even those of John the Baptist—cf. Jn 1.15-18 and 3.22-36), so it is an obvious fact that the teachings of the Johannine Jesus come to the reader as the evangelist's paraphrastic presentations of the Lord's teachings. Despite the fact that at least 44 memorable sayings are shared between Mark and John, none of them are identical, and discerning derivation in one direction or another is impossible.⁶⁹ Therefore, the Johannine tradition cannot be said to be derivative from Mark, and the most likely inference is that it represents an autonomous Jesus tradition, developing in its own individualized ways.⁷⁰ Regarding the origin of the I-am sayings, two Synoptic features cast light on the likely origins of these sayings: theophanic associations with Jesus' use of the phrase ἐγώ εἰμι and metaphorical images embraced and developed in their own Johannine directions.

In sum, a cognitive-critical approach to Mark and John, the bi-optic Gospels, suggests how differences of earliest perceptions and experiences may have set distinctive trajectories, creating organizing rubrics of meaning lending themselves to later developments in these

others. They are outlined in Anderson, *Quest*, pp. 196-99, and seven crises over seven decades are spelled out in Anderson, *Riddles*, pp. 134-41. For a rhetorical analysis of Johannine narration within its evolving situation, see P.N. Anderson, 'The *Sitz im Leben* of the Johannine Bread of Life Discourse and its Evolving Context', *Critical Readings of John 6* (ed. R.A. Culpepper; BIS, 22; Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 1-59; and 'Bakhtin's Dialogism and the Corrective Rhetoric of the Johannine Misunderstanding Dialogue: Exposing Seven Crises in the Johannine Situation', in *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies* (ed. R. Boer; Semeia Studies, 63, Atlanta: SBL Press, 2008), pp. 133-59.

⁶⁹ Over three dozen Johannine-Markan sayings similarities are laid out in Anderson, *Quest*, pp. 131-32, 134-35; for an analysis of John 6 and Mark 6 and 8, see 24 points of contact between John 6 and Mark 6 and 21 points of contact between John 6 and Mark 6 in Anderson, *Christology*, pp. 98-102. In none of these similarities, however, are the Markan and the Johannine connections identical. Therefore, direct dependence is unlikely; more plausible is some form of contact between two independent traditions reflecting parallel memories and renderings of Jesus' ministry.

⁷⁰ On John's autonomy and originative independence from the other traditions, in addition to Gardner-Smith, *Saint John and the Synoptic Gospels* and Smith, *John Among the Gospels*, see Anderson, *Quest*, pp. 101-126, and *Riddles*, pp. 141-55.

parallel-yet-different traditions. As new situations evoked reflections upon earlier memories and understandings of the ministry of Jesus, individuated expansions upon the words of Jesus developed in both oral and written forms. As individuated theological reflections on the Jesus of history, the Markan and Johannine narratives testify to developed memories of Jesus in self-standing ways, and their historicity is suggested precisely because of their non-identical similarities and not-incompatible differences.

The Development and Rhetorical Crafting of the Johannine I-Am Tradition

Working from the later Johannine material to its earlier stages of development, the following inferences may be made regarding the crafting of the Johannine I-am tradition in the light of its emerging history. Here, a cognitive-critical analysis suggests how the presentation of Jesus and his ministry by means of I-am metaphors and claims functions to prepare the reader to develop both a keen sense of Jesus' conveying the numinous presence of God long after his earthly ministry, and likewise a keen sense of divine provision for later generations. Therein the creative and constructive work of the evangelist can be plausibly inferred, and we see many ways in which his paraphrastic adaptation of Jesus sayings into I-am forms effectively furthers the apologetic and rhetorical purposes of the Johannine Gospel. Following are several observable developments—from the latest stages of the Johannine tradition to its earliest.

1. The Final Rhetorical Presentation of the Johannine I-Am Sayings of Jesus

Given that the Gospel of John was likely finalized around 100 CE in a Hellenistic setting, its final presentation of Jesus as the Messiah/Christ features with prominence the I-am sayings of Jesus as fulfilling both Jewish and Hellenistic categories of value. As Bultmann well notes, the entirety of existential value regarding bread, light, life, etc., is fulfilled

in Jesus's declaring 'It is I'.⁷¹ In that sense, the I-am metaphors and themes of John transcend religious and cultural boundaries, addressing the condition of all humanity with the eschatological work of the Revealer. Given that the later material in the Fourth Gospel likely includes chapters 6, 15–17, and 21 (as well as the Prologue and Beloved Disciple and eyewitness references),⁷² the I-am sayings in John 6 and 15 address acutely the needs of the later Johannine audiences in the last decade or two of the first century CE. As the Johannine epistles show a community fractured by pressures from without and within, Jesus' invitation to abide in him and his community emphasizes continuing belief in Christ and his fellowship. Regarding pressures from without, during the reign of Domitian (81–96 CE), as residents in the Roman Empire (including Jesus adherents distanced from the local synagogue) would be called upon to demonstrate their loyalty to Rome by offering emperor worship, the calling to ingest his flesh and blood bolsters solidarity with Jesus and his community of faith (Jn 6.51–58; cf. 1 Jn 4.1–3; 2 Jn 1.7). To refuse the fellowship of Jesus' suffering and death is to forfeit fellowship with him in the power of his resurrection.⁷³ For believers tempted to follow assimilative teachings of Gentile Christians (including participation in local festivals and emperor worship—risking some penalty for refusing to do so) unpersuaded by the mores of Jewish Christians, the reminder that Jesus alone is the life-producing bread bolsters the courage of those tempted to deny Christ and his community before civic and political pressures of 'the world'. Therefore, the adding of John 6 to the final edition of the Johannine Gospel not only reconciles John's narrative with other Gospel traditions; it also calls for

⁷¹ According to Bultmann, when 'I' serves grammatically as the predicate within an I-am saying, it represents the fulfillment of all that humanity desires as an identification formula: 'The meaning is always "in *me* the thing mentioned (bread of life, light, etc.) is present; it is I".' *Theology of the New Testament, Vol. II* (trans. K. Grobel; New York: Scribners, 1955), p. 65.

⁷² In my judgment, a modification of the two-edition theory of John's composition put forward by B. Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (1972) is the most compelling; cf. Anderson, *Riddles*, pp. 125–55.

⁷³ Note the parallels with Ignatius and his letters—especially to the Ephesians; Anderson, *Christology*, pp. 110–36, 194–220.

solidarity with Jesus and his followers—called to live in the world but not of the world (Jn 17). Here the bread motif from the teachings of Jesus and the memory of the feeding are crafted so as to address several emerging crises in the Johannine situation, and John 6 becomes an even more transparent window into the Johannine situation than John 9.⁷⁴

2. The Purpose of the Later Johannine Narrative and the Thrust of the I-Am Sayings

The other I-am metaphor developed in the later Johannine material, involving the image of the vine and branches (Jn 15.1-8), epitomizes the rhetorical thrust of John's later material. While the first ending of John (Jn 20.30-31) calls for initial belief in Jesus as the Messiah/Christ, the later material's emphasis calls for staying with Jesus and abiding in him and his community of faith.⁷⁵ As the Johannine community had already suffered defections—plausibly involving the return of some Jewish Christians back into the synagogue (1 Jn 2.18-25) and other schisms—the living way is made clear: remaining with Jesus is the only viable way forward. Appropriating the imagery of Yahweh's vineyard (Isa. 5) and his nourishment of Israel by the true bread from heaven (Ps. 78.24), abiding in the Messiah and his community is the only life-producing option; a branch remains alive only as long as it stays connected to the vine.

Interestingly, emphases on a human and suffering Jesus are found almost exclusively in John's later material (Jn 1.14; 6.51-58;

⁷⁴ While J.L. Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (3rd edn; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003) sketches a dialogue with the leaders of the local Jewish synagogue on the basis of John 9, no fewer than four dialogical partners in the Johannine audience can be identified employing a two-levels-of-history reading of John 6—with an alternative (Synoptic) valuing of the feeding narrative, local Jewish leaders over the Torah, the call to the way of the cross for later (especially Gentile docetizing) disciples in the light of Roman imperial demands, and rising (Petrine) institutionalism among the likes of Diotrephes and his kin (3 Jn 9–10). Cf. Anderson, *Sitz im Leben*, pp. 24-57.

⁷⁵ The 'purposes' of the two editions of the Fourth Gospel—one apologetic and the other pastoral—are laid out in Anderson, *Riddles*, pp. 85-87 and 141-44.

15.18–16.33; 19.34–35; 21.18–24), evidently challenging docetizing teachings about a non-suffering Lord (see 1 Jn 4.1–3; 2 Jn 1.7). Likewise, nearly all the emphases upon corporate unity and abiding with Jesus and his followers are also found in the apparently later material (Jn 6.56; 15.1–17; 17.1–26; 21.6–23). Therefore, the I-am metaphors in the later Johannine material emphasize not only the way of the cross, but also the prime importance of abiding with Jesus and his community.

3. Spiritual Openings, Remembering, and the Ongoing Work of the Holy Spirit

As an explicit descriptor of how the Johannine evangelist experienced what Mussner describes as gnoseological reflections upon earlier memories of Jesus,⁷⁶ he is presented as promising the Holy Spirit, the Advocate (ὁ παράκλητος), who will abide with Jesus' followers and in them (Jn 14.16–17). He will teach believers all things and will remind them of what Jesus had taught (Jn 14.26). The Spirit of Truth (Jn 15.26) will bear witness to Jesus in order that his followers might bear continuing witness in the world, helping them 'remember' what Jesus had said (Jn 16.4), guiding believers into all truth (Jn 16.13). Herein the connection between historical memory and theological meaning is named explicitly. Earlier memories of Jesus' ministry and teaching are said to be refined and sharpened in terms of their relevance for later issues in the evolving Johannine situation. In cognitive-critical perspective, earlier events and words in the ministry of Jesus become worthy of transmission precisely because of their eventual relevance, and in some instances such meaning might not have been valued or understood until facing the crisis of evolving issues in the later Johannine situation. As a result, experienced history and its perceived significance cannot be too far removed or abruptly divorced within any historical work—including

⁷⁶ Mussner, *The Historical Jesus in the Gospel of John*. Virtually all commentators note the expansion and development of memory described in Jn 14–16; the cognitive-critical point is that this reflection is presented as later-discerned understandings of the historical teachings of Jesus.

Gospel narratives. On this fallacy many a historical-Jesus inference has foundered.⁷⁷

4. *The Rhetorical Thrust of the First Edition of John and the I-Am Sayings of Jesus*

As the first edition of John (likely crafted around 80–85 CE) was probably the second gospel, the evangelist was probably familiar only with Mark, though apparently in only general ways.⁷⁸ Given the apologetic thrust of the narrative (‘written that you might believe’, Jn 20.31), the first edition of John features five signs (not eight) and five I-am sayings of Jesus (with the predicate nominative, not seven)—a solid Jewish rhetorical approach, signifying parallels to the five books of Moses. Also, the metaphorical thrust of these images and themes connotes a typological representation of Israel. Just as Zion is a light to the nations and a city on a hilltop, Jesus is the light of the world. Just as Israel’s leaders are exhorted to be faithful shepherds of the flock, Jesus is presented as the authentic shepherd, who gives his life on behalf of the sheep. Likewise, he is presented as the gate for the sheepfold. Just as Israel’s prophets, Moses and Elijah, bring the covenant of life and raise the dead, Jesus is himself the resurrection and the life. And, whereas the way of Moses, the truth of scripture, and the life-promise of Abraham’s offspring are presented as legitimations of Israel’s cultic and legal institutions, Jesus embodies these Jewish ideals as the way, the truth, and the life. Jesus is thus elevated as the archetypal Jewish Messiah precisely because he fulfills an impressive constellation of typological images embodying the ideal Israel.

A second feature worth noting here is that several of the Johannine ἐγώ εἰμι sayings emphasize aspects of Jesus’ authentic mission as one

⁷⁷ For a full range of historians’ fallacies, see D.H. Fischer, *Historians’ Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).

⁷⁸ P.N. Anderson, ‘The John, Jesus, and History Project—New Glimpses of Jesus and a Bi-Optic Hypothesis’, *The Bible and Interpretation* (February 2010, <http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/john1357917.shtml>); first published in shorter form as ‘Das “John, Jesus, and History”—Projekt; Neue Beobachtungen zu Jesus und eine Bi-optische Hypothese’, *Zeitschrift für Neues Testament* (April 2009), pp. 12–26.

being sent from the Father. The call to faith centers on Jesus' identity as the authentic prophet predicted by Moses and sent by God according to Deut. 18.15-22 (Jn 8.18). This is clearest in Jn 4.26, where Jesus replies to the Samaritan woman that he is the one she anticipates as the Messiah Christ. More subtly in Jn 8.24 and 28, Jesus responds to the Jewish leaders of Jerusalem that unless they believe that he is the one he claims to be (sent from the Father) they will die in their sins (v. 24), and after the Son of Man is lifted up they will know that he is the one who is sent by the Father (v. 28). The same sort of identification formula is used at the Last Supper, as Jesus claims to be their teacher and master (Jn 13.13), emphasizing that the fulfillment of his prophetic word will indeed convince his followers that he is the one he claims to be (v. 19). According to Deut. 18.20-22, the word of the authentic prophet is distinguished from others by the unfailing fulfillment of his word.

A third rhetorical thrust of the main Johannine Gospel narrative involves the likely augmentation of Mark. If the evangelist had at least heard the Gospel of Mark performed publicly in one or more meetings for worship, as Mackay plausibly argues, it is interesting that its five signs are precisely those that are *not* in Mark. Likewise, the five predicate I-am sayings in John's first edition serve to complement the Markan presentation of Jesus' teachings. John's distinctive signs and sayings of Jesus may thus be seen historiographically as an alternative rendering of Jesus' works and words precisely because they were not included in the first gospel, Mark. As Matthew and Luke built *upon* Mark, John built *around* Mark.

A final rhetorical feature shows a Johannine emphasis upon the figure of Jesus. Therefore, over and against kingdom parables, John features *the king*; over and against the imagery of Jesus' teachings, John brings their import to bear on *the teacher*—Jesus—in the predicate nominative I-am sayings. As a result, the double-meanings of I-am sayings are employed with a good deal of ironic crafting, as otherwise innocent statements of identity are presented with theophanic overtones. To the Samaritan woman's messianic question, Jesus replies '*I am*' (Jn 4.26); at the arrest scene the soldiers fall back, as though before the burning bush, when Jesus simply declares '*I am he*' (Jn 18.5, 6, 8); before Pilate, when asked if he were indeed a king Jesus reverses the question into an acclamation: '*You say that I am*' (Jn 18.37). Therefore, the I-am

sayings of Jesus in the first edition of John yoke distinctive themes and scenarios from the ministry of Jesus to the apologetic interests of the evangelist—that hearers/readers might believe that Jesus is the Messiah/Christ, and that believing, they might have life in his name (Jn 20.31).

5. The Connecting of the Works and Words of Jesus within the Johannine Tradition

While little more than speculation can be offered regarding the history and development of the Johannine oral tradition, it is highly likely that signs and discourses were connected at earlier stages of the tradition rather than later ones alone. That being the case, one can imagine the Johannine rendering of the feeding highlighting an emphasis on Jesus' being the bread of life; Jesus' being the light of the world who also opens the eyes of the blind man; Jesus' not only teaching about the narrow way and the shepherd of the sheep, but being the authentic gate and the good shepherd; Jesus' being the resurrection and the life and also raising Lazarus; Jesus' teaching about fulfilling Jewish typologies but also being the way, the truth, and the life; Jesus' being sent into the Father's vineyard, but also being the true vine. Now, this is not to say that the metaphors and themes of the Johannine predicate I-am sayings had no basis in the teachings of Jesus; on the basis of the Synoptics themselves, Jesus' having referenced such images and themes in his teachings cannot be dismissed. It might even be said that the Synoptics and John provide independent attestation for each other, making such an inference likely. And yet, it is also plausible that the Johannine evangelist performed many of the connections between the works of Jesus and his words, and such connections likely figured earlier in the Johannine tradition rather than later only.

6. Distinctive Experiences and Perceptions of Jesus' I-Am Language

From its earliest stages, the Johannine rendering of Jesus and his ministry appears to have at least some purchase on an autonomous and individuated memory as a distinctive Jesus tradition, which is theologically developed over seven decades or more. Finalized, according to the compiler, after the death of the Beloved Disciple (Jn 21.20-24), the

Fourth Gospel is the only canonical gospel claiming first-hand knowledge of Jesus and his ministry, and if Mark is collected by a follower of Paul, and if the Gospels of Luke and Matthew are constructed upon Mark, John may be the only complete Gospel based upon eyewitness memory.⁷⁹ Of course, such is impossible to demonstrate, but if a prime basis for disparaging John's historicity and links to the Jesus of history is its distinctive I-am sayings, in the light of the above analysis such a platform deserves critical reconsideration.

Given that the Synoptic Jesus (a) declares several absolute I-am statements—including some with messianic overtones, (b) mentions the burning bush and Yahweh's appearance to Moses in the wilderness in Exodus 3, and (c) references all nine of the Johannine I-am predicate metaphors and themes, it cannot be said that the Johannine Jesus is totally alien to the Jesus of the Synoptics on the basis of John's distinctive I-am sayings. If more than one person heard Jesus employ such references, it is entirely likely that the bi-optic human sources of Mark and John (and there may have been several, not just two) experienced, perceived, and understood Jesus differently from the earliest phases of their respective Gospel traditions. If the traditional source of the Johannine narrative garnered a theophanic association or found distinctive meaning in any of the I-am sayings of Jesus—whether or not Jesus intended such a meaning—such would have created a rubric of interpretation affecting Johannine memory, development, and delivery over the years.

In sum, while the interpretive development and rhetorical crafting of the I-am sayings of Jesus can be seen as developing over the various phases of the Johannine tradition's history, it cannot be said that they are truncated from the words and works of the historical Jesus. Between the pre-Markan and early Johannine traditions, we may indeed have a difference of earliest impressions as well as later developments, and such befits the character of historical memory and its dialectical features.

⁷⁹) See my dialogue with Marcus Borg, in P.N. Anderson, 'A Fourth Quest for Jesus... So What, and How So?', *Bible and Interpretation* (July 2010), <http://www.bibleinterp.com/opeds/fourth357921.shtml>; and P.N. Anderson, 'Acts 4.19-20—An Overlooked First-Century Clue to Johannine Authorship and Luke's Dependence upon the Johannine Tradition', *Bible and Interpretation* (September 2010), <http://www.bibleinterp.com/opeds/acts357920.shtml>.

While later developments of the Johannine I-am sayings can be discerned, this is not to exclude the additional likelihood of a primitive origin. From its latest stages to its earliest ones, traces of the development of the Johannine I-am sayings of Jesus can be inferred with a good deal of plausibility.

Conclusions

From the above investigation, a cognitive-critical analysis of the origin and development of the Johannine I-am tradition bolsters the following inferences.

- 1) Given John's differences with the Synoptics, especially with regard to the striking I-am sayings of the Johannine Jesus as contrasted to the less extroverted Jesus in Mark, attempts to explain the origin of these sayings as either an insider's access to Jesus, a co-opting of an imagined Gnostic sayings source, or homiletical expansions upon any number of scriptural motifs remain less than satisfactory.
- 2) Despite John's distinctives, it cannot be said that the Johannine Jesus uniquely makes I-am claims; so does the Synoptic Jesus—especially in Mark. On the basis of the Synoptics alone, it cannot be said that Jesus never made absolute I-am statements, referenced the burning-bush theophany of Exodus 3, or employed any of the metaphors and themes associated with the Johannine I-am predicate sayings. Just as aspects of literary form cannot prove Synoptic historicity, they also cannot confirm Johannine ahistoricity.
- 3) The Johannine and Synoptic similarities and differences on this matter reflect a bi-optic set of associations regarding at least one I-am saying of Jesus with theophanic overtones (Mk 6.50 and Jn 6.20), and such an event arguably created a cognitive heuristic schema of interpretation by which other actions and sayings of Jesus became organized within the Johannine memory.
- 4) As *all nine* of the Johannine I-am predicate metaphors and themes are found with prominence in the teachings of the Synoptic Jesus, these terms cannot be excluded from the sayings of Jesus on the

basis of Synoptic-Johannine differences alone. Rather, Synoptic and Johannine memories of Jesus' teachings likely found development related to the teaching ministries of tradition purveyors, and these developments likely involved cognitive associations and operations as well as adaptations to the needs of evolving audiences.

- 5) Given the fact that the παράκλητος is credited with teaching disciples in later situations and generations gnoseologically, the assimilative function of memory appears to have evoked ongoing connections between the original ministry of Jesus and the evolving needs of the Johannine audiences. Therefore, the teachings of Jesus developed paraphrastically, eventually coming to represent the language and diction of the evangelist, while still retaining contact with the historical root of Jesus' teachings and ministry within Johannine memory and perspective.
- 6) Therefore, while the Johannine presentation of Jesus' teachings about himself and the way of the Spirit are highly developed theologically, it cannot be said that they are truncated from the mission and message of the historical Jesus; spiritual guidance is also a prevalent Synoptic theme. Viewed in bi-optic perspective, John contributes to a fuller understanding of Jesus' ministry and thus provides a corroborative complement to the Synoptic traditions both in terms of theology and history; the reverse is also true.
- 7) As a factor of distinctive sets of first impressions, leading to individuated schemas of interpretation and resulting in selective memory and formation of associations, the Johannine tradition developed in its own autonomous ways. Whereas Matthew and Luke diminished the Markan secrecy motif, John may have counterbalanced it with more explicit declarations of Jesus' identity and mission—precisely because of an alternative historical perspective.
- 8) The Johannine I-am sayings of Jesus, finally, further the rhetorical purposes of the first and final editions of the Johannine Gospel. Bolstering the apologetic purpose of John's first and final editions, the I-am sayings in chs. 8–11 and 14, and then in chs. 6 and 15, present Jesus as fulfilling typologies of Israel within Hebrew scripture, also inviting hearers/readers to abide with Jesus and his community of faith amidst centrifugal forces.

Therefore, in assessing the origin, development, and use of the Johannine I-am sayings, cognitive-critical analysis helps make sense of the distinctive Johannine tradition in the light of its originative and emerging literary function and character.

In sum, on the basis of the Synoptics alone, it cannot be argued that the Johannine I-am sayings of Jesus were constructed ‘out of whole cloth’ rather than an individuated perception and memory of sayings uttered by Jesus of Nazareth. The Johannine evangelist indeed crafted his material to suit his understandings of the Jesus of history as the Christ of faith, but the parameters of his material were already determined by historic words of Jesus, not denied by Synoptic renderings, but corroborated by them independently. As a result, one of the central bases for discounting Johannine historicity is itself considerably degraded, forcing Jesus and gospels scholars alike to rethink the character of history, memory, and development within the earliest Jesus traditions—of which John is one.