The Cognitive Origins of John’s Christological Unity and Disunity

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THE COGNITIVE ORIGINS OF JOHN'S UNITIVE
AND DISUNITIVE CHRISTOLOGY

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The most distinctive aspect of John's christology is not that it is the highest in the New Testament, or that it is the lowest; that the Son is one with the Father, or subordinate to the Father; that eschatology is present, or futuristic; that Jesus knows what is going to happen, or that he anguishes in pathos; that the signs are embellished, or that they are existentiaized. The most distinctive aspect of John's christology is that both parts of these polarities, and others, are held together in dynamic tension within the Johannine narrative. This is the most salient characteristic of John's christology. Not only has it been the primary source of classic christological debates, but it has also been the prevalent interest of most modern historical, literary and theological investigations of the Fourth Gospel.

A primary strategy for addressing John's christological unity and disunity has been to pose a diachronic history of composition involving the conflation of earlier sources and later editions. In other words, John's perplexities can be addressed by assuming multiple sources, authors and contexts of the material's origins. Such approaches are indeed attractive, as several of John's perplexities are addressed through them. However, because conclusive evidence for such sources is itself in doubt, other attempts to understand the origin of these tensions must be explored. They cannot be ignored or simply harmonized away. The above work (Anderson, 1995) identifies four major sources of John's christological unity and disunity, but this essay is concerned with only one of those. Namely, the degree to which John's christological unity and disunity may be attributed to cognitive factors in the thinking and experience of the evangelist.

1. Diachronic Solutions to Theological Tensions

One reason for the enduring influence of Bultmann's commentary on John is that not only did he claim to identify three major sources
underlying John and the work of an ecclesiastical redactor overlaying it, but each of his hypothetical sources addresses at least one of John’s historical, literary or theological puzzles. This also is the probable reason criticisms of his source-critical work on John have been only partially successful. They have pointed out the fact of John’s stylistic unity (despite significant aporias — rough transitions and perplexities in the text) but have not addressed adequately the hermeneutical value of Bultmann’s (and other diachronic scholars’) identification of other sources underlying and overlaying the Fourth Evangelist’s contribution. The interpretive value of identifying such sources and the evangelist’s dialectical employment of them is illustrated magnificently in Robert Fortna’s second book on John’s hypothetical “Signs Gospel.” Here Fortna identifies the origin of much of John’s theological tension as being (what I call) a “literary dialogue” between the evangelist and his source. Regarding the aporia of John 4:48, for example, Fortna says, “The most natural explanation for these phenomena, then, is that the narrative stems from more than one author: it consists of an older and a younger layer. In short, redaction has taken place.” (1988, P.5)

While Fortna’s work stands on its own, it also builds on Bultmann’s work, and the hermeneutical implications of Bultmann’s source-critical work must be highlighted, albeit briefly. a.) Bultmann attributes at least one aspect of John’s high/low christological tension to the literary dialogue between the exalted motifs in an inferred revelation sayings source (including most of the Prologue and the “I am” sayings) and the incarnational christology of the evangelist. b.) Bultmann attributes the tension between the glorious Johannine signs (as well as their origin) and the existentializing work of the evangelist to his dialectical employment of a signs source, as he comments upon the signs’ revelational significance while de-emphasizing their thaumaturgic and sensationalistic value. c.) “Solved” by the redaction hypothesis are the apparent tensions between present and futuristic eschatologies, and between instrumentalistic and Christocentric sacramentologies. The dis-ordering/re-ordering aspect of this hypothesis also allows Bultmann to solve some transition- and sequence-aporias, as well as to restore the “original order” of the text, which interestingly enough reveals
gnostic-type poetic verses thought to represent the sayings source employed by the evangelist. d.) The passion source theory simply "explains" the origin of distinctive Johannine passion material (if it is accepted that the evangelist cannot have been among the eye-witness generation) as it shows no stylistic or ideological contrast to the work of the evangelist. (Fortna includes most of this material in his version of the Signs Gospel.) A mistake made by Bultmann, however, is that while he successfully casts many of the Johannine dialectical tensions into sharp relief, he only allows for literary explanations to those tensions. Ironically, Bultmann elsewhere describes lucidly the kind of dialectical theologian the Fourth Evangelist must have been, but he fails to allow this first-century religious leader to have been such. In his 1927 Eisenach address Bultmann asked:

What, then, is meant by dialectic? Undeniably it is a specific way of speaking which recognizes that there exists no ultimate knowledge which can be encompassed and preserved in a single statement . . . The dialectical method in philosophy depends on the conviction that every truth expressed is a partial truth and that the whole truth which is its basis can best be found by first setting beside it the contrary statement. For the contrary statement . . . must also contain a portion of the truth. By setting the two partial truths against each other and combining them, it may be possible to grasp the underlying principle.

What Bultmann is here describing is a cognitive and reflective dialogue, but he apparently rules out this sort of dialogue as the source of John's christological tensions. Furthermore, C. K. Barrett has argued quite convincingly that a "dialectical theologian" is precisely the sort of thinker the Fourth Evangelist must have been. In his compelling essay, "The Dialectical Theology of St. John," Barrett connects the theological style of the Fourth Evangelist with the Socratic practice of dialectical thought (See Theatetus 189-190; thinking is "the conversation which the soul holds with herself in considering anything.");
In Socratic dialogue — and dialogue (dialegesthai) is dialectic — concepts are looked at first from one side then from another, definitions are proposed, attacked, defended, abandoned, or improved, opposite points of view are canvassed and, sometimes at least, combined. And the process of thought itself is conceived as fundamentally unspoken dialogue. (p.49)

Again, the interest of this essay is to explore the degree to which the epistemological origin of John’s christological unity and disunity is attributable to cognitive-reflective origins, rather than literary-corrective ones. This is especially needed, as literary-critical evaluations of Bultmann’s diachronic theory of John’s composition are finally unconvincing. As C.K. Barrett declared about John, “Someone published it substantially as it now stands; and I continue to make the assumption that he knew his business, and that it is the first duty of a commentator to bring out this person’s meaning.” Upon investigating the epistemological origin of the Fourth Gospel’s dialectical tensions, two in particular seem attributable to the cognitive dialectic of the evangelist: the evangelist’s apparent ambivalence toward Jesus’ signs, and the evangelist’s pervasive juxtaposing of the flesh and glory of Jesus. These two analyses explore this possibility, drawing upon two research-based models of cognitive analysis: the developmental model of James Fowler’s Stages of Faith Development, and James Loder’s transformational (crisis) model assessing the anatomy of any knowing event. Attempts will be made to evaluate the cognitive origins of these two sets of christological tensions in John, and then to apply findings toward meaningful interpretation.

2. The Evangelist’s Ambivalence Toward Jesus’ Signs

In none of the four canonical gospels is there any evidence that Jesus’ miracles were understood clearly, free from ambiguity. Especially in Mark and John do Jesus’ followers display a good deal of confusion over the meaning of Jesus’ signs. Divergent between Mark and John, however, is the valuation of the signs as explained by Jesus. In Mark 8:14-21 Jesus declares the import of the feeding to be the implication that the disciples need not worry about bread to eat.
Jesus had fed the 5,000 and the 4,000, so his disciples should put aside their hunger, replacing it with faith in Jesus’ ability to do miracles any time he chose. Likewise, the result of the sea-crossing in Mark 4:35-41 is described in equally thaumaturgic tones: “What sort of man is this that the wind and the waves obey him?” And, the Marcan Jesus again calms the storm in Mark 6:45-52.

In John 6:26, however, the valuation of the miracles is diametrically opposite: “You seek me not because you saw the signs, but because you ate the loaves and were satisfied!” declares the Johannine Jesus. Likewise, in the Johannine sea-crossing, it is the disciples who are calmed, not the forces of nature (Jn.6:21). Obviously, John existentializes the value of Jesus’ miracles, and whether the evangelist has co-opted a signs source with which he disagrees, or whether he is simply correcting the prevalent interpretation of Jesus’ miracles, the epistemological origin of this posture must have involved the evangelist’s cognitive dialogue between earlier perceptions and later experiences. In the Synoptics, faith leads to miracles; in John, faith is their resultant goal.

In both traditions, interpretive valuation of miracles involves notions about their original significance and explanations about their subsequent continuation and non-occurrence. The apparent dearth of miracles, perceived or otherwise, in spite of belief in their value and availability, must have produced the pre-Marcan judgment: “The reason miracles do and do not happen hinges upon our faith. Jesus declared numerous times, ‘Your faith has made you well.’ And in Nazareth, even Jesus could do no miracles because of their lack of faith. If you don’t see the miracles you hope for, it’s not God’s fault. You did not believe strongly enough. If you would have faith — even the size of a mustard seed — you could command that mountain to jump into the sea... and it would!”

Conversely, John interprets the value of miracles in the light of their relative dearth accordingly: “The reason Jesus performed signs was to lead humanity to a saving faith in God. He never intended the miracles to be the center of Christian experience; they were done to signify the spiritual realities in Christ which they prefigure. Whether people are born blind or loved ones fail to be spared from premature
death, the promise is the same: God can and will be glorified in the experiences of those who believe in Christ. Blessed are those who have not seen . . . and yet believe!

The common issue addressed by the pre-Marcan and the Johannine traditions is theodicy. Why do miracles happen and not happen as often as anticipated, despite the belief that they should? Both traditions, however, pose different answers. The former attributes the problem to human lack of faith; the latter explains the function of signs as divinely initiated vehicles of revelation — means of glorifying God. Obviously, each of these approaches involved particular kinds of theological reflection within the gospel traditions themselves. As the Marcan and Johannine narrators commented on the value of Jesus' miracles, those appraisals of value must have been affected by the experiences of early interpreters and their reflections upon those experiences in the light of growing understandings of the ministry of Jesus. This involved cognitive dialogues between perceptions and experiences, and in order to analyze them appropriately Fowler's stages of faith development will be explored. But first consider a summary of his approach.

Patterned after the developmental research of Kohlberg, Piaget, Erikson and Levinson, Fowler's theory of faith development nonetheless establishes its own voice of authority. Based on hundreds of extensive interviews, Fowler poses six stages through which one's faith may develop. Assuming all humans begin with at least some sort of undifferentiated, primal faith (ages 0-4), the first stage of faith is Intuitive-Projective faith (Stage 1) according to Fowler. Characterized by the pre-school child's (ages 3/4-7/8) understanding of God as the projection of one's needs, during this stage of faith the child perceives God as serving the primary task of taking care of him or her. Stage 2 (Mythic-Literal) faith involves the junior's (ages 6/7-11/12) distinguishing of the "real" world from make-believe stories. During this stage the child shows considerable concern for fairness and belonging within a group. God often is perceived as a God of rules, and life is understood in connection with cause/effect relationships. Synthetic-Conventional faith (Stage 3), according to Fowler, is precipitated by the breakdown of literalistic constructs in the
presence of implicit clashes between stories. For the adolescent (ages 11/12-17/18) authority tends to shift from traditional authority roles to individuals commanding personal authority and respect, as well as one's peer group. It is "synthetic" in that values and beliefs are being synthesized into a working whole; it is "conventional" in that the individual values fit in with his or her religious group of peers.

Stage 4 (Individuative-Reflective) faith involves a shift in authority from one's faith group or leaders towards establishing one's autonomous system of beliefs reflectively. Precipitated by contradictions in authorities' opinions on important matters, or clashes between "what they say" tenets and "how it is" observations, the young-to-middle age adult is driven to establish his or her opinion on matters of faith. Here "ownership" is key. Previously held views are demythologized, and one comes to distinguish between one's authentic self and societal roles. An important consideration presents itself regarding Stage 4 faith. According to Fowler, while nearly all adults reach a Synthetic-Conventional stage of faith, and most reach the Individuative-Reflective stage, fewer reach Stages 5 and 6.

Movement to a Conjunctive (Stage 5) level of faith is precipitated by contradictions not between external sources of authority, but between one's autonomously held convictions and/or one's experiences. Here one's awareness of life's complexities threatens the adequacy of owned faith systems, and yet, neither can one deny her or his experiences or convictions. Contrasting to the disjunctive (either/or) choices that establish Stage 4 autonomous faith, Stage 5 faith is conjunctive (both/and). It brings together dialectically glimpses of truth which must be held in tension. Not all contradictions can be "solved" in this stage of faith, but neither can their component parts be ignored or denied. At times they come to be embraced as genuinely paradoxical, and God's truth becomes appreciated as finally beyond one's abilities to organize and define it. This leads to Universal faith (Stage 6). On this level of faith, conventional concerns for safety, provision and survival give way to ultimate concerns which lead one to sacrifice — at times greatly — for one's vision of universal principle. Fowler does not recommend this level of faith as a desired norm, as society itself would be strained to the point of breaking. Nor do those
who reach Stage 6 faith operate on this level consistently. Rather, it represents one's response to ultimate truth whereby it ceases to represent convictions one holds, and one becomes held by conviction as a captive of universal truth.

Obviously, Fowler's theory fits in well within the religious situation of late-twentieth century western society, but can it also apply to a first century Jewish/Christian thinker operating within a Hellenistic context? One of the weaknesses of Fowler's theory is that it claims adequacy regardless of theological content. It represents only the structures of faith. This, however, is also its strength as it relates to the present study. If indeed the religious quest — across time and culture — involves the movement from self-centered faith (Stages 1 and 2) to societally accepted religious views and norms (Stage 3) to autonomous convictions (Stage 4) to conjunctive appreciations of paradox and variant aspects of truth held in tension (Stage 5) to universal principle (Stage 6), Fowler's theory becomes extremely relevant to analyzing the epistemological structures (and perhaps origins) of gospel traditions.14 In particular, movement between Stages 3, 4 and 5 applies to the present study. Where such religious authorities as leaders of the local Synagogue in a first century Asia Minor (or Antioch, Palestine or Alexandria) context must have appealed to the traditions of Judaism and the authority of the scriptures, the tensions experienced by Johannine Christians would have been indeed parallel to ones analyzed by Fowler in modern religious contexts. This sort of struggle can be identified throughout the progressive conversion of the man born blind in John 9 and in Jesus' debates with the Jews in John 5-10. Furthermore, it is inconceivable that the evangelist, who so clearly describes the rejection of Jesus as the refusal to move from a Stage 3 level of Jewish faith to a Stage 4 level of belief in Jesus ("they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God;" Jn. 12:43), and who describes autonomous-yet-monological Christian beliefs (Jn.6:68-70; 16:29f.) as being only partially adequate, should not have made similar faith-stage transitions himself. The operative question is not whether Fowler's work applies to analyses of gospel traditions, but how.

At this point it becomes clear that these insights apply to the
development of Synoptic traditions as well as the Johannine. In terms of Fowler’s stages of faith development, the above pre-Marcan view of miracles operates on either a Stage 3 (Synthetic-Conventional) or a Stage 4 (Individuative-Reflective) level of faith. The Johannine valuation of signs, however, is clearly operating on a Stage 5 (Conjunctive) level of faith. On one hand, the signs in John are embellished. Jesus begins his ministry with a “luxury miracle” (Jn.2:1-11) and a healing that is done from afar (Jn.4:45-54); the middle signs become central platforms on which to construct major Christocentric dialogues and discourses (chs.5, 6, and 9); and the raising of Lazarus is the most glorious miracle of the New Testament (ch.11). Signs confirm Jesus’ messiahship (2:18, 3:2, 7:31, 10:41f.) and evoke belief within the narrative (2:11; 4:53; 6:2; 11:15, 45, 48; 12:11, 18f.; 20:24-29). Sometimes a prediction is made by Jesus in order to facilitate belief (12:32f.; 13-19; 14:29; 16:4; 18:32), and in two cases a voice is sounded from heaven for the pistic benefit of those who are present (11:41f.; 12:28f.). Jesus’ signs in John are indeed employed centrally as revealers of Jesus’ glory and provokers of human faith (Jn.20:30f.).

On the other hand, John clearly betrays an antipathy toward faith that depends mainly on miraculous signs. Belief on the basis of the miracles themselves is encouraged, though finally considered an incomplete kind of faith (10:37f.; 14:11). The Johannine Jesus declares his disgust regarding those who require signs and wonders before they will believe (4:48), and he rebukes the crowd for following him, not because they had seen the revelational significance of the feeding, but because they had eaten of the loaves and were satisfied (6:26). People misunderstand Jesus’ identity and mission on the basis of their signs-faith and want to rush him off and make him their king (6:14). They even play the role of the tempter, offering their belief in exchange for another sign (6:30f.). At every turn, the Johannine Jesus existentializes the import of the signs, and they become pointers to who Jesus is: the one to whom the scriptures point and of whom Moses wrote (ch.5), the true bread of life coming down from heaven (ch.6), the one who opens the eyes of the blind and exposes the blindness of those who claim to see (ch.9), the resurrection and the life (ch.11).
Indeed, blessed are those who have not seen . . . and yet believe (20:29).

Clearly at work in the Johannine tradition is a cognitive dialogue within the thought and experience of the evangelist. Earlier impressions of the value of Jesus’ miracles give way to new understandings in the light of confirming and challenging experiences. A central question is whether the evangelist, or his signs narrative, ever embraced a pre-Marcan thaumaturgical view of Jesus as a theios aner (God-man). There is no evidence that John’s miracles ever employed solely a wonder-attestation proper, or that discourse and interpretation were ever truncated from the Johannine signs. Neither is there any hard evidence that lends itself to favoring an alien source over the evangelist’s interaction with his own traditional material, or at least with the prevalent (oral) interpretation. Again, one would be happy to believe in a signs source if there were any evidence that pointed convincingly to an alien narrative source rather than the evangelist’s dialectical interacting with his own tradition. The numeration of the first two signs, the distinctiveness of the Johannine signs, their intrinsic connectedness to the Johannine discourses, and the central place of Jn.20:30f. all can be explained just as well by regarding John’s signs as simply having been part and parcel to the pervasively independent Johannine tradition.

Put in Fowler’s terms, Fortna and Bultmann believe that the Fourth Evangelist is operating on an Individuative-Reflective (Stage 4) level of faith, correcting a Synthetic-Conventional (Stage 3) interpretation of Jesus’ miracles. This view, however, does not account for the largely dialectical treatment of Jesus’ signs in John, despite the fact that Synoptic-like wonder attestations are missing. It is a miracle to assume that these ever were present in the Johannine miracle narratives. To de-Johannify the ending of a miracle narrative, only to re-Marcanize it, does not a signs source demonstrate. The Fourth Evangelist often appears to be operating on a Conjunctive (Stage 5) level of faith, and the theories of diachronic scholars often overlook that fact. While the evangelist de-emphasizes the value of Jesus’ miracles, he nowhere denies their centrality to Jesus’ ministry, and he employs them strategically as platforms upon which to construct his gospel narrative.
The structure of his thought here is pervasively dialectical, and this is the way the reader is meant to understand Jesus' ministry as well. Nonetheless, diachronic advocates invoke a literary dialogue to account for this theological tension in John, but in doing so, the evangelist's own dialectical pattern of thought is obfuscated. What is clearly suggested by the Johannine text is the existential tension between the belief that miracles (or at least answers to prayer: Jn.14:12-14) ought to have followed the ministry of Jesus, and the fact that the community has apparently also experienced the bewilderment of unfulfilled hopes. These experiential crises are the stuff of which the evangelist's existentialization of Jesus' miracles is made. Here we have a cognitive dialogue, moving from an Individuative-Reflective (Stage 4) appraisal of Jesus' miracles to their Conjunctive (Stage 5) valuation as revelatory signs. Movement from Stage 4 (Individuative-Reflective) faith to Stage 5 (Conjunctive) faith is precipitated by the crisis of one's autonomously held convictions being challenged by one's subsequent experiences. One cannot deny either one's convictions or one's experiences, and one must hold together the truth of both in dialectical tension.

The individuated appraisal of Jesus' miracles in John apparently included the following convictions: a.) Jesus did miracles and they were wondrous. Jesus' signs attest that he has been sent from God, and they mark the dawning of the new age (Jn.11:27; 20:30-31). b.) Jesus' miracles also enhance the well-being of humans, the objects of God's love, and they provide a foretaste of God's saving/healing work done through Jesus the Christ. Illness exists not as the penalty of fault, but as a platform upon which to demonstrate the work of God (Jn.9:1-3). c.) Miracles will continue though believers who ask their requests in Jesus' name, and even greater things (whatever that means) will be done in the post-resurrection community of faith (Jn.14:12-14; 16:23-26). These high valuations of miracles are similar to the Synoptic, prevalent view, but they are also different enough to be considered independently Johannine, as opposed to being derivative from another tradition.

On the other hand, one detects clear tones of disappointment and frustration in John, which suggest that the evangelist's convictions
have been tempered by contradictory experience. a.) The grieving of Mary and Martha still seems fresh in the Lazarus narrative. Both women exclaim, “Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died!” (Jn. 11:21 and 32). The death of Peter (and the Beloved Disciple) is also foretold (Jn. 21:18-23). b.) Persecution and suffering are predicted by the Johannine Jesus in ways which suggest that Johannine Christianity must have experienced hardship from external sources. c.) The true source of blessing lies neither in seeing the miraculous transpire, nor in being a member of the eye-witness generation. “Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed.” declares the Johannine Jesus (Jn. 20:29).

The cognitive tension between authentic conviction and contravening experience must have moved the evangelist to a Conjunctive (Stage 5) level of faith. Neither could he de-emphasize the miracles of Jesus — so central to his understanding of God’s eschatological initiative, nor could he deny his experiences and those of others — ones which modified his own understandings of Jesus’ miracles, and which certainly challenged prevalent notions of Jesus’ ministry as a miracle worker. As the prevalent (Synoptic) interpretation continued to place the blame for the relative dearth of miracles upon the individual’s lack of faith, it never moved far beyond a Synthetic-Conventional (Stage 3) mode of operation. On the other hand, the Johannine tradition had begun to reconsider the significance of Jesus’ signs, given the subsequent, relative dearth of miracles, and it came to view the Synoptic approach as woefully inadequate. It also clarifies Jesus’ original intentionality. Thus, the Johannine Jesus takes pains to declare the prevalent (the entire Synoptic tradition, not just a backwater signs source) valuation of the feeding (“they ate and were satisfied”) flawed and likely to contribute to a misunderstanding of Jesus’ central mission. Likewise, the significance of Jesus’ miracles is not that the blind see and the dead are raised. Rather, they bespeak the kerygmatic conviction that Jesus is the Light of the world — the Resurrection and the Life. The one who believes in him, though he or she were dead, will never die (Jn. 11:25f.).
3.) The Flesh and Glory of Jesus

In contrast to a developmental model of cognitive reflection, a crisis model suggesting the anatomy of any event of knowing is also helpful for assessing one of John’s christological tensions: the flesh and glory of Jesus. Again, diachronic analyses come quickly to rescue John from its ideological tensions, but the evangelist’s christology is both high and low. It is arguable that emphases upon the messianic deity of Christ played an important rhetorical function during the community’s debates with the local Synagogue (during the 70’s and 80’s), and that emphases upon the fleshly humanity of Jesus served anti-docetic functions in the 80’s and 90’s (see the appendix, below), but as a contrast to the monological (either/or) christology of the Elder, the Fourth Evangelist’s is thoroughly dialogical. The best explanation for this difference is the contrast between the creative genius of first-generation dialogical thought and the more systematized and monological character of second-generation constructs. The former explores the truth creatively, posing an ongoing reflective dialogue between earlier perceptions and later experiences; the latter defines the “correct answers” according to a given authority and uses them as standards by which to judge later expressions of faith. This difference in the cognitive structuring of christological views is the most convincing evidence suggesting that the author of the Johannine epistles was a leader other than the evangelist. Says Judith Lieu:

The Gospel balances realised eschatology with more traditional statements of future hope, a strong sense of election with an emphasis on the individual’s responsibility to respond, predeterminism with the universal scope of God’s salvation, the world as opposition with the world as the sphere and goal of the mission of the Son, tradition with the creativity of the Spirit, God as the one whom Jesus makes known with Jesus as the only way by which God can be known. In each case it might seem that I John holds on to the first member of those partnerships far more firmly than he does the second, that a creative dialectic has been surrendered in the interests of the security of dogmatism and exclusivism.
One reason for this fact is that the evangelist embraces an agency christology (based on Deuteronomy 18:15-22; again, see the appendix, below) which employs seemingly egalitarian and subordinationist motifs as two sides of the same coin.²¹ Another is the evangelist’s encounter theology. Put simply, not all of John’s high christological material can be explained on the basis of assuming a movement from lower to higher appraisals of Jesus; nor can all the evangelist’s use of humanizing detail be accounted for on the basis of inferring anti-docetic correctives or novelizing additions by the evangelist. John’s tradition is thoroughly independent from the Synoptics, and the epistemological origin of John’s encounter theology must have been an experiential one.²² According to Loder (1981, pp.39-44), any knowing event will have at least five steps to it. These include: 1.) a sense of conflict. We are confronted by an unusual experience that requires interpretation. 2.) This leads us into an interlude for scanning. One searches one’s frame of reference for interpretive helps. 3.) One’s working “hypothesis” becomes cast in the form of a constructive art of the imagination. 4.) As this hypothesis is tested, a sense of release and opening emerges as it seems to fit. 5.) This is followed by interpretation, which reflects backwards on the event and applies its meaning to future situations. While Loder’s work is not based upon empirical research in the way Fowler’s is, he nonetheless has drawn significantly from a century or more of theoretical work on the thinking process, and his work is worthy of application.

John’s encounter theology is reflected by several instances in which a theophanic encounter with God through the man Jesus is narrated. Jesus is highly exalted in John. a.) The Johannine sea-crossing narrative is rendered as a theophany rather than the pre-Markan epiphany (Jn.6:19f.). Rather than floating past the boat like a phantasm (Mk.6:48-50), Jesus comes to the disciples and addresses them in ways reminiscent of Exodus 3:14 (see Anderson, 1995, Chapter 8 for a full development of the distinctively Marcan and Johannine “eikonic” impressions). b.) People experience themselves as being known intimately by Jesus — a characteristic of spiritual encounter. From Nathanael (Jn.1:47-50), to the Samaritan woman (Jn.4:17f., 39), to Mary Magdalene’s “Aha! experience” in the garden (Jn.20:10-18), the transforming encounter is intrinsic to the Johannine
independent tradition. The Johannine Jesus even knows what is in the human heart as well as what will happen to him (Jn.2:24f.; 13:1, 11). c.) And, to encounter the Son is to encounter the Father in John (Jn.14:6-10). These motifs are imbedded in all levels of the Johannine witness.

On the other hand, the Johannine Jesus is portrayed in starkly human ways. a.) Jesus’ suffering is described in fleshly terms. On the cross Jesus thirsts (Jn.19:28), out of his pierced side flow physical blood and water (Jn.19:34), Thomas places his finger and hand into the flesh-wounds of Jesus (Jn.20:27) and the “bread” offered by Jesus is his flesh — given for the life of the world (Jn.6:51c). b.) Jesus is filled with pathos. He groans (Jn.11:33, 38), he weeps (Jn.11:35), his heart is deeply troubled (Jn.11:33, 12:27; 13:21) and he loves his own unto the end (Jn.11:1, 3, 36; 13:1, 23; 14:21, 15:9f.; 19:26f.). c.) The love motif continues within the community of faith as the last will and testament of the departed savior. The love of the Father for the Son (Jn.3:35; 10:17; 15:9; 17:23f.) and Jesus’ love for his disciples (11:5; 13:1; 13:34) now become the model for their loving of Christ and one another (Jn.13:34f.; 14:23; 15:9f., 12, 17; 17:20-26; 21:15-17). Once again, proximity to the man, Jesus, is suggested by the structure of this content, rather than distance.

Obviously, the primary epistemological question regarding this content asks whether John’s peculiarities reflect later departures from a singular tradition, or whether they reflect an independent trajectory from the early stages of the gospel traditions. Given the fact that of forty-five similarities between John 6 and corollaries in Mark, there are zero identical ones, John cannot possibly be considered derivative from Mark. This is even less likely regarding John’s relation to Matthew and Luke. The implications of this probability are highly significant. There may never have been a time when there was a singular gospel tradition, which diverged into Synoptic and Johannine traditions. From the earliest stages of Jesus’ ministry, it appears that valuations of his work were at least dual: Pre-Marcan and Johannine. Furthermore, given the fact that the fleshly and glorious portrayals of Jesus are inextricably connected within John’s dialectical style of thought, we probably have something more like a creative, first
generation of thought than a more categorizing second or third generation structure of thought. By the time the Elder writes the Johannine epistles, he quite readily poses the apostolic faith in terms of right answers versus wrong answers. He even employs the eye-witness motif to bolster its authority. Unless one believes Jesus is the Christ, that one is the "Antichrist" (1 Jn. 2:18-25); and, unless one believes Jesus came in the flesh, that person embodies the spirit of the "Antichrist" (1 Jn. 4:1-3). The component parts of the evangelist's christology are there, but the dialectical structure is missing, thus suggesting an author other than the evangelist — probably the gospel's compiler (redactor).

This is where cognitive analysis becomes extremely helpful to the historical-critical method. It helps in assessing the epistemological origin of the dialectical tension between the flesh and glory of Jesus in John. One clear result of recent analyses of John 1:14 is that neither Bultmann nor Käsemann are correct in forcing John's christology into an incarnational mode or an exalted one. The Word became flesh, and we beheld his glory declares the evangelist. Not only is his a theology of encounter, but its epistemological origin must have been a tradition which stemmed from Christocentric encounters with God. It is indeed likely that some of these encounters were mystical, reflecting spiritual encounters with the Spirit of the resurrected Lord, but the interwovenness between the fleshly and the glorious motifs as they pertain to the man, Jesus, suggest proximity to the actual ministry of Jesus rather than distance from it alone. Such a view is highly problematic given the vast discrepancies between the Synoptic and the Johannine traditions, but the cognitive structure of John's independent witness suggests it. Some of John's independent insights may even be due to divergent first impressions within the earliest stages of the gospel traditions. Thus, between the witnesses leading up to and following Mark, and the developing witness of John, we may have two "bi-optic" traditions, which were in dialogue with each other for over half a century before John was finalized in its present form.

4.) Conclusions and Implications

In conclusion, cognitive analysis is extremely helpful in assessing the epistemological origins of John's distinctively unitive and disunitive
christology. In the Fourth Gospel we have a remarkable combination of encounter material, perhaps going back to the earliest stages of gospel traditions, and we also have extended, reflective developments of the significance of Jesus' words and works for later audiences, as they faced new crises and situations. The evangelist builds on original insights dialectically, at times finding new relevance in earlier perceptions, and at times modifying preconceptions to be more adequate for subsequent experiences. Finally, it must be remembered that gospel "traditions" were not disembodied sets of ideas, floating docetically from place to place within the early Christian movement. "Gospel traditions" were persons — living human beings — who thought about, perceived, experienced, and reflected upon God's saving activity through Jesus Christ. These are matters of cognition, not just religiengeschichtliche dialogues with alien traditions or sources, and they deserve to be assessed by means of the best cognitive-critical tools available. Fowler and Loder give us a start.

Implications for interpretation are extensive. Rather than reading John's christological unity and disunity as the result of abstract speculation or the production of a novelized drama, it must be seen as a theological reflection, engaged thoroughly with human experience. In that sense, the Fourth Evangelist — whoever he may have been — was an astute dialectical theologian. While embracing the best of the past, he integrated it with later experiences belonging to himself and members of his community. And, this is precisely what we do as modern exegetes and theologians. As we read his testimony, we find ourselves drawn into the narrative and connected with the Jesus he bespeaks. His transforming encounters become ours, and even as we reflect on the words, "...blessed are those who have not seen..." we find ourselves included in the company of the original audience. In that sense, Christocentric encounters with God through the man, Jesus, cease to be a significant — though partial — source of the Johannine narrative alone; they become its product, as well.
APPENDIX:
Sources of John’s Unitive and Disunitive Christology

While the above essay outlines the cognitive origins of John’s christological unity and disunity, its explorations must be understood within the scope of the larger study. The evangelist’s cognitive and reflective tensions influenced, and were influenced by, other levels of “dialogue,” and this should be kept in mind. Relevant conclusions in Anderson (1995, Conclusion, esp. Table #22) are that John’s christological tensions are due to at least four kinds of “dialogue” (dialectic):

1.) Theological schemas used by the evangelist —
   a.) An agency christology based on Deuteronomy 18:15-22 accounts for the apparent subordinationism and egalitarianism in the Father/Son relationship in John; b.) Jewish manna eschatology (exemplified by 2 Baruch 28-30) accounts for at least some of the tension between present and futuristic eschatologies, as these are intertwined in the messianic anticipation of one who imparts heavenly manna as the inauguration of the new age; c.) divine/human dialectic, interpreting the history of salvation as a series of divine initiatives, calling forth believing responses on the part of humanity, accounts for the apparent tension between free will and determinism in John.

2.) Rhetorical correctives within the dialectical Johannine situation —
   a.) Tensions with the local Jewish Synagogue prompted a cluster of “high” christological motifs, including pre-existence and superiority motifs; b.) slightly later tensions with docetizing Gentile Christians prompted a cluster of anti-docetic emphases on the flesh-and-bloodness of Jesus; c.) tensions with the centralizing church prompt a series of correctives, including the revelational value of miracles, an incarnational view of sacramentology and finally expanded doctrine of apostolicity. The latter finally called forth a Johannine corrective to institutionalizing tendencies within the late first century church.

3.) The dialectical theology of the Fourth Evangelist —
   a.) Theodicy within the experience of the evangelist and/or his community produces an existentializing interpretation of miracles’ “significance”; b.) theophanic or numinous experiences produce an interwovenness
between Christocentric encounters with God and graphic, nonsymbolic portrayals of Jesus' humanity; c.) the "surprise" of openness to the Gospel among the nations produces a tension between the particularity and universality of his christocentric soteriology (Jn.1:9); d.) new meanings regarding the story of Jesus find their way into the evangelist's retelling it in the light of evolving situations and community needs.

4.) The dialogical function of the Fourth Gospel as a written communication — a.) The signs, the witnesses, and the fulfilled word are designed to lead people into a saving response of faith to God's initiative in Jesus; b.) dialogues with Jesus are crafted in such a way so as to place the reader in the place of the discussant, thereby facilitating an imaginary conversation with the Johannine Jesus; c.) earlier material suggests interests in evangelizing (especially the Jews), while later material (Jn.1:1-18; chs. 6, 11, 15-17, 21, Beloved Disciple and eye-witness references, etc.) suggests interests in maintaining group cohesion in the presence of persecution and schismatic tensions (esp. docetizing threats). Within this later context, the leading, guiding, convicting and comforting work of the Holy Spirit is emphasized as the original intentionality of Jesus for his ongoing ministry to the Christian community of faith.

NOTES

1This essay was originally presented in the Psychology and Biblical Studies Group at the 1993 National AAR/SBL meetings in Washington, D.C. Appreciation is extended to Wayne Rollins for including the paper, and to J. Harold Ellens and Daniel Merkur for responding to it helpfully.

2Consider for instance the christological debates leading up to and continuing though the seven Ecumenical Councils of the Patristic era. The relation of the Son to the Father, the dual nature of the Son, trinitarian and filioque debates (just to name a few) had as the origin of both sides of each issue the unitive and disunitive christology of the Fourth Gospel.

3See Paul N. Anderson, The Christology of the Fourth Gospel; Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6 WUNT 2, Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1995, where over one hundred of the most significant treatments of John's christology are organized into five major categories and a total of
thirteen sub-categories (Chapter 1). In each of these categories and sub-categories, issues pertaining to John’s christological unity and disunity are central. See also Bibliography I, “The Christology of John” for a total of about 250 titles.

*The other three include the evangelist’s agency christology, his responding to contemporary crises in his evolving context, and the use of narrative and discourse as a means of engaging the reader in an imaginary dialogue with Jesus. These, however, cannot be developed here. For a fine development of the first, see my student Ron Williams’ unpublished essay, “The Son’s Relation to the Father in John: Egalitarian, Subordinate or Neither?” (winner of the Pacific Northwest Region AAR/SBL 1994 undergraduate student paper competition). For a treatment of the second, see my paper, “The Sitz im Leben of the Johannine Bread of Life Discourse and its Evolving Context” (presented in the 1993 SNTS Johannine Literature Seminar, to be published in a forthcoming collection of essays on John 6, tentatively by E.J. Brill, 1996, edited by Alan Culpepper). The third is developed also in that paper, as well as in my paper, “Bakhtin’s Dialogism and the Rhetorical Function of the Johannine Misunderstanding Dialogue” (presented in the "Rhetoric and the New Testament" Section of the 1994 national AAR/SBL meetings). These origins of John’s christological unity and disunity are outlined briefly in the appendix above.


See especially Fortna’s excursus (pp.205-220) and his section entitled “The Theological Development from Source to Present Gospel” (pp.221-314) in his The Fourth Gospel and Its Predecessor; From Narrative Source to Present Gospel, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988.


In his New Testament Essays, London, 1972, pp.49-69. The present work is largely an extended footnote to Barrett’s fine essay, which I believe is the most significant single essay on John 6. (Borgen’s monograph, of course is the most significant book-length treatment of John 6.)
When the twenty or so stylistic characteristics of Bultmann's signs source, the revelation sayings source and the work of the evangelist (the redactor "imitated" the style of the evangelist) are measured in all of John 6, they tend to be distributed evenly throughout the entire chapter (see Anderson, 1995, Chapters 4-6).

See appendix (above) for how these two investigations fit into an overall analysis of John's unitive and disunitive christology. Other tensions attributable to the evangelist's dialectical thought include John's soteriological universality/particularity and dualism (on the latter, see Robert Kysar, John: the Maverick Gospel, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2nd ed. 1993, pp.78-96).


Robert Fortna is on target when he describes the primary motivation for inferring a Signs Gospel as being the fact of theological tension in John, rather than stylistic or contextual evidence (1988, p.213). The question is whether theological tension, in itself, justifies the extensive speculation employed by diachronic scholars, and whether the kind of corrective inferred by Fortna and others really does justice to the phenomenological structure (and thus, the epistemological origin) of the evangelist's thought.

The following discussion summarizes the main points in Fowler's books: (1981, pp.119-213); and Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984, pp.48-76).

Further discussions of Fowler's theory may be consulted in Anderson (1995, Chapters 7 and 8); Craig Dykstra and Sharon Parks (eds), Faith Development and Fowler, Birmingham, Alabama: Religious Education Press, 1986; and Jeff Astley and Leslie Francis (eds), Christian Perspectives on Faith Development; A Reader, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992. Carol Gilligan's work (esp. In a Different Voice, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982) may qualify some of Fowler's work as it relates to women, but it does not diminish it. Fowler incorporates some of the best of her insights into his work.
We probably have a movement from a Synthetic-Conventional (Stage 3) approach to miracles (represented by Jewish thaumaturgy) which has been co-opted by the pre-Marcan tradition and melded into an Individuative-Reflective (Stage 4) interpretation of Jesus' ministry. If Peter, or someone like him, were indeed a prevalent source for Mark (as Papias believes), a conspicuous connection exists between the thaumaturgical thrust of Jesus' miracles in Mark and the presentation of Peter in Acts. In every sermon attributed to Peter in Acts, a wondrous act of God plays a central rhetorical role. Eventually, the "Petrine" interpretation of Jesus' miracles becomes the prevalent one and thus assumes a Synthetic-Conventional (Stage 3) structure as the prevalent view of the mainline church.

By individuated I mean that the evangelist has come up with a view of Jesus' miracles which is parallel to the prevalent view of the Synoptic, but which is not identical to it. In that sense, it operates on an Individuative-Reflective (Stage 4) level of faith development. There is no evidence that the individuated valuation of miracles in the pre-Marcan tradition was ever identical to the Johannine. We may indeed have two "bi-optic" trajectories underlying the Synoptic and Johannine accounts.

In Jn.21:22f. the compiler implies that the Beloved Disciple has died, and it is explained that Jesus never promised he would not die, he only said to Peter, "What is it to you if he remains alive until I come?" See Robert Browning's provocative poem, "A Death in the Desert," where the evangelist himself is commanded to come forth from his "sleep" in the grotto and to reflect upon the memory of a glorious past in the light of present challenges.

By this I mean that hard, critical questions tending to challenge prevalent notions appear not to have been posed too intensely to the Synoptic view that miracles happen as a result of human faith. In fact, by the time Matthew was written, the motif seems even more embellished.

One of the main advantages of Bultmann's revelation-sayings source is that it "explains" the tension between John's elevated christological discourses and the incarnational christology of the evangelist. Once more, however, a cognitive dialogue is mistakenly identified as a literary one.

The Son is equal to (to be equated identically with) the Father precisely because he does nothing on his own and does only what the Father tells him to do. See Anderson (1995 Conclusion) for further development of this view.

Despite the problematic implications of this view, the dialectical character of John's christology suggests proximity to, and distance from, the actual ministry of Jesus, rather than distance from it alone. This is where epistemology and theology meet. Do we have as the original source of John's encounter theology someone's transforming encounters with Jesus? If not, whence the origin, and why the motif? To once again invoke the catch-all justification for eisegetical interpretative moves — "It must be due to the theologizing license of the evangelist" — is overly-speculative and imprecise. It begs the analytical question, "Why?", and that leads again to experiential and cognitive questions regarding the epistemological origins of John's distinctive material.

These may be observed in Anderson (1995, Tables 7 and 8). P. Gardner Smith identified four significant differences between John 6 and Mark (Saint John and the Synoptic Gospels, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938) in his study; whereas these tables identify forty-five differences in terms of detail.

See 1 John 1:1-3. Given the fact that the eyewitness motif in the Gospel of John represents the work of the compiler (clearly Jn. 21:24, and probably 19:35), as well as several other confirming factors, it is indeed arguable that the compiler of the Gospel was also the author of the Epistles of John.

See for instance Marianne Meye Thompson, The Humanity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988, pp.33-52. In Anderson (1995, Ch.7) I develop the view that Jn. 1:14 must be seen as an intentionally conjunctive statement. "The Word became flesh... and we have beheld his glory." Significantly, these two motifs are connected by an experiential clause: "and dwelt among us."

While Professor Ellens has pointed out to me helpfully that Fowler's work is a structuralist model employing psychoanalytic and psychodynamic theory, and Loder's work is largely a transpersonal psychological model, I use the word "cognitive" in the broad sense. I do not mean to suggest that either of these are models of "cognitive psychology" proper; rather, they are both analyses of cognition — one describing a developmental and reflective approach — the other describing the crisis of any knowing event.
Yes, religionsgeschichtliche connections are helpful, but when one asks why did the evangelist co-opt an agency motif or a Logos christology, one is returned once more to experiential and cognitive issues, an overlooked field in the historical-critical method and traditionsgeschichtliche investigations overall.

This is also the conclusion of Franz Musner, *The Historical Jesus in the Gospel of John*, New York: Herder and Herder, 1967.