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The Jesus of History, the Christ of Faith, and the Gospel of John

Paul N. Anderson

The quest for Jesus in the modern era has been governed by two asserted dichotomies by David F. Strauss some 150 years ago: first, that the Christ of faith must be distanced from the Jesus of history; second, that one cannot embrace simultaneously the portraits of Jesus in the Synoptics and in John.¹ As a result, the one Gospel claiming first-hand contact with Jesus of Nazareth is relegated to the confines of theology alone, expunged from canons of history. Further, even features in the Synoptics bearing Johannine traits have been disqualified from Jesus portraitures simply because they are tainted by “Johannine theologization” in the schemes of some critical scholars.² While all other ancient literature has recently been welcomed into the bank of resources for understanding Jesus, John has been programmatically excluded. The critical question is whether the dehistoricization of John and the de-Johannification of Jesus are robust as scholarly platforms on which to construct historical understandings of Jesus.³ If so, fine. History may proceed unencumbered by theology –Johannine or otherwise. If not, however, new stock must be taken of John’s

contribution to history as well as theology, critically, with im­
plications for the quest for Jesus as well as the Christ of faith.4

This reevaluation, however, is not motivated by tradition­
al interests. Indeed, if John is found to be historical over and
against the Synoptics, such would create new problems for tra­
ditionalists and critics alike. Let the chips, though, fall where
they may. Strict dichotomizations of John versus the Synoptics
and theology versus history are critically flawed, as are many
of the reasons for questioning gospel historicity overall.

1. Strengths and Weaknesses of the Critical Platforms

Along these two rails the tracks of critical New Testament
scholarship were laid over and against traditional views, and
their compelling features are understandable. (1) As the coun­
cils of the church (especially the first four, from 325 AD to
451 AD) dealt with Christology in terms of Greek categories
of being and metaphysics, their constructs at times extended
beyond what biblical authors might have envisioned. While
patristic theologians sought above all else to be biblical theo­
logians, some theological claims made for biblical texts left
some traditional views vulnerable to critical challenge. (2) It
goes without saying that a theological investment in the con­
tent of a text may influence unduly the presentation of other­
wise mundane narrative. Therefore, the inference of subjective
interest always threatens objective historicity. (3) Any appeal
to the miraculous or the supranatural steps outside of modern
and scientific understandings of cause-and-effect standards of

4 Since the turn of the new millennium this shift is already under­
way; cf. J.F. Charlesworth, ‘The Historical Jesus in the Fourth Gospel:
historical inquiry. As a result, some means of accounting for miracles and reports of events falling outside the natural order of things call for explanations beyond fideism in the modern era. (4) The Gospel of John indeed is different from the Synoptics, and it is thus understandable that a three-against-one majority might make John the loser when compared with the Synoptic witness. Further, a good deal of Synoptic material is missing from John, and a good deal of John’s material is missing from the Synoptics, so these facts must be accounted for in some way. (5) Because John is the most theological of the Gospels, and because the Johannine Jesus speaks with the language and thought forms of the Fourth Evangelist, these features call into question the historicity of the Johannine text. As a result, John’s highly interpretive presentation of Jesus and his ministry make it all too easy to reassign its witness to canons of theology rather than historiography.

Weaknesses with approaches to such issues, however, also abound. (1) Just because the Johannine Prologue and the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke describe first-century theological understandings of God’s being “in Christ” and reconciling the world to Godself (2 Cor. 5.19), it would be a mistake to assume that New Testament writers were no longer connected to historical operations. Just as it is a mistake to assume first-century biblical authors possessed the theological categories and understandings constructed later upon their writings, it is also an error to dismiss their connectedness to historical memory because of later theological developments. (2) While subjective investment can distort the objectivity of a presentation, there is no such thing as non-subjective historicity. Without the subjective inference of value and significance, a normal event or saying would not be worthy of remembering. A fair and accurate (thus, dispassionate and
objective) presentation of events distinguishes better history from its distortions, but there is no such thing as non-subjective, valued history. (3) While ancient appeals to the wondrous raise questions of whether a reported event stands outside the natural order of things, first century understandings of how God works may at times present otherwise explicable events in supranatural terms. And, the fact that events are considered exceptional rather than commonplace acknowledges the perceived rarity of reports. (4) While the Gospel of John is indeed different from the other Gospels, given that Matthew and Luke built upon Mark, it is not really a matter of a three-against-one majority but a factor of John and Mark. Further, if John has its own story to tell, precisely because of Markan familiarity, this might account for John’s being different from Mark as an intentional alternative. Therefore, John’s differences from the other Gospels may be factors of historicity rather than arguments against it. (5) While John is indeed theological, so is Mark, and so are Matthew and Luke. Further, John has more mundane and archaeologically-verified details than all the other Gospels combined. Therefore, the mundane character of John’s narrative must be taken into consideration as well as its theological inclinations. As a result, in addition to being called “the Theologian”, the John’s author might also be fittingly regarded as “the Historian”.

The point of this brief strength-weakness analysis is not to argue for John’s historical accuracy or inaccuracy; such may finally be left to faith—however one judges the evidence. Rather, it is to appreciate the reasoned basis for these modern platforms, while at the same time questioning their stability as new bases for historical research, given also their weaknesses.
2. The Gospel of John

If Strauss is correct, that John possessed neither historical content nor insight into the Jesus of history, this would be important to establish. The questioning of a proposition, however, does not its opposite establish. The problem is that John is the only Gospel claiming first-hand access to Jesus’ ministry, while also possessing a sizeable number of mundane details and apparently historical data—despite being highly theological in its presentation. This has forced scholars rejecting the traditional view of John’s apostolic authorship to account for the phenomenology of its presentation, which includes apparent-historical material. However, highly diachronic inferences of alien sources, rearrangements, and redactors’ insertions fail to convince factually; John’s imagined dependence on Synoptic traditions is weak because no similarities are identical, and over 80% of John has no Synoptic parallels; and theories of purported “mimetic imitations of reality” are disconfirmed by the fact that Luke and Matthew omit Markan non-symbolic details, overall. Therefore, while traditional views have their limitations, so do proposed alternatives, including the three leading modern alternatives.

Of the most plausible theories of John’s composition, the following elements are most compelling, critically. First, John’s major aporias can be addressed within a modest two-edition theory of composition. The poetic character of the Prologue and the apparent first ending at John 20.31

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suggest that John 1.1-18 and 21.1-25 were added by the final editor; John 6 appears to have been inserted between chapters 5 and 7; John 14.31 appears to originally flowed into 18.1; the references to the eyewitness in John 19.35 and the Beloved Disciple elsewhere appear to have been added by a final compiler – plausibly, the author of the Epistles. This adaptation of the composition theories of Raymond Brown and Barnabas Lindars (affirmed by John Ashton⁶) offers an efficient and effective way to address John’s most perplexing literary issues, accounting also for its autonomy and development.

Second, if John’s later material included the Prologue and chapters 6.15-17, and 21, John’s first edition had only five miracles instead of eight. Further, these five signs are precisely the ones not included in Mark or the other Synoptics. Assuming the Johannine evangelist had a general familiarity with Mark, perhaps hearing it read in a meeting for worship,⁷ his first edition functions to augment Mark chronologically and topographically. Therefore, narrating events before the Bap-


tist was imprisoned (Mark 1.14; John 3.24) and the numbering of the first and second signs (John 2.11; 4.54) reflect John’s inclusion of events in Jesus’ ministry before those reported in Mark 1. Likewise, showcasing Jesus’ three signs performed in Jerusalem and Bethany, as well as featuring multiple trips to Jerusalem, reflect an attempt to augment Mark geographically. Further, the five signs of Jesus in John’s first edition pose a rhetorical parallel to the five books of Moses; his word comes true, showing that he fulfills the prophecy of Moses in Deut 18.15-22 (John 2.22; 12.33; 13.19; 18.9, 32). Therefore, the thrust of John’s first edition (as the second gospel—between 80-85 AD) augments Mark and also furthers an apologetic interest, seeking to present Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. John’s later material adds parallels to the Synoptics and final teachings of Jesus, helping community members continue to abide in Christ and his community of faith.

Third, as John and Mark may be termed the Bi-Optic Gospels, presenting two distinctive memories of Jesus’ ministry from day one, this leads to what may be called a Bi-Optic Hypothesis. While Matthew and Luke built upon Mark, John built around Mark; John is different on purpose. When the distinctive similarities and differences between John and each of the Synoptics are analyzed, further inferences emerge. (1) Distinctive similarities with Mark regarding illustrative, non-symbolic details (200 and 300 denarii, much/green grass, etc.) suggest contact during the oral stages of their early traditions—at least two preachers hearing each other narrate stories of Jesus’ ministry. As influence cannot be ascertained in only one direction, a safer inference is “in-

For a more detailed analysis of the distinctive Johannine-Synoptic literary contacts, see P.N. Anderson, Quest, 101-26.
terfluence” (Brown calls it “cross-influence”) between the early stages of these traditions—the sort of thing that would have happened between the traveling ministries of Peter and John in Acts 8, whether or not these two particular individuals were involved. (2) The first edition of John augments Mark with early and southern reports of Jesus’ ministry, and it sets the record straight on the timing of the temple incident, multiple trips to Jerusalem, and several other aspects of presentation. (3) Luke departs from Mark and sides with John over six dozen times, suggesting that the Johannine tradition (probably in its oral or formative stages) was one of Luke’s sources (Luke 1.2). Luke also provides an overlooked first-century clue to John’s apostolic authorship in Acts 4.19-20, where John the Apostle is presented as declaring a Johannine logion (testifying to “what we have seen and heard”, cf. 1 John 1.3) a full century before Irenaeus’ explicit connection. (4) The Q tradition displays some Johannine features, especially references to the Father-Son relationship in (Matt 11.27; Luke 10.22), so it either depends on the Johannine tradition or shares a parallel early memory of Jesus’ commissioned agency, confirming John’s primacy. (5) Matthean-Johannine contacts show a reinforcing interest in showing Jesus to be the Jewish Messiah and a series of dialectical engagements over church leadership and effective governance—the former advocating an institutional

9 This connection was first published in the last Appendix of P.N. Anderson, Christology, 274-77, noted also my postscript to a new overall theory in Riddles, 153-5. Pope Benedict XVI also notes the reference to John’s having “seen and heard” in Acts 4.20 and 1 John 1.3, but he does not explicitly cite it as a first-century clue to John’s apostolic authorship: The Apostles (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 2007) 77; Jesus of Nazareth (New York: Random House, 2007) 231.
the approach and the latter harkening back to a more primitive familial ecclesiology. (6) The later additions to John and Mark show an interest in harmonization. The likely addition of John 6 and 21 to the first edition of John (around 100 AD) adds the feeding and sea-crossing narratives, standardizing the narrative and fulfilling Mark’s prediction that Jesus will go ahead of the disciples and Peter to Galilee (Mark 16.7); the second ending of Mark includes Johannine details. Interfluentiality continues!

Fourth, the origins of John’s christological tensions involve several dialectical factors. (1) The evangelist was clearly a dialectical thinker, who thought about most issues in both-and ways rather than either-or dichotomies. Such is a trademark of first-order reflection rather than second-order operation, suggesting the evangelist’s proximity to Jesus rather than his being a second-generation dogmatist. (2) John’s Prophet-like-Moses agency schema is Jewish rather than Gnostic, and John’s Father-Son relationship should be viewed in the light of Deut 18.15-22. In Jewish thought, the agent is in all ways like the one who sent him, and parallel to the Synoptic parable of the vineyard owner and his emissary son (Matt 21.33-43; Mark 12.1-11; Luke 20.9-18), the Jewish agency schema in John accounts for Jesus’ presentation as simultaneously equal to and subordinate to the Father. (3) The development of the Johannine tradition and situation shows high and low elements of Christology as being both early and late. High christological themes include primitive memories of spiritual encounter connected with the ministry of Jesus and later emphases upon his being the Messiah and the agency of God’s saving-revealing work. Low christological themes include mundane presentations of Jesus’ emotions, suffering, and pathos, while later incarnational empha-
ses counter rising Docetism in the Johannine situation, calling believers to the way of the cross. (4) The narrator crafts the discourses and dialogues of Jesus in such a way as to draw later audiences into an imaginary dialogue with Jesus. In doing so, overstatement and understatement are employed, and the evangelist crafts Jesus’ teachings in his own words as extensions of his personal ministry.¹⁰

This overall theory of John’s dialogical autonomy addresses John’s most pressing riddles (theological, historical, literary) effectively, bearing implications for understanding more profoundly the Christ of faith and the Jesus of history. Because the Johannine Prologue appears to have been crafted around John 1.6-8, 15, and 19-51 (showing clear similarities with 1 John 1.1-4), it likely reflects the response of the community to earlier narrations of John’s story of Jesus.¹¹ The Jewish agency schema is rendered within a Hellenistic-friendly Logos motif, parallel to other christological hymns among the Gentile-mission churches. The Johannine evangelist expands the I-am metaphors (also found in the Synoptics) into discourses showing that Jesus fulfills the typologies of Israel in Hebrew Scripture, while also connecting his ministry with the existential condition of all humanity.¹² Because John has its own story of Jesus to tell, it also is intended to be read alongside the other Gospels as an alternative Jesus tradition, despite being theologically developed. What John contributes

¹⁰ P.N. Anderson, Christology 252-265; Riddles 157-70.
The quest for Jesus involves an independent corroboration of the Synoptics as an augmentation of Mark, and in some places a modest correction. John features a deeply spiritual engagement with an abiding memory of Jesus in post-resurrection consciousness, showing that the theology and history of the Gospels are in many ways inextricably entwined.

3. John Versus the Synoptics?

While Strauss and others have good reasons for juxtaposing John and the Synoptics, the issues are not as easily addressed as simply choosing one tradition over and against another. A more nuanced approach is required. In the light of John’s and Mark’s bi-optic perspectives, John’s distinctive presentations of Jesus as the Christ may have been ordered by historical concerns every bit as much as theological ones—in some cases, more so. Given that Mark (even in tradition-al view, Eccles. Hist. 3.39) reflects a second-hand collection of Jesus traditions as rendered by Peter and others (I am unconvinced by attempts to de-Petrinize Mark¹³), it cannot be said that it reflects a precise or knowing itinerary of Jesus. It poses more of a general chronology, featuring the beginning, middle, and end of Jesus’ ministry, so its order of events (followed overall by Matthew and Luke) wields little leverage as a historical witness against John.¹⁴ Several implications thus follow.


¹⁴ With F. Schleiermacher, The Life of Jesus (1864; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1975) the Synoptic account (even assuming Matthean priority) is more fragmentary, while John’s is more coherent.
First, John’s complementary augmentation and modest correction of Mark fit entirely well with the testimony of Papias, who cites the opinion of the Johannine Elder—a fact that often goes unnoticed, lodging three historical criticisms of Mark’s project, albeit also with appreciation. (1) Mark is said to have reported fairly Peter’s preaching, but it is not rendered in the correct order. As John features an early temple incident, multiple trips to Jerusalem, and the last supper held on the evening before the Passover, might these differences reflect John’s knowing attempts to set the record straight—chronologically? (2) The claim is made that Peter’s preaching about Jesus was not ordered by historical interests but by the desire to address the needs of developing Christian audiences. Might John’s expansions of the Father-Son relationship (cf. Matt 11.27 and Luke 10.22), Jesus-teachings metaphors (“light of the world”—Matt 7.14, “bread”—Luke 11.3, “way” and “truth”—Mark 12.14, “resurrection” and “eternal life”—Luke 14.14; Mark 10.30, “shepherd” and “gate”—Matt 7.13-14; 18.12, “vine/ vineyard”—Mark 14.25; Luke 13.6) into discourses, and the ongoing instruction of the Holy Spirit (Mark 13.11) reflect an interest to do the same—repackaging Jesus-teachings for the needs of later audiences? Engagement here may have led to imitative individuation. (3) Mark’s redundancies are noted—yet-defended by the Johannine Elder; he did nothing wrong but simply sought to leave nothing out in his apparent repetitions. Might this explain John’s first-edition attempt to not duplicate Mark, thus recording five distinctive signs, and even in the later material including only one feeding and sea crossing instead of two? Here the evidentiary basis for a Bi-Optic Hypothesis coheres factually with the opinion of
Second, John and the Synoptics should in some ways be seen as complementary to each other. As a paraphrase conveying a similar meaning with different language corroborates historicity rather than discounting it, the Johannine tradition offers an independent means of verification regarding several features of Jesus' ministry as portrayed in the Synoptics. These include: Jesus' early association with John the Baptist; Jesus' affirming the spiritual character of God's Kingdom; his calling of disciples as a corporate venture; an event in the wilderness associating a feeding with a sea crossing and a confession by Peter; Jesus' sense of prophetic agency as one being sent from the Father with a divinely commissioned message; Jesus' apparent rejection of nationalistic and popularistic understandings of Jewish messianism; a temple incident; Jesus' healing people on the Sabbath; Jesus' emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit as a continuing presence among believers; the culmination of his ministry in Jerusalem involving a meal, a garden scene and arrest, Jewish and Roman trials, his torture and crucifixion, death, and burial; discoveries of an empty tomb and reports of appearances to women and the twelve.\(^\text{15}\)

Third, at times differences between the Synoptics and John cannot be reconciled, and historical judgment favors the

\(^{15}\) P.N. Anderson, *Quest* 127-45.
Synoptics over John. These include: Jesus coming and proclaiming the advent of the Kingdom of God, heralding the new age; Jesus’ use of parables and common images to illustrate the ways of God; Jesus’ healing and exorcism ministries; Jesus’ sending out his disciples on ministry trips, exhorting them to give freely just as they had freely received; Jesus’ dining with sinners and tax collectors; Jesus’ teaching on the heart of the Law involving the love of God and neighbor, raising up the center over and against legalistic foci on the periphery and boundaries; Jesus’ negotiating deftly the ploys of religious leaders seeking to entrap him with their trick questions; Jesus’ cleansing the temple as a means of challenging systems of ritual purity; Jesus’ apocalyptic discourse predicting crisis and turmoil in Jerusalem; Jesus’ adding christological significance to a Jewish Passover meal and other customs.

Fourth, there are cases in which historical judgment favors John over the Synoptics. These include: Jesus’ simultaneous ministry alongside John the Baptist early in his ministry; Jesus’ cleansing the temple as an inaugural prophetic sign, raising consternation in Jerusalem from the beginning; early events in Jesus’ ministry, including a celebrative sign and a healing within a Gentile household; Jesus’ traveling to Jerusalem several times during his ministry, extending over two or three years, noting also growing hostility among the Judean religious leaders toward the northern prophet; Jesus’ ministry among Samaritans and his positive reception among them, Galileans, and Gentiles; a sense of political and religious realism is contributed—in addition to John’s archaeological and topographical data—giving a sense of critical realism for understanding more fully Jesus’ ministry and its ambivalent reception; Jesus’ favoring women and others who were not members of the twelve among his followers; Jesus’ adding christological significance
to Jewish festivals and customs during his visits to Jerusalem; Jesus’ authorizing his mission as being sent from the Father, whose agency is attested by his fulfilled word and embodying images of Israel in Hebrew Scripture; Jesus’ performing miracles in Judea as well as Galilee, accounting also for believing Jews in Jerusalem; Jesus’ washing his disciples’ feet as a model of servant-leadership and commanding them to also love one another; Jesus’ celebrating fellowship meals with his followers in Galilee, Bethany, and Jerusalem.

Despite John’s differences with the Synoptics, their commonalities corroborate a variety of features worth building upon regarding historical understandings of the ministry and teachings of Jesus. Further, distinctive renderings which are also parallel, when John and the Synoptics are viewed together, provides an independent means of verification. At times the Synoptics are preferable over John’s presentation, and at times John’s is preferable over the Synoptics. Historiographically, Jesus studies are impoverished if John is excised from the mix, even if including John adds further challenges.

4. History Versus Theology?

Insignificant historicity is a contradiction of terms. Yes, vested interests can corrupt the objectivity of a report, but unless an event is subjectively regarded as worth remembering, it will not be preserved, nor does it deserve to be. It falls short of historic regard in terms of its meaning and significance. Further, to require far-removed distance between the interests of historians and their subjects may expunge the greatest works of history from canons of historical record. It would require believing that no German person could write the history of the German people—including Leopold von Ranke, or that Churchill’s his-
toriography is reliable—except when he comments on Britain, or that no communist would ever be a trustworthy source for a treatise on Marx, or that no Republican could ever write a fair treatment of Lincoln—nor a Democrat a history of Jefferson. Nonsense! Must the solid science of ichthyology require that a researcher not own an aquarium? And yet this arch-idiocricy of modern historiography has been allowed to stand within New Testament studies—leveraging a wedge between the interests of ancient writers and modern interpreters from the subject—despite being critically flawed as a disciplinary methodology. One could even argue that a historian cannot perform the best of research unless one is passionate about one’s subject and engaged with it thoroughly. While the interests of the historian should not influence outcomes, they do and must influence one’s questions and inquiry. That is how all scientific inquiry advances, so theological investment should not disqualify the historical value of ancient accounts of Jesus’ ministry or their modern investigations.

A second flaw: while John indeed is theological, the same must be said for Mark. Indeed, the cross is central within Mark’s narrative, but such does not prove that Jesus never died on one. Rather, in the preaching and teaching of the Apostles, the suffering and death of Jesus were central to his redemptive work, and this accounts for its being featured with such prominence in Mark and the other Gospels. While theological investment undoubtedly influenced the selection, crafting, and presentation of events in the narrative, such does not argue against Mark’s historicity overall; neither should it when it comes to John. Further, while John’s Passion narrative is overall independent of Mark’s (as even Bultmann argued), it corroborates a good number of Mark’s narrated events. Even within the writings of Paul, theological convictions grew out of inferences of
tain, for a fair person. that a craithin inter subjectology. best and stori ence quiry the their same ark’s one. suf work, enco ment sen ainst es to nde tes a writ es of the historic, which then contributed to theologically significant narrations of history. Thus, too broad a wedge between the two is critically problematic, and John’s theology and history must be considered alongside the same in Mark and the other narratives constructed upon it.

A third fallacy of Strauss’s history-theology dichotomy involved his antipathy toward Schleiermacher’s approach. Having judged that christological dogmas of the church have no overlap with the Jesus of history, he wrongly inferred Schleiermacher to be arguing the dual nature of Christ in ontological terms, when Schleiermacher sought to understand the phenomenology of John’s christological tensions, navigating a middle ground between Ebionism and Docetism. As a result, he misjudged Schleiermacher’s archetypal Christology to be an ideal Christology (committing the same error as Baur, who wrongly labeled Schleiermacher a Gnostic) and then accused him of being inconsistent. Strauss then erred in overreading aspects of Jesus’ God-consciousness in John 5 and elsewhere, seeing them as reflecting a Logos Christology rather than Jesus’ sense of prophetic mission, as echoed in Q. Strauss was so filled with hatred against Schleiermacher, that his objectivity suffered; he likened him to a Docetist and a Socinian—a Johannine dogmatist in contrast to Bretschneider, “the strong man of science, and Schleiermacher the man of a frail religious-aesthetic partiality.” Strauss declared his purpose at the outset to challenge the view that Jesus could be “a man in the full sense and still as a

16 D.F. Strauss, The Christ of Faith, 41. Interestingly, Bretschneider later softened his critiques of the Johannine riddles, and Strauss also questioned his assertion of John’s ahistoricity in his third edition of The Life of Jesus Critically Examined; he reverted to his critical stance toward John in the fourth edition (1840) at the insistence of F.C. Baur.
single person stand above the whole of humanity”. He sees this as “the chain which still blocks the harbor of Christian theology against the open sea of rational science” and declares the purpose of his book is to break that chain, as it is in all of his writings.\textsuperscript{17} This explains his investment in outcomes, distorting Schleiermacher’s views only to find them lacking. This is not to say that Schleiermacher’s scheme is without its flaws; it is to say that Strauss’s critique is far from being dispassionate and objective. Given that Strauss’ agenda was thoroughly theological, if he was right in his dichotomizing of theology versus history, his argument bears no weight historically.

A fourth point is that naturalistic theology is theology. Therefore, while critical and scientific investigations of the Bible and theology must work with facts and data as well as theory and philosophy, it simply is not the case that the only theological investment threatening historical research is the orthodox or the conservative. Dogmatic naturalism is every bit as theological as its counterparts, and critics of tradition all too easily fail to acknowledge their biases while freely labeling the views of their opponents as such. Operationally, the purported liberation of the historical Jesus from theological investments also is often disingenuous. While promising to distill a historical portraiture of Jesus untainted by theological interest, recent quests for Jesus then avail new sketches of a party reveler and challenger of religiosity of all stripes. Such, then, becomes the new Jesus-iconography of those who have left the church and embraced secular humanism. Irreligion can be every bit as religious as that which it claims to transcend, so the fact of this circularity, both in theory and in practice, deserves critical reappraisal. It is neither objective nor dispassionate and often

\textsuperscript{17} D.F. Strauss, \textit{The Christ of Faith}, 5.
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embody the very dogmatism it seeks to eradicate, featuring the Jesus of Modernism—not necessarily the Jesus of history.

5. Conclusion

While modern theology and biblical scholarship has largely sided with Strauss in the dichotomizing of the Synoptics versus John and history versus theology, these either-or approaches are terribly flawed critically. While problems and riddles indeed abound, they must be approached individually and critically, unencumbered by ideological naturalism or fideistic supernaturalism. Both history and theology are dialectical ventures, requiring both-and considerations instead of disjunctive absolutes. Given that the Johannine tradition poses an alternative rendering of Jesus’ ministry, plausibly in dialogue with the Synoptic traditions, its distinctive features may be factors of historicity every bit as much as its corroborative ones. And, given that history and theology are inextricable, the modern historian cannot claim to have overturned a purported first-century memory of Jesus simply on the basis of being scandalized by aspects of its theological interpretations, ancient or recent. The Gospel of John also contains more mundane and archaeology-attested details than all the other Gospels combined, and this fact requires critical consideration. Given an overlooked first-century clue to John’s apostolic authorship, a reconsideration of the dehistoricization of John and the de-Johannification of Jesus is long overdue. And such is what a renewed look at the Jesus of history, the Christ of faith, and the Gospel of John might avail.

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