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John's Christological Tensions (Chapter in The Gospel of St. John  
and Christian Theology)**

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# On Guessing Points and Naming Stars: Epistemological Origins of John's Christological Tensions

*Paul N. Anderson*

Theological and biblical studies have historically developed hand in hand, and John's distinctive Christology has long been at the center of that relationship. Within John the humanity *and* divinity of Jesus converge, as do the Son's equality with — *and* subordination to — the Father. Likewise, embellished *and* existentialized appraisals of Jesus' signs, present *and* futuristic eschatology, universalistic *and* particularistic soteriology, pro- *and* anti-Jewish sentiments, and apparent free-will *and* deterministic motifs pervade the Johannine text among other tensions as well. From the patristic era to the modern age, John's christological tensions have intrigued and challenged theologians and exegetes alike. Indeed, the history of Christian theology would have been entirely different had it not been for the Fourth Gospel, and debates still rage among those attempting to address the great Johannine riddles along literary, historical, and theological lines. This can be seen in any overview of recent approaches to John's Christology,<sup>1</sup> but central to these investigations is the question of the

1. A survey of over a dozen distinctive approaches is found in the first three chapters (pp. 1-69) and the five bibliographies (pp. 278-96) in Paul N. Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6* (WUNT II; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1996; Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1997). See also reviews of the literature in Robert Kysar, *The Fourth Evangelist and His Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1975) and "The Fourth Gospel: A Report on Recent Research," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II, 25:3, ed. by Wolfgang Haase (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1985), pp. 2389-2480; Maarten Menken, "The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: A Survey of Recent Research," in *From Jesus to John: Essays on Jesus and New Testament Christology in Honor of Marinus de Jonge*, ed. Martinus de Boer (JSNTSup 84; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), pp. 292-320; R. Alan Culpepper, "The Theology of the Gospel of

character and epistemological origin of John's christological tensions. Indeed, the fascinating thing about the Christology of the Fourth Gospel is not that it advances *either* aspect of the above polarities, but that it claims *both*.

Whereas patristic scholars and theologians addressed these tensions employing the best tools available (categories of being and metaphysics), modern scholars have tended to do so by applying the methods of the modern era (historical- and literary-critical methodologies). The epistemological origins of these tensions, however, lie not with literary dialogues between alien sources and later redactors. Rather, they consist largely of four primary factors,<sup>2</sup> each of which has a particular bearing on pressing interpretive issues within John's enigmatic Christology. This being the case, the goal of the present essay is to consider the implications of those factors and their relationships for the interpretation of John. While they can be inferred in overall studies of the Fourth Gospel, they also present themselves clearly within the Johannine Prologue, which becomes something of a case study for their inference and interpretation.

At the center of these four sources of John's tensions, though, is the dialectical thinking of the evangelist.<sup>3</sup> While cognitive-critical analyses lend scientific validity and insight to how persons — the *human* sources of gospel tradi-

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John," *Review and Expositor* 85 (1988): 417-32; and Harold W. Attridge, "Genre Bending in the Fourth Gospel," *JBL* 121, no. 1 (2002): 3-21.

2. These four factors include: (1) the *Prophet-like-Moses agency typology* rooted in Deuteronomy 18:15-22, (2) the *dialectical thinking of the evangelist* and cognitive/experiential factors, (3) the *dialectical situation of Johannine Christianity* emerging over seven decades involving at least as many sequential-yet-overlapping crises, and (4) the *literary functions of the Johannine narrative*. This was the conclusion of Anderson, *Christology* (pp. 252-65), and in that sense the present essay picks up where the monograph leaves off.

3. Table 22 in Anderson, *Christology* (p. 262) places the evangelist's dialectical manner of thought in the center, interacting in both sets of directions between each of the four sources of John's christological tensions. This approach builds on the work of C. K. Barrett, "The Dialectical Theology of St. John," in his *New Testament Essays* (London: SPCK, 1972), pp. 49-69; Marinus de Jonge, "Variety and Development in Johannine Christology," in his *Jesus, Stranger from Heaven and Son of God* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977), pp. 193-222; James D. G. Dunn, "Let John Be John," in *The Gospel and the Gospels*, ed. Peter Stuhlmacher (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 293-322; Charles F. D. Moule, "The Individualism of the Fourth Gospel," *NovT* 5 (1962): 171-90; Edwin D. Freed, "Variations in the Language and Thought of John," *ZNW* 55 (1964): 167-97; P. H. Menoud, "The Originality of John's Thought," in his *Jesus Christ and the Faith* (Pittsburg: Pickwick Press, 1978), pp. 228-66; Paul S. Minear, "Diversity and Unity: A Johannine Case Study," in *Die Mitte des Neuen Testament: Einheit und Vielfalt Neutestamentlicher Theologie, Festschrift für Eduard Schweizer zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. by Ulrich Luz and Hans Weder (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), pp. 162-75; and Stephen S. Smalley, "Diversity and Development in John," *NTS* 17 (1970-71): 276-92.

tions — come to think dialectically,<sup>4</sup> the thesis that the Fourth Evangelist was a dialectical thinker is not a new notion. Already in the mid-nineteenth century, Robert Browning described three levels of thought, or “three souls,” involving *sensory experience* (“A soul of each and all the bodily parts”), *knowing* (“the next soul, which is seated in the brain, . . . feeleth, thinketh, willeth”), and *being* (“the last soul, that uses both the first, . . . constituting man’s self, is what Is”). Indeed, Browning’s poetic treatment of John’s fascinating witness portrays lucidly the dialectical relationship between perception and experience in John:

“What first were guessed as points, I now knew stars,  
And named them in the Gospel I have writ.”<sup>5</sup>

So what *is* the relation between the mundane “points” included in John’s presentation of Jesus’ ministry and the transcendent “stars” adumbrated in the Johannine reflection? Was it a spiritualization of actual events in Jesus’ ministry, or was it a historicization of theological insights conveyed within the novelistic framework of gospel narrative? Was John dependent on the Synoptics or independent of them altogether? Were alien sources employed in the construction of the Johannine evangel, or is the tradition employed intrinsic to the interpretive work along the way? And, in the light of these questions, what is the relation between John’s distinctive presentation of Jesus as the Christ and the development of Christian theology? Not all of these questions can be fully answered in the present essay, but these and others will be addressed at least briefly in exploring the epistemological origins of John’s distinctively unitive and disunitive Christology and in considering their implications for interpretation.

4. See “The Dialectical Character of John 6” (ch. 7) in Anderson, *Christology* (pp. 137-66), where the cognitive-critical platforms of James Loder and James Fowler are applied to Gospel *Traditionsgeschichte*. See also Paul N. Anderson, “The Cognitive Origins of John’s Christological Unity and Disunity,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 17 (1995): 1-24, reprinted in *Psychology and the Bible: A New Way to Read the Scriptures*, ed. J. Harold Ellens and Wayne Rollins, 4 vols. (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2004), vol. 3, pp. 127-49; and Paul N. Anderson, “A Way Forward in the Scientific Investigation of Gospel Traditions: Cognitive-Critical Analysis,” in *Psychology and the Bible*, vol. 4, pp. 246-76.

5. Browning’s oft-cited poem, *A Death in the Desert*, is one of the finest explorations of the Fourth Gospel’s character and origins. In this remarkable work, the ancient apostle John is slumbering in a death-like sleep until he is called forth from the grotto by a Lazarus-type awakening as a young believer who, unencumbered by hesitation, sounds the authoritative word: “I am the Resurrection and the Life.” The rest of the poem describes the tensions between the glorious and powerful days of old and the disappointing times of future eras, as the frail patriarch muses dialectically upon the way things used to be and the ways things had become.

## John's Christology: A Prolific Source of Theological and Biblical Debate

The christological tensions in the Gospel of John have been the most prolific source of theological discussion and debate within the church and without. Consider, for instance, first, the *humanity and divinity of Jesus*.<sup>6</sup> In John the humanity of Jesus is portrayed explicitly, but Jesus' divinity is also portrayed extensively. On one hand, the fleshly incarnation of Jesus is emphasized (John 1:14a; 6:51-56); however, so is his "glory" (1:14c; 11:4; 14:13; 17:1) and "glorification" (1:51; 3:14; 6:62; 8:28; 12:23, 34; 13:1). Jesus is referred to as "God" (1:1, 18; 20:28) and is associated with the theophanic "I AM" of Exodus 3:14 (6:20; 8:58). And yet, the point of the eyewitness testimony in John 19:34 is that *real* blood and water flowed forth from the side of Jesus — emphasizing Jesus' fleshly humanity — and the post-resurrection evidence for Thomas is his climactic touching of the flesh wounds of the risen Lord (20:27).

Likewise, *gnosis* and *pathos* flow mingled down the Johannine current. On one hand, the divine certainty and "knowing" of Jesus are emphasized at key points in the narrative (1:47-51; 2:24-25; 4:17-19; 5:41-42; 6:64; 13:1-3). However, Jesus still weeps (11:35), his heart is deeply troubled (11:33; 12:27; 13:21), he groans (11:33, 38), on the cross he thirsts (19:28), and he loves his own (11:3, 5, 36; 13:1, 23, 34; 14:21; 15:9, 10, 12; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20). The Johannine Jesus comes across in the most human — and the most divine — of portrayals *anywhere* in the New Testament.

Consider also the *Father/Son relationship* in John. Jesus' relation to the Father is portrayed as the most subordinate in the New Testament; and yet, so his oneness with the Father. On one hand, the Son is equal to the Father (1:1, 18; 5:18; 8:23, 58; 10:29-30, 33, 38; 12:41; 14:10; 20:28); "I and the Father are one," declares John's Jesus. On the other hand, he is also subordinate to the Father (5:19, 30; 7:16; 8:16, 28; 12:49; 14:10; 14:28), and he declares in no uncertain terms: "The Father is greater than I." Are these assertions essentially contradictory, or just seemingly so?

John is also the primary source of the historic *Filioque* debates. Does the Holy Spirit proceed from the Father only or from the Son also? On one hand, Jesus declares that he will ask the Father to send the Holy Spirit (14:16) and that the Father will send the Holy Spirit in his name (14:26). On the other hand, Je-

6. These tensions are also outlined in somewhat different form in Anderson, *Christology* (Appendices I-VI, pp. 266-71), and in Paul Anderson, *Navigating the Living Waters of the Gospel of John: On Wading with Children and Swimming with Elephants*, Pendle Hill Pamphlet 352 (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Press, 2000).

sus also promises that he will send the Spirit from the Father (15:26) and promises to send the *Paraklētos* after he departs (16:7). Is the Father or the Son the source of the Spirit's agency?

One can imagine the degree to which these portrayals of the Father/Son relationship and the Holy Spirit's agency in John contributed to great debates among the leaders of the early church! In the fourth century, Arius argued Jesus was divine in his mission, but not fully God. Athanasius and his position eventually won the day by casting the issue in terms of essence: for Jesus and the Father to be "one" this must have implied the essence of being, which led to the doctrine of the dual nature of the Son (Constantinople, 381 CE) and then to the threefold Godhead and the Trinity (Chalcedon, 451 CE). John thus provided many of the answers to, as well as the questions leading up to, these great debates and was used by *both sides* of many arguments!<sup>7</sup>

In addition to these christological issues, other theological tensions also abound in John. Regarding *the judgment of the Son*, the Johannine narrative presents a Jesus who says that he came not to judge the world (3:17; 12:37) and that he judges no one (8:15); then he claims that the Father has entrusted all judgment to the Son (5:22), and it is for judgment that Jesus has come to into the world (9:39).

Regarding *faith and miracles*, John's embellishment and existentialization of miracles presents a problem. On one hand, Jesus' signs lead people to believe in him (2:11; 4:53; 6:2, 14; 11:15, 45, 48; 12:11, 18-19). On the other hand, dependence on signs is rebuked (4:48; 6:26), and belief *without* having seen Jesus' signs is considered "blessed" (20:29). Indeed, the tension between faith and miracles is far more pronounced in John than it is in the Synoptics.

Consider also *the tension between present and future eschatology* in John. On one hand, in Jesus' ministry salvation, authentic worship, and the work of the Holy Spirit are presented as *here-and-now realities* (1:33; 3:18a; 4:21-24; 5:24, 28; 6:63; 10:10; 15:3; 16:32; 20:20-22), and the "hour" of Jesus' glorification appears to have been already actualized (12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1). On the other hand, believers will receive their final reward only on the last day (5:25; 6:39, 40, 44, 54; 11:24), authentic worship and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit appear yet to be in the future (4:21; 7:39; 14:26), and the "hour" of Jesus' glorification appears not yet actualized at places in the narrative (2:4; 7:6, 8, 30; 8:20). Is John's eschatology present, futuristic, or both?

And what is to be made of John's puzzling *sacramentology*? On one hand,

7. See also the excellent treatments of John's influence on the early church by T. E. Pollard, *Johannine Christology and the Early Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); and Maurice Wiles, *The Spiritual Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960).

*sacramental associations abound* (1:6-8, 15, 19-36; 3:5, 22-30; 6:53-58; 10:40-42; 19:34), and Jesus shares table fellowship several times with his disciples (2:1-11; 6:1-15; 13:1-34; 15:1-8; 21:9-14). On the other hand, Jesus is greater than John the Baptist (1:6-8, 15, 19-36; 3:22-30), to receive spiritual birth is to be born from above (3:3) and of the Spirit (3:5), Jesus himself did not baptize (4:2), the words of the institution are missing from the last supper in John 13, and the “bread” which Jesus gives is his flesh — given for the life of the world on the cross (6:51). Does the absence of Jesus’ having been baptized by John and the omission of an institution at the last supper imply a critique of emerging sacramental practice, or were sacramental forms so sacred for the evangelist that he left them out as a factor of holy reverence?

The issues of *determinism and free will* in John also seem puzzling. On one hand, Jesus knows full well who will receive and reject him (5:42; 6:64; 10:27; 16:19), and no one comes to the Father without being drawn by God (6:44, 65). And yet, as many as believe in Jesus are given the authority to become the children of God (1:12), and John is written that readers and hearers might believe (20:31). So, is one’s coming to the Father predetermined in John, or may all who are willing to believe do so?

Amazingly, John is the greatest source of Christian *universalism and particularity*. The true Light that enlightens everyone is Jesus (1:9) suggesting *universal access* to God’s saving work, and Jesus has many sheep that are “not of this fold” (10:16). And yet, Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, through whom all who come to the Father do so (14:6), and believing in him affords eternal life (3:16; 20:31). If Jesus is the only way to the Father, how could the saving Light of Christ be available to the entire world?

Especially since the Holocaust, concerns about John’s *inferred anti-Semitism* have become particularly acute, and rightly so. On one hand, the *Ioudaioi* are presented as adversaries of Jesus (5:16, 18; 7:1, 11, 13; 8:48, 52, 57; 9:18, 22; 10:31, 33; 11:8; 18:31, 36, 38; 19:7, 12, 14, 38; 20:19) and as typologies of the disbelieving “world” (1:10; 3:19; 7:7; 15:18, 19; 16:8; 17:14, 15). On the other hand, the *Ioudaioi* are presented simply as religious leaders (3:1; 18:14 — parallel to the Judean *archoi* — 7:26, 48; 12:42), or as inhabitants of southern Palestine — Judea (11:19, 31, 33; 11:54; 12:9, 11; 13:33; 19:20) or Jerusalem (1:19; 2:18, 20; 5:10, 15; 19:31). Some of the *Ioudaioi* are presented as believing in Jesus (7:15; 8:31; 11:36, 45; 12:19), and Jesus himself even declares that “Salvation is of the *Ioudaioi*” (4:22). Is John essentially anti-Semitic, or have some interpreters gotten it wrong?

The character and function of *Johannine dualism* also appears in an odd juxtaposition. On one hand, it appears that *soteriological results* are highlighted dualistically: God desires life over death (1:14; 3:15, 16, 36; 4:14, 36; 5:21, 24, 26, 29,

39, 40; 6:27, 33, 35, 40, 47, 48-51, 53-54, 58, 63, 68; 8:12, 21, 24, 51-52; 10:10, 11, 15, 17, 28; 11:25-26, 50-51; 12:25, 50; 13:37, 38; 14:6; 15:13; 17:2, 3; 20:31), Jesus desires that none be lost but that all might be saved (3:17; 5:34; 6:12, 39; 10:9; 12:47; 17:12; 18:9), and God's saving initiative is described in terms of light (1:4, 5, 7, 8, 9; 3:19, 20, 21; 5:35; 8:12; 9:5; 11:9, 12; 12:35, 36, 46), which overcomes darkness (1:5; 3:19; 8:12; 12:35, 46). On the other hand, dualism serves as *an explanation of the world's response to the Revealer*, accounting for the fact that many do not believe. Responses to Jesus illustrate the incapacity of humanity to know or understand the ways and workings of God (1:10, 26, 31, 33; 2:9; 3:8; 4:22, 32; 5:13; 7:28, 49; 8:14, 55; 9:12, 21, 25, 29, 30; 10:5; 12:35; 13:7; 14:5, 9; 15:15, 21; 16:18; 17:25; 19:10; 20:2, 13, 14; 21:4), and people's not knowing God, not having God's word abiding in them, and not being one of Jesus' sheep are described as the reason for their not believing in Jesus (1:10; 5:38; 7:28, 49; 9:29; 10: 26; 12:35; 15:21; 17:25). So is John's juxtaposition of dualistic opposites a factor of persons' originaive states or their ultimate destinies?

In addition to these christological and theological tensions, other puzzling riddles also present themselves in John.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, upon particular interpretations of these assertions Christians have defined orthodoxy and heresy, resulting in religious inclusion and exclusion for nearly two millennia, often failing to account for the fact that even the losing sides of the debates were often citing the Gospel of John as well. Over the last two centuries or more, John's differences with the Synoptics, literary perplexities, and historical-theological tensions have created new sets of controversies. As scholars of the modern era have approached these issues by means of history-of-religions influences and literary-critical models of composition, the most enduring of theories not only address historical and literary perplexities, but they also attempt to deal with John's christological tensions. Among these contributions, Rudolf Bultmann's commentary on John<sup>9</sup> stands out as the most important piece of biblical scholarship in the twentieth century precisely because it dealt so thoroughly with the epistemological origins of John's christological tensions.

8. Consider also tensions between John's historicity and theologization, claims to eyewitness authorship that are attested third hand, and other enigmatic perplexities. These and other literary, historical, and theological Johannine riddles are outlined in fuller detail in Paul N. Anderson, *Matters Johannine — Outlining the Johannine Riddles* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, forthcoming).

9. Rudolf Bultmann's commentary, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), may be regarded as one of the most significant exegetical works of the twentieth century. See also his impressive theological treatment of the Fourth Gospel in *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 2 (London: SCM, 1955), pp. 3-92.



## The Johannine Riddles and Christological Tensions

Rudolf Bultmann's magisterial commentary on the Gospel of John may well be considered "the flower of modernistic analyses of John." While Johannine studies have moved on since his monograph was first published in 1941, and while few scholars would assent to even half of his explanations of how the Fourth Gospel came together, no other commentary has wielded as much command over the field — both positively and negatively — as Bultmann's. What made this work so impressive, however, was not simply Bultmann's command of the ancient extra-canonical literature allowing him to pose religious origins of much of John's material. Rather, it was the combination of his exegetical acuity and his theological insight that gave the work its genius. Add to that a highly ambitious attempt to delineate a multiplicity of sources underlying and overlaying John connected with incisive history-of-religions analysis, and we have a provocative work that contributes literarily and theologically despite the failure of its composition theory to hold up, itself. With Ashton, Smith, and others,<sup>10</sup> Johannine studies cannot be conducted adequately without considering Bultmann's attempts to address John's literary, historical, and theological issues by means of his labyrinthine theory of composition. Most significant about Bultmann's work theologically, however, is the way he sought to outline the epistemological origin of John's christological tensions.

While building on the works of those who had gone on before him, Rudolf Bultmann's synthesis sought to reconcile several of the theological tensions described above, proceeding on the basis of inferring a set of literary dialogues between earlier sources, the contribution of the Johannine evangelist, and interpolations added by the redactor. Accounting for the tensions between embellished miracles and the denigration of signs faith is the assumption that the evangelist employed a *sēmeia* source with wonder attestations (like some tendencies in Mark) and co-opted their thaumaturgical tendencies in more existentially adequate directions. The tension between the humanity and divinity of Jesus is ascribed to the evangelist's supposed incorporation of a Revelation-Sayings source, which also accounted for the origin of John's distinctive I-Am sayings. The evangelist's incarnational Christology thus poses a contrast as a factor of a literary dialogue between the evangelist and his source, to be inferred by the interpreter. While an independent Passion source was required

10. John Ashton's coming to the same conclusion about the importance of Bultmann's work independently is spelled out in his *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 9-111, and D. Moody Smith's *The Composition and Order of the Fourth Gospel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965) continues to be the best guide to Bultmann's commentary in any language.

due to the Johannine Passion Narrative's distinctive and non-derivative character, its theology was indistinguishable from that of the evangelist. Following a supposed disordering of the material (the reordering of which makes the presence of the aforementioned sources apparent), the redactor supposedly added futuristic eschatology, formalistic sacramentology, and deterministic soteriology themes. While Bultmann also allows for the existence of other unnamed sources, these four in particular — in tension with the existentialist theology of the evangelist — account for the epistemological origin on John's christological tensions.

Despite the genius and rigor of Bultmann's approach, however, his own stylistic, contextual, and theological evidence fails to convince. While Ruckstuhl, Schweizer, and van Belle have demonstrated John's impressive stylistic unity with their critical studies, the compiling of all of Bultmann's evidence for sources and plying it out in John 6 yields impressively disappointing results.<sup>11</sup> In the very place where we should have the showcase of John's diachronic composition showing the four sources with inferred theological tension, the distribution of stylistic evidence is random. The one exception is the narrative work of the evangelist, but this does not prove that he was using *any* material other than his own Johannine tradition. Contextual "problems" are also forced, revealing the use of irony rather than editorial "seams," and the theological thrust of John 6:51-58 is continuous with verses 60-71, which Bultmann correctly includes in his section entitled "The Way to the Cross."<sup>12</sup> The theological result of this analysis is that John's christological tensions cannot be said to be a factor of literary dialogues between disparate literary sources. At the very least, they result from factors internal to the thinking of the evangelist, who himself was a dialectical thinker instead of a monological one. Therefore, the tensions are meant to be there, and any attempt to eliminate them threatens to alter and distort the character of the Johannine witness.

A second approach to John's origin and theological character is the view

11. John's stylistic and linguistic unity has been argued convincingly by Eugen Ruckstuhl, *Die literarische Einheit des Johannesevangeliums* (Freiburg: Editions Universitaires Fribourg, 1951); Eduard Schweizer, *Egō Eimi* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1939); and Gilbert van Belle, *The Signs Source in the Fourth Gospel: Historical Survey and Critical Evaluation of the Semeia Hypothesis* (BETL 116; Leuven: Peeters, 1994). The distinctive contribution made by chs. 4-6 of Anderson, *Christology* (pp. 72-136), is that even with the plying out of Bultmann's own evidence (stylistic, contextual, and theological) within John 6, which should be the showcase of John's diachronic composition, the evidence itself fails miserably even on its own terms.

12. See Bultmann, *Gospel*, pp. 443-51. His mistake is not to have included John 6:51-59 in that section, as well, especially given his identifying v. 27 as the "starting point" of the chapter's dialogue (p. 221).

that John is a derivative Gospel — one depending upon one or more of the Synoptic traditions, especially Mark. Indeed, there are many distinctive contacts between Mark and John, and if Mark were the first Gospel to be written and John the last (as I believe was the case), one might infer a Johannine spiritualization of Mark. This is the view of C. K. Barrett, Franz Neirynck, and Tom Brodie,<sup>13</sup> but it also has great problems attending it. First, of all the similarities between Mark and John, *none* of them are identical. In P. Gardner-Smith's analysis of John's independence from the Synoptics in which he identifies four similarities-and-yet-differences between John 6 and Mark, I find forty-five (twenty-four with Mark 6 and twenty-one with Mark 8); *none of them*, however, is identical.<sup>14</sup> Also, most of John's material is not found in Mark, so while some contact may have existed between the traditions, derivation is implausible based upon the evidence. John's theological stances, however, may indeed have developed in dialogue with parallel traditions, but engagement is far different from dependence. In John we have a basic *synchronicity of tradition* and an emerging *diachronicity of situation*.

The approach to John's composition that makes sense of the literary perplexities in the most efficient way with a minimal amount of speculation is that of Barnabas Lindars, who among others has argued for a basic first edition of the Johannine Gospel to which supplementary material may have been added later.<sup>15</sup> While his contention that the adding in of the Lazarus narrative displaced the Temple cleansing is not compelling, the view that the Johannine Prologue and chapter 21 were added to a later edition, along with chapters 6 and 15–17 and some other material is. It makes sense of the most pressing literary perplexities with a minimal amount of speculative reconstruction. If something like this were the case, the Johannine Gospel would have been the second Gospel after Mark, and while Matthew and Luke built *upon* Mark, John built *around* it.

When viewed alongside developments in the Johannine epistles, some factors in the history of the Johannine situation also facilitate an understanding of some of the christological content in John as well. For instance, while seeking to

13. See C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978); Frans Neirynck, "John and the Synoptics," in *L'Évangile de Jean: Sources, rédaction, théologie*, ed. Marinus de Jonge (BETL 44; Louvain: Louvain University Press, 1977), pp. 73-106; and Thomas L. Brodie, *The Quest for the Origin of John's Gospel: A Source-Oriented Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

14. See P. Gardner-Smith, *Saint John and the Synoptic Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938); and Anderson, *Christology*, pp. 97-104. D. Moody Smith defends his sympathy with Gardner-Smith's view in "John, an Independent Gospel," an addition to his second edition of *John Among the Gospels* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), pp. 195-241.

15. See Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972).

evangelize Jewish family and friends, John's high christological content was embellished, and confronting docetizing tendencies among Gentile audiences evoked a set of emphases on the fleshly humanity of Jesus. While this is not a basis for its selection, nearly all of the incarnational material in John is located in the supplementary material added to the first edition. As with the letters of Ignatius and in the Johannine epistles, the docetizing threat followed the Jewish one.

While a detailed theory of John's composition cannot here be developed,<sup>16</sup> some of the solid building material presented elsewhere includes the following findings:

- John's tradition is largely unitive, with tradition and interpretation enjoying a sustained connection rather than a later conflation.
- John's tradition is early as well as late, and it represents an independent development parallel to the other Gospel traditions — at times interactive with them, but not derivative from them. With John and Mark being “the Bi-Optic Gospels,”<sup>17</sup> their early traditions may have enjoyed an “interfluent” set of contacts within their oral phases of development.
- A first edition of John was completed a decade or so after Mark, serving the purpose of augmenting and to some degree correcting Mark, especially designed to convince Jewish members of the Johannine situation that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah.
- Given Luke's five dozen departures from Mark and siding with John, the best inference is that Luke had access to the Johannine tradition, probably in its oral stages of development. Less arguable but also likely is the thesis that the Johannine material appearing in the Q tradition also reflects minor Johannine influences upon Q.
- The Johannine epistles were written after the first Johannine gospel narrative was completed (around 85-95 CE) by another leader in the Johannine situation, the Elder.
- Contacts between the Johannine and Matthean traditions appear to have taken place during this later phase in which Johannine preaching and teaching continued, and the supplementary material in John appears to be engaged dialogically with ecclesial developments in the Matthean tra-

16. A full treatment of John's particular relationships to each of the other canonical Gospel traditions is argued in Paul N. Anderson, “Interfluent, Formative, and Dialectical: A Theory of John's Relation to the Synoptics,” in *Für und wider die Priorität des Johannesevangeliums*, ed. Peter Hofrichter (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2002), pp. 19-58.

17. See Paul N. Anderson, “John and Mark: The Bi-Optic Gospels,” in *Jesus in Johannine Tradition*, ed. Robert T. Fortna and Tom Thatcher (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001), pp. 175-88.

dition — perhaps as a factor of inhospitable treatment by Diotrephes and his kin.

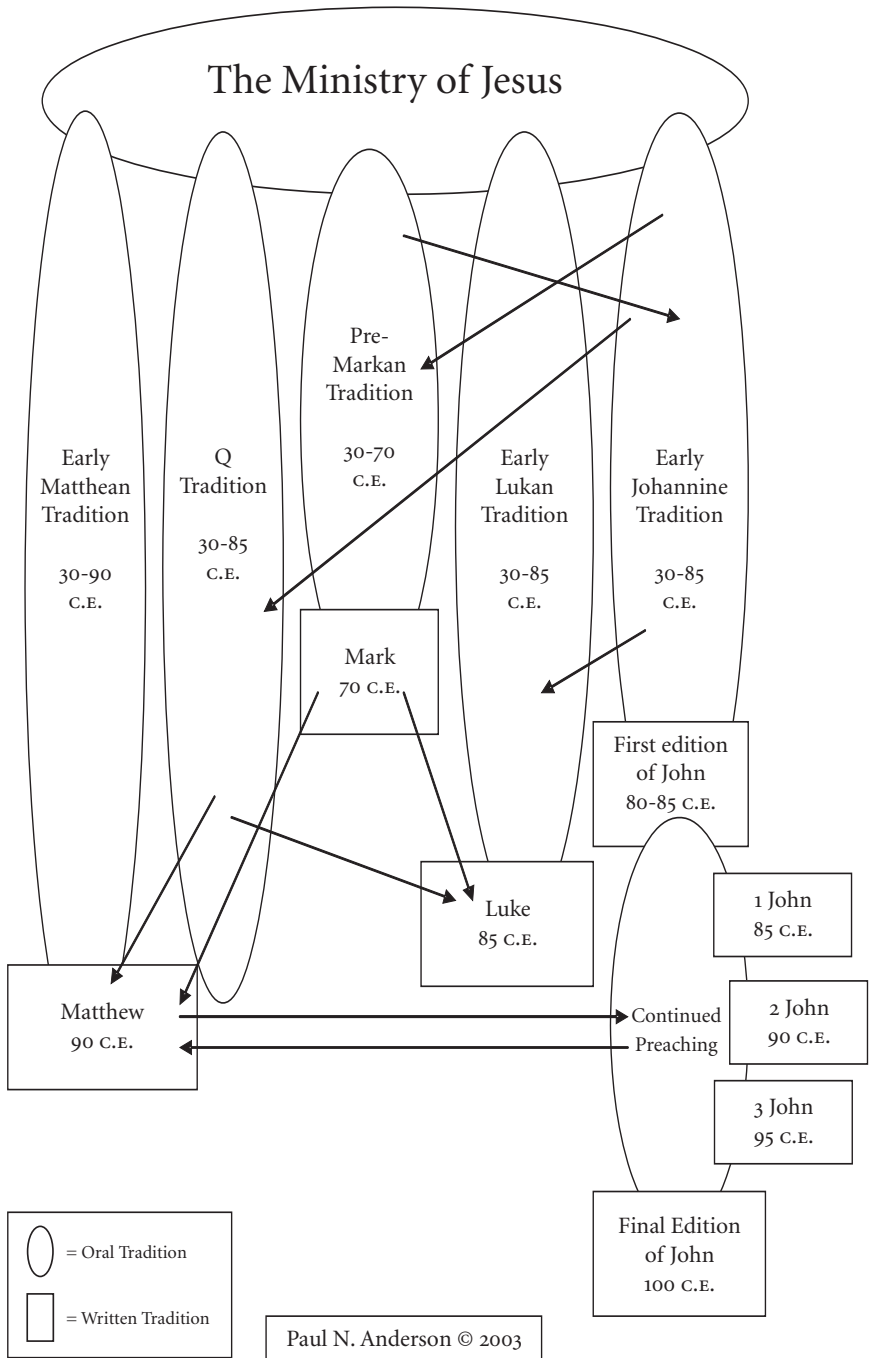
- A final edition of John was completed by the editor (likely the Elder) after the death of the Beloved Disciple, adding such passages as the Prologue, chapters 6, 15–17, and 21, as well as the Beloved Disciple and eyewitness passages. From such a reconstruction several crises can be inferred within the history of the Johannine situation (not just one or two), and these also cast light upon the character and formation of the developing Johannine tradition. The table on page 323 outlines several of these connections.

A few more points deserve to be made in reflecting on Bultmann's attempts to address the Johannine riddles. First, while he correctly inferred an agency typology in John, the religious origin of it was not a Gnostic Redeemer-Myth but the Jewish *Shaliach* principle. Rooted in the Mosaic Prophet typology of Deuteronomy 18, Jesus' emphasis upon having been sent from the Father accounts for much of the Father-Son tension in John. Second, while Bultmann describes well the place of dialectical theology within the scientific investigation of the New Testament, he fails to allow the Johannine evangelist to have been a dialectical thinker himself. C. K. Barrett's view that he was indeed a dialectical thinker deserves to be built upon further, and this feature also accounts for much of the theological tension in John. Third, where Bultmann inferred literary seams due to "contextual" difficulties, he failed to note the place of irony and other rhetorical devices within the Johannine narrative. Indeed, the place of these factors deserves further consideration when seeking to identify the epistemological origins of John's Christological tensions.

## Unpacking the Four Epistemological Sources of John's Christological Unity and Disunity

While these factors are developed more fully elsewhere,<sup>18</sup> the four epistemological origins of John's christological tensions deserve to be spelled out here at

18. In addition to treatments in Anderson, *Christology*, I have further developed these four subjects elsewhere. On the dialectical thinking of the evangelist, see "Cognitive Origins" and "A Way Forward"; on the Prophet-like-Moses agency Christology in John, see "The Having-Sent-Me Father — Aspects of Agency, Irony, and Encounter in the Johannine Father-Son Relationship," *Semeia* 85 (1999): 33-57; on the developing Johannine situation, see "The *Sitz im Leben* of the Johannine Bread of Life Discourse and Its Evolving Context," in *Critical Readings of John 6*, ed. Alan Culpepper (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), pp. 1-59; and "Was the Fourth Evangelist a Quaker?" *Quaker Religious Thought* 76 (1991): 27-43; on the evangelist's literary engagement of the reader, see *Navigating*.



least briefly. While none of these factors is novel, attempting to consider the theological implications of John's christological tensions in the light of their origins may serve to move the discussion forward. Theological interpretation was indeed one of the great contributions of Bultmann's work, for instance, although the strength of any critical theory must rest upon its evidence.

Far more convincing than inferring the Gnostic Redeemer-Myth as the origin of the descent and ascent of the Johannine Jesus as the Revealer from God is the *Jewish agency typology, rooted in Deuteronomy 18*. Based upon the works of Wayne Meeks, Jan-A. Bühner, Peder Borgen, and others,<sup>19</sup> the presentation of Jesus as the Prophet like Moses who will speak not on his own but only what God instructs him to say, comes through clearly in John as its central Messianic construct. This agency schema also accounts for the theological tension within the Johannine Father-Son relationship. Because the agent is to be regarded in all ways like the sender, the Son is to be equated with the Father precisely because he does nothing on his own. Therefore, subordinationism and egalitarianism are wrongly seen as opposing christological categories in John; they are flip-sides of the same coin. Jesus is one with the Father because of his representative faithfulness to the Father's will, and therefore to see him is to behold the Father, and to receive or reject his word is to be held accountable to the one who sent him (Deut. 18:19).

Controversies surrounding the Johannine agency claims may also have spanned more than one epoch in the Johannine situation. While the tradition was rooted in Palestine, the experienced rejection of the northern prophet and his followers by Jerusalem-centered religious leaders still is palpable within the Johannine memory. Whether rooted in Samaria or Galilee, challenges to Jesus' authority are presented as conflicts between anticipations of a prophet like Elijah or Moses and notions of a Judean king like David, perhaps reflecting earlier debates rather than later ones. Nonetheless, later debates also are apparent in the questioning of Jesus' legitimation. Accusations are levied against Jesus by religious authorities, accusing him of speaking presumptuously of himself — the very mark of the inauthentic prophet in Deuteronomy 18:15-22. To this, the Johannine Jesus (as well as the Matthean Jesus) asserts the accompanying witness of his works, the Father and the Spirit. Indeed, the fulfillment of the prophetic word in John attests explicitly to Jesus' having been the authentic

19. See Wayne A. Meeks, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology* (NovTSup 14; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967); Jan-A. Bühner, *Die Gesandte und sein Weg im vierten Evangelium: Die kultur- und religionsgeschichtlichen Grundlagen der johanneischen Sendungschristologie sowie ihre traditionsgeschichtliche Entwicklung* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1977); and Peder Borgen, "God's Agent in the Fourth Gospel," in *The Interpretation of John*, 2nd ed., ed. John Ashton (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), pp. 83-95.

prophet predicted by Moses, and such legitimation was central to the Jewish-Christian apologetic interests of the first edition of John as it was crafted together in Asia Minor between 80 and 85 CE.

A second factor to consider is *the dialectical character of the Fourth Evangelist's thought*. Indeed, the failure to see the evangelist's thinking as dialogical is one of the foundational mistakes continuing to be made by Johannine interpreters. Despite the programmatic interests of interpreters, John often poses more than one perspective on important matters of faith, and the imposing of a monological grid over the tension-filled Johannine witness threatens to produce something other than *Johannine* theology. It is indeed highly ironic that Bultmann grants the best of modern thinkers such license, while denying it of a first-century thinker, who, by the way, is one of the greatest sources of dialectical explorations of the truth hence. Many of John's theological tensions reflect a both/and approach to issues rather than an either-or approach.<sup>20</sup> In addition to Barrett's connecting the dialectical thinking of the Fourth Evangelist to *Theatetus* 189, where thinking is described as "the soul's dialogue with herself," scientific inquiry into Cognitive-Critical factors in the formation of gospel traditions deserves to be conducted. This being the case, the Johannine dialectical reflection has extensive implications for literary and historical interests as well as theological ones.

A third factor contributing to John's christological developments involves *the history of the Johannine situation*, as materials were crafted to meet particular needs within its unfolding history. At least six or seven crises can be inferred within the Johannine situation when considered in longitudinal perspective, and these include:

- (1) *tensions with Baptist-adherents* in the first couple of decades following the ministry of Jesus, continuing into Asia Minor around the followers of Apollos and debates over the baptism of John versus the work of the Holy Spirit; and
- (2) *north-south tensions* between Galilean followers of Jesus and the religious establishment of Jerusalem-centered Judaism.

This was the earliest phase (30-70 CE), and the middle phase was marked by a move to Asia Minor including tensions with:

20. This is one of the greatest differences between the material in the Johannine Gospel and the Johannine Epistles, and perhaps the most telling indicator of different authors. The evangelist's thought is conjunctive and dialectical, whereas the epistle writer issues disjunctive threats regarding the correct theological position on Jesus' humanity and Messiahship. This point is made clearly by Judith Lieu, *The Second and Third Epistles of John* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986), p. 205.



- (3) *local Jewish authorities* regarding an ascending christological beliefs, leading to synagogue challenges and reassimilation back into the synagogue for some; and
- (4) *Roman hegemony and pressure to offer public emperor laud*, experienced as persecution by the world.

The first edition of the Johannine gospel was completed around this time (80-85 CE), and the later phase involved tensions with:

- (5) docetizing Gentile Christians refusing to be disciplined regarding matters of worldliness and assimilation; and
- (6) centralizing Christian developments, which alienated some of the Johannine egalitarian ethos and rejected the likes of Gaius and others (3 John 9-10).

A seventh set of dialogues appears to have spanned the other six crises, in that it involved a running dialogue with parallel gospel traditions on matters ranging from the character of Jesus' teachings and ministry to his predictions of the *Parousia*.

A fourth source of John's christological tensions involves the *literary devices used by the evangelist* to engage the reader in an imaginary dialogue with Jesus. By means of overstatement, understatement, irony, prolepses, narratorial asides, and especially the Johannine misunderstanding dialogue, the Fourth Evangelist cajoles the reader and produces a set of existential crises that can only be addressed by going deeper into the content presented in the gospel. Given the numerous advances in Johannine literary analysis over the last three decades, including reader-response criticism and rhetorical analysis, such factors must be considered in helping us understand the christological content of John — tensions and all. Indeed, the very function of irony, for instance, is to dislocate the attention and focus of the reader in order to relocate it along another path. Therefore, some of the odd transitions and surprises in the Johannine narrative might not have been factors of diachronicity, but intentional means of dialectical engagement.

Lest it be concluded, however, that only one of these factors accounts for any particular set of tensions in John, this is not the point being argued. Indeed, more than one of these factors may have been at play within a given set of developments. For instance, while particular aspects of the humanity and divinity of Jesus would have been emphasized at different times according to particular apologetic interests, apologetic interests were probably a secondary rather than a primary development. Primarily, reflections on the human suffering and spir-

itual encounters with Jesus preceded later reflections, as did encountering something of the numinous in the presence of the earthly Jesus — interpreted in continuity with post-resurrection experiences of the risen Christ. This being the case, the outline below identifies a primary and secondary source of each of the tensions as a means of sketching a nuanced presentation of those connections.<sup>21</sup> While these four sources of John's christological tensions may be explored throughout the Fourth Gospel, it may be instructive to consider their particular manifestations within the Johannine Prologue.

### The Epistemological Origins of John's Tensions

- A. The *humanity and divinity* of Jesus:
  - 1. The Dialectical Thinking of the Evangelist — Perception/Experience Dialogues
  - 2. Dialectical Situation of Johannine Christianity
- B. The *gnosis* and *pathos* of Jesus:
  - 1. The Dialectical Thinking of the Evangelist — Perception/Experience Dialogues
  - 2. Literary Features of John's Composition and Rhetorical Presentations
- C. The *Father/Son relationship* in John:
  - 1. John's Human-Divine Dialogue and Agency Schema
  - 2. Dialectical Situation of Johannine Christianity
- D. The Holy Spirit's *proceeding from the Father only or also from the Son*:
  - 1. Dialectical Situation of Johannine Christianity
  - 2. The Dialectical Thinking of the Evangelist — Perception/Experience Dialogues
- E. The *judgment of the Son*:
  - 1. The Dialectical Thinking of the Evangelist — Perception/Experience Dialogues
  - 2. John's Human-Divine Dialogue and Agency Schema
- F. The relation between *faith and miracles*:
  - 1. The Dialectical Thinking of the Evangelist — Perception/Experience Dialogues
  - 2. Literary Features of John's Composition and Rhetorical Presentations

21. Obviously, the present essay cannot address the particular ways in which each of these judgments deserves to be advanced, but it would be incomplete to not include some basic judgment as to the epistemological origins of these christological tensions. Their being marked as primary and secondary sources reflects an attempt to identify developmental sequence rather than theological significance (see Table II, below).

- G. The *tension between present and future eschatology* in John:
  - 1. The Dialectical Thinking of the Evangelist — Perception/Experience Dialogues
  - 2. John's Human-Divine Dialogue and Agency Schema
- H. John's puzzling *sacramentology*:
  - 1. John's Human-Divine Dialogue and Agency Schema
  - 2. Literary Features of John's Composition and Rhetorical Presentations
- I. *Determinism versus free will* in John:
  - 1. John's Human-Divine Dialogue and Agency Schema
  - 2. Literary Features of John's Composition and Rhetorical Presentations
- J. Christian *universalism and particularity* in John:
  - 1. John's Human-Divine Dialogue and Agency Schema
  - 2. Dialectical Situation of Johannine Christianity
- K. John's *pro- and anti-Semitism*:
  - 1. Dialectical Situation of Johannine Christianity
  - 2. Literary Features of John's Composition and Rhetorical Presentations
- L. The origin and function of *Johannine dualism*:
  - 1. John's Human-Divine Dialogue and Agency Schema
  - 2. Literary Features of John's Composition and Rhetorical Presentations

### The Johannine Prologue: A Case Study in Dialogic Analysis

A feature common to the four explorations mentioned above is that each of them involves a dialogical approach rather than a monological one. The agency motif reflects the divine-human dialogue wherein a representative agent is sent to humanity on God's behalf, calling forth a response to the agent and his message as responding to God. The evangelist's dialectical mode of cognition, reflecting upon experience and evolving perception, involves a conjunctive approach to truth exploration in which opposites are not eliminated but are held together in tension. The dialectical situation of Johannine Christianity involved at least seven sets of dialogues with groups internal and external to the Johannine sector of Christianity over several decades. And finally, the evangelist has sought to engage the reader in an imaginary dialogue with Jesus by means of the literary presentation of the Johannine Gospel narrative. Therefore, as a case study in dialogic analysis, the Johannine Prologue deserves consideration as a text in which all four of these interpretive features can be seen to be at work.

First, however, a comment about the relation of the Prologue to the rest of John is in order, as it has long been interpreted as the key to the theological

interpretation of the rest of the Fourth Gospel.<sup>22</sup> If the theological center of the Prologue can be inferred, so the thinking goes, the meaning of the rest of the Gospel is thereby elucidated. Such a judgment is worthy if the Prologue were crafted from the start as an introduction to the Johannine Gospel, but if it grew out of a worship setting with its own independent history of development and were subsequently attached to a first edition of the Gospel, that relationship might be better understood otherwise. A comment or two on the literary and developmental features of the Johannine Prologue is therefore in order, especially when considering its theological implications and heuristic value.

The poetic and strophic character of John 1:1-18 has been noticed by every serious commentator in recent years, and it is also a fact that much of its language and syntax is closer to the first chapter of 1 John 1:1-5 than to the rest of the Gospel. The light-darkness dualism, the themes of *zoē*, *Logos* and *monogenēs*, and the prominence of John the Baptist's testimony are also presented in notably distinctive ways so as to suggest an individuated composition process. Likewise, the use of "we" language (John 1:14, 16) betrays corporate engagement with the material, suggesting a cultic *Sitz im Leben* and reflecting language accessible to Jewish and Gentile audiences. Given that a two-edition hypothesis accounts most plausibly for the primary literary and contextual aporias in John, the Elder's (or the evangelist's) adding of the Prologue and other material to an earlier edition of the gospel provides the backdrop for that relationship. The Prologue, as a composition growing out of community worship experience and reflecting the aspirations and convictions of Johannine Christians, thus becomes a fitting introduction to the full Gospel narrative. It thereby prepares the reader for a hearing of the Jesus story and engages the reader experientially in what follows.

The Prologue has thus an important bearing upon a focused interpretation of the rest of the Johannine Gospel, but not as an *initial* thesis statement, the center of which becomes the interpretive fulcrum for understanding theologically all that follows. Rather, the Prologue introduces the Gospel in a lucid and engaging way, preparing the reader for what follows. The gospel needs the Prologue, but the Prologue also needs the gospel. Either without the other is in-

22. For an excellent survey of the relation of the Prologue to the rest of the Gospel, see Elizabeth Harris, *Prologue and Gospel: The Theology of the Fourth Evangelist* (JSNTSup 107; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), pp. 9-25. See also C. K. Barrett, "The Prologue of St. John's Gospel," in his *New Testament Essays* (London: SPCK, 1972), pp. 27-48; Herman Ridderbos, "The Structure and Scope of the Prologue to the Gospel of John," *NovT* 8 (1966): 180-201; Jeff Staley, "The Structure of John's Prologue: Its Implications for the Gospel's Narrative Structure," *CBQ* 48 (1986): 241-63; and R. Alan Culpepper, "The Pivot of John's Prologue," *NTS* 27 (1980): 1-31.

complete. Given that the first edition of the Johannine Gospel had probably been preliminarily circulated and read within many worship settings by this time, the Prologue also may reflect a synthesis of and reflection upon the Johannine evangel rather than simply being its herald.<sup>23</sup> It therefore deserves to be considered a digest and incorporation of the Johannine message as well as its announcement. Also, seeing it as a community worship expression diminishes the debate as to whether it should be seen as the composition of the evangelist or the redactor only. *Whoever* added it intended it as a preparation for the evangelist's work to follow, and in that sense continuity is assumed. The Prologue has nonetheless occupied a central role in the history of debates regarding Johannine Christology and its theological implications, and in that sense, it deserves a special focus in any deliberations upon the Gospel of John and its relation to Christian theology.<sup>24</sup>

Within the Prologue itself, several christological tensions also present themselves distinctively. First, the *humanity/divinity of the Son* presents itself as an issue at the offset. The *Logos* at the beginning was with God and was God (John 1:1). The *Logos* is also presented as the creator of the world, although this is not necessarily an assertion of full deity (1:2). The full humanity of the *Logos* is also asserted in 1:14, where the glory of the only-begotten Son is revealed in the flesh-becoming Word.

A second issue relates to *the Father-Son relationship*. The Son's divinity is also implied in 1:18, where earlier manuscripts declared "the only begotten *God*, who is at the Father's side, has made him known," while other manuscripts present the content in less perplexing ways, as "the only-begotten *Son*, who is at the Father's side, has made him known." Both readings have implications for understanding the Father-Son relationship — and therefore trinitarian discussions — although such categories would have been anachronistic for the original author and audiences.

A third theological issue relates to *soteriology* — God's saving-revealing initiative and humanity's mingled response. On one hand, the Light shines in

23. Ed L. Miller, "The Logic of the Logos Hymn: A New View," *NTS* 29 (1983): 552-61, argues convincingly that the Johannine Prologue as a worship piece reflects a matured assimilation of the Johannine evangel.

24. See P. J. Cahill, "The Johannine *Logos* as Center," *CBQ* 38 (1976): 54-72; Craig A. Evans, *Word and Glory: On the Exegetical and Theological Background of John's Prologue* (JSNTSup 89; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993); John A. T. Robinson, "The Relation of the Prologue to the Gospel of St. John," *NTS* 9 (1962-63): 120-29; John Painter, "Christology and the Fourth Gospel: A Study of the Prologue," *ABR* 31 (1983): 45-62; and Jan G. van der Watt, "The Composition of the Prologue of John's Gospel: The Historical Jesus Introducing Divine Grace," *WTJ* 57 (1995): 311-32.

the darkness, and the darkness has neither understood nor overcome it (1:5). The true Light that enlightens everyone was coming into the world (1:9), and though he was in the world (and had created the world), it did not recognize him (1:10). He came unto his own people, but they did not receive him; but as many as received him received the power to become children of God — as many as believed on his name (1:11-12).

A fourth theological issue, and one that would have been more pressing in the first century than later centuries, involves the clarification that *John the Baptist was not that Light*, but that he came as a witness to the Light, testifying that this was the one of whom he had said “he was before me” despite having come after him (1:6-8, 15). He came as a witness that all might believe.

A fifth theological issue relates to *eschatology*. On one hand, Jesus appears to bring redemptive continuity, as grace follows upon grace (1:16); on the other hand, whereas the Law came through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (1:17), implying something of an escalation of redemptive action.

While the Prologue has at times been interpreted monologically, inferring a single theological thrust, these five theological features indeed demonstrate one thing if nothing else. Like the rest of the Fourth Gospel, the theological fabric of the Prologue is itself filled with tensions, and any adequate interpretation must account for its dialectical character. Even within a complete unit, these christological tensions come through with striking clarity. The origins of that dialectical character may also have been polyvalent, though, so an analysis of the Johannine Prologue in dialogical perspective deserves consideration. This being the case, the four epistemological origins of John’s theological tensions also can be seen to be factors in the development of the Johannine Prologue and the formation of its christological content.

### *The Agency of the Logos/Son — A Manifestation of the Divine-Human Dialogue*

Rather than seeing the Johannine revelation theme as a reflection of the Gnostic Redeemer-Myth, the religious origin of the Johannine *Logos* motif and the Father-Son relationship is more likely the Jewish agency schema. Such can also be inferred in the descent-ascent and mission of the Johannine Son of Man.<sup>25</sup>

25. For movement within the Johannine Son of Man Christology, see also John W. Pryor, “The Johannine Son of Man and the Descent-Ascent Motif,” *JETS* 34 (1991): 201-18; and Francis J. Moloney, *The Johannine Son of Man*, 2nd ed. (BSR 14; Rome: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1978).

From the creation narratives of Genesis 1–3, the Logos motif can be seen as rooting in the creative-redemptive work of Yahweh, who's life-producing Word brought forth the created world and the breath of life itself. Likewise, the preexistent Wisdom of Yahweh is presented in Proverbs 8:22–31 as the source of cosmological order.<sup>26</sup> The divine Word and Wisdom of Yahweh therefore comprise the religious backdrop for the Johannine *Logos* motif, and as an etiology of the human situation, humanity's response to the creative-redemptive Word and Wisdom of God bespeaks its inclination. Ironically, while darkness and folly are chosen over light and wisdom, the Divine Initiative persists, calling for a response of faith to any and all who will believe. This is the history-of-religions origin of the Johannine agency Christology, and while it became engaged by second-century Gnosticizing Christians, its origin was not Gnostic, but Jewish.<sup>27</sup>

This agency schema is more explicitly manifest in the Johannine development of the Prophet-like-Moses motif, which provides the key to the Father-Son relationship in John. The origin of this schema within the Johannine tradition is earlier than other ones; indeed, it is the foundational theological and christological schema in John. It may even go back to the self-understanding of Jesus in describing his representative mission from the Father.<sup>28</sup> In John, how-

26. Consider the monograph on the subject by Michael E. Willett, *Wisdom Christology in the Fourth Gospel* (San Francisco: Mellen, 1992).

27. The Jewish origin of the Logos motif of the Johannine Prologue has been advanced by many scholars over the last four decades: notably, Raymond E. Brown, "Appendix II, The Word," in his *The Gospel According to John (i-xii)* (AB 29; New York: Doubleday, 1966), pp. 519–24; C. T. R. Hayward, "The Holy Name of the God of Moses and the Prologue of St. John's Gospel," *NTS* 25 (1978): 16–32; Peder Borgen, "Logos Was the True Light," in his *Logos Was the True Light and Other Essays on the Gospel of John* (Trondheim: Tapir Publishers, 1983), pp. 95–110, also in *NovT* 14 (1972): 115–30; and "Observations on the Targumic Character of the Prologue of John," in Borgen's *Logos*, pp. 13–22; Mary Coloe, "The Structure of the Prologue and Genesis 1," *ABR* 45 (1997): 40–55; Masanobu Endo, *Creation and Christology: A Study on the Johannine Prologue in the Light of Early Jewish Creation Accounts* (WUNT II 149; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2002); and David A. Reed, "How Semitic Was John? Rethinking the Hellenistic Background to John 1:1," *ATR* 85, no. 4 (2004): 709–26.

28. Put otherwise, when comparing such messianic constructs as "a king like David" and "a prophet like Moses" (or even "a king like Moses," see John 6:14–15), the latter is less likely to have been concocted by early Christian apologists. Jesus and Johannine scholars have tended to commit several error on this matter: (1) they fail to notice the place of Mosaic agency in all four Gospels when considering Jesus' prophetic ministry; (2) they fail to read the Father-Son debates and controversies over Jesus' divinity claims and actions in the light of Deuteronomy 18:15–22; and (3) they fail to note the heightened intensity of discussions over Jesus' agency in the Matthean and Johannine traditions as a factor of acute and running debates with Jewish leaders. See Marinus de Jonge, "Jewish Expectations about the 'Messiah' According to the Fourth Gospel," *NTS* 19 (1972): 246–70.

ever, the religious authorities are portrayed as misunderstanding Jesus' description of his agency (5:18-47), and their claims that he is the presumptuous prophet speaking only of himself (Deut. 18:19-22) are countered by Jesus, who asserts over and over again the authenticity of his representative mission. Those who hear him are therefore held accountable to respond to him as though responding to God, and evidence of his authenticity is the fulfilled word of his testimony.<sup>29</sup> In a middle- to late-first-century context, these images would have been accessible to both Jewish and Gentile audiences in Asia Minor or elsewhere in the Greco-Roman world.

In the Johannine Prologue, the creative-redemptive work of the *Logos* takes the lead as the opening thesis (John 1:1-4), and the divine Word spoken is thus identical with the divine Speaker, both in terms of action and being. God's agents also include John the Baptist, sent as a witness (1:6-8, 15), and the only-begotten Son (1:14), who alone has seen the Deity and has disclosed him to the world (1:18). The prime agency of God's saving-revealing work (the Word, the Light, the Son) thus conveys to the world the loving character and being of the Father. He represents not himself, but the one who sent him. Therefore, humanity will be held accountable in their response to the bringer of life, and as many as receive him are empowered to become the children of God (1:9-13). This being the case, the authenticity of the Son's mission is attested by the experience of those who beheld in the flesh of the incarnate Word the glory of the only-begotten Son, full of grace and truth (1:14). While some connections are more explicit in the Johannine narrative, the agency schema of Deuteronomy 18:15-22 nonetheless comes through with impressive clarity as the foundation for the christological-theological connections in the Johannine Prologue. Here the combining of creation, redemption, and revelation motifs into the representative aspects of the Son's agency from the Father serves as the backbone of the Johannine divine-human dialogue.<sup>30</sup> This schema is displayed clearly in the Johannine narrative and Prologue alike.

29. For a fuller outline of the parallels between the Septuagintal text of Deuteronomy 18:15-22 and the Father-Son relationship in John, see Anderson, "The Having-Sent-Me Father." These include: (1) Moses' prediction of a prophetic agent who will speak God's message to the world; (2) to whom people must listen; (3) in whose mouth Yahweh will put his words; (4) who will speak only Yahweh's words, not his own; (5) people will be held accountable for their responsiveness to the divine agent; (6) one speaking presumptuously, in the name of God but of himself, shall die; (7) if the message does not come true, such a message and its agent are not from Yahweh; (8) such a presumptuous prophet is not to be taken seriously, but if the word does come true, both the message and the messenger are to be regarded as authentic and from God (pp. 38-40).

30. See Raymond T. Stamm, "Creation and Revelation in the Gospel of John," in *Search the Scriptures: New Testament Studies in Honor of Raymond T. Stamm*, ed. by J. M. Myers,



*The Transformative Experience of the Johannine Worship  
Community and the Logos Hymn — Aspects of Dialectical  
Engagement and Reflection*

The dialectic of human experience and cognitive reflection is also apparent in the Johannine Prologue. At the offset, religious experience is attested in corporate language as the first-person plural is employed to describe the community's response of faith to God's saving-revealing initiative in Jesus as the Christ. "We beheld his glory;" and "from his fullness we have received grace upon grace," declare the Johannine believers (John 1:14, 16).<sup>31</sup> This corporate affirmation is also echoed in the Prologue of 1 John 1:1-4, in which several planks in the platform of religious experience are attested. That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, seen with our eyes, looked at, and our hands have touched — this is the content of our proclamation, so the corporate attestation goes (1 John 1:1).

Within this context, the drawing in of second and third generation believers is effected by the such operations as the distant-group-inclusion comments of John 4:42; 17:20-23; and 20:29. Not only the firsthand generation, but all others who receive their testimony and enjoy their own experience of transforming faith share in the same quality of religious encounter as did the apostles. Whether or not there is anyone among the eyewitness generation left in Johannine Christianity, the testimony to "what we have seen and heard" builds connections between memories from the apostolic age and the religious experiences of later believers.<sup>32</sup> Emphases upon continuity between the teachings of Jesus and the pneumatic instruction of the *Paraklētōs* (John 14:25-26; 15:26; 16:7-15) appear to have indeed connected the immediacy of firsthand experience between that of subsequent generations and that of the first. Therefore, the appeal to encounter and experience continues as part of the Johannine legacy from one generation to another, emphasizing the authenticity of firsthand experience long after the departure of Jesus.

Within this appeal to experience, the flesh of Jesus and the glory of Christ are linked together inextricably. In the flesh of the incarnated Word is the glory of the only-begotten one encountered and attested (John 1:14, 16). On one hand,

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O. Reimherr, and H. N. Bream (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), pp. 13-32; also see A. E. Harvey, "Christ as Agent," in *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament: Studies in Christology*, ed. L. D. Hurst and N. T. Wright (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 239-50.

31. For experiential aspects of the Johannine Prologue's background, see John C. Meagher, "John 1:14 and the New Temple," *JBL* 88 (1969): 57-68.

32. Note the unwitting connecting of the apostle John with this Johannine motif in Acts 4:19-20, marking that link a full century before Irenaeus; see Anderson, *Christology*, pp. 274-77.

the incarnational motif affirms personal connectedness to Jesus. The memory of his ministry and impact continues to inspire audiences for generations to come. On the other hand, the reminder of Jesus' suffering and death becomes a source of courage for believers of later generations who face hardship and even martyrdom at the hands of Roman enforcers of emperor worship.<sup>33</sup> Likewise, the glory of theophanic encounter in the presence of the man, Jesus (1:47-51; 4:7-30, 39-42; 6:20-21) is remembered as being in continuity with encounters with the risen Lord (20:11-18, 19-23, 26-29; 21:4-7). Paradoxically, though, to ingest the flesh and blood of the crucified Lord is to partake of the life-producing nourishment he offers (6:51-54, 27) — a factor of willingness to embrace the way of the cross martyrologically rather than a requirement of cultic sacramentalism.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, glorification is as paradoxical for the believer as it had been for the uplifted Son of Man, and the beholding of "glory" in the flesh-becoming Word takes on existential meanings in later generations of Johannine experience.

A third feature of experiential dialectic underlying the Johannine Prologue is the literary and artistic means by which by which this poetic worship material both emerged from and leads to corporate experiences of worship. As a composition reflecting the worship of Johannine Christians and crafted also for the experiential benefit of readers beyond the Johannine sector of early Christianity, John 1:1-18 is designed to engage participants experientially in the content presented. By means of stanza-like poetic construction, the origin and character of the cosmos are connected with God's creative-redemptive action in Jesus (see also Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-20; and Heb. 1:1-4), which is in turn connected with the church and Jesus' followers in later generations. It may even be that the Johannine Christ-hymn may have influenced or have been influenced by other worship expressions as listed above. The point is that the introducing

33. Note that in Pliny's correspondence with Trajan around 110 CE (10:96-97), his inquiry is whether he should *continue* putting to death those who refused either to deny Jesus or to worship the image of the emperor. The Asia Minor governor was thus *not* initiating a practice, but *continuing* a policy that had apparently been in force for some time. Trajan's advice not to seek out Christians for trial has been surprisingly mistaken as a pacifistic dictum, as though Roman soldiers all of a sudden became benign and friendly to their Christian subjects. The realism of military occupation suggests otherwise. Trajan also insisted upon carrying out meted punishment — even capital punishment — for any Christians who did not submit to the ultimatum offered: offer worship to Caesar or suffer the consequences. Roman hegemony need not have been pandemic or programmatic to have been a perceived and experienced reality.

34. Note a socio-religious comparison with the situations addressed by Ignatius of Antioch a decade or two later in Anderson, *Christology*, pp. 110-36, 196-251. The "medicine of immortality" in Ignatius was a reference not to the ingesting of *a* loaf (a factor of thaumaturgy), but the ingesting of *one* loaf (a factor of non-schismatic unity). Likewise, the Johannine concern was centripetal unity, countering centrifugal pressures.

of the Johannine narrative with a composition of worship functions to prepare the hearer/reader experientially for that which is to come. Not only is the *knowledge about* Jesus and his ministry propounded by the time the Fourth Gospel is completed, but *experiential encounter with* its subject is facilitated by the adding of an engaging worship piece at the outset.

In these ways, the dialectical reflection upon the religious experience and subsequent reflection of the Fourth Evangelist sets the pattern also for Johannine Christians and others who follow in his wake. Not only does his conjunctive level of thinking apply to his ability to hold truth together in tension throughout the narrative, but the addition of the Prologue functions to lead the hearer/reader into the same quality of spiritual encounter by being engaged in a transformative experience of worship. Within this individuated trajectory, the most radically different aspect of the Johannine witness may not be its distinctive presentations of Jesus ministry and teachings. Whereas the Synoptics call for a focus on learning about the religious experience of Jesus and the effects of his ministry, John focuses on experiencing Jesus spiritually and learning from him in an ongoing sense.<sup>35</sup> The only fitting means of furthering the Johannine witness to the glory of the incarnated Word is to get beyond the notional to the experiential, and this is precisely what the Prologue — as an engaging preparation for the narrative to come — evokes.

### *The Dialectical Johannine Situation as Reflected by the Prologue*

Indeed, some of the christological tension in John is a factor of emphases made in different directions as reflected in the developing setting of the Johannine situation. While the Johannine tradition shows signs of synchronicity of tradition, it betrays a diachronicity of situation as its material develops over several decades. This being the case, several crises in the Johannine situation can be inferred in the background of the Prologue. Given that the baptistic sections (John 1:6-8, 15) appear to have been either added to an earlier piece, or conversely that they constituted the original beginning of the Johannine gospel around which the Logos hymnic material was crafted, the following dialogical engagements may be inferred.

35. Robert Kysar puts John's uniqueness among other religious writings well. Whereas other religions advocate imitating the religious experience of that religion's founder, John advocates an experiencing of *the founder*; see *John, the Maverick Gospel*, rev. ed. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), p. 55.

First, the schema of God's saving action in Jesus comes across clearly as a reflection upon the gospel message of the Johannine narrative. Verses 1-5 and 9-14 reflect the confession of a community that has "seen and heard" the message about that which was from the beginning (1 John 1:1-5),<sup>36</sup> and they betray the response of faith affirming receptivity to the purpose of first edition of the Johannine Gospel (John 20:31). Note also the realism of that confession. While the Light has shone in the darkness, and while the Word came unto his own, neither did the darkness comprehend the Light, nor did his audiences receive him. Therefore, despite owning a believing response to the divine initiative manifest in Jesus as the Christ, Johannine believers also express their familiarity with failed reception. Not all have received the message, and this is a sobering fact. Indeed, rooting in the original ambivalent responses to Jesus, where the northern prophet was rejected by the southern religious leaders, the scenario of humanity's uneven response to the divine initiative continued at every stage of the tradition's development. Nonetheless, hope is held open in that as many as believed in him also received the authority to become children of God, and this hope becomes an invitation to the subsequent hearer/reader — Jewish and Gentile alike.

Second, the emphasis is made that John the Baptist was not the Light, but that he came bearing witness to that Light.<sup>37</sup> The contrasting of Jesus and the Baptist serves as a means of diverting authority away from the latter and pointing it to the former, much as the witness of John the Baptist in the narrative functions to do the same (John 1:1:26-36; 3:27-30). It may even be that reflection upon the theme of Jesus' preeminence (the one who comes after me was *before* me) in the narrative of the first edition has given way to pre-existence associations in the confessing life of Johannine Christians (John 1:30 → 1:15). As mentioned above, at least two phases of dialectical engagement with Baptist adherents are likely, and such may be inferred as background for the Prologue. First, in the earlier (Palestinian) phase of Johannine history, followers of John the Baptist

36. While *archē* is used in 1 John as well as in John 1, the meaning in the epistle relates to "the beginning" of Jesus' ministry, while the association is extended to preexistence in the worship life of these believers. Whether any direct influence has been derived from other christological hymnic material (Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-20; or Heb. 1:1-4), or whether Johannine Christianity was familiar with emerging birth narratives (Matt. 1:18-2:23 or Luke 2:1-52), the embellishment of the cosmic origin and mission of Jesus as the Christ can certainly be seen here.

37. In John Painter's essay, "Christology and the History of the Johannine Community in the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel," *NTS* 30 (1984): 460-74, the Jewish and Hellenistic backdrop of the Christ-hymn is developed. Such a composition would have been at home in more than one socio-religious setting.

in Galilee and Judea would have been diverted from their martyred hero to Jesus as the true Messiah. John's witness to this effect would have furthered this movement, thus connecting John 1:6-8 and 15 with 1:19-51 and 3:22-30.

Another round of dialectical engagement with Baptist adherents may have related to Hellenistic missionaries in Asia Minor, such as Apollos and his followers, who claimed to be furthering John's ministry in their baptismal and proclamational ministries. Apparently while in Corinth Paul had run into followers of Apollos who knew the baptism of John, but did not know there was a Holy Spirit (Acts 18:24-19:10). The issue here was probably less a direct factor of adherence to John the Baptist being a problem and more a factor of partisan loyalties emerging around the efficaciousness of Apostles' ministries (1 Cor. 1:10-17; 3:1-23), with Apollos and his followers appropriating the Baptist's authority toward their ministries. This may explain why John's baptizing of Jesus is not narrated in the first edition of John and why it is emphasized in John 4:2 that Jesus himself did not baptize, only his disciples. The reason that John came baptizing, therefore, was not to set up the ministry of Apollos and his kin, but to point out the ministry of Jesus, who will baptize not with water but with the Holy Spirit (John 1:33). This backdrop also clarifies the emphasis made in John 3:5 — water purification alone cannot suffice; one must also be born of the *Spirit* for one's baptism to be efficacious. John therefore witnesses to the Light which Jesus is, rather than being that Light (John 1:6-8; 2 Cor. 4:1-6), and in continuity with the beginning of the first edition of John, the Johannine Prologue affirms the Baptist's Christ-exalting role.

Third, contrasts to the authority of Moses and the Law can be seen as a factor of raising up Jesus over and against the authority appeals of Jewish religion. Whether *charin anti charitos* (John 1:16) implies continuity or supersessionism, the place of Jesus is clear. "While the Law came through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (1:17). Reflected here is probably a set of dialogues with Jewish leaders in Asia Minor and elsewhere who opposed Jesus adherents on the basis of Torah and tradition and such authorities as Moses and Abraham (alluded to in the first Antichristic threat of 1 John 2:18-25). As a factor of Johannine emphases upon Jesus' representative agency from the Father, the Son's "exegeting" the Father to the world hinges upon his oneness with the one he represents (John 1:18). Therefore, as a factor of Jewish-Christian apologetics and outreach, elevations of Jesus' status as being one with God became a part of their corporate confession. Virtually all of the debates with the Jewish leaders are included in the first edition of John (chs. 5, 7-10), and these apologetic strands also come through in the Prologue.<sup>38</sup>

38. See the contribution of James McGrath on John's apologetic thrust: *John's Apologetic*

Fourth, a set of dialectical tensions within the political setting of the late first-century Johannine situation would have been a set of struggles with Roman emperor worship under Domitian (81-96 CE).<sup>39</sup> While this would not have been the only epoch or setting that Rome would have presented a problem to Christians, a new set of difficulties emerged in the 80s and 90s of the first century of the Common Era. As Jesus adherents were alienated, or even individuated, from the Synagogue, they no longer enjoyed a dispensation allowing them exemption from having to demonstrate public Emperor laud. As Domitian had required his closest followers to regard him as “Lord and God,” the confession of Thomas in John 20:28 sounds an anti-imperial declaration. As worshiping someone other than the Emperor would have had striking political implications, the confessing of Jesus as one with God in John 1:1 and 18 makes a powerful statement of loyalty.<sup>40</sup> The climactic confession of Thomas at the end of the first edition of John therefore becomes the affirmation of all who embrace the Johannine Prologue. At its beginning and end, Jesus’ divine status as the singular object of worship is confessionally reinforced.

Fifth, an emphasis also on the fleshly humanity of Jesus also serves the function of challenging docetizing inclinations in the late first-century Johannine situation. A corollary of the exaltation of Jesus is the diminishment of his humanity, and within the Hellenistic mindset, if Jesus were divine he could not have suffered or died physically. The problematic feature of docetizing Christology, however, is not that it strayed from orthodoxy; such norms had not yet been fixed. The acute problem with docetizing Christology in the late first century situation lay with its practical implications. If Jesus neither suffered nor died, his disciples need not do so either, and this would open the way for legitimizing escaping hardship by submitting to Emperor worship or other aspects of worldly assimilation. This was certainly the case for Gentile believers in Asia Minor to whom Ignatius wrote, and the second Antichristic threat suggested by 1 John 4:1-3 and 2 John 7 apparently involved false teachers whose flawed doc-

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*Christology: Legitimation and Development in Johannine Christology* (SNTSMS 111; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). See also Brown’s inference of apologetic engagements with several groups in *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, ed. Francis J. Moloney (New York: Doubleday, 2003), pp. 151-88, including followers of John the Baptist, Jewish-Christian dialogues, and dialogues with Gentile/Docetists and institutionalizing Christian leaders.

39. Richard J. Cassidy, in *John’s Gospel in New Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992), argues the Roman backdrop of the Johannine situation convincingly. See Anderson, *Christology* (pp. 194-251) and “*Sitz im Leben*” (pp. 41-59), for fuller treatments of at least four largely sequential-yet-overlapping crises in the middle and later periods of the Johannine situation between 70-100 CE.

40. This is the point made by Ed L. Miller, “The Logos Was God,” *EQ* 53 (1981): 65-77; the asserted divinity of Jesus as the *Logos* is inescapable in John 1:1 and 18.

trines could be discerned on the basis of whether they affirmed or denied that Jesus came in the flesh. The content of “the eyewitness” at the cross in John 19:34 is that he testifies to the incarnational veracity that physical water and blood came forth from Jesus’ side, and to ingest the flesh and blood of Jesus is to be willing to go with him to the cross (John 6:51-58). Indeed, most of the incarnational emphasis in John is found in the supplementary material (chs. 6, 15-17, and 21, as well as John 19:34-35 and 1:14), and the same can be said of the Prologue. As well as affirming Jesus’ divinity, John 1:14 declares the reality of the Incarnation — the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and paradoxically, that is the place where the glory of the Father is eschatologically revealed.

In terms of the origins of John’s christological tension, the evolving Johannine dialectical situation played a significant role in the backdrop surrounding such. As a factor of evangelistic outreach, community affirmation, and imperial resistance, the exalted christological aspects of the Prologue played a significant confessional role. While theophanic associations with the works and words of Jesus are attested in the originative encounters with Jesus and are not simply late-and-only-late, they also evolved into a corporate perspective and expression by the second and third Johannine generations. At the same time, though, emphases upon the fleshly humanity of Jesus also became a particularly acute set of assertions. While encounters with Jesus “in the flesh” also appear basic to the Johannine memory, an incisive antidocetic front becomes apparent in the later material — pivotally in the Prologue. Here especially are the polarities maintained in dynamic tension. Paradoxically, it is the fleshly humanity of the eternal Logos that the glory of the Revealer is existentially encountered. This leads the hearer/reader, then, to *crisis*.

### *Literary Means of Engaging the Hearer/Reader in the Prologue*

Having already described the means by which the Prologue as a worship piece engages its audiences experientially as an instrument of encounter, literary means can also be seen to evoke something similar. First, the strophic/poetic structure engages the hearer/reader/worshiper experientially as themes are introduced and then echoed in expanding, repetitive ways. By means of a set of primary clauses, bolstered by secondary ones, the audience is drawn into the cadence of a point-and-parenthesis progression. Like the systole and diastole of a heartbeat, the assimilation of an assertion is facilitated by a pause for reflective consideration. Implications are spelled out parenthetically, so that the cosmic and personal significance of the Prologue’s christological theses may be

come internalized. Here three verses (1:1-5, 9-13, 14-18 — minus v. 15) build a stair-step progression from the cosmic advent of the Word, to the historical reception of the Light, to the personal receiving of grace and truth. Therefore, the movement from outward event to inward encounter is furthered with impressive effectiveness in the strophic/poetic structure of the Johannine Prologue.

A second feature of the Prologue's inclusivity involves the use of the first-person plural: "we." As members of the audience are drawn into the experience of other believers, their confessions become internalized as later hearers and readers are drawn into a larger community of faith. Two passages in particular bring the movement home from external event to inward encounter. The first (1:14) holds the humanity and divinity of Jesus together in tension: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us; and we beheld his glory as the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." The second (1:16-17) follows directly (verse 15 has been added): "Out of his fullness we have received grace upon grace; for the Law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." The corporate movement is here from encounter to reception. In the flesh (and flesh wounds) of Jesus is his glory (and glorification) paradoxically revealed, and from the fullness of his mission and being, access to the Father and ongoing revelation (grace and truth) are received. Later generations are incorporated into the blessedness of firsthand encounter of previous ones (20:29) as they receive these gifts by faith (20:31).

A third literary feature of audience engagement is the chiasmic structure of the Prologue. While many studies have been performed upon the literary structure of the Prologue, deriving its meaning from the central fulcrum, this may not be the best place to begin. Certainly, verses 11 and 12 comprise the central thrust of the larger composition, and they even comprise the center of the central stanza (vv. 9-13), but two issues deserve consideration here. First, another way of thinking about chiasmic structures is to appreciate the first and the last statement (A and A') as the main thrust of the chiasmic form. Put otherwise, even if a chiasmic structure is inferred with accuracy (note the impressive differences between chiasmic approaches to John), the turning point at the center *might not be* the primary thrust of the construct. The thesis and conclusion might better be construed as the *Leitmotif* of the piece, as it would in any poetic composition that begins and ends on the same note. This being the case, the Son's ontic relation to the Father still comes across as the beginning and the end of the Johannine Prologue; it is the implications of that relationship that have existential bearing for hearers and readers in later generations.

This leads to a second point. Given the likelihood that the baptistic sections (vv. 6-8 and 15) were either added later or were the skeleton around which the worship confession was crafted as a second introduction, three movements



in the Prologue are discernable: vv. 1-5, 9-13, and 14-18 (minus v. 15). Thus, the *Leitmotif* of the Prologue might best be conceived as the end toward which the poetic composition moves. It is the last verse among the three that really brings it home for the audience, and therefore, focusing on this section (John 1:14, 16-18) provides the interpretive key to the Prologue as its climax rather than looking for a fulcrum.

The progression of the Prologue's structure, therefore, begins with the cosmic origin and advent of the Logos (building on Genesis 1 and Proverbs 8) in John 1:1-5, and it declares the transcendent origin and outcome of the Revealer's mission and reception. In the middle verses (John 1:9-13), the uneven reception of Jesus as the Light narrates the story of his ministry and the story of Johannine Christianity. While some sought darkness rather than light (3:17-21), the message of God's love for the world nonetheless pervades the story, and the good news of the evangel continues as a hope and an offering for later generations. In John 1:14 and 16-18, the third verse engages the hearer/reader in that corporate experience of faith and affirms the reception of grace and truth. The Son's relation to the Father (1:18) is affirmed as the basis for the experiencing of *doxa* in the flesh-bound work of Jesus as the Christ (1:14, 17), and later audiences are led from one level of history to another: from cosmic-transcendent to social-political to personal-communal. With the hearer/reader's confession of the worship material, the Prologue's progression is complete.

A final feature of the literary-rhetorical function of the Prologue as a second beginning to the Johannine Gospel brings full circle the relation of the Prologue to the rest of the narrative. Given that the first edition probably began with something like verses 6-8 and 15 — a narration of John the Baptist's heralding of Jesus parallel to Mark 1:1-15 — leading into John 1:19-37, the addition of fresh material added new relevance to the narrative. As the Baptist's authority was less of a factor for later and more removed audiences of Asia Minor, the corporate worship expression of the Johannine Christ-hymn provided a broader vehicle of inclusion. Even for those who might not have heard of Jesus or his forerunner would have been familiar to battles with chaos, darkness, and death, and the synthesized worship expression of Johannine corporate faith in Jesus as the Christ advanced a more cosmopolitan appeal among Jewish and Gentile audiences alike. Given that the final editor was likely the Johannine Elder, who had written the epistles, his attaching the Johannine corporate expression of faith in Jesus on behalf of the now-deceased Beloved Disciple (John 21:18-24) became a fitting way to honor his contribution. Indeed, similarities between 1 John 1:1-5 and John 1:1-18 abound, and the Elder's fresh introduction linked the Johannine heritage with the finalized itinerary of the Fourth Gospel.

Whether intended or not, the inclusion of a worship piece as the new in-

roduction for the Johannine evangel also came to have an impressive effect. The reader is prepared inwardly for the outward story of Jesus, presented in its individuated Johannine Perspective, by first being drawn experientially into the content of its message. The genius of such a move is hard to overstate. Even before hearing or reading about the story of the Johannine Jesus — complete with his ambivalent receptions and disjointed understandings — the audience is engaged existentially. If the Johannine gospel was read in corporate meetings for worship, as were other Christian writings along with Jewish Scriptures, one can imagine the Prologue continuing to function as a corporate confession recited aloud before the story is read. The experiential aspects of its design may thus outweigh factors of content in terms of its literary form and intended function. The hearer/reader thus is drawn into the circle of believers personally before hearing about those who got it right and got it wrong. Having become included in the fellowship of the first-person plural references in the Prologue, however, already prepares the hearer/reader to side with those who believe and to eschew the example of those who did not. In this sense, the function of the Prologue with relation to the finalized Johannine Gospel is to engage audiences experientially in the content of the narrative. Having become an insider to the story, everything in it becomes comprehensible.

The above discussion shows that John's christological unity and disunity resulted from at least four sources, and the presence of these factors is as clearly manifest in the Prologue as it is in the rest of the Fourth Gospel. As an approach to interpretation, each of John's christological and theological tensions appears to have at least one primary and one secondary source of origin. Regarding the five aforementioned tensions in the Johannine Prologue, their origins are as follows:

- The *humanity/divinity of the Son* was a factor first of the dialectical experience and reflection of the evangelist; subsequently, emphases upon Jesus' divinity and humanity became factors of Johannine apologetic within its evolving context.
- Tension within the *Father-Son relationship* was first a factor of the Johannine agency schema — the Son is subordinate to the Father precisely because he only does and says what the commissioning sender has instructed; eventually, Jesus' authenticity and representative legitimacy became debates within the Jewish-Christian contextual debates.
- The *universalistic and particularistic soteriology* in the Johannine Prologue was a factor first of humanity's need for enlightenment — no one has seen God at any time. Eventually, receiving the Revealer by means of a believing response to the divine initiative becomes a part of the Johannine evangel.

- Regarding *tension between John the Baptist and Jesus*, this reflects earlier endeavors to reach Baptist adherents with the message that he pointed to Jesus as the Messiah. Eventually, the Baptizer becomes a primary witness to Jesus in the literary work of the Johannine narrative.
- *Present and futuristic eschatology*, even in John's Prologue, were first a factor of the evangelist's dialectical mode of thinking — the contradictions were only apparent, not overly problematic. Eventually, the promise of reward became attached to the Johannine agency schema.

In addition to these tensions in the Prologue, the primary and secondary epistemological origins of the christological tensions in the rest of the Johannine Gospel are as follows. Sound interpretation, then, builds upon these considerations in the inference of meaning for later generations.

### Implications: From Living Faith to Orthodox Creed . . . and Back Again

From the above analysis it can be seen that not only are John's christological tensions prevalent throughout the Fourth Gospel, but they also are present in remarkable clarity within the Johannine Prologue. A second observation is that the four epistemological origins of John's christological tensions also are evident in considering the Prologue as a case study, clarifying the meaning of these themes along the way. Perhaps the next assignment is to work with these four epistemological origins of John's tensions, applying them to a fresh interpretation of the historic christological and theological debates throughout the Christian era, although that would be another project. Indeed, a fresh analysis of orthodox theology (and its alternatives) in the light of these findings would be a worthy venture indeed, and one looks forward to such an opportunity in the future.

The overall impression from the present analysis, however, is of a dynamic set of developments that continued to grow even after the finalization of the Johannine Gospel. Most telling is the likelihood that the spiritual character of John's dialectical reflection upon the Incarnation suggests not removed distance from the ministry of Jesus, but radical proximity to it. Hence, John's being the "spiritual Gospel" betrays more realistically a first-order engagement with living christological content (*abiding in Jesus* — John 15:1-8) rather than a second-order learning of the "right answers" theologically (*abiding in the teaching about Jesus* — 2 John 9). Inadequate interpretations in the early church and since usually have resulted from taking one of the poles into consideration

without maintaining the other pole and its accompanying tension. Thus, the dynamic character of John's presentation of Jesus as the Christ is threatened with mutation or misrepresentation. The Ecumenical Councils, as well as the finest theological treatments of John, function to restore the tension lost due to monological interpretations of John's dynamic Christology.

John's is a living Christology, and such was the dynamic character of John's unitive and disunitive Christology which led to the classic theological debates of the early church and its tension-restoring creedal definitions. However, just because the creeds have functioned to restore the dialectical form of John's Christology, they too can function in ways monological, thus denying the dynamic character of the very living realities they were designed to convey. In understanding the experiential and dialectical origins of the content recrafted into orthodox confessional statements, something of the living character of the material itself is restored. Thus, the final interpretive challenge becomes not only understanding the epistemological origins of John's distinctive Christology, but exploring how fresh considerations of the material may lead the interpreter from living faith to orthodox creed . . . *and back again*. Encounter, thus is not only the primary origin of the Johannine witness; it is also its final goal. Whether guessing points or naming stars, to recall Browning's words, the Fourth Evangelist has performed something like this sort of service for his readers; perhaps today's interpreters can do the same for ours.

As Browning says in his poem:

“Such was ever love's way; to rise, it stoops.  
Since I, whom Christ's mouth taught, was bidden teach,  
I went, for many years, about the world,  
Saying 'It was so; so I heard and saw,' . . .  
But patient stated much of the Lord's life  
Forgotten or misdelivered, and let it work:  
Since much that at the first, in deed and word,  
Lay simply and sufficiently exposed,  
Had grown (or else my soul was grown to match,  
Fed through such years, familiar with such light,  
Guarded and guided still to see and speak)  
Of new significance and fresh result;  
What first were guessed as points,  
I now knew stars,  
And named them in the Gospel  
I have writ.”