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Misunderstanding Dialogue: Exposing Seven Crises in the
Johannine Situation (Chapter**

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BAKHTIN'S DIALOGISM AND THE CORRECTIVE
RHETORIC OF THE JOHANNINE MISUNDERSTANDING
DIALOGUE: EXPOSING SEVEN CRISES
IN THE JOHANNINE SITUATION

Paul N. Anderson

One of the most fascinating thinkers and literary theorists within the last century is the late Russian form critic Mikhail Bakhtin, whose theory of dialogism seeks to account for several levels of dialectical tension and interplay in great literature.¹ On one level, Bakhtin observes the “heteroglossic” character of language. Between its centrifugal uses in popularistic culture and the centripetal actions of philologists and grammarians attempting to standardize meanings and associations, living language is always in a state of flux. On another level, Bakhtin suggests that discourse is always “polyphonic.” Because meanings reverberate against each other upon their utterance, transmission, and reception, the making of meaning is itself a dialogical reality. On a third level, when ironic misunderstanding is used in novelistic prose, Bakhtin asserts this feature is always rhetorical:

The device of “not understanding”—deliberate on the part of the author, simpleminded and naive on the part of the protagonists—always takes on

1. Note, for instance, the three levels of dialogue regarding John 6 (Anderson 1996:167–251). Here we have the Evangelist’s dialogue with his tradition, a literary set of dialogues with his audience and other traditions, and the dialectical situation of Johannine Christianity itself, as it engaged several crises within its own developing history. On the level of historical memory and narrative, or even the narrator’s engagement with a story’s hero, Bakhtin’s works on “Art and Answerability” (1990:1–3) and “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity” (1990:4–256) are relevant; on the literary and rhetorical level, Bakhtin’s work with the dialogic imagination is especially applicable (1981); on matters of sociological dialectic, as culture itself moves from order to fluency and back again, Bakhtin’s School Papers are especially insightful (Voloshinov 1983).

great organizing potential when an exposure of vulgar conventionality is involved. Conventions thus exposed—in everyday life, mores, politics, art and so on—are usually portrayed from the point of view of a man who neither participates in nor understands them. (1981:164)²

While the Fourth Gospel is not as novelistic as the prose of Cervantes and Dostoevsky, the humiliation of the Word, the suffering Son of Man, the rejection of Jesus by religious leaders, disappointments of the crowd, backsliding and scandalized disciples, the ironic trial before Pilate, and the paradoxical glorification of the cross all expose the false conventionalities of the world precisely because Jesus as protagonist is portrayed as the ironic “fool.” His mission is an utter failure in human terms, and yet precisely because of Jesus’ forfeiture of this-worldly success, the tables are actually turned. In the non-receptive judgments of Jesus in John, the unbelieving world finds *itself* judged, as Jesus, the agent of God, stands opposed to everything that is false. As in Plato’s allegory of the cave, the one who beheld the truth of daylight had to be silenced and killed, lest shadows and their conventions be exposed—evoking accountability on more levels than one.³ The paradoxical failure of the protagonist thus exposes the failings of the conventionally minded. In John, Jesus not only reveals truth and light; he *is* that which he reveals. Again, Bakhtin writes, “Stupidity (incomprehension) in the novel is always polemical: it interacts dialogically with an intelligence (a lofty pseudo intelligence) with which it polemicalizes and whose mask it tears away” (1984:403).

This being the case, however, nowhere is the rhetorical effect of misunderstanding more pronounced than when it is combined with the failure to understand the protagonist on behalf of his discussants. This is especially true when the miscomprehending person or group is “privileged,” or “authoritative” (using Bakhtin’s words), and such characters are ironically exposed as lacking and inadequate by the protagonist. Whenever this occurs in narrative, not only does that particular individual or group stand corrected, but

2. On heteroglossia, see Morson and Emerson 1990:142–45, 306–65.

3. Anderson (1996:194–97). Note these parallels between the characters in Plato’s allegory of the cave in book 7 of the *Republic* and the Johannine audience: (1) humans are surrounded by darkness, yet what they believe to be reality is not; (2) the revealer of truth brings “good news” as to their captivity and the limited character of their knowledge; (3) rather than warming to the light of truth, they reject it and kill the witness; (4) despite their failure to believe the truth (about the truth), future audiences are invoked not to repeat such a mistake; (5) the killed witness (Socrates/Jesus) is understood to be the rejected revealer, yet the story bears pointed significance for the later targets of Plato’s/the Fourth Evangelist’s audiences. Thus, misunderstanding of the protagonist in the allegory/narrative is aimed rhetorically at the narrator’s contemporary targets.

so do the persons and groups in the audience they represent. In this and other ways, the Fourth Gospel's portrayal of Jesus' misunderstanding discussants is highly parallel to Plato's sketching of Socrates' naïve students and his non-comprehending audiences. In both the Platonic and Johannine dialogues a later writer portrays the truthful teacher who exposes the foolishness of conventionalities—even those of otherwise privileged society members—and in refuting the misunderstanding discussants each author also addresses contemporary issues and targeted members of his own situation.

Applying Bakhtin's views regarding the polemical effects of exposing monologism, the present essay will consider the corrective function of the Johannine narrative within its first-century context. The thesis of this paper is therefore that misunderstanding in the Johannine dialogue is characteristically used rhetorically by the Evangelist as a specific corrective for particular sectors of his audience. Depending on the oral and written renderings of each dialogue, preliminary targets in the Johannine audience may be inferred with varying degrees of plausibility. Some masks are torn away close to the finalization of the Fourth Gospel, around the end of the first century C.E., while others reflect somewhat cooled debates within Johannine Christianity by the time of John's completion. Whatever the case, Bakhtin's theory of dialogism points the way forward, and earlier correctives continue to impact later audiences in ways beyond the author's original imaginings.

First, however, a comment as to the applicability of Bakhtin's work to first-century rhetorical criticism is in order. While some might object that the his work with Cervantes and the modern novel makes his work irrelevant for working with first-century Gospel narrative, they have wrongly confined Bakhtin (monologically) to an overly narrow set of interests, when his work was wide-ranging. Bakhtin bases his theory in part on Socratic practice and sees it not as simply another literary theory but as epistemologically central to effective quests for truth. In that sense, to confine Bakhtin to literary criticism proper misjudges his contribution.⁴ He worked with philology, ontology, epistemology, art, and historiography as well as novelistic discourse.⁵ Even

4. Ironically, despite the fact that Bakhtin operated as a literary form critic, to limit his contribution to literary analysis alone fails to appreciate the deeply epistemological, sociological, psychological, and anthropological character of his work. If anything, his work should be considered from the standpoint of what I call cognitive-critical analysis (Anderson 1996:137–251; 2004:127–48; and Anderson, Ellens, and Fowler 2004:247–76). On Bakhtin and psychology, see Morson and Emerson 1990:172–230; on existence as dialogue, see Holquist 1990:14–39; on the dialogic self, see Jackson 1987.

5. On philology and the ontological character of language, see Voloshinov 1983, Morson and Emerson 1990:123–71; and Holquist 1990:40–66; on art and novelistic

in his literary analysis Bakhtin works analytically on the philosophy of the act, develops extensively the hermeneutical implications of time and chronotope (time/place presentations) in narrative, and elaborates on the rhetorical function of discourse in the novel.⁶ These are not simply means of conveying content heuristically; they possess the capacity also of getting at the character of truth and its representations, engaging directly the making of meaning existentially. Likewise, the Fourth Evangelist clearly operates Socratically and portrays Jesus as engaging his discussants in dialectical explorations of truth.

Another fact is that John's forward-moving and cyclical-repetitive style betrays the epistemological origin of the Evangelist's unitive-and-disunitive Christology, which is well considered the most fascinating aspect of the Johannine witness. Rather than reflecting a literary dialogue between literary sources having high/low Christologies, or ones having embellished/existential valuations of signs, John's is a basically unitive theology held in dialectical tension within the thinking of the Evangelist. Tellingly, both C. K. Barrett and Mikhail Bakhtin cite the *same passage* from *Theatetus* (189–190) as a key to understanding the relation between inward and outward dialogue in Greek classical literature (Barrett 1972:49–50; Voloshinov 1983:134). In one of the most significant nonmonographic treatments of John's distinctive Christology, "The Dialectical Theology of St. John," Barrett comments upon the epistemological origin of John's dialectical presentation of Jesus' ministry:

For myself I suspect that the roots are to be found if not in Socratic theory at least in the Socratic practice. In Socratic dialogue—concepts are looked at first from one side then from another, definitions are proposed, attacked, defended, abandoned, or improved, opposite points of view are canvassed and sometimes at least, combined. And the process of thought itself is conceived as fundamentally unspoken dialogue.

Socrates. "Do you mean by 'thinking' the same which I mean?"

Theatetus. "What is that?"

Socrates. "I mean the conversation which the soul holds with herself in considering anything." (Barrett 1972:49–50)

discourse, see Patterson 1985; Shevtsova 1992; and Holquist 1990:67–106; on the disjunctive and prescient relation between novel and history, see Singer 1988 and Holquist 1990:107–48; on intertextuality and polyphony, see Durey 1991 and Morson and Emerson 1990:231–68.

6. Bakhtin's treatment of a philosophy of the act (Bakhtin 1993) considers the moral and interpersonal implications of aesthetic activity; his time and chronotope analysis (1981:84–258) considers spatial and temporal relationships in narrative; and his treatment of discourse in the novel (1981:258–422) shows the relation between verbal art and the content of narrative.

The point is that Socratic dialectic probably served as a literary and historical precedent, if not a pattern, for the shaping of the Johannine witness, and this is also one of the models employed by Bakhtin in constructing his theory of how discourse functions in narrative literature. As a contrast to the fool being the protagonist in the modern European novel, however, in Greek biography and in John it is the misunderstanding of the protagonist's discussants that is used most pervasively and effectively. In sketching the misunderstanding of individuals and groups in John, the Evangelist exposes and corrects conventional and false notions within his immediate audience(s). This corrective action not only suggests some of the rhetorical interests of the Fourth Evangelist but also functions to identify varying targets within different strata of the Gospel in ways that corroborate particular crises and issues within Johannine Christianity. As Wayne Meeks has said,

More precisely, there must have been a continuing dialectic between the group's historical experience and the symbolic world which served both to explain that experience and to motivate and form the reaction of group members to the experience. (Meeks 1986:145)

In these ways the dialectical thinking of the Evangelist constructs a set of literary dialogues with varying audiences within the Johannine situation whereby they are brought into an imaginary dialogue with Jesus. As the unfolding narrative is engaged by its audiences, positive responses to the protagonist point the way forward as a favorable example, whereas micomprehending responses to Jesus challenge similar tendencies and patterns in the audience. Even the presentation of the corrected discussant, whereby an originally flawed understanding of Jesus comes around to "getting it right" and becoming a loyal follower of Jesus (the Samaritan woman, Nicodemus, Peter, Mary Magdalene, some of the Ἰουδαῖοι, etc.) shows the way forward. Initial misunderstanding need not be the end of the journey; rehabilitation by the truth is always a possibility! Consider, therefore, the character of the Johannine dialectical situation.

THE DIALECTICAL JOHANNINE SITUATION.

While a full demonstration of Johannine history cannot be developed here, when one considers the sorts of misunderstanding represented in John as well as the corrective teaching of Jesus and the commentary of the Evangelist, several crises in the Johannine situation may indeed be inferred from the narrative. J. Louis Martyn (2003:27–143) described well the two levels of history in John's narrative depicting a set of dialectical relations with the lead-

ership of the local synagogue community, yet this particular set of dialogues was not the only one within the Johannine situation. Religious communities rarely enjoy the luxury of fighting on only one front for an extended period of time, and it is likely that several crises confronted Johannine Christians over three decades or so, rather than just one crisis or another coming from a singular direction. These were living communities struggling on many fronts, often at the same time, and certainly multiple groups and issues were engaged over the relatively long period of time within which the Fourth Gospel was being composed and edited. It may even be that, while the Johannine writings emerged from a particular region or setting, they may have been intended for broader distribution instead of a local one, only.⁷

Interestingly enough, several sources of information corroborate one's assessment of the dialectical Johannine situation. These constructs are developed independently elsewhere, but they also have implications for each other. They include: (1) a two-edition theory of John's composition based upon the composition theory of Barnabas Lindars (which identifies as later, supplementary material the Prologue; chs. 6, 15–17, and 21; and the Beloved Disciple, eyewitness, and Lazarus motifs as having been added to an earlier edition, exposing Jewish/Johannine and Roman/Christian tensions as central to the first-edition material and antidocetic correctives and ecclesiological concerns as central to the final-edition material);⁸ (2) parallel developments in the Johannine Epistles and the letters of Ignatius (at least five of these crises/issues are sketched in one or both of these sets of writings); (3) similar concerns represented in the Johannine Apocalypse (while Revelation appears to be the work of another hand, it nevertheless has at least some Johannine connection, and several of these crises may be inferred behind its writing); (4) comparison/contrasts with Synoptic traditions (dialogues between the first edition of John and Mark betray corrective tensions regarding valuations of Jesus' miracles, and dialogues between John's supplementary material and the Matthean tradition betray corrective tensions regarding ecclesiology); and (5) corroborations within the dialogues of John 6 (at least five crises may be

7. This is the argument by Richard Bauckham 1998: the Gospels were intended for general reception, rather than internal use alone. He corroborates his thesis by showing the crafting of John for readers of Mark.

8. Of all the composition theories available, a modification of Lindars's theory (1981:46–54) continues to be the most plausible. Adding to that view, to the first edition of John (80–85 c.e.) supplementary material was added (100 c.e.) by the editor, whom I believe to have been the author of the Johannine Epistles (85–95 c.e.), completed after the death of the Beloved Disciple (see the outline in Anderson 2006:193–95; this outline is similar to table 2.5 on page 64).

inferred in the “history and theology” conveyed by John 6 and the dialogical character of the Johannine bread of life discourse).⁹ In longitudinal perspective, the Johannine tradition appears to have developed through three major phases with two crises in each. A seventh crisis (ongoing dialogues with other Gospel traditions) appears to have spanned all three periods, and my two-edition theory of John’s composition—emerging within the Johannine dialectical situation—is as follows:¹⁰

AN OUTLINE OF THE JOHANNINE SITUATION IN LONGITUDINAL PERSPECTIVE

Period 1: The Palestinian period, developing tradition (ca. 30–70 C.E.)

Crisis A Dealing with north/south tensions (Galileans/Judeans)

Crisis B Reaching followers of John the Baptist
The oral Johannine tradition develops.

Period 2: The Asia Minor period I, the forging of community (ca. 70–85 C.E.)

Crisis A Engaging local Jewish family and friends

Crisis B Dealing with the local Roman presence
The first edition of the Johannine Gospel is prepared.

Period 3: The Asia Minor period II, dialogues between communities (ca. 85–100 C.E.)

Crisis A Engaging docetizing Gentile Christians and their teachings

Crisis B Engaging Christian institutionalizing tendencies (Diotrephes and his kin)

9. What Martyn achieved with John 9 I have sought to replicate with John 6 (Anderson 1997:24–57). Here, though, at least four crises within the Johannine situation can be inferred, not simply one: (1) the crisis of the meaning of Jesus’ signs (in dialogue with the prevalent Synoptic valuation of the signs miraculous value instead of their existential implications; (2) tensions with Jewish leaders concerning the “bread” of Moses (Torah) versus the bread availed by Jesus’ (3) the “bread” of suffering, especially a challenge to docetizing Christians; and (4) Petrine hierarchical struggles introduced by the likes of Diotrephes and his kin (3 John 9–10). These four “crises” were largely sequential but somewhat overlapping.

10. Most of these crises are actually alluded to by Raymond Brown 2003, although the arrangement is somewhat different (see the fuller outline in Anderson 2006:196–99).

Crisis C Engaging dialectically Christians presentations of Jesus and his ministry (actually reflecting a running dialogue over all three periods)
The Epistles are written by the Johannine Elder, who then finalizes and circulates the testimony of the Beloved Disciple after his death. 100 c.e.

In addition to earlier debates with followers of John the Baptist and north-south tensions with Jerusalem-based religious authorities, at least five other distinct crises may thus be identified within the middle-late Johannine situation. These crises are also corroborated by other literature and are illuminated by an incisive analysis of the Johannine misunderstanding motif. While their developments were somewhat overlapping, these crises include: (1) tensions between northern Palestinian (Galilean, Samaritan, or both) spirituality and southern Judean (Jerusalocentric) religious conventions; (2) debates with followers of John the Baptist seeking to point them to Jesus as the authentic Messiah; (3) debates with local Jewish communities regarding the messianic agency of Jesus; (4) enduring hardships related to the local Roman presence and its increasing requirement of public emperor laud; (5) bolstering group solidarity, especially for Gentile and docetizing Christians, in the face of Roman expansion under Domitian; (6) counters to rising institutionalism in the late first-century church; and (7) a desire to correct prevalent (either Markan or Synoptic) valuations of the miraculous ministry of Jesus (this set of dialogues may have spanned most of the others chronologically).¹¹ Each of these threats is addressed rhetorically in the Johannine text by exposing individuals and groups as failing to understand particular aspects of the teaching and ministry of Jesus. Furthermore, the notions being corrected in each of these crises are first exhibited in the words and actions of the discussants, and the authentic way forward is then declared by the Johannine Jesus. All of this is conveyed, however, by means of the rhetorical function of the Johannine misunderstanding dialogue.

11. While John 6 was added later and thus represents some later features, the Johannine countering of Markan/Synoptic views of miracles was somewhat early in the development of Gospel traditions rather than later only. Other themes, such as eschatology and ecclesiology, for instance, enjoyed a later engagement with the Markan traditions.

THE RHETORICAL FUNCTION OF THE
JOHANNINE MISUNDERSTANDING DIALOGUE.

The Gospel of John progresses by means of two dialogical modes, which are also set off by the presentation of the words and actions of the characters within the narrative. The prevalent mode is a revelational one. Virtually all of John portrays Jesus' mission as effecting the saving/revealing initiative of God's love, offered for the redeeming of humanity (John 3:15–17). God speaks to humanity through the Scriptures, John the Baptist, the words and works of Jesus, the ministry of the Paraclete, the testimony of Jesus' followers and the voice from heaven (twice), the fulfilled words of Jesus and Caiaphas, the written Gospel itself, and, finally, the Word made flesh.¹² Indeed, the saving initiative of God or God's agencies calls forth a believing response on the part of humanity, and this is the *Leitmotif* of the entire Gospel (20:31). As Sandra Schneiders says:

The central concern of the Fourth Gospel is the saving revelation which takes place in Jesus. This revelation, however, must be understood as a dialogical process of Jesus' self-manifestation as the one being continuously sent by the Father (7:16–18) who is thereby encountered in Jesus (10:30; 14:9–11) and the response of belief on the part of the disciple (17:8).¹³

As well as drawing people to God (and indeed no one *can* come to the Father except he or she be drawn; 6:44, 65) this divine-human dialectic also challenges religious norms and authorities, exposing their human origin and thus their final bankruptcy. Furthermore, it scandalizes what Bakhtin calls the privileged language and symbols of religious and political authorities, declaring them less than ultimate and exposing their limitations. Not only are privileged *groups* such as the Ἰουδαῖοι (representing religious authorities), “the crowd” (representing popular conventionality), and “the disciples” (representing Jesus' followers, would-be or otherwise) challenged, but such privileged *individuals* as Nicodemus, Pilate, and even Peter are deftly lampooned by the Evangelist. But in doing so, the primary function is not simply the portrayal

12. Primary examples of scenarios denoting the divine-human, revelational mode of discourse include: 1:1–18 (the Word of God receives an uneven reception in the world); 5:5–15 (Jesus liberates the paralytic); 10:22–39 (Jesus reveals himself to the Judeans); 11:17–45 (Jesus ministers to Martha/Mary and others); 12:20–50 (the culmination of Jesus' ministry); 17:1–26 (Jesus prays for his disciple); 20:10–18 (Jesus reveals himself to Mary Magdalene).

13. Schneiders 1982:39. Note, however, that several scholars have also applied Bakhtinian dialogism to the character of theology: Newsom 1996 and Classens 2003.

of a person or group who suffers from simple-minded conventionality. Rather, particular individuals and groups in the Evangelist's audience are here being targeted and drawn into an imaginary dialogue with the Johannine Jesus, a dialogical bout that the Evangelist intends Jesus to win.

Note how the presentation changes when the narrative shifts into a rhetorical and corrective mode. First, the initiative shifts from God's saving initiative and agency to a human actant denoting creaturely origin and flawed conventionality. Here the theological motif of "of-ness" in John, explaining why some accept and reject God's truth revealed in Jesus, is typified by the subtle detail of initiative. Whenever a person or group takes the initiative and comes speaking to Jesus, making a bold claim or lodging a challenging question, this feature inevitably betrays human incomprehension to be corrected by the Johannine Jesus. A few exceptions exist (such as the mother of Jesus in John 2, although a misunderstanding may be corrected there as well regarding Jesus' "hour"), but note that even Jesus' disciples resist asking him questions, lest their miscomprehension be exposed, according to the narrator. Then, the misunderstanding dialogue is presented with any assortment of the following features:

THE FORM OF THE JOHANNINE MISUNDERSTANDING DIALOGUE

- (1) The setting is usually described.
- (2) Individuals or groups come to Jesus, asking a question or making a statement that reveals, either subtly or explicitly, a telling clue to the discussants' inadequate notions.
- (3) Jesus responds, making some corrective remark about the true character of the kingdom of God, his mission, the Father's work, authentic spirituality, and the like.
- (4) The discussants (usually) make further comments that betray their continued lack of understanding more clearly, building the ironic tension in the narrative.
- (5) Jesus' final response (often) launches into a discourse clarifying the spiritual meaning of the topic at hand, usually a Christocentric elaboration upon the "true" character of the kingdom, Jesus' mission, God's work, life in the Spirit, and so forth.
- (6) The result is usually described along with a transition into the next scenario.
- (7) Sometimes a resurfacing of the discussant(s) later in the narrative reveals their inclination toward the truth: some have begun to walk in it, thus becoming examples of corrected, while others continue as pejorative examples of miscomprehension.

In Bakhtinian terms, when lofty pseudo-authorities are taken on either by the knowing “fool” or the protagonist within a narrative, conventional understandings, thus exposed, are thereby countered in the interest of more transcendent realities, such as virtue, authenticity, and truth. Not only is the figure’s stance tried and judged, but according to Bakhtin regarding Dostoevsky, “His novels are sharply etched novels of trial” (in “Discourse in the Novel,” 1981:391). Interestingly, the scene of “the Grand Inquisitor” in *The Brothers Karamazov* not only builds on the temptation narrative in the Q tradition but also contrasts the bondage of power-dependence to the Johannine motifs of the truth that sets humanity free (John 8:32) and the heavenly bread that comes down from heaven (6:32–33). In that sense, the “hagiographic” tradition used by Dostoevsky, as analyzed by Bakhtin, is rooted in the Gospels’ presentations of Jesus. In the Johannine text it is precisely the lofty, self-assured discussants that represent what Bakhtin calls “the First Stylistic Line,” whereby discussants “approach heteroglossia from above, as if they *descended* onto it” (1981:400).¹⁴ They inevitably are set straight by Jesus within a rhetorical mode of discourse. When the initiative shifts, however, to Jesus or another of God’s agents, however (Moses, John the Baptist, the Word or Light of God), this inevitably poses a revelational mode of discourse. Consider, for instance, Jesus’ trial before Pilate as a fitting example of the rhetorical misunderstanding dialogue in John.

(1) First, the setting is described chronotopically (John 18:28–32): having come from Caiaphas to the Praetorium early in the morning, Pilate objects to Jesus being tried in a Roman court, but he is finally maneuvered into trying Jesus by the Jewish leaders. (2) Pilate then seizes the initiative and asks Jesus if he is “the king of the Jews” (18:33). (3) Jesus responds to Pilate, inquiring if the question is Pilate’s own or if he is reacting to the influences of others (18:34). Here the issue of “kingship” begins to take on multiple levels of meaning, contrasting Pilate’s conventional understanding of power with Jesus’ transcendent assertions about authority. (4) Pilate rejects Jesus’ inference regarding his interest in Jesus’ kingship and unwittingly acknowledges that he is subservient to the agendas of others (18:35), exposing his ironic status as “the impotent potentate.” (5) Jesus’ climactic response clarifies the spiritual meaning of the topic at hand: he indeed is a king, and his “kingdom” is one of truth (18:36–37); all who are on the side of truth hear him. (6) Pilate’s miscomprehension is then portrayed undeniably: “What is truth?”

14. Interestingly, whenever a discussant in John takes the initiative and comes to Jesus, asking a question or making a statement, that subject is about to be exposed as non-comprehending of the revelation, which is ever a factor of the divine initiative (Anderson 1996:221–24; 1997:17–24).

(18:38). This results in a transition into the next scenario, where Pilate goes back and questions the Jewish leaders, seeking the release of Jesus. Despite his juxtaposition of the release of Jesus with the release of the scoundrel Barab-bas, the crowd rejects the loaded offer. The irony intensifies as Pilate claims to possess the power to set Jesus free or to put him to death but then he spends the next half chapter (18:39–19:16) begging the crowd to let him let Jesus go. Also ironic is the crowd's act of blasphemy ("We have no king but Caesar!") in order to ensure the elimination of Jesus as one charged with blasphemy. (7) Finally, Pilate is shown to have some inclination toward the truth, as he lets stand what he has written about Jesus: "He was the king of the Jews" (19:17–22). As a rhetorical mode of discourse, however, Jesus' dialogue with Pilate did not simply exhaust its targeting with those who lived in political proximity the Jerusalem Praetorium. In the end, this challenge to political power by the authority of truth would have continued to confront Roman hegemony throughout the development of the Johannine tradition, emboldening all who would speak truth to power and who would empower the truth.

The Johannine misunderstanding dialogue thus functions to expose conventional "stupidity," or miscomprehension, so as to draw the attention back polyphonically to the saving/revealing initiative of God presented in the mission and reception of Jesus. The questions/comments, assumptions, actions, and identities of the human actants and discussants in John are thus designed to represent the same in the experience of the reader. With one's notionalities thus exposed as inadequate and corrected by God's representative agent, the reader is thereby drawn into a crisis existentially: whether to continue holding on to unenlightened perspectives or to forsake the shadows for the light of the truth. The narration of the result following the responses of Jesus' discussants also helps the reader along. Where the word of Jesus is rejected, the narrator clarifies the negativity of the act in terms of outcomes; conversely, when the word of Jesus is received, the positivity of outcomes points the way forward. In Bakhtinian terms, the Evangelist performs a heteroglossic task:

Heteroglossia, once incorporated into the novel (whatever the forms for its incorporation), is *another's speech in another's language*, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way. Such speech continues a special type of *double-voiced discourse*. It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author. (1981:324)

As well as being important to consider as a heuristic device, conveying reflectively the theological intention of the Evangelist, the Johannine misun-

derstanding dialogue also casts into sharp relief several crises in the Johannine situation that deserve particular consideration.

SEVEN CRISES WITHIN THE JOHANNINE SITUATION
AND THEIR DIALOGICAL ENGAGEMENT BY THE NARRATOR

While these crises are largely sequential, they also varied in terms of duration and character. Put otherwise, they may have overlapped to some degree, and at times the Johannine community may have been struggling on more than one front at the same time. Some of these crises may even have spanned the entire range of the others, and in that sense some were more chronic than acute. For instance, the Johannine critique of Synoptic-type thaumatourgy (there is no evidence of a signs Gospel underlying John¹⁵) may have continued for several decades, even reflecting a difference stemming back to the early stages of Gospel traditions. Also, the effect of one crisis may have evoked the next. Consider likewise the interrelationships between each of these four sequential-yet-overlapping crises. The crisis with the synagogue may have precipitated the crisis with Roman authorities as expelled followers of “the Nazarene” were deprived of the Jewish monotheistic dispensation, thereby not having to worship the emperor. Therefore, expulsion from local synagogues created the crisis of facing into the growing expectation of emperor laud during the reign of Domitian. In turn, Gentile Christians may have been unconvinced about the contradiction between Jesus being the eternal Lord and worshiping Caesar as Lord, leading to a defense of assimilation by means of arguing a docetic Christology. These and other schismatic tendencies, then, were countered by organizing hierarchies and ecclesiological structures in the name of apostolic authority, but not all apostolic communities or leaders felt comfortable with such innovations. Hence, the Johannine corrective to rising institutionalization in the late first-century church was a response to a particular crisis, but this crisis was precipitated by several others. While some scholars consider only one or two of these crises, the polyphonic character of the multiplicity of issues in the evolving Johannine audience—extending over seven decades—deserves to be considered in literary and socioreligious perspective.

(1) The debates between Jesus and the *Ἰουδαῖοι* provide a series of sustained engagements between the Galilean prophet and Jerusalem-centric

15. See Anderson 1996:48–165. For fuller treatments of John’s dialogical autonomy, see Anderson 2001a; 2001b; 2002; and 2004.

authorities.¹⁶ While some of the Ἰουδαῖοι come to believe in Jesus, for the most part they are presented as rejecting Jesus and his mission on religious and scriptural grounds. These figures are wrongly thought of as “the Jews,” since Jesus, the Beloved Disciple, and all of his followers in John are *deeply Jewish*. Despite the fact that John has been a leading biblical text contributing to anti-Semitism, the Johannine presentation of the Ἰουδαῖοι is anything but anti-Semitic. If anything, it claims to showcase the radically authentic Semitic Messiah, who ironically came unto his own people but was rejected by their religious leaders. Spiritually authentic Judeans and Israelites, however, received him.

Among the presentations of the Ἰουδαῖοι in John, at least twenty-two of the seventy references explicitly connect these leaders with Jerusalem or Judea. While debates with the leaders of local synagogue leaders (crisis 4, below) may be inferred in other parts of John (9:22; 12:42; 16:2), north-south tensions between the Galilean prophet and Judean religious authorities present themselves clearly in other parts of John.¹⁷ Following the Jerusalem-based authorities’ questioning of John the Baptist as to whether or not he was the Christ, Elijah, or the Prophet (1:19–28), Jesus performs a prophetic sign in Jerusalem temple itself. The Judean leaders even demonstrate their lofty miscomprehension in asking for a sign to legitimate his temple demonstration (2:18). Jesus points to his future resurrection—building up “this temple” in three days, after it had been destroyed—as a culminative sign, which they mistakenly assume is a temple-reconstruction project (2:19–21). The narrator here clarifies the true reference as being a prediction of Jesus’ victory over death in the light of the disciples’ eventual postresurrection awareness (2:22).

The pinnacle of the north-south impasse is found in John 5 and 7, where the healing of the paralytic on the Sabbath leads to a heated debate over Jesus’

16. Regarding the northern-southern tensions (Judean/Jerusalocentric versus Galilean/Samaritan socioreligious dialectic) consider the following dialogues: 1:47–51 (Jesus and Nathanael); 2:13–25 (Jesus and the dove sellers/Judean cultic leaders); 4:4–42 (Jesus and the Samaritan woman/Samaritans); 5:16–47 (Jesus and the Jerusalem leaders); 7:25–44 (the people of Jerusalem: Pharisees/Judeans and Jesus); 7:45–52 (the temple guards, chief priests, Pharisees, and Nicodemus); 18:19–24 (the high priest and Jesus). See also Anderson 1996:194–251; Brown 2003:157–72.

17. Again, the disjunctive error is to assume that tensions with Jewish leaders after the fall of Jerusalem eclipsed earlier tensions with southern, Judean leaders from an earlier Galilean perspective. In both of these Jewish-Johannine sets of dialectical relations, the religious leaders are presented as speaking with what Bakhtin would call “authoritative discourse” (1981:341–55), seeming internally compelling except for its ironic dethronement by the Johannine Jesus, who better fulfills the very authoritative Jewish ideals being propounded by his discussants.

origin and authenticity. Here the Jerusalem-centered Ἰουδαῖοι get it wrong on many levels. First, they blame the paralytic for carrying his mat, next they fault Jesus for healing someone on the Sabbath, and then they seek to kill Jesus for claiming to do the works of his Father (5:10–18). Indeed, the mention of the desire to kill Jesus in John 5 seems abrupt if it is assumed that this was his first visit. Apparently, the request for a sign in 2:18 made no difference to these Judean leaders. Their interests are exposed as political and power-based rather than spiritual and truth-based, and the extensive discussion of Jesus' authentic mission as one having been sent from the Father (Deut 18:15–22) builds steadily throughout the rest of John 5. Climactically, Jesus declares that, despite their searching the Scriptures for divine life, these religious leaders fail to acknowledge the life-producing agency of life, Jesus, to whom the Scriptures witness (5:39–40). With greater specificity, Jesus then declares that it was of him that Moses wrote (5:46).

The debate with the Jerusalem leaders continues, then, in John 7, as John 6 appears to have been inserted between chapters 5 and 7 during a later augmenting of the first edition. References to John 5 are clear, in that the Judean leaders' desire to kill Jesus is described as the basis for Jesus' reluctance to return to Jerusalem openly (7:1–10, 25), and the debate over the healing of the paralytic on the Sabbath continues (7:19–24). Jesus calls for righteous judgment rather than judging superficially (7:25), and the northern critique of Jerusalem-centric religious hegemony continues to build in several ways over the rest of the chapter. First, several Ἱεροσολυμιτῶν (Jerusalemites) speculate that the reason Jesus speaks openly without challenge is that the religious leaders wanting to kill him really believe he is the Christ. They second-guess themselves, though, by stating that no one will know where Christ is from, but the origin of Jesus is indeed known (7:25–27). Here the “whence” subject (πόθεν) is developed ironically. The Jerusalemites assume they know Jesus' “origin” because they see him as a northerner (ἐκ τῆς Γαλιλαίας), when the real issue (a righteous judgment) is his divine agency as having been sent from the Father (7:16–18, 28–29, 33).

Upon Jesus' declaration in the temple on the main day of the feast (7:37–39), several members of the Jerusalem crowd declare Jesus an authentic prophet, and others declare him to be the Christ. The miscomprehending Jerusalemites, however, declare it impossible for him to be the Christ because they claim to know that the Christ is not supposed to come from Galilee but from the seed of David and from Bethlehem (7:40–43). The religious leaders therefore fail to recognize the authenticity of Jesus' mission because they look for a Davidic and Judean Messiah rather than the Mosaic prophet typology Jesus fulfills prolifically. When the servants of the chief priests and Pharisees hesitate at arresting Jesus, their masters rebuke them by pointing

to the unbelief of their own company (7:44–48). When Nicodemus comes to their defense, claiming the law’s requirement of a fair trial before judgment is exacted, these religious leaders question whether he too is from Galilee—the ultimate Judean insult. The Jerusolocentric leaders then unwittingly expose the epitome of their miscomprehension: despite missing the multiplicity of ways Jesus fulfills the prophet-like-Moses prediction of Deut 18:15–22 (see Anderson 1999), they hold to the more superficial understanding of messianic expectation, limiting it to a region rather than having seen the signs or acknowledged the fulfilled and fulfilling words of Jesus (John 7:50–52).

The north-south tensions are vindicated by the reception of Jesus by the woman at the well and the Samaritans. Not only does she come to believe in Jesus, but many others come to believe in Jesus on the basis of her testimony and because they themselves have perceived Jesus authentically. Their believing reception, parallel to the belief of disciples at the Cana wedding and the Roman official at Capernaum, shows a marked contrast to the religious certainty-and-blindness of the Judean leaders. Finally, however, the issue is not a factor of a north-south divide, with the northerners having preeminence. In response to the Samaritan woman’s question, while the way forward is not to worship in Jerusalem, neither is it to be found by worshiping in a northern site such as Mount Gerizim. Rather, because God is Spirit rather than geographically limiting, authentic worship will ever be in spirit and in truth. The Father actively seeks those who worship in this way (John 4:24).

(2) The outreach to followers of John the Baptist is effected by the early Johannine narrative in several ways.¹⁸ First, John points centrally to Jesus as the first of the witnesses and declares Jesus’ primacy over himself. Indeed, Jesus’ baptism and ministry not only had precedence over his own, but John declares that Jesus *was* before him, as well—a theme eventually picked up in the Prologue. In Bakhtinian terms, the presentation of the heroic Baptist as an interlocutor of “ennobled discourse” (Ibid., 381–84) elevates the status of Jesus by means of his paradoxically self-deprecating witness. John claims to be the voice of the one crying in the wilderness, “Prepare the way of the Lord!” He likewise declares the negative ἐγὼ οὐκ εἶμι (1:20, 21, 27; 3:28) as a counterbalance to the positive ἐγὼ εἶμι of the Johannine Jesus (without a nominative, 4:26; 6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:13, 19; 18:5, 6, 8, 37). When John’s followers ask their master if Jesus is the Messiah or whether they should wait for

18. Regarding the tensions related to the followers of John the Baptist versus Jesus as messianic hero, consider the following dialogues: 1:19–34 (John and Jerusalem authorities); 1:35–43 (Jesus and John’s disciples); 2:1–11 (Jesus’ mother and Jesus); 3:22–36 (a Judean questioner of John); 4:27, 31–38 (Jesus’ disciples and Jesus); 4:46–54 (the royal official and Jesus). Raymond Brown also acknowledges this dialectical relationship (2003:153–57).

another, his answer is clear. Jesus is the bridegroom, John merely the friend of the bridegroom. Third, the presentation of two groups of John's disciples shows the way forward for potential readers dialogically. The first of the Baptist's disciples were pointed to Jesus (1:35–51) with the declaration: "Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" The first two followed Jesus and even brought two more to Jesus: Andrew and Peter. This shows the way forward as a positive example. Jesus is worth following, and even the followers of the Baptist (and perhaps even the Fourth Evangelist himself) become his disciples.

The second group of the Baptist's followers displays miscomprehension at the outset. They had been debating matters of purification with an unnamed Judean, but out of that argument they came complaining to John about Jesus and the fact that more people were going over to Jesus than following the Baptist. At this miscomprehension, John sets the record straight with finality. Not only is Jesus the Messiah that John is not, but Jesus must become greater and John less (3:30). While the response of the Baptist's second group of adherents is not narrated, the message for the hearer/reader is clear. Any would-be followers of John the Baptist would honor their hero supremely by turning to the one he came to point out: Jesus, the authentic Messiah. Thus, by both positive and negative narrative construction, followers of the Baptist are invited to join the primate of the Johannine witnesses in pointing to and following Jesus as the authentic Messiah/Christ (see Anderson 2000:10–13). He is the ultimate "hero" to which his heroic predecessor points.

(3) The debate with the local synagogue, probably transcending the 70s and 80s, is the most broadly covered crisis reflected in John's narrative.¹⁹ Virtually all the dialogues with the Jewish leaders illustrate this series of dialectical tensions, and the works of Brown (2003), Martyn, and Rensberger cast valuable light on them. The individual discussant who typifies this debate most clearly, however, is *Nicodemus*, who comes to Jesus by night—probably reflecting fear of the Jewish leadership, notional inadequacy (being "in the dark"), or both. Notice, however, his privileged status ("a Pharisee ... a leader of the Jews ... a teacher of Israel") and thus the ironic punch of his misunderstanding. In the ensuing dialogue, the concerns of crypto-Chris-

19. Regarding the tensions with local Jewish leaders and Jewish Christians in the Asia Minor setting, consider the following dialogues: 3:1–21 (Nicodemus and Jesus); 6:30–59 (the crowd/the Jews and Jesus); 7:11–24 (the Jews and Jesus); 8:12–58 (Jesus and the Judeans/believing Jews/Pharisees); 9:8–34 (the man born blind/his associates and the Pharisees/Jewish leaders); 9:35–10:21 (Jesus and the man born blind/Pharisees). This threat coincides with the first antichristic threat in the Johannine Epistles; see Anderson 1997:32–40; Brown 2003:172–75.

tians (what Raymond Brown calls Christian believers who remained behind in the synagogue after the expulsion of known Christians) are exposed and their masks torn off by the Johannine Jesus. Nicodemus starts off on the right foot, acknowledging (unlike the crowd of John 6) the significance of Jesus' signs: "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could do such signs ... except God be with him" (3:2). However, when Jesus agrees and says, "It is not enough to be sent from above, you must be born from above" (3:3), Nicodemus misunderstands. He thinks Jesus means a second physical birth. At this point Jesus clarifies that being born of water is not enough. One must also be born from above (ἄνωθεν)—born of the Spirit—to enter the kingdom of God. (3:5) Put pointedly toward crypto-Christians, water baptism may be a start for a Christian, but unless one is willing to set one's sails to the wind of the Spirit and risk socioreligious rejection, one has not apprehended the dynamic activity of God's reign (3:1–21). Therein lies the reality and the scandal of the transcendent kingdom.

Likewise, debates between Jesus and the Jewish leadership reflect numerous issues that contemporary Johannine Christians must have faced. Obstacles to "the world" recognizing the saving presence of God in the mission of Jesus include an over-reverence for the temple, Sabbath laws, the Scriptures and Torah, Moses and Abraham, Davidic messiahship, Judean (versus Galilean) roots, Jewish (versus Gentile) heritage, and even monotheism proper. The key corrective text is 6:32: "It is not Moses who *gave*..., but my Father who *gives you the true bread from heaven*." But this is no mere exegetical triumph where the midrashic mastery of Jesus wins the day. Rather, it involves the overturning of exegesis proper, lest it be connected to the recognition of the one to whom the Scriptures point. In short, retrospective exegesis is displaced by realizing eschatology. The telling assessment of these flaws, however, is their bondage to *conventionalism*. Concluding the signs section the Evangelist declares:

Nonetheless, however, even many of the Jewish leaders believed in him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess openly, lest they should become synagogue outcasts (ἄποσυνάγωγοι γίνωνται). For they loved the praise of humans more than the glory of God. (John 12:42–43)

As a privileged authority, receiving its legitimation from above, Bakhtin undoubtedly would have picked up on the ironic portrayal of Jewish leadership as idolatrous in its religious zealotry. Its motivational scaffolding is definitely base—from below. Theirs is a spiritual monologism that, although perhaps well-meaning, certainly in a distortional way has displaced divine-human encounter with creaturely instrumentalities. Bakhtin's analysis of chronotope

(time-place setting) in the Greek biographical rhetorical novel applies to the Johannine misunderstanding dialogue extremely well. The “public square” settings for these Jewish dialogues with Jesus includes the temple area in Jerusalem, the synagogue in Capernaum, Solomon’s colonnade, various feasts in Jerusalem, and the trials before Jesus’ death. By scandalizing the scandalized, the Evangelist deconstructs the socioreligious hegemony of his community’s setting and bolsters the faith of its Jewish Christian members.

(4) A fourth crisis for Johannine Christianity involved the stepping up of the Roman expectation that all subjects of the empire would demonstrate loyalty to Caesar by means of requiring public emperor laud.²⁰ Even in the first-edition material, probably completed in the early-to-mid 80s, we see the stage being set for the Johannine appeal in the ironic portrayal of Pilate as misunderstanding the character of authority and truth. As the case study above shows, indeed Jesus *is* a king, but his kingdom is one of truth. This is a kingdom not maintained through human force, which is why Jesus’ disciples do not fight. Pilate’s question “What is truth?” is a flat-out acknowledgement that Pilate has no say about, or even access to, Jesus’ kingdom. (18:28–40) Here the tables are turned whereby the man on trial is actually the ruler, and the Roman regent is portrayed as gazing upon the true kingdom from the outside. On the transcendent plane, Pilate is not yet even a dot, but on the human plane he fares little better.

Appealing to his privileged position of authority, Pilate attempts to slap down the insubordinate Jesus: “Do you not know I have the power to kill you or release you?” he threatens. Jesus responds in a double entendre, “Indeed, you would have no authority were it not given you by my Father who is in heaven.” In the following scenario, Pilate’s mask is torn off as he is portrayed as being held hostage by the crowd. He is reduced to political impotence, begging the crowd to allow him to release Jesus, a blatant and highly ironic denial of his previous claims to authority (19:1–16). Finally, the crowd reduces itself to blasphemous emperor laud in their desire to rid the land of the one accused of blasphemy. “We have no king but Caesar!” they chant. In the light of appeals to emperor worship in the early 80s, this rendering of Jesus’ trial

20. Regarding Roman hegemonic demands of emperor worship as experienced by beneficiaries of the *pax Romanam* consider the following dialogues: 6:5–15 (Jesus and several disciples/the crowd); 14:1–31 (Jesus and disciples: Thomas, Philip, other Judas); 18:1–9 (Jesus and soldiers); 18:28–19:16 (Pilate and Jesus). During the reign of Domitian (see Cassidy 1991) from 81 to 96 C.E., even Domitian’s Roman counterparts were commanded to worship him as “Lord and God”; against this backdrop, Thomas’s confession before Jesus, “My Lord and my God!” would have been seen as an explicit defiance of Roman hegemony (Anderson 1996:221–31).

must have had a tremendously powerful effect on the Johannine audience. Roman demands in later generations could not be taken as seriously, given the memory of Pilate's miscomprehension of truth, the transcendent kingdom of God, and dethroned political authority.

(5) A fifth crisis alluded to in the Johannine situation involved an anti-docetic corrective that was levied against denials of Jesus' humanity among the Gentile Christian population of Asia Minor in the 80s and 90s.²¹ Lindars insightfully points out that virtually all the antidocetic motifs in John are included in the supplementary material added to an earlier edition of the text. This fact, combined with the docetizing antichrists of 1 John 4:1–3 and 2 John 7, representing a different schismatic threat than the synagogue-returning antichrists of 1 John 2:18–25, suggests a later and different schismatic threat, and such a tandem sequence may also be inferred from the letters of Ignatius. The Jewish threat preceded the docetic threat in late first-century Asia Minor Christianity. What was really at stake, however, in the docetizing tendencies of Gentile Christians was not the threat of bad theology primarily but the implications of bad theology in terms of praxis. While Romans probably never sought out Christians to persecute as a pastime, the reign of Domitian with its emperor-laud requirements brought with it at least occasional, if not repeated, testings of Christian solidarity with their Lord and the community of faith. Richard Cassidy makes this clear.

What Schnelle, Borgen, and others who have illuminated the Johannine antidocetic thrust for us have understated, however, is the connection between the docetist's refusal to acknowledge the humanity and suffering of Jesus and the reluctance to suffer for Christ at the hand of the Romans. Put simply, "If Jesus the Son of God did not suffer on the cross, neither should it be expected of the Christian convert." Gentiles in Asia Minor would have had a long history of assimilation with respect to governing groups' requirements, and this new Christian teaching, that to offer emperor laud was blasphemous, must have had a higher price tag than they had anticipated. The reluctance to suffer for their new-found faith, in combination with a Greek dualistic understanding of Jesus as the divine (and therefore, supra-human) Son of God, must have spurred on the docetizing advance. If docetic Christian leaders who had themselves assimilated (at least externally) to Roman emperor laud traveled among the churches teaching this "new gospel," this would explain

21. Regarding tensions with docetizing Gentile Christian teachers and community members in the Asia Minor setting, consider the following dialogues: 6:60–66 (Jesus' disciples and Jesus); 7:1–10 (Jesus' brothers and Jesus); 16:17–33 (Jesus' disciples and Jesus); 21:18–22 (Peter and Jesus). This crisis also coincides with the second antichristic threat of the Johannine Epistles; see Anderson 1997:41–50; Brown 2003:175–80.

why the antichristic docetists of the Johannine Epistles were regarded as “false prophets” and “deceivers” who had gone out into the world bringing a false teaching with them. The point I want to make is that John’s antidocetic motifs converge with appeals for solidarity with Jesus and his community in the face of suffering, and this particular crisis is illuminated again by the Johannine misunderstanding dialogue.

The intramural Johannine audience is then addressed by the rhetorical use of the disciples’ scandalization and noncomprehending abandonment of Jesus in John 6, part of the supplementary material. Like Amos’s oracles against the nations, the most severe judgment is reserved for the final group addressed: in Amos’s case, Israel; in the narrative of John 6, the disciples of Jesus. The masks of the crowd and the Jews have already been yanked away, but now the penetrating words of Jesus are served to Jesus’ disciples. Their noncomprehension is portrayed both ironically and tragically. Ironically, after hearing Jesus say, “Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no life in yourselves,” the disciples themselves are now scandalized. What has been debated by scholars as a eucharistic requirement or interpolation is actually an expansion upon 6:51c, “The bread that I offer is my *flesh*, which I shall give for the life of the world.” While eucharistic imagery is used, the hortatory message is about the cross and disciples’ willingness to shoulder it. To ingest the flesh and blood of Jesus is to be willing to suffer with him in the face of persecution, and that clear message is the source of the disciples’ scandalization. Corporate solidarity with Jesus and his community in the face of Roman persecution was the central issue addressed by Ignatius and the Fourth Evangelist, not participation in cultic theophagy. Interpreters have often missed this distinction. Irony may even be built into the debate, as the question of the Jews in 6:52 appears to launch a predictable cannibalism versus Eucharist debate. The Johannine audience must have swallowed hard, though, when it came to realize Jesus is not simply defending a Christian practice against a typical Jewish objection but is calling for the radical willingness to suffer for their Lord in the face of Roman persecution (see Anderson 1996:110–36, 194–220).

The second shoe falls hard with 6:66. Even some of Jesus’ disciples abandon him and walk with him no longer. Here the Evangelist has constructed a masterful scenario of rhetorical biography. On an *Einmalig* (Martyn’s term suggesting a “once upon a time” reference to the past as a means of engaging the present situation) level, Meeks (1967) is right. There is ample reason to assume Galilean messianic hopes did include king-like-Moses ideologies, and some of Jesus’ “followers” must have turned away upon his distancing himself from nationalistic triumphalism. These events, mirrored in John 6:14 and 66, are brought to bear upon the immediate situation of the Johannine audience

around the time John 6 was finalized (probably in the 90s). On the rhetorical level of their delivery, these events pose the existential question powerfully: “Will you also abandon the Lord, as those noncomprehending Galileans in days of old, or will you be faithful to the end?”

(6) The sixth crisis betrayed by Johannine misunderstanding motif involved an ecclesial corrective to rising institutionalism in the late first-century church.²² The primary discussant portrayed as not understanding servant leadership in John, of course, is Peter. Furthermore, Peter is juxtaposed to the Beloved Disciple in ways that embellish Peter’s noncomprehension, while the Beloved Disciple clearly shows the exemplary way forward. In the light of 3 John, where “Diotrephes, who loves to be first,” has been excluding Johannine Christians and excommunicating any who would take them in, we see a likely motivator for this intramural corrective. While emerging hierarchical forms of leadership must have functioned smoothly in many settings, all it takes is one case where judgments are not meted graciously for one to object to such an innovation—which is precisely what the Fourth Evangelist does. He appeals to the original intentionality of Jesus to lead his church by means of the Holy Spirit. In John 20:21–23, the Johannine equivalent to Matt 16:17–19, Jesus breathes upon (inspires) believers and declares, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” Then he “apostolizes” them (“As the Father has sent me, so send I you.”) and gives them (plural) the priestly responsibility to be forgivers of sins. Furthermore, as a contrast to entrusting Peter with instrumental keys to the kingdom of heaven, he entrusts the Beloved Disciple with his mother, a relational symbol of ecclesial coinage rather than an instrumental one. But notice how the foundation for this constructive work is set by the deconstructive portrayal of Peter as failing to comprehend servant leadership.

First, Peter refuses to allow the mission of Jesus to falter and declares him to be the “Holy One of God” who will vanquish God’s enemies by his triumphal might and exalt the elect on his right and left. Jesus rejects this understanding and declares: “I have not *chosen you the Twelve* [as in elected you, the Twelve, to surface triumphantly], and one of you is a devil.” The Greek, οὐκ ἐγὼ ὑμᾶς τοὺς δώδεκα ἐξελεξάμην..., is normally translated as

22. I am indebted here to the work of Käsemann 1968 and others for the ecclesial implications of the juxtaposition of Peter and the Beloved Disciple in John. Regarding tensions with institutionalizing (Petrine) Christian leadership, consider the following dialogues: 6:67–71 (Jesus and the twelve/Peter); 13:1–20 (Simon Peter and Jesus); 13:21–30 (Jesus and disciples/Beloved Disciple/Judas); 13:31–38 (Jesus and Peter); 21:1–14 (Jesus and the disciples); 21:15–17 (Jesus and Peter). For dialectical engagements with rising institutionalism within Christianity, especially responding to Diotrephes and his kin (3 John 9–10), see Anderson 1991; 1996:221–51; 1997:50–57; Brown 2003:180–83.

a question, “Have I not chosen you the Twelve...?” but the declarative is certainly possible, and it even works better if by “election” is implied the sparing of hardship or loss. This also would explain Jesus’ sharp response to Peter’s otherwise orthodox-sounding confession. By confessing Jesus as the triumphant “Holy One of God”—even the one feared by the demoniac in Mark 1:24—Peter is portrayed as misunderstanding the sacrificial character of Jesus’ ministry.

A second misunderstanding dialogue between Peter and Jesus involved Jesus’ washing of Peter’s feet. Peter fails to comprehend the action and lampoons himself by requesting a full bath as though water-cleansing were the issue instead of servanthood. After Peter’s misdirected enthusiasm, Jesus lectures the group as to the character of loving servanthood. But the concluding comment must have had a corrective sting in it for aspiring hierarchical leaders in the late first-century audience, claiming Petrine authority as did Ignatius a decade or so later: “Truly, truly, I tell you, a slave is not greater than his master...”; so far so good, but now for the corrective sting: “nor is the apostle [ἀπόστολος] greater than the one sending him.” Parallel to Matt 16:17, a blessing is given in the next verse, John 13:17, but the macarism is not bestowed for making an inspired confession; rather, it is promised for obeying the servant-leadership injunctions of Jesus.

The third misunderstanding dialogue between Peter and Jesus takes place in John 21 after the resurrection. As well as being a priestly go-between at the Last Supper, the Beloved Disciple again is the one who points out the Lord to Peter. Unencumbered by reflective pause, Peter jumps into the water and comes to Jesus quickly. There on the shore, Jesus restores Peter around a charcoal fire, giving him the opportunity to make a threefold confession after having uttered a threefold denial (also around a charcoal fire, obviously an act of reconstructive therapy). But the reinstatement is not free from ambiguity. Despite Brown’s showing of the nearly synonymous interchangeability of ἀγάπη and φίλος love, Peter is portrayed here as failing to understand Jesus’ injunctions to love and tend the flock in an ἀγάπη manner. He is even hurt (ἐλυπήθη) that Jesus pressed the question three times, and this deserves to be understood as a corrective to the ascending institution founded in Peter’s memory rather than a personal one alone. Put ideologically, the issue of leadership continuity was redefined by the Evangelist in terms of Christocracy: the effective means by which the risen Christ continues to lead the church. While he does not abolish institutions proper, he juxtaposes Jesus’ original intention to lead the church through the Paraclete, available to all believers, over and against an emerging structural model represented by Peter. This motif comes even clearer when the disciples as a group are portrayed as failing to understand Jesus in John 16:17–18.

Central to the supplementary material added to the Fourth Gospel's first edition, probably in the 90s, is the teaching of Jesus on the Paraclete. Having already been introduced in the first edition of the Gospel, this theme becomes all the more significant as the last of the apostolic generation fades off the scene. Whereas the Matthean tradition addressed this crisis by posing an institutional answer to the problem, the Johannine tradition posed a Spirit-based approach. The disciples are portrayed as being absolutely confused regarding Jesus' teaching, and here we have the only explicit declaration of discussant noncomprehension in John:

Therefore, some of his disciples said to one another, "What is this he's telling us: 'In a little while you won't see me any more?' And, 'Again, in a little while you will see me?' And, 'Because I am going to the Father?'" Therefore, they said, "This "little while" stuff he's talking about *leaves us absolutely clueless!*"

From a Bakhtinian perspective, here we have the use of the second stylistic line, where heteroglossia is now introduced from below. Their here-paraphrased declaration of miscomprehension is designed to pique internal dialogue in the understanding/experience of the hearer/reader. The reporting of cognitive dissonance evokes the same for the audience, and intentionally so. Jesus thus clarifies their misunderstanding in chapter 16 by offering his last will and testament in chapter 17, and Käsemann is right. We have an outline for Johannine ecclesiology in the great prayer of Jesus, which punctuates the Paraclete passages in the previous three chapters. In response to the disciples' failure to understand not only his absence but also his eschatological presence in the church, the Johannine Jesus offers not simply an ecclesiological lecture but an intercessory prayer. But the outline of that prayer offers the constructive sequel to the deconstructive misunderstanding motif. The Christocratic presence of Jesus will guide believers faithfully within the gathered community, and they will not be abandoned as orphans having to devise their own schemes to get by.

(7) Engagements with parallel Synoptic traditions can be inferred during the early, middle, and later stages of the Johannine historical situation.²³ Here it is listed seventh among the crises, not as a factor of sequence, but as

23. Regarding dialogical engagements with Synoptic emphases and interpretations of Jesus' ministry, consider the following dialogues: 6:25–30 (the crowd and Jesus); 9:1–7 (Jesus' disciples and Jesus); 11:1–16 (Jesus and some of his disciples); 12:4–7 (Judas and Jesus); 20:24–29 (Jesus and Thomas); 21:18–25 (Jesus and Peter). On Johannine dialectical engagements with Markan presentations of Jesus' ministry, see Anderson 1997:24–32; 2001a; 2001b; 2002; Brown 2003:90–114.

a reflection that it spans the other six. One of the earlier tensions with the Markan traditions involved the prizing of outward wonders, which is supplanted in John by the revelational and soteriological significance of Jesus' miracles. Thomas comes to Jesus declaring that he will not believe without an external sign. While Jesus does not rebuke him for his interest and even grants it (see the scars in my hands and put your hand into my side), he also declares its inferiority to sightless trust. "Blessed are those who have not seen," declares the Johannine Jesus, "and yet believe." At this, the externalist becomes an authentic believer, as Thomas confesses, "My Lord and my God!" But does he do so because he has heard Jesus or because he has experienced a penultimate rather than the ultimate source of blessing? The Evangelist leaves it ambiguous, exposing Thomas's desire for external evidence as incomplete and portraying Jesus as both rejecting his interest while at the same time granting it.

The misunderstanding crowd serves as a group whose conventional desires for more barley loaves are challenged by the Johannine Jesus in John 6. In Bakhtinian terms, prevalent Christian perceptions of Jesus are engaged dialectically in the "everyday-life" presentation of the misguided crowd. After first of all misconstruing Jesus' messiahship, wanting to rush him off for a hasty coronation, they come again asking, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" implying the hidden question: "When is the next feeding?" Jesus recognizes full well their agenda and responds prophetically: "You seek me *not* because you saw the signs but because you ate the loaves and were satisfied!" The corrective is obvious. Jesus fed the multitude with real bread, but he did not intend to be construed as a source of physical bread alone. His saving/revealing mission was conveyed through the sign, but the primary valuation of the miracle should have been that which it signified: Jesus' being sent from the Father as the eschatological representative envoy. Not only are the thaumaturgic aspirations of the misunderstanding crowd challenged by Jesus, but in Jesus' response the preliminary target is also suggested. "Ate and were satisfied" is the result of *all five Synoptic feeding accounts*, and not only is it missing from the Johannine rendition, but Jesus is portrayed in John as rejecting that outcome as missing the entire point of his semiotic ministry. Rather than a backwater signs source being engaged existentially, we probably have the prevalent Christian valuation of Jesus' miracles, assuming it is represented or influenced by the unanimous Synoptic accounts, being corrected by the Johannine Jesus. It is hard to overstate the implications of this corrective.

While the crowd is not a privileged sort of authority, descending from above, it still represents popular conventionality—certainly an emerging sort of authority—that is being corrected. The implication of such a move is that it betrays at least a particular controversy within the Johannine situation—

although perhaps beyond it—wherein the valuation of Jesus' miracles was contested. The misunderstanding of the crowd exposes thaumaturgic conventionality within the middle to late first-century Christian setting, and the Johannine Jesus sets the record straight.

Finally, the narrator sets the reader straight eschatologically, as a corrective to the Markan Gospels' emphasis that the Son of Man would return before the apostles had all died. John's Jesus declares explicitly that Jesus was misunderstood to say the Beloved Disciple would not die (implying that he has died by the time the Fourth Gospel is finalized). Rather, he only said to Peter, "What is it to you if he lives until I come again....you follow me!" (21:18–23). In that sense, the other Gospel traditions are complemented, augmented, and corrected by the Johannine witness dialectically. Because of the Fourth Gospel, Jesus can now be viewed in bioptic perspective.²⁴ In Bakhtinian terms, the Johannine evangel not only comments upon polyphonic readings of Jesus; it *contributes* to them.

CONCLUSION

In sum, Mikhail Bakhtin offers a systematic literary theory that accentuates interesting features in the Johannine Gospel. Furthermore, by employing a rhetorical/critical analysis of the Johannine misunderstanding motif, one's knowledge of the Evangelist's specific meanings can be narrowed to a more clearly defined set of contextual correctives—right? According to Bakhtin, wrong. First, he would say that the Holy Writ is its own authority from on high. It is simply to be listened to and heard, not analyzed and explained. Second, Bakhtin would say that no theory of language or literature can be systematically adequate entirely, precisely because of the dialogical character of truth and the human means by which we apprehend and express it. According to Clark and Holquist:

Dialogism is Bakhtin's attempt to think his way out of ... all-pervasive monologism. Dialogism is not intended to be merely another theory of literature or even another philosophy of language, but it is an account of relations between people and between persons and things that cuts across religious, political and aesthetic boundaries. ... *Dialogism liberates precisely*

24. Such is the thesis of *The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus*, with 24 particular made in favor of a more nuanced approach in part 4 (Anderson 2006:127–73). Historiography is itself an artistic venture, every bit as much as fiction (Anderson 2001b), as reality and artistry answer back and forth within the dialectic of subjective memory and human experience.

because it insists that we are involved in the making of meaning. (Clark and Holquist: 348)

Finally, while Bakhtin might agree with some of the connections between Jesus' misunderstanding discussants in John and the Evangelist's addressing of seven acute, largely sequential-yet-overlapping crises in his situation, Bakhtin would consider those intentional meanings preliminary but never final. He would not, however, disconnect the original author-hero relationship from evolving author-audience dialectical engagements; like art and answerability, one set of realities answers back and forth in the experience and cognition of the narrator, until past is connected with present in a further dialogical work of artistry. Further, knowledge within one disciplinary approach informs one's investigations within another. More universally and existentially, as we find *ourselves* drawn into an imaginary dialogue with the Johannine Jesus, the reader finds one's own conventions exposed and corrected in the place of the crowd, Nicodemus, Thomas, the Jews, Peter, and the disciples. With these words, Bakhtin closed the last article he ever wrote:

There is neither a first word nor a last word. The contexts of dialogue are without limit. They extend into the deepest past and the most distant future. Even meanings born in dialogues of the remotest past will never be finally grasped once and for all, for they will always be renewed in later dialogue. At any present moment of the dialogue there are great masses of forgotten meanings, but these will be recalled again at a given moment in the dialogue's later course when it will be given new life. For nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will someday have its homecoming festival. (Clark and Holquist: 350)