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## From One Dialogue to Another: Johannine Polyvalence from Origins to Receptions

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FROM ONE DIALOGUE TO ANOTHER:  
JOHANNINE POLYVALENCE FROM  
ORIGINS TO RECEPTIONS

*Paul N. Anderson*

Throughout the ages, one of the primary mistakes committed in studying the Gospel of John has been to read the text monologically instead of dialogically. This error has often led some readers of the Fourth Gospel to “get it wrong,” needing correction by later interpreters. Put otherwise, many an ecumenical council or more nuanced interpretation has restored the tension that had been lost by interpreters who had sided with one aspect of John’s witness without considering another. Likewise, one flaw of modern literary-critical theories is that they have often sought to ascribe the sources of the Fourth Gospel’s theological tensions to sets of imagined literary poles, failing to consider the possibility that the origin of those tensions was been integral to the thinking and style of the Evangelist.<sup>1</sup> John’s material developed dialogically, and it must be read dialogically if its epistemological origin, developmental character, and rhetorical design are to be adequately understood. Indeed, there are different levels and types of dialogical operation underlying the Johannine text—from origins to receptions—and these involve theological, historical, and literary factors that require a *polyvalent* approach to Johannine interpretation.

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1. For a fuller discussion of the Fourth Gospel’s theological tensions as *external* to the thinking of the Evangelist (Bultmann and diachronic theorists) or *internal* to the Evangelist’s thinking (Barrett and synchronic theorists), see Anderson 1996; 2004. For a development of the four sources of the Gospel’s theological tensions (the dialectical thinking of the Evangelist; John’s Mosaic-Prophet Agency schema; the dialectical Johannine situation; and the dialogical/rhetorical work of the narrator) see Anderson 2007a. For the history of patristic discussions of Johannine Christology see T. E. Pollard’s excellent overview (1970).

## POLYVALENCE AND BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

So what is meant by “polyvalence”? The word *valence* (from the Latin *valentia*) means “power” or “capacity,” especially with reference to the making of connections. In chemistry, the valence of an atom refers to the capacity of its particles to bond with those of other atoms. In linguistics, valence refers to the number of meanings implied by various qualifiers of a verb. In psychology, valence refers to a person’s feelings and thoughts, especially referring to two opposing feelings or drives leading to conflictive *ambivalence*. In literature, valence refers to the ways a narrative connects with audiences and themes, and *polyvalence in literature* relates to many levels of meaning, embedded within the text and beyond it, transcending time, space, and form.

This is an important consideration because literature, and especially narrative literature, is rarely monovalent, as though it has only one level of meaning. Even nursery rhymes carry within themselves multileveled associations beyond the simplistic themes they convey. Further, any “classical” text will be deemed such precisely because it conveys meaning on more than one level alone, which is why it continues to be engaged again and again across epochs and settings.<sup>2</sup> What Mikhail Bakhtin has described as “dialogism” reflects the multiplicity of meanings emerging from different systems of thought as represented through divergent voices within a narrative. As *polyphony* presents a diversity of voices, and as *polysemy* leverages a panoply of signified meanings within literature, *polyvalence* in narrative refers to the multiplicity of connections, associations, and meanings that accompany—both preceding and following—any theme or its signification in a given text.<sup>3</sup>

In Johannine perspective, a dialogical presentation of Jesus bears within itself multiple forms and modes of dialogue, which in turn engage each other in polyvalent ways. The question is whether approaches to the Fourth Gospel can also make connections from one system to another. Semiotic polyvalence works within literature, but can interdisciplinary polyvalence function within biblical studies?

Reflecting a trend that D. A. Carson calls the “balkanization of Johannine studies” (2007), it can be seen how Johannine scholars have often resorted to mono-disciplinary approaches to the Fourth Gospel’s riddles—understandably, but nonetheless to their peril. The introduction of any set of disciplinary tools to the analysis of a biblical subject or text requires its intensive application and

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2. Note James Fowler’s reference to the Fourth Gospel as one of the genuinely *classic* texts of religious literature (Anderson, Ellens, and Fowler 2004, 268–71).

3. See especially Bakhtin’s description of “heteroglossia” in the novel (1981, 324–31) and his analysis of the hero in aesthetic perspective (1990).

narrow use, but the best studies will also take into consideration other relevant approaches, incorporating the findings of other studies into an interdisciplinary synthesis. Indeed, the great Johannine research programs of the twentieth century have done precisely this. One of the reasons Rudolf Bultmann's epoch-making synthesis has endured for so long, despite sustained criticism along the way, is that it was built upon multiple types of analysis, bringing together a synthesis of several approaches that had developed over a century or more.<sup>4</sup> Since Bultmann's programmatic contribution in 1941, however, two others demand notice for their interdisciplinary character and multivalent impact. First, Raymond Brown's contribution stands out because, in addition to writing over two thousand pages in his Anchor Bible commentaries on the Johannine Gospel and Epistles (1966–70; 1982), he constructed compelling theories of the Fourth Gospel's composition and the history of the Johannine situation in ways that intersected with the text's literary, historical, and theological features.<sup>5</sup> Even in his analysis of the Johannine situation, however, Brown's refusal to limit discussion to a single dialogue (with the synagogue alone) is significant. Brown appreciated the polyvalence of the emerging Johannine situation itself, and in this way his approach differed from that of Martyn.<sup>6</sup> As a second example, Alan Culpepper's contribution stands out because of its capacity both to introduce new literary theories to the critical study of Gospel traditions and his ability to integrate those new literary disciplines with historical and theological approaches.<sup>7</sup> In particular, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* has

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4. On one hand, Rudolf Bultmann's 1941 commentary on the Gospel of John drew together an amazing synthesis of source-critical, redaction-critical, exegetical, history of religions, and theological analyses enriched by existential sensitivities. On the other hand, Bultmann's *Theology of the New Testament* (1951–55) is one of the finest theological treatments of the New Testament ever produced. The synergy between his diverse methodological approaches and their incisive theological implications were a winsome combination. With the possible exception of Schweitzer's *Quest*, Bultmann's *Commentary on John* deserves consideration as the most significant single work of biblical scholarship work of the twentieth century.

5. In my 2006 review of *Life in Abundance; Studies in John's Gospel in Tribute to Raymond E. Brown* ([http://bookreviews.org/pdf/4874\\_5078.pdf](http://bookreviews.org/pdf/4874_5078.pdf)) I argued that Brown's contributions are worthy of being considered the most significant of any American Bible scholar of the twentieth century.

6. See here Brown 1979 and his outline of several crises and dialogical partners in the Johannine situation in Brown and Moloney 2003. By contrast, Brown's colleague at Union Theological Seminary, J. Louis Martyn, focused on one primary dialogue within the Johannine situation: the Johannine-Jewish dialogue (see Martyn 2003).

7. Even before Brown wrote *Community of the Beloved Disciple* (1979), Culpepper had written the first sustained development of the Johannine situation (Culpepper 1975).

captured the imagination of Johannine scholars in ways that have impacted the last quarter century of Johannine studies more than any other single work. With this new literary approach to Johannine analysis, the hopeless impasses related to historical-critical positivism and Johannine-Synoptic comparisons/contrasts could be sidestepped, while still yielding rich hermeneutical results. A consideration of the impact of these three luminaries upon biblical studies overall reveals that interdisciplinary approaches to the Johannine riddles augur for a more enduring set of contributions. That being the case, a brief overview of the Johannine riddles seems in order.<sup>8</sup>

#### THE PERPLEXING CHARACTER OF THE JOHANNINE RIDDLES

While a full treatment of the Johannine riddles cannot be presented here, a mention of some of the prevalent ones makes it apparent why these issues continue to be relevant for any sustained approach to the Fourth Gospel. Indeed, the very existence of these and other *aporias* (perplexities)—odd transitions, repetitions and variations, similarities and differences with the Synoptics, and theological tensions—makes simplistic approaches to John's narrative obsolete. It should also be pointed out that the polymorphic and multileveled character of these riddles explains why so many first-rate scholars have come to different views on the composition and development of John's text. Nonetheless, these are the very features that make the Fourth Gospel the mystifying text that it is, and each generation must struggle with its content and its presentation anew. Therefore, the literary, historical, and theological Johannine riddles deserve a fresh review.

#### LITERARY RIDDLES

Upon any serious reading of the text, it cannot be denied that numerous literary riddles abound within the Fourth Gospel. First, the distinctive style and

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Following that work, however, Culpepper's *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (1983) literally created a field of fresh literary approaches to John over the last quarter century. Yet Culpepper has still maintained his engagement with historical and theological interests. As notable examples, his 1998 commentary, *The Gospel of John and Letters of John*, and his *John, the Son of Zebedee* (2000) both explore the histories and legends pertaining to John, the son of Zebedee.

8. As a point of clarification, I do not use the word "riddles" in the more particular way that Tom Thatcher (2000) develops the term in his study of the of riddle as a speech genre but rather in the more general sense in which Moody Smith used the term in his gracious foreword to Anderson 1996, iv.

form of the Prologue (John 1:1–18, which seem closer to 1 John 1:1–5) and the apparent first ending at John 20:31 make it plausible that the first eighteen verses and the last twenty-five verses of the current text were added to an earlier edition. Certainly, the text-critical fact that John 5:4 and 7:53–8:11 were not part of the original narrative makes at least some sort of diachronic history likely, although unlike the above sections, these are post-Johannine additions. The final editor refers to someone else as the author—the Beloved Disciple who leaned against the breast of Jesus at the Last Supper—and “explains” the belief that Jesus never said that individual would not die, as though he has apparently died (21:20–24). Does this imply that there were at least two writers involved in the composition of the Fourth Gospel: an Evangelist and an editor? These phenomena force interpreters to consider at least some scenario of the text’s developmental history and editorial compilation.

Second, seemingly odd transitions puzzle John’s readers. The testimony of John the Baptist in 1:30 is described as a former event in 1:15. The debates about the Sabbath healing in John 5 and 7 are set in Jerusalem, while John 4 and 6 take place in Samaria and Galilee. In 14:31 Jesus declares “Let us depart” from the supper but does not reach the garden until three chapters later (18:1). While Mary’s anointing of the feet of Jesus is alluded to as having happened in 11:2, the event does not actually take place until 12:3; while Thomas asks Jesus where he is going in 14:5, Jesus declares in 16:5 that none of them has asked where he is going. Repetitions and variations also raise the question as to whether multiple layers of material are compiled in the Johannine narrative. Did some of John’s material get rearranged, or are these odd transitions and sequences factors of another sort of process?

Third, the existence of distinctive types of material in the Fourth Gospel raises the question as to whether distinctive collections of material may have been a part of John’s tradition or sources. The distinctive “I am” sayings, the “double amen” sayings (see, e.g., 1:51; 3:3–5; 5:19–25.), the distinctive signs with their theologizing proclivities, the Scripture citations and their introductory formulas, and the Johannine misunderstanding dialogues raise questions about the origin and development of this material. Did signs and discourses grow up together in the Fourth Gospel, or were they combined at a later time, having been joined from disparate literary sources? Was there one primary source of the Johannine material or several? If there were several sources of John’s material, might that also account for theological tensions and differences within the material, or does assuming the latter point beg the inference of sources?

Fourth, John’s relation to the Synoptics is an enduring source of puzzlement. On the one hand, several dozen similarities suggest intertraditional contact, yet none of these similarities is verbatim. This is especially true of

the events narrated in John 6 and the passion narrative—the two sections that are the closest between John and the Synoptics. It even seems that some Johannine passages are in corrective dialogue with Markan and Matthean traditions, while Luke appears to favor some Johannine details over Mark's, and the Johannine Father-Son motif shows up at least once in Q (Matt 11:25–27; Luke 10:21–22). If the Fourth Gospel was independent from the Synoptics, was its tradition entirely isolated, or might its engagement involve intertraditional dialogues along the way? Further, might a variety of different sorts of Johannine-Synoptic contacts have existed at different times and with respect to different traditions and their forms as the traditions underlying all four Gospels developed?

Fifth, while there appears to be a *basic* synchronicity of John's tradition, dialogues are also apparent between earlier and later material. In several cases the narrator reminds the reader of what has happened, and either Jesus or characters in the narrative do the same (4:45–47; 9:15, 35; 10:25, 40; 12:1, 17, 37; 18:14; 20:24). On the other hand, the narrator sometimes clarifies points made earlier or anticipates things to come (2:4; 4:2; 7:39; 8:27; 11:30; 21:23). Proleptic statements by Jesus are fulfilled later in the narrative, confirming his identity as the authentic prophet-like-Moses of Deut 18:15–22, and the reader is drawn into the omniscient perspective of the narrator along the way (John 2:22; 12:33; 13:11; 18:32; 21:19). Given the pervasive unity of John's style and inclinations, the Fourth Gospel seems like a seamless robe that critics may gamble over but not divide.

Sixth, despite this synchronicity of tradition, there appear to be several aspects of diachronicity in the Johannine situation reflected in the text. Translations of Aramaic terms into Greek and explanations of Jewish language and customs for Hellenistic audiences suggest a Palestinian origin and a later development within a non-Jewish setting (1:38, 41, 42; 2:6; 4:9; 5:2; 11:55; 19:13, 17, 31, 40, 42). While some material emphasizes the presentation of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, he is also presented in categories conducive to the mindset of Hellenistic cultures.

So what do the above features suggest about the origin, development, and unity of the Johannine tradition? Was it a unitive tradition developing in its own distinctive way, or was it a compiled collection of disparate material and perspectives?

## HISTORICAL RIDDLES

The Gospel of John's historical problems are many. First, many of the historically plausible features of the Synoptics are missing from the Fourth Gospel. The parables of the kingdom and the short, pithy sayings of the Syn-

optic Jesus are largely absent, as are all of Jesus' exorcisms and healings of lepers. The baptism of Jesus is not directly reported in John (Mark 1:9; John 1:29–34), nor is the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper (Mark 14; John 13). Further, virtually every event in which John the son of Zebedee is mentioned in the Synoptics is missing from John, including the calling of James and John from their fishing nets and boat (Mark 1:19), the healing of Simon's mother-in-law (Mark 1:29–31), the calling of the Twelve (Mark 3:16–19), the request of the Zebedee brothers for privilege (Mark 10:35–45), the raising of Jairus's daughter (Mark 5:22–43), the transfiguration (Mark 9:2–10), the uneasiness of John with other exorcists (Mark 9:38–41), the request of the Zebedee brothers to call down fire from heaven (Luke 9:54), the arranging of the upper room (Luke 22:8), the Olivet discourse (Mark 13:3–37), and the slumber of the disciples in Gethsemane (Mark 14:32–34). If *none* of these events is reported in the Gospel traditionally attributed to John the son of Zebedee, can it really be assumed that the Fourth Gospel was indeed written by him or, for that matter, by any other member of the Twelve?

Second and conversely, most of the distinctively Johannine presentations of Jesus' words and works are missing from the other three canonical Gospels. The "I am" sayings (John 6:35–58; 8:12, 24, 28, 58; 10:7–16; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1–8), the water-into-wine miracle (2:1–11), the healing of the Jerusalem paralytic (5:1–15), the raising of Lazarus from the grave (11:1–41), extended debates with Jewish leaders in Jerusalem (John 5; 7–10), dialogues with such characters as the Samaritan woman (4:4–42) and Nicodemus (3:1–15), the Baptist's Lamb of God testimony (1:26–36), various feasts in Jerusalem (2:23; 4:45; 5:1; 6:4; 7:2; 10:22; 11:56; 13:1), the washing of Peter's feet (13:3–17), and the great discourses at the culmination of Jesus' ministry (John 14–17)—these are all missing from the Synoptics. If these things really happened as historical realities, how could they *not* be known to traditions besides John's, and if they were known, how could such memorable accounts be omitted from all three Synoptic Gospels? Given John's theological proclivities, many scholars have wondered whether the origin of these accounts was theological, questioning their historical basis. However, John has more mundane and archaeological material than all the other Gospels put together.

Third, differences between John and the Synoptics abound, especially regarding order and chronology. In the Synoptics, Jesus cleanses the temple at the culmination of his ministry (Mark 11:15–18), whereas in John the event is presented as an inaugural sign (John 2:13–21). Regarding the date of the Last Supper, the Synoptic accounts present it as a Passover meal (Mark 14:12–25), whereas in John's account it is dated as the day before the Passover (John 13:1–14:31). In the Synoptics, Jesus visits Jerusalem only once (Mark 11:11), at which point he is arrested, tried, and killed; in the Fourth Gospel, Jesus

makes at least four trips to Jerusalem (John 2:13; 5:1; 7:10; 12:12), and his opposition results from the raising of Lazarus, not the temple incident. The Synoptics present only one Passover (Mark 14:1); John presents three (John 2:13; 6:4; 11:55). In Mark 1 the first miracles are the exorcism and the healing of Simon's mother-in-law (Mark 1:23–31); John presents the wedding miracle in John 2 and the healing of the official's son in John 4 as the first two signs Jesus had done in Galilee (John 2:1–11; 4:43–54). Did the agonizing of Jesus about the foreboding "hour" and events to come happen before or after the Last Supper (John 12:27; Mark 14:34–36)? Was it the third hour that they crucified Jesus (Mark 15:25) or the sixth hour (John 19:16)? In these and other ways, the Johannine order and chronology appears decidedly different from those of the Synoptics, although basic similarities remain.

Fourth, the presentations of Jesus' ministry and his emphases are very different in John's Gospel and the Synoptics. The Markan Jesus shrouds himself in secrecy (Mark 1:44; 3:12; 7:36; 8:30; 9:9), whereas the Johannine Jesus declares his identity with extroverted disclosure (John 4:26; 6:35, 48, 51; 7:28–29; 8:12, 24, 28, 58; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5; 18:5–8, 37). In Mark and Matthew, the woman anoints Jesus' head (Mark 14:3; Matt 26:7); in John and Luke, the woman anoints Jesus' feet (John 12:3; Luke 7:37). In Matthew, Jesus' followers are the light of the world (Matt 5:14); in John's Gospel, it is Jesus (John 8:12; 9:5). In Mark, Jesus' ministry begins after the arrest of the Baptist (Mark 1:14); in the Fourth Gospel, the Baptist ministers alongside Jesus, at least for a while (John 1:19–37; 3:22–30). In Mark, the Nazarenes do not receive the home-town prophet (Mark 6:1–6); in John's account, even the Samaritans and the royal official believe in him (John 4:39–54). In the Synoptics, Elijah and Moses come in the ministry of the Baptist and at the transfiguration (Mark 6:15; 9:4); in the Gospel of John, the Baptist denies being these individuals, pointing instead to Jesus, who fulfills both typologies (John 1:19–27). The Synoptic Jesus teaches a great deal about the kingdom (Mark 1:15; 3:24; 4:11, 26, 30; 9:1, 47; 10:14, 15, 23–25; 12:34; 14:25); the Johannine Jesus teaches correctively about the kingdom (John 3:5–8; 18:36) and is regarded as king (1:49; 6:15; 12:13; 18:33, 37, 39; 19:3, 14, 15, 19, 21). The Synoptic Jesus propounds the love of God and neighbor as fulfilling the commandments of Moses (Mark 12:29–31); the Johannine Jesus lays down a new commandment: love of one another (John 13:34–35; 15:12, 17). The differences between these two sets of presentations make one wonder if it is the same Jesus who is presented—or divergent perspectives on the same subject.

Fifth, differences in detail and emphasis abound between John's Gospel and one or more of the Synoptics. "Much" grass is described at the feeding of five thousand (John 6:10), although Mark alone describes it as "green" grass (Mark 6:39). Mark and John alone mention two hundred and three hundred

denarii worth of bread (Mark 6: 37; 14:5; John 6:7; 12:5), but Matthew and Luke omit these details. Jesus' birth in Bethlehem in Matthew and Luke is apparently unknown to the Jewish leaders in John 7:42, yet in 6:42 the Jewish leaders claim to know Jesus' parents. Matthew and Mark have two feeding narratives and two sea crossings (Mark 6:44; 8:9; Matt 14:21; 15:38); John and Luke only have one of each (John 6:10; Luke 9:14). Rather than confess Jesus as the Christ, as he does in the Synoptics (Mark 8:29), the Johannine Peter confesses Jesus as "the Holy One of God" (John 6:68), the same title used by the demoniac in Mark 1:24. Peter is imbued with authority in Matt 16:17–19; in John 6:69 Peter affirms *Jesus'* authority. Luke moves Peter's confession to follow the *other* feeding, the feeding of the five thousand instead of the feeding of the four thousand, departing from where it is in Mark and siding with where it is in John (Luke 9:11–17, 18–26; John 6:1–15, 68–69). In the Synoptics, Jesus promises to return before the eyewitnesses have passed on (Mark 9:1); John's narrator clarifies that Jesus never said that he would return before the Beloved Disciple died (John 21:20–23). Peter's third denial is predicted in Mark as preceding the second crowing of the rooster (Mark 14:30, 72); the other three Gospels predict only one crowing as the prophetic signal (Matt 26:24, 74–75; Luke 22:34, 60–61; John 13:38; 18:27). Luke alone follows John in mentioning Mary and Martha (John 11:1–12:8; Luke 10:38–41), Satan's "entering" Judas (John 13:27; Luke 22:3), the servant's right ear that was severed (John 18:10; Luke 22:50), and the great catch of fish (John 21:1–11; Luke 5:1–11). Why do we find these the similarities and differences between John's Gospel and particular Synoptic presentations in terms of graphic, illustrative detail? Perhaps a comprehensive theory of traditional contacts is needed, rather than a simplistic "John-and-the-Synoptics" approach.

Sixth, John's is the only canonical Gospel claiming to have been written by an eyewitness, yet this claim is made in the third person—apparently by the final editor about the "Beloved Disciple," who had leaned against the breast of Jesus at the last supper (John 13:23; 21:20–24). While the traditional view contends that the Fourth Evangelist was John the son of Zebedee, neither John nor James is mentioned explicitly in the Johannine narrative, and "those of Zebedee" are mentioned only once (21:2). Ironically, one might think that the authority of the eyewitness would testify to Jesus' divine authority, but this is not the case. The importance of the eyewitness's testimony in John 19:34–35 is to emphasize the fleshly humanity of Jesus rather than his divinity—water and blood pouring forth from his side while on the cross. Further, the final editor's emphasis that Jesus never said the Beloved Disciple would not die gives the impression that he had died by the time the Johannine Gospel was finalized (21:20–24). However, if the Fourth Evangelist were someone well known, such as John the son of Zebedee, why was his name *not* mentioned

more explicitly in the Johannine narrative? These are enduring questions regarding the question of John's historical character and origin.

### THEOLOGICAL RIDDLES

A third set of riddles concerns the Fourth Gospel's theological tensions. In addressing these issues, one must ask whether their epistemological origin was a multiplicity of sources with their own perspectives or whether the text reveals a dialectical thinker engaging his evolving audience dialogically at work.

First, the Fourth Gospel's christological tensions may be noted. On one hand, the Son is equal to the Father (John 10:30, 33, 38; 12:41; 14:7, 10; 17:11, 21; 20:28), is equated with God (1:1, 18; 5:18; 8:23, 28, 58), and is presented in glorified terms as one who knows what will happen next (6:6; 13:1, 19, 38; 11:11; 14:29; 21:19) and the hearts and minds of those around him (1:47–50; 2:24–25; 5:6; 6:64; 13:11; 16:19). His feet appear not even to touch the ground, as the Johannine Jesus escapes capture and proceeds undaunted on his mission (7:30, 32, 44; 10:37; 11:57). On the other hand, Jesus declares that the Father is greater than he is (5:19, 30; 7:16; 8:16, 28; 12:49; 14:10, 28), claims not to do his own bidding but only the Father's (5:43; 15:10), is presented in flesh-bound terms as one who weeps at funerals (11:35), is deeply troubled (11:33, 38; 12:27; 13:21), and is filled with pathos over the welfare of his own (11:3, 5, 36; 13:1, 34; 14:21; 15:9, 12; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20). Water and blood flow physically from his side (19:34), and Thomas believes upon seeing and touching the flesh wounds of Jesus (20:27). The Johannine Jesus is presented as both stoic and pathetic, yet to ignore either side of these polarities is to distort the character of the dynamic tension intrinsic to John's distinctive flesh-and-glory Christology.

Second, the Johannine presentation of Jesus' miracles is equally filled with tension. On one hand, the signs are embellished as facilitators of belief (John 2:11; 4:53; 6:2, 14; 11:15, 45, 48; 12:11, 18–19). Jesus begins his public ministry with a party miracle (2:1–11), performs healings from afar (4:45–54), heals the sick in Jerusalem and Judea as well as Galilee (5:1–15; 9:1–41), and even raises Lazarus from the dead despite his having been in the tomb four days (11:1–45). The Johannine Jesus performs signs reminiscent of Elijah and Moses (6:1–21), and these deeds confirm that he has been sent from the Father (6:29); if people cannot believe in Jesus, they are at least exhorted to believe in his works (10:38). On the other hand, people's requests for signs are rebuked by Jesus, whether they be from a royal official imploring help for his son or the crowd's challenge to produce more bread (4:48; 6:26). At every step of the way, the "significance" and meaning of the miracles is emphasized: the water-into-wine wonder signifies Jesus' saving the best for last (2:10); the

healing in Jerusalem shows Jesus' authority over the Sabbath (5:1–15); his feeding of the multitude points to his being the Bread of Life (6:1–58); the healing of the blind man exposes the blindness of those who claim to see (9:1–41); and the raising of Lazarus points to Jesus as the resurrection and the life (11:1–45). Further, dependence upon signs is challenged by the Johannine Jesus, and those who believe without having seen are considered especially blessed (20:29). Did these tensions regarding Jesus' miracles originate in the Evangelist's corrective treatment of alien traditions, or were they factors of his own dialogical presentation of his own material?

Third, tensions within Johannine eschatology are also pressing. On one hand, the saving/revealing work of Christ, the fullness of authentic worship, and the dynamic activity of the Holy Spirit are presented as here-and-now realities. The "hour" of Jesus has indeed come, and his glorification is actualized (John 1:33; 3:18a; 4:21–24; 5:24, 28; 6:63; 10:10; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 15:3; 16:32; 17:1; 20:20–22). On the other hand, those who believe will finally be rewarded only on the last day, at least some of the Holy Spirit's manifestation lies still in the future, and the "hour" of Jesus and his glorification are yet anticipated as future events (2:4; 4:21; 5:25; 6:39, 40, 44, 54; 7: 6, 8, 30, 39; 8:20; 11:24; 14:26). The issue of judgment is also a puzzling one. On one hand, Jesus judges no one and did not come for judgment (3:17; 8:15; 12:37). On the other, the Father has entrusted judgment to the Son, and judgment is the reason the Son has come into the world (5:22; 9:39). Regarding the sending of the Spirit, the Fourth Gospel is equally ambivalent. Two passages declare that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father (14:16, 26), and two assert that Jesus himself will send the Holy Spirit (15:26; 16:7). In terms of Christian theology, the way forward has been to read John's treatments of these issues dialectically; one wonders if even historic divisions between Eastern and Western Christianity since the middle of the fifth century might be transcended with a more dialectical approach to John's presentation of whence the Holy Spirit proceeds.

Fourth, regarding soteriology, is salvation through Christ a particular and exclusivistic reality, or is it a universal and inclusivistic one? On the one hand, Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, the only means of access to the Father (John 14:6). Those who believe in him receive eternal life (3:16). On the other, the light enlightening all humanity was coming into the world in the ministry of Jesus (1:9). Jesus claims to have sheep "not of this fold," and his mission is described as gathering the children of God scattered in the Diaspora (10:16; 11:52). A related topic is the issue of determinism versus free will. On one hand, Jesus knows who will receive him and reject him (2:24–25; 6:64; 13:11); no one can come to God except having been drawn by the Father (6:44, 65). On the other hand, as many as received him are

given the power to become children of God (1:12), and the Fourth Gospel was written in order that people might believe (20:31). Of course, “can come” is different from “may come,” and the belief that no one has seen the Father except the Son (1:18; 6:46) explains why the only hope for humanity is the saving/revealing initiative of God. This being the case, can one respond believably to this initiative in salvific faith without knowing the story of Jesus’ coming as the Christ, or does the Johannine Jesus supplant one form of religious formalism with another? If the existential response of faith to the Revealer is the Johannine *Leitmotiv* (central and weighty theme), the Fourth Gospel poses a challenge to religious dogmatism rather than an affirmation of it.

Fifth, especially since the Holocaust, the question of John’s perceived anti-Semitism has been a pressing one. On the one hand, “the Jews” are portrayed as Jesus’ adversaries who seek to kill him and reject both his ministry and his claims to authority (John 5:16, 18; 7:1, 13; 8:59; 10:31, 33; 11:8). They are portrayed as typologies of the unbelieving world (5:38; 6:36; 8:45–46; 10:25–26; 12:37–40) and are associated with the negative polarities of the Johannine dualism. Jewish leaders reject Jesus as the Messiah on the basis of the Mosaic Law (9:28–29), yet they do not realize that Moses wrote of Jesus (5:39–47). They claim to be children of Abraham (8:33, 39), yet they reject the one sent from the Father. In that sense, they fulfill the prediction of Isa 6 that humanity will fail to see and hear (John 12:38–41). On the other hand, many of “the Jews” indeed believe (2:23; 7:31; 8:30–31; 10:42; 11:45; 12:42), and Jesus declares that “salvation is of the Jews” (4:22). It is also a fact that the word **Ἰουδαῖοι** also means “Judeans” (7:1; 11:7), so the term is not a reference to all who are Semitic, which would include the receptive Galileans. Clearly Jesus is presented as the Jewish Messiah (1:41; 11:27), and even Pilate hails him as the “king of the Jews” (19:14, 19, 21). Nearly all the presentations of “the Jews” involve southern, Jerusalem-based, religious leaders who are scandalized by the northern prophet (John 5; 7–12; esp. 7:40–53). Ironically, while the Judeans reject the northern prophet, Nathanael is described as an Israelite in whom there is nothing false: in contrast to the southern leaders, the northerner gets it right (1:45–50). The ontology of characters’ reception of Jesus in John’s Gospel is more spiritual and religious than racial and ethnic; after all, the Fourth Evangelist himself was also Semitic. The rejection of the Light is prefigured by predisposing darkness (3:17–21), and openness to the Revealer is facilitated by abiding in truth and love (15:1–17), according to the Johannine Evangelist. Nonetheless, John has contributed to anti-Semitism, even if wrongly so, and such distortions deserve to be challenged by sound exegesis rather than being granted any sort of status as valid interpretations of the most Jewish of the Gospels.

Sixth, the Fourth Gospel continues to be a source of puzzlement with relation to ecclesiological and sacramental questions. On the one hand, Jesus and his disciples baptize more disciples than the Baptist (John 3:26; 4:1), water and blood pour forth from the side of Jesus on the cross (19:34), Jesus dines with his disciples after the resurrection (21:12–13), and receiving eternal life requires ingesting the flesh and blood of Jesus (6:53–54). On the other, the narrator clarifies that Jesus himself never baptized anyone (4:2) and that John came baptizing to point to Jesus, who baptizes with the Holy Spirit (1:26–36); no institution of the Eucharist is mentioned at the Last Supper (John 13); and the direct narration of Jesus’ baptism is missing from the Johannine narrative (1:19–51). Is Johannine sacramentology so sacred that it cannot bear to be diminished by an explicit reference, or does the dearth of sacramental references reflect a deconstructive and critical stance?

John’s tensions in the area of ecclesiology are equally apparent. Indeed, Peter makes a climactic confession in the Fourth Gospel (John 6:68–69), and a threefold denial around a charcoal fire avails him the opportunity to make a threefold profession of loyalty to Jesus around the same (13:38; 18:18–27; 21:9–17). However, it is the Beloved Disciple who is entrusted with a symbol of authority (19:26–27), one that is relational instead of hierarchical—the very *mother of Jesus*—while Peter is portrayed as affirming Jesus’ singular authority rather than being imbued with such himself (John 6:68; Matt 16:16:17–19). Models for the church are more fluid instead of “petrified” in John’s Gospel, and Jesus is portrayed as the dynamic leader of the church (flock/shepherd, John 10:1–30; vine/branches, 15:1–8), leading believers through the ongoing work of the Paraclete (14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). If the Synoptic Jesus came to set up religious structures and forms, the Johannine Jesus certainly corrects that image, and programmatically so.

The literary, historical, and theological riddles in John, laid out here even in a cursory way, illustrate the strong reasons why scholars make such varying inferences about the composition and development of John’s tradition. To be fair, some issues are granted more prominence within some composition theories, but a good deal of disagreement also exists over how to deal with the same acknowledged puzzle. Further, the moves one makes in addressing one issue affect one’s treatment of others, so varying degrees of plausibility will accompany features of any theory.

Views that fail to convince include the following.<sup>9</sup> First, the traditional view that the Fourth Gospel represents a flat eyewitness memory and insider’s

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9. For extended analyses of the strengths and weaknesses of these views, see Anderson 1996, 1–169; 2006a, 1–99.

perspective is countered by the fact that the Beloved Disciple is described in third-person terms, including allusions to his death, which imply that he had died by the time the Johannine Gospel was finalized. Second, the history of religions approach, regarding multiple sources of John's material, fails to be convincing even by the marshalling of Bultmann's stylistic, contextual, and theological evidence. Third, implicit within Bultmann's program is the view that the Fourth Evangelist could not have been a dialectical thinker. Modern theologians can think dialectically, and the best ones do so according to Bultmann and other scholars, but this mode of reflective operation is not extended to a first-century thinker (the Fourth Evangelist), to the peril of Johannine interpretation (see Bultmann 1969, 146). Essentially, any analysis of Johannine perspective that does not include an appreciation for the dialectical thinking of the Evangelist is almost certain to be inadequate. Fourth, views that John's Gospel is a spiritualization of Mark or is dependent on one or more of the Synoptics are challenged by the fact that none of the many similarities between them are identical. Some contact may have existed, but John's direct literary dependence on other traditions goes against the evidence. Fifth, complex rearrangement and multiple-layer theories diminish in their plausibility in direct proportion to the intricacy of the theory. While at least a first edition and a final edition of the Fourth Gospel seem likely, complex scenarios of multiple editions or rearrangements of material are impossible to demonstrate. Sixth, despite the fact that new literary and rhetorical approaches to John have been advanced over the last three decades, one must still deal with the historical material in the Fourth Gospel, as well as its claims to first-hand memory. John's Gospel is highly theological, but that does not imply detachment from originative history and historiographic concerns.

In all of these approaches, some aspects are stronger than others, calling for a new synthesis. Given the implausible character of these leading theories, a workable hypothesis deserves to be advanced. The most workable synthesis, in my view, relates to the *dialogical autonomy* of the Fourth Gospel.

#### JOHN'S DIALOGICAL AUTONOMY AND ITS TRADITIONAL POLYVALENCE

While John's Gospel is not based on a dependent tradition, either on Mark or alien (non-Johannine) sources, neither is it isolated and disengaged from other traditions. Therefore, "autonomy" is a better way to describe the character of John's independence. This means that, while John's tradition develops theologically, theological speculation was not its origin; an independent reflection on the ministry of Jesus is what the Johannine tradition shows itself to be, casting light on the Jesus of history as well as the Christ of faith. Further, while the Evangelist operated dialectically, he was also engaged dialogically

with particular audiences as the Johannine situation evolved over decades, as well as being in dialogue with other Gospel traditions. Here Bultmann's interest in theology and Brown's interest in the Johannine situation deserve to be conjoined with Culpepper's rhetorical analysis. Because the Fourth Gospel's narrative presentation relates to its composition history, evolving situation, theological operation, and rhetorical purposes, polyvalence between these factors deserves consideration. My own theory of the Fourth Gospel's dialogical autonomy is thus based upon the following six inferences.

(1) There seems to be a final compiling of the Fourth Gospel by someone other than the Evangelist. Further, some of the material apparently added to the earlier edition of the Gospel is very close to that of the Johannine Epistles. This makes it plausible that the author of 1, 2, and 3 John may have been the final editor of the Johannine Gospel, likely placing the Epistles between the first and final editions of the Gospel.

(2) The stylistic unity of the Johannine Gospel argues for a unified tradition, reflecting an individuated perspective throughout the origin and development of the narrative. Some repetition and transitional oddities may have resulted from compiling a final edition, but there is nothing in the Fourth Gospel that appears alien to the Johannine tradition, beyond the post-Johannine additions that are evident from the facts of text-critical analysis.

(3) Given the likelihood that the Fourth Evangelist was a dialectical thinker, the dialogue between earlier perceptions, subsequent experiences, and later reflections deserves to be taken into analytical consideration. Therefore, cognitive-critical analysis must be applied to the character and development of the Johannine witness, including considerations of origins, developments, and finalized forms of the Johannine material.

(4) John's developing tradition may have had different sorts of engagements with parallel Synoptic traditions, and analyses between John's tradition and each of these distinctive traditions deserves consideration in order to ascertain the character and likely origin of these similarities and differences. More than one form of intertraditional relationship may have existed between the Johannine and parallel tradition.

(5) A basic two-edition theory of composition is the least implausible way of dealing with the major textual perplexities in John's narrative. While John is likely the last canonical Gospel to have been finalized (around 100 c.e.), an earlier edition is plausible (80–85 c.e.), which was likely the second Gospel narrative to be developed. Following the first edition of the Fourth Gospel, the Epistles were written by the Elder as the ministry of the Evangelist continued. After the Evangelist's death, the author of the Epistles appears to have finalized the Gospel, adding the Prologue, chapters 6, 15–17, and 21, and the references to the Beloved Disciple and eyewitness.

(6) The three phases in the history of the Johannine situation each included two crises, with a seventh set of Johannine-Synoptic dialogues spanning all three phases. Period 1 (30–70 c.e.) involved the Palestinian stages of the tradition, including north-south dialogues between Galileans and Judeans and dialogues with Baptist adherents. Period 2 (70–85 c.e.) involved a move to Asia Minor (or some such mission setting), and dialogues with local Jewish leaders saw movement out of and back into the synagogue, while tensions developed with Rome under Domitian's reign. Period 3 (85–100 c.e.) saw the emergence of several Christian communities as the movement grew. New threats included the false teachings of Hellenistic docetizing Christians and the centralizing endeavors of Diotrefes and his kin.

As these elements are the most plausible and least conjectural approaches to the major literary and historical features of the Johannine tradition, theological interpretation deserves to follow accordingly. In doing so, however, the valences and open receptors of one approach deserve consideration in the light of others. This is especially appropriate because each of these features is itself something of a dialogical construct. The Evangelist reflects dialogically on his tradition, but he does so in the light of other traditional renderings and also in the context of an emerging situation. While there is an impressive synchronicity of tradition as the Johannine memory develops, the diachronicity of the Johannine situation evokes particular emphases and stylization as a means of addressing the needs of the evolving audience. Even the compiler's crafting of a final presentation of the narrative completes the earlier work and pulls it together into a unified whole, introduced by a hymnic composition and finalized with a second ending. Therefore, from one dialogue to another, Johannine polyvalence enriches interpretation and expands the number of valid meanings accordingly. The key is approaching the interpretive task in an integrated and synthesizing way.

### THREE MODES OF DIALOGUE UNDERLYING THE JOHANNINE TEXT

Just as there are three general types of riddles facing Johannine interpretation, three types of dialogical realities underlying the Johannine text deserve consideration. These features must be approached dialectically because of the Fourth Gospel's literary, historical, and theological dialogical character. While some interpreters may seek to confine the discussion to a single discipline or issue, adequate biblical interpretation cannot accede to such an artificial request. Again, the interpretive paradigms of Bultmann, Brown, and Culpepper have made enduring contributions precisely because they worked with multiple disciplines and approaches, addressing the polymorphic character of the Johannine riddles with complementary hypotheses that provide

suggestive ways forward for understanding matters Johannine: literary, historical, and theological.

In addition to the Fourth Gospel's thoroughgoing dialogical character, however, its central literary, historical, and theological features also include dialogical modes of operation. One wonders if the dialogical function of narrative ever stops; to pose a Bakhtinian answer: No! While there may have been a first word in the cosmos, there is never a *first* word in literature, nor will there ever be a *last* word. In that sense, we are involved in the making of meaning, and from one dialogue to another we ourselves are engaged dialogically in hearing and reading the Johannine narrative (see Clark and Holquist 1984, 350; Anderson 2007a). Yet even great programs have their particular strengths. Bultmann's theological sensitivity and acuity will withstand the test of time; Brown's illuminating history of the Johannine situation will make a perdurant (to use one of his terms) contribution; Culpepper's literary contributions will continue to capture the imagination of interpreters over the long term. In picking up the mantles laid at the feet of interpreters, we, too, are invited into dialogue with the Johannine text, as well as with the most enduring contributions of its finest interpreters. That leads now to the threshold of John's theological, historical, and literary dialogical realities.

#### JOHN'S THEOLOGICAL DIALOGISM: JOHANNINE MISUNDERSTANDING DIALOGUE—EXPOSING SEVEN CRISES IN THE JOHANNINE SITUATION

From beginning to end, the theological character of the Fourth Gospel is thoroughly dialogical. The challenge, of course, is to understand clearly the epistemological character of John's theological dialogism and to interpret it accordingly. While other features could be noted, three aspects of John's theological dialogism deserve special consideration. They include the dialectical thinking of the Evangelist, the agency schema at the heart of John's Christology, and the human-divine dialogue at the center of John's revelational theology.

First, any adequate interpretation of a Johannine theological theme must engage the dialectical thinking of the Evangelist, lest its character and meaning be missed. Some exceptions will apply, but the common thread in the tensions inherent to most of John's theological riddles (as outlined above) is the fact that the Evangelist characteristically works in both-and conjunctive ways rather than either/or disjunctive ones. This feature reflects a first-order type of cognition, which in turn reflects the dynamism and creativity of first-generation discovery. In contrast to the right-answerism of the author of the Johannine Epistles, the author of the Gospel challenges monological thinking, religious platforms, biblical notionalities, and political motivations in

the name of the liberating power of truth. Whether discovery emerged from pneumatic openings mediated by the work of the Paraclete or from spiritual encounters and associations during the historic ministry of Jesus, or both, or some other means, John's is a theology of encounter—originating from, and leading to, the same in the way the narrative is constructed. Therefore, rather than allow the reader to get smug in one presentation or another, John's irony, apparent contradictions, abrupt shifts in sequence, and other narratological ploys hook the reader, seeking to engage later audiences in the same sort of first-order encounter that the Evangelist has himself experienced. From a cognitive-critical perspective, certainty is challenged by mystery precisely because the ineffable cannot be reduced to the notional. Deep calls to deep, and theological interpretations that do not appreciate the epistemological character of John's dialectical thought will fall short of adequacy.

Second, the Johannine agency schema is central to understanding the Son's relation to the Father and mission in the world. One thing Bultmann got right was the dialectical structure of John's agency schema. The saving/revealing agent was sent to the world to disclose God's love, knowledge, and light and to lead humanity into the fullness of restored relationship by means of an authentic response of faith to the divine initiative. Indeed, the Revealer scandalizes the world and its religious approaches to the divine precisely because it calls for the forfeiting of trust in human ventures and their scaffolding in exchange for the receiving of grace through faith. One thing Bultmann got wrong, however, was made apparent by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls just six years after his 1941 commentary appeared. The prophetic agency schema was rife within Judaism itself, and while John's dualism played well within Hellenistic settings, its origin was profoundly Jewish. When the Father-Son relationship in John's narrative is viewed in the light of the prophet-like-Moses agency schema of Deut 18:15–22, virtually all of the Son's emissary characteristics may be identified within the outline of this agency schema below. Rather than locating a high Christology in inferred gnostic poetry countered by the incarnational inclination of the Evangelist, the Johannine Jesus' equality with and subordination to the Father are flip-sides of the same coin: a Jewish agency schema, within which the agent is in all ways like the one who has sent him.

Therefore, (1) God will raise up a prophet like Moses who will speak God's words to the world (the Son speaks the Father's words to the world); (2) the prophet will say nothing on his own behalf, only what he is instructed to say (the Son speaks not on his own behalf but only what the Father has instructed him to say); (3) his audiences will be accountable to God for their responses to him (to reject or receive the Son is to reject or receive the Father); and (4) as distinguished from the presumptuous prophet, the authentic prophet's words

will come true (Jesus' proleptic words come true, showing that he is authentically sent from the Father). This is the christological subject of which Moses wrote (John 5:39, 46), and the main thrust of the first edition of the Fourth Gospel is to present Jesus as the fulfillment of this prophetic agency typology.

A third dialectical aspect of Johannine theology is to further the divine-human dialogue, which the Fourth Gospel bespeaks *and* conveys. John presents salvation in revelational and relational terms, and in that sense salvation is a function and the goal of the divine-human dialogue. Again, the issue of initiative is central. What the Revealer reveals is the message that human initiative cannot suffice: no one has seen God at any time (John 6:46); only the one who is sent from the Father has seen God and can reveal the love of the Father to humanity (1:18). Therefore, all that is of human origin and initiative is scandalized by the divine initiative, and in that sense it is not only the Jewish leaders and their religious platforms that are challenged, but all religious scaffolding—Christian, atheist, academic, political, popular, sectarian, and otherwise. This is what makes the Johannine Gospel classic religious literature: it continues to speak and to challenge within Christian traditions and beyond them. It declares that the truth alone is liberating and that, while the light is available to all, the world either responds to the light or seeks the “security” of darkness (3:17–21). Like Plato's Allegory of the Cave (*Republic* 8), humanity's response to the light betrays its inclination toward it.

John's dualism is a “dualism of decision,” to use Bultmann's language, and in the narration of John's Jesus story, humanity is called to make a choice for or against the Revealer. Indeed, this existential response of faith is the most difficult for the religiously invested, for to come to the light in faith is to acknowledge the frailty of one's theological constructs and claims to knowledge in exchange for that which is of God. Yet no one can come except through being drawn by the Father, which is what the saving/revealing initiative of the divine Word does. To say yes to God's loving YES to the world is to enter into that eternal Dialogue that was and is from the beginning and that will be until the end. Its scandal, however, is not that it requires laying humanity's sin at the foot of the cross, but its religious claims to see (9:41).

#### JOHN'S HISTORICAL DIALOGISM

As mentioned above, many a classic theological statement of especially the first four ecumenical councils restored the both-and component of a theological issue that had been stripped of its conjunctive tension by one heretical movement or another. Interestingly, while dialectical reasoning has been the time-tested way forward for addressing the Fourth Gospel's theological tensions, the same has not successfully been attempted in addressing the text's

historical tensions. This may be a factor of an overconfidence in objectivism within the modern era or a privileging of noncontradiction as the prime marker of historical truth. While Bultmann failed to conceive of the Johannine Evangelist as a dialectical thinker (unlike his conception of the best of modern theologians), he nonetheless called for a dialectical approach to historiography, which may yet pose the way forward for addressing John's historical riddles (Anderson 2006a, 175–90). While Brown did more to set the template for those investigations, John's historical dialogism deserves consideration in terms of the Evangelist's historical dialogues within his own tradition, parallel traditions, and his emerging audiences.<sup>10</sup>

A first dialogical consideration relates to the fact that Johannine narrative contains several references to earlier and later understandings within the Johannine tradition. This *intratraditional dialogue* is evidenced by the fact that Jesus' disciples did not understand what he said at first, but after the resurrection their comprehension was fulfilled (John 2:22; 12:16). Indeed, Jesus predicts fuller understanding later (13:7), and the disciples' understanding of Scripture becomes fuller from a distanced perspective (20:9). Correctives and clarifications to particular meanings abound within the Johannine tradition itself, suggesting engagement between earlier narrations and later editings (see 1:15; 4:1–2; 7:22; 12:6; 18:32; 19:35; 21:19). Further, one of the central features of Johannine theological operation involves reflecting on the meaning of earlier events for later audiences. The words of the wedding steward, that Jesus saves the best for last (2:10), allude finally to the raising of Lazarus and the glorification of Jesus (John 11; 19–21); the well-water scene points to Jesus' availing living water (4:7–26; 7:37–39); the feeding of the multitude points to Jesus as the bread of life (6:1–15, 31–58); the restoration of the blind man's sight illuminates the blindness of the religious leaders (9:1–7, 8–41); the raising of Lazarus from the tomb points to Jesus as the resurrection and the life (11:1–45; 20:1–28). In these ways, the theological reflection of the Evangelist upon his own tradition shows the inference of meaning, even in later settings, as understandings continue to unfold as a factor of intratraditional dialogue. Climactically, an extension of graciousness to later generations is evident in the declaration of blessedness for those who “have not seen and yet believe” (20:29). Ironically, the very mention of later understandings attests to the reality of earlier impressions—perhaps even alluding to first impressions and the originative stages of the Johannine memory.

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10. For a development of these three levels of dialogue using John 6 as a case study, see Anderson 1996, 167–251.

Second, while a good deal in intratraditional dialogue is apparent in John's Gospel, there are also signs of *intertraditional dialogue*. Assuming Markan priority, while Matthew and Luke built *upon* Mark, the first edition of the Fourth Gospel appears to have built *around* Mark. Given that the most likely contents of the supplementary material include the Johannine Prologue, chapters 6, 15–17, 21, and the Beloved Disciple and eyewitness passages, the following inferences are likely. (1) Distinctive contacts between the Johannine and Markan traditions reflect “interfluence” between the oral Markan and Johannine traditions (Anderson 2006a, 104–6). (2) The first edition of John's Gospel augments Mark with two early miracles (John 2:1–11; 4:45–54) and three southern ones (John 5, 9, 11), also setting the record straight here and there (Anderson 2006a, 106–12). (3) Luke departs from Mark and sides with John at least six dozen times, suggesting Luke's dependence on the Johannine oral tradition (Anderson 2006a, 112–17). (4) Johannine motifs in the double tradition material suggest that the Q tradition may have incorporated some Johannine material (Anderson 2006a, 117–19). (5) The later Johannine material appears to have been engaged dialogically with Matthean ecclesial developments, including the role of Peter and the function of apostolic authority (Anderson 2006a, 119–25). (6) Of course, a good deal of secondary (and perhaps tertiary) orality likely existed between the Johannine and Markan traditions, so that these “bi-optic Gospels” should be interpreted as reflecting a good deal of interfluentiality from the earliest to the latest stages of their traditions.<sup>11</sup>

Regarding understandings of the kingdom, miracles, ministry, worship, the *parousia*, sacraments, leadership, and authority, the Johannine and Markan traditions were engaged in dialogue over the course of seven decades at least. While intratraditional dialogue found new meanings in earlier impressions, intertraditional dialogue appears at times to have set the record straight, especially with reference to the Markan and Matthean traditions. Therefore, historical memory was likely a part of at least some of the interfluentiality between the bi-optic Gospels, ultimately casting light upon the historic ministry of Jesus.<sup>12</sup>

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11. Anderson 2006a, 127–73. Beyond the simplistic source-dependence approaches, contacts during oral stages of traditions also deserve critical consideration. Here Walter J. Ong's theory of secondary orality bears great interpretive potential. In his *The Presence of the Word* (2002) and *Orality and Literacy* (1982), Ong describes the informal ways that contacts happen beyond written means.

12. Note, e.g., the interfluentiality between the Johannine and Markan traditions regarding the sea crossing in John 6 and Mark 6 (Anderson 2004). More comprehensively, see Anderson 2001; 2006a, 101–26.

A third dialogical aspect of Johannine historicity relates to the *dialectical Johannine situation* evolving over several decades. While Raymond Brown argued for the basic historicity of the Johannine situation and even was becoming open to some “cross-influence” between John and the Synoptics, his greatest contribution was a plausible sketch of the historical Johannine situation (see Brown and Moloney 2003, 104). While his inference of Samaritan influence on the Johannine tradition is not as compelling as his theories regarding the Johannine Christians’ dialogues with Baptist adherents, local Jewish leaders, Gentile Christians, and apostolic Christians, the primary impact of his contribution is to pose a realistic synthesis of Johannine Christianity, drawing in the content of the Gospel and Epistles effectively. What is evident over a period of seven decades is at least as many dialogical crises within the evolving Johannine situation, with two in each of the three periods and with the running dialogue with Synoptic traditions spanning the other six.<sup>13</sup> While most of these dialogical crises were largely sequential, many were also at least somewhat overlapping. Within John 6 alone, no fewer than four or five of these crises can be inferred when a history-and-theology reading of its narrative is performed in the light of its *Sitz im Leben*.<sup>14</sup>

#### JOHN’S LITERARY DIALOGISM

Historical narrative is every bit as rhetorical as novelistic narrative, and even

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13. Within the *Palestinian period*, (1) north-south dialogues between the Galileans and the Judeans are apparent, as are (2) dialogues with adherents of John the Baptist. Within the *first Asia Minor period*, (3) a set of dialogues with local Jewish leaders of the synagogue is followed by (4) increasing tensions with the Romans during the reign of Domitian (81–96 C.E.). The first edition of the Johannine Gospel was drafted during this time. The *third period* saw the proliferation of other Christian communities, coinciding with (5) the threat of docetizing Gentile Christian teachers advocating cultural assimilation, and (6) the proto-Ignatian structuralizing attempts to diminish the docetist threat by Diotrephes and his kin (3 John 9–10) was experienced adversely by the Elder and his fellowship. The Epistles were written during this time, and after the death of the Beloved Disciple the Elder finalized the Johannine Gospel and circulated it among the churches as a testimony to Jesus’ will and testament for the church (Anderson 2006a, 193–99).

14. While John 9 shows clearly a later set of dialogues with Jewish leaders around the time the first edition of the Gospel was finalized (80–85 C.E.), John 6, as a later addition to the text (ca. 100 C.E.), shows evidence of dialogue with the crowd on the meaning of the feeding (Synoptic-Johannine dialogues), Jewish leaders (“Bread” versus Torah), disciples of Jesus (willingness to ingest the flesh and blood of the suffering Son of Man), and Peter (the challenge of rising institutionalism in the late first-century church). See here Anderson 1997, 25–59. The crisis with Rome would have been in the background, and the first two Palestinian crises (north-south and with Baptist adherents) would have been in the distance.

the claim to historicity itself is a rhetorical assertion. Nonetheless, the Gospel of John must be engaged literarily, as well as theologically and historically. The new historicist will ask “whose history?” while the new literary critic will focus on what is in front of the text instead of what might lie behind it. This is the most significant advance in Johannine studies over the last three decades, and Alan Culpepper’s *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* is the book that heralded the new literary paradigms for interpreting the Fourth Gospel. In his analysis of the Gospel’s “plot,” characterizations, presentations of time, and ways of drawing the reader into the omniscient perspective of the narrator, Culpepper’s advances brought fresh analyses and insights to subjects that were once mired hopelessly in historical-critical or theological debates. As diachronic theories of composition have given way to more synchronic approaches, a better feel for John’s rhetorical purposes and functions have emerged. Thus, the focus has changed from the question “*Is* John’s Gospel true historically?” to “*How* is John’s narrative true literarily?” Rather than being held hostage to Synoptic-Johannine historical hegemony or afflicted with speculation about “the theological interests of the Evangelist,” Johannine readings have been liberated with answers facilitated by reader-response criticism, irony, characterization, symbolism, typological, and rhetorical-critical analyses.

The literary dialogism of the Fourth Gospel thus functions on several levels. First, the Evangelist seeks to engage the reader rhetorically by means of producing a dialogical literary text. While literary deconstructionists will question any interpreter’s ability to discern the original intention of an author, the Johannine Evangelist openly declares his *literary purpose* in 20:30–31: “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.” The question here is the particular meaning of this statement of purpose. As others have argued regarding the rhetorical interest of a hypothetical σημεῖα source, I would suggest that the purpose of the first edition of the Fourth Gospel was the presentation of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah in order that its hearers and readers might come to believe. Virtually all of the text’s dialogues involving the Jewish leaders of Jerusalem and presentations of Jesus as fulfilling the prophet-typologies of Moses and Elijah occur in this first edition material. The Johannine narrative even presents John the Baptist as denying his associations with the prophet and Elijah, and perhaps the transfiguration narrative has been omitted because Moses and Elijah are indeed come, according to John, in the ministry of Jesus. That being the case, in the Fourth Gospel the witnesses, the signs, and the fulfilled word all testify that Jesus is the prophet-Messiah, calling for a response of faith from

members of the Johannine audience.<sup>15</sup> Given that the first Johannine edition augments and to some degree corrects Mark around 80–85 c.e., it should be considered the *second* Gospel rather than seen as presenting an alternative to all three of the Synoptics.

Yet regardless of the Evangelist's original intention, what may be said about the final purpose of the Fourth Gospel? Debates abound as to whether the call to belief in John 20:31 should be understood as the invitation to first-time faith or as an exhortation to believers to continue abiding in faith instead of defecting, as others apparently had done (see Anderson 2000). Might it have been *both*? Put otherwise, the first edition appears more apologetic in its evangelistic thrust, whereas the supplementary material more explicitly calls for solidarity with Jesus and his community in the face of trials and hardship. Not only do the trials described in the Johannine Epistles make this emphasis clear, but the character of the later material itself does so even more clearly in anti-Docetic ways.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the final purpose of the Fourth Gospel—and by the time of its finalization it was “the *Fourth* Gospel”—is to call believers to solidarity with Jesus and his community, even willingness to participate with him in his suffering and death if they wish to share with him in his gift of eternal life. Therefore, the literary *purposes* of the first and final editions of the Johannine Gospel functioned to elicit responses of initial and abiding faith in Jesus as the Christ and Son of God.

A second feature of John's literary dialogism involves the personal engagement of the reader in the experience and testimony of the author and his community. From a cognitive-critical standpoint, the narrator seeks to draw the hearer/reader into the community of those who testify as to the meaning of Jesus and his mission. As the Prologue reflects the corporate embracing of the Gospel's message within the Johannine faith community, it is added as a

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15. On the many parallels between the elements of the prophet-like-Moses typology (rooted in Deut 18:15–22) and the Johannine Father-Son relationship, see Anderson 1999.

16. Note the incarnational (and thus, anti-Docetic) thrust of the supplementary material: (1) the Prologue invites fellowship with the flesh-becoming Word; (2) John 6 calls for the willingness to suffer with Jesus on the cross—to ingest his flesh and blood (6:51–58) if one wishes to be raised with him in the afterlife; (3) Jesus promises that, despite the trials believers will face in the world (John 15–16), he has overcome the world and will send them the Holy Spirit to empower and encourage them; (4) the testimony of the eyewitness is to the flesh-and-blood suffering of the Lord on the cross—physical water and blood poured forth from his side (19:34); (5) Jesus prays that his followers will be one and that they will be kept in the world but not of the world (17:11–19); and (6) John 21 adds a final ending to the original, emphasizing the shepherding responsibilities of leaders to care for the flock instead of themselves and to be willing to suffer martyrdom if needed.

dialogical beginning to its final edition. The first-person plural (“we”) functions to include the willing reader in the experience and perspective of the narrator and his community. To behold Jesus’ glory (1:14), to receive from his fullness grace and truth (1:18), to have found the Messiah (1:41, 45), to have seen the Lord (20:25), and to know that the Beloved Disciple’s testimony is true (21:24) are just a few of the ways that the reader is invited into the experience and perspective of those who testify to a relationship with Jesus. Indeed, the promise of the Holy Spirit, who will abide with believers and in them (John 14–16), invites future hearers and readers into the same level of first-order encounter as experienced by the eyewitnesses themselves. In that sense, the apostolic community celebrating intimacy with the risen Lord continues from one generation to another, and later audiences are invited dialogically into fellowship with that original community across the boundaries of time and space.

Finally, the most distinctive feature of the Johannine narrative is neither its signs nor its sayings, but rather the prevalence of dialogues with Jesus, laced throughout the story, which invite hearers and readers themselves into an imaginary dialogue with Jesus. The dialogues basically function in two ways: comprehending and believing responses to Jesus are affirming and exemplary; misunderstanding and unbelieving responses to Jesus are rhetorical and corrective. Interestingly, these two rhetorical thrusts are characteristically signaled in the presentation by who takes the initiative. When Jesus or God’s agent takes the initiative, the structure is nearly always revelational. As discussants respond in faith to the revelation, this is a positive example for others to follow; as they reject or respond incompletely to the divine initiative, this is presented as a negative example. However, when human actants come to Jesus asking a challenging question or making a self-assured statement, this presentation nearly always exposes their incomprehension and spiritual inadequacy. Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night, betraying his being “in the dark” (John 3:1–21); the crowd comes asking for a sign that they might believe, exposing their lack of adequate faith (6:22–35); religious leaders challenge Jesus’ authorization, evidencing their lack of scriptural knowledge (5:16–47; 7:14–10:42); the soldiers declare their quest for the Nazarene, yet despite falling to the ground in awe they nonetheless take Jesus away as a hostage (18:3–6); and Pilate makes bold statements to Jesus about his power, yet he is reduced to impotence before the demanding crowd (18:28–19:22). It is as though the inadequacy of human initiative is mirrored in the actions of the discussants. The only hope for humanity is that which is of divine origin, and the reader is drawn into an imaginary dialogue with Jesus by being engaged in the story. In that sense, each reader is subsumed into the identity of Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the crowd, the Beloved Disciple, Peter, Pilate, Mary Mag-

dalene, and Thomas. Therein we find our own misunderstandings challenged and our authentic understandings confirmed. From one dialogue to another, the hearer/reader is finally engaged in dialogue personally, becoming a participant in the story.

#### POLYVALENT READINGS OF JOHN: FROM ONE DIALOGUE TO ANOTHER

Polyvalent readings of John, however, do not imply discipline-free license, as though any reading will be just as good as another. What they do commend and facilitate is the synthesizing of the best of various approaches, realizing that no reading stands alone—in isolation from others. While disciplinary investigations of the Gospel of John must necessarily narrow their focus so as to establish arguable hypotheses and degrees of plausibility, the findings of these approaches must eventually be integrated with other approaches effectively. Because literary, historical, and theological aspects of the Johannine Gospel involve dialogical realities from beginning to end, synthesizing them together is itself an interdisciplinary and dialogical venture.

As understanding John's literary operations and evolving situation helps one better appreciate his theological claims, one becomes engaged experientially in the reception of the narrative. In that sense, hearers and readers in every generation are drawn dialogically into an imaginary dialogue with the Johannine text and its subject, Jesus, wherein conventional notionalities are challenged by the Revealer and contemporary readers are faced with the dualism of decision: whether to seek the truth and its liberating effects or to remain in the relative comfort of darkness, lest the crises of the story become personal. This is the enduring scandal of the Johannine narrative, but also its liberating promise.

As Mikhail Bakhtin reminds us, there is never a first meaning nor a last meaning, because we all are involved in the making of meaning (Clark and Holquist 1984, 350). In that sense, the polyvalence of the Johannine levels and modes of dialogue invites new connections between the open receptors of the narrative's many dialogical features. In so doing, our certainties are challenged as the invitation to mystery is extended. As the Johannine tradition began with an originative set of cognitive and experiential dialogues, it developed traditionally and literarily by means of dialogical explorations of the truth and its meanings. That is what is reflected in the Johannine text, but also what is furthered through it.

Finally, the narrative invites future readers and hearers into the same dialogical encounter from whence it came. In engaging dialogically the content of the Gospel, the reader's involvement in the making of meaning becomes a new story with its own history to tell. Existentially, the valences of personal

openness find connections with valences of interdisciplinary learnings and discoveries, and the truth is always liberating. From origins to receptions, the dialogical origins of the Johannine tradition evoke new sets of dialogical encounter and reflection within its later audiences. After all, when considering the character, origin, and development of the Johannine narrative, one must confess that:

In the beginning was ... the *dialogue*.