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On Vias Negativa and Positiva in John's Dialectical Theology—Apophatic and Kataphatic Thrusts in Philo and Within the Johannine Tradition

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On *Vias Negativa* and *Positiva* in John's Dialectical Theology— Apophatic and Kataphatic Thrusts in Philo and Within the Johannine Tradition

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The *Vias Negativa* and *Positiva* are evident in Jewish Scripture and Philo, but they also come across dialectically in the Fourth Gospel.[1] Indeed, connections between these writings and the Fourth Gospel abound, as Peder Borgen and others have shown over the years, but this particular subject of overlap is an intriguing one.[2] Of special interest here are the apophatic and kataphatic thrusts of John's historical, theological, and compositional interests with relation to the *Via Negativa* and the *Via Positiva*, as played out within histories of John's situation and composition. Put simply, John's presentation of Jesus and his ministry reflects a primitive theology of encounter (apophatically), designed rhetorically to lead people to believe in Jesus as the Messiah/Christ (kataphatically), followed by inviting believers to abide in Jesus and his community of faith in ways spiritually transformative (apophatically).

At this point, however, a flaw in studies of apophatic and kataphatic spirituality must be flagged. Rather than seeing a writer or composition as reflecting

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1. With great appreciation for Bernardo Estrada's many contributions to the spirituality of early Christianity and New Testament studies, I am honored to offer this essay in furtherance of that good work. Professor Estrada and I also share a common history in Medellín, Colombia, where he learned English in the Centro Colombo Americano, which was directed by my father, Dr. Alvin L. Anderson, the Centro's Director from 1961-1965. I would also like to thank Athanasios Despotis for his fine paper on Philo and John, and also Per Jarle Bekken and Greg Sterling for the invitation to respond. Athanasios Despotis, "Aspects of Cultural Hybridity in Philo's Apophatic Anthropology and a Short Excursus on John," Philo Seminar, Marburg SNTS, 2019.

2. See P. Borgen, *Bread from Heaven: An Exegetical Study of the Concept of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo*, NovTSup 10 (1965; 2nd edn. 1981; repr. Johannine Monograph Series 4, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017); idem, *Philo, John, and Paul: New Perspectives on Judaism and Early Christianity,* Brown Judaic Studies 131 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987); idem, *Philo of Alexandria, An Exegete for his Time*, NovTSup 86 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2005); idem, *The Gospel of John: More Light on Philo, Paul and Archaeology: The Scriptures, Tradition, Exposition, Settings, Meaning*, NovTSup 154 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2014).

only one pole, a more realistic appraisal must take note of movement between the empty and the full, between silence and sound, between openness and closure. This reflects something of narrative polyvalence, whereby an ancient narrator moves from human experience to rhetorical form, and back again to experience: a dialogical set of realities and movements. Upon monological approaches to the Johannine riddles, many an interpretive program—both traditional and critical—has foundered. As such, this paper will engage the kataphatic and apophatic thrusts of John's story of Jesus, set in dialectical tension at emerging stages of its developing tradition.

1. *Dialectic Between the* Vias Negativa *and* Positiva *in Second Temple Judaism*

The relation between the apophatic and the kataphatic in ancient Jewish literature should be no surprise. After all, just as a sodality (substance) is conveyed by means of a modality (means), so the value of a modality is determined by its capacity to further a valued reality. Thus, on one hand, the end of Psalm 46 (v. 10) invites the faithful to embrace the immediacy of the Divine Presence: "Be still and know that I am God!" On the other hand, the beginning of Psalm 47 (v. 1) exhorts them to actively celebrate the same: "Clap your hands, all you peoples; shout unto God with loud songs of joy." And, this is followed by the exhortation to simply meditate on God's unfailing love (Ps. 48:9). Authentic worship is thus impressive and expressive, involving both the *Vias Negativa* and *Positiva*.

Likewise, the callings of the prophets and apostles in Hebrew and Christian Scripture involve the movement from encounter to commission, including both receptivity and responsiveness to the Divine Initiative. For Moses before the Burning Bush (Exod 3:1–4:12), for Isaiah in the Temple (Isa 6), for youthful and inexperienced Jeremiah (Jer 1:4–19), for the mortally mindful Ezekiel (Ezek 1:25–2:8), for Saul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1–20), and for John on Patmos (Rev 1:1–20), we see a fourfold sequence. (a) Encounters with the Divine Presence lead directly to (b) a sense of human inadequacy and unworthiness, which is addressed by (c) an act or word of divine redemption and restoration, leading to (d) a commission and a message. A personal sense of apophatic anthropology can thus be said to have led to an authentic and existential response (b) to encountering something of the divine (a), which leads, then, to a sense of divine touch and commissioning (c and d).[3] And, invariably, the prophet's

3. Note how Krister Stendahl describes Paul's Damascus-Road experience as a "calling" rather than a "conversion" in *Paul Among the Jews and the Gentiles* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1976), 7–23, citing some of the passages mentioned above. As a cognitive-critical approach to understanding the origin and development of gospel traditions (Mark and John), see P. N. Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6*, WUNT 2.78 (1996; third printing, Eugene: Cascade Books, 2010 with a new introduction, outlines, and epilogue); idem, "The Cognitive Origins of John's Christological Unity and Disunity" (Vol. 3, 127–49), and "A Way Forward in the Scientific Investigation of Gospel Traditions: Cognitive-Critical Analysis (introduction and reception report)" by P. Anderson, J. H. Ellens, and J. Fowler

kataphatic commission involves calling audiences to embrace and heed the life-producing Word of the Lord, a spiritual and apophatic reality, itself.

Likewise, Philo's advocacy for the *Via Negativa* is evidenced in a number of places, including *The Contemplative Life* (40–47), where he contrasts the virtuous spirituality of the Therapeutae and their sacred meals over and against the drunken festivities of Hellenistic culture as an apophatic thrust. And yet, as Philo also argues that natural reason cannot suffice when it comes to encountering the divine—such can only happen as a response to revelation—his arguing such as a central theme of Jewish Scripture advocates the Jewish *Via Positiva*. Take, for instance, Philo's engagement of the archetypal theophanic event: the Burning-Bush account of Exodus 3–4.

Whereas Philo develops the incident allegorically in *Life of Moses* I (63–67) as a sign pointing to the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage, in *On Flight and Finding* 1 (161–165) the ineffable character of the divine is juxtaposed against philosophical views of God—a single Nature, a Monad, a composite Being. Given that even Moses is not allowed to see the face of God (Exod 33:23), "it amply suffices the wise man to come to a knowledge of all that follows after God and in his wake," lest one be blinded by gazing upon the Supreme Essence and "the rays that beam forth all around him" (Loebs translation, 165).[4]

Philo then connects the Burning-Bush theophany of Exodus 3–4 with the apophatic divine command of Deuteronomy 27:9, "Be silent, and listen." Indeed, the revelatory thrust of the Divine Word calls for Adam, Moses, Abraham, and Jacob to receive divine instruction, over and against philosophic alternatives within Hellenistic culture (*On Dreams, That They Are God Sent* 1, 193–200). Thus, with Peder Borgen, the very meaning of the name "Israel" is to see the Jewish nation as "self-taught" over and against worldly alternatives.[5] In Philo's view, in contrast to the Greek encyclical schools, the Jewish synagogal schools are superior. After all, God gave the Jewish people manna from heaven, and instruction from Jewish Scripture receives pedagogical priority. It is at this point that Philo's revelatory references to manna come into play, seeing also bread from heaven as an image of God's revelatory work. In contrast to seeing John 6:27–58 as a homiletical expansion upon a proem text, though, it more centrally reflects the employment of manna as a secondary text—a trump card taking all others on the table.[6]

(Vol. 4, 247–76) in *Psychology and the Bible; A New Way to Read the Scriptures*, edited by J. H. Ellens (4 Volumes, Westport/London: Praeger Publishers, 2004).

4. For Isaiah themes in John, see C. Williams, *I am He: The Interpretation of 'Ani Hu' in Jewish and Early Christian Literature*, WUNT 2.113 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000). For a cognitive-critical analysis of the Mosaic theophanic encounter motif in John, see P. N. Anderson, "The Origin and Development of the Johannine *Egō Eimi* Sayings in Cognitive-Critical Perspective," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 9 (2011): 139–206.

5. Borgen, *Bread from Heaven*, 115–18.

6. Anderson, *Christology*; idem, "The *Sitz im Leben* of the Johannine Bread of Life Discourse and its

Thus, God gave the children of Israel manna from heaven to eat (*Allegorical Interpretation* III, 162–173), rained down from heaven like rain (*On Flight and Finding* 137–142) as the source of heavenly wisdom and authentic virtue (*On the Changing of Names* 252–260). And of course, this is also the way the manna motif functions in John 6:31 and the surrounding passage. Like the temptation narratives of Matthew and Luke, Jesus is "tempted" to produce more loaves, featuring the citing of biblical texts by tempters and Jesus alike. The crowd comes to Jesus in John 6, asking "When did you get here?" to which Jesus answers their hidden question ("When's lunch?" John 6:25–26). They cite Scripture (Exod 16:4; Psa 78:23–24) as a secondary text, whereby Jesus counters exegesis with eschatology: "It is not Moses who *gave*, but my Father who *gives*…" (v. 32).[7] Thus, in Philo and in John, we see a dialectical movement back and forth from apophatic encounter with the Divine Presence, to kataphatic apologetic writing, to inviting readers into spiritual encounter rooted in apophatic experience. After all, claims Jesus in John 6:45 (citing Isa. 54:13), "And they shall all be taught by God."

2. *Apophatic and Kataphatic Dialectic Within John's Dialogical Autonomy*

As the composition and development of the Johannine corpus is considered, first, an overview of Johannine composition and its developing tradition is serviceable, as such issues critically inform the character and design of John's theological and anthropological apophatic and kataphatic motifs. I call this overall Johannine theory John's Dialogical Autonomy, which is summarized along several lines.[8]

Excursus: The Dialogical Autonomy of the Fourth Gospel— An Overall Johannine Theory

As John's narrative is considered within an overall Johannine theory, three foundational paradigms are central to understanding how John's story of Jesus came together and in what settings. Thus, John's composition, relation(s) to the Synoptics, and situation history must be considered in any critical appraisal of its narrative history and thrust. In addition, a number of other dialectical features also accompany John's autonomous account of Jesus and his ministry; thus, John's Dialogical Autonomy must be considered in assessing any important subject.

Evolving Context," *Critical Readings of John 6*, edited by R Alan Culpepper, Biblical Interpretation Series 22 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), 1–59.

7. Anderson, *Christology*, 194–220.

8. For a concise overview of this overall Johannine theory, see P. N. Anderson, *The Riddles of the Fourth Gospel: An Introduction to John* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 125–26.

A) *A Modest Two-Edition Composition Process*

With Bultmann, Lindars, Brown, von Wahlde, Ashton, Beutler, and others (versus Barrett, Thyen, and others), while John's narrative certainly made sense to its finalizing compiler as it stands, it seems highly likely that at least some later material was added to an earlier stage of the gospel by a final editor.[9] With Bultmann, later material was plausibly added by the Johannine Elder and author of the Epistles following the death of the evangelist, but with Brown (versus Bultmann), the final compiler (my language) seeks to further the witness of the Beloved Disciple (who likely continued preaching and teaching beyond the gathering of a foundational narrative) in a conservative way, preparing it for circulation among the churches (not just the Johannine fellowship, with Burridge and Bauckham).

That being the case, later material added to an earlier stage of the narrative's composition would at least include the Johannine Logos Hymn (John 1:1–5, 9–14, 16–18), John 6, 15–17, and 21, and the eyewitness reference in 19:34–35 (with Lindars and Ashton). Interestingly, the five signs in John's first edition are precisely the ones not found in Mark, so the numeration of John's first two signs can be seen as providing early material (before the events narrated in Mark 1), while the three Judean signs augment Mark geographically as well as chronologically. Thus, John's first edition is apologetic, showing Jesus to be the Jewish Messiah (the five signs of Jesus = the Five Books of Moses), while the later material harmonizes a bit with the Synoptics (with Bultmann and others, here), added after the writing of the three Epistles by the Johannine Elder.

B) *A Bi-Optic Theory of Interfluentiality*

In my judgment, there is no evidentiary or reasoned basis for inferring John's being a derivative tradition—versus Robert Funk and the Jesus Seminar; likewise versus Rudolf Bultmann, Robert T. Fortna, J. Louis Martyn, C. K. Barrett, the Leuven School, and others—either reflecting the evangelist's use of alien sources, or reflecting Johannine dependence upon Mark or other synoptic material.[10] John's story of Jesus reflects a self-standing, autonomous tradition (with Brown, Schnackenburg, Dodd, Smith, Schnelle, Keener, and others), which, if at least Markan familiarity can be inferred (with Mackay, Bauckham, and others), reflects and augmentive and modest alternative to Mark as the second gospel, at least in its first edition.

9. P. N. Anderson, "On 'Seamless Robes' and 'Leftover Fragments'—A Theory of Johannine Composition," *Structure, Composition, and Authorship of John's Gospel*, edited by S. E. Porter and H. Ong; *The Origins of John's Gospel*, Vol. 2 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2015), 169–218.

10. See citations of these works in my analyses listed below.

John's story of Jesus shows signs of Judean, Samaritan, and Galilean familiarity, featuring independent references to topographical and archaeological realities, some of which are explained for non-Jewish audiences in a diaspora setting. (1) Given the translated Aramaisms and Hebraisms in addition to incidental details featured in John and Mark, they deserve to be called the Bi-Optic Gospels, representing distinctive traditions from day one. (2) Luke's departures from Mark, however, betray no fewer than six dozen similarities with John, so the Johannine tradition is likely to have been known by Luke, perhaps having served as one of his sources (Lk. 1:2). (3) The Q tradition also reflects Johannine echoes (especially Matt. 11:27; Lk. 10:22), so some sort of interfluential contact may therein be inferred, although (4) Matthean-Johannine contacts appear to have been later, likely reflecting intertraditional dialogue regarding ecclesiology in the late first century situation. A Bi-Optic Hypothesis thus infers that Matthew and Luke built upon Mark; John built around Mark. John is different on purpose.[11]

C) *The Johannine Dialectical Situation—Engaging Several Crises Over Seven Decades*

Thus, the Johannine emerging tradition developed over at least seven decades, engaging six or seven crises or issues related to various audiences within the evolving Johannine situation over three major phases.[12] These include (1) north-south tensions between the Galilean Prophet and Judean religious authorities, featuring also (2) competition between followers of John the Baptist

11. I lectured on a Bi-Optic Hypothesis as a plausible alternative to Bultmann's paradigm at Marburg in June of 2010 for the classes of Professor Friedrich Avemarie; the discussion was very engaging! For more on a Bi-Optic Hypothesis, see P. N. Anderson, "Mark and John—the *Bi-Optic* Gospels," *Jesus in Johannine Tradition*, edited by R. T. Fortna and T. Thatcher (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 175–88; Idem, "Interfluential, Formative, and Dialectical—A Theory of John's Relation to the Synoptics," *Für und Wider die Priorität des Johannesevangeliums*, edited by Peter Hofrichter, Theologische Texte und Studien 9 (Hildesheim / Zürich / New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 2002), 19–58; Idem, "Das John, Jesus, and History Projekt—Neue Beobachtungen zu Jesus und eine Bi-optische Hypothese" (an expanded version in English is posted on the website: "The John, Jesus, and History Project—New Glimpses of Jesus and a Bi-Optic Hypothesis," including a German translation of the author's chart and outline, "A Bi-Optic Hypothesis—A Theory of Interfluentiality between the Johannine and the Markan Gospels," *Zeitschrift für Neues Testament* 23 (April, 2009): 12–26. Revised and expanded edition published in *The Bible and Interpretation* (February 2010) http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/john1357917.shtml.

12. For an outline of the history of the Johannine situation, see Anderson, "*Sitz im Leben*;" see also idem, *The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus: Modern Foundations Reconsidered*, Library of New Testament Studies Series 321 (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 196–99; and Idem, "Bakhtin's Dialogism and the Corrective Rhetoric of the Johannine Misunderstanding Dialogue: Exposing Seven Crises in the Johannine Situation," *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies*, Semeia Studies 63, edited by Roland Boer (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2007), 290–318; Idem, "The Community that Raymond Brown Left Behind—Reflections on the Dialectical Johannine Situation," *Communities in Dispute: Current Scholarship on the Johannine Epistles*, edited by R. A. Culpepper and P. N. Anderson, ECL 13 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), 47–93.

and disciples of Jesus (Phase 1, in Palestine, ca. 30–70 CE); (3) tensions with leaders of local synagogue leaders in Asia Minor or elsewhere and (4) pressures related to Domitian's imposing of required Emperor Laud (Phase 2, Asia Minor I, ca. 70–85 CE); and (5) tensions with traveling ministers with docetizing tendencies, followed by (6) the rejection of Johannine believers by such Christian hierarchical leaders as Diotrephes and his kin (Phase 3, Asia Minor II, ca. 85–100 CE). (7) A further set of tensions relates to engagements with synoptic traditions—especially Mark and Matthew—whereby the Johannine narrative offers a bit of corrective pushback as well as complementary reinforcement. Thus, we have in John a synchronicity of tradition within a diachronicity of situation

D) *Further Dialectical Operations*

Summarizing four further dialectical operations, (1) *first* (with Barrett), the Johannine evangelist was clearly *a dialectical thinker*, presenting one side of an issue, only then to present an opposite perspective. That being the case, many of John's theological riddles reflect "the soul's dialogue with herself" (Plato, Theatetus 189), as the glory of her opinion reflects truths held together in tension. From a cognitive-critical perspective, this feature of the evangelist's thought makes *Tendenz* Criticism virtually obsolete in John.[13]

(2) A *second* dialectical operation is the Fourth Evangelist's presentation of Jesus as fulfilling the Prophet-Like-Moses Agency Schema (with Borgen, Bühner, and others), whereby the fulfilled word of Jesus shows that he authentically embodies the role of the Eschatological Prophet predicted by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15–22 as a Jewish agency schema, not a Gnostic-Redeemer Myth (versus Bultmann).[14] Thus, the agent is in all ways like the one who sent him, and this accounts squarely for the egalitarian and subordinate features of the Johannine Father-Son relationship. They are not metaphysical contradictions; they are flip sides of the same coin—the Mosaic agency schema.

(3) A *third* dialectical operation is that of *revelation, itself*. When Jesus, John the Baptist, the signs, Scripture, or some other feature of the Divine Initiative is operative, humans are invited to respond in faith to the saving-revealing work of the Father, manifested eschatologically in the Son's words and works.[15]

13. Anderson, *Christology*, 137–65; idem, "The Cognitive Origins."

14. For the Jesus fulfilling the Prophet-Like-Moses Agency Schema within the Johannine Father-Son relationship, see P. N. Anderson, "The Having-Sent-Me Father—Aspects of Agency, Encounter, and Irony in the Johannine Father-Son Relationship," *Semeia* 85, edited by A. Reinhartz (1999): 33–57; Idem, "Jesus, the Eschatological Prophet in the Fourth Gospel: A Case Study in John's Dialectical Tensions," *Reading the Gospel of John's Christology as Jewish Messianism: Royal, Prophetic, and Divine Messiahs*, edited by Ben Reynolds and Gabriele Boccaccini, Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity 106 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2018), 271–99.

15. P. N. Anderson, *Navigating the Living Waters of the Gospel of John—On Wading with Children and Swimming with Elephants*, Pendle Hill Pamphlet #352 (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Press, 2000).

In terms of apophatic theology, the uncreated Divine Initiative (revelation) scandalizes that which is of creaturely origin (religious, political, and social constructions—Jn. 1:10–13; 3:18–21); thus, the apophatic revelatory work of God is an affront to kataphatic religiosity itself, although the formalization of such a perspective itself becomes a kataphatic reality in its expression.

(4) A *fourth* dialectical operation in John's narrative involves the rhetorical presentation of miscomprehending discussants, engaged in dialogue with Jesus. This rhetorical mode of narrative construction poses a contrast to the revelational mode, as the initiative invariably shifts from Jesus or the divine agent to characters in the narrative. With Mikhail Bakhtin, stupidity in narrative is always corrective.[16] It rips masks off high members of society who betray their lack of comprehension before the protagonist, and in John, discussants' miscomprehension is signaled by their taking the initiative—making an overconfident claim or asking an unwitting question. In either case, Jesus sets them (as well as targeted members of the audience) straight with liberating truth (John 8:32).

Within such an overall theory, we see extensive movement between apophatic and kataphatic theology and anthropology. This is germane to the present conversation, as the author of the Epistles is likely not the Fourth Evangelist, and there may be some difference of thrust between the earlier material and the later material in the Gospel—even if representing the evangelist's work, whether it was added by himself (Lindars) or the redactor/compiler (Bultmann, Brown, and others). That being the case, note three movements and engagements between the apophatic and the kataphatic in John's story of Jesus.

3. *Jesus As a Galilean Prophetic Figure—The Apophatic Prophet Challenging Kataphatic Religion*

First, we see in the Fourth Gospel Jesus of Nazareth challenging the religious authorities of Judea and Jerusalem in a number of ways. He disrupts the temple mercantile system and casts the money changers and animals out of the temple precincts (Jn. 2:13–25); he heals sick people on the Sabbath, breaking (with intentionality) strict Sabbath-observance laws (5:1–15; 9:1–7); he declares to the Samaritan woman that authentic worship is confined neither to place or form, but it must be in spirit and in truth (4:21–24). In these and other ways, the Johannine Jesus is portrayed as acting and speaking in ways similar to the Synoptic Jesus, and one might even infer a bit of corroborative impression between John and the Synoptics along these lines, embracing the *Via Negativa*.[17]

16. Anderson, "Bakhtin's Dialogism;" idem, "*Sitz im Leben*."

17. In devising new criteria for determining historicity *with* the Fourth Gospel in the mix, instead of designing grids to exclude it, *corroborative impression* is a historical-critical improvement over *multiple*

Note, however, the resistance Jesus receives from the religious authorities in Jerusalem, protecting kataphatic cultic practices and legal requirements. They challenge him as to his authorization, asking for a sign as proof of authorization (2:18). They persecute him for breaking Sabbath laws (5:16), and they then seek to kill him for claiming authorization by God as his Father (5:18). The tensions with the Jewish leaders over divine authorization continue in chapters 7–10, but the discussion with Nicodemus sets the stage for the apophatic work and testimony of Jesus overall. Nicodemus is willing to grant Jesus's divine agency because of the signs he was performing (3:2), but he betrays miscomprehension in failing to understand what it means to be born from above (vv. 3–4). Again, with Bakhtin, miscomprehension is always rhetorical in narrative.

In the explanation of Jesus, the emphasis is placed on *being born of the Spirit*—water alone will not suffice. Whether the water here references the amniotic fluid of birth, rites of Jewish ritual purification, or the informal water immersion of the Baptist movement followed later by Jesus adherents, the emphasis is upon the second value over and against the first. Water alone is insufficient; it is only being born of the spirit that will be life producing.[18] Thus, the apophatic priority of setting one's sail to the wind of the Spirit is the main Johannine thrust here, over and against kataphatic approaches to religious purification or membership. That is something Jewish (and Christian) leaders ought to understand.

4. *Jesus As the Eschatological Prophet, Messiah/Christ, and Son of God—Formalizing the Apophatic Work of Jesus in Kataphatic Terms*

Within the first edition of the Johannine narrative, we see a movement from the charismatic and spirit-based authorization of Jesus as authentically being sent from the Father—with an apostolic and prophetic commission—to a confessional coin denoting that one has come to believe in him as the Messiah/Christ, the Son of God. Note how the titles within the pistic credo of the final verse of the first edition now include both Jewish and Gentile targets in their sights (John 20:31). Thus, not only does Jesus fulfill the typological roles of Moses and Elijah in the Johannine narrative, but actants in the narrative "get it right" by believing in Jesus and his divine agency (by his disciples—2:11, 22; 16:27; 17:8; 20:8, 29; by the

attestation along those lines. P. N. Anderson and J. Clark Soles, "Introduction and Overview," *John, Jesus, and History, Volume 3: Glimpses of Jesus Through the Johannine Lens*, edited by P. N. Anderson, F. Just, S.J., and T.Thatcher, *Early Christianity and its Literature* 18 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 1–25; published also on *The Bible and Interpretation* (December 2015), https://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/2015/12/and398021.shtml.

18. Thus, the thrust is not upon "*water and*" (versus Bultmann's inference of an addition by a redactor); the emphasis is upon "*and the spirit*"—perhaps alluding to the insufficiency of the followers of Apollos in Acts 18, who knew the baptism of John, but they did not know the Holy Spirit. Whatever the case, the emphasis here is upon the apophatic priority of spiritual immersion as the key to spiritual birth and entry into the Kingdom. Cf. Anderson, *Christology*, 118, 245.

Samaritans—4:39, 41; by the royal official and his household—4:50, 53; and yes, even by Judeans in Jerusalem, along the Jordan River, and in Bethany—2:23; 7:31; 8:30; 10:42; 11:45).[19] Thus, John is not anti-Semitic, as none of the general references to the *Ioudaioi* (= "the Jews") are negative; most are neutral, but some are positive (4:22, etc.); and, of the references to *Ioudaioi* in Jerusalem (= "the Judeans") half of them are negative, but fully a third are positive, as they come to believe in Jesus.[20] In defining the purpose of the Johannine narrative, however, we see a programmatic move, whereby receptivity to the Divine Initiative is consolidated within a kataphatic confession. In addition to believing in Jesus as a participatory form of receptivity to the Divine Initiative, such a belief becomes codified as a pistic credo—believing that he is the Messiah/Christ, the Son of God—which leads to receiving eternal life in his name (20:31).

Indeed, the entire narrative (especially the first edition) is designed to evoke a believing response to Jesus as the divine agent from the Father, despite his uneven reception by his own (see also the Parable of the Vineyard in Mark 12:1–12). The authenticity of his mission is attested by his signs, the witnesses, and the fulfilled word.[21] Note that even at the beginning of the Johannine calling narrative in John 1:19–51, several introductory moves set the stage for the original conclusion in John 30:30–31.[22] In contrast to Mark, where Moses and Elijah come in the ministry of John the Baptist and in transfigured form on the Mount, John denies being either Elijah or the Prophet (Moses), and the Johannine first edition omits (along with most everything else in Mark) the Transfiguration narrative. Why? Because the typologies of Moses and Elijah are fulfilled by Jesus himself; in John, that will suffice.[23] Thus, by the end of the narrative, receptivity to "the one of whom Moses and the prophets wrote" is consolidated into a kataphatic confession: believing that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of God," which leads to receiving eternal life in his name. Contra Brown (with Carson and McGrath), John's narrative is indeed apologetic—even evangelistic—in its first edition, while the later material connects believing with abiding in a more pastoral way (with Brown).[24]

20. Paul N. Anderson, "Anti-Semitism and Religious Violence as Flawed Interpretations of the Gospel of John," *John and Judaism: A Contested Relationship in Context*, edited by R. A. Culpepper and P. N. Anderson, Resources for Biblical Study 87 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 265–311; a longer edition published on *The Bible and Interpretation* (October 2017), https://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/2017/10/and418017.shtml.

21. Anderson, *Navigating the Living Waters*.

22. In addition to the Prologue, such Christological titles emerge in somewhat spontaneous form at the end of the first chapter, where the messiahship of Jesus is signaled by his being hailed as "the Lamb of God," "Rabbi" (translated as teacher), "Messias" (translated as Christ), "the Son of God," "the King of Israel," and finally, by Jesus, "the Son of Man." These reflect kataphatic confessions emerging within the Johannine tradition, itself.

23. Anderson, "Eschatological Prophet."

24. Anderson, "On Seamless Robes."

5. *The Community's Confession—Professing Kataphatic Convictions in the Interest of Evoking Apophatic Encounters Among Later Audiences*

With the reception of the Johannine narrative over some period of time, members of the Johannine community come to receive what has been seen and heard from the beginning—the Word of Life—so that the eternal life from the Father that has been received by believers is now attested in the first of the Johannine Epistles (1 John 1:1–4). Clearly, the author of the Epistles and those to whom he is writing were familiar with the witness of the Beloved Disciple, and in having received the good news narrated over some time within the Johannine situation, they themselves feel called to continue that witness in order to lead others into the gift of life that they have received.

That being the case, the story of the Galilean Prophet is transformed into a cosmic narrative, whereby the preexistent Logos, as the Light of the World, is heralded as coming to illumine all of humanity, welcoming any and all who believe into the divine family as children of God (John 1:1–18). They are thus born not of human will or schemes of religion (the kataphatic), but are born of the Divine Initiative and work of revelation (the aphophatic), attested by John's Christological hymn (vv. 10–13). Thus, whereas the original beginning of the Johannine narrative likely began with vv. 6–8 and 15 of Chapter 1, leading into vv. 19 and the further witness of the Baptist, three stanzas of the Johannine Logos-hymn, reflecting the community's response to the narrative over time, are added as an engaging introduction to the circulated edition of the Johannine Gospel. Verses 1–5 address God's saving/revealing action *cosmologically*; verses 9–13 reflect God's saving/revealing action *as embraced within community*; verses 14 and 16–18 reflect God's saving/revealing action *as gospel*.

Here we see the movement from apophatic human-divine encounter to kataphatic confessional faith, transformed into a community worship hymn, designed to create again an experiential encounter with the divine in the process of affirming, with the Johannine believers, an attestation of life-producing belief. Thus, we see here the movement from living faith to formulated confession designed to produce once again the experience of living faith as a preparatory experiential basis for receiving the circulated Johannine Gospel—a complement (and to some degree, a dialectical corrective) to the other three, but now into the late first and early second century situation—an alternative account of the ministry and mission of Jesus.

Within the narrative, we note many epiphanic encounters with something of the divine in contact with Jesus of Nazareth (Nathanael—known from afar, 1:45–51; the Samaritan woman at the well—knowing her situation, 4:7–29; the disciples in the boat—experiencing the self-identification of Jesus as a Burning-Bush theophany, 6:16–21; Mary Magdalene—experiencing divine recognition at the mere mention of her name, 20:11–18; Thomas—seeing and touching the

flesh wounds of Jesus, 20:24–27; the Beloved Disciple—seeing Jesus on the shore and pointing him out to Peter and the others, 21:1–14).

While such recognition scenes could simply be literary tropes of anagnorisis, it cannot be claimed that there were no instances of aphophatic experiences of the ineffable in direct relation to the historic ministry of Jesus.[25] Such apophatic encounters are attested independently also in the Synoptics, but the formative, cognitive-transformative attestations in the Johannine tradition may also account for some of the distinctive features of the Johannine memory of Jesus and his ministry. Certainly, some embellishment is likely in post-resurrection perspective and experience, but some of this encounter-orientation was likely part and parcel of the Johannine witness from the beginning. From a cognitive-critical perspective, such might also account for the individuated origin and paraphrastic development of the distinctive I-Am sayings in the Johannine preaching, leading into the eventual written account.[26] And, just as such reflects at least some of the originative character of the Johannine memory, so the Christ-hymn is added as a response to the narrative. It may even have been crafted by the Johannine Elder, rather than the evangelist (accounting for changes in vocabulary and literary form) serving also as the final introduction to the Gospel. As an invitation into a confessional worship experience before hearing or reading the rest of the narrative, the Johannine Prologue is thus designed to engender the same quality of apophatic encounter for later audiences as is part and parcel of the narrative itself, as the Fourth Gospel is prepared for circulation among the churches after the death of the Beloved Disciple by the Johannine Elder (John 21:20-25).

6. *Concluding Reflections on Vias Negativa and Positivita in the Fourth Gospel—From Apophatic Encounter to Kataphatic Apologetic… and Back Again*

In reflection upon the interplay between the *Vias Negativa* and *Positivita* in the Fourth Gospel, several reflections follow. First, it is helpful to remember that very few writings are apophatic only, with no kataphatic origin or development—either in Jewish or Christian Scripture. The important thing is to note particular aspects of each thrust, while also noting movements back and forth between them. While silence before the Divine Presence is the only conceivable response to having encountered the ineffable, even to reflect, speak, and write about such involves movement toward the kataphatic. Conversely,

25. R. A. Culpepper, *The Gospel and Letters of John* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 72–77; K. Bro Larsen, *Recognizing the Stranger: Recognition Scenes in the Fourth Gospel*, Biblical Interpretation Series 93 (Leuven: E. J. Brill, 2008).

26. F. Mussner, *The Historical Jesus in the Gospel of St. John*, Quaestiones Disputatae 19 (translated by W. J. O'hara, New York: Herder & Herder, 1967); P. N. Anderson, "The Origin and Development of the Johannine *Egō Eimi* Sayings in Cognitive-Critical Perspective," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 9 (2011): 139–206.

the high value of the kataphatic, within religious movements especially, reflects the hope that by embracing narrated memories or by following prescribed confessions, practices, or perspectives, something of the divine might be experienced in ways spiritually impactful and personally transformative. As Paul would put it, indeed the gospel of the Light of Christ is a treasure, but it is enhoused in earthen vessels to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us (2 Cor 4:1–7).

Second, it might be helpful to note that Philo and the Johannine evangelist must both be seen as Jewish apologists, producing in written form a set of compelling cases for the truth as they understand it, though operating in different genres and ways. Interestingly, while Philo poses many a defense of Jewish faith and practice over and against Hellenistic views and culture, John offers a defense of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah/Christ, reaching out to Jewish family and friends as well as welcoming Hellenistic audiences into the blessings of Abraham and Moses. Thus, the pre-existent Light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has neither comprehended nor received it (John 1:1–5, 9–10). And yet, this uneven response to the Johannine evangel is explained with the imagery of Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*.[27] Humans loved darkness rather than the apophatic Light, lest the creaturely origins of their philosophic and religious scaffolding be exposed, thus threatening their worldviews and kataphatic constructs (John 3:18–21). Therefore, Jewish and Hellenistic tropes are employed by Philo and John in their apologetic work, both positively and negatively.

Third, in constructing their arguments rhetorically, both Philo and John argue for the revelatory and liberating workings of God, seen as a gift of love to the world for the betterment of human lives, both Jewish and Gentile. Especially in John's work, while alternative philosophies and religious views have their claims, the liberating power of truth is not only declared by the Johannine Jesus; it is embodied in his earthly ministry. The Shekinah-Glory of God is revealed in the flesh-becoming Word—the time-bound ministry of Jesus—relevant for earlier and later audiences who might believe on the basis of their witness. Along these lines on how the *Via Negativa* scandalizes *Vias Positiva*, Gregory of Nyssa would agree. Thus, it is no coincidence that central to and "learned ignorance" of Nicholas of Cusa, John's witness is central to the apophatic way, argued kataphatically in his writings in his coincidence of opposites.[28] In the Fourth Gospel and in all documents of life-producing faith, substance and form go hand in hand, as knowledge about the divine can never supplant intimate acquaintance with the same.

27. Anderson, *Christology*, 197.
28. Anderson, *Christology*, 137–66.