Why this Study is Needed, and Why it is Needed Now (from John, Jesus, and History, vol. 1)

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Jesus and Gospel studies possess rich histories of analysis, and within those histories new findings and distinctive trends emerge. Few scholarly developments—in any field—have been as interesting, however, as the modernistic dehistoricization of John and the de-Johannification of Jesus.¹ To a certain degree, each of these trends has bolstered the other, and the assertion of many a scholar claiming the authoritative weight of critical and scientific study is that the one thing we know for sure is actually two: the Fourth Gospel is of no historical value, and historical Jesus research must be performed untainted by any Johannine influence.² The question is the degree to which either of these assertions is true, a solid platform upon which to base the frameworks of further studies. Negative claims are even more difficult to substantiate than positive ones, and surprisingly large numbers of scholars speak in terms of certainty along either or both of these propositions. Simply challenging

¹ These terms were coined by the John, Jesus, and History steering committee, as they seemed to describe pointedly the so-called “critical consensus” on the two primary issues involved. Happy to grant them privileged status as prevalent modernist views, the question is how well they stand up to critical scrutiny as predominant platforms for conducting further critical investigations. This essay was published as part 2 in Paul Anderson, *The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus* (2006b) as “On Planks and Platforms—A Critical Assessment of Critical Foundations Regarding John, Jesus and History” (pp. 43–97). Permission to republish it within this volume is appreciated.

² Can it be put any clearer than the introductory statement of Funk, Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar (1997, 10)? “The first step is to understand the diminished role the Gospel of John plays in the search for the Jesus of history. The two pictures painted by John and the synoptics cannot be both historically accurate.... The differences between the two portraits of Jesus show up in a dramatic way in the evaluation, by the Jesus Seminar, of the words attributed to Jesus in the Gospel of John. The Fellows of the Seminar were unable to find a single saying they could with certainty trace back to the historical Jesus.” So much for the words of Jesus; the results of the Jesus Seminar’s analysis of the actions of Jesus (Robert Funk and the Jesus Seminar 1998) are equally sparse. None of Jesus’ deeds in John are rooted in history, save the death of Jesus (433, 435), in their analysis.
a traditional view, however, does not confirm an alternative view, and the planks in these platforms should be tested with the same critical scrutiny and rigor as those they endeavor to supplant. This is why this study is needed.

Obviously, John's ahistoricity goes against the traditional view that the Fourth Gospel was written by the apostle John, connected inferentially with the redactor's claim that the Johannine Evangelist was an eyewitness who leaned against Jesus' breast at the Last Supper, was present at the crucifixion, and that "his witness is true" (John 13:23; 19:26, 34–35; 21:7, 20, 24). Over half a century ago Pierson Parker declared, "If there was one 'assured result of biblical criticism' for such scholars of the 20's, 30's and 40's, it was that John, the son of Zebedee, had nothing at all to do with the writing of this gospel" (1962, 35). Another scholar more recently has even declared that the burden of proof is now upon any who would challenge the purported scholarly consensus regarding John's patent ahistoricity.  

This claim reflects an interest in establishing the sort of "critical orthodoxy" Bishop Robinson alluded to half a century ago. Whereas the question in traditionalist circles used to be whether or not one believed in the historicity of John, the litmus test for the modernist biblical scholar has come to be: Do you believe in the ahistoricity of John? Because a scholar's livelihood and career may hinge upon distinguishing oneself as a hard-minded scientific scholar rather than a soft-hearted traditionalist, the stakes are indeed high. Further, no scholar wants to come across as embracing a naively traditionalistic view, yet the present critical question remains: Is the ahistoricity of John an open-and-shut case—on critical grounds? If so, fine. Scholars may build on a solid platform, conducting further studies upon an established foundation. However, if the modernist platform fails to stand up to critical analyses, or if parts of it are found to be less solid than others, critical scholarship at the dawn of the postmodern era demands an alternative. This is why this study is needed now.

Before continuing with analysis, however, two points deserve to be made before acknowledging a scholarly consensus exists at all on the matter. First, many, perhaps even most, of the leading Johannine scholars over the last two centuries would not have agreed to John's patent ahistoricity; so, if any "consensus" exists, it must be regarded as one that is purported among a group that excludes many of the
keenest experts in the field. One need only consider the works of Schleiermacher, Lightfoot, Westcott, Sanday, Robinson, Hoskyns, Dodd, Brown, Schnackenburg, Barrett, Lindars, Carson, Beasley-Murray, Morris, Hengel, and many others to realize that many of the great Johannine scholars of the modern era stood or would have stood against the purported consensus. As Raymond Brown says,

> We are not always to assume facilely that the Synoptic Gospels are recording the historical fact and that Jn has theologically reorganized the data. In the cases we have studied, an interesting case can be made out for the basic historicity of the Johannine picture and for theological reorganization on the part of the Synoptic Gospels. We are coming to realize more and more that the critics have played us false in their minimal estimate of the historicity of the Fourth Gospel.\(^5\) (1965, 271)

A second fact, however, is that even some of the most skeptical of scholars have expressed reservations regarding the degree to which certainty about John's historicity can be assumed. A telling example of such a turnaround may be found in David Strauss's introduction to his third edition of his *Life of Christ*. In response to criticisms regarding his earlier marginalizations of John's historicity, he reversed himself as follows:6

> The changes offered by this new edition are all more or less related to the fact that a renewed study of the Fourth Gospel, on the basis of de Wette's commentary and Neander's *Leben Jesu Christi*, has made me again doubtful of my earlier doubt concerning the authenticity and credibility of this Gospel. It is not that I have become convinced of its authenticity, merely that I am no longer certain of its inauthenticity. From among the peculiarly striking and frustrating features of credibility and incredibility, of proximity to and distance from the truth, which exist in this most remarkable Gospel, I had emphasized in the first composition of my work, with one-sided polemical zeal, only what seemed to me the adverse and unfavorable side. In the meanwhile the other side has gradually come into its own for me.

Ironically, many scholars aligning themselves with the revisionist view outlined by Strauss, F. C. Baur, and others have failed to balance their critical views with reflective nuance. Just as a traditionalist arguing for the eyewitness historicity of

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5. In another essay on John's historicity (1962), Brown argues that the Johannine rendering of the Last Supper on Thursday seems more plausible historically. Arguably, the Synoptics have stylized it as a Passover meal to conform with emerging Christian worship practices, a judgment bolstered by the criterion of dissimilarity. Brown further develops and refines his belief in John's historicity in his revised and expanded introduction to John (2003, 90-114).

6. Here David Friedrich Strauss (1972, lvii) seeks to hold the negative and positive aspects of critical study together in tension, but he reverts to his earlier skepticism in his fourth edition under the influence of Baur.
everything in John based upon shallow assumptions is flawed, so is an unreflective arguing of a critical view. For some reason, while the Gospel of John possesses the most extensive and explicit claims to represent a firsthand narration of Jesus’ works and ministry, it has ceded place to the Gospel of Thomas and other second-century apocryphal narratives in some recent Jesus studies. The question is whether those exchanges are warranted and whether a distorted presentation of Jesus is being constructed by those who claim to know. On the other hand, there are good reasons for scholars to question John’s historicity and contribution to understanding Jesus and his ministry, so the bases for these platforms deserve fresh critical consideration. Such is the critical interest of the present investigation.

1. Planks in Platform A: The Dehistoricization of John

John’s claims to historicity are problematic. In many ways John’s presentation differs significantly from those of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and the Johannine Jesus is clearly crafted in the image of the Evangelist’s own convictions. Further, the Fourth Evangelist’s presentation of Jesus is a spiritualized one, which raises questions as to the motives for particular aspects in the construction of the Johannine narrative. As the main planks in the platform of John’s dehistoricization are analyzed, including an assessment of their strengths and weaknesses, the bases for this judgment will be better ascertained. Fresh considerations of classic problems also may lead to other ways forward not yet considered, but such can only be envisioned at the end of such an analysis.

1.1. John’s Differences with the Synoptics

A great and puzzling fact of biblical studies is that John is very different from the Synoptics. Rather than a birth narrative, John’s story begins with the advent of the eternal Logos. Rather than ministering for only one year, three Passovers are mentioned in John. Rather than cleansing the temple at the end of Jesus’ ministry, John’s temple incident is at the beginning, and John mentions two miracles that were the first ones performed in Cana of Galilee. Rather than ministering exclusively in Galilee, the Johannine Jesus goes to and from Jerusalem and performs three Judean miracles. Rather than teaching pervasively about the kingdom of God and doing so in parables and in short, pithy sayings, the Johannine Jesus speaks in long I-Am discourses, engaging the kingdom motif in only two passages. In contrast to the Synoptic Jesus, John’s Jesus performs no exorcisms but knows what is in the hearts of humans and escapes capture in knowing ways. Finally, rather than celebrating the Last Supper as a Passover meal where the Eucharist is instituted, the Johannine rendering omits the words of institution and presents the event as happening the day before the Passover meal would have taken place. These are just some of the facts that contribute to preferring the Synoptics’ presentation historically over the Johannine.
Strengths. John’s ahistoricity seems to be confirmed if one assumes a three-against-one majority, with John being the lone Gospel out. This indeed was the argument of Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider, who in 1820 argued that, because of the threefold witness of the Synoptics, they could not possibly have concocted their view, while the same cannot be claimed for John. Rather, he argued that the historical probability of material in John should be considered low, and a generation later Strauss levied this argument against Friedrich Schleiermacher’s preference for John’s historicity over and against the Synoptics, designating Bretschneider to be the true man of science on the matter. Indeed, Jesus could have cleared the temple more than once, but John’s presentation, because it is out of step with the majority, calls for explanations on grounds other than historical ones. Likewise, in the presentation of Jesus’ teachings, the Synoptic presentation of Jesus’ use of parables seems far more reliable as a guide to Jesus’ teaching ministry than the more elevated revelatory discourses in the Johannine I-Am sayings. These are some of the good reasons for questioning John’s historicity on the basis of major differences with the Synoptics.

Weaknesses. If Luke and Matthew used Mark, however, viewing John’s differences with the Synoptics as a three-against-one minority must be reconsidered. Critically, scholars in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who took this view did so before Markan priority was established, but later scholars failed to make the appropriate self-correction along the way. If Mark got it wrong here and there, so did Matthew and Luke. If John and Mark are worthy of being considered the Bi-Optic Gospels, as several recent studies have argued, this means that the door must be held open in ascribing greater or lesser degrees of historicity to the Johannine and Markan traditions. For instance, John may be more realistic in presenting a Jesus who traveled to and from Jerusalem, like most observant Jews would have done during his time. This being the case, John’s three-year ministry also seems more realistic than Mark’s one-year presentation, perhaps locating all the Jerusalem and judgment material at the end for the purposes of a narrative climax rather than reflecting chronological knowledge. Indeed, Mark’s gathering of Jesus material and ordering it into a progressive narrative must have involved some conjecture, and the killing of Jesus due to a temple disturbance is far more

7. Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider (1820) questions several features of John as being inauthentic: Jesus’ speaking with exalted self-references; his knowing the hearts of others; his claim to represent God; and all his miraculous deeds. By hastily excluding all of John’s wondrous reports and themes from his perceived categories of naturalism, Bretschneider expels John from the canons of historicity in the name of modest, scientific inquiry.

8. Strauss (1977, 41) fails, however, to appreciate much of the critically significant work conducted by Schleiermacher, such as his extensive observations about the fragmented character of the Synoptic narratives in contrast to the more unitive Johannine narrations.

9. See part 3 in Anderson 2006b, especially table 3.3, reproduced below as appendix 1.
likely to have been inferred ("concocted," to use Bretschneider's language) than the unlikely-to-have-been imagined "threat of the risen Lazarus" as portrayed in John.

Was this a factor in the second-century opinion of Papias (quoted in Eusebius, Hist. eccl. 3.39; few scholars if any have noted that Papias cites the Johannine Elder as the source of this opinion!), that while Mark preserved Peter's preaching effectively, he got it down in the wrong order? If such were the case, one of the motivations for producing the "second Gospel" (John's first edition was completed around 80–85 C.E., before the Gospels of Luke and Matthew) might have been to set the record straight.10 John should thus be reconceived at least in part as a complementary presentation for readers and hearers of Mark,11 and some of John's contrasts to Mark may have been intentional. Indeed, Matthew and Luke eventually did the same, as did the editor who added the second ending of Mark. With these issues in mind, the fact of John's differences from the Synoptics does not force a three-against-one overruling of John's account. We have two individuated perspectives between John and Mark, the Bi-Optic Gospels, and any assumptions about how early Christian narrators would have gathered and presented their material must also be subjected to critical scrutiny. The case is thus still open, and exploring these distinctive presentations analytically may yet lead to some new ways of approaching longstanding New Testament riddles.

1.2. SYNOPSISIC OMISSIONS IN JOHN

One of the strongest arguments against an apostolic origin of John's material is that leading themes and events in the Synoptics, especially those at which the sons of Zebedee are reported as being present, are missing. First, the calling of the Twelve is not found in John, nor are more than eight disciples mentioned. Second, the transfiguration is not mentioned in John, nor is it reported that Peter, James, and John had gone with Jesus to the Garden of Gethsemane. Third, if the Beloved Disciple really had been leaning against the breast of Jesus at the Last Supper, how could he have missed the institution of a meal of remembrance? That would certainly have been an unlikely event to have forgotten or omitted. Fourth, Jesus'

10. Of all the theories of John's composition, the most compelling is the two-edition theory of Barnabas Lindars (1984), inferring a first edition emerging around 80, to which the editor added supplementary material after the death of the Beloved Disciple around 100 CE. Here I agree with Bultmann, however, that the compiler may likely have been the author of the Johannine Epistles, rather than the evangelist himself (contra Lindars), thus leading one to believe that the Epistles were plausibly written between these two editions. I concur with Lindars that material added to the final edition included the Prologue (John 1:1-18), chs. 6, 15–17, and 21, and Beloved Disciple and eyewitness passages. Contra Lindars, evidence for the translocation of the Temple cleansing making space for the Lazarus narrative seems weak.

11. The relation between John and Mark as the two "Bi-Optic Gospels" is developed elsewhere (Anderson 2001a, 2001b, 2002a, and 2006b).
having spoken in parables about the kingdom of God is terribly conspicuous as a pervasive omission in John. Fifth, Jesus' exorcisms are not mentioned at all in John. These facts pose major problems for anyone arguing that the Synoptic and Johannine presentations of Jesus are both historically reliable.

**Strengths.** Indeed, if the apostle John were in some way connected to the purveying of the Johannine witness, it seems odd that many of the points at which we might expect an event to have been embellished or expanded are characterized by pervasive silence. How could the son of Zebedee, for instance, have omitted the calling of the Twelve, the transfiguration, the words of the institution, and the anguish of Jesus at Gethsemane, if he were indeed both present at those events and the traditional source of the Fourth Gospel? These facts pose major problems for the traditional view of John's authorship, and they are one of the key reasons critical scholars reject it. A further problem is that the sons of Zebedee are referred to as ὑποτάξατοι (sons of thunder) in Mark 3:17, and elsewhere they are reported as wanting to call down fire from heaven (Luke 9:54). The reflective character of the Fourth Gospel seems to betray a very different personality type, to say the least. Beyond these particulars, the omission of Jesus' parables, major teachings on the kingdom of God, and exorcisms make it very difficult to reconcile an apostolic or eyewitness origin of John's material, even if the author was not the son of Zebedee. For these reasons, one can understand why critical scholars might find the traditional view of John's authorship problematic.

**Weaknesses.** On the other hand, the Markan presentation of the disciples, including the sons of Zebedee, might not have been completely untainted by subjectivity when considering its historicity. The ambivalent presentation of the sons of Zebedee would certainly have furthered the personal interests of someone like Peter, if he or anyone like him were indeed a source of Mark's tradition. For instance, their having been included along with Peter here and there might reflect a Petrine co-opting of their authority, whereby the inclusion of Peter within an inner ring (the sons of his employer) would have served his own interests as a narrator, let alone the interests of those wanting to preserve his memory. Note that it was Peter who in Acts 1 is presented as wanting to preserve "the Twelve" and who calls for a successor to Judas. Certainly the presentation of the sons of Zebedee as desiring precedence among the disciples is rejected by the Markan Jesus—just as Peter's failure to comprehend servanthood is presented graphically in John 13 and 21. Note that the martyrdom of the sons of Zebedee is predicted by Jesus in Mark (10:38-39), whereas the martyrdom of Peter is predicted by Jesus in John (21:18-19). Was the labeling of James and John as thunderheads a sober, historical judgment in the Markan or pre-Markan tradition, or was it a factor of Petrine projection? The point here is not to argue for particular personalities
underlying Gospel traditions; the point is that making too much about what can and cannot have been true regarding particular disciples, based upon a few terse comments in Mark, overreaches the bounds of historical demonstrability from the Synoptic side. Motive criticism may be the tool more appropriate here than historical criticism. Therefore, the grounds for excluding anyone from Johannine authorship based upon Synoptic presentations of Jesus’ followers are weak.

Another weakness of making too much out of Johannine omissions of the Synoptic presentations of Jesus’ ministry is that it fails to account for more plausible explanations. For instance, if the Fourth Evangelist were familiar with at least parts of Mark, it could be that parts were left out because of a desire to be complementary.13 A primitive witness poses that John filled out the earlier parts of Jesus’ ministry,14 and this might explain the emphasis upon the wedding miracle and the healing of the official’s son as the first two signs performed in Galilee. The point may have been setting the record straight over and against the Markan presentation of the exorcism of the demoniac and the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law in Mark 1. Likewise, the other three miracles in the first edition of John15 are all three Judean miracles, perhaps filling out the almost entirely northern ministry of Jesus in the Synoptics. Therefore, if the Fourth Evangelist were intentionally seeking to complement and augment Mark, this would explain why much of Mark’s material was left out. Matthew and Luke built upon Mark; John built around Mark.16 The likelihood that John 6 was added as part of the final edition of John throws the augmentive function of John’s first edition (probably between 80 and 85 c.e.) into sharper relief. If the five signs in John’s first edition fill out the earlier and the Judean aspects of Jesus’ ministry as a complement to Mark, John’s omissions of most of Mark’s material are not scandalous but understandable.

A further point deserves to be made here. The omission of the transfiguration scene in John is more likely to have been related to the Johannine distinctive presentation of Moses and Elijah than an oversight. In Mark, the roles of Moses

Gospel traditions to the era following their finalization one can infer distinctively “Petrine” and “Johannine” trajectories (Anderson 1996, 153–60, esp. notes 22–26) on at least seven different themes.

13. The impressive 1998 Ph.D. thesis of Ian Donald Mackay on John 6 and Mark 6 and 8 changed my mind on this score (published 2004). I now see John’s independence from Mark as nondependence rather than isolation.

14. Note the comment in Eusebius, Hist. eccl. 3.24.7–13 to this effect. The connecting of the first two signs in Cana of Galilee with a chronological augmentation interest casts at least part of the Johannine Evangelist’s purpose into sharp relief with reference to Mark in particular.

15. A flawed assumption is that because the Johannine Evangelist fills out the Judean ministry of Jesus, he must have been a southerner rather than a Galilean (see, e.g., Parker 1962). None of Parker’s twenty-one points is compelling—individually or collectively.

and Elijah are fulfilled in two ways: they appear at the transfiguration (in keeping with the prophecy of Mal 4:4–5); and they are present in the ministry of John the Baptist. In John, however, the Baptist denies that he is either the prophet (Moses) or Elijah (John 1:19–27). Here Johannine augmentation of Mark moves to correction. The Baptist explicitly denies these associations in John, clearing the way for both typologies being fulfilled in Jesus. Not only does Jesus perform the same sort of signs as Elijah had performed (in the Johannine feeding, even the same word is used for the barley loaves that Elijah had reproduced: κριθονος; see 2 Kgs 4:43 LXX), but he is explicitly hailed as the prophet like Moses predicted in Deut 18:15–22 (John 6:1–15). It is no exaggeration to say that the entirety of the Johannine Jesus’ sense of agency is cast in the form of the Mosaic prophet, and this may have played a role in John's omission of the Markan transfiguration scene. Jesus, not the Baptist, fulfills the typologies of Elijah and Moses in John.

A strict “omission of Synoptic material” view of John, however, must be tempered by noticing the many nonidentical similarities between the two traditions. Many of John’s miracles are similar to Synoptic ones (healing of an official's servant/child, healing of a paralytic, healing of a blind man, raising of someone from the dead, etc.), but other than the feeding and the sea crossing, they do not appear to refer to the same events. Likewise, Synoptic-like sayings have long been noted in John, but they have not been thought of as authentic aphorisms by recent historical Jesus studies. The characteristic agrarian metaphors associated with the Synoptic Jesus—presented in terse, aphoristic form—appear to have been displaced by long revelatory discourses in John. A closer look, however, shows that these sorts of sayings are far from missing in John. Indeed, Jesus’ revelatory discourses do develop themes in ways quite distinctive from sayings in the Synoptics, but it cannot be said that agrarian images are missing from John or that short, terse Jesus-sayings are absent from the Johannine text. A factor in their having been missed is their placement within dialogues and within the body of larger discourses. They are not absent from John, and one cannot say that their presence in John simply marks Synoptic derivation. Several agrarian wisdom aphorisms are found in distinctively Johannine settings, and these sayings conform very closely to the criteria otherwise used to distinguish historical Jesus sayings. If they were found in Mark or Thomas, rather than John, few scholars would question their authenticity. Consider, for instance, the great number of Synoptic-like aphorisms in John 4 and 12 alone.18

17. See the many connections between the septuagintal rendering of Deut 18:15–22 and the Johannine Father-Son relationship (Anderson 1999a).

18. See below the over six dozen aphorisms in John detected by Drummond 1904 and Bridges 1987.
> “I have ‘food’ to eat you know nothing about.” (4:32)
> “My ‘food’ is that I might do the work of the Having-Sent-Me-One and might accomplish his work.” (4:34)
> “Do you not say, ‘It will take about four months for the harvest to come?’ Look, I say to you, lift up you eyes and see the fields because they are already white with harvest.” (4:35)
> “The one reaping receives wages and gathers grain unto eternal life in order that the sower might celebrate together with the reaper. For in this the saying is true, that ‘one sows and another reaps,’ I sent you to harvest what you have not worked for; others have labored, and you have enjoyed the benefits of their hard work.” (4:36–38)
> “Unless a wheat kernel dies by dropping into the ground, it remains alone; but if it dies it bears great quantities of wheat.” (12:24)
> “The one loving his life will lose it; but the one hating his life in this world will keep it for eternity.” (12:25)
> “If anyone serves me, let him follow me, and where I am there will my servant be. If anyone serves me, my Father will honor him.” (12:26)
> “The time for the judgment of this world has now arrived: the ruler of this world shall now be cast out; and I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all to myself” (12:31–32)
> “You only have the light among you for a short time. Walk in the light you have lest darkness overtake you; because the one walking in darkness does not know where he is going. While you have light, believe in the light, that you may become children of light.” (12:35–36)

The Johannine omission of kingdom sayings, parables, and exorcisms is more problematic. John does have two “kingdom” passages in John 3 and 18, but both are corrective rather than elucidative. The kingdom is not this but that. Then again, while John has no Synoptic-like parables, Jesus’ disciples report being troubled by his speaking in riddles (παροιμίας, John 10:6; 16:25–30) and celebrate his speaking plainly. This harkens back to the more primitive Markan presentation of parables as wedges dividing insiders and outsiders rather than being means of clarification (Mark 4:11–12, 33–34). Of course, John’s I-Am sayings are highly metaphorical, as are the Synoptic parables, but they are presented in a distinctively Johannine form. Why the exorcisms of Jesus are omitted from John is difficult to explain, other than to point out that all the Synoptic miracles were omitted from the first Johannine edition. Then again, an incidental Markan detail is interesting to consider. The particular disciple who was uncomfortable with other exorcists in Mark and who reported to Jesus that they had asked them to desist was none other than John, the son of Zebedee (Mark 9:38).  

19. While the discovery of a hitherto overlooked first-century clue to Johannine authorship
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or others like him, had anything to do with any stage of the Johannine presenta-

tion of Jesus’ ministry, discomfort with exorcist ministries may have been a factor

in John’s omission of Jesus’ exorcisms. Because of the vulnerability of making too

much out of John’s omissions of Synoptic material, especially with relation to who

could and could not have been connected to the Johannine tradition, the critical

scholar should exercise caution before dehistoricizing John too readily.

Unlike Mark, John contains only two sections that develop the kingdom

motif, and rather than being illustrative they are antithetical. They suggest

what the active reign of God is like in contrast to alternative understandings of

it. In contrast to Nicodemus’s religious understanding of the kingdom of God,

Jesus emphasizes the need to be born from above, using the powerful effect of

the invisible wind as a metaphor (John 3:1–21). And, with reference to Pilate’s

political understanding of power, Jesus declares that the kingdom is one of truth

(18:33–38), explaining that this is why his disciples do not fight or resort to force.

In these two passages one could infer a Johannine contrasting of the reign of God

to two primary worldly spheres: the religious and the political. Does this mean,

however, that the teachings of Jesus on the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ (kingdom of God)

are pervasively missing in John, or do we have a Johannine representation of the

essential kingdom teaching of Jesus, even as represented in the fuller Synoptic

accounts? After all, the spiritual workings of God’s active and dynamic reign are

indeed contrasted with the human scaffoldings of the religious quest in the Syn-

optics, and the truthful and penetrating activity of God’s present-and-ultimate

reign is contrasted to all worldly powers—political and otherwise. In that sense,

rather than leaving out Jesus’ teachings on the kingdom, it could be said that

John summarizes them. When considering kingdom language in John, however,

it is not entirely void. John has a considerable number of kingdom references,

but they focus largely on the βασιλεῖς, Jesus, rather than on the βασιλεία, the

kingdom.20 On the face of it, one could consider John’s dearth of Synoptic-like

kingdom parables and teachings as evidence of disconnection from a Jesus

tradition, but this misreads the evidence. John’s presentation of Jesus as a king

might not make much of a difference to scholars convinced of John’s nonapostolic author-

ship (Anderson 1996, 274–77), it challenges the view that Irenaeus was the first to make such

a connection. Peter and John are presented as speaking in Acts 4:19–20 in two characteristic

statements: one Petrine and the other Johannine (see Acts 5:29 and 11:17 for the first; 1 John

1:3 and John 3:32 for the second). Luke’s even unintended connecting of the apostle John with a

characteristically Johannine phrase—a full century before Irenaeus—approximates a fact, call-

ing for critical consideration of the implications.

20. Consider, for instance, these references to Jesus in Johannine kingdom terms: Jesus is

acclaimed as the king of Israel (John 1:49; 12:13), is embraced as a king like Moses (6:15), ful-

fills the kingly prophecy of Zech 9:9 (John 12:15), is questioned and affirmed as a king (18:37;

19:12), and is presented and disputed as the king of the Jews (18:33, 39; 19:3, 14, 15, 19, 21).

John’s is a Christocentric basileiology.
is even more pronounced than those of the Synoptics, and the source of those differences more likely resides in an alternative emphasis and the individuated development of the Johannine tradition itself.

While major Synoptic themes and features are omitted from John, the default inference of John's ahistoricity is naïve and simplistic. Other motives and factors are more compelling in explaining these facts. Such interests as "building around" Mark in nonduplicative ways, reserving the Moses and Elijah typologies for Jesus (not John the Baptist), preferences against exorcisms (especially when rendering a narrative in a Gentile setting), and a practice of paraphrasing Jesus' teachings in Johannine forms of delivery cause a rethinking of the larger issues. It is also a fact that much Synoptic-type material is present in a distinctively Johannine form, so "total absence" is often not the case; rather, an alternative presentation is. A classic case in point is the way the Lord's Prayer can be said to be found in embellished form in John 17. \(^\text{21}\) Finally, since argument from silence is an extremely tenuous basis on which to build, it cannot be said that this is a very sturdy plank, able to support much interpretive weight.

1.3. Johannine Omissions in the Synoptics

Considering the material distinctive to John, many of Jesus' sayings and deeds are among the most memorable in the four Gospels. The great I-Am sayings (I am the bread of life, light of the world, resurrection and the life, good shepherd, true vine, and the way, the truth, and the life) in John are certainly rich with content and of great importance christologically. Five of John's miracles (the wedding miracle, the healing of the official's son, the healing of the Jerusalem paralytic, the healing of the blind man, and the raising of Lazarus) are nowhere mentioned in the Synoptics. The oddity here is that if these sayings and events really happened, how could they not be mentioned or closely replicated in the other three Gospels? Other distinctively Johannine events also stand out, such as Jesus' dramatic dialogues with the likes of Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the Jewish leaders, Pilate, and Peter. Finally, Jesus is portrayed in John as having visited Jerusalem at least four times during his ministry, whereas in the Synoptics he visits Jerusalem only once—the time when he was crucified. Given their absence from the Synoptics, the inference is that much of John's material must have originated in some way other than historicity, requiring alternative explanations.

**Strengths.** Obviously, the raising of Lazarus would have been considered one of Jesus' greatest miracles by all who knew about it, and its absence from the Synoptics strongly suggests that it was not known by their writers. Put otherwise, if the raising of Lazarus indeed happened, how could it possibly be confined to a

\(^{21}\) C. F. Evans builds this case in his provocative essay (1977), making one wonder if the Johannine prayer is an expansion or the Q prayer of Jesus an abbreviation.
Because the Johannine signs clearly serve the rhetorical purposes of the Fourth Evangelist, presenting evidence that Jesus was indeed the Jewish Messiah, the distinctive Johannine signs could have had an origin other than public historical events in the presence of Jesus' disciples. The same can be said of the wedding miracle—by no means a private or secluded event. Likewise, the I-Am sayings must be considered the most theologically significant statements uttered by Jesus about himself anywhere in the four canonical Gospels. If Jesus indeed uttered them, how could they not have been included in the Synoptics? Conversely, the language and diction of Jesus in John is nearly identical to that of John the Baptist (see John 3:31–36) and the Fourth Evangelist. In that sense, the Johannine Jesus' discourses probably reflect the Evangelist's paraphrasing of Jesus' teachings rather than a historical rendering of such teachings. Further, they are far more self-referential than the kingdom sayings of the Synoptics and the Markan messianic secret, and one can understand how John's presentation of Jesus would call for explanations other than historical ones.

Weaknesses. As with the former issue, one of the primary weaknesses of questioning the origin of the distinctive Johannine material is that it also argues from silence. Such arguments can only be tenuous, and by definition they elude certainty. To argue that everything significant said or done by Jesus would be included in the Synoptics, or even in all the Gospel records, is likewise fallacious. The conclusion of John explicitly declares intentional selectivity (21:24–25), and the same was probably true of Mark and the other Gospels. It is also problematic to argue that Mark had access to all of Peter's preaching material (or whatever Mark's primary source might have been), let alone other narrative sources that might have been connected to particular geographical regions. Further, if the patterning of the Johannine miracles in chapters 2, 4, 5, 9, and 11 seems to be crafted to augment the Markan narration of Jesus' ministry, the Cana miracles apparently fill out the early part of Jesus' ministry, and the other three contribute Judean miracles to the mix—perhaps reflecting the sentiment that Mark's rendering was incomplete. In that sense, the distinctive Johannine signs appear to have been presented as a means of filling some of the gaps left by the Markan project, and the final words of the first edition of John allude to that possibility. The Evangelist is apparently aware of other signs reported that "are not in this book" (in other words, "Yes, I know Mark is out there, and I know I am leaving things out, so stop reminding me"), "but these are written that you might believe" (in

22. While the so-called Secret Gospel of Mark might betray an independent account of a resurrection narrative very much like the account in John 11, its existence is itself in doubt, thus offering little or no corroboration of the Johannine Lazarus narrative.

other words, "but the above material has a purpose beyond what Mark sought to accomplish"; John 20:30–31).

While the Johannine Jesus clearly speaks in the language of the Evangelist, this is not to say the Johannine paraphrase has no root in the ministry of the historical Jesus.24 Indeed, the Markan Jesus also delivers several I-Am sayings, although they are not as fully developed as those in John.25 What one cannot say is that Jesus' I-Am sayings are absent from, or insignificant in, Mark, as the following list of similar ἐγώ εἶμι sayings of Jesus in Mark and John makes clear.

- ἐγώ εἶμι· μη φοβεῖσθε. In Mark 6:50, an epiphany (it is not a ghost; "It is I!"); in John 6:20, a theophany ("I Am!") on the lake.
- An I-Am association with the burning bush, Abraham, and Exod 3:14–15 is declared by Jesus before the Jerusalem leaders (εἶμι understood in Mark 12:26, explicitly declared in John 8:58).
- I-Am claims are mentioned regarding alternative Messiah figures: false messiahs will say "I am the Christ" in Mark 13:6; John the Baptist confessed, "I am not the Christ!" in John 1:20.
- A christological claim in response to Pilate's question (Mark 14:62: "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" "I am!"; John 18:37: "Are you a king, then?" "You say that I am a king.").

One could also argue that the I-Am sayings in John that make use of the predicate nominative are similar in their metaphorical character to the parables of the Synoptics (especially the shepherd/sheepgate imagery, truth and way emphases, the light-of-the-world motif, the vine/vineyard theme, the resurrection and life themes, and the bread and subsistence motif), although they clearly are not couched in the same parabolic form as the Synoptic teachings of Jesus. While it could be argued that Synoptic developments were constructed upon themes present in John, it is more likely to see the Johannine discourses as Christocentric developments of plausible Jesus sayings. What cannot be said is that the Johannine I-Am metaphors are at all missing from the Synoptics, as the following list reveals.

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24. Franz Mussner (1966) shows how the Johannine memory and paraphrastic work may have developed in distinctive, gnoseological terms.

25. See, for instance, Jesus' response to the high priest in Mark 14:61–64, where, when asked if he were the Christ, the Son of the Blessed, Jesus declared, "I Am! And you shall see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven." At this, the high priest tore his garments and called for the blasphemy to be penalized. See also the words of Jesus at the sea crossing: ἐγὼ εἶμι· μη φοβεῖσθε ("It is I; fear not!" Mark 6:50), which are identical to the words of Jesus in John 6:20, despite contextual differences.
Even some of the associated clusters of *I-am* metaphors can be found together in Jesus’ teaching in the Synoptics. Indeed, while much material thought to be characteristic of Jesus found in the Synoptics is not found in the same way in John, it cannot be said that it is altogether missing. Some of it is situated in different sets of contexts and forms. John’s tradition reflects a distinctively Christocentric rendering of Jesus’ teachings, but that does not imply a radical disconnection from the Jesus represented by the Synoptics. If these and other Johannine aphoristic sayings in John would have been found in Mark, or even in the second-century Gospel of Thomas, it is doubtful they would have been passed over quite as readily in the selection of Jesus-sayings material.
declare the Evangelist's own theological convictions? After all, William Loader has shown effectively that these two passages comprise the "central structure" of John's Christology and that they provide a valuable lens for viewing the Son's saving mission from the Father and his ambivalent reception in the world, rife with implications (1984; 1989). However, if indeed it is the case that the Evangelist has imbued the Baptist's climactic witness to Jesus' mission with his own theological framework and terms, why not infer the same for the declaration of Jesus at the climax of his ministry and elsewhere in John? Especially when the language of John's Jesus is so dissimilar to that of the Synoptic Jesus, this makes it extremely difficult to imagine the *ipsissima verba* of the historical Jesus coming to us through the Johannine text. The words (and deeds) of Jesus in John betray such an obvious projection of the Johannine rendering that considerable caution must be exercised before attributing too much of the Johannine Jesus' teaching to the Jesus of history, proper.

**Strengths.** First, the Johannine witness comes to us explicitly from the perspective of postresurrection consciousness. Several times the point is made that the disciples did not "understand" the action or words of Jesus at the time, but later, after the resurrection, they understood fully what he was getting at (John 2:22; 12:16). Likewise, Jesus himself emphasizes that their comprehension will be fuller in the future, as mediated by the Holy Spirit, and this prediction is borne out in the perceptions of the Johannine narration (7:37-39; 13:7, 19-20; 14:25-31; 15:26-16:4; 16:12-16). From this perspective, the Johannine memory is pervasively influenced by later discovery, and this perspective by its own admission presents the past in the light of future valuations. In that sense, a "what really happened back then" mode of historicity is less important to the evangelist than the connecting of "what happened" to a "what it really meant ... and means now" form of narration.

A second question relates to the connections between the language and thought forms of the Johannine Jesus and those of the Johannine Evangelist. As mentioned above, the Johannine Jesus speaks in the language of the Evangelist, and impressive similarities can be observed between the corporate Johannine situation reflected by the Prologue, the witness of the Baptist, the interpretive work of the Evangelist, the words of Jesus, and the narration of Jesus' works. In contrast to the gnostic redeemer myth as the central history of religions origin of the mission of Jesus in John, its similarities are much closer to the prophet-like-Moses agency schema of Deut 18:15-22. Indeed, many of these features can be found throughout the Fourth Gospel, and it is indeed the case that the Evangelist's understanding of Jesus' ministry has been subsumed into this agency schema. Therefore, aspects of historicity must be read through such a missional and theological lens, which includes the following themes: (1) No one has seen God at any time, and only by the saving/revealing initiative of God can humanity be "drawn" to the Father. (2) Jesus came to the world as God's agent, revealing God's love and truth to the world. (3) The world's reception of the Revealer was ambivalent; some
believed, but some did not. (4) Those who knew God received the Revealer, but those who challenged the authenticity of Jesus’ mission exposed their spiritual condition. (5) Jesus affirmed that he spoke and did only what he had seen and heard from the Father, attested by his words and works. (6) The world is therefore invited to respond believably to the Father’s Agent as responding to the Father (Deut 18:15–22). (7) Those who believe receive life and further light; those who reject the Revealer seek to preserve the “comfort” of their darkness.

Nearly all these seven themes may be found in each of the above five portions of the Johannine Gospel, showing the degree to which the Evangelist’s presentation of the ministry of Jesus and the witness of the Baptist had become integrated within his own ministry. This set of connections leads to a third question: To what extent does John’s presentation of Jesus’ teachings reflect the teaching of the historical Jesus as opposed to the Evangelist’s teaching within the evolving history of his situation? Certainly the above outline reflects at least two levels of history (using Martyn’s construct): the mission and reception of Jesus and his message; and the mission and reception of the Evangelist and his message. Indeed, nearly everything claimed for Jesus (he came unto his own and his own received him not, but as many as received the Gospel are given the power to become the children of God, John 1:12) can also be claimed for the Evangelist and the Johannine leadership. At least four crises within the Johannine situation can be inferred in the narration of the feeding and the sea crossing in John 6, not just the one in John 9.26 In that sense, because John’s narration addresses the evolving needs of the Johannine audience and represents the teaching ministry of the Evangelist, its reliability as a guide to the historical Jesus comes into question.

Weaknesses. The cardinal weakness, of course, of assuming that interpretive relevance completely eclipses originative history is that it simply is not true. True historicity is never limited to the irrelevant, and to assert such misjudges the character of historiography itself. Every historical project distinguishes events of greater significance from their alternatives, and that implies subjectivity of judgment. Mark’s narrative also distinguishes important events from others, so the question is better put as to whether the Markan selection of historically significant content is closer to the historical Jesus than that of the Johannine rendering. Further, to assume that an independent Gospel tradition either did not accommodate to Jesus’ teachings or that it did not adapt Jesus’ teachings to its own content needs is fallacious and unrealistic. Given the fact that the Johannine

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26. Note that (a) the desire for more loaves corrects Synoptic-type valuations of the feeding (not a σῆμαι source); (b) the Jewish leaders’ request for manna as Moses gave reflects debates over the authority of the Torah (Deut 8:3); (c) the disciples’ being scandalized over eating and drinking the flesh and blood of Jesus is aimed at docetizing Gentile believers; and (d) Peter’s figurative “returning the keys to Jesus” corrects the proto-Ignatian tendencies of Diotrephes and his kin (these four crises behind John 6 are developed further in Anderson 1997).
Jesus’ teachings are rendered in the modes of the Evangelist’s own teaching ministry, the following features must be taken into consideration.

First, despite distinctively Johannine characteristics, there are dozens of aphorisms in John that sound very much like the sort of thing the historical Jesus would have said. Those mentioned above are only some of the most distinctive ones; others have been identified in analyses not noted by so-called historical Jesus studies. For instance, Wilbert Francis Howard lists no fewer than sixty aphorisms in John,27 and Linda Bridges isolates twenty-six aphoristic sayings in John.28 About half of those identified by Bridges are also selected by Drummond and Howard. Given the prolific inclusion of aphoristic sayings in John, it is extremely difficult to imagine why these sayings go unnoticed by Jesus scholars preferring instead the mid-second-century Gospel of Thomas with its gnostic proclivities over the Gospel of John in terms of historicity.29 An explanation of that fact may lie in the tendency to analyze Johannine discourses as longer units, therefore missing aphorisms embedded within the larger contexts. Many of the above sayings, however, are not found in larger discourse sections, so the fact that they are overlooked entirely comes across as a striking oversight among otherwise astute critical scholars.

A second mistake in judgment is to infer that, because the historical Jesus spoke in characteristically terse, pithy aphorisms, he therefore did not deliver any longer discourses. Here a meaningful criterion for inclusion becomes used inappropriately as a measure of exclusion, which is faulty logic. Given that set A (aphorisms) overlaps with set B (Jesus’ characteristic style of teaching), it does not follow that set C (longer discourses or alternative diction) cannot have had any overlap with set B. Put otherwise, how did Jesus hold the attention of multitudes for more than a few minutes at a time? If he held the attention of crowds for hours on end at times (as the feeding narratives and other sections in all four Gospels suggest), he must have delivered longer discourses as well as short aphorisms. Thus, aphoristic sayings were probably included in these longer discourses, but it is difficult to imagine that they were the only content or form delivered. Another variable also presents itself: Were Jesus’ teachings delivered to his dis-

27. John 1:51; 2:16, 19; 3:3, 6, 8; 4:14, 21, 23, 31, 34, 44, 48; 5:14, 17, 19, 23, 30, 40, 44; 6:27, 33, 35, 44, 63; 7:7, 17, 24, 37; 8:12, 26, 32, 34, 36, 51; 9:4, 39, 41; 11:25; 12:24, 25, 26, 32, 36, 44, 47; 13:15, 20, 34, 35; 14:1, 2, 6, 9, 15, 21, 27; 17:1; 18:36, 37. Howard (1931, 267) cites these verses as examples given by James Drummond (1904, 17–19). He also says, “Many more can be found, particularly in chaps. xiii-xvii. One of the most striking is xx. 29.”


29. Indeed, the Jesus Seminar’s according of authentic Jesus sayings is more prolific in Thomas than all the canonical Gospels put together (see Anderson 2000b)—a surprising judgment for such a clearly gnostic second-century collection!
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ciples identical to those addressed to the multitudes? Probably not. Therefore, to
assert that Jesus’ teachings are not at all represented in the distinctively Johannine
presentation cannot be critically maintained.

A third fallacy is the assertion that a Johannine paraphrase of Jesus’ teachings
cannot represent the content or character of the teaching of the historical Jesus.
Earlier impressions are not necessarily more authentic than distanced reflections,
nor are historical presentations more authentic when not interpreted or paraphrased. Franz Mussner’s intriguing monograph on the historical Jesus in the
Gospel of John takes for granted a spiritualized reflection underlying the Johannine “memory,” but he performs upon that premise a critical analysis of how the
Johannine tradition might have developed as anamnesis. In his analysis of key
Johannine vocabulary terms (“gnoseological terminology”), Mussner applies the
terms “to see,” “to hear,” “to come to know,” “to testify,” “to remember” (and to
have brought to remembrance) to a realistic estimation of how the “historical
reason” of the Evangelist might have developed. While Mussner’s investigation
is motivated by the desire to reconcile historicity with inspiration, he makes a
significant set of phenomenological contributions. First, he acknowledges the distin-
tive features of Johannine spirituality and memory. Second, he describes how
such memory from a distance really might have been experienced as a factor of
the work of the παράκλητος calling to present earlier content for the needs of
the emerging Johannine situation. Third, rather than seeing such developments
as a historical disjunction with a more primitive Jesus tradition, he shows how
continuity between earlier experiences and later perceptions may have emerged
within the Johannine circle of leadership. In that sense, he gives us an alternative
cognitive-critical model for historical investigation within a distinctive situation
such as the Johannine.

While the Johannine Jesus clearly speaks in the language of the Evangelist,
so do John the Baptist and others in the Fourth Gospel. This being the case, how-
ever, it cannot be said that aphoristic sayings of Jesus are totally absent. No fewer
than seventy to eighty have been identified, and their embeddedness within
longer sections may explain why some scholars have missed them. Nor can it
be claimed that Jesus’ characteristic aphorisms constituted the totality of every-
ting he ever said. While the paraphrases of Jesus’ teachings are a given in John,
this is not to say, however, that they are completely truncated from the teaching
ministry of the historical Jesus. This plank rests upon a significant problem, but
it cannot be said to solidly support a total divorce between historical sayings of
Jesus and later Johannine renderings. As Mark’s source (and thus, Matthew’s and
Luke’s) rendered Jesus’ sayings meaningfully for the needs of emerging audiences

30. Mussner’s question, “Who is really speaking here?” is a good one (1966). Throughout
the course of his analysis, he is able to show how both the historical Jesus and the paraphrastic
Evangelist might have been implicated together.
in the church, so did the Johannine narrator, and in some ways the Johannine paraphrase may have been closer to original teachings of Jesus than scholars have thought.

1.5. The Johannine Material Is Rendered in Response to the History of the Johannine Situation

Because much of John's material shows evidence of development within the history of the Johannine situation, at least two levels of history must be considered in assessing the historical character of the Johannine material. In reality, all Gospel narrative is historical; the only question is, What aspect of history is represented regarding a particular passage or detail? As well as historical origins in the ministry of Jesus and within the influence of history of religions background, at least six or seven crises can be inferred within the Johannine situation. In the earlier period, the Palestinian period (30-70 C.E.), the first two crises appear. The first betrays tensions between northern Galileans or Samaritans and their southern neighbors, the Judeans, with the issue here apparently related to centralizing pressures and the rejection of northern perspectives by the Jerusalem-centered authorities. The second crisis betrays an interest in emphasizing that John the Baptist was not the Messiah, and it probably reflects dialogues seeking to convince Baptist adherents that Jesus was. In the middle period, the Asia Minor I period (70-85 C.E.), the Johannine Christians faced two more crises. The third crisis involved tensions with the local synagogue over the orthodoxy of the Jesus movement and their attempts to convince Jewish family and friends that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah. The fourth involved hardship experienced at the hand of the local Roman presence under the reign of Domitian (81-96 C.E.), as residents of the empire were forced to offer emperor laud or suffer the consequences. The later period, the Asia Minor II period (85-100 C.E.), saw the emergence of multiple communities in the Johannine situation. The fifth crisis stemmed directly from the attempts of Gentile Christians to diminish the effects of required emperor laud. They taught a message of assimilation, legitimated by a nonsuffering and docetic Jesus. The sixth crisis reflects intramural tensions with rising institutionalism within the Christian movement, as the Johannine tradition calls for more egalitarian and familial approaches to church governance. The first edition of John was probably finalized around 80-85 C.E., and the Johannine Epistles were probably written in the interim between that time and the Gospel's finalization around 100 C.E. (see the table below). A seventh set of dialogues that spanned all six of the above crises involved dialectical interaction with other Gospel traditions. Within these evolving issues—largely sequential but also somewhat overlapping—the Johannine presentation of Jesus was formed in response to the needs of the churches, as were the Markan and other Gospel traditions.
AN OUTLINE OF THE JOHANNINE SITUATION IN LONGITUDINAL PERSPECTIVE

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

Crisis A  Dealing with north/south tensions (Galileans/Judeans)
Crisis B  Reaching followers of John the Baptist

The oral Johannine tradition develops.

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

Crisis A  Engaging local Jewish family and friends
Crisis B  Dealing with the local Roman presence

The first edition of the Johannine Gospel is prepared.

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

Crisis A  Engaging docetizing Gentile Christians and their teachings
Crisis B  Engaging Christian institutionalizing tendencies (Diotrephes and his kin)
Crisis C  Engaging dialectically Christians presentations of Jesus and his ministry (actually reflecting a running dialogue over all three periods)

The Epistles are written by the Johannine Elder, who then finalizes and circulates the testimony of the Beloved Disciple after his death.

Strengths. Strict objectivity in historiography, as such, is of little value to interpreters. For instance, weeks and months of flat-line seismograph readings are objectively historical, but they are far less significant than the punctuating measures of seismic activity, even if they last for only moments. The relevant recording of the past always hinges upon inferred meanings for later generations, and in that sense the subjective inference of original significance is always determined in the light of an account’s eventual impact and relevance. That being the case, many aspects of the Johannine memory appear to have been formed on at least two levels of history. What happened “even back then” (John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2) is brought to bear on “what’s happening now.”

Regarding crisis one, a crisis involving hegemonic actions and attitudes of Jerusalem-centered Judaism would have affected the preservation of material within the northern situation of the Evangelist. Whether he lived in Samaria, Galilee, or the Transjordan (Galilee seems the most plausible), the presentation of the Joudaioi and leaders of Jerusalem, who reject the northern prophet and are scandalized by Jesus’ healing on the Sabbath and claim of divine agency, would have borne resonance with the experience of northern Jewish populations travel-
ing to Jerusalem for festivals and worship several times a year. In that sense, the relevance of the northern prophet being rejected by the Judean authorities (John 4–5; 7–8) would have matched the experience of Galilean and Samaritan populations seeking to worship authentically as children of Israel. With relation to the second crisis—still in the first period—the Evangelist takes great pains to connect the Baptist’s testimony with the authenticity of Jesus as a means either of reaching Baptist adherents or of cashing in on his authority in respect to his apologetic interests (20:30–31). The Johannine tradition is distinctive in this matter, and it is possible that some of the Johannine leadership originally were followers of the Baptist but left him and followed Jesus. Indeed, John 1 portrays Jesus’ first disciples as such. Therefore, the Evangelist’s vested interest should be kept in mind regarding the Baptist material in John.

The middle period of the Johannine situation appears to have involved the movement of the Evangelist to one of the mission churches, probably in Asia Minor; several details bear witness to such a possibility. First, the explanation of Jewish customs interprets the story of Jesus for a Gentile audience. Second, the translation of Aramaic words into Greek connects the original language of the Lord with later Hellenistic audiences. Third, tensions with Jewish and Roman leaders in the earlier period of the Christian movement find resonance with what is happening in the fifth and sixth decades of the Johannine situation. With the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E., religious authority in Judaism shifted from the cultic religion of Jerusalem to scriptural religion practiced more broadly. As the emphasis upon Jewish biblical faith continued to collide with Jesus adherents claiming his divine agency and status rooted in Deut 18:15–22 and Christian worship (John 1:1–18), local religious authorities understandably sought to retard the Jesus movement. The Birkat Haminim of the Jamnia Council codified some of the threats of expulsion that were already at work in Asia Minor and elsewhere, and the Johannine historical project connected religious hostility in the past with the impending crisis in the present. “Even back then” believers were put out of the synagogue for confessing Jesus openly (9:22; 12:42; 16:2), and this historical marker connects earlier memories with present experience. In that sense, it reflects the emerging process of self-identification, as Johannine Christianity individuates away from its Jewish origins. This was the first crisis within this period. The second crisis within this period involved the hardship received at the hand of the local Roman presence, intensifying the requirement to express loyalty to the empire by requiring public emperor laud. Domitian (81–96 C.E.) even required his Roman subjects to refer him as “Lord and God,” thus providing a backdrop to the confession of Thomas and the presentation of Pilate in John 18–20. Against these likely Jewish and Roman historical backgrounds, the Johannine narration must be read as reflecting a contextual history of delivery rather than an originative history alone. It was probably at the end of this phase in the history of the Johannine situation that the first edition of John was written.
The later period of the Johannine situation brought with it two more crises (85–100 C.E.): the crisis of having to confront docetic tendencies among Gentile Christian teachers advocating a doctrine of assimilation with Rome, and the resultant remedy to Docetism: the emergence of proto-Ignatian hierarchies within the Christian movement. As a result, the emphasis on water and blood flowing from the side of Jesus (John 19:34–35) emphasizes the physicality of his having suffered, and this antidocetic emphasis is the acute occasion for asserting the eyewitness origin of the Johannine tradition. Indeed, nearly all the incarnational and antidocetic material in John can be found in the supplementary material added to the first edition (including 1:1–18; 6; 15–17; 21; and eyewitness and Beloved Disciple passages). Likewise, the juxtaposition of Peter and the Beloved Disciple speaks with relevance to issues surrounding emerging institutionalization in the late first-century church. Here investigations of the “historical Peter” and the “historical Beloved Disciple,” seeking to prove or disprove John’s historicity, miss the point entirely. The seventh set of dialogues was less of a crisis and more of a running dialogue with alternative Synoptic traditions. This being the case, at least some of John’s presentation of Jesus history emerges in dialogue with alternative perspectives. Historiography is itself a rhetorical venture, and the primary historical interest involves unpacking the meaning of these figures’ authority being yoked to the addressing of needs within the historical Johannine situation.

In these and other ways, the Johannine memory is thoroughly engaged in history, but the question is: Which history? All of John relates to history; the question is whether particular material reflects originative history in the ministry of Jesus, the religious history of ideas and typologies attached to Jesus narratives, the history of the Johannine tradition itself, or an echo of the historical Johannine situation evolving from one period to another. The fact that audiences in the history of the Johannine situation were being addressed by the Johannine narration raises serious questions about the degree to which the Jesus of history is being presented here, as opposed to John’s Jesus simply being a projection of the emerging needs of the Johannine historical situation.

Weaknesses. Again, like many of the previous issues, some merit is granted the concern, but the fallacy comes when an overly reductionistic approach to the Johannine tradition displaces other plausible aspects of Johannine historicity. Two points deserve to be made here. First, the Johannine tradition is not the only Gospel tradition crafting the words and deeds of Jesus to address the later needs of the Johannine audience. Mark too, according to Papias, preserved the preaching of Peter, which itself was reportedly crafted to meet the needs of the church. One might infer several “craftings” of Mark’s Jesus tradition to address...
the needs of the early church: the way of the cross and costly discipleship; anticipations of the return of Christ; the messianic secret as an antidote to messianic embellishments; and exhortations to be faithful in following Jesus regardless of apparent outcomes. Likewise, Matthew's tradition crafted a Jesus relevant to the teaching needs of Matthean sectors of Christianity, demonstrating Jesus as the authentically Jewish Messiah, and Luke constructed a portrayal of Jesus presenting him as a just and righteous man as a way of minimizing Roman criticisms or concerns about the Jesus movement. In these ways the Synoptic traditions also applied originative histories of Jesus to emerging histories of their respective situations, so John is not alone in such a venture.

A second point is to emphasize the fallacy of assuming that, because John's narration shows signs of later developments, it cannot have represented anything historical about the events in Jesus' ministry. The inference of a history of tradition development does not demonstrate the absence of originative history. Put otherwise, eventual relevance in itself does not negate historical origination. Indeed, the emerging Johannine narrative certainly evolved into its eventual form, but arguing that its originative history was not rooted in events or reflections upon them is impossible to demonstrate or maintain. This is especially the case when several aspects of John's presentation of Jesus square very closely with the basic historic elements of the Synoptic tradition, despite not having been dependent upon them.

First, Jesus' cleansing of the temple is included in John as well as the other Gospels, and while John's rendering is at the beginning rather than the end of Jesus' ministry, this independent narration arguably goes back to an originative incident. Second, Jesus' teaching on the love of God in John is parallel with, though not dependent on, the presentation of the same theme in the Synoptics. While the Abba-Father language of Mark is probably closer to the language of the historical Jesus than the Johannine Father-Son relationship, the two are nonetheless close and can be said to reflect consonance with each other as windows into the sort of relationship Jesus plausibly described. Third, Jesus' healing on the Sabbath and challenge of religious authority is presented as dearly in John as it is in the Synoptics, despite its many distinctive features. Fourth, the passion narrative in John is very similar to those of the other Gospels, yet John's rendering is also different enough to evince Synoptic derivation. Just because the sequence is the same between the entry, the supper, the garden scene, the arrest, two trials (one Jewish and one Roman), the crucifixion and death of Jesus, and his resurrection and appearances, this does not imply common source dependence. Rearranging the order of any of these elements in the stories does not work. The trial cannot come after the death, nor can the garden scene come after the arrest, nor can the supper come after trials. A more plausible explanation is that the Johannine and Synoptic traditions represent parallel narrations of a common set of events impressed upon the memories of different traditions,
The distinction made by Clement, that while the Synoptics wrote about the bodily aspects of Jesus' ministry, John wrote a "spiritual Gospel," has provided a heuristic key for dehistoricizing the Johannine witness. Based upon this inference, differences between John and the Synoptics have been largely ascribed to Synoptic factuality versus Johannine theologization. With regard to the message of Jesus, the Johannine paraphrase of Jesus' teachings and the spiritualization of how he was received (both positively and negatively) bolster this move. With respect to Jesus' ministry, his signs are clearly discussed symbolically and theologically, and the revelatory function of the signs—including their pointing to the mission of Jesus—becomes their primary interpretive value in John. And, with regard to distinctive aspects of chronology or narration in John, such as the timing of the temple cleansing and the Last Supper, "the theologizing work of the Evangelist" receives attribution as the basis for Johannine peculiarities. Scholars explain that John does not present a historical challenge to the Synoptic tradition; John's presentation reflects theological interests rather than historical ones. The question is the degree to which this thesis holds.

**Strengths.** Indeed, the Fourth Evangelist is the most spiritualizing and theologizing among the four canonical Gospel writers, and since the second century C.E. he has simply been called "the theologian." In John, the theological import of Jesus' teachings—highlighted by the I-Am sayings and the Son's relation to the Father—form the basis for most of the christological debates within the history of Christian theology. As mentioned above, the origin of that work must be credited as including centrally the theologizing work of the Evangelist. Likewise, the presentation of the theological significance of Jesus' miracles is also rooted in the reflective process of the Evangelist's thinking. Even the emphasis upon the existential value of Jesus' signs betrays the theological engagement of the Evangelist's thinking, operating on a stage 5 level of faith (Conjunctive Faith, according to James Fowler's approach), contrasted to less dialectical and more conventional

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33. For further details, see Anderson 1996, 33–36.
On theologizing explanations of John's distinctive chronology, the "paschal theology of the Evangelist" gets credited with the placement of the temple cleansing early and the location of the Last Supper on Thursday, the day the paschal lambs were slain. These moves preserve the three-against-one approach to the Johannine/Synoptic problem, alleviating historical embarrassment from the Johannine distinctives. If John's differences of presentation were rooted in theological interests rather than historical differences, the four canonical Gospels can more easily be harmonized. The theological valuation of John's witness thus displaces apparent historical incongruities, and Clement's dictum finds its destined modernistic application.

**Weaknesses.** While Jesus' teachings and deeds are indeed spiritualized and theologized in John, Clement was not declaring John to be historically inferior. The word translated "facts" (as in, the Synoptics preserved the "facts" in contrast to John) is actually σωματικά, referring to the bodily aspects of Jesus' ministry as contrasted to the spiritual perspective of John. In that sense, it is a mistake to interpret Clement as making a historical judgment about John or the Synoptics. Clement was not a modern positivist. He was simply declaring, nearly a century after the four Gospels' completion, his inference of their tone and approach, not respective degrees of historical reliability. Therefore, to employ Clement's dictum as a license for dehistoricizing the Johannine witness falls flat from a critical standpoint. It was nothing of the sort originally, but it came to be used in the modern era as a means of bolstering a three-against-one marginalization of John before Markan priority was established. In the light of a bi-optic approach to the Johannine/Markan analysis, the spiritualistic discounting of John's distinctive presentation no longer holds.

A second problem emerges when seeking to explain John's chronological differences on the basis that the Evangelist's "paschal theology" caused the moving of the temple cleansing early and the location of the Last Supper on a Thursday rather than on a Friday. The first fact to consider is that the Evangelist cannot really be said to have much of a paschal theology to begin with. Indeed, John the Baptist declares at the beginning, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29, 36), but the Lamb of God theme occurs nowhere else in the rest of the Gospel. The Johannine Apocalypse culminates with Christ as the victorious Lamb, but it is a mistake to connect the Johannine Apocalypse and Gospel too closely together, as though one can be read through the other. John has no explicit paschal theology other than the witness of the Baptist in the first chapter, so this cannot be said to have been a pervasive interest or investment of the Evangelist. It could be argued that the interpretation of Caiaphas's willingness to "sacrifice" Jesus instead of risking a Roman onslaught as an economy of violence

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reflects a Johannine atonement theology (11:45–57), but the thrust of the larger passage is more political than theological. Of the paschal imagery present in John, Jesus is more clearly portrayed as the Good Shepherd, the True Shepherd, who lays down his life for the sheep. The pastoral image of Christ as Shepherd in John is far stronger than the presentation of Jesus as the Lamb, so it thus is not a strong basis upon which to build any sort of a heuristic platform. Further, as the outline of John’s central christological structure above shows, it centers not around atonement theology (that is more properly Pauline) but around revelation. Imputing Pauline or Synoptic atonement theology onto that of the Fourth Evangelist is itself an unfounded move.

A third weakness with this particular approach is that it assumes an absence of otherwise historical factors in the location of the Johannine temple cleansing and Last Supper. Indeed, rhetorical interests are present in the construction of all narratives, historical and otherwise, but to assert that no historical-type awareness or motivation is evident in the Johannine ordering and presentation of these events simply is not true. Regarding the temple cleansing, the following apparently historical associations are present. First, the unit (John 2:12–25) is hemmed by chronotopic markers. The beginning of the passage bears three chronological details; μετὰ τοῦτο (“after this”) is a general reference, not necessarily a chronological one, as is καὶ ἐξεῖ ἐμείναν ὑφ πολλὰς ἡμέρας (“and there [in Capernaum] they remained a just few days,” 2:12). The next statement, however, is more particular: καὶ ἐγγύς ἤν τὸ πάσχα τῶν Ἰουδαίων (“And the Passover of the Jews was near”) locates the event at a particular festival time, although which Passover season is meant may be debated.35 The end of the passage also bears with it chronological references, again mentioning the Passover feast and the σημεία (“signs”) he had been doing (2:23). Whether the Evangelist used these references with particularly chronological meanings in mind, and even if they were wrong, it cannot be said that historical-type details are entirely missing. They are present at least in general ways.

A second fact is that it cannot be claimed that the temple cleansing unit has no references to the narration of events before and after. First, the way to Jerusalem (via Capernaun, 2:12) again draws in the mother of Jesus, who had just been mentioned in 2:1–5. While she is not mentioned as being present in Jerusalem, Jesus’ disciples are. At the beginning of John 3, however, Nicodemus

35. The question of which Passover festival this may have been is relevant here; if indeed the reference were to the same Passover mentioned in John 11:55, a theory of transposition would be required. Such is the view of Barnabas Lindars, for instance. In addition to these references, a third mention of the proximity of the Passover is found in John 6:4, but in none of them is an explicit connection made with the paschal atonement theology. The unwitting prolepsis of Caiaphas in 11:50 is a response to a reference to Roman violence and destruction, and this theme of impending political violence is more closely associated with ἐγγύς τὸ πάσχα in John than an inferred Pauline atonement motif (see Anderson 1996, 172–73).
makes reference to Jesus' "signs," and this statement (in addition to 2:23) appears to include the temple cleansing as a σημεῖον. These references, of course, are not necessarily made with the temple cleansing in mind, but in John 4 Jesus appears to be traveling from the south to the north (thus having to pass through Samaria), and the events in John 5 are inexplicable without Jesus having been to Jerusalem before. Already in John 5:18 the Jerusalem-based leaders are presented as wanting to kill Jesus, and if the only thing he had done in Jerusalem up until that time was the healing of the paralytic, this extremely hostile reaction is hard to explain. The desire to put Jesus to death is again mentioned in John 7, and without an early temple cleansing in the mind of the narrator it is difficult to imagine why these references would have been mentioned during the early ministry of Jesus. Again, the point is not to argue John's chronological veracity; it is to challenge the often-made assertion that the early placement of John's temple cleansing bore no chronological/sequential associations with it.

A third difficulty with the current "consensus" is that several aspects of the Markan locating of the temple incident at the end of Jesus' ministry do not appear to be ordered by "factual" knowledge or information. For one thing, Mark locates all the Jerusalem events at the end of Jesus' ministry, as though he only visited the city once during his entire ministry. John's presentation of several visits to Jerusalem indeed seems more plausible than the Markan singular visit. Mark also locates nearly all the judgment and apocalyptic teachings of Jesus as happening on that eventful visit to Jerusalem, but such could simply be a factor of conjecture or climactic narration, clumping material together at the end, rather than motivated by factual information. Further, Mark mentions only one Passover, the one at which Jesus was killed, implying that Jesus' ministry and opposition were all mounted within a relatively short period of time rather than over a period of several years. This could have been the case, but John's rendering here seems more plausible. Another oddity is that Mark's presentation of the events narrated in the Johannine rendering of the temple cleansing are more fragmented than they are in John. For instance, the mention of the event itself is in Mark 11:15–17 (cf. John 2:14–17), while the challenging of Jesus' authority comes in a return visit in Mark 11:27–33 (cf. John 2:18–22). Still less integrated are two references to Jesus' declaration that he would raise up "this temple" in three days: that made by those who stood before the chief priests and the Jewish council (Mark 14:58); and that made by those who observed him hanging on the cross (Mark 15:30). Interestingly, while both of these statements assert that Jesus had made this declaration, he is only portrayed as having done so in John 2:19. Because the material in John 2:13–25 is more integrated, and the parallel material in Mark is more disintegrated and diffuse, it cannot be said that the best explanation for the differences is Mark's "factuality" at the expense of John's.

A fourth problem with the "scholarly consensus" that Mark's rendering is rooted in objective fact and John's is rooted in spiritualizing fancy is that John's
2:23) appears of course, are John 4 Jesus pass through having been elders are pre-Jerusalem up stile reaction rted in John 7, is difficult to he early min-veracity; it is John's temple al aspects of mistry do not or one thing, ry, as though presentation of farkan singu-teachings of s would simply be tgether at the ments only us' ministry of time rather ut John's ren-presentation of sing are more the event itself us' authority ess integrated his temple" in nd the Jewish n hanging on nts assert that one so in John and the para-it be said that he expense of's rendering is y is that John's presentation correlates impressively with several aspects of historicity. First, the reference to the forty-six years it had taken to reconstruct the temple locates the event around the year 27 C.E., toward the beginning of Jesus' ministry, as Herod had begun the construction of the temple around 19 B.C.E. Further, this particular detail in John 2:20, declared on behalf of the Jewish leaders, is not explicable on the basis of numerology or semeiology; it is mentioned simply as an "innocent" objection to the three-day reconstruction reference. Second, the mention of the disciples' later remembering his word, after the resurrection (2:21-22), appears to require a considerable passing of time rather than just a few days. Again, John's presentation could have been wrong, but it cannot be said that the Synoptic/Johannine differences are simply due to factuality versus spirituality. A third fact is also interesting here: Papias's opinion that Mark preserved Peter's teaching favorably—but in the wrong order—is attributed to "the Elder" (Hist. eccl. 3.39.15). Was this the Johannine Elder, reflecting a second-century opinion that Mark's conjectural ordering of events deserved to be set straight? If so, John's presentation may have been a corrective in the name of a historical opinion in opposition to the Markan rendering. For these reasons at least, the temple-cleansing differences between John and Mark cannot be said to confirm a "factual" Mark in opposition to a "spiritual" John. After all, John too is somatic, as Origen declares (Commentary on John 1.9). But what about the dating of the Last Supper? Is not Mark's presentation of the event as a Passover meal a more likely timing than John's rendering of the event on Thursday night? After all, Mark 14:12-16 records that the Last Supper was being prepared on the day the paschal lambs were killed, the Day of Preparation, making it a more formal Passover meal. Supposedly, John's location of the event on the eve of the Day of Preparation (John 19:14, 31, 42) would have been motivated by the paschal theologizing interests of the Evangelist over and against the superior chronology of Mark. Two major problems accompany this view. First, if the Passover were observed on the Sabbath, it seems highly unlikely that Jesus' crucifixion would have happened on the Sabbath, and if Mark's rendering in chapter 14 is correct, this would have been the case. John's report of the sense of urgency that the bodies needed to be removed from the crosses before the Sabbath seems far more likely. Another problem with the Markan rendering is that Mark presents the appearance narratives as happening on the "first day," the day after the Sabbath (as does John), which would mean that Jesus was only in the tomb overnight (Mark 16:1-2, 9). Given Mark 14 on its own, to allow three days in the tomb, the Johannine rendering is required. Yet Mark 15:42 claims that Jesus was actually crucified on the Day of Preparation, thus contradicting the earlier Markan passage that the meal was on the same day. Like Jesus' words about the three-day raising up of the temple, this is not just a matter of John

against Mark; it also is a matter of Mark against Mark. Then again, if the Passover was held the day before the Sabbath that year, the above could be more easily harmonized. Another fact is that “eating the Passover” would not necessarily have been confined to one day; it could have involved a week-long set of celebrations. The problem for such a move is that John 19:31 declares that the Sabbath was a “high day” that year, implying that the Passover and Sabbath were on the same day.

A second problem with preferring a Passover meal setting over a less formalistic meal in John is that the former too easily can be explained as an adapted meal conforming to evolving Christian cultic practice. John’s assertion that Jesus did not baptize (4:2) and the omission of the words of the institution of the Eucharist in John 13 cannot be explained on the basis of “spiritualization” or the representation of evolving cultic practice. Indeed, John goes against those cultic developments within the broader Christian movement, but the Markan rendering advances them. For these and other reasons, the primary examples used to explain Synoptic/Johannine differences on the basis of factuality versus spiritualization fall far short of a compelling critical argument.

The “theological interests of the Evangelist” is one of the most inexact and carelessly used explanations given among scholars who do not otherwise know what to do with a particular Johannine feature (see Anderson 2006c). Rarely is its use subjected to critical assessment, and seldom are the bases for its use laid out clearly. The dehistoricizing treatment of the above issue is a telling example. First, despite John making no mention of the paschal lambs being killed, this exclusively Markan theme (Mark 14:12) is carelessly imputed into the Fourth Evangelist’s motives despite the relative dearth of paschal theology in John.37 Second, the issue is set up as John versus Mark, when Mark also disagrees with Mark. Third, the more cultic Passover meal and institutionalizing rendering in Mark gets precedence over John’s more innocent presentation, against the criterion of dissimilarity. Fourth, these specious moves are amassed as critical evidence illustrating a prime case of Johannine ahistoricity, functioning to deconstruct other apparently historical Johannine material. If these same sorts of moves were made in favor of John’s historicity or apostolic authorship, critical scholars would certainly raise objections—yet, as challenges to its historicity, it appears they are given a critical pass.

A final fallacy also accompanies this discussion: the assumption that theologization and spiritualization necessarily imply ahistoricity. Indeed, the spiritualization of earlier events calls into question the memory of purported events.

37. The witness of the Baptist, “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29, 36), is more fittingly a reference to Isa 53:7, where it is the suffering and faithfulness of Israel as the Suffering Servant of Yahweh through which the world is redeemed, than a paschal atonement theme.
and evolving narrations may have supplanted earlier renderings, but to say that symbolization, spiritualization, or theologization displaces originative history is terribly flawed as a historiographic procedure. Apply the premise to any subject, and the extent of its fallacious character becomes evident. Does the phenomenon of “war-story embellishment” prove that a war never happened or that there was no connection between originative events and later reflections? Do symbolized expansions upon traumatic experiences prove that they never happened? The embellishment of events does not negate their ontology. Indeed, the case can be made that dialectical processes of thought and reflection betray a first-order level of encounter rather than second-order reasoning (Anderson 2004a). For these and other reasons, equating John’s spiritualization of events in the ministry of Jesus cannot be considered a solid proof of its ahistoricity.

In summary, of the various planks in the platform contributing to the dehistoricization of John, none of the strengths of these positions are decidedly compelling. Problems indeed are inferred, and ones that need to be addressed critically, but John’s aspects of historicity are as disruptive for the purported consensus as obstacles to John’s historicity were to the traditionalist view. Therefore, a blunt appraisal of John’s ahistoricity is devoid of nuance and fails to account for dozens of exceptions to its claims. For this reason the genuinely critical scholar cannot be satisfied with the purported critical consensus.

Planks in Platform B: The De-Johannification of Jesus

Attempting to employ the Gospel of John for Jesus studies is indeed problematic. A Jesus who possesses sole control over his future and who “knows” what is in the hearts of humans is hard to equate with the incarnation. Likewise, it is difficult to know how to square the Logos, who was with God in the beginning and through whom all was created, with the historical Jesus who suffered and died under Pontius Pilate. John’s historicity seems to have been subsumed into John’s Christology, and thus John is thought to provide very little insight into what the historical Jesus may have been like. After John is removed from the database used to reconstruct the “historical” Jesus, criteria are established that function to separate John further from historical Jesus quests. The problem, however, is that this move is circular in its conception and its exercise. This being the case, the planks in the platform of the de-Johannification of Jesus must also be assessed critically to determine whether John’s marginalization from Jesus studies is warranted or not.

2.1. John’s Similarities with the Synoptics—Especially Mark

An obverse problem of John’s differences from the Synoptics is the fact that John is also very similar to them. Many similarities between John and Mark can be
found, and despite the sustained objections of P. Gardner-Smith, Raymond E. Brown, and D. Moody Smith, such scholars as C. K. Barrett, Franz Neirynck, and Thomas Brodie have inferred John's spiritualized use of Mark. The significance of this inference as it relates to Jesus, John, and history is that, if John is a spiritualization of Mark, this would account for a major factor in the origin of John's tradition. On one hand, seeing John as an expansion upon Mark would bolster interests in securing a historical basis for John. On the other hand, dependence upon Mark casts John in a derivative relation to Mark rather than having an original claim to its own tradition. Whatever the case, John's many differences from Mark continue to pose difficulties for a Markan dependence view and is, in fact, one of its major vulnerabilities.

**Strengths.** The hypothesis that John is derivative from Mark has several strengths, although it is by no means embraced by the majority of Johannine scholars. The first strength involves the similar beginnings and endings of Mark and John. Both begin (after the Johannine Prologue) with the beginning of the “Gospel” and the ministry of John the Baptist, and both end with the passion, death, resurrection, and appearances narratives. Second, similarities in the passion accounts are impressive. Both begin with an acclaimed entry to Jerusalem, a Last Supper, prayer and arrest in the garden, two trials (a Jewish and a Roman trial), the crucifixion and death, the resurrection, and, finally, appearance to women. Third, both have an impressive number of general similarities around the feeding of the multitude, the sea crossing, further discussions of the feeding, and the confession of Peter. Fourth, multiple particular similarities (distinctive to Mark and John) exist regarding graphic detail (the mention of two hundred and three hundred δηνάρια; the grass upon which the people sat; “Holy One of God” as a christological title; and the use of Isa 6:9–10 to explain the Galileans’ unbelief). These similarities imply some form of contact between these traditions. Fifth, some aspects of John's witness show signs of being crafted for readers and hearers of Mark. The references to the adverse reception in Nazareth and the timing of the Baptist's imprisonment point to familiarity with the Markan witness, as do the clarification of the first two signs performed in Galilee (John 2:11; 4:54) and the acknowledgement that other signs were performed by Jesus not reported in “this book” (20:30). For these and other reasons, some scholars have inferred a derivative relationship between the Johannine and Markan traditions.

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Weaknesses. The problem with such a view, however, is that despite all these similarities, none of them is identical. Mark has “green” grass; John has “much” grass. While “Holy One of God” is used as a title for Jesus in both Gospels, in Mark it is uttered by the demoniac (Mark 1:24), in John by Peter (John 6:69). In fact, of the forty-five similarities between John 6 and Mark 6 and 8, none of them is identical. Further, the placement of the temple cleansing at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry argues strongly against John’s dependence upon Mark. After an extensive analysis of John’s relation to the Synoptics, in particular Mark, Moody Smith resolutely affirms the same conclusion that Perceival Gardner-Smith came up with in 1938: if the Fourth Evangelist was aware of Mark or the other Synoptics extensively, he disagreed with them at almost every turn. Certainly if there were some contact or familiarity, the relation of John to Mark was nowhere near the much closer connections evidenced between Mark and the other two Gospels. A further problem is that much of the Johannine archaeological and geographical detail is found only in John, so the Markan tradition cannot have been a source of the majority of the Johannine material most likely to be considered historical. For these reasons, Johannine familiarity with Mark cannot be ruled out, but dependence upon Mark can. Therefore, John’s independence from Mark should be regarded as nondependence, or autonomy, rather than isolation.

2.2. JOHN’S COMPOSITION: DIACHRONIC OR SYNCHRONIC?

John’s composition has been a considerable interest of Johannine scholars due to its many perplexities (aporias). First, formal and vocabulary differences exist between the Prologue (1:1–18) and the rest of John’s narrative. The Prologue is poetic and stanza-based in its form (suggesting a worship setting in its origin), whereas the rest of John is prose. A second perplexity is that several odd progressions require attention: chapters 5 and 7 are in Jerusalem, while chapters 4 and 6 are in Galilee; after Jesus says “let us leave” in 14:31, it takes three chapters for them to arrive at the garden (18:1); John 20:31 seems to have been an original first ending, with chapter 21 added at a later time; Mary is mentioned in chapter 11 as the one who anointed the feet of Jesus, but she does not actually do so until chapter 12; Jesus says “none of you asks where I am going” in 16:5, yet Thomas had just asked him about where he was going and how to know the way in 14:5; finally, neither 5:4 nor 7:53–8:11 is found in the earliest Greek manuscripts of John, suggesting at least some later textual additions. These perplexities
raise more than a few questions about John's order and composition, and some scholars have advocated a diachronic history of John's composition. The relevant question here involves the degree to which John's narration represents a coherent presentation of Jesus or whether it represents a fragmented one, composed of alien material and disparate sources possessing varying degrees of historicity.

**Strengths.** The greatest of Johannine diachronic composition schemes is the theory devised by Rudolf Bultmann. He argued for three primary sources from which the Evangelist derived his Gospel material, for the constructive work of the Evangelist that then fell into a disordered state, and for the reconstructive (and reordering) work of the redactor who prepared the Fourth Gospel into the perplexing state in which we find it today.42 This being the case, a σημεῖα source provided the distinctive signs found in John, a gnostic revelation-sayings source availed the Evangelist's distinctive I-Am sayings explaining their origin, and an individuated passion narrative made it possible for John's distinctive material to be gathered without the Evangelist's having been an eyewitness. A redactor then added his own material, rearranging the text that had fallen into disorder and reconciling the Johannine Gospel with Synoptic renderings and ecclesial interests. Bultmann's source-critical inferences were based on stylistic, contextual, and theological bases, and they accounted for several perplexing Johannine features: (1) the rough transitions in John, and even some smooth ones; (2) the origins of John's christological tensions, as these were due to dialogues between sources and Evangelist and redactor; and (3) the inferred historical origins of John's material, which was derivative from other sources and from mythological origins, from which a distinctive narrative was constructed. Thus John's distinctive presentation of Jesus was accounted for, and John's theological-rather-than-historical character was explained. Other diachronic schemes have abounded, but Bultmann's represents the zenith of modern Johannine diachronic reconstruction.

**Weaknesses.** Despite the brilliance of Bultmann's approach, it falls flat when tested on the basis of its own evidence. Regarding the differences between "Hellenised Aramaic" and "Semitising Greek," when all of Bultmann's stylistic evidence is gathered and applied to John 6 as a case study (the very place where four of his five sources should be discernibly present), its distribution is not only nonconvincing, but it is nonindicative. Other than the fact of a narrator's stylistic work being obvious (which does not imply the use of alien material), the rest of the features are evenly distributed throughout John 6.43 Likewise, contextual reasons for inferring a disordering and a reordering of John's text are terribly weak. Bultmann misses the irony of Jesus' knowing response to the crowd's question

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42. See especially the analysis of Bultmann's program (1971) by Moody Smith 1965.

43. See an analysis of the viability of Bultmann's evidence on its own terms in Anderson 1996, 70–136.
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about his arrival in John 6:26 (“When did you get here?” as in “When’s lunch?”) and infers instead a displacement of material. His inference of a disordered John 4; 6; 5; 7 makes better sense if it is seen as the insertion of John 6 into an earlier version of the Gospel.\(^{44}\) Theologically, John’s christological tensions should be viewed not as dialogues between sources and editors but as a function of the dialectical thinking of the Evangelist. In that sense, these tensions are *internal* to the thinking of the Evangelist rather than external. While Bultmann is happy to describe modern theologians as dialectical thinkers, he ironically fails to allow a first-century theologian the same privilege. With relation to the Evangelist’s subject, Jesus, this dialectical level of engagement may reflect proximity to Jesus rather than distance.

As mentioned above, the most plausible and least speculative of Johannine composition theories involves a two-edition theory of composition, inferring that a first edition of John was finalized around 80–85 C.E. and a final edition compiled around 100 C.E. by the redactor after the death of the Beloved Disciple (implied in John 21:18–24). Material added to the final edition would have included the Prologue, chapters 6, 15–17, and 21, and Beloved Disciple and eyewitness passages. With Bultmann here, the editor appears to have added several sections that are quite similar to 1 John, so it is plausible to identify the author of the Johannine Epistles as the final compiler of the Johannine Gospel. This would explain the third-person references to the purported author and appeals to authority otherwise (1 John 1:1–3, etc.). If something like this two-edition process took place, the Johannine Gospel was written *before and after* the Epistles (which were probably written between 85 and 95 C.E.). What can be inferred in the first-edition material, then, is the concern to present Jesus apologetically as the Jewish Messiah in response to engagement with the local synagogue presence, while the supplementary material shows signs of antidocetic emphases on the suffering and humanity of Jesus, the incarnated Word.

### 2.3. The Lateness of John and Historical Validity

A central plank in the platform arguing for the de-Johannification of Jesus results from the belief that John was finalized last among the canonical Gospels. Indeed, both the traditional view and the consensus of most Johannine scholars agree that John was finalized last among the four Gospels, and plausible estimations locate John’s finalization around 100 C.E. While several scholars in recent years have

\(^{44}\) This is the view of Barnabas Lindars 1972, 46–54; independently of one another, John Ashton and I came to the same favorable impressions of its prime viability (see Ashton 1991, 124–204), although he embraces a final editor along the lines of Brown, as do I. See appendix 1 below.
argued for the chronological priority of John.\textsuperscript{45} It is fair to say that most Johannine scholars go with the later date. Because of John's chronological "posteriority," the case is made that earlier sources, such as Mark and hypothetical Q, provide a closer measure of what the historical Jesus may have been like.

**Strengths.** Indeed, the earlier the traditional material, the greater the confidence that may be placed in its historicity. Further, given the high degree of plausibility that Mark was the first Gospel to be finalized, and given the likelihood that an early sayings tradition was drawn upon by Matthew and Luke (Q, or whatever it may have been), a portrait of the historical Jesus based upon Mark and Q should be accorded primacy over the more spiritualized and hellenized John. The fact that Luke and Matthew were also probably finalized before John likewise gives the Synoptic presentations of Jesus precedence over the Johannine. The Johannine Prologue betrays a cultic appraisal of Jesus rooted in the faith and worship of community experience. A Logos Christology, for instance, combined with a presentation of Jesus who has sole control over what happens to him, clearly betrays a more distanced and confessional reflection, which challenges assertions of John's historicity. Likewise, the postresurrection faith of Johannine Christians shows signs of superimposing the Christ of faith over the Jesus of history more than in any of the other canonical Gospels.\textsuperscript{46} John's apparent addressing of docetizing tendencies within its audience also raises questions about Gnosticism and John—certainly reflecting later developments in Christianity. For these and other reasons, John's lateness accords it a secondary place among the Gospels with reference to historicity.

**Weaknesses.** John's relative lateness among the canonical Gospels, however, does not mean that John is late and only late. Indeed, John also appears to contain a great deal of primitive tradition and material. (1) John operates in ways parallel to Mark in rendering Jewish terms in Greek, including such Aramaic words as \textit{rabbi/rabbouni} (John 1:38; 20:16), \textit{Messias} (1:41; 4:25), \textit{Bethzatha} (5:2), \textit{Siloam} (9:7), \textit{Gabbatha} (19:13), and \textit{Golgotha} (19:17). These terms appear to have served

\textsuperscript{45} Three leading studies arguing John's primitivity include John A.T. Robinson 1985; Klaus Berger 1997; and Peter Hofrichter 1997. Their primary weakness is common: primitivity of tradition need not imply earliness of finalization. Despite the earliness of much of John's material (see Erwin R. Goodenough 1945), it still seems to have later and more developed material in it as well.

\textsuperscript{46} While Maurice Casey (1991; 1996) argues for the "profoundly untrue" character of John, he never clearly defines the meaning of "true." He then commits two simplistic and disjunctive errors. First, he forces a dichotomy between seemingly all of John and the Synoptics, requiring a choice to be made between them. Second, he insists upon a division between theology and historicity, denying the latter by affirming the former. Even his correct detection of theological content, however, is hindered by inadequate inferences of its meaning, equating the presentation of the \textit{Ioudaioi} in John with anti-Semitism, moving from thence to racism and thus to pervasive historical error.
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at the latest within the Palestinian period of John’s tradition, and their “transla-
tion” seems to bridge primitive tradition with later Hellenistic audiences.

(2) John explains Jewish customs to a Gentile audience. Such passages as John
2:6, 13; 4:9; 5:1; 6:4; 7:2; 11:55; 19:31, 40, 42 connect Palestinian Jewish worship
practices and social customs with later non-Jewish audiences. If John is late and
only late, the presence of this material is hard to explain.

(3) John includes some of the most explicit archaeological and topographical
references among all the Gospels. Particular places locating events are men-
tioned explicitly, including the places where John baptized (Bethabara beyond
the Jordan, 1:28; Aenon near Salim, 3:23; beyond the Jordan, 3:26; 10:40) and
Jesus performed his ministries (other than Jerusalem, Galilee, 1:43; 4:3; 6:1; 7:1, 9;
Can of Galilee, 2:1–11; 4:46–54; Capernaum, 2:12; 4:46; 6:17, 24, 59; Judea, 4:3,
47, 54; 7:1, 3; 11:7; Samaria, 4:4, 5, 7, 9; the Sea of Tiberias, 6:1, 23; 21:1; Bethany,
11:1, 18; and a village near Ephraim to which Jesus withdrew, 11:54).

(4) Places where people were from include the following: Philip, Andrew, and
Peter were from the town of Bethsaida (John 1:44; 12:20–21); Jesus, from Naz-
areth, saw Nathanael, an authentic Israelite, under a fig tree (1:45–48); Judas son of
Simon was from Kerioth in Judea (distinctively the only disciple of Jesus from the
south; cf. Jer 48:24; Amos 2:2; John 6:71; 12:4; 13:2; another Judas was not, John
14:22); Jerusalem leaders declare, “How can the Christ come from Galilee?” (the
Christ was to come from Bethlehem, David’s village, John 7:41–52); Bethany was
the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (11:1, 18–20; 12:1); the one the soldiers
sought was “Jesus of Nazareth” (18:7); Mary of Magdala and other women were
present at the cross, and Mary was present after the resurrection (19:25–26; 20:1;
18); Joseph of Arimathea requested the body of Jesus (19:38); and Nathanael was
from Cana of Galilee (21:2).

(5) Explicit distances reported include the disciples setting off across the lake
for Capernaum and rowing 25 or 30 stadia (furlongs, three or four miles; John
6:17–19); Jesus’ return with his disciples to Bethany, 15 stadia from Jerusalem
(11:18); and the boat was about 200 προὺς (cubits, a hundred yards) from the
shore, where Jesus had built a fire (21:8–9). Likewise, spatial uses of ἀνάβαινω
(“ascend, go up”) are used topographically in John (with reference to Jerusalem,
2:13; 5:1; 7:8, 10; 11:55; 12:20; to the temple, 7:14; out of the water, 21:11); as are
uses of κατάβαινω (“descend, go down” to Capernaum, 2:12; 4:47, 49; into the

47. It is more likely to infer that “Bethany” was added later than to infer that Bethabara
or Betharabu replaced the more common place name. The speculation that, because Bethany
was not across the Jordan and that the Evangelist has thus made an inexcusable geographical
mistake, is itself based upon a flawed assumption (see Parker 1955). Leading archaeological
investigations in Jordan are currently excavating a site east of the Jordan River (not far from
Jericho), which have found both the remains of a village and a former tributary to the Jordan
that had once formed pools of water—confirming the Johannine account.
water, 5:7; into the boat, 6:16). Spatial and topographic references appear to be used with intentionality in John.

(6) The narrator appears to know particular topographical details, including John baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water there (John 3:23). Jesus departed across the Sea of Galilee, that is, of Tiberias (6:1; 21:1). Jesus visited Jacob's well in Sychar of Samaria, having to go through Samaria between Jerusalem and Galilee (4:5); neither the mountain of Samaria (Gerizim) nor Jerusalem is the credited place of worship (4:19–24); Jesus fled again to the mountain alone (6:15) and was later found on the other side of the lake (6:25); the Bread of Life discourse was delivered at the Synagogue of Capernaum (6:59); Lazarus's tomb was a cave with stone lying in front of it (11:38); Jesus withdrew to the wilderness area near the village of Ephraim and remained there with his disciples (11:54); the crowd who had come for the (Passover) feast met Jesus on his way to Jerusalem (12:12).

(7) Particular Jerusalem details are mentioned: Jesus went up to the temple courts for the Passover (John 2:13); he went up to Jerusalem for a Jewish feast to a pool named ἄνω θάλαττα near the Sheep Gate, which is surrounded by five porticoes, or covered colonnades (5:1–2); halfway through the Feast of Tabernacles Jesus went up to the temple courts to teach (7:14), speaking in the treasury area of the temple (8:20) and leaving the temple area (8:59); the blind man was told to wash in the Pool of Siloam (9:7); at the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, Jesus walked in the temple area in Solomon's Colonnade (10:22–23); Jesus and his disciples crossed the Brook of Kidron and entered the garden there (18:1); the other disciple (but not Peter) was allowed to enter the courtyard of the high priest because he was known to the high priest (18:15); Jesus declared he had spoken openly in the synagogues (6:59) and the temple (7:14, 28), where all the Judeans gathered (18:20); Jesus was led from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, where Pilate met with them outside (18:28–29); having gone inside and outside several times, Pilate came out and sat on a juridical seat, in Aramaic called Γαββάθα (the ridge of the house), on a place called the “Stone Pavement” (Greek Λιθόστρωτον, 19:13); Jesus carried his cross to the Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew was called Golgotha (19:17); the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city (19:20); near the place where Jesus was crucified was a garden and a new tomb in which no one had been buried (19:41); Mary the Magdalene saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb and later announced the resurrection to the disciples (20:1, 18).

(8) While time is developed kairotically in John (momentous time versus chronological time; the “hour” of Jesus has or has not come, 2:4; 4:21, 23; 5:25, 28; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 16:21, 25, 32; 17:1; the “hour” will have come for the disciples, 11:9; 16:2, 4; things change “from that time on” for Jesus' mother and the Beloved Disciple, 19:27), ὥρα is also used in explicit, chronological terms. Jesus called his disciples at the tenth hour, which is the end of the day and finding somewhere to stay for the night is an issue (1:39). Jesus approached
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the woman at the well at the sixth hour, obviating a noon-time event (4:6). The
seventh hour was the time of Jesus' healing word from afar, and it was indeed
the same time as the recovery of the royal official's son (4:52–53). The sixth hour
also comes in with reference to the timing of the crucifixion, locating the event
in the middle of the day (19:14). Likewise, “day” is used seasonally (8:56; 9:4;
11:9, 53; 12:7; 19:31) and eschatologically (the last day, 6:39, 40, 44, 54; 11:24;
12:48) in John, but it also is used with apparent chronological intention. In
general terms, a few days’ passing is mentioned (2:12), and some events follow
others on the same day (5:9; 20:19), but the explicit numeration of days is also
employed: a marriage was held on the third day (2:1); after three days Jesus (this
temple) will be raised up (2:19–20); Jesus stayed in Samaria two days (4:40, 43)
and waited two days before traveling to Bethany (11:6); Lazarus had been dead
days (11:17); the anointing of Jesus was six days before the Passover (12:1); and
after eight days Jesus again appeared to his disciples (20:26). The partic-
ular year of Caiaphas's service as high priest is mentioned (11:49, 51; 18:13),
duration of time is measured in years (the forty-six years taken to rebuild the
temple, 2:20; the paralytic had been ill for thirty-eight years, 5:5; Jesus is not yet
fifty years of age, 8:57), and winter is mentioned as the time of year for the Feast
of Dedication (10:22). Also, the early part of the day is mentioned (18:28; 20:1;
21:4), as is the evening (6:16; 20:19).

(9) Graphic and sensory-types of detail also appear in the Johannine narra-
tion. Indeed, scholars point out the plausibly symbolic function of much of this
material, but the fact that it is presented as empirically inferred detail is striking
nonetheless. Sensorily derived material is a fact in John: John confesses openly
that he is not the Christ (John 1:20) and reports what he has seen (1:32–34);
Nathanael was under the fig tree (1:48); six stone purification jars are described
as holding two or three µuprrrou (2:6); Jesus made a whip out of chords (2:15);
Nicodemus came to Jesus “by night” (3:2); the well on the plot of ground Jacob
given to his sons appears familiar (4:5–6); 200 δηνάριου would not buy
enough food for the multitude (6:7); “much grass” describes the feeding setting
with the men numbering five thousand (6:10); the loaves were barley (6:9–13),
and the sort of fish served and eaten was ὄψιον (a prepared fish, 6:9, 11; 21:9,
13); people picked up stones to kill Jesus (8:59); spittle and mud were applied
to the blind man's eyes (9:6–15); a bad odor accompanied Lazarus (11:39);
Lazarus was wrapped in strips of linen around his hands and feet and a cloth over
face (11:44); the house was filled with the fragrance of the pure nard oint-
ment (12:3); the perfume itself was worth 300 δηνάριου (12:5); the crowd waved
palm branches (12:13); Jesus changed into the clothes of a servant (13:4–5);
Judas departed at night (13:30); lanterns and torches were in the garden (18:3);
right ear of the servant (whose name is Malchus) was severed by a disciple
(Peter, 18:10); it was cold outside the courtyard of the high priest, and servants
and attendants stood around a fire (18:18); the cock crowed after Peter's third
denial (18:27); the soldiers placed a crown of thorns on Jesus' head and a purple
robe around him (19:2, 5); Pilate's inscription was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek (19:20); four divisions of Jesus' clothes were made and divided up among the soldiers (19:23); Jesus' tunic was seamless, woven from top to bottom, which is why lots had to be cast for it (19:23–24); a sponge on a hyssop stick was dipped in a jar of vinegar and offered to Jesus, and he partook of it (19:29–30); water and blood came out from Jesus' side (attested by "the eyewitness," 19:34–35); the type and weight of the spices are noted (about 100 λίτρας of a mixture of myrrh and aloes, 19:39); it was still dark when Mary came to the tomb on the first day of the week and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb (20:1); when the other disciple and Peter arrived and looked into the tomb, they saw linen strips lying there with the head cloth folded and placed separately from the rest (20:5–7); the disciples had gathered behind closed doors (20:19, 26); Thomas saw and touched Jesus' flesh wounds (20:25–27); nets are thrown from the right side of the boat (21:6); Peter put on his coat (because he was naked) before jumping in the water (21:7); the charcoal fire had fish and bread on it (21:9); and the nets did not break despite holding 153 fish (21:11).

(10) John mentions the names of persons in ways that imply familiarity. Andrew (John 1:40, 44; 6:8; 12:22) is identified as Peter's brother; Thomas (11:16; 14:5; 20:24, 26, 27, 28, 29; 21:2) is referred to by the nickname Didymos (11:16; 20:24; 21:2); the sons of Zebedee are mentioned only once (21:2); Cephas is the Aramaic name given to Simon Peter (1:42), and Peter (1:40, 44; 6:8, 68; 13:6, 9, 24, 36, 37; 18:10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 25, 26, 27; 20:2, 3, 4, 6; 21:2, 3, 7, 11, 15, 17, 20, 21) is described as the son of Jonas (1:42; 21:15, 16, 17); Judas is described in consistently treacherous terms (6:71; 12:4; 13:2, 26, 29; 18:2, 3, 5), although another Judas (not Iscariot, 6:71; 12:4; 13:2, 26; 14:22) is also mentioned (14:22); Nathanael is referred to as an Israelite in whom there is nothing false (1:45, 46, 47, 48, 49; 21:2); Philip is mentioned more prominently in John than in all the other Gospels combined (1:43, 44, 45, 46, 48; 6:5, 7; 12:21, 22; 14:8, 9); two unnamed disciples are mentioned (1:35, 37; 21:2), one or more unnamed (the other, another) disciples are mentioned (18:15, 16; 20:3, 4, 8); and the enigmatic Beloved Disciple is given a special place of honor in the Johannine narrative (13:23; 19:26, 27; 20:2; 21:24). By these references relationships are heightened, and personal knowledge is conveyed in ways that sometimes further the narrative and sometimes do not.

In addition to Jesus' disciples who accompanied him in his ministry, Annas (John 18:13, 24) is mentioned as the father-in-law to Caiaphas the high priest (11:49; 18:13, 14, 24, 28); Joseph of Arimathea (19:38) is presented as the generous benefactor of the tomb; Barabbas is described as a robber (18:40); Joseph is referred to as the acknowledged father of Jesus (1:45; 6:42); Jesus' mother is mentioned, but not by name (2:3; 19:25); Lazarus is identified as a close friend whom Jesus loved (11:1, 2, 5, 11, 14, 43; 12:1, 2, 9, 10, 17), as are his sisters Mary (11:1, 2, 19, 20, 28, 31, 32, 45; 12:3) and Martha (11:1, 2, 19, 20, 21, 24, 30, 39; 12:2); Mary of Magdala encounters the risen Lord (19:25; 20:1, 18) and
ew, Latin, and led up among ottom, which was dipped 30; water and -35; the type of myrrhs and the first day of (20:1); when they saw linen from the rest; Thomas saw the right side and the nets did not jump in a familiar way.

ly familiarity. Thomas (11:16; dymos (11:16; Cephas is the 8, 68; 13:6, 9, 7, 11, 15, 17, s is described 5), although ioned (14:22); is false (1:45, is than in all 14:8, 9); two unnamed (the the enigmatic sine narrative e heightened, r the narrative inistry, Annas the high priest l as the gener-

8:40); Joseph sus' mother is a close friend are his sisters 19, 20, 21, 24, 20:1, 18) and brings her witness to the others; Malchus is given as the name of the servant whose ear was severed (18:10); Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night (3:1, 4, 9; 7:50; 19:39); the woman of Samaria becomes an effective evangelist to her people (4:7, 9, 11, 15, 17, 19, 21, 25, 27, 28, 39, 42); and Pilate is described dramatically as the impotent potentate at the trial scene (18:29, 31, 33, 35, 37, 38; 19:1, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13, 15, 19, 21, 22, 31, 38). In these ways other actants are brought into the narrative, adding color and tension to its fabric. Some of this material is even accorded red or pink status by the Jesus Seminar in acknowledgement of its likely historicity.48

Obviously, it is possible that all these details were simply fabricated in mimetic form as art imitates reality, and some scholars argue such.49 Indeed, many of the details may be included for rhetorical reasons or as a means of heightening the lucidity of a passage, as other contemporary literature may have done. It must be acknowledged, however, that the closest parallels to John—the Synoptic Gospels—show the reverse of the so-called mimetic proliferation of detail. Mark and John have far more nonsymbolic illustrative detail than Matthew and Luke, and where Matthew and Luke take over a Markan passage, they tend to eliminate names and places and to leave out details in summary form. If John operated similar to its close literary parallels, the Synoptics, the abundance of detail is more likely attributable to the oral stages of the tradition, as was probably the case for Mark. In fact, the best explanation of the detail common only to John and Mark is that buzz words and images were shared between the oral stages of the two traditions, perhaps in interfluentual ways. Because influence in one direction to the exclusion of the other is impossible to establish between two autonomous traditions, interference is the best way to describe these relationships. The relative absence of this sort of detail from Luke and Matthew suggests what is left out when engaging a written form of Mark's tradition: the superfluous detail. Luke's access to the Johannine material also appears to have collected several Johannine details during its oral renderings, notably the right ear being

48. The detail about Annas being the father-in-law of that year's high priest, Caiaphas (John 18:13), is one of the only Johannine passages listed in red, and the taking of Jesus from the place of Caiaphas to the governor's residence (18:28) is listed in pink (having plausible likelihood—a three on a scale of one to four) in the voting of the Jesus Seminar (Funk and the Jesus Seminar 1998, 429, 431).

49. Erich Auerbach (1953) argues that mimetic imitation is used broadly in making a narrative more readable and believable. Richard L. Sturch (1980) applies such an inference to John, seeking to overturn the works of Westcott and Dodd in their connecting of apparent eyewitness detail with the eyewitness claims of the redactor by identifying their mimetic associations. While some details "resist elimination," he claims to show that alternative explanations mean that demonstrating the "Evangelist was an eyewitness of nearly all that he reported ... cannot in fact be achieved" (324). Again, the fallacy presents itself operationally: because all of John is not historical, none of John is historical. This overstates the case in the observe direction.
cut off and *Satan entering Judas*. Of course, none of the above details may have originated in events, but these and other inclusions of apparently primitive material give one pause before asserting that John was late and only late. The obvious fallacy here is the assumption that John's finalized lateness discounts all of John's apparent earliness. Something between these two poles is far more plausible critically.

### 2.4. **Criteria for Determining Historicity**

The task of determining historicity in investigating the historical Jesus has led to several criteria for making these judgments. The criterion of dissimilarity distinguishes later predictable portrayals from more primitive ones. The criterion of multiple attestation singles out units that appear more than once to describe an event or saying in the ministry of Jesus. The criterion of coherence distinguishes a presentation that seems to cohere with what Jesus is thought to have been like over and against other portrayals. The criterion of naturalism distinguishes the mundane from the more fantastic renderings, crediting the former with greater plausibility. Other criteria are used, but these four continue to be applied across Gospel studies, and their use has laid the foundation for the majority of modernist Jesus studies.50

**Strengths.** Indeed, later developments reflect the emerging history of Jesus traditions rather than offer a window into the historical Jesus. Examples from Synoptic studies include the identification of ecclesial interests emerging in the Matthean tradition over and against less developed Mark and Luke's presentation of Jesus as a just man. Indeed, John's adaptation of Jesus to fit the tastes of Hellenistic audiences and the needs of late-first-century believers probably reflects more closely the emergent history of the Johannine situation than the originative history of the material, so this criterion is of some benefit in combining Jesus and Johannine studies. The second criterion also works well in that it produces a set of test cases for conducting comparative Gospel analysis. The passages most conducive to inter-Gospel analysis include the ministry of John the Baptist, the temple cleansing, events surrounding John 6 (the feeding, sea crossing, the discussion of the feeding, and the confession of Peter), the anointing of Jesus, the passion narratives, and the appearance narratives. This being the case, however, over half of John is not only distinctive but unique among the Gospels, which

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50. In addition to these criteria, embarrassment is included by John P. Meier (1991. 167–95), as are secondary criteria, including traces of Aramaic, Palestinian environment, vividness of narration, tendencies of the developing Synoptic tradition, and historical presumption. Stanley E. Porter (2000) highlights Gerd Theissen's "plausibility" as a criterion and puts forward Aramaic and Greek as languages of Jesus, Greek language in its context, Greek textual variance, and discourse features.
tails may have only primitive ones, the less discounts is far more

Jesus has led to a similarity distinguishing the Christ of faith from the Jesus of history, producing a largely negative set of results.

Weaknesses. Problems with each of these methods abound, and they especially are problematic when taken together. The criterion of dissimilarity, if pushed hard, for instance, assumes that Jesus did nothing that his followers assimilated into their values and practices. It also infers that Jesus did nothing conventional or that, if he did, it cannot count as part of the data base distinguishing him from other prophets and rabbis in his day. While this method may indeed clarify what aspects of historicity are least likely to have been invented by later Christians, making a portrait out of the “odd” memories is sure to produce a distorted presentation. So, even if the criterion of dissimilarity does produce clarity on some matters of historical plausibility, its very emphasis upon distinctiveness produces a skewed image.

The second criterion, multiple attestation, also is helpful for investigating the Jesus of history, especially when the presentations are not identical. Where they are identical, source dependence and redaction may be inferred, which diminishes the likelihood of more than one attestation being present. It may reflect a derivative relationship between Gospel traditions. The Gospel of John, despite its distinctiveness, overlaps with other Gospels in significant ways, and it may therefore be assumed that Jesus probably did connect with the Baptist, create a temple disturbance, preside at some sort of feeding and sea rescue, receive an anointing, undergo the passion events, and was experienced in some way by his followers after his death. Indeed, these connections between John and the Synoptics provide the best test cases for analysis and thus have been the classic passages receiving analytical attention. What cannot be said, however, is that a singular or minority report is necessarily less credible. It may also be the case that particular details and distinctive presentations reflect an authentic historical memory, so this criterion can be used only to affirm, not to discount, a report’s historicity. For instance, if John was familiar with Mark, perhaps with the Evangelist having

51. Again, Borg’s point is worth keeping in mind (2002); holding open the possibility that “at least” this much is historically true is very different from asserting that “only” this much is true.
heard a public reading of the material, or at least parts of it, distinctive material in John may have been included intentionally because such was not present in Mark. Again, this criterion may be used to affirm, but it cannot be used to deny, a passage's historicity.

The third criterion, coherence, is important for distinguishing the sort of Jesus we believe ministered in Palestine from more fanciful renderings in early Christianity. A lucid example of a noncohering Jesus is the presentation of boy-Jesus in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, who makes pigeons out of clay that fly away after he claps his hands, who kills his friends with a curse when they anger him (only to bring them back to life again to make a happy ending), and who is instructed by Zacchaeus (a perfect child-size teacher) despite having written the languages himself. Despite some parallels with Luke's childhood narratives, this book falls far short of anything historical, largely because its rendering of Jesus does not cohere with more solid and reliable impressions. The vulnerability of this criterion, however, lies with its circularity. The impression of Jesus to which other presentations do or do not conform is itself based upon those same sources when applied to canonical Gospel analysis. This being the case, it is no wonder that John loses when the picture of the "historical" Jesus is determined on the basis of information in the Synoptics—excluding John—and then this grid is plied over the Fourth Gospel to determine its authenticity. What if the reverse were performed? What if a picture of the historical Jesus were determined upon the basis of John—the one purportedly eyewitness account—and material in the Synoptics were sifted through a Johannine grid and voted upon by scholars applying their criteria for determining historicity? The results would be entirely different from those starting with the Synoptics only. Perhaps the problem lies with excluding any primitive tradition when forming one's impression of a coherence standard—including John. When tradition-critical inclusion/exclusion methodologies build upon the Synoptics and second-century gnostic texts to the exclusion of John and then are used to find John wanting, this circular operation cannot but be regarded as dubious and critically flawed.

Nonetheless, in addition to the many aphoristic Jesus sayings in John mentioned above, many of the other "coherent impressions of Jesus" rooted in Mark can also be found in John, although in slightly different forms. The "messianic secret" in Mark, however, should not be regarded as Jesus' diminishing of his messianic mission; it is more precisely a reference to Jesus eschewing popularistic and sensationalistic appraisals of his ministry. Likewise, John presents Jesus as rejecting these features in his flight from the crowd's design to rush him off for a messianic coronation (John 6:14–15), his rebuke of those requesting mes-

52. This was Albert Schweitzer's review of Wrede's work: "Because Wrede does not deal with the teaching of Jesus, he has no occasion to take account of the secret of the kingdom of God" (Schweitzer 2001, 312).
sianic signs (2:18–19; 4:48; 6:26, 28–30; 20:29), and his refusal to disclose himself openly because of a reluctance to embellish human testimony (2:23–25). In these ways the Johannine Jesus also eschews popularistic and sensationalistic notoriety parallel to the messianic secret of Mark. Likewise, in his declaration that Jesus’ “hour” was not yet come (2:4) but later in declaring the actualization of the ωνα of Jesus (12:23; 13:1; 17:1), the Johannine narrator works in a way parallel to the culmination of the messianic secret in Mark: tell no one until after the resurrection (Mark 9:9), when the meaning of his mission would be apparent. Therefore, the messianic secret has interesting parallels in Mark and John, and the mistake is to delimit a Markan trait to a narrow category. A second Markan motif is found pervasively in John: a theology of the cross.53 Indeed, the Johannine Jesus also invites his followers to join him in his suffering and death, and in Jesus’ Johannine aphorisms (John 12:24–26), in his final discourses (15:15–16:33), and in his culminating section in the Bread of Life discourse (6:51–70) Jesus calls his followers to embrace the way of the cross. To ingest the flesh and blood of Jesus is to partner with him martYROlogically, as the bread he offers is his flesh, given for the life of the world on the cross.54 The point here is that, if the distinctively Johannine rendering is accounted for, John is not as far away from the coherent view of Jesus as typified in Mark, and John may even contribute in its distinctive sort of way to the multiple attestation of Jesus’ teachings about the messianic secret and the way of the cross. It cannot be said that these emphases are totally absent from John.

The fourth criterion, naturalism, is of course one of the primary bases for questioning John’s historicity to begin with. John’s supernatural presentation of Jesus bears with it considerable problems for historicity. The Johannine Prologue presents Jesus in preexistent terms, but it obviously also does not qualify as part of the Johannine narrative. Jesus is presented as “knowing” people, including what is in their hearts (John 1:48; 2:24–25; 4:3, 16–19; 5:6, 42; 6:15, 64) and is able to escape attempts to arrest and kill him (7:30; 8:59; 10:39). He also declares things in advance in order that their fulfillment might attest to his being sent from God (13:18–19; 16:2–4; 18:8–9, 31–32), and his disciples experience his predictions’ coming true (2:19–22; 3:14; 4:50–3; 6:51, 64–65; 7:33–34, 38–39; 8:21, 28; 10:11, 15–8; 11:4, 23; 12:24, 32–33; 13:33, 38; 14:2–3, 18–20, 23; 15:13; 16:16, 20, 28, 32; 18:9, 32), especially regarding his glorification. Jesus’ signs, of course,

53. See James T. Forestell 1974 for a fuller development of this theme.
54. See an intensive treatment of John 6 in Anderson 1996, 48–250. Parallel to the “sacramental” imagery of Jesus’ reference to the drinking of his cup and sharing in his baptism in Mark 10:35–45, John 6:51–38 likewise calls the hearer/reader to the martyrological willingness to suffer and die with Jesus if demanded by life to do so, and this is why the disciples were scandalized and why some abandoned him. They did not misunderstand Jesus; they understood full well his hard saying as a reference to the cost of discipleship and the way of the cross (1996, 110–36, 207–20).
are extremely problematic for a naturalistic modernist, although recent histori­cal-Jesus questers are willing to allow at least some healing and exorcist work to have been done by Jesus, in keeping with contemporary figures. Certainly the signs of Jesus were used apologetically to convince members of the Johannine audience that Jesus was indeed the Jewish Messiah, and the embellishment of such narratives is likely. The problem with ascribing all of John to the canons of ahistoricity because of its wondrous elements is that John also has a great deal of incarnational and fleshly Jesus material in it. 55 Out of his side flow physical blood and water (19:34); Thomas is allowed to touch with his finger the flesh wounds of Jesus (20:27); and his disciples must ingest his flesh-and-bloodness (6:51–58), if they hope to participate in the life he avails. Jesus also weeps (11:35); his heart is deeply troubled (11:33; 12:27; 13:21); he groans (11:33, 38); he thirsts on the cross (19:28); and he loves his own (11:3, 5, 36; 13:1, 23, 34; 14:21; 15:9, 10, 12; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20) with pathos, enough to be called the “pathetic” Jesus. 56

Indeed, John's elevated presentation of Jesus has been one of the most provocative aspects of Christian material, leading the church into centuries of debate over metaphysical aspects of Christology, but every bit as present is John's presentation of the incarnational Jesus. 57 Just as the church fathers and mothers had to keep these polar aspects of the Johannine dialectic in tension, so must modern critical scholars, if they are to remain honest to John. Holding John's elevated material at bay is understandable for the modern critic, but if the elevated christological elements in John are considered apart from the humiliated elements and the entire historicity of the Fourth Gospel is rejected on the basis of such a distortion, such moves commit the fallacy of a sweeping generalization and are less than worthy as “critical” scholarship. It could also be that the apparently miraculous in John does not always require a supernatural categorization, but to neglect the entirety of John's incarnational thrust is to push John beyond itself. Such is flawed as an exegetical and as a historiographic move.

Part of the problem in applying the above methods to determining degrees of historicity within John is that the standards over and against which John is measured do not include Johannine content to begin with in setting the template. John is especially excluded from setting dissimilarity and coherence standards, so it is little wonder that they produce a dearth of historical material when these grids are plied back over the Johannine text. Where the great promise of critical scholarship has been its objective neutrality, the historical treatment of John

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56. For further detail, see Anderson 2000a.
57. John's christological tensions are the most interesting feature of Johannine theology, and they possess basically four epistemological origins: the agency Christology rooted in Deut 18; the dialectical thinking of the Evangelist; the evolving needs of the Johannine situation; and the Evangelist's use of rhetorical devices as a means of engaging the reader in an imaginary dialogue with Jesus. See Anderson 1996, 252–65; 1997.
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combines across as less than that. When John’s material is deemed different from the
Synoptics, it is excluded; where it is similar, it is relegated to a derivative relation-
ship to a non-Johannine source (either Mark or a hypothetical source that looked
Mark); elevated christological themes are credited to mythological origins,
and mundane references are attributed to mimetic imitations of reality. Therefore,
only the results of the scholarly “consensus” regarding John’s irrelevance to
Jesus quest deserve fresh critical analysis, but so do the procedures by which
these “results” have been established.

If specific criteria for performing analyses of John’s historicity were to be
devised, in addition to the above, they might include the following. (1) Examine
passages most similar between John and the Synoptics in order to get a full
sense of particular similarities and differences. These passages would include the
treatment of John the Baptist, the temple cleansing, events surrounding John
(feeding, sea crossing, discussion of the feeding, and Peter’s confession), the
anointing of Jesus, the passion narratives, and the appearance narratives, among
others. (2) Consider the material omitted and used by Matthew and Luke (in their
redactions of Mark) and see if that sort of analysis suggests anything about John.
Upon analysis, two primary kinds of material in Mark tend to be omitted: non-
symbolic illustrative detail, and theological asides. As the presence of these sorts
of material is more prolific in Mark and John, this may lend insight into the oral
rather than written character of the Markan and Johannine traditions. (3) Make
allowance for the Johannine paraphrasing of earlier tradition and integrate such
material with potential parallels emerging from Synoptic studies. Conceptual
parallels should be considered and explored, in addition to extended identical
verbal ones. (4) Allow knowledge of John’s development to influence one’s under-
standing of Synoptic developments. Perhaps Mark’s compilation was not ordered
entirely by chronological information, since of it appears to have involved clump-
ing all the Jerusalem events and most of the judgment sayings at the end. Perhaps
Luke and Q used the oral Johannine tradition as one of their sources. Perhaps
the Matthean and Johannine traditions were in dialogue with each other about
governance and how Christ would lead the church. The benefits of intertextual
Gospel analysis extend in more than one direction. (5) Reconsider the pneumatic
teaching of the Johannine Jesus in the light of charismatic appraisals of the his-
torical Jesus. Despite distinctive presentations, not all early Christian spirituality
was gnostic. More congruities may exist than we might have supposed, especially
between the charismatic Jesus and the pneumatic traditions about his teachings
and ministry. These are a few of the means for exploring historicity we might
construct if we were doing historical Jesus studies with John in the mix.

2.5. THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS BACKGROUND OF JOHN

If John’s narration is not rooted in the life and ministry of Jesus, one must put
forward an alternative explanation as to where the material came from; the myth-
ological religious background of the Evangelist is the best option available. Given the miracle-working stories of the likes of Apollonius of Tyana in the region several decades after Jesus’ ministry and the reports of Simon Magnus in Acts, it is easy to conceive of the Johannine narration’s embellishment along these aretological lines. Likewise, many signs and wonders from the Hebrew Scriptures have echoes in John, and just as Homer described great narratives of sea rescues and wondrous adventures, so does the Fourth Evangelist. Bultmann’s view, of course, was that a theios anēr (a miracle-working god-man) mythic construct prevalent in the contemporary social milieu affected the telling of the Jesus story, that the Evangelist found himself furthering such mythic constructs, and that he also found himself needing to deconstruct such aretologies existentially. Likewise, revelation discourses found in contemporary Jewish and gnostic literature would have impacted the ways the teachings of the Johannine Jesus were crafted and rendered. If the origin of John’s material was mythological, these reported events need not have happened in history for them to be narrated meaningfully in John’s first-century Jewish and Hellenistic setting.

**Strengths.** Several attractive features about this view include the fact that stories of miracle-workers and divine men abounded in the first-century Mediterranean world. The wisdom myth of early Judaism is presented as the preexistent and creative agency of God. Philostratus described how Apollonius of Tyana performed many miracles and even explained how Apollo of Delphi could turn water into wine if he wanted to; when the son of Rabban Gameliel was ill, Hanina ben Dosa prayed for him from afar, and he was made well that very hour; the well in Asclepius’s temple had healing powers when the waters were stirred; it was believed that at the consummation of time the treasuries of heaven would open and manna would descend from heaven; the histories of Suetonius and Tacitus report the emperor Vespasian applying spittle to a blind

58. See above the descriptions of the Moses and Elijah typologies embodied by the Johannine Jesus.

59. The *Hellenistic Commentary to the New Testament* (Boring, Berger, and Colpe 1995) presents 132 Hellenistic parallels to the material in the Gospel of John. Most of these are later, but they nonetheless suggest the sorts of Jewish and Hellenistic mythic views that would have been embraced by the Fourth Evangelist and his audiences.


available. Given the regionesus in Acts, among these are the Scriptures of sea rescues ann’s view, of his construct Jesus story, s, and that he ally. Likewise, literature would be crafted and ported events fully in John’s

man’s eyes and the resultant recovery; and Homer describes a thundering response from heaven, as the prayer of Odysseus was apparently well received by Zeus. In these and other ways the investigation of John's history of religions background is essential for understanding the origin and formation of the Johannine narrative.

**Weaknesses.** While Jewish and Hellenistic hero stories and mythic constructs clearly would have impacted Gospel narrations of Jesus’ ministry, this is not the same as claiming that they constituted the sole origin of the Johannine narrative. This is the first and cardinal weakness of assuming that the presentation of Jesus in the mould of contemporary mythic constructs thoroughly displaced the historical origin of the entire Johannine narrative. A narrative’s developmental history cannot disprove its originative history. A second weakness is the fact that evidence for non-Johannine sources has not been convincing enough to merit credence in the sort of source-critical inferences made by Bultmann and others as to where the Johannine material may have originated. That being the case, aretological and gnostic material coming into the Johannine tradition from afar is diminished in its plausibility. A third weakness with imputing Hellenistic mythic constructs onto the Johannine tradition is that John’s Jewish background is already quite clear. As mentioned above, the Johannine Jesus clearly is presented as fulfilling the Jewish typologies of Moses and Elijah and is explicitly credited with fulfilling many messianic associations within the Jewish Scriptures. Even the Logos Christology of the Prologue bears considerable similarities with Gen 1, and if the Dead Sea Scrolls had been discovered twenty years earlier, Bultmann would not have been able to write the commentary that he did. First-century dualism was Jewish as well as Hellenistic, and John’s Jesus is portrayed clearly as a Jewish Messiah repackaged for later Jewish and Hellenistic audiences. A fourth weakness is that, despite the many similarities to contemporary mythologies, John’s narration is time and again closer to the Synoptic renderings of Jesus, although it cannot be said that John is close enough to have depended upon them. This being the case, the bi-optic theory of John and Mark—representing two individuated and yet somewhat interfluential Gospel traditions—offers the best explanation of their primary historical origins. History of religions information illuminates the

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67. Robert Kysar’s change of mind (1999b, 40) regarding evidence for sources underlying John represents a significant shift, I believe.
69. Below is a charting of plausible Synoptic-Johannine relationships (also in Anderson 2006b, 126), in which John’s dialogical autonomy is sketched. A two-edition theory of John’s composition sees the first edition completed before 85 C.E., with a final edition completed.
background and worldviews of John and its audiences, but it cannot suffice as the sole, or even the primary, historical origin of the Johannine narrative.

2.6. EMERGING PORTRAITS OF JESUS

One contribution emerging from recent Jesus studies is the sketching of several “portraits” of Jesus, each rooted in first-century historical images of religious and philosophical leaders. Marcus Borg’s digest of images of Jesus in contemporary scholarship has been very helpful for understanding these constructs (1994). Borg lists four major portraits of Jesus representing some of the most creative work of contemporary Jesus scholars. First, envisioning Jesus as a noneschatological prophet allows us to see him against a backdrop of Jewish prophets who were not about apocalyptic futurism, but about justice and social reform in the present. Second, envisioning Jesus as a wisdom-imparting sage fits the Q tradition and his short, pithy sayings about the character of the kingdom of God. Third, envisioning Jesus as an institution-challenging Cynic fits his tendency to challenge the institutions and conventionality of his Jewish and Roman setting, and it coheres with his dining with “sinners” and healing on the Sabbath as provocative actions. Fourth, envisioning Jesus as a holy man reconnects his healings and spiritual ministries with the sorts of things that an indigenous healer and exorcist might do. A fifth portrait, not covered by Borg but substantive nonetheless, involves envisioning Jesus as an apocalyptic messenger. Each of these portraits provides a heuristic lens through which to see more clearly the ministry and message of the Jesus of history.

Strengths. Because each of these portraits is rooted in socioreligious models contemporary with the historical Jesus, it does not take much imagination to reconfigure one’s understanding of Jesus within one or more of these moulds. That is why John’s presentation of a Jesus who speaks primarily of his relation to the Father, who speaks about himself and the authenticity of his mission, and who performs miraculous signs while at the same time deemphasizing their importance might seem at odds with any or all of these portraits. That being the case,

around 100 C.E.; the Epistles may have been produced between the two by the Elder, who served as the final compiler of the Gospel after the death of the Beloved Disciple. Johannine-Markan engagements reflect interfluential contact in the oral stages of their traditions, and the first edition of John appears to have augmented and to some degree corrected Mark. The Lukan and Q traditions appear to have drawn from the Johannine oral tradition, as evidenced by the “bolt out of the Johannine blue” in Q, and alternatively, the fact that Luke departs from Mark no fewer than three dozen times in order to side with John. A set of interfluential dialogues also seems to have developed between the Matthean and the later Johannine traditions, evoking a Johannine corrective to rising institutionalism, as suggested by the juxtaposition of Peter and the Beloved Disciple in John.

70. See especially Bart D. Ehrman 1999 for an excellent overview of this portrait.
the Jesus of the religious anthropologist becomes more attractive historically than
the spiritualized Jesus of the Fourth Gospel for many a Jesus scholar.

Weaknesses. However, a closer look at the Johannine text makes such disjunctive judgments hard to understand. Despite John's pervasive nondependence
the Synoptic traditions, the case can be made that each of these portraits does
find a home in John's presentation of Jesus, in some ways more clearly than his
presentation in any one of the Synoptic Gospels. Consider, for instance, the presen-
tation in John of Jesus as a noneschatological prophet. The primary history
of religions image embodied by the Johannine Jesus is the prophet-like-Moses
typology rooted in Deut 18:15–22 (see Anderson 1999a). Rather than a gnostic
redeemer myth, the Father-Son relationship in John is ordered by Jesus' sense of
having been sent by the Father, claiming to speak only what he has seen and heard
from the Father (Deut 18:15). Therefore, God's words are his words and vice versa
(18:18), God will hold people accountable in reference to their response to Jesus
as God's agent (18:19), and the way the authentic prophet is distinguishable from
the false prophet is that the true prophet's words come true (18:22). The Johan-
nine Jesus fulfills the Mosaic typology in multiple ways,71 and it is even arguable
that John's Mosaic prophet typology was closer to the historical Jesus' self-under-
standing than the Synoptic king-like-David royal typology. The Johannine Jesus
claims to have been sent from the Father, not speaking on his own behalf but rep-
resenting the Father fully, in keeping with the agency typology of Deut 18:15–22.
In these ways he fits the prophetic model entirely—even more clearly than Syn-
optic presentations.

The Johannine Jesus can also be conceived within the portraiture of a
wisdom-imparting sage. In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus not only brings divine
wisdom; he is the Word and Wisdom of God (Prov 8:22–30) to the world and
imparts saving knowledge to all who believe. John's Wisdom Christology has not
gone unnoticed by scholars, nor has its sapiential thrust. Jesus not only brings
light to penetrate the darkness of worldly thought; he is the Light of the world
(John 1:4, 5, 8, 9; 3:19; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46). Those who come to him are drawn by the
Father and are taught by God (6:44–50; cf. Isa 54:13; Deut 8:3),72 and Jesus has
amassed great learning without ever receiving formal training (John 7:15). Even
Greeks come from afar to drink from Jesus' wisdom (12:20–21). The theme of
personified Wisdom is more centrally featured in John than it is in Q, and indeed
the case can be made that the "bolt out of the Johannine blue" in Matthew and

71. Jan-Adolf Bühner 1977; T. F. Glasson 1963; and Adele Reinhartz 1989 support this
typology being found in John.

72. Raymond E. Brown 2003, 259–65, includes a special section on "Wisdom Motifs." In
this section Brown argues that personified Wisdom associations with Jesus are even stronger in
John than in any of the other canonical Gospels. For the wisdom motif in John, see also Michael
E. Willett 1992; Sharon H. Ringe 1999; and Ben Witherington III 1995b.
Luke actually reflects the Q tradition's dependence on the primitive Johannine tradition. The point is that the Johannine wisdom motif is used to describe the mission and message of Jesus in ways that are striking and also independent from the Synoptic traditions.

John also presents Jesus readily as an institution-challenging Cynic, in that Jesus cleanses the temple at the beginning of his ministry, heals on the Sabbath, confronts religious authorities in Jerusalem prolifically, and is willing to challenge the Roman governor in the name of God's transcendent truth and reign. The Johannine Jesus challenges all that is of human origin, being the manifestation of the divine initiative; the Revelation of God scandalizes political, religious, and worldly authorities. One can also claim that the juxtaposition of the Beloved Disciple and Peter in John functioned to challenge rising institutionalization within the late first-century church, and it did so rhetorically in the name of Jesus' original intentionality. At least seven parallels in John can be identified with some relation to the keys of the kingdom passage in Matt 16:17–19, yet they are all different. Does this imply that they were corrective parallels, clearing the ground within the Christian movement for the pneumatic work of the παράκλητος? Indeed, the presentation of Jesus challenging conventionalities and all that is of human origin in the name of the transcendent God is as clear in John as it is anywhere in the New Testament.

Likewise, Jesus certainly comes across with spiritual power, as a holy man in John. While he does not perform exorcisms, the Johannine Jesus is encountered by people epiphanically. Like Nathanael and the Samaritan woman, actants in the Johannine narrative experience themselves as being known by God in their encounters with Jesus, and even a royal official believes Jesus can do his household some good—from afar. Jesus' signs demonstrate that he came from God, and his teachings are experienced as authoritative by those open to the truth. Upon encountering the presence of the divine in Jesus, those who meet him experience themselves as being known by God. Indeed, in telling the Johannine story the Greek device of anagorisis (a recognition marker) is used, but this does not mean that the reports themselves were entirely fictive in their origins. They may have been, but proving so has yet to be established. How would persons have experienced the numinous in the presence of a charismatic figure, such as Jesus—let alone reflected upon it later? Given the Johannine belief that the work of "another" παράκλητος is continuous with the ministry of Jesus, it is not too far off the mark to consider that Jesus is remembered as evoking human-divine encounter, much like any holy or spirit-imbued person would have done. In that

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73. Certainly this is more plausible than inferring that a characteristically Johannine theme came from one small unit in Q—the theme is pervasively Johannine (Anderson 2002a, 48–50).
75. See the development of this feature in R. Alan Culpepper 1998, 71–83.
Jesus as a holy man cannot be said to be incompatible with the Johannine presentation of Jesus. This portrait also fits John entirely well.

A final portrait also works with John’s presentation of Jesus: as an apocalyptic messenger, the Johannine Jesus comes to the world dividing the children of God those whose spiritual origins and investments are other. All who come the light receive the newness of life and are given the authority to become the of God (John 1:12). The time is coming, and now is here, that even the will hear the voice of the Son and live (5:25), and those who believe will raised up at the end of the age (6:39, 40, 44, 54). The Johannine Son of Man indeed comes as an eschatological agent, and the paradoxical exaltation of Jesus the cross brings about the glory of God. The prince of this world is overthrown Jesus (12:31), and eschatological judgment is effected by the mission and glorification of the Son of Man, who ascends and descends in ways Danielic (Dan John 1:51; 6:62). In these and other ways, despite John’s mystical passages and emphases upon loving one another, the apocalyptic motif comes through and the entire ministry of Jesus is presented eschatologically. What certain cannot be said is that the portraiture of Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet is fundamentally at odds with the Johannine narration. It too is found in John, but in an autonomous and distinctive set of ways.

A consideration of the “portraits” of Jesus emerging from the latest Jesus scholarship demonstrates that each of these constructs, rather than being at irreconcilable odds with the Johannine presentation of Jesus, finds impressive echoes and actualization in John, despite John’s autonomous rendering of Jesus and his ministry. One might even make the case that any of these portraits might be sketched more clearly from Johannine material than from any of the other Gospels, which is a puzzling prospect if John’s irrelevance to historical Jesus studies is taken as an established fact. The fact is, however, that such is not a fact but a hypothesis, a hypothesis that has many exceptions and problems to it. One also wonders what might happen if new grids were developed for conducting Jesus research using such second-century works as the Acts of Pilate, the Apocryphon of James, the Dialogue of the Savior, the Gospel of Truth, and the Gospel of Judas—in addition to the Gospel of Thomas—in seeking to establish a new set of criteria for investigating the Jesus of history in ways more consonant with the Johannine witness. How do we know, for instance, that the charismatic and Spirit-emphasizing Jesus of history is not replicated in the pneumatic Jesus of the

76. John’s dualism is somewhat parallel to the dualism of the War Scroll of Qumran. The strife between the children of light and the children of darkness connects with John’s dualism of decision, and the response to Jesus as the saving/revealing agent of God is itself an eschatological event in John. See Brown 2003, 139–42; Ashton 1991, 205–37.
Fourth Gospel? One could argue a sustained case that John contributes key elements, not only of the historical and political outline of Jesus’ ministry, but also of the spiritual character of his work. As a plank in the platform of the de-Johannification of Jesus, the presentation of recent Jesus portraits versus John appears to demonstrate the opposite when examined critically.

In summary, all the planks in the platform of the de-Johannification of Jesus are constructed in response to real problems that need to be addressed, and all have certain strengths. However, when each is considered critically to see how solid it might be, it also betrays considerable weaknesses and multiple exceptions to the norms that are claimed. While John is close to Mark, none of John’s similarities are identical. In that sense, the bi-optic view of John and Mark is confirmed as two traditional sources plausibly going back to the ministry of Jesus. Diachronic theories have failed to demonstrate alien material as foundational sources for John, and a two-edition theory of composition is the most likely. John’s lateness does not discount the possibility of primitivity, and in fact there is a great deal of detail in John that is best accounted for on the basis of having been earlier rather than later. Criteria for determining historicity are often circular and, being largely constructed out of Synoptic material, thus say very little about John when used to discredit John’s historicity. A history of religions analysis of John shows that John is closer to the Synoptics than pagan or Jewish aretologies and mythologies, so arguing derivation from such sources rather than influence is specious. Finally, the portraits of Jesus emerging from Synoptic studies actually affirm John’s authenticity rather than discredit it, as each of them may be fulfilled by the Johannine presentation of Jesus with independent lucidity. Despite the rigor with which John has been marginalized from Jesus studies, the above analysis suggests that, because none of these planks possesses compelling integrity, the larger platform itself cannot support much weight. Like the dehistoricization of John, the de-Johannification of Jesus is an equally feeble foundation on which anything of critical worth may be established.

**Findings**

Neither the dehistoricization of John nor the de-Johannification of Jesus is constructed of solid material, so neither is able to support much weight for constructing Gospel or Jesus studies. Indeed, each of the planks in both platforms is

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77. Consider, for instance, Martin Hengel’s monograph (1981) in the light of John’s pneumatic presentation of Jesus, or consider insights into the Spirit-based ministry of the historical Jesus from the perspective of Gary Burge’s monograph (1987) as potential ways forward. If Jesus challenged institutions and society in the name of spirituality and unmediated access to the divine, John as a resource has not yet begun to be tapped for historical Jesus studies.
constructed in response to real problems, but not a single one is compelling in a foundation for either platform. Fallacies of logic are evident in many cases, and only parts of the data are considered in most cases. Distortions of Johannine and Synoptic material sometimes appear to make a plank more sturdy, but, when analyzed critically, the facts and procedures themselves raise questions with the analyses and their conclusions. In fact, some of the planks in each platform possess greater weaknesses than strengths, and a critical appraisal of the subject must question sweeping generalizations that are founded on such presumptions.

So, in response to our earlier question—Is the dehistoricization of John and the de-Johannification of Jesus an open-and-shut case, a “consensus” among critical scholars (which fails to include most of the leading Johannine scholars over the last two centuries), to be embraced as a solid set of platforms on which to construct future investigations?—one might be happy if it were so. Jesus studies could just continue along without Johannine interference, and Johannine studies could just continue without raising historical-critical questions. Unfortunately, neither platform, nor any of the planks composing them, is solid. In the light of the above analysis, the “critically established consensus” is neither; more work remains to be done. 78

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78. As a proposal for getting the discussion going, appendix 2 below suggests what a nuanced approach might look like. It is developed more fully elsewhere (Anderson 2006b, 127–73), but here it suggests an outline of what Jesus in bi-optic perspective might look like. Appendix 1 below was published first in Anderson 2006b, 126.

While Robert Kysar’s essay in this volume questions the bases upon which this theory of interfluentiality is laid, his foreword to The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus (Anderson 2006b, xvii–xx) is far more positive than his reaction to its presentation in the 2002 Hofrichter volume below (pp. 90–92): “I find Anderson’s suggestion of a two-way influence very valuable with numerous implications, such as his theory of a ‘bio-optic perspective on Jesus’. He argues that one can identify the interfluentiality of each of the Synoptics and John, with each bringing its own peculiar perspective (Part III). With such a perspective how then does each of the four Gospels contribute to our understanding of the Jesus of history? This volume challenges biblical scholars to rethink the foundations of much of our study. It will, I believe, make readers assess their own methods and stimulate new discussions of John and the quest for Jesus” (Kysar in Anderson 2006b, xx)
APPENDIX 1
A Charting of Johannine-Synoptic Interfluential Relations

The Ministry of Jesus

Early Matthean Tradition
30–90

Q Tradition
30–85

Pre-Markan Tradition
30–70

Early Lukan Tradition
30–85

Early Johannine Tradition
30–85

Mark
70 C.E.

Matthew
90 C.E.

Luke
85 C.E.

First Edition of John
80–85 C.E.

Continued
Preaching

1 John
85 C.E.

2 John
90 C.E.

3 John
95 C.E.

Final Edition of John
100 C.E.

Oral Tradition

Written Tradition
APPENDIX 2

JESUS IN BI-OPTIC PERSPECTIVE: A NUANCED PROPOSAL

If John is excluded from historical studies, the thirty-plus ways that it agrees with the Synoptics should also be excluded (Anderson 2006b, 129). A more adequate approach, however, is to note several ways in which all four canonical Gospel traditions cohere in multiple-attestation ways and to begin with the following nucleus in quest of the historical Jesus with John in the mix. In all four Gospels, Jesus comes as a Jewish prophet healing the sick, challenging religious institutions, speaking with prophetic urgency, and suffering death at the hands of the Romans in Jerusalem. On these and other matters, John and the Synoptics agree.

A. Dual Attestation: John and the Synoptics
1. Jesus' association with John the Baptist and the beginning of his public ministry
2. Jesus' calling of disciples as a corporate venture
3. A revolt in the desert?
4. Jesus as a healer; healing on the Sabbath
5. Jesus' sense of prophetic agency from the Father and religious resistance
6. Jesus' cleansing of the temple
7. The culmination of Jesus' ministry: his arrest, trials, and death in Jerusalem
8. Attestations to appearances and the beginning of the Jesus movement

Despite impressive features of John's historical realism, the Synoptics nonetheless pose several more plausible presentations of Jesus from a historicity standpoint, and these should not be neglected. In particular, Jesus as a Jewish rabbi teaches with parables about the ways of the kingdom, exorcises demons, liberates the socially alienated, and sends out his disciples as agents of change and reform. Jesus in Synoptic perspective declares the irruption of God's reign into human history in ways that make all things new. Each of the Synoptic narratives is crafted with traditional material, targeted audiences, and the theological/rhetorical interests of the Evangelist in mind.

B. Synoptic Contributions to the Quest for the Jesus of History
1. Jesus' teachings about the kingdom of God in parables and in short, pithy sayings
2. The messianic secret and the hiddenness of the kingdom
3. Jesus' healing and exorcizing ministries
4. Jesus' sending out of his disciples to further the work of the kingdom
5. Jesus' dining with "sinners" and provocations toward renewal
6. Jesus' cleansing of the temple as an intentional challenge to the restricting of access to God
7. Jesus' teaching on the heart of the law: love of God and humanity
8. Jesus' apocalyptic mission

Despite impressive features of Synoptic historicity, John nonetheless poses several more plausible presentations of Jesus from a historicity standpoint that should not be neglected. In particular, Jesus as a Mosaic agent from God (Deut 18:15–22) speaks on the Father's behalf, challenging religious authorities in Jerusalem as well as Galilee. John the Baptist ministers alongside Jesus for a period of time, and Jesus goes to and from Jerusalem over a period of two or more years. Jesus' incident in the temple may well be taken as an inaugural prophetic sign pointing to the spiritual and authentic character of Jewish faith and practice, and first-hand knowledge of Palestine is recrafted for other audiences among the mission churches.

C. Johannine Contributions to the Quest for the Jesus of History
1. Jesus' simultaneous ministry alongside John the Baptizer and the prolific availability of purifying power
2. Jesus' cleansing of the temple as an inaugural prophetic sign
3. Jesus' travel to and from Jerusalem and his multiyear ministry
4. Early events in the public ministry of Jesus
5. Favorable receptions in Galilee among Samaritans, women, and Gentiles
6. Jesus' Judean ministry and archaeological realism
7. The Last Supper as a common meal and its proper dating
8. Jesus' teaching about the way of the Spirit and the reign of truth