

# Jesus in Johannine Perspective: Inviting A Fourth Quest for Jesus

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## **Abstract**

Despite the fact that the Fourth Gospel has been a puzzlement to modern scholars seeking to construct a solid, bare-minimum understanding of Jesus and his ministry, a parsimonious approach cannot suffice critically. If all worthy sources are to be utilized, the Gospel of John cannot be neglected. The question is how to do so. Bolstered by three paradigms within an overall Johannine theory (John's Dialogical Autonomy), the Fourth Gospel can be seen as developing over at least two editions, with the first edition augmenting and modestly correcting Mark. The later material functions to harmonize with the Synoptics, added by the author of the Epistles after the death of the Beloved Disciple, the evangelist. As the first three Quests of Jesus have excluded the Gospel of John, improved criteria for determining historicity are here advanced: *corroborative impression, primitivity, critical*

*realism, and open coherence.* Within such an approach, the Johannine witness provides an independent corroboration of the Synoptic accounts. Additionally, the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John make distinctive contributions of their own. This calls for a Fourth Quest for Jesus—an inclusive Quest—at the dawn of the new millennium.

## **1. Introduction**

The Gospel of John has been called a stream in which a child can wade..., *and* an elephant can swim. The question is “Why?” Of course, the main answer lies in its perplexing riddles—theological, historical, and literary—which have puzzled readers and scholars

## Conspectus

### **Keywords**

Johannine riddles, historical Jesus, a bi-optic hypothesis, interfluentiality, John's dialogical autonomy, historicity, memory theory, archaeology, realia, verisimilitude

### **About the Author**

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<https://www.sats.ac.za/conspectus/>

This article: <https://www.sats.ac.za/jesus-in-johannine-perspective>  
<https://doi.org/10.54725/conspectus.2021.2.1>



Bible-based. Christ-centred. Spirit-led.

for the last two millennia.<sup>1</sup> It was John's Christological tensions that precipitated four centuries of theological debates (Anderson 2010d),<sup>2</sup> and it is John's historical and literary perplexities that have created the most intense of scholarly debates over the last two centuries of Jesus and gospel studies within the modern era (Anderson 2006c, 1–41; 2000, 5–39). Within that discussion, David F. Strauss leveraged two dichotomies, dividing theology from history and John from the Synoptics. However, such polarizations lack nuance and a measured analysis of the literary facts.<sup>3</sup> The Synoptics are also theological, and many features of the Johannine witness are more plausibly historical than the Synoptics, so more measured analyses are required. Given the fact that the first three Quests for Jesus have programmatically excluded the Fourth Gospel within their reductionistic and parsimonious enterprises, a more critically adequate and inclusive approach is required. This calls for a fresh consideration of Jesus in Johannine perspective, which, with more fitting criteria for determining historicity, invites a *Fourth Quest for Jesus*. Introducing that enterprise is the thrust of the present essay, and indeed, this new and inclusive paradigm within Jesus research is already underway.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. The Johannine Riddles: Their Character and Origins

As an overview of earlier research, an analytical sense of the character and origins of John's riddles establishes a critical basis for such an exploration. Again, one of the main reasons that top Johannine scholars have disagreed

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<sup>1</sup> See my outlining of three dozen such riddles (Anderson 2011, 25–90).

<sup>2</sup> See also Anderson (2018c, 84–108).

<sup>3</sup> For a critical analysis of Strauss's flawed dichotomies, see Anderson (2013b, 63–81).

<sup>4</sup> The title of this essay anticipates that of a forthcoming book with Eerdmans (scheduled for 2022): *Jesus in Johannine Perspective: A Fourth Quest for Jesus*. See also Anderson (2014c, 168–176).

with each other on matters of John's composition, origin, and development is that different methodologies and disciplines have been applied to addressing John's perplexing features. This has created disconnects between scholars using differing approaches to the issues, as well as disagreements on the outcomes, even when the same methodologies are being used.<sup>5</sup> In my view, however, an interdisciplinary approach is required by the text itself.<sup>6</sup> The best methodologies must be applied in the most suitable ways to the particular issues being addressed, leading to the most plausible ways forward in seeking to address the Johannine riddles. That being the case, here is an overview of my best judgments regarding how to understand and interpret the particulars of the Johannine riddles, given their character and origins.

### 2.1 *John's Theological Tensions*

The first riddle, John's theological tensions (the flesh and glory of Jesus, the subordinate and egalitarian Father-Son relationship, John's present-and-future eschatology, John's embellished and existentialized semeiology, etc.), are factors of four primary origins:<sup>7</sup>

- *The evangelist as a dialectical thinker*, operating in both-and ways instead of either-or dichotomies (Anderson 2010d, 137–165; 2004, 127–149).
- *The Prophet-like-Moses agency schema* (Deut 18:15–22), inviting a response to the divine initiative of the Revealer (Anderson 1999, 133–159).

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<sup>5</sup> See Carson (2007, 133–159).

<sup>6</sup> This is the approach I take (Anderson 2006c; 2010d).

<sup>7</sup> This was the conclusion I reached (2010c, lxxix–lxxx, 252–265). See also Anderson (2011, 158–162).

- *The dialectical Johannine situation*, involving no fewer than seven crises over seven decades (Anderson 2007c, 133–159).
- *The rhetorical design of the Johannine narrative*, inviting hearers and readers into an imaginary dialogue with the protagonist, Jesus (Anderson 1997, 1–59).<sup>8</sup>

## 2.2 John's Historical Problems

The second riddle, John's historical problems (theological-historical tensions, differences with the Synoptics in terms of order and chronology, John's omissions of Synoptic material, John's material being absent from the Synoptics, the originative character of John's account—memory or folklore, and so on), are factors of four primary origins (Anderson 2011, 162–166):

- *An alternative and distinctive Jesus tradition with its own perceptions and reflections*, aware of at least Mark, but developing independently with its own take on things (Anderson 2015, 169–218).
- *Intra-traditional dialectic*, reflecting interactivity between earlier and later perceptions and experiences (Anderson 2010d, 167–193).
- *Inter-traditional dialectic with at least Mark*, reflecting interactivity between various stages of the Johannine tradition and various forms of the Synoptic traditions (Anderson 2013a, 197–245).
- *History as theology and theology as history*, engaging developing issues within the evolving Johannine situation (Anderson 2010d, 194–251).

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<sup>8</sup> Here, I perform with John 6 what J. Louis Martyn achieved with John 9.

## 2.3 John's Literary Perplexities

The third riddle includes John's literary perplexities (dependent on alien sources or the Synoptics or independent, composed in one edition or several, relations to other Johannine writings, the Beloved Disciple—a literary device or a dead author?) (Anderson 2011, 166–169). I propose these are factors of four primary origins:

- *A synchronicity of tradition within a diachronicity of situation*, engaging as many as seven crises or issues over seven decades (Anderson 2007c).
- *The memory of the evangelist as the second biography of Jesus* (ca. 80–85 CE), to which the compiler added later material following his writing of the Epistles (ca. 100 CE) (Anderson 2006c).
- *John's first edition* as an augmentation of and modest corrective to Mark, an apologetic narrative (Anderson 2001; 2013a).
- *John's later material* added after the death of the Beloved Disciple, featuring pastoral, incarnational, and egalitarian thrusts (Anderson 2015).

Of course, some of John's riddles may have more than one origin, but these comprise at least a primary origin of each in my judgment. Much has been written regarding my overall Johannine theory, which I describe as *the Dialogical Autonomy of the Fourth Gospel* (Anderson 2006c, 38–41; 2011, 125–155), but this overview suffices for now, in laying out the broad scope of the territory for addressing John's historical character and potential contribution to understanding its subject: Jesus of Nazareth. Three central elements of this paradigm will be outlined further below: John's composition, John's relations to the Synoptics, and the history of the Johannine situation. Nonetheless, these riddles also account for the

fact that John's historical contribution has been marginalized within the last two centuries of critical biblical scholarship.

### 3. The First Three Parsimonious Quests of Jesus..., and their Problems

While an extensive overview of the last two centuries of Jesus research cannot be laid out fully in the present context,<sup>9</sup> a rough overview of some of the highlights illustrates several of the challenges involved.

*The Nineteenth-century Quests of Jesus* can be seen as involving several phases. Launched on the continent by the work of Hermann Samuel Reimarus, published a decade after his death (1768) by the German playwright Gotthold Lessing, a wedge was leveraged between the Jesus of the gospels and objective historicity (Reimarus 1970). Reimarus argued that the political goal of Jesus was likely the ridding of the Romans and their occupation of Palestine; but upon his failure, gospel writers concocted stories of miracles and the resurrection, having stolen his body. Thus, cause-and-effect historicity was distinguished from the religiously motivated fabrication of narratives.

As debates ensued, the place of the Gospel of John became especially vulnerable because of its high theological motifs and its differences from the Synoptics. In 1820, Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider disparaged the Johannine writings, claiming they cannot have been written by the same person—the Apostle John.<sup>10</sup> While he later affirmed John's authenticity, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1975) argued with force that the Gospel of John was the only gospel rooted in eyewitness memory, in contrast to the fragmentary character of the Synoptics. Some other scholars came to see the canonical

gospels as “lives of Jesus,” within the genre of Hellenistic biographical narratives (*bioi*), although some attempts to harmonize the gospels along those lines amounted to mere speculation.

Challenging the traditional view of John's apostolic origin, along with F. C. Baur, who saw John as countering Gnostics around 170 CE, David F. Strauss (1972) posed several arguments against John's historicity. First, he countered the inference of biographical narratives with the inference of mythic folklore. Assuming that miracles cannot happen, the wonders of gospel narratives must have originated in contemporary religions which narrators gathered into their own stories of Jesus, so the speculation went. Second, Strauss wedged a dichotomy between history and theology. If an account is highly theological in its thrust, its subjective interest obliterates its objective reliability. Third, because John's narrative is theological and different from the Synoptics, John's value must be restricted to the Christ of faith, not adumbrating by any means the Jesus of history.<sup>11</sup>

*The Continental Abandonment of Historical Aspirations: With William Wrede's challenging of Mark's historicity in 1901* (Wrede 1971), Albert Schweitzer (1964) completely gave up on the historical quest for Jesus as a possibility; he comes to us as one unknown, calling us to follow him without knowing whence nor whereto. On the Continent, scholars moved from the history of Jesus to investigating the history of gospel traditions. Along these lines, the work of Rudolf Bultmann was emblematic. Not only did he seek to identify the form-critical features of the materials underlying the Synoptic

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<sup>9</sup> See the fuller overview in Anderson (2006c, 1–37).

<sup>10</sup> See also Eduard Schwartz (1907, 342–372; 1908a, 115–148; 1908b, 149–188; 1908c, 497–560).

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<sup>11</sup> Published the year after Schleiermacher's postmortem book on Jesus, in its preface Strauss declares that in this book, as in his other writings, his primary goal has been to debunk the views of Schleiermacher. Thus, while Strauss divorces theology from history, does his self-declared theological interest obliterate his historical agenda? If Strauss is right, then he is wrong. Not the case, however, because his dichotomies themselves are fallacious from the start, so nothing of his argument holds ultimate reasonable sway. For a critical analysis of Strauss's dichotomies, see Anderson (2013b, 63–81).

Gospels, but he also produced the most expansive (and brilliant) diachronic theory of John's composition and development. Inferring three major sources underlying John (a *Sēmeia* Source, a Revelation-Sayings Source, and a Passion Source), the evangelist's narrative fell apart, which the ecclesial Redactor reordered (wrongly) and added disparate material reflected in the Johannine Epistles. Thus, John may possess some historical material, but it is not written by an apostle or an eyewitness, given the assumption of "the early death of John" and Bultmann's inference of folkloric material (Jewish signs, proto-Gnostic sayings, and a Christian Passion account) as the basis for John's narrative (Bultmann 2014).

*The New Quest:* While Jesus research continued in America and Britain during the first half of the twentieth century,<sup>12</sup> the "New Quest" was launched by the presentation to the "Old Marburgers" by Ernst Käsemann, published in 1954 on "The Problem of the Historical Jesus" (Käsemann 1954, 125–153).<sup>13</sup> Following the Holocaust, the Jewishness of Jesus could not be ignored. Given the challenges posed by the Gospel of John in the mix (Käsemann [2017] indeed saw John's narrative as naively Docetic), minimalistic criteria were designed to provide sure steppingstones within the quest, which functioned to exclude John's content from the mix. Over the next several years, the criteria of *dissimilarity*, *embarrassment*, *multiple attestation*, *naturalism*, and *coherence* paved the way for a positivistic approach to Jesus research from a verification standpoint. As Norman Perrin of the University of Chicago put it, "When in doubt, leave it out." These criteria were especially designed to pare off distinctive Johannine material from otherwise "historical" presentations in the Synoptics.

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<sup>12</sup> See the critique of periodization and its permeability by Allison (2002, 135–151).

<sup>13</sup> See also Käsemann (1964, 15–47). James M. Robinson (1959) stamped the new movement with his book, which was furthered by several of Bultmann's other students, including Gunther Bornkamm (1960).

*The Third Quest:* As new methodologies came to be applied to Jesus research over the next several decades, including social-sciences inquiry, political-economic analyses, and religious anthropological studies, N. T. Wright (1982, 20–27) coined the term "the Third Quest for Jesus" in 1982. Signaled by the works of George Caird, Geza Vermes, Ben Meyer, John Riches, Martin Hengel, Marcus Borg, Ed Sanders, and others,<sup>14</sup> Third Questers posed new lenses for understanding the sociology and Mediterranean-based setting of the Jesus movement to great benefit. Jesus was indeed a Jew, and understanding his situation in the light of Roman occupation and Jewish attempts to achieve liberation and a thriving existence has been greatly helpful. Nonetheless, most of the Third Quest studies have steered clear of the Fourth Gospel, primarily for disciplinarily conservative reasons—not wanting to risk error or controversy in posing new methodologies within the reductionistic venture.

*The Jesus Seminar and the Renewed Quest:* Even more striking was the rise of the Jesus Seminar in 1983, which drew in some Third Questers. John Dominic Crossan, however, described it as "the Renewed Quest"—distancing it from the Third Quest and seeking to instantiate the gleanings of the New Quest. This consultation, meeting twice a year in cities around the nation so as to attract local and national media attention, voted on all the sayings and deeds of Jesus with colored marbles. Including the Gospel of Thomas as "the Fifth Gospel," scholars were forced to get off the fence and to vote for or against the historicity of a passage (or even a phrase or a detail) on the basis of outlined reductionistic criteria. Virtually none of John's material received a pink or a red vote by these seventy or so scholars (Funk, Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar 1993).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Wright continues to include the following in the Third Quest: Caird (1965); Bowker (1973); Vermes (1973); Meyer (1979); Riches (1980); Hengel (1981); Borg (1984); Sanders (1985).

<sup>15</sup> See also Funk and the Jesus Seminar (1998).

More specifically, fewer than 18% of the verses in the Synoptic Gospels were deemed to contain anything likely or certain in terms of historicity regarding the sayings or actions of Jesus (pink or red). In my (2002b) *Quaker Religious Thought* engagement with Marcus Borg, Marcus put things in more nuanced terms. Rather than see the results as denoting “only this much” going back to the historical Jesus, a better way to understand things is to affirm that “at least this much” casts light on the historical Jesus from the Synoptic.<sup>16</sup> By contrast, the Gospel of Thomas was deemed to possess nearly 25% likely or certain historical statements by Jesus, and the Gospel of John was judged to possess less than 1% likely or certain historical content. Only seven of John’s 879 verses received a pink or a red designation, and nearly all of John was accorded black status (*certainly not* historical), with only a few references accorded *unlikely* (grey) status. *Plausible* reports in John were thus limited to the arrest, crucifixion, and death of Jesus, along with Annas being the father-in-law of Caiaphas. The only Jesus saying in John accorded a pink score is that which echoed in Mark 6:4, regarding the prophet not being honored in his hometown (John 4:44). It is at this point that the operations of the Jesus Seminar are exposed as inconsistent and biased: a Johannine-Synoptic mundane detail may be accorded historical weight, but a theologically laden detail definitely may not.

In particular, Synoptic and Thomasine echoes of Johannine themes were denied historicity by the Seminar simply because they sounded Johannine. Jesus being “the light of the world” was excised from Matthew’s historical record because it is echoed in John (Matt 5:14; John 8:12; 9:5). A Johannine echo thus became a basis for rejecting a saying in Matthew. Even more striking, “the bolt out of the Johannine blue” was excised from the

Q tradition—otherwise privileged as the most historical by Seminarians—solely because of its Johannine ring: “none knows the Father except the Son” (John 3:35; 5:19–26; Matt 11:27; Luke 10:22). Ironically, Jesus is also “the light” in Thomas (77:1), and the relationship of Jesus and the Father is also referenced with prominence in Thomas (61:3). Thus, the strategic operation of the Jesus Seminar eliminated all content from the three Synoptic Gospels, the Q tradition, and even the Gospel of Thomas that sounded Johannine. In following this procedure programmatically, the results of their voting are no surprise. By that strategy, Robert Funk was able to declare both the basis for the stance and the outcome of the program:

In the Gospel of John, Jesus is a self-confessing Messiah rather than a self-effacing sage. In John, Jesus seems to have little concern for the impoverished, the disabled and the religious outcasts. Although John preserves the illusion of combining a real Jesus with the mythic Christ, the human side of Jesus is in fact diminished. For all these reasons, the current quest for the historical Jesus makes little use of the heavily interpreted data found in the Gospel of John. (Funk 1996, 127)

And again,

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

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<sup>16</sup> I invited Marcus to respond critically to my essay (Anderson 2000), which he did generously (Borg 2002, 21–27). See also my response (Anderson 2002b, 43–54).

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. (Funk and the Jesus Seminar 1998, 10)

Having assumed the *dehistoricization of John*, they proceeded with the *de-Johannification of Jesus*.<sup>17</sup> If it looks, sounds, smells, feels, tastes like John, expunge it from the historical record; *nothing* distinctively Johannine can be allowed to stand among “real” historians. The question, however, is whether such were indeed the last word among Jesus scholars worldwide, or whether such reflects the last gasp of the New and Renewed Quests, seeking to hold onto Jesus portraiture within a parsimonious reductionism, welcoming all other sources but remaining untainted by assumedly corruptive Johannine influence. Again, this would be acceptable if John’s features bore no historical semblance. The problem, though, is that such is the furthest from the truth. Along these lines three major problems present themselves, critically.

First, many of John’s details seem more historically plausible than those in the Synoptics. Second, the realia of Johannine details have piqued the imaginations of readers and artists over centuries, connecting later audiences with John’s illustrative content, not just its theological claims. Third, John’s distinctive detail also coheres with mundane facts, reflecting

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<sup>17</sup> On the six planks in each of these platforms—the dehistoricization of John and the de-Johannification of Jesus—and their structural instability, see Anderson (2006c, 43-99), published in slightly revised form (Anderson et al. 2007, 13-70). From a critically evaluative perspective, none of the planks are robust in their stability, so it is impossible for them to comprise an enduring set of platforms despite hailing the mantle of scholarly authority. Although real issues are addressed, and while good points are made, if anything, they represent critical claims destined for the dustbin when second criticality is applied. See also the literature reviews along these lines in Kysar (2007, 75-102), Verheyden (2007, 109-120), and Powell (2007, 121-133).

verisimilitude with the topography, material culture, and archaeological findings of the region.<sup>18</sup>

#### **4. Problems with Omitting Johannine Details and Distinctive Contributions (A)—John’s Compelling Realism.**

While many of the presentations of Jesus in the Synoptics are superior to John’s (Jesus speaking in parables about the Kingdom, Jesus dining with sinners and others, Jesus sending his followers out on ministry trips, Jesus healing lepers and exorcizing the afflicted, and so on), there are many ways in which John’s presentation is more plausible when compared with the Synoptics. Some of these include:

- Jesus ministering alongside John the baptizer for a period of time before John’s arrest
- An informal welcoming of followers of John the baptizer prior to a more programmatic calling of the Twelve
- An early temple incident as an inaugural prophetic sign, contemporary with the baptizer’s prophetic challenges to religious and political authorities
- Traveling to and from Jerusalem at least four times, rather than a single visit
- Traveling through and ministering in Samaria, rather than avoiding the region
- Engagements with religious authorities in Jerusalem, not simply in Galilee

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<sup>18</sup> Thus, if all worthy resources are considered within serious Jesus research, how can the one gospel claiming direct access to the subject be excluded (Anderson 2019b, 7-46, 264-269)?

- A ministry extending over three Passovers, rather than a single Passover
- Including women among the close followers of Jesus, rather than men only
- An egalitarian and Spirit-based approach to leadership, rather than structural hierarchy
- Informal table fellowship as the final meal, rather than an instituted rite.

In these and other ways, John's account appears more historically plausible than the Synoptic ones.<sup>19</sup> Further problems, however, also abound.

## 5. Problems with Omitting Johannine Details and Distinctive Contributions (B)—John's Vivid Detail.

Even more so than the Gospel of Mark, the Gospel of John features a proliferation of non-symbolic illustrative details. While critical scholars have assumed that such details were added to make John's narrative *seem* more realistic—features of a lively imagination rather than experiential memory—contemporary practices demonstrate the opposite. Matthew and Luke *omit* Markan details rather than adding them (Anderson 2010d, 187–192). This is an empirical fact. The ancient authors most closely related to the Johannine narrative add sections, but they largely omit names, places, and incidental details. Thus, if John is thought to have followed parallel conventional practices, adding details would have been the *exception* rather than the norm.

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<sup>19</sup> See a fuller analysis in Anderson (2006c, 154–173).

Another fact is that Johannine details and distinctive presentations have captured the imaginations of artists and sculptors over centuries of classic artistry and historic representations of gospel narratives. I might estimate that, other than the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke, over three-quarters of paintings over the last half millennium and more have featured particular Johannine details. Is this an accident, or do John's mundane details strike interpreters as *realia* within the narrative, evoking a graphic link between the experience of later readers and remembered situations and events? If none of John has a historical root, and if all of John's details reflect theological flourishes rather than first-hand memory, these paintings should be regarded as fictive cartoons rather than representational masterpieces. That move has not been embraced, however, within the greatest museums of the western world. Johannine *realia* featured in classic art include:

- Religious authorities coming from Jerusalem, interrogating John (John 1:19–25)
- John declaring: “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!” (1:29, 36)
- Peter, Andrew, Philip, and the unnamed disciple leaving John and becoming followers of Jesus, along with Nathanael (1:35–51)
- The wedding feast and the turning of water into wine launching the beginning of Jesus's ministry (2:1–11)
- Jesus using a whip of cords in the Temple Incident (2:15)
- Jesus conducting a nocturnal conversation with Nicodemus, a religious leader of Jerusalem (3:1–8)
- The reference to the uplifted brazen serpent of Moses is associated with Jesus on the cross (3:13–14)

- Jesus engaging the Samaritan woman at the well, and the Samaritans receiving him, extending Jesus two days of hospitality (4:1–42)
- The healing of the lame man at the Pool of Bethzatha in Jerusalem (5:1–15)
- The feeding of the multitude featuring the contribution of two loaves and five fishes by a boy (6:9)
- Jesus healing the blind man by the Pool of Siloam, placing spittle-mud on his eyes, and instructing him to wash and present himself to the priests (9:1–7)
- Jesus remembered as the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep (10:1–18)
- Jesus walking among the Colonnade of Solomon in the temple area during the Festival of Dedication (10:22–23)
- Jesus embracing Lazarus, Mary, and Martha in Bethany (11:1–32)
- Lazarus coming forth from the tomb (11:38–45)
- Mary of Bethany identified as the one anointing the feet of Jesus and wiping them with her hair (12:1–8)
- Judas holding the money bag for the disciples (John 12:6)
- Palm branches spread on the ground, honoring Jesus’s entry into Jerusalem (12:13)
- Greeks coming to see Jesus and brought to him by Philip (12:20–22)
- Jesus washing Peter’s feet (13:1–17)
- The Beloved Disciple leaning against the breast of Jesus (13:23)
- In the garden, soldiers arriving with weapons, lamps, and torches (18:3)
- Peter identified as the one severing the right ear of Malchus, the named servant of the high priest (18:10)
- Peter, warming himself by the fire, interrogated by the female servant (18:16–18)
- Jesus being slapped, flogged, and clothed in a purple robe (18:22; 19:1–2)
- Pilate declaring: “Behold, the Man!” (19:5)
- Written in Aramaic, Latin, and Greek, Pilate’s announcement reads: “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews” (Latin initials: *INRI*, 19:19–20)
- Jesus’s seamless robe contested among the soldiers (19:23)
- At the foot of the cross are the three Marys and the Beloved Disciple (19:25–27)
- After receiving vinegar from the sponge, Jesus bows his head and dies (19:29–30)
- The side of Jesus pierced with a spear; water and blood pour forth from it (19:34–35)
- The body of Jesus removed from the cross and buried in an unused tomb by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus (19:38–42)
- A hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes brought to embalm Jesus (19:39)
- Mary Magdalene finding the tomb empty early in the morning and reporting her findings to Peter (20:1–2)
- Peter and the Beloved Disciple arriving at the tomb and beholding folded burial cloths within the empty tomb (20:3–5)
- Mary encountering Jesus in the garden (20:14–17)
- Jesus appearing to his disciples behind closed doors and showing them his hands and side (20:19–20)
- Thomas later beholding the nail holes in Jesus’s hands and his pierced side (20:25–27)

- The Beloved Disciple pointing out Jesus to Peter, having fished all night, and Peter jumping in the water, coming to Jesus (21:7)
- The great catch of fish is 153, and yet the nets do not break (21:11)
- Jesus eating fish and bread with his disciples on the shore (21:12–13)
- Peter is instructed to care for the flock of Jesus (21:15–17)
- The Beloved Disciple referenced as the author of the narrative (21:20–24).

While some of these details are developed theologically, most of them are not; most of them are mentioned only in passing in the Fourth Gospel, serving no discernible theological or symbolic function.<sup>20</sup> If the Gospel of John really has no connection with grounded realities or Palestine-based memory, none of these details would have been rooted in historical recollections. They would have had to emerge from imaginative, mimetic imitations of realities that just happen to cohere with cultural and temporal realities in Palestine. Now *that* wonder would strike against naturalistic likelihoods. Again, this is not to claim that any or all of these details are historically verified. It is simply to acknowledge the graphic and mundane character of these details, which has created experiential bridges between later audiences and the ministry of Jesus in distinctively compelling ways over the centuries, however the material came together.

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<sup>20</sup> Within John 18–19 (the section with greatest Johannine-Synoptic parallels other than John 6), the details are roughly distributed equally in four categories: clearly symbolic, likely symbolic, possibly symbolic, and non-symbolic (occurring only once, only in John, with no scriptural association, with no further reference or role within the narrative) (Anderson 2006b, 157–194).

## 6. Problems with Omitting Johannine Details and Distinctive Contributions (C)—Topographical Realism and Archaeological Discoveries

In addition to John’s detailed realism, much of its account also coheres with archaeological discoveries and topographical realia. Places, distances, elevations, and mundane features match the material culture of Palestine, demonstrating the verisimilitude of first-hand acquaintance with the region. Thus, in the light of recent discoveries, John’s narrative stands totally against second- and third-century gospels and other narratives (such as Matthew and Luke), which are rooted in gathered traditions rather than first-hand recollections.<sup>21</sup> Archeological and topographical realia in John include:

- The Transjordan baptismal site of John the Baptist (Wadi Kharrar, confirmed by the Madaba Map—*Bethabara*)
- Bethsaida excavations—Et-Tell as Bethsaida-Julias or El-Araj as Bethsaida—either way, a fishing village
- Lathed stone jars found in the burnt house in Jerusalem (six on display)
- Large houses found in Cana of Galilee (large enough to host a wedding)
- Aenon near Salim—one of John’s baptismal sites (much water there)
- Sychar in Samaria—Ell er-Ras as a worship site on Gerizim
- Jacob’s Well in Sychar

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<sup>21</sup> On John’s mundane and archaeological features, see von Wahlde (2006, 523–586); Anderson (2006a, 587–618); Anderson (2011, 39–45). See also Anderson (2021).

- Roman water-heated houses in Capernaum—the royal official’s village
- Sheep Gate (area near Bethzatha—a Byzantine church on this site which was called the *Probatia*—“of the sheep”)
- The Pool of Bethzatha—two pools surrounded and divided by five porticoes—a healing center
- The Capernaum Synagogue—built upon earlier foundations
- The large purification Pool of Siloam—discovered in 2004
- The Migdal Stone in Galilee—note the menorah and connections with Jerusalem’s leaders
- Jesus teaching in the treasury area of the Temple, walking among Solomon’s Porticoes
- The tomb of Lazarus in Bethany—cohering with tombs and rolling stones in the region
- The Kidron Valley is crossed on the way to the Garden
- The courtyard and houses of Priests in Jerusalem
- The Stone of Pontius Pilate—Caesarea Maritima
- Pilate’s Praetorium (*Gabbatha*) and the stone pavement (*Lithostrōtos*) in Jerusalem
- The nail-pierced heelbone of Yehohanan (Jerusalem, ca. 70 CE)
- Golgotha—the place of the skull
- The Tomb of the Holy Sepulcher
- The Garden Tomb and burial sites and customs in Jerusalem.

It would be fair to say that not only does John’s account of Jesus and his ministry contain the greatest amount of sensory-based content among the gospels, but that it contains more archaeologically and topographically corroborated content than all the other gospel presentations combined, canonical and otherwise. Thus, while John is different and theologically

inclined, it is also the most grounded, mundane, and realia-featuring account of Jesus and his ministry in ancient literature. That being the case, such statements as the following ring hollow when the phenomenology of the Fourth Gospel is considered closely.

It must be remembered that topography and chronology were among the least of the author’s concerns. His head was among the stars. He was seeking to determine the place of Jesus in the spiritual universe and his relations to the eternal realities. These were the matters that interested and absorbed him, not itineraries and timetables, so that practical mundane considerations that might apply to Mark, Matthew, or Luke have little significance for his work. (Goodspeed 1937, 310)

## 7. Scholarly Movements Within the New Millennium

In response to the overstated claims of the Jesus Seminar claiming to represent the judgments of New Testament scholars overall, other scholars began to object. For one thing, the Jesus Seminar had very few Johannine scholars in the mix. Robert Fortna was an exception. For another, citing far more red and pink sayings in the second century, gnosticizing Gospel of Thomas than any of the canonical gospels called into question the methodologies of the group, as well as the results.<sup>22</sup> Then again, part of the issue involves how the results themselves are viewed.

It was concerns about the overstated claims of the Jesus Seminar and the parsimonious quests for Jesus that led some of us to establish the

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<sup>22</sup> See, for instance, the critique of Luke Timothy Johnson (1996).

John, Jesus, and History Project at the national SBL meetings (Anderson 2019a, 222–268).<sup>23</sup> Over our fifteen years of meetings (2002–2016), we commissioned 264 papers by top scholars internationally, inviting contributors to argue any thesis they desired, but to do so with evidence and compelling reason. Along those lines, we have published eight volumes so far, with one in press and three more to be gathered, for an even dozen. Several of these were within the central series, published by SBL Press,<sup>24</sup> and others addressed such subjects as John and Qumran (Coloe and Thatcher 2011), the contributions of C. H. Dodd (Thatcher and Williams 2013), the Johannine Epistles (Culpepper and Anderson 2014), John and Judaism (Culpepper and Anderson 2017), portraits of Jesus in John (Koester 2020), and Archaeology and John (Anderson 2022a). Again, one of the reasons this new Quest was launched at the beginning of the new millennium is that the first three Quests had programmatically excluded the Gospel of John. However, an inclusive quest requires new criteria for determining history, including critically adequate means of addressing John’s perplexing riddles. That’s what a Fourth Quest is designed to address.

In setting forth an inventory of the issues, our first volume included several disciplinary approaches to the issues, five literature reviews, and a case study and response. This was introduced by an analysis of the two pervasive critical platforms—the dehistoricization of John and the de-Johannification of Jesus—showing the frailty of each of the planks within each of the platforms. That led then to the next two volumes, addressing aspects of history in John (Vol. 2) and glimpses of Jesus through the

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**23** Chairs of the steering committee included Tom Thatcher, myself, Jaime Clark-Soles, and Craig Koester; other members included D. Moody Smith, Mary Coloe, PVBM, Felix Just S.J., Alan Culpepper, Helen Bond, Catrin Williams, and Chris Keith.

**24** Volumes within the central series include those edited by Anderson, Just, and Thatcher (2007; 2009; 2016). Another three volumes are planned for future publication.

Johannine lens (Vol. 3). Along with several book reviews and joint sessions with the Johannine Literature Section and the Historical Jesus Section, our final six years addressed the themes of Jesus Remembered in the Johannine Tradition and Jesus Remembered within the Johannine Situation. We also continued engaging some of the issues mentioned above, as well as criteria for determining Johannine historicity. In addition to the John and Archaeology volume (forthcoming), our hope is to get these three more books into press in the near future.

The sessions at the national SBL meetings were well attended—ranging between 40 and 300 in attendance but averaging over 100—and scholars began to acknowledge a change in Jesus and Johannine studies. Mark Allan Powell (2009, 121–128), for instance, noted that Jesus studies can no longer continue without taking notice of the Gospel of John.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, James Charlesworth (2010, 3–46) noted a shift in paradigms beginning within the new millennium. Showing five examples of the old paradigm, functioning to exclude John from Jesus research, Charlesworth lodged ten reasons as to the inadequacy of the old paradigm and noted five examples of the new paradigm. The paradigm shift was already in play.<sup>26</sup> In these essays, both Powell and Charlesworth noted the John, Jesus, and History Project as one of the leading factors in such a shift.

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**25** According to Powell (2009, 124), “There is a new, cautious appreciation for the historical value of John’s Gospel. In the 1990s, Jesus studies invariably involved analysis of the synoptic tradition; the Fourth Gospel was deemed too theologically developed and its compositional history was considered too complex for it to function effectively as a source for historical reconstruction. The growing trend in current Jesus studies is to recognize the Fourth Gospel as a ‘dissonant tradition’ that not only can be utilized but must be, if the synoptic tradition is not to be accorded free rein in a manner that seems uncritical.”

**26** Following the contributions of Dodd (1963) and Brown (2003), Charlesworth notes five monographs that have launched the new paradigm in Johannine and Jesus studies: Meier (1991); Theissen and Merz (1998); Anderson (2006c); Bauckham (2007); and Smith (2008). See also Charlesworth’s own contribution to the field (2020), as well as Thatcher (2006).

In addition, several other recent projects have advanced the inclusion of the Gospel of John in Jesus research. The Princeton-Prague Symposium held meetings at Princeton Theological Seminary in 2016, examining John's place in the historical quest of Jesus (Charlesworth and Pruszinski 2019). Within that conversation, it became evident that stages within the development of the Johannine tradition were significant in identifying earlier and later interests within John's story of Jesus. Another interest involved John's relations to other traditions, especially Mark, and a renewed focus on the Johannine-Synoptic set of questions surfaced as an important subject to consider. John's relationship with Mark also served as the focus for a special conference held at Athens before the 2018 SNTS meetings, where various theories of the Johannine-Markan relationship were advanced (Becker, Bond, and Williams 2021).

Another focus on John and religio-historical issues has been advanced by the Enoch Seminar, considering John's presentation of Jesus as a contribution within Second Temple Judaism. At the Camaldoli 2016 Conference on reading the Gospel of John as a form of first-century messianism, papers were presented on pre-existence within contemporary Judaism, sectarian and religious tensions within contemporary Judaism, and the presentation of Jesus as a Jewish prophetic figure within first-century Judaism (Reynolds and Boccaccini 2018). Other Enoch Seminar meetings, focusing on the historical development of the Johannine Jesus movement and the role of John the Baptist in relation to Jesus, have added sustained foci on John's Jewishness and understandings of Jesus and his followers from a historical Jewish perspective. In particular, the presentation of Jesus as the Eschatological Prophet in the Fourth Gospel poses a grounded, contextually viable portraiture of Jesus of Nazareth that is distinctive among the gospel traditions (Anderson 2018a, 271–299).

What the above developments show is that the Johannine-excluding quests for the historical Jesus may have dominated the last century and a half of critical studies, but they do not have the last word. Since the turn of the new millennium, the exclusion of the Gospel of John from Jesus studies no longer holds, although some may still pursue the parsimonious approach. Even so, a reductionistic historicity must at least consider ways that John's tradition is arguably more plausible—or equally plausible, or even independently corroborative or corrective—over and against the Synoptics. Along these lines, drawing in more nuanced and adequate approaches to disciplinary historiography itself has paved the way for an inclusive quest of Jesus, over and against von Rankian objectivism.<sup>27</sup> In the light of Hayden White's (2014) *Metahistory*, for instance, the question of “whose history” is worth considering when more than one perspective on a historical subject is put forward. It is precisely the defense of an alternative perspective that the two endings of the Johannine witness in John 20:30–31 and 21:24–25 assert: an individuated and distinctive historical memory, *not* an abstract theological treatise (Anderson 2006c).

Nonetheless, it is not enough simply to call for an inclusive Quest without understanding the particulars of the Johannine tradition and its development. Thus, three new paradigms within an overall Johannine theory make such an inquiry critically plausible, in my judgment.

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<sup>27</sup> As the founder of the historicism paradigm: *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist* (how things actually were), Leopold von Ranke (1874, vii) set the standard for the value of objectivism in historicity, bolstered by text-based verification. Of course, the rational fallacy, exemplified by parsimonious Jesus researchers, is the assumption that the lack of external verification implies the demonstration of inauthenticity. As Mark Allan Powell (2002, 32) puts it, “my principal critique of the Jesus Seminar is that they have not clearly distinguished between what is ‘historically unverifiable’ and what is ‘historically false’.”

## 8. Three Paradigms Within an Overall Johannine Theory—Critical Bases for an Inclusive Quest

While there indeed has been a great deal of dissent among Johannine scholars worldwide, on how to address the Johannine riddles, Raymond Brown was correct when he proposed an overall Johannine theory in his approach to the Gospel and Epistles of John. Indeed, the most compelling of Johannine studies have all proposed at least something close to an overall Johannine theory, and these elements must include theories of John's composition, John's relation(s) to other traditions, and the history of the Johannine situation.<sup>28</sup>

### 8.1 Paradigm I—A two-edition theory of John's composition

While the Gospel of John deserves to be read as an overall synchronic unity—after all, with Barrett (1978), it made sense as a whole to *someone* by the time it was finalized—it also bears evidence of editorial elements that deserve to be taken seriously by critical scholars.<sup>29</sup> This gets us into, of course, John's literary riddles. Note, for instance, the following literary perplexities:

- John 20:30–31 appears to conclude the narrative, and chapter 21 seems to have been added as a second ending, with the last verse (v. 25) echoing the ending of the first edition.

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<sup>28</sup> This is why, in my literature review of John's Christology (Anderson 2010d, 1–69), I began with analyzing the overall theories of Bultmann, Schnackenburg, Barrett, Brown, and Lindars. These and other leading Johannine scholars have addressed John's theological, historical, and literary issues within distinctive overall theories, lending credibility to their approaches. Additional scholars with overall Johannine theories include Haenchen, Smith (D. Moody), Keener, von Wahlde, and Culpepper, among others.

<sup>29</sup> For an overall view of Johannine composition, see Anderson (2015).

- A final writer alludes to the death of the Beloved Disciple, referencing the evangelist, who was intimate with Jesus, in the third person (21:20–24; 13:23).
- The testimonies of the eyewitness, who saw water and blood flowing from the side of Jesus, and that of the Beloved Disciple, are attested as true (19:34–35; 21:24).
- The vocabulary and strophic form of the Christ-hymn in John 1:1–18 is closer to the prologue of 1 John (1:1–3) than it is to the rest of the gospel narrative.
- John 14:31 (“let us depart”) seems to have led directly into the arrival at the garden (18:1), with chapters 15–17 (featuring a number of repetitive themes, echoing also the dialectical situation of the Johannine Epistles) plausibly having been added at a later time.
- The healing on the Sabbath in John 5 continues to be a matter of controversy in John 7, raising the possibility that John 6 was added at a later time.

Along these lines, a plausible inference is that at least some later material was added to an earlier edition of the Johannine narrative, which likely included parts of John 1:1–18; the eyewitness reference in 19:34–35; and chapters 6, 15–17, and 21. While it was earlier assumed that there were no text-critical clues to multiple editions of John, Brent Nongbri (2018, 345–360) points out that P<sup>66</sup> displays a break of about four centimeters at the bottom of the page featuring the end of John 20. This is unusual among the other pages, suggesting a clean break between John 20 and 21, in the mind of the copyist, at least. This fact reflects a second-century impression that John 21 was regarded as a separate unit, one way or another, and even the possibility that John's narrative had circulated locally before the final

chapter was added. If such was the case, other material may likely have been added, as well, including the Christ-hymn, which is more similar to 1 John 1:1–3 than the rest of the prosaic narrative. After all, later non-Johannine material was added, as John 7:53–8:11 and 5:4 are explicitly missing from P<sup>66</sup>. The first reflects an added non-Johannine pericope (the style and vocabulary are clearly different), and the second reflects an explanatory gloss. If post-Johannine copyists added material, it is difficult to imagine that the Johannine compiler did not do something similar in finalizing the Beloved Disciple’s witness. John 21, however, is clearly Johannine; but it seems to have been added to an earlier edition of the narrative, likely along with some other material.

Here, a number of judgments by Raymond Brown and Rudolf Bultmann come into play. Assuming at least the addition of later material by the redactor, Brown guessed that the Beloved Disciple continued to preach and perhaps write, even after his earlier material had been written, and that the final editor gathered up some of the material, comprising some of the material in the later chapters of the Farewell Discourse. This also accounts for some of its repetitive features. Second, there are clear echoes between the added material and the situation of the Johannine Epistles. 1 John 2:18–25 reflects a church split; in John 17, Jesus prays for unity. In John 13:34–35, Jesus gives his followers a “new commandment”: to love one another. In 1 John 2:7–11 and 2 John 5, the “old commandment” they have heard from the beginning is to love one another. The docetizing tendencies of the second Antichristic threat (1 John 4:1–3; 2 John 7) are countered by the incarnational thrusts of the later gospel material (1:14; 6:51–58; 19:34–35; 21:18–20), and the Elder attests, along with the Eyewitness and the Beloved Disciple, that “our testimony is [also] true” (John 19:34–35; 21:21–24; cf. 3 John 12) (Anderson 2020b, 171–183).

Further, in addressing the proto-Ignatian (and Petrine?) hierarchical authority claims of primacy-loving Diotrephes (3 John 9–10), in the Elder’s finalizing the witness of the Beloved Disciple, that completed narrative informs future audiences that the Beloved Disciple posed a priestly bridge between Jesus and Peter (John 13:23–24; 21:7); the direct leadership of the risen Lord is available to all believers through the Holy Spirit (John 14:16–26; 15:26–27; 16:7–15); and Peter is presented as “returning the keys of the Kingdom” to Jesus, where they belonged all along (John 6:67–70; cf. Matt 16:17–19) (Anderson 2007a, 6–41). Thus, it is likely that the final compiler of the gospel was the Johannine Elder, who added the Beloved Disciple’s later teaching material after his death (chs. 15–17). His adding of chapters 6 and 21 also harmonize the narrative with the Synoptics, referenced indirectly in 21:25. Finally, the three verses of the Christ-hymn (1:1–5, 9–13, 14 and 16–18) echo the Elder’s introduction to 1 John (1:1–3), all of which reflect a confessional response to the evangelist’s witness, later added as introductions to the first epistle and the gospel, alike (Anderson 2007f, 311–345; 2010d, 252–263; 2011, 25–43, 158–162; 2016, 219–242). Therefore, a modest two-edition view of Johannine composition plausibly looked something like this.<sup>30</sup>

## 8.2 A two-edition theory of Johannine composition

- 80–85 CE—Following several decades of preaching, the composition of the Johannine witness by the Beloved Disciple provides an alternative complement to Mark.
- 85 CE—The composition of 1 John by the Elder, serves as a circular among the churches.

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<sup>30</sup> For a more detailed overview of Johannine composition, see Anderson (2015).

- 90 CE—The composition of 2 John by the Elder, is written to the chosen lady and her children.
- 95 CE—The composition of 3 John by the Elder, is written to Gaius.
- 100 CE—The finalizing of the Gospel by the Elder, is performed and circulated after the death of the Beloved Disciple.

While the counsel of Alan Culpepper is well taken, that one's view of John's composition should not depend on particular inferences of authorship, a couple of issues are important, here. First, despite the fact that the traditional view, linking John the son of Zebedee with the Beloved Disciple, has problems to it, every other theory also bears with itself new sets of problems and few of the advantages. The author of the epistles and the final editor of the gospel seems to have been the same person (with Bultmann and others, here), but the editor-compiler clearly references someone else as the evangelist, whose testimony is claimed to be true. Second, a major reason for challenging the traditional view was the 1888 essay by de Boor (1888, 167–184, esp. 170), claiming fifth- and ninth-century references to “the early death of John.” This would be fine to know, but neither Philip of Sides nor George Hamartolos claims that James and John died *at the same time* (their suffering martyrdom simply references the prediction of Jesus in Mark 10:38–39, that they would share his cup and in his baptism. The Syrian martyrology, celebrating James and John on the same day, simply honors that tradition). Just because James died in 44 CE, this does not mean that John did too. There is no clear reference to such in *any* of the ancient literature, and Paul even reports meeting with Peter, James, and John (Gal

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**31** For a critical analysis of the so-called “early death” that never was, see Anderson (2018d, 17–82 and 241–249).

2:9) in the late 40s CE. Further, both Philip and George follow Eusebius in claiming that John the Apostle *died in Ephesus after the death of Domitian* (96 CE). So, neither of them said nor believed that John died early. The inference of such is an embarrassment to modern critical scholarship, and all solid evidence augurs firmly against it.<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, such an inference became a key basis for many scholars assuming that John the Apostle could not have been the Johannine evangelist—against the univocal memory of second- to fourth-century Christianity. Lightfoot's (2015) expansive work on the subject deserves a fresh look, here.<sup>32</sup>

Further, an overlooked first-century clue to John's authorship was discovered three decades ago and noted in Appendix VIII of *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel* (274–277). Overlooked perhaps because scholars have not recognized the character and function of composite statements (statements by more than one person within a unit of material), Acts 4:19–20 presents Peter and John as speaking. The first statement is clearly Petrine: “we must obey God rather than men” (see also Peter's comments in Acts 5:29 and 11:17). The next statement, though, is clearly Johannine: “we cannot help speaking about *what we have seen and heard*” (see the claim of 1 John 1:3 and the words of Jesus in John 3:32). The second statement reflects John the Apostle (*not* John the Elder) making a clearly Johannine statement a full century before Irenaeus's citing John the Apostle as the

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**32** Martin Hengel (1989), for instance, conjectures that the thesis of de Boor must be considered likely because the ancient appeals to Papias go against tradition instead of supporting it. While the logic is understandable, the facts augur against this move. In addition to the fact that Philip and George do not say what de Boor claims, they could be seen as simply celebrating the traditional honoring of the deaths of James and John in the Syrian martyrology, which itself was a traditional move. Hengel and others correctly, however, connect the contribution of the Johannine Elder with the witness of Papias, and as author of the Epistles, he certainly appears to have been the final compiler of the Beloved Disciple's contribution.

Fourth Evangelist (Anderson 2010d, 274–277; 2010b; 2018d). This does not prove the authorship of the Fourth Gospel, but it does connect the contribution of John the Apostle with the work of John the Elder as two individuated leaders within the Johannine tradition, who contributed to the narrating, writing, and editing of the Johannine writings in one way or another.<sup>33</sup> However, while no other authorial inference carries more weight—traditionally or critically—working with the phenomenology of the text itself is the surest way forward, regardless of who the Johannine authors and editors might or might not have been.

### *8.3 Paradigm II—Three periods in the Johannine situation—seven crises over seven decades*

The history and setting of Johannine Christianity have been approached from a number of perspectives, but the most common treatments over the last century or so have seen the Johannine adversaries as either Gnostics or Jewish leaders in the diaspora. On the former, second-century Gnosticism as the Johannine backdrop ruled the day within continental scholarship for a century or more, but such amounts to mere speculation and projections of authorized institutional leaders against pietists, enthusiasts, charismatics, and such, rather than the best of Second Temple and Greco-Roman scholarship. Docetism was an issue in the later Johannine situation (and likewise referenced in the writings of Ignatius), but not all docetists were gnostics, despite the fact that most later gnostics were docetists. From such speculation it has been wrongly assumed that the main threat in the Johannine situation was perfectionistic enthusiasm.

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<sup>33</sup> For a spirited challenge to inadequate views of the Johannine literature, see Anderson (2020a; 2021).

“When those perfectionistic enthusiasts claim to be led by the Spirit, challenging institutional leadership, they’re just totally incorrigible!” So, the projection has gone by mainline Christian interpreters. The inference of perfectionistic proto-gnostics has thus served as a hermeneutical foil within various interpretive schools, but with absolutely no evidence. Yes, Montanism became an issue in the mid second century CE, but the debate in 1 John revolved around disagreements over the sin of idol worship and pagan festivals (1 John 5:21), not sinlessness perfectionism, proper. The later Montanists would have agreed with the Elder’s admonition to “love not the world” on that and other scores. Further, locating the Johannine writings in the mid to late second century by Baur and others made the inference of Johannine pneumatism a facile paper tiger, enabling the dismissal of John’s historical content, as well.<sup>34</sup>

On this matter, however, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls displaced the gnostic backdrop of the Johannine situation with the inference of a Jewish backdrop in a diaspora setting. Overall, this move reflects a historical advance, although shaving with Ockham’s razor sometimes gets a little too close.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the Johannine tradents—and their tradition—experienced tensions with Jewish family and friends, and dialectical engagements with local synagogue communities and leaders in their Asia Minor setting are palpable within the Johannine corpus. With Brown, Lightfoot, and others, there is no better location than Ephesus, so the traditional view remains

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<sup>34</sup> Against fundamentalist and dispensational aggregating of the Johannine Antichrists and the Beast of Revelation, see Anderson (2007b, 196–216; 2007d, 217–240).

<sup>35</sup> Thus, versus Martyn, in contrast to a single audience addressed in the crafting of John 9, several other issues are being addressed within the larger passage (9:1–10:21) (Anderson 2020c, 441–470). Note also the four or five contextual issues addressed in the crafting of John 6 in Anderson (1997). See also Anderson (2007c, 133–159).

plausible overall. The Johannine-Synagogue dialectic was precipitously advanced by J. Louis Martyn in 1968, and John Ashton (1986, 5) rightly judged that book to be the most important advance in Johannine studies since Bultmann's commentary in 1941. Martyn, however, in advancing his thesis, excluded all other factors in the Johannine situation so as to argue more pointedly a synagogue expulsion thesis, bolstered by inferring the *birkat haminim* to have been a reference to the ἀποσυνάγωγος references in John 9:22, 12:42, and 16:2. On this score, Martyn (2003) distanced the Johannine Epistles from the Gospel so as to exclude their antidocetic thrust from consideration.<sup>36</sup>

Another inference of the character of tensions within the later Johannine situation had been a long-term view that the main target in the Johannine dialogical engagement was the likes of Diotrephes and his kin (3 John 9–10) as a reflection of John's challenge to rising institutionalism of the mainline church. As von Harnack surmised, Diotrephes might not have been the first hierarchical bishop in the early church, but he is the first one we know of *by name*. Along these lines, Ernst Käsemann (2017) saw the Johannine thrust as challenging Petrine hierarchy, calling for a more Spirit-based ecclesiology. It was in support of such a view that Barrett refused to go along with Brown's inference of a localized Johannine community, seeing its target as the larger Christian community. Richard Bauckham (1998, 147–171) furthered that view, arguing that the gospels were written for all Christians, not just a particular community.

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<sup>36</sup> See also Martyn (2019).

Among these views, though, I see the synthesizing work of Raymond Brown (1978, 2003) as the most comprehensive overview of Johannine Christianity in longitudinal perspective, and that model is the one most worthy of building upon.<sup>37</sup> Brown pointed out that we also have early dialogical tensions within the Johannine tradition's developments, reflecting at least two pre-70 CE dialogical engagements in Palestine: tensions between followers of the Galilean Prophet and the Jerusalem elite, and competition with followers of the baptizer.<sup>38</sup> Brown also discerned tensions with docetists in the later Asia Minor setting, along with synagogue engagements, so his view was more expansive—and realistic—than Martyn's. Brown also noted tensions with institutional developments in early Christianity, but he (wrongly, I believe) came to see John's challenge to Petrine hierarchy as originating beyond the apostolic movement (Anderson 2010d, 221–249; 1997; 2007a). He also overread the history-and-theology projection of the Johannine narrative onto inferences of the Johannine situation (I do not think crypto-Christians in Ephesus are the primary reference behind Nicodemus coming to Jesus by night in John 3:2; nor does John 4 imply there were Samaritans present in the later Johannine situation), and he totally misses the Roman imperial backdrop under Domitian, which was so incisive and determinative in the Asia Minor letters of Ignatius (Anderson 2010d, 110–136, 221–250).<sup>39</sup>

Therefore, what is required in sketching an overview of the Johannine situation (not just a singular community) is its development in longitudinal perspective over seven decades. That being the case, with Brown and Martyn,

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<sup>37</sup> See also Meeks (1972, 44–72) and Smith (1984).

<sup>38</sup> For an overall evaluation of Brown's Johannine community sketch, see Anderson (2014b, 47–93).

<sup>39</sup> See also Anderson (2007e, xi–xxiii; 2009, 60–61).

three overall periods can be inferred: the first within Palestine (30–70 CE), and the latter two within an Asia Minor regional setting (70–85 and 85–100 CE). Especially among the two later periods, however, each of these crises and situational engagements were largely overlapping, even if developing in somewhat sequential ways. Put otherwise, the next crisis never waits until the previous one has receded. Further, an earlier crisis never totally disappears; it simply gets pushed aside by more acute and pressing ones. Thus, the difference between the second and third stages is at least partially an external-versus-internal orientation. The tensions in the second period involved Jewish synagogue and Roman imperial forces (which preceded and followed 70–85 CE); the tensions in the third period involved intra-Christian tensions with assimilative Christian teachers and hierarchical emerging leaders (which preceded and followed 85–100 CE).

These matters being the case, the following inferences regarding the highly dialectical Johannine situation involved the following engagements.

#### *8.4 The Johannine dialectical situation in longitudinal perspective: Seven crises over seven decades*

- Early Period (30–70 CE): The Palestinian Location of the Johannine Tradition:
  - o Rejections of the Galilean prophet and his followers in Jerusalem
  - o Competitive tensions with followers of John the Baptist.
- Middle Period (70–85 CE): Asia Minor I—The Emergence of Johannine Communities:
  - o Johannine participation with and individuation from local Jewish communities
  - o Adversity related to the Roman presence and imperial cult requirements under Domitian and following.

- Later Period (85–100 CE): Asia Minor II—Engagements with Other Christian Groups:
  - o Staving off assimilative worldly teachings and docetizing legitimation
  - o Challenging rising institutionalization—the likes of Diotrephes and his kin
  - o Dialectical tensions with Synoptic traditions, spanning all seven decades.

The last crisis, or set of dialogical engagements referenced, actually spanned all three periods, as Johannine engagements with alternative gospel traditions—Synoptic and otherwise—was ongoing from day one through and beyond the finalization of the Johannine witness. That being the case, a simplistic John-and-the-Synoptics literary theory cannot be sustained, critically. Inter-traditional engagements were far more complex than that. Thus, a comprehensive analysis of all the similarities and differences between John and each of the Synoptic Gospels must be conducted, leading to a third critical paradigm.

#### *8.5 Paradigm III—A bi-optic hypothesis: An interfluent set of relations between the Johannine and Synoptic traditions*

With our modern access to all three Synoptic Gospels and John side-by-side, the tendency is to perform comparisons and contrasts between the finished works, without evidentiary understandings of how inter-traditional contacts might or might not have transpired. The clearest way forward among the Synoptic Gospels, of course, is to infer Matthew's and Luke's access to the Gospel of Mark, probably in its relatively finished

form without Mark 16:9–20. The tendency, then, is to infer a text-based approach to John's relation to the Synoptics, although the phenomenology of the contacts is completely different. While a number of similar words are present between John and Mark (see especially John 6 and Mark 6 and 8),<sup>40</sup> none of the similarities are identical or verbatim for more than a word, or at most, a phrase. Thus, even Barrett, who saw John as spiritualizing Mark's content, admitted that John did not make use of Mark as Matthew did.

Another analysis, that of Percival Gardner-Smith (1938), saw John as disagreeing with Mark at nearly every point of contact. At this, he surmised John's total independence from Mark, and C. H. Dodd (1963) referenced Gardner-Smith's work a good deal in constructing a view of John's material as historical tradition, parallel to the Synoptics, but not dependent upon them. Rudolf Bultmann (2014) also saw John as independent of the Synoptics, which is why he was forced to imagine disparate sources underlying John, assuming it did not involve an autonomous tradition. It was Moody Smith's (2001; 2015) analysis of Bultmann's work that convinced him of John's independence from the Synoptics. However, John's differences and distinctiveness could reflect its posing an autonomous, alternative witness rather than reflecting total Johannine isolation.

In my own analysis, I noted more than Gardner-Smith's four similarities and differences between John 6 and Mark. I found a total of forty-five instances: twenty-four similarities and differences between John 6 and Mark 6, and twenty-one between John 6 and Mark 8. Given the fact also, that some 85% of John is not included in the Synoptics, John's independence, or non-dependence on Mark, seemed obvious, critically. In 1999, however, I was an external evaluator of the doctoral dissertation of

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<sup>40</sup> Nonetheless, in addition to the Leuven School, several scholars have seen the Johannine-Markan relationship as John's dependence upon Mark. See also Hunt (2011) and Brodie (1993).

Ian Mackay (2004), under the supervision of Bill Loader, analyzing again John 6 and Mark 6 and 8. What I had not seen before is the structural similarities between John and Mark, suggesting at least familiarity with Mark's outline, while likely not having access to Mark's text literarily. In Mackay's view, given that Mark likely circulated among the churches as a performed reading, John plausibly heard Mark's text performed orally in one or more meetings for worship, so that familiarity became more of a plausibility, even if literarily independent. This caused me to change my language from Johannine *independence* of Mark to Johannine *autonomy*. John's narrator has his own story to tell, but his crafting of it might have followed Mark's pattern, even as an augmentation.<sup>41</sup>

As I thought about John's first edition having five signs instead of eight, these just happen to be the five that are *not* included in Mark. Assuming at least a general familiarity with Mark, part of John's original purpose appears to have involved augmenting Mark with non-duplicative material. Further, the numbering of the first and second signs in John 2:11 and 4:54 appears to reflect a knowing augmentation of the miracles in Mark 1 with earlier events in the ministry of Jesus. Likewise, the signs in John 5, 9, and 11 augment Mark geographically. Given that the Papias citation of John the Elder's opinion (*Hist. Eccles.* 3.39) that Mark's rendering of Peter's preaching is pretty good, but in the wrong order, John's distinctive chronology might reflect a timeline correction rather than a theological flourish. Further, a critique of Mark's content being situationally crafted rather than historical, and the Elder's critique of Mark's duplications account for many of John's

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<sup>41</sup> Thus, assuming that the Johannine Christ-hymn was added by the author of 1 John 1:1–3, the Johannine Elder, the evangelist's original beginning of the second biography of Jesus likely began with John 1:6–8, 15, 19ff., to which the three stanzas of vv. 1–5, 9–13, and 14 and 16–18 were added later (Anderson 2007f; 2016).

<sup>42</sup> For a fuller analysis, see Anderson (2013b).

differences from Mark. If the evangelist's general familiarity with Mark is imagined, (a) John's account sets some chronological issues straight; (b) the narrator also takes license to paraphrase and craft his memory to the needs of his audiences, as did Peter; and (c) he avoids duplications, which explains why most of Mark's content is *not* included in the first edition of John's material.<sup>42</sup> The Papias citing of the Johannine Elder's opinions about Mark coheres entirely with the earlier stages of the Johannine witness.

John's first ending even seems to acknowledge familiarity with Mark while defending John's distinctive account. "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in *this* book [I know Mark's out there; stop bugging me for leaving things out!]. But these are written so that you may come to believe..." (John 20:30–31). John's second ending acknowledges the fuller Synoptic witness, and despite adding the well-known feeding, sea crossing, debate about the loaves, and Peter's confession (John 6, etc.), as well as rectifying the image of Peter (John 21, and so on), the compiler nonetheless defends Johannine selectivity. "But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written [Look! If we would have included *everything* in the Synoptics, you wouldn't have enough libraries in the world, let alone enough books, to contain them—get off our case for our selectivity!]" (John 21:25) (Anderson 2015). Three further points follow.

First, given that some of Matthew's and Luke's uses of Mark tend to leave out details (they add units, but normally summarize and reduce Markan narratives), the fact that John and Mark contain some common details (much/green grass—John 6:10 and Mark 6:39; 200 denarii—John 6:7 and Mark 6:37; 300 denarii—John 12:5 and Mark 14:5) raise a question about some sort of inter-traditional contact. It could be that these

similarities are simply incidental or accidental. However, if they do reflect some sort of contact, Raymond Brown's explanation that oral-tradition crosses-influence seems a plausible inference (I call it *interfluence*—the sort of thing that must have happened as such figures as Peter and John preached together throughout Samaria in Acts 8). That being the case, however, it is impossible to know which direction the influence might have gone. Mark's source could have borrowed from John's just as easily as vice versa. Therefore, the most critically plausible inference accounting for some of the distinctive Markan-Johannine verbal similarities is some form of inter-traditional contact, or *interfluence*, between the formative stages of the Johannine and Markan traditions.

A second fact is that Mark, Matthew, and Luke all show signs of having made use of Johannine material, so it cannot be said that inter-traditional influence went in only one direction—toward the Johannine. Interestingly, the words of Jesus at the temple incident (John 2:19), "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up," are cited twice in Mark—by false witnesses at the trial of Jesus (Mark 14:58) and by the derisive passersby at the cross (15:29–30). These facts suggest the Markan tradition's access either to the Johannine tradition, or to an independent Jesus saying corroborating the Johannine witness. Matthew also references healings of Jesus in Jerusalem narrated only in John: healing the blind and the lame in the temple area (Matt 21:14; John 5:1–15; 9:1–7). Matthew also locates the healings in Peter's household referenced in Mark 1 just after the healing from afar in Capernaum: the *second* sign of Jesus, according to John 4:46–54 (Matt 8:5–13). Even in the Q tradition (if there was one—i.e. if Luke did not have access to Matthew), "the bolt out of the Johannine blue" raises questions about whether the Q tradition might also have depended upon the Johannine: "All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son

and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Matt 11:27; Luke 10:22; cf. John 1:18; 3:35; 5:19–26). Even more telling is the fact that Luke departs from Mark no fewer than six dozen times in ways that coincide with John (Anderson 2010b). Conversely, characteristically Lukan material is not found in John. Thus, the formative Johannine tradition—likely before its finalization, as the great catch of fish is placed early by Luke, and Luke does not follow John’s ordering of the temple incident—was clearly one of Luke’s sources, and the reference to “eyewitnesses and servants of the *Logos*” in Luke 1:2 might even be seen as an expression of gratitude to Johannine and other sources for Luke’s content. Again, influence also clearly flowed from the Johannine to each of the Synoptic traditions, albeit likely in different ways.

Third, the Johannine Matthean contacts are less pronounced in terms of particular diction, and yet, they still reflect some forms of engagement in the late first century situation.<sup>43</sup> In terms of presenting Jesus as the Jewish Messiah/Christ, Matthew and John reflect confirmations from Jewish Scripture—both explicit and implicit. Explicitly, numerous biblical texts are seen to be fulfilled in Jesus, reflecting apologetic interests. Implicitly, Matthew and John both show Jesus as fulfilling such biblical typologies as those of Moses and the Eschatological Prophet, especially in their crafting of their narratives. Nonetheless, Matthew’s institutionalizing of

Peter’s memory (Matt 10:2; 16:17–19) must be held in tension with John’s juxtaposition of Peter and the Beloved Disciple. Peter gets it wrong several times in John (also in the Synoptics),<sup>45</sup> and in narrative, miscomprehension is always rhetorical. While neither the Johannine evangelist nor the compiler need have known Matthew’s text specifically, the inhospitable actions of primacy-loving Diotrephes in 3 John 9–10 likely evoked an ideological corrective to rising institutionalization in the late first century situation. In terms of historicity, John’s presentation of a more familial and egalitarian ecclesiology reflects a more primitive memory of Jesus and his intentions for his followers than later, hierarchical developments, influenced by Matthew 16:17–19 and other texts. Thus, a larger view of *interfluentiality* between the Johannine and Synoptic traditions, likely included the following.

### 8.6 A Bi-optic hypothesis—A theory of Johannine-Synoptic interfluentiality

- The Johannine and Markan Traditions: Oral tradition *interfluentiality*, John’s augmentation and modest corrections of Mark as the second biography of Jesus.
- Luke’s (and perhaps Q’s) access to the Johannine tradition: Adding Johannine details and content, preferring John’s rendering of the feeding, and harmonizing Mark and John.
- Dialectical engagement between the later Matthean and Johannine traditions: Apologetically showing Jesus to be the Jewish Messiah/Christ, and reflecting conversations about leadership and church organization.
- The finalization of John’s Gospel by the compiler after the death of the Beloved Disciple: Harmonizing the Johannine narrative with those of the Synoptics and presenting a more egalitarian and Spirit-based view of church leadership.

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<sup>43</sup> Versus Barker (2015), the Johannine-Matthean relationship is better seen as a development of dialectical engagement rather than literary dependence.

<sup>44</sup> See, however, Brown, Donfried, and Reumann (1973), who show a range of portrayals of Peter in the New Testament. This does not mean, though, that there was no ideological tension between the Johannine leadership and rise of Ignatian Petrine hierarchy. If anything, it documents the critique of institutional developments within the early church (and apostolic) memory more broadly. See my response delivered personally in 2006 to Pope Benedict and Cardinal Kasper (Anderson 2005, 3–39). See also Anderson (1991, 27–43).

- The second ending of Mark (Mark 16:9–20): Including Lukan, Matthean, and Johannine material; *interfluentiality* continues! (Anderson 2002a, 19–58; 2014a, 102–126).

## 9. New Criteria for Determining Historicity—A Key Element in the Fourth Quest

Understandably, many may demur at the idea of naming the inclusion of the Gospel of John in critical Historical Jesus research *the Fourth Quest*, but such a designation is not simply a factor of advances in the twenty-first century, or new paradigms for understanding the character and origin of the Johannine tradition. What really makes this a distinctive quest unlike the others is the introduction of new and inclusive criteria for determining gospel historicity, in contrast to the reductionistic criteria of the parsimonious quests. These were introduced in the introduction to Vol. 3 of the *John, Jesus, and History* series, and I largely repeat them, here (Anderson and Clark-Soles 2016, 1–25).<sup>45</sup>

### 9.1. Corroborative impression versus multiple attestation

A huge problem with the criterion of multiple attestation is that, by definition, it excludes everything that might be added to Mark's account of Jesus's ministry by other gospel traditions and writers. Further, if Mark was used by Matthew and Luke, then triple-tradition material may simply denote their uses of Mark rather than reflecting independent attestations of a historical memory or event. And, if anything within the Gospel of John is intended to augment or correct Mark, it is automatically excluded from consideration, even if the basis for such a judgment is flawed. A more adequate

criterion looks for corroborative sets of impressions, wherein paraphrases, alternative ways of putting something, or distinctive renderings of a similar feature inform a fuller understanding of the ministry of Jesus. Such an approach would thus include the Johannine witness rather than excluding it programmatically.

### 9.2 Primitivity versus dissimilarity or embarrassment

While the criteria of dissimilarity and embarrassment might keep one from mistaking later Christian views for earlier ones going back to Jesus, they also tend to distort the historiographic process, itself. What if apostolic Christians and their successors *actually did get something right* in their memories of Jesus? Or, what if Jesus of Nazareth *actually did teach conventional Jewish views* during his ministry? The criterion of dissimilarity would thereby exclude such features from historical consideration, allowing only the odd or embarrassing features to be built upon. Even if such data is unlikely to be concocted, to exclude other material from the database of historical tradition creates an odd assortment of portraiture material, which, if used, is likely to create a distortive image of Jesus. A more adequate way forward is to seek to identify primitive material, seeking to distinguish it from its more developed counterparts. This may include Palestine-familiarity features, Aramaic and Hebraic terms, and other undeveloped material less influenced by the later mission to the Gentiles.

### 9.3 Critical realism versus dogmatic naturalism or supranaturalism

Just as dogmatic supranaturalism is an affront to historical inquiry, so is dogmatic naturalism—especially when it functions to exclude anything that might approximate the wondrous in gospel narratives. John's Prologue

<sup>45</sup> See also Anderson (2019a).

was probably added to a later or final edition of the gospel, so its cosmic perspective should not eclipse or distort the more conventional features of John's narrative, just as the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke should not eclipse their more mundane features. Rather, political realism, religious anthropology, and social-sciences analyses provide helpful lenses for understanding the perception of Jesus as a Galilean prophetic figure in all four gospel traditions. After all, John's narrative begins in ways similar to Mark's, launched by the association of Jesus with John the Baptist. Therefore, historical and critical realism acknowledges the historical problem of wondrous claims, but it also considers cognitive, religious, political, anthropological, and societal aspects of realism that might account for such impressions.

#### 9.4 *Open coherence versus closed portraiture*

Two central flaws in coherence-oriented criteria for determining historicity in the quest for Jesus include the circularity of the approach and the closed character of its portraiture. On one hand, the gospels form the primary database for determining a coherent impression of Jesus of Nazareth; on the other, those same gospels are evaluated on the basis of information contained within them. Further, scholars too easily base a view of what cannot represent a feature of Jesus's ministry based upon the narrowing down of what he must have done and said.

#### 9.5 *Gradations of certainty*

If indeed the Johannine tradition reflects an autonomous tradition, a considerable advance in Jesus research is that one need not identify extracanonical Jesus traditions to corroborate the Synoptic accounts. True, the distinctive Matthean and Lukan material (and even some of the Jesus sayings in the Pauline letters) corroborate the Markan account, but the

Johannine witness does so in several distinctive ways. From a *corroborative impression* standpoint, even when neither the language of Jesus nor the incidents reported are the same, John's witness functions to confirm a good number of Synoptic presentations as an independent means of verification. It also may serve to correct Markan or Synoptic impressions, although in some other ways, the Synoptic witness is preferable to the Johannine. Thus, a more nuanced and measured analysis of the particulars is required.

Along those lines, rather than force a dichotomous choice among Jesus scholars for or against an item's historicity within four brittle categories, a larger middle ground is essential, lest overstated judgments be forced. Along these lines, some scholars have argued for the inclusion of *plausibility* as a more realistic category for some judgments precisely because evidence is often ambiguous. Therefore, in addition to "Certainly Not" and "Unlikely," sometimes an issue is simply "Questionable." Likewise, in addition to "Certain" and "Likely," sometimes an issue is simply "Plausible." Further, some issues might not compel a judgment in one direction or another, deserving a more open category, "Possible." Therefore, the most nuanced of analyses are well advised to stipulate their gradations of certainty, declaring also *why* they have chosen such a category for a particular judgment. That would allow gradations of certainty to be named and evaluated more serviceably. The gradations would be as follows:

- Certainly not (1–14%)
- Unlikely (15–29%)
- Questionable (30–44%)
- Possible (45–54%)
- Plausible (55–69%)
- Likely (70–84%)
- Certain (85–99%)

Therefore, the Fourth Quest—laid down in further detail in the deliberations emerging from the John, Jesus, and History Project—invites the use of more adequate and nuanced measures of historical plausibility, promising more textured impressions of Jesus and his ministry. But why is this important?

## **10. The Value of Including the Gospel of John in the Fourth Quest for Jesus of Nazareth**

If the ministry and teachings of Jesus are considered in bi-optic perspective, this could launch highly significant advances in Jesus studies. The best way to proceed, in my judgment, is to begin with the Synoptics (especially Mark) and then to proceed with analyzing John and making sense of particular similarities and differences. Along those lines, I might offer three categories of historical information emerging from the analysis: (A) Johannine corroborations of Synoptic presentations of Jesus, (B) Synoptic contributions to understanding Jesus and his ministry, and (C) Johannine contributions to understanding Jesus and his ministry. While these features deserve fuller treatments, an overview of my earlier analyses is as follows (Anderson 2006c, 127–173).

### *10.1 Three contributions to historical Jesus studies in bi-optic perspective*

When John and the Synoptics are viewed together, a more nuanced appreciation of Jesus and his ministry is availed.

#### **10.1.1 Johannine independent corroborations of Synoptic presentations of Jesus—Synoptic-Johannine dual attestation:**

- Jesus's association with John the Baptizer and the beginning of his public ministry

- Jesus's calling of disciples as a corporate venture
- A revolt in the desert? (the feeding of the multitude)
- Jesus as a healer—healing on the Sabbath
- Jesus's sense of prophetic agency from the Father and religious resistance
- Jesus's cleansing of the temple
- The culmination of Jesus's ministry—his arrest, trials, and death in Jerusalem
- Attestations to appearances and the beginning of the Jesus movement.

In dual attestation between John and the Synoptics, the above perspectives on the ministry of Jesus deserve to be researched and taken further by Historical Jesus scholars. Indeed, there is no figure in ancient literature attested to more fully than Jesus of Nazareth, and the addition of the Gospel of John as an independent and distinctive memory of Jesus bolsters many of the features included in the Synoptics. Although distinctive features abound among the above presentations, differences may actually bolster the likelihood of such memories being rooted in history, given the implausibility of literary dependence as the best accounting for their parallels.

#### **10.1.2 Synoptic contributions to historical Jesus studies:**

- Jesus's teachings about the Kingdom of God in parables and in short, pithy sayings
- Messianic secrecy and the hiddenness of the Kingdom
- Jesus's healing and exorcizing ministries
- Jesus's sending out his disciples to further the work of the Kingdom
- Jesus's dining with "sinners" and provocations toward renewal
- Jesus's cleansing of the temple as an intentional challenge to the restricting of access to God

- Jesus’s teaching on the heart of the Law—the love of God and neighbor
- Jesus’s apocalyptic mission.

Given Mark’s contribution as the first biography of Jesus, attested also by the distinctive material in Matthew and Luke, the above Synoptic features provide a solid basis for understanding Jesus of Nazareth and his ministry. While most of these features are not included in the Gospel of John, the Synoptic contributions to Jesus studies nonetheless provide a sound framework for the inquiry. Along these lines, distinctive-yet-similar presentations of Jesus and his ministry in Matthew and Luke function to corroborate the Markan witness from a number of independent sources.

### 10.1.3 Johannine contributions to Historical Jesus studies

- Jesus’s simultaneous ministry alongside John the Baptizer and the prolific availability of purifying power
- Jesus’s temple cleansing as an inaugural prophetic sign
- Jesus’s travel to and from Jerusalem and his multi-year ministry
- Early events in the public ministry of Jesus
- Favorable receptions in Galilee among Samaritans, women, and Gentiles
- Jesus’s Judean ministry and archaeological realism
- The last supper as a common meal and its proper dating
- Jesus’s teaching about the way of the Spirit and the reign of truth.

In addition to dually corroborated impressions and Synoptic contributions, the Gospel of John has its own contributions to make—some of them adding to Synoptic reports, and others correcting or being more historically

viable than the Synoptic witnesses. On the latter point, such considerations are not motivated by religious conservatism; preferring one gospel against three others historically may raise consternation among literalists, both liberal and conservative. The value of an inclusive quest is that a multiplicity of perspectives can be considered rigorously, providing a more textured understanding of how Jesus of Nazareth was understood by his followers and others.

Along these lines, we are also helped in grasping a fuller and more adequate understanding of the character and significance of history, itself. Too often, the value of objective certainty tempts the modernist to dismiss the personal, contextual, and subjective aspects of memory, so as to distort the historical enterprise, itself. As Hans Küng (1976, 415–416) reminded us, “Truth is beyond mere facticity.” On precisely this point, the 1927 Eisenach address by Rudolf Bultmann (1969, 146) expands upon the value of dialectical theology to include also the character of dialectical historiography:

Insight into what is really meant by dialectical theology could lead to a deeper insight into the nature of history and thus modify, enrich or clarify the method of historical investigation.... What, then, is meant by *dialectic*? Undeniably it is a *specific way of speaking* which recognizes that there exists no ultimate knowledge which can be encompassed and preserved in a single statement.

Thus, what an inclusive quest for Jesus puts into play is a more humble, contextual, and dialectical approach to historiography, welcoming a multiplicity of perspectives whereby a more textured understanding of the subject is availed. If dialectical theology poses an advance over dogmatic theology, a dialectical approach to historiography poses a critical

advance over reductionistic historiography, despite critics' claims to positivistic objectivism. This is also important as a corrective to dogmatic understandings of apostolic memory. As James Dunn (1990) reminds us, within New Testament Christianity abounded a good deal of diversity within the unity and unity within the diversity. This fact is also relevant for understanding the contributions of the apostolic and sub-apostolic sources of gospel traditions in bi-optic perspective, distinctive though they may be. How can historical memory over seven decades or more have been other?

*Whoever* was Mark's source (and I do think there is critical evidence of a Petrine trajectory underlying Mark, cohering with Peter's presentation in Acts and features of the Petrine Epistles; Anderson 2010d, 137–165; 2014c, 285–296, 321–338), and *whoever* the Johannine evangelist might have been (and I do think Acts 4:19–20 connects John the Apostle with Johannine phraseology), there was likely more than one apostolic perspective—let alone later perspectives—within the development of gospel traditions. Indeed, disputes about what Jesus did and meant are referenced in all four gospels, and like any other historic figure, first- and second-generation interpreters always dispute understandings and meanings. While a good number of advances have resulted from the first three quests for Jesus, their limitation lies primarily in what they have cropped. Here's where restoring the Johannine witness to Jesus research avails new considerations, which may yet be of interest to present and future audiences.

In 2010, Marcus Borg and I presented three public dialogues at the Center for Christian Studies at Reedwood Friends Church in Portland, Oregon on “The Gospels and Jesus in Bi-Optic Perspective.” Marcus presented on the Synoptic perspective regarding the works, teachings, and last days of Jesus; I presented on the Johannine (Anderson 2010a). At the end of our first of three sessions, Marcus said to me, “Paul, what if the Gospel of John was the only account going back to eyewitness memory, what difference

would that make? Is it just a matter of three Passovers and multiple trips to Jerusalem, or would it make any meaningful difference?” I was taken back at his allowance of such a consideration, but then I responded: “Well, actually, I don't care what the results produce; I just think the Gospel of John is an under-utilized resource for understanding Jesus of Nazareth.” I continued: “Then again, John's presentation of women in leadership and in close relation to Jesus, plus an egalitarian and familial approach to church governance and leadership, *could* be really important in understanding the Jesus of history and the movement he founded.” Thus, here are just a few values of an inclusive quest for Jesus.

## *10.2 Values of envisioning Jesus in Johannine perspective within the Fourth Quest*

- The spirituality of Jesus
- The valued place of women in the Jesus movement and in church leadership
- An egalitarian, familial, and Spirit-based approach to church governance
- A more realistic chronology
- A grounded-yet-meaning-driven account of Jesus and his ministry
- An independent corroboration and engagement of the Synoptic accounts.

While including the Johannine witness within the Historical Quest of Jesus involves huge critical challenges, it also bears with it a number of timely advances. John's memory of Jesus, despite reflecting the Fourth Evangelist's paraphrastic representation of Jesus as developed within his own ministry, nonetheless corroborates a good deal of the Synoptic witness while also contributing valuably to ongoing understandings of spirituality,

ecclesiology, leadership, women's issues, and cross-cultural outreach. Not only is the Fourth Quest demanded by the phenomenology of the texts; it is also beneficial in service to fuller and more textured understandings of Jesus and his ministry.

## 11. Conclusion

In conclusion, while the sure steppingstones of the parsimonious quests of Jesus need not be rejected, their limitation is that they do not go far enough in making use of all worthy sources, which cannot avoid meaningfully engaging the Gospel of John. Despite the critical challenges posed by the Johannine theological, historical, and literary riddles, the Fourth Gospel cannot simply be assigned to canons of theology or literary flourishes. Its historical features also demand consideration, and a compelling overall theory is required to make sense of John's composition, evolving situation, and relations to other traditions. What we see within the Johannine account is an individuated memory of Jesus, distinctive from the Markan perspective from day one, yet also engaging and engaged by other traditions as they all developed into the later first century situation. While John's presentation represents a paraphrastic crafting of Jesus and his ministry, the same can be said of other traditions, whether rooted in first-hand memory or second- or third-hand accounts. John's tradition includes primitive memory as well as developed understandings. Some of it corroborates Synoptic accounts; some of it augments Synoptic accounts; some of it counters or modestly corrects Synoptic accounts. But, such is the character of historical contributions, as there is no such thing as non-rhetorical historiography. It is precisely a set of myopic impressions—among general readers and scholars alike—upon which a bi-optic approach improves.

Not only is it the modern quests for Jesus that the Johannine witness complements and completes; such was also the claim of the original compiler at the end of the first century CE, with alternative accounts in view, who defended the distinctive witness of the Fourth Evangelist, claiming: "His testimony is true." As the Johannine Elder endeavored to set the record straight regarding a fuller grasp of Jesus around the turn of the first century CE, so a Fourth Quest for Jesus does the same at the dawn of the third common millennium, bolstered by a fuller grasp of Jesus in Johannine perspective.

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