

**Saint Louis Christian College**  
**BNT331, 331n - JOHN**

**I. Historical Background**

Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, writing in the 4<sup>th</sup> century & quoting apparently from Clement bishop of Rome in the 1<sup>st</sup> century said, “But last of all, John, perceiving that the external facts had been made plain in the Gospel, being urged by his disciples, and inspired by the Spirit, composed a spiritual Gospel.”

St. Augustine, 4<sup>th</sup> century, said “John’s Gospel is shallow enough for a baby to wade in and deep enough for an elephant to swim in.”

G.R. Beasley-Murray begins his commentary, *Gospel of Life – Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, saying, ‘the last of the four Gospels appears among the rest in a manner reminiscent of Melchizedek to Abraham: ‘without father, without mother, without genealogy’ (Heb. 7:3).

Ben Witherington III, in his commentary *John’s Wisdom: a commentary on the fourth gospel*, concurs saying, “Here we have a Jesus who speaks no parables but rather offers long discourses; a Jesus who, far from silencing messianic acclamations, personally offers various ‘I am’ utterances; a Jesus who is said to have preexisted, to be the Logos in human form, and yet is also depicted as radically dependent on and subordinate to the Father and his will. This Jesus speaks rarely of kingdom and often of eternal life. He does not so much call disciples as exercise some kind of mysterious spiritual gravity, attracting them from among the world’s many truth seekers. It is no wonder that E. Kasemann once suggested that the Johannine Jesus bestrides the stage of history like some sort of colossus or deity.”

Andreas Kostenberger, concludes saying, “John’s Gospel, together with the Book of Romans, can justifiably be called ‘the Mount Everest of New Testament theology.’ From its peaks it is possible to survey much of the territory of biblical revelation, including the Old Testament, the Synoptics, and other portions of the New Testament.” (*Studies on John and Gender: a decade of scholarship.*)

Elsewhere Kostenberger says that this Gospel “has moved countless hearts to recognize their need for Christ and nurtured many to greater heights in their spiritual pilgrimage.” (*A Theology of John’s Gospel & Letters: The Word, The Christ, The Son of God*)

John Calvin (1553) – “And since they all [i.e. the four Gospels] had the same object, to show Christ, the first three exhibit His body, if I may be permitted to put it like that, but John shows His soul.”

Kostenberger says,

“In the recent history of interpretation, Clement’s reference to John as a ‘spiritual gospel’ has frequently been taken to imply that John is less interested in historical matters than the Synoptics, and a chasm began to open up between John as a ‘spiritual’ (i.e., nonhistorical) gospel and the Synoptics as more reliable historical accounts...

More likely, by observing that John was ‘conscious that the outward facts had been set forth in the [Synoptic?] Gospels’ already, Clement sought to draw attention to the profound theological reflection present in John’s gospel without intending to disparage the historical nature of his account. Indeed, John deepens the reader’s understanding of the significance of Jesus’ life and work by focusing on a small number of pivotal items such as the identity of Jesus, the necessity of faith, and the universal scope of Christ’s redemptive work.” (Kostenberger, *A Theology of John’s Gospel & Letters*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI. 2009, 38-39)

Understood this way, the assertion that John is a “spiritual gospel” makes sense. For while grounded in historical time & space, John’s intent was clearly to provide deeper more transcendent reflection on the historical events surrounding Jesus the Messiah.

John is the most theological of the Gospels spending almost two-thirds of his writing devoted to the last weeks of Jesus’ life.

Fascinating that from John’s Gospel we have the most extensive revelation concerning the Person & Work of the Holy Spirit; this spoken by Jesus in the Upper Room discourse.

Still deeper, “John and the Synoptics were designed by the divine Spirit to supplement each other. They ‘represent an interlocking tradition, that is,... they mutually reinforce or explain each other’”. (MacArthur, *John 1-11*, 2)

For example, at His trial & while on the cross the enemies of Christ accused Him of having claimed He would destroy the temple (Mark 14:58; 15:29). This statement Mark never recorded, but John did in 2:19. The call of Peter, Andrew, James and John in Matthew 4 becomes much more understandable alongside John 1:35-42. Furthermore, John the apostle, writing decades after the Synoptics, clearly assumed his readers were familiar with the events recorded in Matthew, Mark & Luke. MacArthur cites several examples on pages 2-3.

“However, the last half millennium of human thought has bequeathed several unfortunate dichotomies on biblical scholarship. The separation between history and theology has led to a gradual disparagement of John’s historical reliability and moved the gospel’s genre closer to myth and legend.

For example, David Strauss, writing in *The Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History* (trans. and ed. Leander E. Keck; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977 [1865], 161) said, “The Gospels are to be regarded as the oldest collections of the myths which were attached around the core of this personality [i.e. Jesus]”.

### **The roots of this anti-supernatural bias or presupposition**

“During the Enlightenment, many became disenchanted with the supernatural element in Scripture, such as the miracles performed by Moses or Jesus. Increasingly, the very possibility of miracles was questioned, and anti-supernaturalism often prevailed. A new view of science led to the interpretation of the biblical creation and miracle stories as ‘myths.’ This included Jesus’ resurrection, even though Paul and other NT writers insisted that the resurrection is essential to the Christian faith. Over time, this rationalistic mindset gave rise to a pronounced skepticism toward the scriptural data and led to the historical-critical method with its commensurate criteria for assessing the historicity of biblical texts.” (Kostenberger, *A Theology...*, 43)

At the end of the Enlightenment, Immanuel Kant asserted a separation between metaphysics & the cosmos. Subsequently another dichotomy was & is asserted between religion and theology. Whereas theology is understood as reflection on actual revelation from God, religion is seen as the evolutionary growth of the human quest for meaning and pursuit of a higher power.

“Friedrich Schleiermacher, likewise, building on Immanuel Kant’s distinction between metaphysics and practical morality, drew the same distinction between religion as a phenomenon of feeling and experience, ‘The sense of absolute dependence on God,’ and theology as intellectual reflection about God.” (Koestenberger, *A Theology...*, 40)

The consequence of this homogenization of liberal & anti-supernatural philosophies with Biblical studies was that if there was to be any salvaging of John’s spiritual message it would have to embrace a rejection of John’s historical reliability. This was facilitated through Rudolf Bultmann’s demythologization of John and more contemporaneously by the quest for the historical Jesus pseudo scholarship.

Today, Postmodernism casts the very notion or concept of either transcendent or historical truth as a mere function of sociological factors rather than in terms of correspondence to facts and reality.

In your textbook Kostenberger remarks, “Recent years have seen increasing attention being devoted to literary aspects of John’s Gospel. John’s Gospel is not alone in this regard. The science of literary criticism as practiced in nonbiblical studies has invaded the exegetical enterprise, often to the extent of overshadowing traditional historical and theological concerns. Several factors may account for this phenomenon:

1. a growing disenchantment with the limitations of the so-called **historical-critical** method: it became clear that while the historicity of events recorded in Scripture is important, it is reductionistic to limit exegesis (biblical interpretation) to the assessment of the historicity of

certain events alone; the study of various literary aspects of biblical narratives can helpfully supplement the historical-critical method

2. an impasse regarding historical questions in biblical scholarship: it became apparent that consensus was elusive regarding matters such as the authorship of John's Gospel; so why not choose agnosticism in this regard, agree to disagree, leave historical concerns aside altogether, and move on to an area of investigation that appears to offer almost limitless potential for fruitful exploration, that of the study of a biblical book "as literature"
3. the meteoric rise of postmodernism in reaction to the perceived flaws of modernism: a preoccupation with factual historicity and absolute, objective, propositional truth must give way, it was argued, to more dynamic models of knowing, focusing instead on subjective experience, the cultural relativity of various interpretive communities, and other factors; once the author was dethroned as determinative for interpretation, the isolated text proved patent to interpretations by interpreters of various stripes and backgrounds. (Kostenberger, *Encountering John*, 30)

Kostenberger then cites various concerns regarding the following developments spawned by Literary Criticism.

1. Recent years have witnessed a deplorable de-emphasis on theology. Literature is a medium, a vehicle to convey a message. Once the study of the medium (the literary art of the fourth evangelist) has overshadowed the apprehension of the message (John's desire to lead his readers to faith; 19:35; 20:31), biblical priorities have been reversed.
2. Inherent in much of literary criticism is also an illegitimate dichotomy between literature and history. As already mentioned, the literary study of biblical narratives has often become an avenue for avoiding the historical dimensions of the text of Scripture. But here we must say with Paul that, if Christ has not been raised, our faith is futile, and we are still in our sins: "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men" (1 Cor 15:17, 19). Christianity is a historical religion, not merely an exercise in art appreciation. Scripture is not merely world literature, a classic document of Western civilization, it is divine revelation that confronts readers with their sin and need for salvation and forgiveness, calling upon them to make a choice that has eternal ramifications: to receive Christ's free gift of salvation or to reject it. Readers of Scripture are not merely dispassionate literary critics – they are existentially addressed and engaged by the biblical message and must act in response to it rather than merely revel in interesting plot lines, masterful characterization, or various other instances of skillful literary techniques employed by the biblical authors.

In a culture where **the medium is the message and image is frequently more important than substance**, it is, of course, not surprising that the literary study of Scripture is elevated above historical and theological concerns. But faithfulness to the intentions of the authors of Scripture demands that the historical and theological dimensions of biblical narratives are given their due and the literary investigation of a given text be kept in proper perspective.” (Kostenberger, *Encountering John*, 30-31)

Kostenberger astutely points out that “it must be admitted that the traditional understanding of the authorship of John’s gospel, attributing the composition of this work to the apostle John, the son of Zebedee, is a minority position today... Yet, curiously, the traditional view has not so much been refuted as it has been dismissed in the wake of Enlightenment’s questioning of ecclesiastical authority and long-held positions.” (Kostenberger, *A Theology...* 52)

He summarizes in your textbook saying, “In the end, we must allow the four writers of the canonical Gospels to write their own story. The question is therefore not merely, ‘What is a Gospel?’ but ‘Which kind of Gospel did John write?’ And at this point it is striking that John, in keeping with the conventions of ancient biographies, recounts the deeds of a person primarily as a means of illuminating his essence.” (Kostenberger, *Encountering John*, 32)

With that statement he hits the proverbial nail on the head!

## Historical Setting

The traditional view is that the apostle John, at the request of his disciples, recorded his personal memories of Jesus’ earthly ministry at the end of the first century AD.

Irenaeus (c. AD 130-200) is the first to explicitly name John as the author. In his work *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus wrote, ‘Afterwards [after the Synoptic Gospels were written], John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia’ (*Against Heresies*, 3.1.1).

What is fascinating here is that Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp who was a disciple of the apostle John. Thus there is a direct line from John the apostle to Irenaeus with only Polycarp forming the link.

Following Irenaeus the church fathers consistently held John to be the author of the fourth Gospel.

MacArthur cites a fascinating development from Lower Criticism. “The earliest extant portion of any New Testament book is a tiny fragment (p52) containing a few verses from John 18 and dating from about AD 130 (or earlier)... Nineteenth-century critics confidently dated the gospel of John in the second half of the second century. The discovery of p52 early in the twentieth

century sounded the death knell for that view. The fragment was found in a remote region of Egypt. Allowing time for John's gospel to have circulated that far pushes its date of writing back in to the first century." (MacArthur, *John 1-11*, 4-5)

Leon Morris observes that it is remarkable that the apostle John, mentioned some 20x in the Synoptic Gospels, is not named once in the fourth Gospel. "It is not easy to think of a reason why any early Christian, other than John himself, should have completely omitted all mention of such a prominent Apostle" (Morris, *John*, 11)

MacArthur argues that "only a preeminent person of unquestioned authority could have written a gospel that differed so markedly from the other three and had it universally accepted by the church." (MacArthur, *John 1-11*, 6)

Thus, while John was geographically located in Ephesus, on the west coast of Asia Minor (modern Turkey) he penned the fourth Gospel.

"In the traditional reconstruction John, the son of Zebedee and one of three disciples to make up Jesus' inner circle, paired with Peter in the early portions of the book of Acts and reputed to be one of the pillars of the Jerusalem church in Galatians 2, later moved to Ephesus, perhaps just prior to the outbreak of the Jewish War, where he had a fruitful ministry that led to the establishment of several congregations, which eventually were the recipients of the three canonical Johannine letters. Still later, the same apostle was exiled to the island of Patmos, where he wrote the final book of the NT canon, the book of Revelation." (Kostenberger, *A Theology...*, 53)

Thus John's gospel has been historically placed within the first century. It is therefore an actual eyewitness account by one of the key disciples who walked with Jesus.

So from the writing of the fourth Gospel forward "the church unanimously attributed Johannine authorship to the apostle John for almost eighteen centuries with virtually no dissent." (Kostenberger, *A Theology...*, 74)

### **Higher Criticism** (*"professing themselves to be wise they became fools"*)

The spirit of the Enlightenment approached the 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel with a pre-suppositional bias. David Strauss (1835), building on Enlightenment thought, viewed the gospel as myth, a category picked up and developed still more by Rudolf Bultmann.

Yet there were other scholars asserting more traditional viewpoints. B.F. Westcott, writing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century placed the time of John's composition in the period subsequent to the destruction of the temple:

“The Synoptic Gospels are full of warnings of judgment... In St. John all is changed. There are no prophecies of the siege of the Holy City... the judgment has been wrought... The task of the Evangelist was to unfold the essential causes of the catastrophe, which were significant for all time, and to show that even through apparent ruin and failure the will of God found fulfillment. Inexorable facts had revealed the rejection of the Jews. It remained to show that this rejection was not only foreseen, but was also morally inevitable, and that it involved no fatal loss... The true people of God survived the ruin of the Jews: the ordinances of a new society replaced in a nobler shape the typical and transitory worship of Israel.” (B.F. Westcott, *Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975, 1908, xxxvii-xxxviii)

Kostenberger asserts that the composition of the gospel historically took place within the context of three major & immediately recent phenomena:

- (1) The Gentile mission
- (2) The destruction of the temple
- (3) The emergence of *Gnosticism* (see Kostenberger, *Encountering John*, 58-60)

“While much continental Johannine scholarship in the early twentieth century followed Strauss rather than Westcott (most notably Bultmann in his celebrated 1941 John commentary), this member of the famed ‘Cambridge trio’ (together with F.J.A. Hort and J.B. Lightfoot) has served as an important point of reference for more conservative scholars ever since. They contend that Westcott’s synthesis, while frequently disputed, has never been refuted.” (Kostenberger, *A Theology...*, 55)

### **The Destruction of the Second Temple by Rome in AD 70**

“I will argue that whatever background is assigned to John, here lies a key, perhaps the key. The core element occasioning the composition of John’s gospel, and particularly its emphasis on Jesus as the fulfillment of Jewish festivals and institutions, including the temple, can be identified as the destruction of the Second Temple.

John’s Christology would then not be tied simply to temple imagery, as others have naturally recognized, but would be formulated precisely in the context of a crisis of Jewish belief, brought on by the destruction of the temple. The gospel could then be understood, at least in part, as a response to the religious vacuum left by the temple’s destruction, a response that points to a permanent solution to that vacuum: Jesus’ replacement of the temple, in the religious experience of his people, by himself.” (Kostenberger, *A Theology...*, 59-60)

Recent scholarship has historically demonstrated the devastation the Jews in both Palestine and the Diaspora were dealt upon the destruction of the Second Temple.

Dr. Martin Goodman writes there is “every reason to suppose that the razing of the Temple horrified diaspora Jews as much as their Judaeans compatriots...Judaism without the Temple seems to have been unthinkable” at least initially. (Martin Goodman, *‘Diaspora Reactions to the Destruction of the Temple,’* in *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways A.D. 70 to 135*, 27-38)

Kostenberger aptly summarizes saying, “the destruction of the Jerusalem temple was not just some distant event, nearly irrelevant for Diaspora Jews, but an earthquake that reverberated powerfully among Jews and proselytes who lived toward the end of the first century AD throughout the Greco-Roman world...The temple’s ruins still cast their shadow in the days when the gospel was composed, and the echoes of its fall still rang loudly in Jewish ears everywhere.” (Kostenberger, *A Theology...*, 62-63)

Kostenberger’s thought here is crisp...

“A fascinating glimpse of ways of coping with the loss of the Second Temple after AD 70 appears in Josephus’ works *Jewish War* and *Antiquities*. In the former volume, published in AD 79 – almost ten years after the destruction of the temple – Josephus expresses his views in the manner of Thucydides, by placing them on the lips of the characters in his account. He features a speech by Eleazar, son of Yair, who contends that there could be no Judaism without the temple, so that the people in Masada were the final Jews on the earth (J.W.7.341 -88). By the time *Antiquities* was published thirteen years later (AD 92), Josephus had come to realize that his previous opinion had been mistaken and Judaism could continue even without the temple.

The earlier outlook of Josephus and his later shift of opinion are especially illustrative when the composition of John’s gospel is placed in the same period as his writings, at the end of the first century. He shows that, at least for certain Jews, life without the temple was at first hardly imaginable. Initial shock, however, gradually gave way to coping mechanisms that overcame the absence of a temple. It may be surmised that, likewise, after initial shock waned, Christian apologetic efforts toward Jews (such as John’s) emerged to address the Jews’ need to fill the void left by the Second Temple’s destruction. The fourth evangelist’s approach was to commend a permanent solution, namely, faith in Jesus the Messiah as the one who fulfilled the underlying symbolism not only of the temple, but of the entire Jewish festival calendar (not to speak of a variety of other typological substructures of OT theology, such as the serpent in the wilderness or the manna). In other words, John offered an alternative to the path chosen by mainstream (Pharisaic) Judaism, which eventually became rabbinic Judaism centered on the Mishnah and the Talmuds. (Kostenberger, *A Theology...*, 64-65)

Another commentator referencing Jesus’ words in John 2:19, “‘*Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days,*’ together with the entire temple-clearing episode, as an instance that ‘rang with nuances and connotations fed by the readers’ situation... Read within a post-70 situation, there would be no difficulty for any reader, Jew or Christian, in comprehending the



claim made for Jesus in 2:21f: his resurrection constitutes a rebuilding of the destroyed Temple.” (Motyer, *Your Father The Devil? A New Approach to John and the Jews*, Paternoster Biblical Monographs, 38-39)

### **Conclusion of the probable impact of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple’s destruction on John’s Gospel**

“The destruction of the Second Temple in AD 70 is a most promising candidate for formative influence on John’s gospel. We know it actually happened. There is general agreement that it happened not long before the composition of the gospel. The demonstrably universal impact that this destruction of the temple had on Jews, not only in Palestine but also in the Diaspora, heightens the possibility that the composition of the gospel was also marked by that impact, or rather it makes it incredible to suppose that it was not. The destruction fits into an inherited Jewish typological substructure that qualifies physical sanctuaries as merely provisional manifestations of God’s presence, and cherishes expectations that the Messiah will inaugurate a fuller and more permanent manifestation of God’s presence with his people. A link between the destruction of the temple and the composition of John’s gospel (and in particular its Christology) would be in keeping both with previous expectations centered on God’s coming and manifesting his presence more fully in the person of the Messiah.” (Kostenberger, *A Theology...*, 71)

### **Conclusion of internal & external evidence**

“A close examination of all the available internal and external evidence provides plausible grounds for the following three conclusions about Johannine authorship.

- (1) The author is an apostle and eyewitness (John 1:14; see 2:11; 19:35);
- (2) The author is one of the Twelve (13:23; see Matt 26:20; Mark 14:17; Luke 22:14);
- (3) The author is John, son of Zebedee, & is by far the strongest candidate... While the hypothesis of the apostolic authorship of John’s gospel is regularly the object of derision in recent Johannine scholarship, the hypothesis has never been decisively refuted...” (Kostenberger, *A Theology...*, 75)

### **The fourth Gospel’s purpose**

Toward the end of his gospel, John gives his purpose: “*But these [signs] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name*” (20:31).

Here it would seem is an evangelistic purpose, leading his readers to faith in Jesus as the Christ the Son of God. Yet, the fourth Gospel clearly assumes an audience already familiar with the previous three Gospels.

“For reasons such as these it seems perhaps most likely that John’s purpose encompassed both aspects, evangelism of unbelievers and edification of believers, and that John pursued an indirect evangelistic purpose, aiming to reach an unbelieving audience through the Christian readers of his gospel.

John’s purpose, then, according to 20:31, is to set forth the evidence that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, so that people might believe in him and as a result have life in his name. The purpose statement corresponds to the opening chapter of the gospel where John sets forth Jesus’ messianic identity (e.g., 1:1-3, 14, 17, 29, 34 & 41). In the body of the gospel, John presents a series of Jesus’ messianic ‘signs’ and narrates his death, resurrection, and appearances in order to elicit in his readers’ faith in Jesus as Messiah. ‘Believing,’ in John, goes beyond mere intellectual assent and involves putting one’s trust in Jesus. ‘Life’ refers to eternal communion with Jesus entered into already in the here and now (e.g., 5:24; 8:12; 10:10; 17:3). (Kostenberger, *A Theology...*, 85-86)

“We must first learn to appreciate John’s Gospel in its original context in order to understand John’s message authentically and appropriately. In God’s providence, then, the Gospel’s audience is not limited to its first readers and intended recipients; it also extends to us. And in God’s providence, we may benefit from John’s Gospel by deriving spiritual insights from it not even envisioned by John himself. This is entirely legitimate, yet these insights must still be informed and constrained by the Gospel John actually wrote. We, too, should use John’s Gospel in an evangelistic context rather than merely for the purpose of our own edification. And just as in John’s day, it is of crucial importance today that Jesus, and Jesus alone, is the universal Savior, the one and only way provided by God for us to have our sins forgiven, to be saved, and to experience eternal life.” (Kostenberger, *Encountering John*, 28)

Ponder anew Calvin’s assessment... “*And since they all had the same object, to show Christ, the first exhibit His body, if I may be permitted to put it like that, but **John shows His soul.***”

## II. The Structure of John’s Gospel

It is customary to see John’s Gospel as comprised of four elements:

- (1) A Prologue (1:1-18)
- (2) A first major unit often called “**The Book of Signs**” (1:19-12:50)
- (3) A second major unit often called “**The Book of Glory**” (13:1-20:31)
- (4) A Postscript (21:1-25)

Yet, the first major unit definitely speaks of “glory” (2:11; 11:4; 12:23). Thus, Kostenberger says, “it is more appropriate to label Part 1 of John’s gospel as The Book of Signs and Part 2 as The Book of Exaltation.” (*A Theology...* p168)

**The Book of Signs** is made up of two major cycles describing Jesus’ ministry: a Cana Cycle (2:1 – 4:54) & a Festival Cycle (5:1-10:42)

### **The Cana Cycle**

In this portion of the Gospel, John demonstrates Jesus messiahship through seven selected signs. Here is a progressive display of signs with the intent of establishing Jesus as Messiah.

**First sign: Water to wine** (2:1-11)

**Second sign: Temple clearing** (2:13-22)

**Third sign: Healing of the official’s son** (4:54)

### **The Festival Cycle**

**Fourth sign: Healing of the lame man** (5:1-15)

**Fifth sign: Feeding of multitude** (6:1-15)

**Sixth sign: Opening of a blind man’s eyes** (chapter 9)

**Seventh sign: Raising of Lazarus** (chapter 11)

**The Book of Exaltation** includes the Farewell Discourse (chapters 13-17), and the Passion Narrative (chapter 18:1 – 20:31). All this culminates in a terse statement of John’s purpose in 20:30-31.

Kostenberger summarizes this Book of Exaltation saying that it “shows how Jesus ensured the continuation of his mission by preparing his new messianic community for its mission. This portion opens with Jesus’ Farewell Discourse (John 13-17); the new messianic community is cleansed (by the footwashing and Judas’s departure; John 13) prepared (by instructions regarding the coming Paraclete and his ministry to the disciples; (John 14-16), and prayed for (John 17). The disciples are made partners in the proclamation of salvation in Christ (15:15-16), their witness being aided by the Spirit (15:26-27), and they are taken into the life of the Godhead, which is characterized by perfect love and unity (17:20-26).

The Johannine Passion Narrative (John 18-19) presents Jesus’ death both as an atonement for sin (cf. 1:29, 36; 6:48-58; 10:15, 17-18), though largely without the Synoptic emphasis on shame and humiliation, and as a stage in Jesus’ return to the Father (e.g. 13:1; 16:28). The resurrection

appearances and the disciples' commissioning by their risen Lord constitute the focal point of the penultimate chapter (John 20), where Jesus is cast as the paradigmatic Sent One (cf. 9:7), who has now become the sender of his new messianic community (20:21-23).

The purpose statement of 20:30-31 reiterates the major motifs of the gospel: the signs, believing, (eternal) life, and the identity of Jesus as Messiah and Son of God. The epilogue portrays the relationship between Peter and 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' in terms of differing yet equally legitimate roles of service within the believing community."

(*A Theology...* p167-170)

### III. An initial look at the "forest" of John's Gospel

"In 2:1 – 4:54, Jesus travels from Cana to Jerusalem and back to Cana again. Through a series of enigmatic words and deeds, the evangelist develops his portrait of Jesus as the fulfillment and replacement of God's previous dwelling places. The incarnate Son is the new Bethel, where the gateway of heaven is opened and upon whom the angels of God ascend and descend (1:51). His body is a 'temple' that must first undergo destruction before it is raised in eschatological splendor (2:19-21; cf. Mic. 3:12 – 4:5). He is the source of 'living water' promised by Ezekiel (4:10, 13-14; cf. Ezek. 47:1-11), whose coming supplants all previous houses of worship, both Jew and Gentile, and inaugurates the full and final worship of the messianic age, worship 'in spirit and in truth' (4:21, 23-26)...

In John 5-10, the stakes are raised as Jesus takes his enigmatic words and deeds to the epicenter of Jewish worship, the Jerusalem temple, and attends a series of major Jewish festivals. Jesus continues to present himself as the true dwelling place of God among men, the site of God's presence and source of God's blessing. Only now he makes this self-preservation in competition with the contemporary forms of divine presence and blessing in the Jewish temple and festivals. His behavior in this regard 'initiates a process that promises to be fatal'. "

(*Father, Son and Spirit...* pp138-139)

The Theology of Glory in John's Gospel

The only Son sent from the Father

The descent & ascent motif

Jesus the prophesied eschatological shepherd/teacher

The Trinitarian nature of John's Gospel

## The Theology of Glory

“The identification of the theology of glory with the theology of the cross is at the very heart of John’s gospel. At the outset, John testifies saying, *“and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth”* (1:14), and this glory was evident both in Jesus’ signs (2:11; 11:4; 40; cf. 9:3-4) and his death on the cross (12:23, 28; 13:31-32).” (*A Theology*, p294)

Indeed, as mentioned, it is emphatically not only the second half of John’s gospel that is a “Book of Glory”; rather, John’s entire gospel was written to show that God’s glory was continually on display in and through Jesus’ ministry, from its inception all the way to the cross and beyond. The reason for this is that Jesus’ was a pre-existent glory that he had with God from all eternity (17:5, 24). Within this purview of glory, the mission of the Word-made-flesh in Jesus is utterly devoted to revealing the glory of God in everything Jesus says and does (1:18), including his loving act of ultimate self-giving at the cross (13:1-3).

As with his sending Christology (cf. Isa 55:11), his use of “lifting up” terminology (cf. Isa 52:13), and his portrayal of John the Baptist (cf. Isa 40:3), John’s theology of glory takes his cue from the theology of Isaiah.

There the prophet *“saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up,”* and angelic creatures calling to one another, *“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory”* (Isaiah 6:1-3). The prophet’s vision of God’s glory served as the point of departure for his prophetic message of judgment on an obstinate nation, Israel. The fourth evangelist, quoting from this same chapter, asserts that *“Isaiah said these things because he saw His glory and spoke about Him”* (John 12:41). Like Isaiah, therefore, John saw Jesus’ glory (1:14), which led him to proclaim a message of divine judgment on unbelieving Israel, which ejected her Messiah (see 12:37-40).” (Kostenberger, *A Theology...*, 294-295)

Among the particular “trees” that predominate in John’s “forest” is the word “glory”. Thus, the “forest” has this theme running throughout. A good hermeneutic will, therefore, prayerfully ponder the usage given the word “glory”. Below they are initially listed as they flow with the text.

*“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”* (1:14)

*“This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and **manifested his glory**. And his disciples believed in him.”* (2:11)

*“The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; **but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true**, and in him there is no falsehood.”* (7:18)

*“Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, **because Jesus was not yet glorified.**” (7:39)*

*“**Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge.**” (8:50)*

*“Jesus answered, **‘If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God.’**” (8:54)*

*“But when Jesus heard it he said, **‘This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.’**” (11:4)*

*“Jesus said to her, **‘Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?’**” (11:40)*

*“His disciples did not understand these things at first, **but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him.**” (12:16)*

*“And Jesus answered them, **“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”** (12:23)*

*“**‘Father, glorify your name’.** Then a voice came from heaven: **‘I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.’**” (12:28)*

*“Isaiah said these things **because he saw his glory** and spoke of him.” (12:41)*

*“When he had gone out, Jesus said, **“Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once.”** (13:31-32)*

*“**He will glorify Me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.**” (16:14)*

*“When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, **“Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you ...”** (17:1)*

*“**I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.**” (17:4-5)*

*“I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and **I am glorified in them.**” (17:9-10)*

*“**The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one,**” (17:22)*

*“Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, **to see my glory that you have given me** because you loved me before the foundation of the world.” (17:24)*

**Consider the differing contexts in which the word “glory” is used:**

**(1) Pre-Incarnational glory of God the Son**

- (2) **The Incarnational manifestation of Jesus' glory through signs**
- (3) **Jesus seeking God the Father's glory**
- (4) **Jesus' glory through the cross (and subsequent exaltation)**
- (5) **God the Father seeking the Son's glory**
- (6) **God the Holy Spirit glorifying the Son**
- (7) **God the Son glorified in those given to Him**
- (8) **Christology: States of Christ: Humiliation & Exaltation**

### **The pre-Incarnational glory of God the Son**

*"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." (1:14)*

*"Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him." (12:41)*

*"I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed." (17:4-5)*

### **The Incarnational manifestation of His glory through signs**

*"This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him." (2:11)*

*"But when Jesus heard it he said, 'This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.'" (11:4)*

*"Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?'" (11:40)*

*"The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one," (17:22)*

### Jesus seeking the Father's glory

*"The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; **but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true**, and in him there is no falsehood."* (7:18)

*"**'Father, glorify your name'**. Then a voice came from heaven: 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.'"* (12:28)

*"When he had gone out, Jesus said, **'Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once.'**"* (13:31-32)

*"When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, **'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you...'**"* (17:1)

***'I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.'**"* (17:4-5)

### Jesus' glory through the Cross (& subsequent Exaltation)

*"Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, **because Jesus was not yet glorified.**"* (7:39)

*"His disciples did not understand these things at first, **but when Jesus was glorified**, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him."* (12:16)

*"And Jesus answered them, **'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified... He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.'**"* (12:23, 33)

*"When he had gone out, Jesus said, **'Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once.'**"* (13:31-32)

### God the Father seeking the Son's glory

***'Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge.'**"* (8:50)

*"Jesus answered, **'If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'He is our God.'**"* (8:54)

*"When he had gone out, Jesus said, **'Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once.'**"* (13:31-32)



*“When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; **glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you...**” (17:1)*

*“I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, **glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.**” (17:4-5)*

*“**The glory that you have given me** I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one,” (17:22)*

*“Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, **to see my glory that you have given me** because you loved me before the foundation of the world.” (17:24)*

### **God the Holy Spirit glorifying the Son**

*“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. **He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.**” (16:13-14)*

[Observe 1 Peter 4:14 - “If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the **Spirit of glory** and of God rests upon you.”]

### **God the Son glorified in those given to Him**

*“I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and **I am glorified in them.**” (17:9-10)*

### **Christology: States of Christ: Humiliation & Exaltation**

Christ’s State of Humiliation: 2:11; 7:18, 39; 8:50, 54; 11:4; 12:16; 12:23; 13:31-32; 17:22

Christ’s State of Exaltation: 16:14; 17:1, 4-5, 9-10, 24

### Jesus as the Son “sent” from the Father

Ponder the emphasis Christ Jesus placed upon His self-identification as having been “sent” from the Father. Thirty-nine times (39x) Jesus specifically references himself as having been “sent” by the Father.

*“My food is to do the will of **Him who sent me**...” (4:34)*

*“Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor **the Father who sent him**.” (5:23)*

*“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes **him who sent me** has eternal life” (5:24)*

*“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes **him who sent me** has eternal life.” (5:24)*

*“As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of **him who sent me**” (5:30)*

*“But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that **the Father has sent me**.” (5:36)*

*“**And the Father who sent me** has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen,” (5:37)*

*“And you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe **the one whom he has sent**.” (5:38)*

*“Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, **that you believe in him whom he has sent**.” (6:29)*

*“For I have come down from heaven, **not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me**.” (6:38)*

*“**And this is the will of him who sent me**, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.” (6:39)*

*“No one can come to me unless **the Father who sent me draws him**. And I will raise him up on the last day.” (6:44)*

*“**As the living Father sent me**, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me.” (6:57)*

*“My teaching is not mine, **but his who sent me**.” (7:16)*

*“The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of **him who sent him is true**, and in him there is no falsehood.” (7:18)*

*“So Jesus proclaimed, as he taught in the temple, “You know me, and you know where I come from. But I have not come of my own accord. **He who sent me is true**, and him you do not know. I know him, for I come from him, **and he sent me.**” (John 7:28-29)*

*“Jesus then said, “I will be with you a little longer, and then **I am going to him who sent me.**” (John 7:33)*

*“Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is true, for it is not I alone who judge, **but I and the Father who sent me**... I am the one who bears witness about myself, **and the Father who sent me bears witness about me.**” (John 8:16 & 18)*

*“I have much to say about you and much to judge, **but he who sent me is true**, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him... **And he who sent me is with me.** He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.” (John 8:26 & 29)*

*“Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, **but he sent me.**” (John 8:42)*

*“**We must work the works of him who sent me** while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work.” (John 9:4)*

*“If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken—**do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world**, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’? (John 10:35-36)*

*“I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, **that they may believe that you sent me.**” (John 11:42)*

*“And Jesus cried out and said, “Whoever believes in me, believes not in me **but in him who sent me.** And whoever sees me **sees him who sent me.**” (John 12:44-45)*

*“For I have not spoken on my own authority, **but the Father who sent me** has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak.” (John 12:49)*

*“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and **whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.**” (John 13:20)*

*“Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but **the Father's who sent me.**” (John 14:24)*

*“But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, **because they do not know him who sent me.**” (John 15:21)*

*“But now I am going to **him who sent me**, and none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ (John 16:5)*

*“And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and **Jesus Christ whom you have sent.**”*  
(John 17:3)

*“For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and **they have believed that you sent me.**”* (John 17:8)

*“As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.”* (John 17:18)

*“That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so **that the world may believe that you have sent me**... I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so **that the world may know that you sent me** and loved them even as you loved me... O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, **and these know that you have sent me.**”* (John 17:21, 23, 25)

*“Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As **the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.**”*  
(John 20:21)

Surely from these self-descriptive statements Jesus makes it very clear that a fundamental part of His self-perception involves the concept of being sent by the Father. And then His final reference to this in 20:21...

### **Implications:**

- (1) Ponder the number of references Jesus makes to having been “sent by the Father” to do “the will of the Father”: 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 6:39; 7:16; 8:26 & 29; 12:49 & 14:24.

Whose will was uppermost in Christ’s mind, thoughts & choices contemplated & made? And what is the implication for us in light of 20:21?

- (2) To focus exclusively on the self-perception of Jesus & His submission to this role of being “sent” by the Father is to miss that which is behind all this; the Father.

Indeed, what are we to ponder anew per our perceptions of God the Father in light of this knowledge that everything Jesus did, thought or said was exactly the Father’s will for Him to do on our and the Father’s behalf. Perhaps we need to ponder afresh the parable of the prodigal son as a parable really of the Father.

- (3) Clearly God the Son’s self-identity was fundamentally missional. He had been sent. This was not His initiative. It was His obedience. Even more, it was the Father’s will with which His will was in complete harmony. Consider the insight into the intra-trinitarian Covenant that Hebrews the tenth chapter gives when laid alongside John’s witness.

*“For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Consequently, **when Christ came into the world, he said,** ‘Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but **a body have you prepared for me;** in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, ‘**Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.**’” When he said above, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law), then he added, “**Behold, I have come to do your will.**” He does away with the first in order to establish the second. **And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.**”*  
(Hebrews 10:1-10; ESV)

### The Descent & Ascent of the Son of Man

Jesus is the one who came into the world and returned to the place from where he came (descent-ascent).

“This aspect of John’s Christology focuses on the other worldly origin and divinity of Jesus.”  
(*Encountering John*, 33)

“While... the mission of the sent Son, focuses more on the horizontal dimension... Jesus as coming into the world and as returning to the Father, lays more stress on the vertical dimension of Jesus’ descend and ascent.” (A *Theology*..., p.541)

*“He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all.”*(John 3:31)

John the Baptist here describes himself as “he who is of the earth” and “who belongs to the earth” and who “speaks in an earthly way”. In contrast John the Baptist describes the Messiah as “He who comes from above and is above all” and again “He who comes from heaven is above all!”

“This kind of thinking presents Jesus as the mysterious, divine-human Danielic figure of the son of Man who came as the ultimate revelation of God (1:51; 3:13-14).

*“Jesus then said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He **who comes down from heaven** and gives life to the world.’* (6:32-33)

*“**For I have come down from heaven**, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.”* (6:38)

*“**I am the living bread that came down from heaven**, not to do my own will but the will of Him who sent me.”* (6:51)

*“So Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. **This is the bread that came down from heaven**, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.’* (John 6:53-58 ESV)

Another relevant passage is John 8:23, where Jesus is represented as saying,

*“You are from below; **I am from above**. You are of this world; **I am not of this world**.”*

In this way Jesus contrasts his heavenly origin with his interrogators’ earthly provenance. This contrasts Jesus as the preexistent, divine Word-made-flesh with those who are finite human creatures. While

appearances suggests that both Jesus and his opponents were equally human (7:27; cf. 19:5), appearances were deceiving in this case.” (Kostenberger, *A Theology...*, 288)

For Jesus’ origins in fact transcended this world; this cosmos. Therefore, Jesus must be seen as God of very God (see 1:1, 18; 9:38; 20:28).

*“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, **but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.** And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore **God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,**”* (Philippians 2:5-9)

*“There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, **‘When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.’** (In saying, **“He ascended,”** what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? **He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.**)”* (Ephesians 4:4-10)

1. His origin
2. His nature (Who is He?; 7:27-29; 8:21-25)
3. His authority (“above all”)
4. His humiliation in His descent
5. His exaltation in His ascent
6. His descent’s contingency & singularity
7. The servant leader paradigm; the Strong dies for the weak
8. An eternal principle: Humility comes first, then exaltation
9. “Truth is stranger than fiction”; in the descent-ascent Christianity stands alone

### **Jesus the prophesied eschatological shepherd/teacher**

“It is highly instructive to understand the relationship of John 10 to its OT antecedents in Ezekiel 34:23-24 and Zechariah 13:7-9. Jesus is the fulfillment of the messianic promise, the messianic shepherd in contrast to the failing leaders of the Jewish people.” (A *Theology*..., p.501)

*“And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken.”* (Ezekiel 34:23-24)

*“Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who stands next to me,” declares the LORD of hosts. “Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered; I will turn my hand against the little ones. In the whole land, declares the LORD, two thirds shall be cut off and perish, and one third shall be left alive. And I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, ‘They are my people’; and they will say, ‘The LORD is my God.’”* (Zechariah 13:7-9)

*“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.”* This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. So Jesus again said to them, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”*  
(John 10:1-18)



### **The Trinitarian nature of John's Gospel**

“A glance at the biblical text indices of major patristic treatises reveals how massively the Gospel of John figured in the formation of classic trinitarianism. References to it typically overwhelm those to other biblical books. The fathers found in the Fourth Gospel a deep mine of trinity materials... Why were major fourth-century Trinitarian theorists drawn like a magnet to John?

Among all New Testament documents the Fourth Gospel provides not only the most raw material for the church doctrine of the Trinity, but also the most highly developed patterns of reflection on this material – particularly, patterns that show evidence of pressure to account somehow for the distinct personhood and divinity of Father, Son, and Spirit without compromising the unity of God.

How are such accounts attempted? Within the Fourth Gospel's general program of life giving and life disclosing, Father, Son, and usually Spirit/*Paraclete* appear as distinct role players. Yet they are also unified in John's scheme by (let us say) six central phenomena: common will, work, word, and knowledge, plus reciprocal love (excluding the Spirit) and glorifying. A functional subordination relation among the three (the Father sends, the Son sends and is sent, the Spirit is simply sent) insures that the same phenomena that distinguish the persons also unite them, for in the divine missions just one will or work, for instance, gets presented. In fact, John appears to treat the six phenomena as manifestations – possibly as reinforcements – of some mysterious, superlative unity expressed by the use of *en*, i.e., ‘in’ or ‘one.’ Father and Son are in each other; they are also one with each other. **Though the relation of ‘in-ness’ and oneness is never explained, the two concepts are, for John, obviously close, transcendent, and primordial.**

John's combination of transcendent unity and functional subordination in the life of God virtually assured later debate (not least the Arian debate of the 4<sup>th</sup> century) and has offered theologians along the centuries endless opportunity for testing various hermeneutical skills and theories in the attempt to draft trinity statements.”

(“The Fourth Gospel as Trinitarian Source Then and Now”, Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., p303-306; in *Biblical Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective*, ed. M.S. Burrows and P. Rorem, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans)

**Kostenberger further assesses** this thought saying, “There is a danger associated with speaking of the Bible's, or even of John's, ‘trinitarianism’. We must not import fourth-century discussions into our exegesis of biblical texts. Anachronism should be avoided. Nevertheless, we believe it is legitimate to label John's teaching about God ‘trinitarian’ for at least two reasons.

First, John's gospel is ‘trinitarian’ in an obvious, non-controversial sense: John presents Father, Son and Spirit as three characters whose identities are bound together in a profound and mutually determining way... Second,... John's portrayal of Father, Son and Spirit (along with the rest of the Bible) put

‘pressure’ on fourth-century discussions about the nature of God in such a way that later formulations and terminology should be viewed less as evolutionary developments beyond the NT data and more as attempts ‘to describe and analyse the way in which Jesus Christ and the Spirit’ were ‘intrinsic to’ Scripture’s way of speaking about God. In other words, the creeds represent a ‘descriptive grammar’ of the Bible’s own *intrinsically* Trinitarian discourse. Jenson explains:

The real question about the relation of church doctrine to biblical witness is not about the development of ideas, but about whether the church’s Trinity doctrine and Christology make – and then develop and analyze – the same judgments about Jesus that Scripture does.

(*Father, Son and Spirit*, p 19-22)

## JOHN’S PROLOGUE (1:1-18)

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.”* (John 1:1-3 ESV)

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.”* (John 1:1-3; NASB)

### Greek NT: Westcott/Hort with Diacritics (accents)

*“In the beginning [Ἐν ἀρχῇ]..... was [ἦν]..... the Word [ὁ λόγος],  
and the Word was with God [πρὸς τὸν θεόν], ... and the Word was God [θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος].  
He was in the beginning with God.  
All things were made through him [πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο],  
and without him was not anything made that was made.”*

## John 1:1-2

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.”*

R.C. Sproul, speaking of the opening verse, says, “That sentence, in and of itself, was enough to keep the theologians busy for the next three hundred years. Because on the one hand, the Word is distinguished from God, and then from a different perspective is identified with God.” (Sproul, from audio sermon on “*The Prologue*”)

Just as Genesis introduces God’s work of creation, so John 1:1 introduces God’s work of redemption. What is stunning though is that John chapter one precedes Genesis chapter one in point of reference. John’s opening words take us utterly past the beginning of this space-time-matter universe & point transcendentally into eternity past and asserting that the Logos (Word) was (a) in the beginning, (b) with God, (c) created all that was created & (d) was God.

MacArthur accurately says, “from the first five verses of John’s gospel prologue flow three evidences of the deity of the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ: His preexistence, His creative power, and His self-existence.

### **The Preexistence of the Logos (Word)**

John 1:1 positions us on the edge of the precipice of Genesis 1:1 which marks the furthest reach of time, matter & space. From this brink of eternity we peer straining to see the infinite recesses of eternity past. From the edge of eternity’s abyss John 1:1 projects backward declaring three eternal verities (truths): First, the Word WAS, continually... continuously pre-existing in the beginning. Secondly, the Word was WITH, in an eternal face-to-face relationship with God. Thirdly, the Word WAS, continuously eternally WAS God!

### **The Creative Power of the Logos (Word)**

Something has to have existed from eternity past. For if this is not true, then there was a point at which there was nothing. But if this is true, how did something come out of nothing? This is absurd logically. Thus, something has to be eternal. And the options before us are two. Either the eternal reality (whatever it is) is personal or it is impersonal; i.e. it either has personhood or it is non-sentient stuff/matter. Fundamentally the choice may be framed this way. Either the cosmos is eternal or there is an eternal Creator.

Both natural revelation & divine revelation declares the ultimate eternal reality of the Creator God.

Ponder the stark assertion of 1:3... The Logos (Word) is Himself “uncreated.” John 1:3 utterly denies the Arian heresy which asserts that Jesus himself is a created being. False.

Three New Testament passages assert that the Son was the agency by which the Father created all that was created: John 1:3, Colossians 1:15-17 & Hebrews 1:2

Ponder that “creation” is biblically defined as creation ex nihilo.

“In the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist” (Romans 4:17).

### **The Self-Existence of the Logos (Word)**

(MacArthur Study Bible footnotes)

Kostenberger says of the opening verse...

“John opens his gospel with a reference to the work of creation “in the beginning” through “the Word” (1:1). With stunning transcendence John takes us to the brink of the precipice of Genesis 1:1 where it is declared, “In the beginning God created...” Thus the origin of the cosmos is revealed and redemption’s history begins from that point to now.

But John, with brilliant eloquence takes us back to the very brink of that same precipice from which all creation owes its origin and stands looking, not forward in time as Genesis 1 does, but backward. John’s gaze pierces eternity past as he declares things transcendent to the creation, “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God...*” (1:1).

“John’s argument here is that the Word, as God’s creative agent, constituted an extension of God’s own person, as the one through whom God’s creative power became effective. Ultimately, therefore, God the Creator and the Word through which (or whom) he created are inseparable, and according to John they share the same identity while at the same time being distinct. One detects here the quarry from which later conciliar doctrines defining and describing the relationship between God the Father and Jesus the Son were hewn.

John then views the creation event as the first inaugural act of salvation history and bases his account of Jesus’ coming into the world on this primal act. Understand that “the incarnation” is John’s equivalent of the Synoptic narrative of “the virgin birth”. Both describe that spoken in the Christian Hymn, “Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail incarnate Deity!”

John highlights Jesus’ unparalleled relationship with God the Creator and presents Him as the exclusive and unique agent of God, who is his self-expression – an extension, as it were of his own identity and deity, the one through whom God’s glory was eschatologically and definitively revealed to God’s covenant community.” (*A Theology...* p179)

Leon Morris says, this “is a book about Jesus. This is underlined by the fact that John uses the name ‘Jesus’ 237 times, far and away the most in any New Testament book (next is Matthew with 150; Luke has 89; and Mark, 81; Paul’s total is 213 spread over his entire correspondence, the most in any one of his letters is 37 in Romans). John is absorbed in Jesus, and, while it is true that he gives attention to other topics, he also sees everything in the light of who and what Jesus is and the importance of Jesus’ coming to earth to live and to die for us.” (Leon Morris, *New Testament Theology*, 225)

In the prologue, John refers to Jesus as “the Word” four times. He will not identify Jesus as the Word again in the entire Gospel.

Morris says, “We use the term word for a unit of language, whether spoken or written, but the Greeks gave it a much wider usage. They distinguished between what they called the *logos prophorikos*, the word going forth from a person (that is the way we use ‘word’), and the *logos endiathetos*, the word remaining within a person.

The *logos endiathetos* meant something very like our ‘reason’; it pointed to the thinking rational part of our nature. As they looked at this mighty universe, some of the philosophers discerned a principle of rationality. The sun and the moon rise and set with regularity; the planets move in their orbits; the seasons follow each other in regular sequence. So they thought of a Logos, a Word, that runs right through the universe, something like a ‘world soul.’

The Jews did not have this usage, but there are some not unimportant Jewish usages that form part of the background to the way John uses the term. There are passages in the Old Testament that use concepts like ‘wisdom’ or ‘word.’ Thus in Proverbs 8 wisdom is personified and says, ‘The Lord possessed me at the beginning of his work, before his deeds of old; I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began... I was there when he set the heavens in place... Then I was the craftsman at his side...’ (Prov. 8:22-30). It is not easy to be sure how literally people took such passages, but it is beyond doubt that in the first century Jewish thinkers speculated about such a heavenly being as Wisdom.

There were similar speculations about the Word, based on such biblical passages as that in which we read ‘By the word of the LORD were the heavens made’ (Ps. 33:6). This reminds us that in the account of creation in Genesis 1 we read repeatedly that God spoke; that was all that was needed for him to create. There is power in the Word of God. The Word is given almost an existence of its own when we find that ‘the Word of the Lord came’ to this or that prophet (e.g., Jer. 1:2, 4; Ezek. 1:3; Hos. 1:1), while in Isaiah we read, ‘So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it’ (Isa. 55:11).

To this we could add personifications of the Law. That the Law and the Word meant much the same is seen in the way the two may be used in parallel: ‘The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem’ (Isa. 2:3; Mic. 4:2). The Law occupied a very significant place in the discussions of the rabbis.

We should also give some consideration to the Targums. These were translations of the Old Testament into the language of the people (readings in the synagogues were in Hebrew, a language not necessarily understood by the congregation). At first this was done only orally, but in time some of the Targums were written and these give significant information about how the Jews of the time understood Scripture. The name of God, we find, was not pronounced, and when the reader came to it he substituted some reverent periphrasis, such as ‘the Lord,’ or ‘the Holy One.’ And sometimes the reader would say ‘the

Word.’ William Barclay says that in the Targum of Jonathan the expression is used about 320 times. This is not exactly the usage we have seen in John or in the Old Testament, because the expression here means God himself, not someone close to him. But the point is that where people were used to the Targums, they were familiar with the use of *memra*, ‘word,’ to point to deity. [emboldening mine]

Many find Philo an important part of the background of John’s use of the term. This great Jew of Alexandria made extensive use of the term Logos in his unusual combination of Old Testament thought and Greek philosophy. He could speak of the Logos as a ‘second God,’ but he sometimes uses the term of the one God in action. C.H. Dodd sees Philo as very important if we are to understand John and holds, for example, that John’s opening words ‘are clearly intelligible only when we admit that λόγος, though it carries with it the associations of the Old Testament Word of the Lord, has also a meaning similar to that which it bears in Stoicism as modified by Philo, and parallel to the idea of Wisdom in other Jewish writers.’

More could be said. But this is not an exhaustive discussion, and it is sufficient to point out that ‘Word’ was an important concept for John’s first readers, whether their background was Jewish or Greek. William Temple said that the Logos ‘alike for Jew and Gentile represents the ruling fact of the universe, and represents that fact as the self-expression of God. The Jew will remember that ‘by the Word of the Lord were the heavens made; the Greek will think of the rational principle of which all natural laws are particular expressions. Both will agree that this Logos is the starting point of all things.’

John says that this Logos was ‘*in the beginning*,’ that he was with God and that he was God (1:1). There has been much discussion about this last point; some agree with Moffatt that ‘the Logos was divine,’ understanding this as meaning something less than deity. But this can scarcely be derived from the Greek, which seems to mean that the Word was nothing less than God, however hard or easy that is to fit that meaning into our theologies. John is giving the Logos the highest possible place.

He proceeds to a number of things the Logos does that show him to be a most exalted personage, but then we come to this surprising statement: ‘*The Word became flesh and lived among us*’ (1:14). This is a strong statement of the Incarnation. ‘The Word’ is that being who has been described as ‘God’ (v. 1). ‘Became’ means more than ‘showed himself in’ or ‘appeared as’; the aorist tense means action at a point of time. Thus John is not referring to some timeless manifestation but to a definite happening at a definite time. And ‘flesh’ is a very strong term. John has just used it (v. 13) for what is human as opposed to what is divine (cf. 3:6; 6:63; 8:15). John could have softened what he had to say by using some such form of words as ‘the Word took a body’ or ‘the Word became man’; instead, he chose words that were almost offensive. James D.G. Dunn speaks of ‘the shocking nature of his assertion.’ And we should not miss the point.

When John calls Jesus the Word, then, he is drawing attention to Jesus’ greatness. The Word is mentioned with deity, and the Word is himself God. It is a strong note to sound in his opening section. But with that he joins the thought of incarnation. High though the Word undoubtedly is, he came right where we are. These are thoughts that recur throughout John’s Gospel.”

(*New Testament Theology*, Leon Morris, p225-227)

[The following is from *The Forgotten Trinity*, James White, 50-55]

“Throughout the prologue of the gospel of John, the author balances between two verbs. When speaking of the Logos as He existed in eternity past, John uses the Greek word ἦν (*en*) (a form of *eimi*). The tense of the word expresses continuous action in the past.

Compare this with the verb he chooses to use when speaking of everything else – found, for example, in verse 3: ‘All things were made through him,’ *egeneto*.

This verb contains the very element missing from the other; a point of origin. The term, when used in contexts of creation and origin, speaks of a time when something came into existence.

The first verb, *en*, does not. John is very careful to use only the first verb of the Logos throughout the first thirteen verses, and the second verb, *egeneto*, he uses for everything else (including John the Baptist in verse 6). Finally, in verse 14, he breaks this pattern, for a very specific reason...

Why emphasize the tense of a little verb? Because it tells us a great deal. When we speak of the Word, the Logos, we must ask ourselves: how long has the Logos existed? Did the Logos come into being at a point in time? Is the Logos a creature? John is very concerned that we get the right answer to such questions, and he provides the answers by the careful selection of the words he uses.

Above we noted that John gave us some very important information about the time frame he has in mind when he says in the beginning. That information is found in the tense of the verb *en*. You see, as far back as you wish to push the beginning, the Word is already in existence. The Word does not come into existence at the beginning, but is already in existence when the beginning takes place.

If we take the beginning of John 1:1, the Word is already there. If we push it back further...say, a year, the Word is already there. A thousand years, the Word is there. A billion years, the Word is there. What is John’s point? The Word is eternal. The Word has always existed. The Word is not a creation. The New English Bible puts it quite nicely: When all things began, the Word already was.

John then tells us something vital about the Word. Whatever else we will learn about the Word, the Word is eternal.

## WITH GOD

The next phrase of John 1:1 tells us something new about the Word. The Word is eternal, but the Word was not alone in eternity past;. The Word was with God (*pros ton theon*). Yes, it is the same word ‘was,’ again pointing us to an eternal truth. The Word has eternally been with God. What does this mean?

Just as Greek verbs are often more expressive than their English counterparts, so too are Greek prepositions. Here John uses the preposition *pros*. The term has a wide range of meanings, depending on the context in which it is found.

In this particular instance, the term speaks to a personal relationship, in fact, to intimacy. It is the same term the apostle Paul uses when he speaks of how we presently have a knowledge comparable to seeing in a dim mirror, but someday, in eternity, we will have a clearer knowledge, an intimate knowledge, for we shall see ‘face to (*pros*) face’ (1 Corinthians 13:12). When you are face-to-face with someone, you have nowhere to hide. You have a relationship with that person, whether you like it or not.” (*The Forgotten Trinity*, p51-52)

MacArthur says, “The English translation does not bring out the full richness of the Greek expression (*pros ton theon*). That phrase means far more than merely that the Word existed with God; it **‘[gives] the picture of two personal beings facing one another and engaging in intelligent discourse’** (W. Robert Cook, *The Theology of John*, Chicago: Moody, 1979, 49.) [Emboldening mine]

From all eternity, Jesus, as the second person of the trinity, was ‘*with the Father [pros ton patera]*’ (1 John 1:2) in deep, intimate fellowship. Perhaps *pros ton theon* could best be rendered ‘**face-to-face.**’ The Word is a person, not an attribute of God or an emanation from Him. And He is of the same essence as the Father.

Yet in an act of infinite condescension, Jesus left the glory of heaven and the privilege of face-to-face communion with His Father (cf. John 17:5). He willingly ‘*emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant [“**slave**”; *doulos*], and being made in the likeness of men....He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross*’ (Phil. 2:7-8).

Charles Wesley captured some of the wonder of that marvelous truth in the familiar hymn ‘*And Can It Be That I Should Gain?*’:

And can it be that I should gain  
An int'rest in the Savior's blood?  
Died He for me, who caused His pain?  
For me, who Him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! how can it be  
That Thou, my God shouldst die for me?

He left His Father's throne above,  
So free, so infinite His grace!  
Emptied Himself of all but love,  
And bled for Adam's helpless race!  
'Tis mercy all, immense and free,  
For, O my God, it found out me.



Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
Fast bound in sin and nature's night.  
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray:  
I woke the dungeon flamed with light!  
My chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

4. No condemnation now I dread:  
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine!  
Alive in Him, my living Head,  
And clothed in righteousness divine,  
Bold I approach th'eternal throne,  
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.

Chorus:  
Amazing love! how can it be  
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me!

(from MacArthur, *John 1-11*, p17-18)

James White (The Forgotten Trinity) continues saying, “In John 1:1b, John says the Word was eternally face-to-face with God, that is, that the Word has eternally had a relationship with God. Immediately, questions about how this can be pop into our minds, but for the moment we must stick with the text and follow John’s thought through to its conclusion. He will answer our question about the identity of ‘God’ in due time. For now, we note it is the normal word for God, *Theos*. It is the word any monotheistic Jew would use to describe the Almighty God, Yahweh, the Creator of all things. Someone such as John would never think that there were two eternal beings. John will explain himself soon enough.

## WAS GOD

The third clause of John 1:1 balances out the initial presentation John is making about the Word we read, ‘and the Word was God (*Theos en ha Logos*).’ Again, the eternal *en*. John avoids contradiction by telling us that the Word was with God, and the Word was God. If John were making this an equation, like this:

All of the ‘word’ = All of ‘God’

he would be contradicting himself. If the Word is ‘all’ of God, and God is ‘all’ of the Word, and the two terms are interchangeable, then how could the Word be ‘with’ himself? Such would make no sense.

Observe the clear Subject/Object distinction of 1:1b.

But John beautifully walks the fine line, balancing God's truth as he is 'carried along' by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21; ESV). John avoids equating the Word with all of God through his use of the little Greek article, the equivalent of our word 'the' (*o*).

It may seem 'nit-picking' to talk about such a small thing as the Greek article, but as my friend Daniel Wallace points out, 'One of the greatest gifts bequeathed by the Greeks to Western civilization was the article. European intellectual life was profoundly impacted by this gift of clarity.' He also notes, 'In the least, we cannot treat it lightly, for its presence or absence is the crucial element to unlocking the meaning of scores of passages in the NT.' The writers of Scripture used the article to convey meaning, and we need to be very careful not to overlook the information they provide to us through the use, or non-use, of the article.

The third clause of John 1:1 provides us with an example of what is known in grammar as a predicate nominative construction. That is, we have a noun, the subject of the clause, which is 'the Word.' We have an 'equative' or 'copulative' verb, 'was,' and we have another noun, in the same case or form as the subject which is called the nominative case, that being 'God.'

We need to realize that in Greek the order in which words appear is not nearly as important as it is in English. The Greeks had no problem putting the subject of a sentence, or its main verb, way down the line, so to speak. Just because one word comes before another in Greek does not necessarily have any significance.

What does this have to do with John 1:1? Well, in English, the final phrase would be literally rendered, 'God was the Word.' But in English, we put the subject first, and the predicate nominative later. The Greeks used the article to communicate to us which word is the subject, and which is the predicate. If one of the two nouns has the article, it is the subject. In this case, 'Word' has the article, even though it comes after 'God,' and hence is our subject. That is why the last phrase is translated 'The Word was God' rather than 'God was the Word'.

Stay with me now, for there is another important point to be seen in the text. If both of the nouns in a predicate nominative construction like this one have the article, or if both lack the article, this is significant as well.

In that case, the two nouns become interchangeable. That is, if 'Word' had the article, and 'God' did too, this would mean that John is saying that 'God was the Word' and the 'Word was God.' Both would be the same thing. Or, if neither of them had the article, we would have the same idea: an equating of all of God with all of the Word. 'God' and 'Word' would be interchangeable and equal terms.

You see, much has been made, especially by Jehovah's Witnesses, of the fact that the word "God" in the last clause of John 1:1 is anarthrous, that is, without the article. You will notice that there is no form of the Greek article preceding the term θεός (*theos*). Because of this, they argue that we should translate it 'a god.'

This completely misses the point of why the word θεός does not have the article. If John had put the article before θεός, he would have been teaching modalism, a belief... that denies the existence of three divine Persons, saying there is only one person who sometimes acts like the Father, sometimes like the Son, sometimes like the Spirit.

“Modalism is probably the most common theological error concerning the nature of God. It is a denial of the Trinity. Modalism states that God is a single person who, throughout biblical history, has revealed Himself in three modes, or forms. Thus, God is a single person who first manifested himself in the mode of the Father in Old Testament times. At the incarnation, the mode was the Son. After Jesus' ascension, the mode is the Holy Spirit. These modes are consecutive and never simultaneous. In other words, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit never all exist at the same time, only one after another. Modalism denies the distinctiveness of the three persons in the Trinity even though it retains the divinity of Christ.” <http://carm.org/modalism>

[This is also often called ‘Sabellianism’, named after Sabellius, a theologian & priest from the third century]

For now, we see that if John had placed the article before θεός, he would have been making ‘God’ and the ‘Word’ equal and interchangeable terms. As we will see, John is very careful to differentiate between these terms here, for He is careful to differentiate between the Father and the Son throughout the entire Gospel of John.”

One commentator has rightly noted regarding the prologue, ‘John is not trying to show who is God, but who is the Word.’ The final phrase tells us about the Word, emphasizing the nature of the Word. **F.F. Bruce’s comments on this passage are valuable:**

“The structure of the third clause in verse 1, *theos en ho logos*, demands the translation ‘*The Word was God.*’ Since *logos* has the article preceding it, it is marked out as the subject. The fact that *theos* is the first word after the conjunction *kai* (and) shows that the main emphasis of the clause lies on it. Had *theos* as well as *logos* been preceded by the article the meaning would have been that the Word was completely identical with God, which is impossible if the Word was also ‘with God.’ What is meant is that the Word shared the nature and being of God, or (to use a piece of modern jargon) was an extension of the personality of God. The NEB paraphrase ‘what God was, the Word was,’ brings out the meaning of the clause as successfully as a paraphrase can.’ (Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, 31)

### **Exegetical Insight on John 1:1c by Daniel Wallace**

“The nominative case is the case that the subject is in. When the subject takes an equative verb like “is” (i.e., a verb that equates the subject with something else), then another noun also appears in the nominative case—the predicate nominative. In the sentence, “John is a man,” “John” is the subject and

“man” is the predicate nominative. In English the subject and predicate nominative are distinguished by word order (the subject comes first). Not so in Greek. Since word order in Greek is quite flexible and is used for emphasis rather than for strict grammatical function, other means are used to distinguish subject from predicate nominative. For example, if one of the two nouns has the definite article, it is the subject. As we have said, word order is employed especially for the sake of emphasis. Generally speaking, when a word is thrown to the front of the clause it is done so for emphasis. When a predicate nominative is thrown in front of the verb, by virtue of word order it takes on emphasis. A good illustration of this is John 1:1 c. The English versions typically have, “and the Word was God.” But in Greek, the word order has been reversed. It reads,

καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος  
and God was the Word.

We know that “the Word” is the subject because it has the definite article, and we translate it accordingly: “and the Word was God.” Two questions, both of theological import, should come to mind: (1) why was θεός thrown forward? and (2) why does it lack the article?

In brief, its emphatic position stresses its essence or quality: “What God was, the Word was” is how one translation brings out this force. Its lack of a definite article keeps us from identifying the person of the Word (Jesus Christ) with the person of “God” (the Father). That is to say, the word order tells us that Jesus Christ has all the divine attributes that the Father has; lack of the article tells us that Jesus Christ is not the Father. John’s wording here is beautifully compact! It is, in fact, one of the most elegantly terse theological statements one could ever find. As Martin Luther said, the lack of an article is against Sabellianism; the word order is against Arianism.

To state this another way, look at how the different Greek constructions would be rendered:

καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν ὁ θεός  
“and the Word was the God”  
(i.e., the Father; Sabellianism)

καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν θεός  
“and the Word was a god” (Arianism)

καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος  
“and the Word was God” (Orthodoxy).

Jesus Christ is God and has all the attributes that the Father has. But he is not the first person of the Trinity. All this is concisely affirmed in καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος.

Daniel B. Wallace

<http://www.puritanboard.com/f17/exegetical-insight-john-1-1c-daniel-wallace-72459/>

### **John 1:3**

*“All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.”*

### **John 1:4-5**

*“In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”*

Consider the parallel “light and darkness” motif in both Gen 1 and John 1. For as Genesis 1 records how God separated between physical light and darkness, even so John declares that in the incarnation of the Word, a spiritual separation was made between light and darkness. And so the spiritual axiom stands out of 1 Corinthians 15:46, But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual.

“‘In him,’ and only in him, ‘was life,’ John continues in verse 4, which attributes to the Word life-giving power in keeping with the OT characterization of God, and God alone, as the Life-Giver.” (ibid, 180)

That self-existent life gave mankind light, both guiding & exposing moral spiritual pathways. Furthermore, being rooted in the very nature of Deity this eternal self-existent life/light cannot be overcome by darkness.

From the prologue onward, “life” and “light” figure prominently in the theology of John’s gospel & first letter.

Consider that there are sixteen major clusters of references to “light” in John’s gospel and six such clusters in 1 John.

“Eternal life” is the subject of Jesus’ dialogue with Nicodemus in John 3 and the Samaritan woman of chapter 4. The topic stands out prominently in the “Sabbath controversy” of chapter 5 and the “bread of life” discourse of chapter 6. In fact, “life” is the subject in virtually every chapter of the first half of John’s gospel. While the second half sees less, yet the topic of “life” stands out boldly in Jesus’ pronouncements in 14:6 and 17:2-3.

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

“...since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

“‘Life’ is also a major theme in John’s first letter. It opens with a reference to the apostolic message regarding the ‘Word of life’ and its incarnation (1 John 1:1-2). The letter also speaks of passing from death to life similar to the gospel (3:14; cf. John 5:24) and connects the possession of life to love (1 John 3:14-15). The purpose statement at the end of 1 John mentions ‘life’ five times in the short span of three verses, striking a note of reassurance. All in all, this letter features thirteen instances of ‘life’ (zoe) and one occurrence of the verb ‘to live’ (zao; 4:9).” (ibid. 342)

Consider the following observations that come out of a careful comparison of all the references to life and light in John’s gospel:

The themes of life and light are explicitly intertwined and juxtaposed in the intro to both John’s gospel (1:4-5) and first letter (1 John 1:1-2, 5, 7) and in the body of John’s gospel (8:12).

Life and light terminology is found particularly in Jesus’ discourses with the gospel (3:15; 4:10-11, 14, 36; 5:21, 24-26, 29, 39-40; 6:27, 33, 35, 40, 47, 48, 51, 53, 54, 57-58, 63, 68; 7:38; 8:12; 10:10, 28; 11:25-26; 12:25, 50; 14:6, 19; 17:2-3; 20:31).

The use of “life” is far more prominent than “light” which suggests that life is the more basic category of the two (see esp. John 1:4; 20:31; 14:6; 19; 17:2-3).

“Life is mentioned in the gospel’s purpose statement (20:31), providing an inclusion with 1:4 and underscoring the importance of the theme of life in the gospel.” (ibid., 346)

The obverse of each of these terms, “death” & “darkness” are terms used throughout Scripture describing sin & its consequences.

Both themes intersect with Jesus’ “I Am” sayings: “life” 3x (6:35, 48; 11:25; 14:6) and “light” 1x (8:12; 9:5).

The possession of life and light is a divine attribute shared by God the Father, God the Son (5:21, 26) and God the Holy Spirit, who is presented under the emblem of Living Water (4:10-11; 14: 7:38).

“John’s use of the universal motifs of life and light highlights the universal nature of the gospel transcending ethnic boundaries; rooting the Christian message in creation through Christ and new creation in Christ, John lifts the gospel to a higher plane than the Mosaic law or the kingdom motif” of the Synoptics. (ibid., 346)

“Life” in John’s usage has a transcendent nature pointing beyond itself to things eternal. “Light” in John’s usage has a more immediate moral dimension exposing sin.

If we consider this through C.S. Lewis’s essay, “Meditation in a toolshed”, the shaft of sunlight viewed as it strikes the workbench points to its nature as “light” exposing what is in darkness. But the same shaft of sunlight when we look along that beam of light at its source points to its nature as “life” as it points to things transcendent; eternal zoe!

Fascinating that “in the context of Jesus’ ministry to the Jews, the period of ‘the light’ is the time of Jesus’ earthly ministry in their midst. Once Jesus has departed, the Jews’ opportunity to receive the light has passed; this is why references to ‘light’ (similar to references to Jesus’ ‘signs’) are found only in chapters 1-12 of John’s gospel (see esp. 12:35-36, 46).” (ibid., 346-347)

### The Old Testament background for Life and Light

The foundational passage providing the background for John 1:4 is the Genesis narrative of God’s creation of the world. “As his first creative act by his word, God called forth light (Gen. 1:3-5). Later he placed lights in the sky to separate between light and darkness (1:14-18). This light, in turn, made it possible for life to exist. Thus God called forth living creatures in the water and on the land (1:20-31), culminating in his creation of man (2:7; 3:20). The tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil were set in the garden, linking life with obedience to God (2:9).

In the remainder of the OT, it becomes clear that life is more than merely ‘physical existence sustained by material bread; it rests upon the word and act of God’ (cf. Deut 8:3). God is the living God (Ps 42:2) and the fountain of life (36:9). Perhaps most importantly, ‘life’ is an integral part of covenant language in the OT and thus has an important salvation-historical dimension.

The Deuteronomic covenant presented Israel with a choice between ‘life and prosperity, death and destruction,’ and people were commanded ‘to love the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws’ (Deut 30:15-16). Many of these theme clusters are present in John’s gospel with reference to Jesus’ new covenant community, especially in the Farewell Discourse.

In John’s creation theology that explicitly links that which was ‘in the beginning’ (John 1:1; cf. Gen 1:1) with the incarnation of Christ (John 1:14), the above-painted scenario forms the backdrop against which Jesus’ coming is more readily understood. Humanity’s sin had issued in the loss of life, resulting in physical death, and plunged humanity into moral darkness, rendering it incapable of living life the way it had been intended by the Creator. The crying need was for human beings to be restored to life, ‘eternal life,’ and to be brought back into the light, that is, moral insight unclouded by the pervasive presence and power of sin.

In this regard, it is instructive to compare John’s gospel to the other canonical gospels. What the Synoptic writers, especially Matthew and Luke, present in terms of God’s kingdom, John grounds in creation realities that were perverted through the fall but had now been restored through Jesus the Messiah. While ‘kingdom’ language dominates in the Synoptics, references to ‘life’ are not absent in their portrayal of Jesus (see Matt 25:46 [= the kingdom in vs.34]; Mark 7:14; 9:43, 45 [= the kingdom in v.47]; 10:17 [cf. 10:15, 23]; Luke 10:25).

In John's gospel, the 'kingdom of God' and 'eternal life' are the subject of his conversation with Nicodemus (John 3:1-15). There Jesus makes clear that no one can enter the kingdom of God apart from personal regeneration as envisioned in prophetic passages such as in the book of Ezekiel (e.g., Ezek 36:25-27; 37). Yet, importantly, this life is not merely to be experienced in the age to come; it can be entered into already in the here and now (e.g., John 3:16; 5:24; 10:10). (ibid., 347-348)

Ponder well the poetic description of these two concepts in Psalms 36: 8-9...

*"They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light."*

"Passages such as these provide a fertile soil for Jesus' promise of living water (John 4:10-15), of rivers of living water emanating from people's inner most being (7:38), and of the blessing of abundant life brought by Jesus' coming for believers (10:10). As Jeremiah had lamented, people had forsaken God, 'The spring of living water,' and had 'dug their own cisterns' (Jer 2:13; cf. 17:13); they must return to the Lord... In the Johannine writings, the vision of restored, abundant life in God's presence is given final expression at the end of the book of Revelation (Rev 22:1-2), echoing similar visions in the latter, postexilic prophets (e.g., Ezek 47:12).

"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." (Revelation 22:1-2)

"The themes of 'life' and 'light' are inextricably wedded in John's theology. Both attest to the blessing resulting from Jesus' coming into the world: new, eternal life made available through his substitutionary death to 'everyone who believes,' issuing in believers' crossing over from death into life and from darkness into light. Jesus thus renews creation on both a cosmic and a personal scale. He satisfies the psalmist's longings, making possible the prophet's highest aspirations, and paves the way for the fulfillment of the apocalypticist's vision of abundant, eternal life in God's presence." (*A Theology...*, 348-349)

See *A Theology of John's Gospel* 341ff



### **John 1:6-13**

*“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.*

*The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”*

### **John 1:14-18**

*“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”) For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.”*

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### **THE MONOGENES QUESTION: ‘ONLY’ or ‘ONLY BEGOTTEN’?**

“As for the texts that say that Christ was God’s ‘only begotten son,’ the early church felt so strongly the force of many other texts showing that Christ was fully and completely God, that it concluded that, whatever ‘only begotten’ meant, it did not mean ‘created.’ Therefore the Nicene Creed in 325 affirmed that Christ was ‘begotten, not made’:

“We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, the only begotten; that is, of the essence of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance (*homoousion*) with the Father...”

(Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 244)

“The controversy over the term ‘only begotten’ was unnecessary because it was based on a misunderstanding of the meaning of the Greek word *monogenes* (used of Jesus in John 1:14, 18; 3:16k 18; and 1 John 4:9). For many years it was thought to be derived from two Greek terms: *mono*, meaning ‘only,’ and *gennao*, meaning ‘beget’ or ‘bear.’

Even the received version of the Nicene Creed understands it that way, since the explanatory phrases ‘begotten of the Father before all world’ and ‘begotten, not made’ both use the verb *gennao* (beget) to explain *monogenes*.

But linguistic study in the twentieth century has shown that the second half of the word is not closely related to the verb *gennao* (beget, bear), but rather to the term *genos* (class, kind).

Thus the word means rather the ‘one-of-a-kind’ Son or the ‘unique’ Son...

The idea of ‘only-begotten’ in Greek would have been, not *monogenes*, but *monogennetos*...

The fact that the word does not mean ‘the only son that someone has begotten’ can be confirmed by noticing its use in Hebrews 11:17, where Isaac is called Abraham’s *monogenes* – but certainly Isaac was not the only son Abraham had begotten, for he had also begotten Ishmael. The term there means rather that Isaac was Abraham’s ‘unique’ son, that there was none other like him...

It is reassuring, however, to see that even though the early church had a misunderstanding of one biblical word, the rest of Scripture came to the defense of doctrinal purity and prevented the church from falling into the error of Arianism (although the struggle consumed most of the fourth century A.D.).

If the phrases ‘begotten of the Father before all worlds’ and ‘begotten, not made’ were not in the Nicene Creed, the phrase would only be of historical interest to us now, and there would be no need to talk of any doctrine of the ‘eternal begetting of the Son.’ But since the phrase remains in a creed that is still commonly used, we perpetuate the unfortunate necessity of having to explain to every new generation of Christians that ‘begotten of the Father’ has nothing to do with any other English sense of the word beget. It would seem more helpful if the language of ‘eternal begetting of the Son’ (also called the ‘eternal generation of the Son’) were not retained in any modern theological formulations. Similarly, to refer to Jesus as God’s ‘only begotten’ Son – language that derives from the King James translation – seems to be more confusing than helpful. What is needed is simply that we insist on eternal personal differences in the relationship between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and that the Son eternally relates to the Father as a son does to his father.

(Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, “Appendix 6: The Monogenes Controversy: ‘Only’ or ‘Only Begotten’?”, 1233-1234)

[This lecture follows the structure of *A Theology of John's Gospel & Letters, ch 4*, by Kostenberger.]

“The introduction of ‘a man...whose name was John’ in verse 6 marks a transition from creation ‘in the beginning’ (v.1) all the way to the time immediately preceding the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, leaping over all of Israel’s history including the exodus, the giving of the law, the monarchy (David), the building of the temple, and other significant events in the life and history of the Jewish nation. .. this movement directly from creation to John (the Baptist) calls for theological exploration and explanation.” (ibid, 180)

Kostenberger suggests that by identifying John the Baptist merely as ‘John’, “serves the purpose of deemphasizing John’s baptizing activity that, in this gospel, is subsumed under John’s role as one of several witnesses to Jesus. Hence, for the evangelist, John ‘the Baptist’ becomes John ‘the witness.’

Thus, the purpose of John’s coming, according to the gospel of John, was ultimately not to administer baptism or even to preach repentance, but to bear witness to the people of Israel regarding the Messiah (see esp. 1:31). Interestingly, as verse 2 restates verse 1, so also does verse 8 restate verse 7 concerning John witnessing to the Light.

John, by relating the Baptist’s identity to that of Jesus “provides an opportunity for the evangelist to clarify their respective roles and to accentuate Jesus’ uniqueness in relation to John, especially since the latter was held in high esteem by many Jews in Jesus’ day (Matt 14:5) and thereafter (Acts 19:1-7).

Verse 9 declares that the “true Light which gives light to everyone” was coming into the world, which now moves past his role in creation to a more specific visitation that will be described even more strikingly when John declares that the “Word became flesh”.

“This characterization builds on a trajectory of OT references to the Messiah or Coming One in terms of light (Num 24:17; Isa 9:2 cf. 42:6 -7; Mal 4:2), and ‘true’ light also distinguishes this light from other, ‘false,’ lights that likewise made their public appearance to gain adherents. Verse 10 reveals then that “paradoxically, ironically, and tragically (adversative kai, ‘but’), the world made through the Word rejected that very Word and failed to recognize it/him.” (ibid, 182)

This initial reference to the rejection of the Word by the world depicts the coming of the Word somewhat in terms of failure. This rejection by the world continues in 6:60-66; 7:1-9 and 12:36-41.

But, consider... verse 9 states that “the true Light gives light to everyone”. The failure thus lies, not with the Word’s revelation of God, but with the world’s rejection of that revelation. It is this failure to respond to this revelation that renders humanity culpable and without excuse (15:22).

The 2nd half of verse 11 reveals that God’s chosen people, the Jews, by rejecting the incarnate Word’s claim of being God’s Messiah thereby forfeited their status as God’s children instead revealing themselves to be one with the larger world of humanity rejecting the Light preferring their moral & spiritual darkness.

### **Two consequences leap out:**

First, with faith in Jesus as Messiah constituting the sole requirement for becoming a child of God, the doors were opened for non-Jews to enter the orbit of saving grace in fulfillment of God's creative purposes that encompass all people.

Second, according to John, reception or rejection are the only two stark alternatives. "As the gospel narrative will develop, secret discipleship of Jesus falls short and proves inadequate (12:42-43), and all efforts at neutrality are doomed and render a person morally culpable (e.g., Pilate)." (ibid., 183)

With the next statement of verse 12, what is later affirmed even more emphatically in 3:16 is initially stated – that whoever receives Him (believes in His Name) will have eternal life, regardless of ethnic, race or cultural background (see 12:32; cf. Gal 3:28).

"Verse 13 then strikingly elaborates on the true nature of those 'children...born of God' who become such by virtue of their faith in the name of Jesus (made explicit in v. 17). In truth, they are 'born,' not physically as a result of human initiative and conception, but 'of God.' Born of God! How can this be? This is precisely the question Nicodemus will ask later in John 3. In the context of his larger narrative, John here seems to speak of the spiritual regeneration that comes from faith in the Word-made-flesh, the God-sent Messiah who died and rose again, the One who is now exalted and through that same Spirit directs the mission of his followers. For John, as for Paul (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15), what counts is nothing less than a new creation [the implication and imagery conjured up through the allusion at John 20:22 to the account of God's 'breathing on' the first man and constituting him as a 'living being' in Gen 2:7)."

"Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature." (Genesis 2:7)

"And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" (John 20:22)

Per verse 13, Kostenberger says, "The reference to birth from God in John 1:13 continues to underscore the theocentric nature of the introduction... God's presence pervades all of salvation history, and he is the source, both of the missions of the Word and of John... God is thus the towering, ubiquitous figure in the verses thus far considered in the introduction (John 1:1-13), and it is in his orbit that references to other agents and recipients are placed and must be understood." (ibid., 184)

Beginning with verse 14, it is the identity of this word that comes into sharp focus. The One who was God (v.1), became a human being – 'flesh' (sarx, v. 14; observe the immediately preceding usage of the term in v.13), a term more crass than 'body' (soma) or 'a human being' (anthropos) or 'a man' (aner) – and pitched his tent among people.

While this reference to "people" referred to those who "were His own", it more specifically refers to the "representatives of the new messianic community who did perceive the Word's glory.

“Little does the unsuspecting reader of the introduction to John’s gospel know, however, that the ‘glory’ of the Son to be revealed by the Father will entail the ‘lifting up’ of the Son of Man through crucifixion.

Only gradually, the fourth evangelist reveals through the course of his narrative, and particularly in the words of Jesus, that the glory spoken of in the introduction is a crucified glory, a glory that shines forth initially in selected messianic ‘signs’ of Jesus and subsequently finds its climactic expression in the exaltation of the Son at the cross, in keeping with Isaiah’s vision of Jesus’ glory (John 12:41).

Hence the thrust of Jesus’ mission in its entirety is the revelation of God’s glory – from the first sign in Cana (2:11) to the cross and the raising of the new temple, Jesus’ body, on the third day (12:23; 17:1; CF. 2:20-21), the perfect revelation of God’s love for the world at the self-humiliation and divine exaltation of the Son (3:16; 13:1).” (ibid., 186)

So, observe the shift, wrought with transcendent implications from John’s description of God and the Word, or perhaps better yet, the Word and God in verse 1, to now a much more intimate and familial word attesting to the relationship between a one-of-a-kind Son and his Father.

“The former designation attests to the word’s ancient origins and to its participation already in the first act of the covenant-establishing and –keeping God and Creator; the latter introduces the more personal aspects of love as that between a unique, cherished son and his father, one who, as the heir, would be trusted by his father and entrusted with the most intimate disclosure pertaining to his purposes and plans. According to John, that Jesus is ‘the one and only Son’ from the Father qualifies him in a unique way to reveal the inner thoughts and workings of the Father – God- to others, workings that most significantly include a substitutionary cross-death the Son would be prepared to die willingly for dark, sinful humanity (3:16).”

That Son was ‘full of grace and truth’; that is, he proved to be a complete perfect expression of God’s covenant=keeping faithfulness (charis and aletheia, alluding to the OT expressions chesed and emet; cf. Exod 34:6). ‘Grace and truth’ thus continue the series of references to the salvation-historical trajectory pervading the OT of which Jesus, not only the Word but also the Son, has become the ultimate expression.” (ibid., 186)

## **The juxtaposition of Grace & Truth**

### **OT expressions**

Chesed (#2617) & Emet (#571)

Psalms 25:10; 26:3; 36:5; 40:11; 57:3, 10; 61:7

*Steadfast love (chesed) and faithfulness (emet) meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other (Psa 85:10)*

*By steadfast love (chesed) and faithfulness (emet) iniquity is atoned for (Proverbs 16:6)*

## NT progressive revelation

Hebrews 7:1-3 with Psalm 85:10b

## NT theology developed

John 1:14 & 17 - The Word made flesh is “full of grace and truth”

Romans 3:21-26, “*It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just (OT emet; NT truth/righteousness/justice) and the justifier (OT chesed; NT ‘grace & mercy’ in His forgiveness of the ungodly) of the one who has faith in Jesus.*”

### The two Divine attributes juxtaposed

Lovingkindness (KJV)	Truth	Psalms multiple times
<i>By Steadfast Love and.....</i>	<i>faithfulness iniquity is atoned</i>	(Proverbs 16:6)
<i>Mercy and.....</i>	<i>truth have met</i>	(Psalm 85:10)
<i>peace have kissed...</i>	<i>Righteousness and...</i>	(Psalm 85:10)
<i>Full of grace and</i>	<i>truth</i>	(John 1:14 & 17)
<i>&amp; the justifier of the ungodly</i>	<i>That He might be both Just</i>	(Romans 3:26)

The “why” of the Cross explained & an Apologetic

Understanding this Divine ‘crossroad’ both explains the “why” of the Cross & offers a powerful apologetic with those of other faiths/religions.

### **The relational aspect of God's revelation of Truth in the Word made flesh; the Son**

“It is remarkable to note that in these first two instances of ‘truth’ in John’s gospel toward the end of the introduction, this term bears clear connotations of God’s covenant faithfulness and loyalty. This makes the rejection of Jesus, God’s ‘Sent One,’ which is narrated in the rest of the gospel (particularly in John 1:19 – 12:50; 18-19), a deeply personal matter – rejection of a relationship – rather than merely a rejection of certain truth claims and the refusal of intellectual assent to them. Faith, or relational trust, is what, according to John, is called for in response to the Word’s becoming flesh and pitching his tent among us and revealing God’s glory (note the ninety-eight instances of the word ‘believe’ in this Gospel, including in the purpose statement in 20:30-31).” (ibid., 187)

Here is a powerful Apologetic for the philosophy of today’s ‘man on the street’ – postmodernism! Postmodernism asserts that “It is not about dogma, doctrine, theology or truth claims. It’s about relationship!” But in the Word made flesh, we are confronted with both!

### **John’s Witness to Jesus (1:19 – 34)**

“The witness of John is at times today, at least on the lay level, regarded as a dispensable preamble to the story of Jesus. With his eccentric demeanor and a message narrowly focused on the Jews of his day, John seems to be a vestige of the OT era that has been rightfully transcended by the appearing of Jesus and the Christianity he founded, a Christianity that is much more broad, inclusive, and universal. There is some appeal to this argument, and even an element of truth in it, but the stubborn fact remains that all four canonical Gospels give considerable attention to John’s ministry and message, which seems to call for a reassessment of the above-stated stereotypes and attitudes with regard to John the Baptist.” (ibid. 188)

In one sense Jesus himself points out he needs no witness, if He is the Son of God (John 8:12-14). Absolute ultimate Truth has no higher court to appeal to.

The terms ‘witness’ or ‘to bear witness’ receive special attention in this Gospel, reflecting the courtroom language of the OT where the truth of a matter was to be established on the basis of multiple witnesses (John 8:17-18; Deut 17:6; 19:15).

Thus, not only did John the Baptist witness regarding Jesus as Messiah and Son of God (1:19-34); 3:27-30; 5:35), but there were other witnesses

The Samaritan woman (4:29)

The works of Jesus (10:25)

The Father (5:32-37)

The OT (5:39-40)

The crowd (12:17)

The Holy Spirit (15:26-27)

### **John's Humility & Confession (1:19-23)**

Not the Christ

Not Elijah (Malachi 4:5)

Not the Prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15-18)

John turns to Isaiah 40 humbly comparing himself to a voice rather than a person, thus focusing the attention exclusively upon Christ!

*“Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. And they came to John and said to him, ‘Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him.’ John answered, ‘A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.’ The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease.” (3:25-30)*

On what do those proclaiming today focus their audience's attention?

### **Behold! The Lamb of God!**

John's declaration in 1:29-36

Intriguingly, John does not limit the activity of “the Lamb of God” to Israel but speaks with reference to the sin of the world!

John completely transcends the distinction drawn by the Jews in the other gospels between “publicans” and other “sinners” and themselves.

“Lamb of God” certainly had overtones linking back to Genesis 22, Exodus 12-13 & puzzlingly to Isaiah 53.

### **The Sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22 reveals...**

(1) An adumbration of **the relational nature** of the ultimate sacrifice: A Father & Son



- (2) A hidden focus in the sacrifice, not on justice, but on love between the Father who both provides & performs the sacrifice & the Son who willingly & obediently submits.
- (3) The Divine willingness & provision of substitutionary blood

**The Passover of the exodus reveals...**

- (1) The necessity of shed blood
- (2) The Divine willingness to accept substitutionary blood
- (3) The purity & flawlessness of the sacrificial lamb
- (4) The escape, under the blood, of the judgment of death.

**The Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 reveals...**

- (1) The clear concept of a substitutionary blood sacrifice
- (2) The clear understanding that retributive wrath was poured out on the substitutionary suffering Servant; on our behalf...
- (3) The clear meaning of “propitiation” as in “wrath satisfied” (53:10); or more precisely:  
**Propitiation** = *a blood sacrifice that satisfies wrath*

*Surely he has borne our griefs  
and carried our sorrows;  
yet we esteemed him stricken,  
smitten by God, and afflicted.  
But he was pierced for our transgressions;  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,  
and with his wounds we are healed.  
All we like sheep have gone astray;  
we have turned—every one—to his own way;  
and the LORD has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.  
He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,  
yet he opened not his mouth;*

*like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,  
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,  
so he opened not his mouth.  
By oppression and judgment he was taken away;  
and as for his generation, who considered  
that he was cut off out of the land of the living,  
stricken for the transgression of my people?  
And they made his grave with the wicked  
and with a rich man in his death,  
although he had done no violence,  
and there was no deceit in his mouth.  
**Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him;** (see Hebrews 10)  
*he has put him to grief;  
when his soul makes an offering for guilt,  
he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days;  
the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.  
**Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied;**  
by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant,  
make many to be accounted righteous,**

“My Lord, what love is this that pays so dearly?

That I the guilty one may go free?

Amazing love, oh what sacrifice!

The Son of God given for me.

My debt He pays and my death He dies.

That I might live.... That I might live...”

(*Amazing Love*, Graham Kendrick)

### **Jesus’ First Sign in Cana (2:1-12)**

“This first sign constitutes the first validation of the evangelist’s claim in the introduction that he and his fellow disciples perceived the glory of the incarnate Word, God’s one-of-a-kind Son (1:14). For Jesus’ disciples, therefore, the purpose of Jesus’ mission was fulfilled already at his very first sign: the revelation of God’s glory in Jesus and the identification of Jesus as God’s unique Son.

This explicates the nature and function of the signs. We may be interested in the miracle that took place in the conversion of water into wine. John, by passing over the Greek word for “miracle” used in the Synoptics, *dynamis* and instead choosing the word *semeion* (“sign”), pinpoints the precise purpose of this (and other) of Jesus’ powerful works as signposts to Jesus’ messianic claim. The ‘signs’ are an integral part of Jesus’ messianic mission and must not be separated from it. To observe a powerful work of Jesus while missing the way in which this work validates Jesus’ claim of a unique relationship with God is to fail to perceive God’s intended purpose of the ‘sign.’

Here again is C.S. Lewis’s Meditation in a Toolshed concept of looking at what the beam of light is shining upon or looking along the beam of light as its source! Those without ears to hear & eyes to see perceive only what the light reveals in front of them. The beasts of the field do likewise. In Jesus’ words, the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. (Matthew 7:14) Very few are those who contemplate the truth Psalm 36...

*How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light.*

### **Jesus’ sign of the Temple Clearing (2:13-22)**

It is my opinion that John, rather than duplicate what was recorded in the other three gospels, but in indirect acknowledge of his awareness of the clearing recorded in the others, “instead chose to feature an earlier clearing of the temple by Jesus in order to illumine the precedent for the later temple clearing early on in Jesus’ ministry. This solution has the advantage of accounting more satisfactorily for the Synoptic representation of the contradictory eyewitness testimony at Jesus’ Jewish trial and of involving neither the Synoptics nor John in historical misrepresentation.

Jesus, who is the Passover in his very person (1 Corinthians 5:7) here attends the Passover in Jerusalem early in his ministry.

“Thus, the Messiah comes to God’s temple in Jerusalem in a momentous visitation, invoking in the alert reader the mention in the introduction, ‘The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him’ (John 1:9-11).” (ibid., 194)

Observe that ‘Jesus’ clearing of his temple and his rejection by the Jerusalem authorities serves as a perfect, paradigmatic example of the light’s shining of a bright, pure ray into a corrupt temple system that was overgrown with cobwebs and in dire need of reform and renewal. Still, Jesus’ agenda was not mere reform but nothing less than revolution. As the ensuing narrative makes clear, Jesus and his body are the new temple only by passing through temporary destruction and being raised again on the third day (2:20).”

“Jesus’ prediction of the ‘temple’s’ destruction subtly, yet unmistakably, echoes the reference to a similar prediction in the Synoptic Olivet Discourse (Matt 24:2). Yet in the present reference it is Jesus himself who is said to be the new, rebuilt temple that constitutes the typological fulfillment of the Jerusalem sanctuary and that represents its divinely provided replacement. It is as if Jesus’ pronouncement that ‘new wine’ be poured into ‘new wineskins’ (Matt 9:17) provides the theological backdrop to the Johannine account of the temple clearing (see John 2:1-11), for the temple must first be cleared by the Messiah before God’s glory can be fully manifested in the new temple, Jesus’ body (2:21).” (ibid., 195)

“One final observation about the temple clearing may be registered. By referring to Jesus’ resurrection as early as in 2:22, John, similar to the effect of the introduction, robs the narrative of all suspense, showing the futility of the Jewish authorities’ efforts to blunt Jesus’ activity at the outset. This again seems to presuppose that John’s readers (whether from reading the Synoptic Gospels or otherwise) are already familiar with the outcome of Jesus’ story.

By giving away the outcome of the story at the outset, it appears, John is able to shift the readers’ primary attention away from the question, ‘What end will Jesus meet?’ to exploring the spiritual dynamics that led inexorably to the end that was predetermined already both theologically and narratologically. This is done in a form roughly reminiscent of a Synoptic parable. An event is shown to be imbued with symbolic potential that is explored and exploited with regard to Jesus’ messianic identity and its rejection by the Jewish leaders. This is typology at its best.” (ibid., 197)

### **Jesus’ Witness to Nicodemus (2:23 – 3:21)**

“In John 2:23, John relativizes the effectiveness of Jesus’ signs, noting that many ‘believed’ in Jesus – even ‘in his name’ – on account of his signs in Jerusalem at the Passover, but that Jesus would not ‘entrust’ in these outward expressions of belief because he knew what truly was in people’s hearts (2:23-25).

Intriguingly, Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night, a Jew who represents the world where the world and the unbelieving Jewish nation have become all but indistinguishable.

There are several important links connecting Nicodemus with the preceding Temple clearing. Here is the theological rationale for the antagonism of the Jewish leaders leading them to challenge Jesus’ authority in 2:18.

“As John makes clear in the Nicodemus (account), in a commentary on the Jewish obduracy displayed at the temple clearing, as it were, the reason for the Jewish rejection of the Messiah is, at the root, the lack of spiritual regeneration.” (ibid. 198)

“This, indeed, is a profound and exceedingly perceptive theological diagnosis by the author of the ‘spiritual gospel.’... In this sole cluster of references to the ‘kingdom of God’ in the entire gospel,

entrance into God's kingdom is predicated upon spiritual regeneration, a regeneration that is ultimately not merely corporate in the sense of religious national renewal (a la Ezekiel's vision of dry bones in Ezekiel 38; see the allusion to Ezekiel in John 3:5) but personal and individual in nature.

This confirms that old-style Judaism is in desperate need of spiritual, personal renewal (see John 2:6 and 2:14-189); nothing less than a new spiritual birth will suffice. But how will this new birth be accomplished? In dealing with this matter, and with Nicodemus serving as representative character asking this very question, the reader is led to reflect on the typological significance of a past event in Israel's history: Moses' lifting up a snake in the wilderness, with the result that everyone who looked at that snake lived and did not die (3:14; see Num 21:9). Typologically speaking, John expounds by recounting Jesus' response. Jesus represented that snake: he was to be 'lifted up' (the first, somewhat oblique but nonetheless unmistakable, reference to Jesus' crucifixion in John's gospel; later developed in John 8:28 and made explicit in 13:32-33), and, as the evangelist's commentary makes clear, 'whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life' (3:16)." (ibid., 198-199)

Thus Jesus meets with a spiritually unregenerate Jewish leadership that opposes his messianic mission. But at the same time, there are those such as Nathaniel, who 'truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit' (1:47) – who follow Jesus. "Spiritual, personal renewal in Israel has begun, with Jesus launching a movement that is joined by those who place their faith (relational trust) in the Messiah!"

### **John the Baptist Exalts the Christ (3:22-36)**

Ponder again the humility and servitude of John to Jesus. While John's role as a witness had abiding value, it was nevertheless close to becoming obsolete. Thus, his imprisonment and subsequent martyrdom were no great loss to the Master's messianic community & movement, "for John had fulfilled his divine assignment by the time he was called from the scene." (ibid., 201)

Here are profound lessons for every one called to ministry...

### **Jesus and the Samaritan Woman (4:1-42)**

How does this narration function in the overall flow of John's Gospel?

"First, there is irony in the implied comparison between Nicodemus's and the Samaritan's response (the juxtaposition of these accounts is almost certainly intentional). The contrast could not be starker: Nicodemus is part of the establishment, a member of the Jewish Supreme Court, 'Israel's teacher.' The Samaritan woman lacks any such status, is part of a race shunned by the Jews, and is exposed for her immoral lifestyle in the course of her conversation with Jesus. Yet while Nicodemus is reduced to incredulity and speechlessness by Jesus, the Samaritan emerges as a dialogue partner who continues to engage Jesus... And while Nicodemus stagnates in his spiritual perception, the Samaritan progresses

from her understanding of Jesus as ‘a Jew’ (4:9) to viewing him as ‘a prophet’ (v. 19) to acknowledging that Jesus was ‘a man who told me everything I ever did,’ asking, ‘Could this be the Messiah?’ (v. 29).” (ibid., 201-202)

Secondly, the early church’s mission first to Jerusalem, then to Judea & Samarai, then to the ends of the earth is here initially validated and example set for by Jesus.

Third, in Jesus’ reaching out to the Samaritan, he serves as the paradigmatic “sent one” whose activity his followers are to walk in. *“Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”* (John 20:21 ESV) Observe that it is often in seasons of weakness that divinely ordained encounters with the lost take place... Ask yourself, “why?”...

Fourth, perhaps the climactic moment is Jesus’ discussion of true spiritual worship. Worship is not a matter of geographical location of externals; it is a spiritual matter, just as God is spirit (ual) and thus must be worshiped spiritually.

Jesus said true worship transcends any locality. True worship established by God is not fixed on any particular location, monument, building or physical person.

Here is a powerful apologetic with Islam. For Islam requires not only that the adherent learn a particular language but that he also travel to or at least focus upon a particular geographical point – Mecca.

Christianity on the other hand transcends race, geographic, language barriers thus presenting itself intrinsically as a “world religion” for all people.

Lastly, ponder the difference of approach Jesus made between Nicodemus and this woman. In John 3 he ignores Nicodemus offered flattery and makes a bold confronting assertion about the necessity of spiritual regeneration. In John 4 he makes a request of her. But his request is on the very focus of her need & attention: water.

Ponder how Jesus’ used this physical need of water to point her to things transcendent. Jesus literally set her up to turn her attention gently but irresistibly to look upward along the beam of light to the One Who is transcendent and Who was standing in front of her.

Here indeed are profound lessons to ponder & consider while asking for wisdom & guidance.

### **The Second Sign in Cana: The Healing of the Gentile Official’s Son (4:43-54)**

Fascinating here that Jesus’ performance of another sign is “preceded by a sharp rebuke of the people’s desire to see ‘signs & wonders,’ that is, an unwholesome preoccupation with the miraculous. This is precisely the separation of the miraculous element of a ‘sign’ from its messianic orientation.” (ibid., 205)

Observe that the healing John focuses on here is what others have called a “hard miracle”; i.e. it was long distance...

Observe again that Jesus’ purpose was not to build large crowds following his healing ministry...

### **Summary of the Cana period of ministry (chapters 2-4)**

Ponder the themes: John’s witness, the Jews’ rejection of Jesus as Messiah, Jesus as the new Temple, the need to be born again, people rejecting the light while preferring to continue living in darkness, & so on...

“In an incipient manner that remained to some extent implicit, John has hinted at the cross, the resurrection, and universal human sinfulness in need of divine redemption through an atoning, vicarious sacrifice.

While Jewish antagonism flared up at the temple clearing in John 2:13-22, it is not until the next unit, the Festival Cycle in John 5-10, that the conflict between Jesus and the Jerusalem authorities escalates and is characterized by an increasing degree of acrimony. In fact, as will be seen, while John 2-4 marks two messianic signs of Jesus in Galilee, the major focus of chapters 5-10 will be the Jews’ charge against Jesus of blasphemy (5:18; 10:33).

### **From Jerusalem to Bethany: The Festival Cycle: The Height of Jesus’ Ministry to the Jews (John 5-10)**

#### **The Healing of the Lame Man (John 5)**

Consider first, that we find Jesus back in Jerusalem where he encounters a man lame 38 years – another of Jesus’ difficult miracles (or, better, ‘signs’).

This account “constitutes but the prelude to the actual bone of contention on which the remainder of the chapter focuses: the way in which the fact that the healing took place on the Sabbath gives rise to a heated controversy between the Pharisees and Jesus, which, in turn, occasions Jesus’ claim to be Lord of the Sabbath and thus (as the Pharisees correctly infer) equal to God (5:18). This, in turn, for the first time in John’s gospel, leads to the charge of blasphemy, which in due course turns out to be the Jews’ major charge against Jesus that leads to his crucifixion (19:7). Jesus must die because he claimed to be the son of God; John wrote his gospel to demonstrate from Jesus’ ‘signs’ that Jesus was the Son of God (20:30-31).”

Here is highlighted the beginning of open hostility toward Jesus in Jerusalem in the southern part of Palestine.

From this chapter on, John will take great pain to make “a compelling case for why Jesus ended up on the cross. For according to OT law, Jesus was guilty of blasphemy, at least according to his opponents, and so he must – and did – die.”

Let’s first observe the opening verse of chapter 5... “After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.” (5:1)

John repeatedly links his narrative to various Jewish feasts:

2:13    Feast of Passover (our March/April)

6:4     Feast of Passover (our March/April)

7:2     Feast of Tabernacles (Booths; our September/October)

10:22   Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah; our November/December)

11:55   Feast of Passover

But, this reference in 5:1 is the only unidentified feast...

Ponder Kostenberger’s thoughts in *Encountering John* (p 77)...

Observe then the “whole series (crescendoing especially in the Festival Cycle in John 5 – 10) of references to Jewish festivals in this gospel, which has the cumulative effect of presenting Jesus as the comprehensive fulfillment of the symbolism inherent in various Jewish festivals and other institutions (such as the tabernacle or the temple) throughout the gospel.” (*A Theology*, 194)

Interesting that after John tells of the healing, only then, does he mention it taking place on a Sabbath (5:9). Stunning how the discussion that follows, heating up quickly, focuses not on the healing of a lame man, but on the fact that subsequent to the healing, Jesus told the man to take up his bed & walk, and the man did so. “This brought him in conflict, not with Scripture, but with Jewish tradition, which forbade people to move an object from one domain to the other on the Sabbath.” (ibid., 207-208)

What stands out starkly is the response Jesus gave their charge. Rather than offer an olive branch of conciliation, Jesus voices what provokes them far more than the violation of the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, ‘My Father is working until now, and I am working.’ (5:17)

John 5:17-23



*“And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.” This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.”*

“This section is Christ’s own personal statement of his deity. As such, it is **one of the greatest Christological discourses in Scripture**. Herein Jesus makes five claims to equality with God.” (MacArthur Study Bible footnote)

He is equal with God in His person (5:17-18)

He is equal with God in His works (5:19-20)

He is equal with God in His power and sovereignty (5:21)

He is equal with God in His judgment (5:22)

He is equal with God in His honor (5:23)

“Here is thick Johannine irony: as John’s readers, prepared as they are with the introduction to John’s gospel, will be quick to realize, that which outrages the Jews to no end – Jesus’ ‘calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God’ (5:18) – is precisely what he actually is: Jesus is equal to God, and he is ‘guilty as charged,’ and yet completely innocent.”

### **The Son’s possession of life in himself equal to the Father (5:26)**

*“For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.” (5:26)*

“The Son from all eternity had the right to grant life (1:4). The distinction involves Jesus’ deity versus his incarnation. In becoming a man, Jesus voluntarily set aside the independent exercise of his divine attributes and prerogatives (Phil 2:6-11). Jesus here affirmed that even in his humanity, the Father granted him ‘life-giving’ power, i.e., the power of resurrection.” (MacArthur Study Bible note)

The 2nd part of the discourse then shifts to a series of witnesses substantiating Jesus' claim of equality with God the Father:

John the Baptist - You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved. He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. (5:33-35)

Jesus' works - But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me. (5:36)

God the Father - And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen... (5:37)

The Scriptures - You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me... (5:39)

Moses - For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. (5:46)

“At the outset, Jesus implicitly acknowledges that, according to the Hebrew Scriptures, a minimum of two or three witnesses was required to establish the truthfulness of one's claims (Deut 17:6; 19:15). Hence he supplements his testimony in John 5:19-30 regarding his unique relationship with God the Father as the son with a list of witnesses (not without adding, however, that he needs no human testimony, 5:34). This list is weighty indeed: Jesus claims support from the Scriptures, and Moses specifically (i.e., the Pentateuch; this may pertain particularly to the messianic passages in the five books of Moses).

Ultimately, it must be noted, the Father is behind all these witnesses: he is the sender of John the Baptist (1:6); he is the one who enables Jesus to perform his works (5:36); and he sent Moses and inspired the Scripture he and others wrote. Hence, as the writer of Hebrews noted, God revealed himself in OT times in various ways, but in these last days he revealed himself by” Son (Heb 1:1-2).” (ibid., 209)

Observe again:

The relational aspect of God's revelation through & in Christ Jesus

The thrust of Jesus' words, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” (John 20:21)

As the Son was & is missional, so is His body, the Church. This breaths new meaning into Matthew 28:18-20...

Ponder the implications of his words , How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? (5:44)

## **The Feeding of 5000, Walking on Water & Bread of Life Discourse (John 6)**

A large gap of time may exist between chapters 5 and 6. If the feast in 5:1 is Booths, or Tabernacles, then at least six months passed (October to April). If the feast of 5:1 is Passover, then a year passed between these chapters.

Observe also that chapter 6 is very close to the same structure as chapter 5 since both occur around a Jewish feast and both lead to a discourse focused on Jesus' deity. While chapter 5 takes place in the south around Judea & Jerusalem, chapter 6 takes place in the north around Galilee. The result of both chapters is the same: he is rejected not only in the southern but also in the northern regions." (MacArthur Study Bible notes)

"In a rather abrupt and a bit awkward-seeming transition (seams), John follows up the end of Jesus' defense of his equality with God in the latter part of John 5 with a reference to Jesus 'some time after this' (a vague general expression, see 5:1) crossing over 'to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee' in 6:1. 'I didn't even know Jesus was at the Sea of Galilee to begin with,' the contemporary reader may object. Nevertheless, to resort to a displacement theory as Bultmann did is an extreme expedient that is uncalled for in the absence of manuscript support. More like, John thinks of his various selections as vignettes that follow one another as somewhat self-contained units, connected only loosely to form a coherent sequential narrative." (ibid., 210)

While the presence of large crowds following Jesus is a common sight in the Synoptics (see Matthew 5:1), chapter 6 of John is the first instance of Jesus attracting a large following. This may be due to the fact that here in the feeding of the 5000 is the only miracle featured in all four Gospels (Matt 14; Mk 6; Lk 9).

The reference of the Jewish Passover being near gives a helpful time marker indicating the passage of at least one year since the last Passover of John 2, and continues the Passover theme in John... The sight of Jesus taking the bread, giving thanks, and distributing it to the people strikes the reader as a Eucharistic image anticipating his institution of the Lord's Supper later on in his ministry.

Jesus' miraculous provision of more than enough food for all the people, places him "in continuity with Moses' provision of manna for Israel in the wilderness and strikes the 'new exodus' theme.

This is the second major discourse of Jesus in John's gospel, the first being in John 5. In the present Bread of Life Discourse, Jesus challenges his interrogators simply to believe in him, which is the only 'work' God requires of them (6:28-29), rather than keeping all their traditions.

The Jews ask Jesus for a messianic sign, betraying utter blindness to the meaning of his feeding the multitude. Again, they saw what the light illuminated on the table top but failed to consider what it meant; failed to look along the beam at the One in their midst Who was God in the flesh.

"This, in turn, gives Jesus the opportunity to unpack the messianic significance of this event in the ensuing Bread of Life Discourse, which, along the lines of an escalating typological pattern, presents

Jesus as the paradigmatic ‘bread of God... that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world’ (6:33; note the universal reference to ‘the world,’ transcending the scope of Israel; see also 6:51).” (ibid., 212)

Consider the confusion in which the Jews operated. When Jesus plainly states that he is the “bread of life” and invites them to believe in Him, they stumble over the fact that they know his father and mother! (6:42)

A prophet is not without honor except in his home town...

“Prophets don’t grow up from little boys; do they?!” – Keith Green

Can a person be lost & damned to hell on the basis of faulty information?

In the end, it is the analogous typology of “eating Jesus’ flesh & drinking Jesus’ blood” that proves too much for the dialogue to continue far.

Fascinating that Jesus does not back down but instead restates more forcefully, *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.”* (6:53-55)

Consequently, many of his disciples turned away and no longer walked with him leaving only the twelve; of which John tells us one would turn out to be a traitor. (6:60-71)

**Puzzling that Jesus seems to place a higher premium on truth than He does attracting those who are ‘outside’.** In other words, rather than approach in a conciliatory manner, he actually intensifies the discussions forcing a decision; a decision which was rather predictable too.

How like Jesus is the Church today in its balance of seeking the lost and speaking the truths of the Gospel?

Could it be that what we win them with is what we win them to...?

## The “I AM” statements of Jesus

*“Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.’” (6:35)*

Here is the first of seven highly significant statements where Jesus joins the words *ego eimi* (“I am”) with metaphors to describe both His deity & His work. More on this later in chapter 8...

Hence this portion of John’s gospel “ends on a profound note of failure, foreshadowing the even more pronounced and comprehensive note of failure sounded at the end 12:36b-40. The increasing profundity of the Messiah’s self-disclosure, it appears, is met and matched in the narrative by the deepening rejection of the Messiah by all but his closest followers. This illustrates the decision required from every individual regarding Jesus’ true identity. In John’s equivalent to Peter’s confession of Jesus as the Messiah at Caesarea Philippi (Matt 16), Peter, speaking for the Twelve, reaffirms his allegiance to Jesus at this pivotal juncture in his ministry, acknowledging him as “the Holy One of God” (John 6:69). This confession provides a critical counterpoint to the virtually universal rejection of Jesus, and it is this “rock” (Matt 16:18) – or, in John’s terms, his “own” (John 13:1; cf. 1:11; see also chap 17) – that will serve as the foundation for the new community that the Messiah will establish to represent him in this world (see 20:21).” (ibid., 213)

Particular thoughts verse by verse

Ponder his words of 6:26 and their implication for what we attract people with, in our efforts to lead them to Christ...

Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.

Ponder his words in 6:27 for where we spend our lives...

Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you.

And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. (Deuteronomy 8:2-3)

### **Ponder the Divine Sovereignty Human Responsibility paradox of John 6**

*All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. (6:37)*

*And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father. (6:65)*

*Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. (8:43)*

*Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God. (8:47)*

*Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice. (18:37)*

### **Summary of John’s Narrative through chapter 6**

“This, then, represents yet another messianic self-disclosure of Jesus. At the wedding in Cana, Jesus showed himself to his disciples as the messianic bridegroom (compare the Baptist’s testimony at John 3:27-30). At the temple clearing, he acted as the authoritative prophet through the sacrifice of whose life destruction and new life would come to the nation’s worship as its new temple. To Nicodemus, Jesus disclosed himself as the one who would be ‘lifted up’ and who would become the source of eternal life upon people’s believing response (3:13-16). To the Samaritan, he was the proclaimer of a new kind of worship ‘in spirit and truth,’ who turned out to be none other than the Messiah himself. Before the Pharisees, he asserted his claim of being on par with God himself and adduced John, his own works, God the Father, and Moses and the Scriptures as his witnesses.

Now he shows himself to be the climactic fulfillment of people’s messianic expectations centered on the ‘prophet like [Moses]’ (Deut 18:15, 18), whose coming was to be patterned after the first deliverer and lead to another ‘exodus’ of God’s people (cf. Luke 9:31), where Jesus, in conversation with Moses and Elijah, calls his impending death an ‘exodus’. Significantly, in John 6 Jesus further elaborates on the nature of ‘believing’ in him over against earlier references (e.g. 3:16). According to Jesus, this is not merely an external act (looking); rather, it involves the actual taking of Jesus into one’s internal being, akin to the universal human act of eating and drinking (see later, e.g. 14:23, where Jesus talks about him and the Father coming into a believer and making their residence in him). While this comparison may – and did- offend Jewish sensibilities (and later led to charges that the early Christian practiced cannibalism!) – this points to the nature of this most intimate union with Jesus entered into by the believer.

By providing the reader with a glimpse inside the ‘Jesus movement’ and showing Jesus’ ‘little flock’ (see Luke 12:32)\_ pared down to a very small number, John illustrates that, indeed, the gate is small and the

path narrow, and few are those who enter it (Matt 7:13-14). God's people were never promised they would be in the majority. To the contrary, they must brace themselves to be only a small minority in a world dominated by massive unbelief. This picture is at times obscured by the larger number of people (the 'crowds') who are associated with the 'Jesus Movement' (the church) in some way but who turn out to follow Jesus only from a distance (i.e. their discipleship is shallow at best and nonexistent at worst) and who are not truly part of Jesus' inner circle of committed disciples in any meaningful sense. These insights are of perennial ecclesiological significance and continue to represent challenges for those engaged in Christian ministry." (ibid. 214-215)

### **Jesus at the Festival of Tabernacles, part 1 (chapter 7)**

After the initial thoughts concerning Jesus' delay coming to Jerusalem & the diverse opinions within the crowds about him, John records Jesus, having gone up to the Temple, begins teaching once again (v 14). When the people marvel at his teaching (v 15), Jesus affirms his close relationship with God and goes on the counter-offensive asking them 'why they are attempting to kill him'. Upon hearing the people's denial of such motive, Jesus refers back to the healing of the lame man (chapter 5) picking up the previous controversy with a stunningly insightful & damaging question followed by an imperative, Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment. (7:24-25)

John then records the confusion of the people concerning Jesus in terms of three messianic expectations:

- (1) "When the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from" (v 27). The truth was that Jesus was of heavenly descent (3:31-36; 6:31-59)
- (2) "When Messiah comes, will he perform more signs than this man?" (v 31). The question itself indicates Jesus was measuring up to their expectations!
- (3) "How can the Messiah come from Galilee? Does not Scripture say that the Messiah will come from David's descendants and from Bethlehem...?" (vv 41-42) John's "irony is apparent, for as the informed reader already knows (though Jesus' birth in Bethlehem is not actually recording in this gospel), the apparent contradiction is resolved easily enough: Jesus had in fact been born in Bethlehem (e.g. Matt 2:1). Only later his parents had moved with the boy Jesus to Nazareth in Galilee..." (ibid., 216)

### **Rivers of living water...**

*On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' (7:37-38)*

“A tradition grew up in the few centuries before Jesus that on the seven days of the Feast of Booths, or Tabernacles, a golden container filled with water from the pool of Siloam was carried in procession by the high priest back to the temple. As the procession came to the Water Gate on the south side of the inner temple court, three trumpet blasts were made to mark the joy of the occasion and the people recited (Isa 12:3, ‘With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.’ At the temple, while onlookers watched, the priests would march around the altar with the water container while the temple choir sang the Hallel (Ps 113-118). The water was offered in sacrifice to God at the time of the morning sacrifice. The use of the water symbolized the blessing of adequate rainfall for crops.” (MacArthur Study Bible notes)

In a surreal scene which reminds us of the Synagogue in Capernaum when, after reading the Scripture, *He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and said aloud to the congregation, ‘This day this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’* (Luke 4:21)

Here amidst the ceremony, no doubt following the singing of the Psalms of the Hallel as the priests marched around the altar with the golden pitcher of water, the devout congregation awaiting eagerly the outpouring of the ceremonial water, Jesus, as the water is being poured out, suddenly stands and literally cries aloud, *‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water!’*

A dead hush falls upon the entire crowd as all eyes stare at him... His words recall Isaiah through whom Yahweh spoke saying, *“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.”* (Isaiah 55:1)

John MacArthur says further... “thirsts... come... drink. These three words summarize the gospel invitation. A recognition of need leads to an approach to the source of provision, followed by receiving what is needed...

This water-pouring rite was also associated within Jewish tradition as a foreshadowing of the eschatological rivers of living water foreseen in Ezek. 47:1-9 and Zech. 13:1. The significance of Jesus’ invitation centers in the fact that he was the fulfillment of all the Feast of Booths, or Tabernacles, anticipated, i.e., he was the One who provided the living water that gives eternal life to man (cf. John 4:10-11).” (MacArthur Study Bible notes)

Observe further, the connection here of the Holy Spirit with “life” through the imagery of “living water”.

In his *Systematic Theology*, L. Berkhof summarizes saying,

“As being is out of the Father, and thought through the Son, so life is mediated by the Spirit... In that respect He puts the finishing touch to the work of creation.” (p98) ...and re-creation!



Chapter 7 ends with the failed attempt to arrest Jesus and voiced frustration by the Chief Priests & Pharisees. Observe that the question is no longer “if” Jesus will be crucified, but “when”.

This gives to John’s narrative “a certain aura of inevitability in that John presents the events in Jesus’ life and ministry as the inexorable outworking of a divine predetermined destiny. The Messiah’s performance of a successive series of startling signs does not fundamentally alter the state of the Jewish leaders’ heart; rather, it simply confirms them in their obduracy and stiffens their resolve to oppose and reject God’s anointed. This, in turn, serves the Johannine purpose of theodicy (the vindication of God’s righteousness in his dealings with humanity), showing the evil of human hearts set in sinful moral rebellion against God and redemption in Christ as the only salvation out of this universal human predicament.

Tragically, for those who, like the Jewish authorities, reject the atoning work of God’s Messiah on their behalf, there is no other way: ‘No one comes to the Father except through me’ (14:6). By rejecting Jesus, the Jews (and the unbelieving world at large, of which unbelieving Jews are a part) slam shut the only door that provides access to salvation. This outcome is truly tragic and paradoxical, as it is these very people who started out as God’s chosen people, which raises profound questions concerning God’s election, predestination, and the relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility.” (A Theology..., 218)

### **Jesus at the Festival of Tabernacles, part 2 (8:12-59)**

I am the light of the world

“After the brief vignette from the Sanhedrin chambers (John 7:45-52), the narrative resumes with Jesus speaking to the people at the Festival of Tabernacles (so may be assumed, since no change of location is indicated). Jesus’ affirmation in 8:12, ‘I am the light of the world’ (to be repeated in 9:5 in the context of the next sign; note that signs are notably absent from John 7-8, but through 8:12 = 9:5 there is a connection between this unit and a Johannine sign nonetheless), followed by the assertion that any follower of Jesus will never walk in darkness but have the light of life, harks back to the introductory identification of the Word – Jesus – as the light. Not only is Jesus bread (John 6) and water (John 7), he is also light, meeting the universal human need for life – spiritual, eternal life.

This casts Jesus’ message into even more universal terms than the Synoptic terminology of the ‘kingdom of God.’ What is more, while bread and water are essential to physical life and hence are fitting analogies for Jesus’ mission to impart spiritual life to people, the ‘light’ metaphor harks back to the beginning of time, that is, creation, where God created all things and separated light from darkness.

This, therefore, is part of John’s ‘new creation’ theology, which presents Jesus’ mission in continuity with the work of God at creation: like God, so Jesus too separates light from darkness by coming into the world. Yet he does so in a more overtly spiritual sense, for his mission pertains not primarily to

literal separation of light and darkness but to a spiritual separation brought about by his exposure of human sinfulness and rebellion against God. Either people, like rats when light is shone into a cellar, will scurry for cover, or they will be ‘overcome’ by the light (see John 1:5) and yield to its sovereign power. As Jesus will say at the close of his ministry to the Jews, “While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.” (12:36) (ibid. 219)

Consider the ‘black & white’ way Jesus speaks

*“You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.” (8:23)*

*“I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father.” (8:38)*

*“If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” (8:42-44)*

*“Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.” (8:47)*

**If making the outsider feel comfortable was Jesus’ method of operation, he certainly lacked ‘tact’. Ponder which was methodologically Christ’ priority:**

(1) Sensitivity to ‘outsiders’, or

(2) Truth about Himself?

Consider the strong “I am” assertions of John 8 (verses 12, 18, 24, 28, 58)

*“I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.” (8:24)*

The pronoun “he” is not in the original text. The translators indicate this by italicizing it. This is true in the KJV, NKJV & NASV. The HCSB places the pronoun in brackets; [He]. Unfortunately the ESV does not so indicate.

John MacArthur says this, “Jesus’ words were not constructed normally but were influenced by OT Hebrew usage. It [8:24] is an absolute usage meaning “I AM” and has immense theological significance. The reference may be to, both Ex. 3:14 where the Lord declared his name as “I AM”, and to Isa. 40-55 where the phrase “I am” occurs repeatedly (especially Isa. 43:10, 13, 25; 46:4; 48:12). In this, Jesus referred to himself as the God (Yahweh – the Lord) of the OT, and directly claimed full deity for himself, prompting the Jews’ question of John 8:25.” (MacArthur Study Bible notes)

Contextually this understanding of 8:24 is firmly driven by his “firmly embedding the nail still yet” in 8:58.

Consider the Holman Christian Standard Bible translation

*“Therefore I told you that you will die in your sins. For if you do not believe that I am [He], you will die in your sins.” (8:24)*

*“So Jesus said to them, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am [He], and that I do nothing on My own. But just as the Father taught Me, I say these things.” (8:28)*

*“Jesus said to them, “I assure you: Before Abraham was, I am.” (8:58)*

## Summary of 8

“Thus, in a theological tour de force, John has managed (recounting the essence of Jesus’ words, of course) to expose the true spiritual underpinnings of the opposition to Jesus and his messianic mission. As Paul would put it, this ‘struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against... the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms’ (Eph 6:12), or, sharpened still further, against what John calls “the prince of this world,” Satan (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Thus the deadly combat between Jesus and the Pharisees that ultimately brings Jesus to the cross is presented by John as, not an internecine Jewish struggle for supremacy (as Romans officials may have surmised), but a cosmic clash between good and evil, between God and Satan, proceeding completely under God’s sovereignty while still rendering those opposing the Messiah morally culpable and subject to judgment.

Hence Jesus concludes that the root cause of the Jews’ opposition to him is that they “do not belong to God” (v. 47), in flat contradiction of their earlier claim (v. 41). Sound familiar? This was precisely the same point made by Jesus in his interchange with Nicodemus, the Sanhedrin member and ‘Israel’s teacher’. Now the point is extrapolated to old-style Judaism at large. Confronting Jewish ethnic presumption, Jesus maintained that the Jews’ claim of descent from Abraham would not save them; the root problem of their sin can be remedied only by faith in the Son, who alone could set them free (v.36). This, then, is always the problem: sin. As Paul noted, indwelling sin renders any effort of consistent law-keeping futile and ineffective. Only Jesus can save us from our wretched body that is doomed to die (see Rom 7:14-25)...

Hence Jesus’ controversy has progressed to a point where the differences seem completely irreconcilable. In a sense, John 8 constitutes the high point (if one can call it that) of the controversy between Jesus and the Jews. After this the battle lines are drawn and the fronts harden further, but it would be hard to transcend the intensity and explicit nature of the charges that have been traded here.” (*A Theology...* 221-222)

## God in John's Gospel

Fascinating that nearly half of the references to "God" (theos; 39 out of 83) come from Jesus' lips. Jesus himself is the referent of theos in 1:1, 18 & 20:28.

He is called the 'Son of God' in 1:49; 3:18; 5:25; 10:36; 11:4, 27 & 20:31.

Other Christological titles which refer to theos are 'Lamb of God' (1:29, 36); 'Holy One of God' 1:34) & 'Bread of God' (6:33). Jesus' claim to deity is disputed in 5:18; 10:33 & 19:7.

Passages in which God as an independent referent with specific things characterized of Him:

- Eternally existing (1:1-2)
- The source of the new birth (1:13)
- Invisible (1:18)
- The origin of Jesus' coming (3:2; 6:46; 8:42, 47; 9:33; 13:3; 16:27, 30)
- Loving the world (3:16)
- True (3:33; 17:3)
- The sender of the Son (3:17, 34; implied in other passages as well)
- Spirit (4:24)
- The only God (5:44; 17:3)
- Approving of Jesus (6:27)
- The Father (6:27; many other passages imply this in context)
- The source of Jesus' teaching & of truth (7:17; 8:40)
- The Jews' alleged Father (8:41, 42, 47, 54)
- The One who spoke to Moses (9:29)
- The One who hears righteous prayer (9:31; 11:22)
- The God of Jesus and of His disciples (20:17)

"On the whole, God is a character who remains in the background. He is 'the reality beyond, the transcendent presence.'... Overall, God is the great Given, Known, Accepted and constant Assumed in the controversy concerning Jesus, whose support is sought and invoked by both sides in the escalating

debate. Jesus affirms that he has a unique relationship with God as the Son of God as firmly as this is denied by his opponents. Various Christological titles are applied to Jesus by his followers, but most striking is the application of the term *theos* itself to Jesus in the opening and closing verse of the prologue and in the final periscope [section] of the gospel proper (20:28).

This affirmation of Jesus to be God at the beginning & end of the Gospel (nowhere else in those terms) is “startling in that it takes a designation, *theos*, universally applied to the God of the Hebrew Scriptures in the entire body of the Gospel and changes the referent to Jesus.

This is done without any sustained attempt at adjudicating the issue of how the God of the Hebrew Scriptures and Jesus can both be called *theos*. The major exception, of course, is found at the inception of the Gospel, where the Word (himself *theos*) and *theos* are said to have existed eternally in close proximity to one another.

Yet at the same time, even the risen Jesus still refers to the God of the Hebrew Scriptures as ‘my God’ in 20:17, and earlier in the Gospel affirms that the Father is greater than him (14:28; cf. 10:30).

This hints at a resolution of an apparent ditheism; while there is more than one referent of *theos* in this Gospel, these two persons sustain a nuanced and complementary relationship, which... is most frequently described in the narrative as that of ‘Father’ and ‘Son’.

*(Father, Son & Spirit: The Trinity and John’s Gospel, Kostenberger & Swain. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2008; 58-60)*

### **The Father in John’s Gospel**

“While ubiquitous [‘existing or being everywhere at the same time’] in John’s Gospel, the notion of God as Father is not a common one in the Hebrew Scriptures. On the whole, ‘Father’ tends to be applied to Israel as a nation rather than to individual Jews.”

But in John’s Gospel “there are 136 instances of *pater*, of which 120 have God as a referent.”

What is striking is that the instances of the usage of *pater* are in major clusters concentrated primarily in the so-called festival cycle (chapters 5, 6, 8 & 10) and in the farewell discourse (14-16). Furthermore, virtually all references are found in discourse rather than narration. This strongly suggests that John’s ‘Father’ language is rooted in the terminology of Jesus himself.

Further of interest is that 15 of the 38 references to God as ‘Father’ in chapters 5-10 are clustered in 5:17-47, the classic Christological discourse by Jesus Himself.

Eleven references to God as Father are found in the Bread of Life discourse (ch. 6).

The intense debate of chapter eight sees 19 references to God as Father in the face of Jewish claims to the same.

Chapter ten sees Jesus using the trusting caring relationship between a shepherd and his sheep as an illustration of Jesus' relationship with His Father. This culminates to where Jesus affirms his unity with the Father saying, 'I and the Father are one' (10:30; cf. 5:17-18).

"The Jews promptly pick up stones to stone Jesus. Jesus present claim forms the climax of the chapter much as 8:58 does for chapter 8. The statement echoes the basic confession of Judaism, 'Hear, O Israel: The LORD our god, the LORD is one' (Deut 6). For Jesus to be one with the Father yet distinct from him amounts to a claim to deity (cf. 1:1-2). To be sure, the emphasis here is on the unity of their works, yet an ontological (not just functional) unity between Jesus and the Father seems presupposed. While not affirming complete identity, clearly there is more in view than a mere oneness of will between Jesus and the Father." (ibid. 67-68)

The densest concentration of references to God as Father is in 14:6-13, where in a span of eight verses Jesus refers to God as Father twelve times.

The 'High Priestly' prayer of Jesus of chapter 17 exudes this eternal Father-Son relationship.

"Summary: Father-Son is the dominant, controlling metaphor used for Jesus' relationship with God in the Fourth Gospel. The two persons of God the Father and the Son are thoroughly and inextricably intertwined. Jesus derives his mission from the Father and is fully dependent on him in carrying it out. The imagery of 'father' and 'son' plainly draws on Jewish cultural expectations related to father-son relationships, especially those pertaining to only sons. The vast majority of instances of pater in John's Gospel are found in discourse material. Emphatically, it is Jesus himself who refers to God as 'the Father and in close to twenty instances even as 'his' Father. 'The Father' is Jesus' natural, almost unselfconscious, way of referring to God. Particularly prominent are references to the Father's sending of Jesus." (ibid. 73-74)

### **The Son in John's Gospel**

The term *huios*, 'Son', plays a central role in the Christology of John's Gospel. While Jesus is repeatedly addressed as *kyrios* ('Lord') and *rabbi* ('teacher'), the term *huios* ('Son') literally pervades the Gospel.

*Huios* is found 55x in John's Gospel of which 41 refer to Jesus. Of interest is that "references to God as Father are considerably more frequent than references to Jesus as the Son. It appears that Jesus speaks quite a bit more about the Father than he does about himself." (ibid. 76)

### **Monogenes or 'one-of-a-kind' Son**

The seminal OT event is Abraham's offering of Isaac in Genesis 22. Here clearly *monogenes* means not 'only-begotten' but 'one-of-a-kind' son.

It is probably that John's reference to Jesus as the monogenes refers to Jesus' uniqueness in that He is both the human Son of Joseph & Mary and the divine Son of God.

## **Son of God**

There are eight references to Jesus as the Son of God, seven of which are positive, in John's Gospel. The opening reference is by Nathanael which startlingly appears as the first assertion of this elevated Christological title.

While seven references to Jesus as Son of God may be a small number, yet by way of comparison, the Synoptics record not one instance of Jesus calling himself the 'Son of God'.

Jesus words, "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live" (5:25), become reality in chapter 11 when he raises Lazarus proving that He is indeed the resurrection and the life (11:25) and has life in Himself (5:26).

So from the opening confession of Nathanael, the evangelist's identification of Jesus as the Son of God, and Jesus' self-reference to that effect already at 5:25, set the early stage for the Christological controversy, sustained through the entire first half of John's Gospel, centering on whether or not Jesus is the Son of God (cf. 10:36; 11:4, 27). (ibid. 84)

## **Son of Man**

Viewed from the perspective of all four Gospels, with one significant exception, the phrase 'the Son of Man' is found in the New Testament only on Jesus' lips (Acts 7:56).

Consider, in particular, the following statements by Jesus, in which he enigmatically refers to himself as 'the Son of Man':

No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. (3:13)

And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. (5:27)

Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? (6:62)

And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. (12:23)

When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. (13:31)

Leon Morris, writing specifically with reference to John 5:27, "The background of this saying is evidently Daniel's vision... where the sovereignty divinely conferred on the 'one like a son of man' includes the authority to execute judgment. Nor is there any doubt about the person who is said in John

5:27 to be ‘Son of Man’; it is to ‘the Son’ that ‘the Father’ has given this judicial authority. When ‘the Son’ and ‘the Father’ are spoken of together like this in the Gospels, ‘the Son’ is the Son of the Father, the Son of God. John, to a greater degree than the other evangelists, presents the ministry of the earthly Jesus in the light of what he has come to know about the heavenly Christ. But could one infer from other biblical writers that ‘the Son of Man’ is in fact ‘the Son of God’?

Indeed one could. For one thing, if the scene depicted in Daniel 7:13, 14, is viewed in the light of ancient Near Eastern imagery, one can only with difficulty escape the conclusion that the ‘one like a son of man’ is greeted by the Ancient of Days as his firstborn son. There are parallels here and there in the Psalms – not only in Psalm 110:1, which has been mentioned, but in other places where God acclaims and installs the ‘man of his right hand’ as his son, his firstborn, ‘the highest of the kings of the earth’ (Psalms 2:7; 80:17; 89:20-27).”

(*Jesus: Lord & Savior*, F.F. Bruce. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986. 65-66)

In this vein of theological reflection consider what Stephen saw at his martyrdom:

*“Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.’”* (Acts 7:55-56)

In this title, Jesus is laying claim to being the new Federal Head, the Second Adam, who by virtue of His existence as fully God & fully man may rightfully reclaim what the first Adam forfeited. He is thus our Federal Head under Whom all saved humanity in submission & adoration exists & worships.

“For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive... Thus it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being’; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.” (1 Cor 15:22, 45 )

Adam’s likeness, Lord, efface, stamp Thine image in its place.

Second Adam from above, reinstate us in Thy love.

(Hark, the Herald Angels Sing)

### **The Spirit in John’s Gospel**

As we theologically reflect upon John’s Gospel per the key theological themes we now approach the divine Person of the Holy Spirit.

Of interest immediately is that while the Father-Son relationship between the Word made flesh and God the Father completely dominates the first ‘book’ of John’s Gospel, “it is not until the second half of the



gospel, when the Son's return to the Father is rapidly approaching, that the Spirit becomes the focal point of much of the discussion.

There is no reference to the Spirit in the Prologue with only four passages referring to the Spirit in the first half. These all refer to the Spirit's role in Jesus' ministry.

"The Spirit rests on him (1:32-33) and does so to an unlimited degree (3:34). His words are life-giving and Spirit-infused (6:63), and the Spirit is to be given only subsequent to Jesus' earthly ministry (7:39)."

"References to the Spirit in the second half increase dramatically in both number and prominence in keeping with the Spirit's pivotal role in the disciples' mission subsequent to Jesus' departure and his return to God the Father. The Spirit is referred to variously as the 'Spirit of truth' (14:17; 15:26; 16:13), the 'Holy Spirit' (14:26; 20:22; cf. 1:33) and by the adumbration *parakletos*, or 'helping presence' (14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7)."

(quotations under this heading from *Father, Son and Spirit...* 93)

"In the first half of his Gospel, John's treatment of the Spirit has largely resembled that of the Synoptics. Like them he has included the Baptist's reference to Jesus as the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit (1:32-33; cf. Matt 3:11) and emphasizes that the Spirit in all his fullness rested on Jesus during his earthly ministry (1:32; 3:34; cf. Luke 4:18). Moreover, John has stressed the Spirit's role in regeneration (3:5, 6, 8; cf. 1:12-13), worship (4:23-24) and the giving of life (6:63).

But it is in John's "adoption of a post-exaltation vantage point" that leads to a vastly enhanced portrayal of the Spirit in the farewell discourse, where he is featured primarily as 'the *parakletos*' (14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7) and as 'the Spirit of truth' (14:17; 15:26; 16:13), two closely related terms (see 15:26)." (ibid. 96-97)

### **Another Helper**

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you." (14:15-18)

Helper translates *parakletos*, a term not found in the LXX and which appears in one other place besides John – 1 John 2.

"My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous". (1 John 2:1)

- Meaning of parakletos

“The Greek term here literally means ‘one called alongside to help’ and has the idea of someone who encourages and exhorts.” (MacArthur Study Bible notes)

- Implications of “another”

“The Greek word specifically means another of the same kind. i.e., someone like Jesus himself who will take his place and do his work. The Spirit of Christ is the Third Person of the Trinity, having the same essence of deity as Jesus and as perfectly one with him as he is with the Father.” (MacArthur Study Bible notes)

- Implications of John 14:18 “I will come to you”

Observe the identification with the Spirit of Truth, Jesus makes, just after identifying a distinction from the Spirit of Truth in his words, “He will give you another Helper”.

Identity with... distinction from...

Very similar to John 1:1 “the Word was with God, and the Word was God”... distinction from... identity with...

But observe that there are clear differences between Jesus and the Spirit: the latter neither becomes flesh nor dies for our sins, & must await the former’s ascension to the right hand of the Father as the 2nd Adam, holding the offices of Prophet, Priest & King.

“The initial reference to the Spirit as parakletos in 14:16 is the first of five Paraclete sayings in the farewell discourse, in each case with reference to the Holy Spirit (cf. 14:26; 15:26; 16:7-11, 12-15). As Jesus’ emissary, the Spirit will have a variety of functions in believers’ lives. He will

- Bring to remembrance all that Jesus taught his disciples (14:26)
- Testify regarding Jesus together with his followers (15:26)
- Convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (16:8-11)
- Guide Jesus’ disciples in all truth and disclose what is to come (16:13; historically, this included the formation of the NT canon as apostolic testimony to Jesus) (ibid. 98)

While initially focused upon the Eleven (cf. 15:26), the Spirit, in a secondary sense, fulfils similar roles in believers today. He provides illumination, conviction & council.

The final reference to the Spirit is found in the commissioning scene of chapter 20.

“Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit”. (John 20:21-22)

This “climaxes the characterization of Jesus as the sent Son. The disciples are drawn into the unity and mission of Father and Son... The reference to Jesus breathing on his disciples while saying, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’, probably represents a symbolic promise of the soon-to-be-given gift of the Spirit, not the actual giving of him fifty days later at Pentecost. Against many commentators, the present [passage] does not constitute the Johannine equivalent to Pentecost, nor is the proposal satisfactory that at 20:22 the disciples ‘were only sprinkled with His grace and not [as at Pentecost] saturated with full power.’ The present event does not mark the actual fulfillment of these promises other than by way of anticipatory sign.

On any other view of the present passage, it is hard to see how John would not be found to stand in actual conflict with Luke’s Pentecost narrative in Acts 2, not to mention his own disclaimers earlier in the narrative that the Spirit would be given only subsequent to Jesus’ glorification, which entailed his return to the Father. The disciples’ behavior subsequent to the present incident would also be rather puzzling had they already received the Spirit. The present gesture is made to the group in its entirety rather than to the separate individuals constituting it, just as the authority to forgive or retain sins is given to the church as a whole.

The Greek verb *enephyse* means ‘breathed on’ [not ‘breathed into’]. The theological antecedent is plainly Genesis 2:7, where exactly the same form is used. There God breathes his Spirit into Adam at creation, which constitutes him as a ‘living being’. Here, at the occasion of the commissioning of his disciples, Jesus constitutes them as the new messianic community, in anticipation of the outpouring of the Spirit subsequent to his ascension. Hence the circle closes, from creation 1:1 to new creation in 20:22.” (ibid. 101-102)

### **Christology in John’s Trinitarian perspective: Jesus’ filial identity**

Christology, then “is the church’s answer to Jesus’ question ‘Who do you say that I am?’ (cf. Matt. 16:13). In the church’s attempt to answer this question, John’s Gospel has always played a pivotal role, and rightly so. The Fourth Gospel presents the testimony of one who beheld Jesus’ miraculous sign (2:11), reclined on Jesus’ chest at the table (13:23), and witnessed his glorious death (1:14; 19:35) and resurrection (20-21). Moreover, the Fourth Gospel was written with explicitly Christological aims: ‘that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God’ (20:31).

When it comes to understanding Jesus’ identity and mission (‘Christology’), John urges us to perceive Jesus’ identity and mission in a trinitarian light. John’s Christology is a Trinitarian Christology.

John ascribes to Jesus prerogatives that belong uniquely to the one true God of Israel. John's Jesus created and now governs the world (1:3; 5:17), raises the dead (5:21), judges the world (5:22) and breathes the Spirit of life (20:22), to cite but a few examples. John also attributes to Jesus the 'name' of the one true God. John's 'I am' sayings, in both their absolute and predicative forms, function in this regard. Moreover, John ascribes to Jesus the right to be worshipped, a right enjoyed by Israel's God alone (see 5:23; 20:28).

Helpful at this point is the Chalcedonian logic of the early church: 'Person is contrasted to nature: it is concerned with the way we are (the mode, or tropos), not what we are... Whatever we share with others, we are: it belongs to our nature. But what it is to be a person is not some thing, some quality that we do not share with others – as if there were an irreducible somewhat within each of us that makes us the unique persons we are. What is unique about each one of us is what we have made of the nature that we have: our own unique mode of existence, which is a matter of our experience in the past, our hopes for the future, the way we live out the nature we have. What makes the Son of God the unique person, he is, is the eternal life of love in the Trinity which he shares in a filial way.' (Father, Son and Spirit: The Trinity in John's Gospel, Kostenberger & Swain, 112)

Here is the aspect of the 2nd phrase of John 1:1, "And the Word was with God..." The Greek preposition translated "with" (pros) means literally "face to face".

A.T. Robertson addresses the significance of the preposition pros in John 1:1b: With God (pros ton theon). "Though existing eternally with God the Logos was in perfect fellowship with God. Pros with the accusative presents a plane of equality and intimacy, face to face with each other. In 1 John 2:1 we have a like use of pros: "We have a Paraclete with the Father" (paraklēton echomen pros ton patera). See prosōpon pros prosōpon (face to face, 1 Cor, 13:12), a triple use of pros."

Protestant apologist James White says concerning the personal intimacy expressed by the preposition pros: "Just as Greek verbs are often more expressive than their English counterparts, so too are Greek prepositions. Here John uses the preposition pros. The term has a wide range of meanings, depending on the context in which it is found. In this particular instance, the term speaks to a personal relationship, in fact, to intimacy. It's the same term the apostle Paul uses when he speaks of how we presently have a knowledge comparable to seeing in a dim mirror, but someday, in eternity, we will have a clearer knowledge, an intimate knowledge, for we shall see "face to (pros) face" (Corinthians 13:12). When you are face-to-face with someone, you have nowhere to hide. You have a relationship with that person, whether you like it or not."

Commenting on the intimate nature of pros, A.T. Robertson correlates John 1:1b and 2 Corinthians 5:8: "It is the face-to-face converse with the Lord that Paul has in mind. John thus conceives the fellowship between the Logos and God."

R.C.H. Lenski says, “The preposition *pros*, as distinct from *en*, *para*, and *sun*, is of the greatest importance ... The idea is that of presence and communion with a strong note of reciprocity. The Logos, then, is not an attribute inhering in God, or a power emanating from him, but a person in the presence of God and turned in loving, inseparable communion toward God, and God turned equally toward him. He was another and yet not other than God. This preposition *pros* sheds light on Gen. 1:26, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.’”

Thus, according to John’s Gospel, Jesus holds the unique divine identity in common with the Father as the Son of the Father. Jesus’ way of being God, his sonship, illuminates not only his deity; it illuminates the nature of his humility and saving work. Understanding Jesus’ filial identity is therefore essential to grasping John’s Christological claim. The glory of Jesus the Messiah, according to John, is the glory of ‘the only Son from the Father’ (1:14).

## The Prologue

In 1:1, we are told that Jesus, described as ‘the Word’, has existed eternally ‘with God’ as ‘God’.

By attaching the Greek article to both *logos* and *theos*, the prologue establishes a personal distinction between ‘the Word’ and ‘the God’ (later identified as ‘the Father’ in 1:18). By predicating ‘God’ (anarthrous) to ‘the Word’, the prologue establishes the divine identity of ‘the Word’ with the Father. The Word is not who God is, but he is what God is. [footnote]

1:3-5 Describes the Word as the agent of God’s creative work...

1:9-13 Describes the Word as coming into the world as light in order to fulfill a mission: giving God’s people ‘the right to become children of God’ (1:12).

1:14 The high point of the prologue, announces the incarnation in glory...

1:18 Rounds out the prologue’s initial characterization of Jesus, describing him as one who dwells ‘at the Father’s side’ and who is therefore fully capable of making the Father known.

John, after the prologue, will not again call Jesus ‘the Word’; instead using some form of sonship (e.g. Son, Son of God, Son of Man). Thus, throughout the Gospel, He enjoys perfect fellowship with the Father; He is God; He is the agent of God, sent on a mission from God; He is God in the weakness of mortal human flesh; he reveals God. But these traits are now traits of Jesus the Son. They are distinctly filial [relating to or befitting a son] traits that manifest his distinctly filial glory. As we have seen, the prologue itself prepares us for this substitution in nomenclature [set of terms or symbols] in 1:14: the glory of the incarnate Word is the glory of ‘the Son’.

### **Jesus' Sonship identity & divine agency**

John 1:3 describes the Word (Logos) as the One through whom 'all things were made' and without whom 'nothing was made that has been made'.

The role of the Word, God the Son, as the one through whom God's work is accomplished is a central theme of John's Christology.

Observe, that in the Prologue there is no violation of the monotheistic truth that God alone created the world with the help of anyone else.

"Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb: 'I am the LORD, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself...' (Isaiah 44:24)

"The distinction between God and the Word with respect to the act of creation is not a distinction between God's action and the action of an 'other' helper, perhaps a semi-divine intermediary or even a second god.

John's Gospel thus forbids understanding the Word's work in either 'subordinationist' or 'tritheistic' directions. [footnote]

Rather, the distinction between God and the Word with respect to the act of creation is a distinction within the singular creative activity of the one God. God exercises his own singular divine activity in creating the world and does so by means of his own Word. God does not need the help of another to create the world but instead works through his own sovereign Word.

God is the efficient cause of creation. God's Word is the instrumental cause of creation. [footnote]

The prologue's portrayal of the Word's creative agency thus establishes an important theme that will command the reader's attention for the rest of John's Gospel.

While the Word is personally distinct from God, the work he performs is nonetheless nothing but the work of God. The two participate in one divine work!

"Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves." (14:10-11)

Furthermore, another dimension of the Word's activity may be seen in the way John compares & contrasts the Word's role as an agent of God with John the Baptist's role as an agent of God.

Clear it is that the prologue regards both as personal agents sent by God. Note that 'sending' is a key term in John's Gospel.

“Arguably, then, we are to conclude that, just as John ‘came’ because he was first ‘sent’, so the Word ‘came’ because he was first ‘sent’. ‘Sending’ and ‘coming’ apparently represent two sides of one relationship: the sender sends; the sent one comes in obedience to his commission.

Observe the deeper insight we now gain into Isaiah’s words...

*“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”* (Isaiah 55:10-11)

Observe further the contrast between John the Baptist and the Word as one’s sent.

*“The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease. He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all. He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony.”* (John 3:29-32)

Jesus is ‘the bridegroom’ who ‘comes from above’ and who speaks according to ‘what he has seen and heard’ from above.

This is an important point to note. While both John the Baptist and the Word are agents sent by God on a mission, their status is wholly different. One is earthly, a mere man. The other is divine and human (John 1:14).

Thus, the Word’s mission is to perform the very works of God (see 4:34; 5:36; 9:4; 10:25; 32, 38; 14:10-11; 17:4).

Observe then John’s connecting of the ‘Sonship’ theme with Divine agency in the following:

Upon being challenged in the 5th chapter, Jesus responds immediately positioning himself as the Son. He says, “My Father is working until now, and I am working... calling God his own Father, making Himself equal with God.” (5:17-18)

Jesus’ discourse then centers heavily around the nature of his agency as ‘the Son’ of ‘the Father’ (5:19-47). Look at the flow of His Christological discourse:

As the Son, he is working even as the Father is working. (5:17-18)

As the Son, he does only what He sees the Father doing (5:19)

As the Son, he is loved by the Father (5:20)

As the Son, he gives life to whom he will, as the Father does (5:21)

As the Son, he has been given all judgment from the Father (5:22)

As the Son, he is to be honored as the Father is honored (5:23)

Furthermore, as the Son he has been sent by the Father (5:23)

The dead shall hear the voice of the Son and those who hear shall live (5:25)

As the Son, he has life in himself, as the Father has life in himself (5:26)

Observe, in all this the absolute Sonship dependence Jesus, as the Son, has upon the Father! According to John's Gospel, the Son lives in absolute dependence upon the Father at every moment.

It is this need to reconcile Jesus' equality with God to his dependence upon God that constitutes the challenge. This relationship within the Godhead, is best understood out of John's Gospel as the father-son relationship.

In OT social order, the father-son relationship carried a distinctive character.

**The role of the Father may be seen in three things:**

- (1) The father is the source or origin of a family or clan, and thus provides an inheritance to his children
- (2) The father protects & provides for his children
- (3) The father receives obedience and honor; thus when children go astray they are corrected or disciplined

**Corresponding to the role of 'father' is the 'role of son':**

- (1) The son, begotten of his father is therefore heir to the inheritance
- (2) The son is beloved & cared for by the father
- (3) The son is called to obey his father's instruction

Observe that in this Biblical model for a father-son relationship we gain the ability of understanding that relationship as one characterized by equality and obedience. "In biblical anthropology, a son is at once 'like' his father as his 'image' (Gen 5:3) and 'heir'; but a son is also called to submit to his father's will.



This father-son model is very helpful understanding the nature of the relationship between the Word, who is said to be the Son of God, and God the Father. Two passages stand out here confirming this father-son model.

First, is the prologue which clearly portrays the Word as God's agent, sent to accomplish God's purpose in the world. Moreover, the Word is able to accomplish his particular mission because he is himself God.

While both John the Baptist & the Word are sent on a mission, nevertheless, the two sent agents belong to qualitatively different categories: the Word is God (1:1-3), whereas John the Baptist is 'a man sent from God'.

The second passage is the parable of the wicked tenants found in Mark 12:1-12. Observe the salient point of this parable for our purpose here:

"The notion of 'being sent' does not necessarily imply that the sent one is of a lesser class than the sender, even though it implies a relationship of order and obedience." (ibid., 120)

Kostenberger then writes...

"What is the significance of this observation for understanding John's conception of Jesus' agency? It is that there is a kind of ordered, obedient agency that presupposes an equal class or status between sender and sent one (the word is God; the beloved son is heir of his father's vineyard), even as there is a kind of ordered, obedient agency that presupposes an unequal class or status between sender and sent one (John the Baptist is 'a man who was sent from God' [1:6]; the servants do not own the vineyard). What John makes explicit everywhere is that the kind of ordered, obedient agency that presupposes an equal status between sender and sent one is the kind that obtains pre-eminently between a father and a son, between the Father and the Son. The kind of agency exhibited by Jesus in John's Gospel is a distinctly divine-filial agency.

This filial conception of Jesus' agency, with its particular configuration of equality and order that exists between sender and sent one, explains several textual phenomena relevant to Johannine Christology.

First... the situation in John's Gospel is not that we have certain texts that stress Jesus' equality with the Father while we have other texts that stress his dependence and obedience such that the challenge facing interpreters concerns how to reconcile these different sets of texts. In fact, the case is just the opposite:

[T]hose notable Johannine passages that seem at first sight to proclaim most unambiguously the unity and equality of the Son with the Father are often set in contexts which if they do not deny at least quality this theme, and place alongside it the theme of dependence, and indeed of subordination.

For example, when sender and sent one are father and son, we are not dealing with a relationship where one is superior and the other inferior, or where the will of one is imposed on the will of the other. "When sender and sent one are father and son (at least in the case of the triune life) we are dealing with a

relationship between equals, between those sharing the same ontological status. Thus, when sender and sent one are father and son we are dealing with a relationship where the action to be undertaken involves not the imposition of the will of the one upon the other, but where the action to be undertaken must be understood as a common cause, and a common cause because it is family business.

*“Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house. For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.”* (Heb 3:1-6)

Nevertheless, inasmuch as the analogy holds, equality and engagement in a common cause in no way rule out the relationship of command and obedience that holds between a father and a son, biblically conceived. This explains, for example, why Jesus can say in John 10:18 that, on the one hand, he has received a ‘charge’ from his Father that, on the other hand, consists in having the ‘authority’ to lay down his life on his own accord (freely, as Lord) and to take it up again. The Son’s obedience to the Father’s charge does not compromise the son’s authority to act but rather establishes it. He is the free Lord of all – including his own death – as the Son who obeys the Father.

Jesus’ filial relationship to the Father also explains the enigmatic statement *‘the Father is greater than I’* (14:28), a statement that bears similarities to Paul’s teaching...

*“For ‘God has put all things in subjection under his feet.’ But when it says, ‘all things are put in subjection,’ it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.”* (1 Cor 15:27-28)

The Father enjoys personal priority in the order of the triune life, not ontological superiority, for the Father and the Son hold all things in common: one divine name (17:11), one divine power (5:19, 21-22), one divine identity (10:30).

*And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.* (17:11)

*Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.* (5:19)

*For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son,* (5:21-22)

*I and the Father are one.* (10:30)

John reveals that “the Father commands; the Son obeys. But the Son does not obey because he is inferior to the Father or ‘under compulsion’ to do so. He obeys the Father because the Father’s will is his will (*homoousios*) and because obedience to the Father is the truest personal expression of his filial unity with the Father. In this sense, the Son is equal in authority to the Father as the Son of the Father, whose will is always to obey the Father’s will. (ibid. 124)

### John’s usage of *ego eimi*

Below is a synthesis between chapter 6 of *The Forgotten Trinity* by James White & an essay article, by the same, entitled “Purpose and Meaning of “*Ego Eimi*” in the Gospel of John in Reference to the Deity of Christ”

“When dealing with theological issues, we often condense things and make connections that, in reality, take a little more proof than we have offered. This is nowhere better illustrated than in the connection that is alleged to exist between Jesus’ words in John 8:58 and the words of Yahweh in Exodus 3:14, “I am that I am.” You will find references to Exodus 3:14 in most commentaries on John 8:58, yet those who deny the deity of Christ cry ‘foul!’ and argue that such an immediate connection can’t be made. The strongest argument they can present is that the *ego eimi* portion of Exodus 3:14 isn’t really the assertion of divinity: the *ho ohn* portion is (*ho ohn* being translated as ‘the Being’ or ‘the One Existing’).

As far as the argument goes, this is true. However, the claim that Jesus’ words in John 8:58 (and the other passages) should be connected to Exodus 3:14 does not exist in a vacuum. There is a line of argumentation, a very solid one, that leads us from John 8 back through Isaiah to Exodus 3. We need to trace that path before we can make the statement that Jesus is, in fact, using a name of deity of himself in John’s gospel.

The specific phrase *ego eimi* occurs 24 times in the Gospel of John. Seventeen of these times it is followed by a clear predicate. 1 Some of these instances would be John 6:35, “*I am the living bread*” (*ego eimi ho artos tes zoes*) or John 10:11, “*I am the good shepherd*” (*ego eimi ho poimen ho kalos*). 3 times the usage does not fall into a clear category - these would be 4:26, 6:20, and 9:9.

In 4:26 Jesus says to the woman at the well, “*I am, the one speaking to you*” (*ego eimi, ho lalon soi*) which is strangely reminiscent of the LXX rendering of Isaiah 52:6 (*ego eimi autos ho lalon*). In 6:20 it seems to be a rather straight-forward self-identification to the frightened disciples in the boat. 2 And in 9:9 we find the man who had been healed of his blindness insisting that he was indeed the man of whom they spoke. This last instance is similar to the sayings as Jesus utters them, in that the phrase comes at the end of the clause and looks elsewhere for its predicate.

Given the above usages, we are left with 7 usages that have been described as “absolute”. These would be John 8:24, 8:28, 8:58, 13:19, 18:5, 18:6, and 18:8. It is these seven passages that make up the bulk of

the discussion concerning the use of *ego eimi* by John. For the sake of accurate examination, the transliterations of these phrases are provided below:

John 8:24: *ean gar me pistuesete hoti ego eimi*

John 8:28: *tote gnosesthe hoti ego eimi*

John 8:58: *prin Abraam genethai ego eimi*

John 13:19: *hina pisteusete hotan genetai ego eimi*

John 18:5: *legei autois Ego eimi*

John 18:6: *hos oun eipen autois Ego eimi*

John 18:8: *eipon humin hoti ego eimi*

John uses this phrase of Jesus more than any other writer. The phrase does occur in Mark 14:62-64 as well, however. It is to be noted that in the above list, the phrase itself comes at the end of the clause in each instance. This will have significance when the Septuagint background of John's usage is examined.

The main verses that will undergo examination here are 8:24, 8:58, 13:19, and 18:5-6. In the author's translation these passages read as follows:

John 8:24: *"Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am, you will die in your sins."*

John 8:58: *"Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.'"*

John 13:19: *"From now on I tell you before it comes to pass in order that when it does happen, you may believe that I am."*

John 18:5-6: *"They answered Him, 'Jesus the Nazarene.' He said to them, 'I am.' And Judas also, the one who betrayed Him, was standing with them. Therefore when He said to them, 'I am,' they went backwards and fell upon the ground."*

### **Old Testament Background of *ego eimi***

The position taken by this writer reflects a consensus opinion of many scholars, that being that the closest and most logical connection between John's usage of *ego eimi* and the Old Testament is to be found in the Septuagint rendering of the Hebrew phrase *ani hu* in the writings (primarily) of Isaiah. It is true that many go directly to Exodus 3:14 for the background, but it is felt that unless one first establishes the connection with the direct quotation of *ego eimi* in the Septuagint, the connection with Exodus 3:14 will be somewhat tenuous.

The Septuagint translates the Hebrew phrase *ani hu* as *ego eimi* in Isaiah 41:4, 43:10 and 46:4. In each of these instances the phrase *ani hu* appears at the end of the clause, and is so rendered (or punctuated) in the LXX (just as in these seven examples in John). The phrase *ego eimi* appears as the translation of a few other phrases in Isaiah as well that are significant to this discussion. It translates the Hebrew *anoki anoki hu as ego eimi* in 43:25 and 51:12. Once (52:6) *ani hu* is translated as *ego eimi autos* (basically an even more emphasized form). And once (45:18) we find *ego eimi kurios* for *ani Yahweh*!

This last passage is provocative in that it is in the context of creation, an act ascribed to Jesus by John (John 1:3) and other New Testament writers (Colossians 1:16-17, Hebrews 1:2-3).

The usage of *ani hu* by Isaiah is as a euphemism for the very name of God Himself. Some see a connection between *ani hu* and Yahweh as both referring to being. That it carried great weight with the Jews is seen in 8:59 and their reaction to the Lord's usage of the phrase. If one wishes to say that Jesus was not speaking Greek, but Aramaic, the difficulty is not removed, for the identification would have been just that much clearer!

There seems to be a direct connection between the Septuagint and Jesus' usage of *ego eimi*. In Isaiah 43:10 we read, "that you may know, and believe, and understand, that I am He" (personal translation). In the LXX this is rendered thus: *hina gnote kai pisteusete kai sunete hoti ego eimi*. In John 13:19, Jesus says to the disciples, "from now on I tell you before it comes to pass in order that when it does happen, you may believe that I am." (personal translation). In Greek the last phrase is *hina pisteusete hotan genetai hoti ego eimi*. When one removes the extraneous words (such as *hotan genetai* which connects the last clause to the first) and compares these two passages, this is the result:

Is. 43:10: *hina pisteusete ... hoti ego eimi*

Jn. 13:19: *hina pisteusete ... hoti ego eimi*

Even if one were to theorize that Jesus Himself did not attempt to make such an obvious connection between Himself and Yahweh (which would be difficult enough to do!) one must answer the question of why John, being obviously familiar with the LXX, would so intentionally insert this kind of parallelism.

Another parallel between the usage of *ego eimi* in John 13:19 and its usage in Isaiah has to do with the fact that in 13:19 Jesus is telling them the future - one of the very challenges to the false gods thrown down by Yahweh in the passages from Isaiah under consideration (the so-called "trial of the false gods").

This connection is direct in Isaiah 41:4, "Who has done this and carried it through, calling forth the generations from the beginning? I, the LORD, - with the first of them and with the last - I am He." Here the "calling forth" of the generations - time itself - is part of the usage of *ani hu*. The same is true in John 13:19. In the same chapter of the book of Isaiah references above, in verse 22 we read, "*Bring in your idols, to tell us what is going to happen. Tell us what the former things were, so that we may consider them and know their final outcome. Or declare to us the things to come...*" That this reference to

knowledge of the future would appear in the same section that uses *ani hu* as the name for God, and that this would be introduced by the Lord Himself in the same context in John 13:19, is significant indeed.

Hence, though some would easily dismiss the *ani hu/ego eimi* connection, or ignore it altogether, the data seems strong that this connection is intended by John himself by his usage.

### **Johannine Usage of *ego eimi* - Interpretation**

It is not hard to understand why there have been many who have not wished to make the connection that John makes between Jesus and Yahweh. One cannot make this identification outside of a trinitarian understanding of the Gospel itself, as one can certainly not identify Jesus as the Father in John's Gospel, hence, if Jesus is identified as *ego eimi* in the sense of the Old Testament *ani hu*, then one is left with two persons sharing the one nature that is God, and this, when it encounters John's discussion of the Holy Spirit, becomes the basis of the doctrine of the Trinity! Indeed, many of the denials of the rather clear usage of *ego eimi* in John 8:24, 8:58, 13:19 and 18:5-6 find their origin in preconceived theologies 18 that are nearly unitarian, subordinationist, or so enamored with naturalistic rationalism as to be anti-super-natural. An interpreter who is unwilling to dismiss the words of Scripture as simply "tradition" (and hence non-authoritative) or to interpret Scripture in contradiction with itself (as in a violation of strict monotheism in the positing of a being who is quasi-god, mighty, but not "almighty") will be hard pressed to avoid the obvious conclusions of John's presentation. Lest one should find it hard to believe that John would identify the carpenter from Galilee as Yahweh Himself, it might be pointed out that he did just that in John 12:39-41 by quoting from Isaiah's temple vision of Yahweh in Isaiah 6 and then concluding by saying, "*These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory and he spoke about Him.*" The only "Him" in the context is Jesus; hence, for John, Isaiah, when he saw Yahweh on His throne, was in reality seeing the Lord Jesus. John 1:18 says as much as well.

It is self-evident that such a far-reaching and in reality astounding claim as is made by the Lord Jesus in John 8:24, 58 is hard to accept outside of the highest estimation of His person.

Indeed, Augustine wrote, "Weigh the words, and get a knowledge of the mystery." *'Before Abraham was made.'* Understand, that 'was made' refers to human formation; but 'am' to the Divine essence. 'He was made,' because Abraham was a creature. He did not say, Before Abraham was, I was; but, 'Before Abraham was made,' who was not made save by me, 'I am'. Nor did He say this, Before Abraham was made I was made; for *'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth;'* and *'in the beginning was the Word.'* *'Before Abraham was made, I am.'* Recognize the Creator – distinguish the creature. He who spake was made the seed of Abraham; and that Abraham might be made, He Himself was before Abraham.'

But can the usage of *ego eimi* withstand that much weight? Though being a "scholar" does not guarantee infallibility in judgment, it should at least provide assurance of factual understanding. Given this, the scholars seem to feel that it can.

Leon Morris has written, "I am' must have the fullest significance it can bear. It is, as we have already had occasion to notice...in the style of deity." (in a footnote on same page:) "*ego eimi* in LXX renders the Hebrew *ani hu* which is the way God speaks (cf. Deut. 32:39; Isa. 41:4, 43:10, 46:4, etc.). The Hebrew may carry a reference to the meaning of the divine name Yahweh (cf. Exod. 3:14). We should almost certainly understand John's use of the term to reflect that in the LXX. **It is the style of deity**, and it points to the eternity of God according to the strictest understanding of the continuous nature of the present *eimi*. He continually IS. Cf. Abbott: "taken here, along with other declarations about what Jesus IS, it seems to call upon the Pharisees to believe that the Son of man is not only the Deliverer but also one with the Father in the unity of the Godhead" (2228)."

Warfield has written concerning this, "...and again, as the most impressive language possible, He declares...: *"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am,"* where He claims for Himself the timeless present of eternity as His mode of existence."

The great expositor J. C. Ryle noted, "Let us carefully note what a strong proof we have here of the pre-existence and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. He applies to Himself the very name by which God made Himself known when He undertook to redeem Israel. It was "I AM" who brought them out of the land of Egypt. It was "I AM" who died for us upon the cross. The amazing strength of the foundation of a sinner's hope appears here. Believing on Jesus we rest on divinity, on One who is God as well as man. There is a difference in the Greek verbs here employed which we should carefully notice. The Greek for "was" is quite different from the Greek for "am." It is as if our Lord said, *"Before Abraham hwas born, I have an existence individual and eternal."* "

Luther, like Augustine before him, wrote in no uncertain terms: "The Lord Christ is angry below the surface and says: "Do you want to know who I am? I am God, and that in the fullest sense. Do as you please. If you do not believe that I am He, then you are nothing, and you must die in your sin." No prophet, apostle, or evangelist may proclaim and say: "Believe in God, and also believe that I am God; otherwise you are damned." "

A.T. Robertson certainly did not see any linguistic problems here: I am (*ego eimi*). Undoubtedly here Jesus claims eternal existence with the absolute phrase used of God. The contrast between *genesthai* (entrance into existence of Abraham) and *eimi* (timeless being) is complete. See the same contrast between en in 1:1 and *egeneto* in 1:14. See the contrast also in Psa. 90:2 between God (*ei*, art) and the mountains (*genethenai*)."

And finally, William Hendrickson put it rather bluntly: "The "I am" here (8:58) reminds one of the "I am" in 8:24. Basically, the same thought is expressed in both passages; namely, that Jesus is God!"

This writer feels that there is no way that John could have been any more obvious in his intention to invest in *ego eimi* a significance far beyond the simple function of identification that it can, and does at times, perform. In 8:58 the Jews pick up stones to stone Jesus.

The other two times this occurs are right on the heels of claims to deity as well - first in John 5 where Jesus has just claimed equality with the Father both by calling God His own Father in very special terms as well as claiming the same right to work on the Sabbath as the Jews understood to be God's in upholding the universe; secondly in John 10 after Jesus claims that He and the Father are one in their role of bringing salvation to God's elect - His "sheep". In both instances John spells it out clearly that these claims were understood to be claims to equality with God - can 8:58 then be different?

In John 13:19 the introduction of the phrase in correlation with the revelation of future events just as is found in Isaiah, even to the point of nearly quoting the LXX rendering, is far too specific to be overlooked. And in 18:5-6, John repeats the phrase in verse six to make sure that the reader understands the reason for the soldiers' falling backwards. And why would the soldiers fall backwards if not for the awesomeness of the words of Jesus? Some of the naturalistic explanations brought forward for this incident are so ludicrous as to be absurd. John's meaning cannot be mistaken.

If each of these instances were examined solely in a vacuum, separated from the others, without any thought of the entire book of John, one might see how their collective significance could be missed. But this is not the way of scholarly interpretation. These statements are not made in a vacuum - they are placed in a book that is rich with meaning and purpose. It has been well said that John intends the entire Gospel to be read through the "interpretive window" of the Prologue of 1:1-18. Given the teachings of that passage, can one seriously doubt the meaning of *ego eimi* in the above examined passages? It would seem not.

## Conclusion

It could fairly be admitted that an immediate and unqualified jump from the *ego eimi* of John 8:58 to Exodus 3:14 is unwise. The connection that is much more properly traced is the one given here, that of *ego eimi/ani hu* as found in Isaiah. The connection between Isaiah and Exodus 3:14 is so obvious as to be undeniable.

We have seen that John uses *ego eimi* in more than one way - the majority of the time providing a predicate. Even these are astounding in their majesty in regards to the person of Christ. Here Jesus is said to be the way, the truth, and the life; the light of the world; the bread of life; and the good shepherd, each of which it should be noted, has parallels to statements made by Yahweh in the Old Testament. But the bulk of this paper has been devoted to those passages where the phrase is used in a specific sense - in an "absolute" sense.



Upon examining these we have seen that they find their origin and background in the book of Isaiah's usage of the Hebrew term *ani hu* and its translation as *ego eimi* in the LXX. We have seen the close parallel between Isaiah 43:10 and John 13:19, both in form as well as thought content.

We have also seen how the context of the passages themselves - the setting and teaching of the entire book of John - makes the identification of *ego eimi* and its resultant presentation of the deity of Christ inevitable. We have seen how John purposefully emphasizes these phrases, helping us to grasp their significance.

In closing, we might do well to look, then, with this understanding in mind, at Jesus' words at John 8:24: "unless you believe that I am, you will die in your sins." Jesus here gives us the content and object of saving faith - faith, real faith is that which comes to the real Jesus. A faith that demands a change in Jesus before a commitment is made is not real faith at all. The Jews standing about Him during this conversation most assuredly would not have denied that He was a man - but that was not sufficient for faith. Some had just recently proclaimed Him as Messiah - but that was not sufficient for faith. Some might hail Him as a prophet or a miracle worker, blessed by God - but that was not sufficient for faith. Some today say He was a great moral teacher and philosopher - but that is not sufficient for faith. Some call Him "a god" or a great angel - but that is not sufficient for faith. No, Jesus Himself laid down the line - unless one believes Him for whom He says He is - the *ego eimi* - one will die in one's sins. There is no salvation in a false Christ. If we are to be united with Christ to have eternal life, then we must be united with the true Christ, not a false representation. It is out of love that Christ uttered John 8:24. We would do well to heed His words."

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Above taken from the article, "**Purpose and Meaning of "Ego Eimi" in the Gospel of John in Reference to the Deity of Christ**", by James White, <http://vintage.aomin.org/EGO.html>

"A filial understanding of Jesus' agency illuminates the nature of Jesus' claim [8:28]. When Jesus is raised up on the cross, he says that the Jews will know two things: (1) 'that I am he'; and (2) 'that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just what the Father has taught me'. The cross reveals Jesus' divine identity. He is 'I am'. More specifically, the cross reveals Jesus' filial-divine identity. He is the 'I am' who does and says all that he does and says on the basis of his Father's authority and teaching. The cross, in other words, reveals Jesus' divine sonship because it is the culminating revelation of the relationship between the teaching Father and the obeying Son. The cross is therefore the culminating revelation of John's Trinitarian monotheism.

Jesus' identity as the divine Son also suggests how his 'lifting up' on the cross can constitute the fulfillment of his human vocation to suffer as 'the Servant of the Lord' (Isa 52:13 – 53:12)...

The crucifixion is the moment when Jesus suffers the all-too-human fate of death. Ironically enough, far from hiding his divinity, Jesus' death becomes the supreme moment for unveiling the unique divine glory he shares with his Father. The glory of God's Son is manifest in and through his flesh, which withers like the grass (1:14; cf. Isa 40:6-8).

A trinitarian understanding of the incarnation indicates how this can be the case. Jesus' crucifixion can constitute at once the culmination of his human vocation unto death and the manifestation of his divine glory because of who he uniquely is. Because he is the Son of God in the flesh (whose personal way of being God includes his filial obedience to the Father) his death can constitute the moment where he fulfils at once the roles of sovereign Lord and humble, obedient human Servant. As Bobrinskoy observes, 'The obedience of Jesus is the hinge of his double relation to the Father: as eternal Son, and suffering Servant.'

In the light of this discussion, we may summarize John's understanding of the Son's agency as follows: Jesus performs the singular divine actions of Israel's Lord God, but he does so as God the Son, who depends upon, obeys and thereby fulfils the one will and work of God the Father. Moreover, as a consequence of the incarnation (1:14), the Son fulfils the one will and work of God the Father in 'the form of a servant': the form of the Servant, whose vocation reaches its climax in his death on a cross (cf. Phil 2:7-8). One divine action is executed on the stage of the Fourth Gospel, the singular action of the Father through his obedient, incarnate Son (see also 1:3; 10:37-38; 14:10-11) in the power of the Spirit." (*Father, Son and Spirit...* 125-127)

### **Jesus' filial identity and the nature of salvation**

John 1:12 tells us that the Word was sent by God to deliver the gift: 'the right to become children of God'. As the monogenes Son, the Word is particularly suited to deliver such a gift. Yet, John's Gospel makes hardly any mention of the gift of sonship until 20:17, where Jesus says,

*"Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."* (20:17)

Having completed His Father's will, God the Son ascends back to heaven, where he was before (3:13; 6:62; 7:33; 16:28).

Thus, the sequencing of John's narrative as well as "logic of John's soteriology, the right to Sonship can come to Jesus' disciples only after his earthly mission is 'finished' on the cross (19:30; cf. 13:36). Once his work on the cross has been accomplished, the risen and ascending Jesus can deliver to his 'brothers' the glad tidings of their reception into the Father's household (20:17; 14:2-3)." (ibid. 127-128)

Consider that the reference to Jesus as 'the only Son' in John 3:16 is doubtlessly alluding to Genesis 22:2, where Abraham is commanded to offer his 'only son' Isaac. "Similarly, the Father's gift of the Son

reveals the true measure of his love for the world. God's Son-sacrificing love is the fountainhead of the world's salvation.

"To grasp the full significance of this point, we must step back and survey the broader landscape of John 1 – 3. In John 1, John the Baptist identified Jesus as '*the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*' (1:29, 36). This description probably represents another allusion to Genesis 22. In Genesis 22:8, Abraham expresses his confidence to Isaac that 'God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering'.

God answers Abraham's confidence by providing a ram in the thicket, a ram that Abraham promptly offers 'instead of his son' (Gen 22:13). Consequently, the patriarch names the mountain 'The LORD Will Provide' (Gen 22:14). This further clarifies the meaning of John 3:16. The Father's gift of the Son constitutes not only the measure of his love for the world, but also the means by which he saves the world. The Father so loved sinners that he did not withhold his own beloved Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, but 'gave him up for us all' (Rom 8:32) as a substitutionary sacrifice. *Unus ex Trinitate passus est* (One of the trinity suffered).

Jesus' crucifixion during the feast of the Passover (13:1; 19:14) confirms this interpretation. The feast of Passover commemorated God's deliverance of his 'firstborn son' Israel (Ex 4:22) from slavery by providing a sacrificial lamb in Israel's place (Ex 12 – 13).

In John's Gospel, the feast occasions God's eschatological provision of 'the Lamb of God' (1:29) to liberate those enslaved to sin and death (8:34-35) that they might enjoy the freedom of Sonship in God's household. 'If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed' (8:36).

Read in this light, the substitutionary, sacrificial death of Jesus constitutes the turning point of the new exodus. The Father gives his own beloved Son to suffer as the eschatological Passover Lamb in order to deliver his enslaved people into the freedom of being God's children. As a result of the Son's redeeming, substitutionary death, God becomes our Father and we become his children (cf. Gal 4:4-7). (Ibid. 128-129)

Consider Jesus' words, "*When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world.*" (John 16:21)

This comparison of the disciple's sorrow turning to joy draws from a common human experience. It also draws from the imagery of Isaiah.

"Like a pregnant woman who writhes and cries out in her pangs when she is near to giving birth, so were we because of you, O LORD; we were pregnant, we writhed, but we have given birth to wind. We have accomplished no deliverance in the earth, and the inhabitants of the world have not fallen. Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead." (26:17-19)

“This text provides one of the OT’s clearest references to a literal, bodily resurrection. John’s allusion to Isaiah 26 suggests that the prophesied eschatological birth pangs of divine judgment, as well as the accompanying birth of bodily resurrection from the dead, find their fulfillment in Jesus’ death and resurrection.

This interpretation is confirmed by Jesus’ action in John 20:22 where he appears to his disciples, turning their sorrow into joy. Jesus then ‘breaths’ on’ them saying, *‘Receive the Holy Spirit’* (20:22).

“Jesus’ action here is reminiscent of two OT texts, Genesis 2:7 and Ezekiel 37:9, where the same verb translated ‘breathed on’ in 20:22 is used. In Genesis the Lord ‘breathed into’ Adam’s nostrils, making him a ‘living being’. Ezekiel is commanded by the Lord to summon ‘the breath’ to ‘breathe into’ the slain of Israel that they might live. Just as the Lord breathed life into Adam, making him a living being, so the Lord promises through Ezekiel to breathe into exiled Israel, reconstituting them a living and breathing people in His presence.”

In the light of 16:21 and 20:22, the connection between Jesus’ resurrection and the disciples’ adoption becomes clear. Through his death, God’s beloved Son bore the eschatological birth pangs of divine judgment. Through his resurrection ‘on the first day of the week’ (20:1), God’s Son inaugurated the eschatological rebirth of Israel. Jesus is the firstborn Son of Israel’s dead, the first fruits of the new creation (cf Col 1:18; 1 Cor 15:20, 23). As such Jesus breathes new life into his disciples, reconstituting eschatological Israel around himself in those who have been born his ‘brothers’ (20:17; cf. 1 Cor 15:45). God’s purpose for creation and redemption will now be fulfilled in the community of Jesus’ Spirit-infused brothers.” (ibid. 129-130)

The significance, then, of Jesus’ cross and resurrection was to enable God to gift fallen man with the right to become children of God. “God the Father sacrificed his own beloved Son that he might bear God’s eschatological wrath on behalf of God’s people. God subsequently raised his Son that he might be ‘the firstborn among many brothers’ (Romans 8:29).

The significance of Jesus’ divine sonship for soteriology does not end there, however. Jesus’ identity as God’s only Son also determines the destiny of God’s children. This destiny is revealed in John’s teaching on Jesus’ ascension.

Jesus’ death and resurrection mark the beginning of his ascent to the Father (12:23; 13:32-33), his return to the place from which he came (6:62; 16:28). In his final prayer in the Gospel, Jesus describes this destination as the place where he enjoyed the Father’s glory before the world existed (17:3) and where he basked in the Father’s eternal love (17:24).

The Son’s place in the Father’s house will be the place of Jesus’ ‘brothers’ as well (14:2-3).

It is significant to mention here the close association between Jesus’ ascent and the Son of Man title (see 3:13-15; 6:62; 12:34; 13:31-36)... As it goes for the son of Man, so it goes for God’s people.

Consequently, it is Jesus' exaltation as the son of Man that guarantees the exaltation of his brothers as well.

In the light of this fact we may summarize John's Christology as follows: the Son of god became incarnate to suffer as 'the Servant of the Lord' and 'the Lamb of God' on behalf of his people. He ascends as the risen and glorified 'Son of Man', the inclusive representative of his brothers and guarantor of their full and final exaltation. John's doctrine of Jesus' person and work must therefore be viewed as a Trinitarian theology of 'the wonderful exchange'. The son became flesh to deliver his people from the snare of sin and death into 'the Father's lap' (1:18). The Son became a man that, in and with him, men and women might become sons and daughters of the living God.

John's Christology is a Trinitarian Christology. Jesus' person and work can be understood only in the light of his filial relationship to the one he called 'Father'." (ibid. 131-133)

### **The Spirit who rests & remains on God's Son & his brethren**

Kostenberger makes an astute observation when we says, "The Spirit's personal identity is revealed not in the divine activities he holds in common with the Father and the Son. The Spirit's personal identity is revealed in the distinctive, characteristic ways in which he relates to the Father and the Son... The Spirit's way of relating to the Father and the son follows a complex but consistent pattern: the Spirit descends from the Father to rest and remain upon the Son so that, through the Son, he may come to rest and remain upon Jesus' disciples as well." (ibid. 135-136)

According to John, the Spirit "is the one who descends from the Father upon the Son that he might flow through the Son to all who believe, bringing forgiveness and renewal, life and light. His coming signals the replacement of God's former dwelling in tabernacle and temple with the triune indwelling of the children of God. His role is to confirm believers' interest in the Son, and thus in the Father as well, and to continue the mission given by the Father to the son through the church in the world. The Spirit effects all these things 'that the Father may be glorified in the Son' (14:13). (ibid. 148)

### **John's Trinitarian mission theology**

*"Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."* (John 20:21)

"John's mission theology is an integral part of his presentation of Father, Son and Spirit... Rather than John's mission theology being a function of his Trinitarian theology, the converse is in fact the case: John's presentation of Father, son and Spirit is a function of his mission theology... the point pertains to the order of knowing, not to the order of being. The triune identity is revealed through the triune missions. But the triune missions flow from, through and to the eternal Trinity." (ibid. 149)

Observe that “it is always the Father who is the sender of the Son, never vice versa, and it is the Father and the Son sending the Spirit, never the Spirit sending the Father or the Son. The sending of the Spirit, in turn, occurs by salvation-historical necessity only after the Son’s return to the Father. This shows that the roles exercised by the three persons of the Trinity are not interchangeable.” (ibid. 155)

The two-part format of the Gospel with chapters 1-12 presenting the earthly mission of Jesus and chapters 13-21 anticipating the mission of the exalted Jesus subsequent to his departure back to his pre-existent heavenly glory also carries an important theological, Trinitarian message. In the first part, Jesus is shown to claim a unique relationship, and, in fact, equality, with God (e.g. 5:18). The second part moves beyond the vindication of Jesus’ claim through the resurrection and shows the unity of the triune Godhead in their mission to the world, extended through Jesus’ followers (chs 17; 20:21-22)

In this way, the gospel’s presentation of the Father as the one who sent Jesus as well as of John’s Christology and pneumatology can be shown to issue ultimately in missiology. Thus, rightly understood, theologically speaking John’s presentation of the Trinity is not a mere exercise in ontology as an end in itself but is made subservient to mission: the Spirit-enabled demonstration to the world that the Father sent the Son, offering the world forgiveness of sins and eternal life upon faith in the Messiah.” (ibid. 155)

“Hence it can truly be said, not only that John’s mission theology is Trinitarian (which in and of itself is a very significant statement), but that his Trinitarian teaching is part of his mission theology; a truly revolutionary insight.

The insight is revolutionary, because, if heeded, it calls the church to focus its major energies on acting on and acting out her Lord’s commission., ‘As the Father has sent me, I am sending you’ (20:21), in the power of the Spirit, rather than merely engaging in the study of God or cultivating personal holiness...

The insight is revolutionary also because a proper understanding of John’s Trinitarian mission theology ought to lead the church to understand its mission in Trinitarian terms, that is, as originating in and initiated by the Father (the ‘one who sent’ Jesus0, as redemptively grounded and divinely mediated by Jesus the Son (the ‘Sent One’ turned sender, 20:21), and as continued and empowered by the Spirit, the ‘other helping presence’, the Spirit of truth.” (ibid. 156)

“What is more, not only is John’s mission theology Trinitarian in nature; it is universal in scope. A comparison with Luke’s two-volume work, the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, may prove instructive at this point. In essence, Luke, in his first volume, provides an account of the saving mission of Jesus culminating in his substitutionary cross-death and his resurrection. Yet, as Luke is careful to show, this is only the beginning. In his second volume, Luke consequently narrates the coming of the Spirit (in fulfillment of Jesus’ promise; cf. Luke 24:48-49; Acts 1:4-5) and the church’s Spirit-empowered witness ‘to the ends of the earth’ (Acts 1:8).

It is our contention that John’s salvation-historical outlook is much the same as Luke’s, but that John accomplishes in one volume what Luke does in two. This lends John’s Gospel a virtually unparalleled

theological compactness and coherence. In John's presentation, the Son is the focal point of the *missio Dei* in that he is the sent Son from God the Father, himself God, who also, together with the Father, becomes the sender of the Holy Spirit, who thus empowers Jesus' followers for their universal witness. The universal scope of this witness is underscored by several means:" (ibid. 156-157)

1. Believing in Jesus is the sole requirement for inclusion in Jesus' new messianic community (1:12; 3:16; 20:30-31...)
2. The pattern of Jesus' mission anticipates the early church's mission as recorded in Acts: from Jerusalem & Judea (John 3) to Samaria (John 4:1-42) to the Gentile world (John 4:43-54).
3. The division of John's Gospel into major halves, John 1-12 narrating Jesus' earthly mission to the Jews and John 13-21 the now exalted Jesus' mission to the world through His followers.
4. "The transcending of OT Israel's salvation-historical privilege (still acknowledged in 4:22) and the extension of the salvific scope of Jesus' mission to the Gentiles (cf. e.g. 4:34-38; 10:16; 11:51-52; 12:20-36; 15:8). By being the 'true vine' representing Israel (15:1), Jesus becomes the centre of God's salvific purposes and the channel through which salvation, subsequent to the cross and the resurrection, can be freely extended to 'whoever' believes in Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, whether Jew or Gentile.
5. In this way, John manages at the same time to be true to the historical vantage point of his Gospel prior to Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection and ascension while at the same time showing the seeds and anticipatory signs of the universalization of the *mission Dei* in and through Jesus that would ensue subsequent to the cross and the sending of the Spirit, something that, of course, had long taken place by the time of writing of John's Gospel.

### **What impact does this have upon the church's mission?**

Kostenberger says,

"The shape of Jesus' mission determines the shape of the church's mission... The first aspect of Jesus' mission, that he is sent from the Father to the world teaches us that there is a centrifugal dimension to mission. The church's mission proceeds from the sending Son to the world in the power of the Spirit. The second aspect of Jesus' mission, Jesus' role as the eschatological shepherd-teacher, teaches us that there is a centripetal dimension to mission. Jesus gathers his sheep from the world into his fold through the witness of his Spirit-empowered church (6:35-65). The third aspect of Jesus' mission, that he comes into the world and returns to the Father (descent-ascent), emphasizes the transcendent origin and power of the church's mission. Whereas the first two aspects of Jesus' mission find analogies in the church's mission, the last aspect does not. This reminds us that the church's mission to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth and to draw all peoples into the triune fellowship is wholly dependent upon the unique

mission of the Son who descended to die and ascended to reign that he might baptize his people with the Holy Spirit (1:33).

Keeping all three aspects of Jesus' mission in mind will protect the church from various forms of reductionism with respect to its missionary endeavor.

First, the community that focuses too exclusively on the centrifugal dimension of mission and ignores the centripetal dimension, which includes building a community characterized by worship, sound doctrine and loving fellowship, will not ultimately have an alternative way of life to offer the world (cf. 13:35).

Second, the community that focuses too exclusively on the centripetal dimension of mission at the expense of the centrifugal dimension, which includes John's expansive trinitarian vision for the transformation of the entire cosmos, will eventually domesticate the gospel to the service of its own private or local ends.

Third, the community that ceases, in both its centrifugal and centripetal dimensions, to depend wholly upon the spiritual power of the incarnate and ascended Son will quickly become a community that, when it comes to matters of eternal consequence, 'can do nothing' (15:5). Jesus gave his disciples spiritual authority to execute their mission (20:22), thereby authorizing them to forgive and retain sins (20:23), shepherd Christ's flock (21:15-17) and bear witness to his person and work (20:21). The church thus continues the apostolic mission through analogous activities under the power of the same Spirit, not that of the sword. This does not limit the scope of the church's mission, which is universal, but it does limit the means of the church's mission, which are spiritual.

(Father, Son and Spirit, pp 160-162)

### **What is the relationship then between Pneumatology and Christology in the church's mission?**

The Church must, in each generation, not allow Pneumatology to override Christology. The role of the Holy Spirit flows after and from the prior role of God the Son coming as the Son of Man to be sacrificed, buried & then to rise from the grave and be exalted at the right hand of the Majesty on high, from which point He then sends forth the Holy Spirit to His body of saved ones for the purpose of sending them in His name. The role of the Holy Spirit is to point to God the Son as God's sacrificial offering for sin, and subsequently exalted 2<sup>nd</sup> Adam now at the right hand of God the Father. Thus where the Holy Spirit is prioritized over the Gospel message, and thus God the Son, a serious error with serious implications has taken place.

### **The Trinity and John's Gospel**



(A condensation of chapter ten, *Father, Son and Spirit*, Kostenberger & Swain, 2008; quotations are in identified by the appropriate symbol, “ ”, and by page number)

“The Trinity is the Alpha and Omega of John’s Gospel. John’s account of Jesus’ identity and mission is literally Trinitarian from beginning to end. The Trinity explains how the world began (1:1-3), where the (redeemed) world is heading (17:24-26) and how it will get there (3:16-17; 20:21-23 etc.). Nowhere is John’s breathtaking Trinitarian vision more pronounced than in chapter 17, Jesus’ ‘high-priestly prayer’. Indeed, according to Walter Kasper, ‘The high-priestly prayer contains the entire doctrine of the Trinity in basic form and in a nutshell.’” [*The God of Jesus Christ*, Kasper, W. (1984), trans. M.J. O’Connell, New York: Crossroad]

Jesus makes three petitions:

- (1) Jesus prays for himself (17:1-5)
- (2) Jesus prays for his disciples (17:6-19)
- (3) Jesus prays for those who will believe through the disciples’ testimony (17:20-26)

The flow of his prayer, at a macro-level, ponders three great moments in redemption’s history:

- (1) Redemptive history begins ‘*before the world began*’ in the intra-trinitarian plan concerning the Son’s descent from and ascent to the Father (17:1-5)
- (2) Redemptive history continues through the apostolic mission as the Father ‘keeps’ and ‘sanctifies’ the apostles in the truth revealed to them by the Son (17:6-19)
- (3) Redemptive history reaches its consummation as those who receive the apostolic message come to participate in the eternal, glorious love of the Father for the Son (17:20-26).

## Verses 1-5

Jesus prays for eschatological glorification (17:1)

Jesus prays as he approaches ‘the hour’ marking the completion of the ‘work’ given him by the Father (17:4), which includes revealing the Father’s name to his disciples (17:6) and dedicating himself as a sacrifice (17:19).

Thus, Jesus prays for divine vindication: ‘glorify me’ (17:5). But observe that his request is not an end in itself, but for the purpose of the Son glorifying the Father! “Jesus prays that the eschatological glorification of the Son by the Father and of the Father by the Son will match the protological glory he enjoyed in the Father’s presence ‘before the world began’ (17:5). This is the prayer of the eternal Son of God who came from God and is now returning to God (16:28).” (*Father, Son and Spirit*, Kostenberger and Swain, p. 168)

“Jesus refers to his pretemporal fellowship with the Father not only as the standard for the eschatological glory he requests, but also grounds his request for glorification in something given to him by the Father before the creation of the world: ‘glorify your Son... *just as* you have given him authority over all flesh’ (17:1-2 ESV; cf. Eph. 1:4). Jesus’ request for glory now is somehow in keeping with the authority given to him by the Father in eternity.” (ibid. 168)

Herman Ridderbos says, “It is in the function and power of the figure of the eschatological Son of man that the Son of God came down from heaven, in order thus (cf. 3:13), from heaven, to exercise that power in an unrestricted sense (cf. 7:39), an exercise to which he was predestined by the Father and for which he now prays’ (*The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary*, Eerdmans, 1997, p. 548)

“Previously in the Gospel, Jesus has traced the origin of his mission to the Father’s eternal ‘sanctifying’ and ‘sending’ activity, describing himself as ‘the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world’ (10:36). He is the Word of God, who was with God ‘in the beginning’ (1:1), and who was sent from ‘the Father’s side’ (1:18) ‘into the world’ (1:9). Jesus now describes the origin of this mission in terms of an ‘eternal grant’ given to him by the Father. Specifically, a grant to exercise authority over all flesh with the express purpose of conferring eternal life upon all that the Father has given him (17:2).

Jesus thus grounds his prayer for glorification in what Reformed dogmatics calls the ‘*pactum salutis*’; [or ‘Covenant of Redemption’]. Briefly stated, the *pactum salutis* concerns the saving mission given by the Father to the Son before the foundation of the world, a mission in which the Son acts representatively on behalf of those the Father has given him, together with the Father’s promise that the Son will be gloriously vindicated upon the completion of his mission. Jesus now petitions the Father to glorify him because he believes the Father is ‘true’ (3:33) and ‘righteous’ (17:25). He believes that the Father will keep his promise to glorify the Son (cf. 12:28) because the Son has fully and faithfully accomplished on earth the mission given to him by the Father before the world began (17:2, 4; cf. 19:30)...

While the doctrine is sometimes regarded as overly speculative, it does not assume humanity’s capacity to rend the veil of time and history so that we might perceive the eternal, hidden counsels of God. It assumes only that the one who makes petitions to the Father in John 17 is none other than the Son of God incarnate, and that everything he does is a true revelation of the life of love, promise and fidelity he eternally shares with the Father in the Spirit. It only assumes that John’s Gospel narrates ‘the interior life of the triune God visible (to the eyes of faith) in our history’.

In other words, the *pactum salutis* teaches us that the story which unfolds on the stage of history is the story of an intra-trinitarian fellowship of salvation, a fellowship that reaches back ‘before the world began’ (17:5) and that continues even to ‘the hour’ of Jesus’ cross, resurrection and ascension (17:1). In this regard, the claim that the *pactum salutis* is eternal is not so much a claim about ‘eternity past’ as about eternal persons, persons whose fellowship remains unbroken throughout the course of redemption and thus guarantees that redemption...

Jesus is granted authority that he might give ‘eternal life’ to God’s people (17:2). The substance of this gift consists in knowing ‘the only true God’ and ‘Jesus Christ’ whom he has ‘sent’ (17:3).

The greatest privilege of the New Covenant as of the old is a knowledge of the one true God (cf. 4:22; also Deut. 4:32-35). Here John’s monotheism shines at its brightest. Moreover, John’s monotheism once again reveals itself to be a fully *trinitarian* monotheism. Knowledge of ‘the only true God’ comes through and with the knowledge of the Messiah he has ‘sent’... Knowledge of the Father who sends is intrinsically tied to knowledge of the Son who is sent (see 4:43; 5:36-37; 6:38-39, 44, 57; 7:28-29; 8:16, 18, 26 etc.). One cannot know or honour the Father apart from knowing and honouring the Son (1:18; 5:23; 1 John 2:22-24; 2 John 1:9). One therefore cannot enjoy the eternal life granted by the Father unless one knows the sent Son, the Son who shares the Father’s self-existent life (17:3; cf. 5:24, 26-29; cf. 1 John 1:1-3)...

John’s “doctrine of the Trinity is in a very real sense a function of his doctrine of mission. It is in the Father’s sending of the Son (as well as in the Father and the Son’s sending of the Spirit) that the three persons of the Godhead are revealed in their personal distinctions and unified purpose. We have also seen that there is a theological reason why John’s Trinitarian theology is embedded in his theology of mission: John no doubt wishes to provide a Trinitarian warrant, model and means for the apostolic mission (thus 17:18; 20:21), a mission that continues in the church.

There are at least two further reasons why Trinity and mission are so closely related in John, reasons picked up in the Augustinian tradition of reflection upon the Trinity. First, it is precisely the two sendings (of the Son by the Father, and of the Spirit by the Father and the Son) that reveal the fact that within the unity of the one God there are indeed three distinct persons. In other words, the fact that Jesus Christ is the sent one reveals something about the identity of ‘the only true God’ (17:3). The logic of this principle is as follows: “Sending is not a reflexive act”; a person cannot send himself or herself. Therefore, because the Father sends the Son, we must distinguish the Father from the Son personally. Moreover, because the Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son, he too must be personally distinct from the Father and the Son. The triune *missions* presuppose and reveal the triune *persons*.

Second, the triune missions reveal not only *that* there are three distinct persons; they also reveal *how* those three distinct persons relate to one another *as persons*. John’s Gospel does not recount the generic ‘sendings’ of ‘persons’ but instead tells the story of *the Father’s* sending, commanding and authorizing of *his Son*, of the Son’s coming, obeying and executing his Father’s will, and of *the Spirit of the Father who descends and rests upon the Son* that he might ultimately be sent by the Father and the Son to indwell God’s children. In other words, the missions reveal the *sorts* of persons that subsist in the one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Read in the context of the Gospel as a whole, John 17:3 therefore suggests an important principle concerning the relationship between the triune mission and the triune identity... The principle may be stated as follows: the triune God is characteristically himself in his saving missions because the reliable revelation of his true identity is internal to those saving missions. If the goal of sending Son and Spirit

is to tell the story of who God truly is (1:18; 16:14-15), then for the missions not to reveal the triune identity reliably would constitute the failure of those missions. Put differently, while the *opera Dei ad intra* (e.g. 1:1) are one thing and the *opera Dei ad extra* (e.g. 1:14) are another, there is only one way that Father, Son and Holy Spirit relate to each other *ad intra* and *ad extra*. That ‘way’ has been revealed in the story of Jesus Christ, the incarnate and anointed Son of God (1:18; 14:6; cf. Exod 33:13; 34:5-7).” (*Father, Son and Spirit*, p 169-173)

## Verses 6-19

“Having prayed for his own glorification in view of his completed mission, Jesus then prays that the Father will keep and consecrate his disciples in their mission. As with the first petition, Jesus grounds the second petition in the fact of his finished work. Jesus has revealed the Father’s ‘name’ to those whom the Father gave him out of the world (17:6). As a result of this revealing work, the disciples have received the Father’s word and have acknowledged Jesus’ identity as the sent Son, the one who has received all things from his Father (17:7-8). Jesus therefore prays that the Father will ‘keep’ (ESV) the disciples in his name, the name revealed to them by Jesus (17:11,15).

Jesus continues to develop the theme of the inter-relationship between the triune mission and the triune identity by means of a discussion of the Father’s ‘name’ (17:6, 11, 12). In the OT, the ‘name’ of the Lord functions as a summary description of his person, character and reputation; it is a sign of the Lord’s presence, encapsulating in itself his characteristic way of relating to the world and his people (Exod. 6:1-8; 34:5-7; 2 Sam. 22:50; 1 Kgs 3:2; Pss 8:1; 102:15; Ezek. 36:22 etc.). This understanding of the name is certainly in view in Jesus’ claim to have revealed the Father’s name to his disciples. Jesus is the final exposition of God’s character and the climactic embodiment of his presence (1:14-18)...

The name to which Jesus entrusts his disciples in his prayer is the same name by which he has protected the disciples throughout the course of his earthly ministry: ‘While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me’ (17:12). This is a striking claim. Jesus claims to have exercised during his earthly ministry the same divine sovereignty that he now petitions the Father to exercise after his departure from the world. Once again, the sovereign power Jesus has exercised is a power he has received from the Father (cf. 5:19). Jesus bears the name of the Lord. But he bears it as the Son who has received his Father’s name.

Significantly, of all the things that the Son has receive from the Father, things that he will in turn ‘give’ to the disciples, the ‘name’ is not one of them. Jesus ‘reveals’ the Father’s name to the disciples (17:6). He does not ‘give’ it to them. The theological significance of this fact later comes to light in John’s account of the resurrection. When the risen Jesus appears to his ‘brothers’, he gives them ‘the right to become children of God’ (1:12), announcing, ‘*I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God*’ (20:17). Jesus’ Father has become their Father as a consequence of his saving work. Nevertheless, for all the analogy that exists between Jesus and his brothers, a profound difference remains. Jesus *alone* is worthy of the worship that accompanies the divine name. And so Thomas

proclaims, *'My Lord and my God!'* (20:28), a clear echo of the Shema (Deut. 6:4). Jesus is related to his disciples as their brother and as the Lord their God. His name he will not give to another (Isa. 42:8). He alone, with the Father, retains the glory of this singular name.

There is a profound Trinitarian grammar at work here. The Father and the Son are clearly distinct persons. One gives; the other receives. Nevertheless, they share one divine name, one divine power and one divine identity (cf. Matt 28:19; also John 10:30).

Jesus does not 'give' the divine name to his disciples, but he does pray that they will participate in this pre-eminent attribute, namely unity. Jesus prays that the Father will keep the disciples in his name 'so that they may be one as we are one' (17:11; cf. 21-23). The chief predicate of the name of the Lord is its oneness: *'Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one'* (Deut 6:4; cf. John 10:30). As we have already seen, Jesus is not praying that the disciples will become the Lord God. That name belongs only to Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In keeping with other Jewish writings (e.g. 2 Sam. 7:22-23) and the rest of the NT (e.g. 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:4-5), Jesus is praying 'that his disciples might be a single community corresponding to the uniqueness of the one God, in which he and the Father are united'.

However, the disciple's gift of unity will not go unthreatened, as Jesus' prayer for protection has already implied. The disciples, like Jesus, have been sent 'into the world' to accomplish a mission (17:18). In the course of fulfilling their mission, they can expect the world to treat them as it treated Jesus (15:18-21), for they, like Jesus, 'are not of the world' (17:14). It is for these reasons that Jesus prays, *'Holy Father, ...protect them from the evil one'* (17:11, 15), so that they might accomplish their mission.

Closely related to the preceding point is Jesus' prayer that his 'Holy Father' will 'sanctify' his disciples (17:7). In John's Gospel, mission and 'sanctification' are closely related. Just as Jesus was 'sanctified' by the Father and sent into the world (10:36), so, too, the disciples have been sanctified and sent into the world (17:18-19). Moreover, Jesus' mission serves as the sanctifying basis for their mission. The means by which the disciples are consecrated to the Father's mission are twofold. (1) They are sanctified by 'the truth' (17:7), the full revelation of the Father through the Son; and (2) by Jesus' own self-offering on their behalf (17:19) as 'the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world' (1:29). By means of his revealing and redeeming work, Jesus has set the disciples apart from the world for the service of the Father. And so Jesus prays that the Father will continue to apply the benefits of his finished work (cf. 17:4) to the disciples that they might be kept from the evil one for their mission.

## Verses 20-26

As in the case of their Lord, the disciples' mission is not an end in itself. Jesus thus prays not only for his disciples but also 'for those who will believe....through their message (17:20). He prays that the disciples' mission in the world will accomplish the same end as that of his mission: that those who come to believe will participate in the one community that corresponds to the unity of the Father and the Son (17:21).

The revelation of the Father's name (17:11), word (17:20-21) and glory (17:22) in the Son is the means of accomplishing this end of unity. The model for this unity is found in the Father and the Son, specifically, their mutual indwelling or *perichoresis* (17:21, 23, 26)." (ibid. p173-176).

The word *perichoresis* is from the ancient Greek *peri* ('around') and *khoreuo* ('dance'). Because of this the relationship between the three members of the Trinity was described by early Christians as an eternal '**holy dance**' of each member around the other two.

Jesus as the unity of the Father and the Son is manifest in their mutual indwelling (14:10-11), so Jesus asks that the unity of the apostolic community will be manifest as they come to experience the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son (cf. 14:17, 23). The effect of this new *perichoretic* communion will be that the world will '*know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me*' (17:23).

The *perichoretic* unity of the Father and the Son in the apostolic community indicates why Jesus' high-priestly prayer must finally be understood as a Trinitarian as opposed to a merely binitarian prayer. Though the Spirit remains 'anonymous', literally unnamed, in Jesus' high-priestly prayer, his characteristic mode of activity cannot be missed. Indeed, there is a real sense in which the Holy Spirit is both the basis of and the answer to every one of Jesus' petitions...

John characterizes the Spirit as the one who descends from the Father to rest and remain upon the Son so that, through the Son, he may come to rest and remain upon the disciples as well. In John 17, a very similar pattern repeatedly recurs: the Son receives a gift from the Father that he might in turn pass that gift on to others. The Son has received authority from the Father that he might pass on the gift of eternal life to his disciples (17:2; cf. 5:21, 26-27). The Son has received the Father's words that he might give those words to his disciples (17:8). The Son has received the Father's glory that he might pass that glory on to his disciples (17:22). In the light of John's earlier association of this pattern with the person of the Holy Spirit, it is not a stretch to suggest that the gifts of eternal life, words and glory represent but different aspects of Jesus' one messianic anointing with the Holy Spirit, an anointing he receives from the Father to bestow upon his disciples (1:33). Jesus has received 'all things from his Father that he might accomplish his mission (17:7; cf. 3:35). This full donation of the Father to the son therefore must include the gift of the Spirit 'without limit' (3:34).

If this interpretation is indeed correct, then we may conclude that, while the Spirit is strictly speaking anonymous in the prayer of John 17, he is nonetheless the essential link in that prayer's great chain of gifting, the seal of the *pactum salutis* (cf. Eph 1:13). Viewed in this light, the gift of the Holy Spirit represents the ground and goal of Jesus' messianic mission. Jesus grounds his prayer in his pretemporal messianic investiture. He asks the Father to answer his prayer because he has received the Spirit before the world began that he might give him to his brothers. Having approached the hour of his glorification (cf. 7:39), Jesus looks to the goal of that investiture and asks the Father to apply the eternal grant of the Holy Spirit to his brothers in time, so that they might come to participate in the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit (14:17, 23). In the light of this Johannine pattern, we must conclude that Augustine was right in identifying the Spirit's distinctive personal property by

the title of ‘the Gift’. The Spirit is the Gift of the Father to the Son, given for the sake of bringing his people into the *perichoretic* fellowship of the triune God.

Augustine asks the fascinating question: Does the Spirit’s identity as ‘the Gift’ have reference only to the messianic economy of salvation, or does his identity as the Gift belong to his eternal personhood, without reference to creation or redemption? The question concerns the appropriateness of the title. Is it merely a function of the triune mission or does it say something about the triune identity itself? Jesus’ high-priestly prayer suggests that this title’s significance extends beyond the triune mission of salvation. For the ultimate goal of the triune mission is that the messianic community, built upon the foundation of the apostolic witness and gathered out of the world, might participate in the intra-trinitarian fellowship of love, glory and gifting that existed ‘before the creation of the world’ (17:24).

*Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.* (John 17:24-26; ESV)

The Spirit, with all his benefits, has been given by the Father to the Son, that the Son might in turn give the Spirit to his disciples. And in giving the Spirit to his disciples, Jesus gives them the greatest gift that can be given; he grants them a share in the loving fellowship he has enjoyed with the Father by the gift of the Spirit ‘before the creation of the world’ (17:23-24).

Jesus’ high-priestly prayer thus manifests the inner secret of the triune plan of salvation, the secret that comprises both the foundation and the purpose of that plan. *The triune plan of salvation, the pactum salutis, flows from, through and to the Father’s eternal love for the Son in the Spirit.* The triune God has eternally desired to bless his people with the greatest possible gift and the greatest possible gift he can give is nothing other than the enjoyment of his own eternal, fecund fellowship. Communion in the Son’s eternal life of love, glory and giving with the Father in the Spirit constitutes the ultimate blessing of the gospel...

Accordingly, the ‘*full measure of...joy*’ (17:13), which Jesus prays his disciples will experience, must be understood as his joy, the joy he has eternally known as the Father’s beloved Son and eternal recipient of the glorious gift of the Spirit (17:24). This gift of glory and joy will reach its eschatological consummation when his people, following a time of mission and persecution (17:14; cf. 21:18-19), experience the blessed vision of the triune God (17:24; cf. 1 Cor 13:12; 1 John 3:2; Rev. 22:4).” (ibid. 176-179)

## Conclusion

John’s presentation of the Trinity thus lays the groundwork for later ecclesial summaries of the doctrine. Father, Son and Spirit ‘are not three Gods, but one God’. Moreover, this one God eternally exists as three distinct persons: ‘The Father is made of none, neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the

Father alone, not made, nor created, but begotten. The Holy Spirit is of the Father and the Son, neither made, nor begotten, but proceeding.’

John, we should add, sees no tension between the unity of one glorious Godhead, shared equally and identically by three persons, and a relational order, or *taxis*, among the persons, a *taxis* revealed in the salvation-historical missions of the Son and the Spirit and rooted in their eternal relationships. But neither does John attempt to explain this mystery. Rather, John simply testifies to the one God – Father, Son and Spirit – in order that we too may enter into the Father’s love for the Son in the fellowship of the Spirit.” (ibid. 186)

### **The gift of life: Knowing the Triune God**

#### **Addendum A**

“The great battle over Christology was fought in the ancient Church... First of all, the Council of Nicea (AD 325) stated that Jesus is the Son of God in the full sense of the word. The key word in its confession was *homoousios*, i.e. Jesus is ‘of the same substance’ with the Father. This was a non-biblical term (which previously had been used even by unorthodox people!), but the Council Fathers felt that they should use it, because it so clearly and unambiguously expressed what they understood to be the teaching of Scripture. Later on, in the... Nicene Creed, the same doctrine was stated in the following words:

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance (*homoousion*) with the Father, by whom all things were made...

But the Creed stresses not only his divinity but also his humanity, for it continues:

*Who . . . was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man.*

Thus Nicea confessed: *very God and very man.*



This confession, however, in the years that followed raised new questions. How are these two statements related? How can one person be both God and man? The Council of Chalcedon (AD 451) answered this question by speaking of one (divine) Person and two natures: a divine and a human nature:

*We confess . . . one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged of two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no wise done away because of the union, but rather the characteristic property of each nature being preserved, and concurring into one Person, . . . not as if Christ were parted or divided into two Persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God, Lord, Jesus Christ.*

The church has always been aware that this too was an inadequate formulation. It realized full well that the being of Jesus Christ is a mystery. This was also the reason why to a large extent the statement of Chalcedon was put in a negative form. The Fathers, so to speak, put up four fences (without confusion, without change, without division, without separation) and said: The mystery lies within this area. At the same time they were deeply convinced that, despite the inadequacies of the formulation, the decision expressed the truth about Jesus, namely that he is very God and very man in one Person.

In the following centuries the church adhered to the statements of Nicea, Constantinople and Chalcedon. Even the division between the Eastern and Western churches (AD 1054) did not change this; both churches retained the Christology of the early church. Likewise the Reformation, the great division within the Western church, left the situation unchanged. All major Reformation churches (Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican) accepted the ancient creeds. It was only in the eighteenth century that serious opposition arose from the new liberal theology, but even then the churches themselves, at least officially, retained the old Christological dogma. As far as I know, none of the historic churches has ever officially abandoned it. One may even say that throughout this whole period and also in our own century it remained the shibboleth that distinguished orthodoxy from liberalism.

*(The Present-Day Christological Debate, Klaas Runia. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 11-13)*

## **ADDENDUM B**

## **Outline of John's Gospel**

Prologue: (1:1-18)

The incarnation of the Word, who was in the beginning with God, and was God

### **I. Book of Signs of the Messiah (1:19 - ch.12)**

#### **A. Seven Signs**

- First sign – water to wine (ch.2a)
- 1st discourse – Nicodemus & the new birth (ch.3)
- 2nd discourse – The Samaritan woman & the water of life (ch.4a)
- Second sign – healing of the nobleman's son (ch.4b)
- Third sign – healing of the lame man (ch.5a)
- 3rd discourse – The Divine Son (ch.5b)
- Fourth sign – feeding of the 5,000 (ch.6a)
- Fifth sign – walking on water (ch.6b)
- 4th discourse – The Bread of Life (ch.6c)
- 5th discourse – The life-giving Spirit (ch.7)
- 6th discourse – The Light of the world (ch.8)
- Sixth sign – healing of the man born blind (ch.9)
- 7th discourse – The Good Shepherd (ch.10)
- Seventh sign – raising of Lazarus (ch.11)

#### **B. Seven "I Am" statements**

- I am the bread of life (ch.6)
- I am the light of the world (ch.8)
- I am the gate (ch.10)
- I am the good shepherd (ch.10)

- I am the resurrection and the life (ch.11)
- I am the way and the truth and the life (ch.14)
- I am the true vine (ch.15)

## **II. Book of Glory of the Messiah: Farewell discourse & Passion narrative (ch.13-20)**

- Foot washing & a new commandment (ch.13)
- Jesus' oneness with the Father & sending of the Holy Spirit (ch.14)
- Abiding in Jesus the true Vine (ch.15)
- Jesus promises to send the Helper, the Spirit of Truth (ch.16)
- The Messiah's high priestly prayer (ch.17)
- Jesus' betrayal & arrest (ch.18)
- Jesus' crucifixion & burial (ch.19)
- Jesus' resurrection & appearances (ch.20)

Epilogue: John's purpose in writing (20:30-31) & Jesus & Peter (ch.21)

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